

Short Questions, Short Answers: The IPO and the Teaching of Philosophy

1. What is the most important aspect to consider in teaching philosophy?

Shinji Kajitani: It is to encourage people (not only young people but everyone from all generations) to think by themselves and express what they think.

Gad Prudovsky: I understand the question as relating to the practice of teaching philosophy. My primary goal as a practitioner is to foster students' joyous engagement in philosophical conversations. By philosophical conversations I mean not only the discourse that occurs in class but the continuous conversation that forms the philosophical cultural heritage. Therefore, I see my role as that of inviting the students to partake in an ongoing dialogue. As we all know, participation in a conversation demands attentive listening and sincere contribution. Based on this I formulate the two important aspects of teaching philosophy:

- a) insistence on close and generous reading of philosophical texts (as well as the oral and written contributions of peers); and
- b) encouragement of active participation in which the student expresses his or her authentic perception on the matters discussed.

Thor Steinar Grødal: To nourish the curiosity of the students.

Ji-Aeh Lee: I think, it is to guide students into the way of “doing philosophy” for themselves; in order to do this, the first step is that they find “genuine questions” in their everyday life.

2. What is the role of the IPO for the teaching of philosophy?

Grødal: To nourish the teachers through interaction with international colleagues.

Lee: My starting point of training delegation students for IPO is asking for their own interests and questions. From their own questions, the “real inquiry” of philosophical issues begins. Before reading any philosophical texts, finding out in an authentic manner about philosophical questions is very important to dig into further philosophical issues. Therefore, I think IPO can be a good motivation to “do philosophy” for the students who have not any chance to study philosophy in schools.

Prudovsky: The IPO emphasis on philosophical essays is in complete harmony with the aspects of teaching philosophy that I value most. Thus, preparing my students for the IPO is a wonderful opportunity to practice good teaching. The national competition is a chance to create an important bonding between teachers and students, proving to them that they are not alone in this strange endeavor. The actual meeting in the international event, with teachers and students from around the world adds another dimension. The fact that there is an international

community that is committed to perpetuating the philosophical tradition and to do so in an atmosphere of academic excellence, is very reassuring for both students and teachers.

Kajitani: It is a wonderful opportunity for both students and teachers to learn how closely we can be connected with each other and to develop our solidarity and friendship through philosophy.

3. What is the relation between the teaching of philosophy and the idea of competition?

Prudovsky: For me, there is no direct relation. As I emphasize the joy of learning, it seems that competition may generate it. Another peripheral advantage lies in boosting the prestige of philosophy, given widespread public dismissal of its value.

Kajitani: It is really like sports or Olympiad. We can respect and praise each other because we make a lot of efforts for the competition as an opportunity to construct our philosophical thought, not only for students but also for teachers (just as we are doing now).

Lee: In fact, I do not think IPO is a competition. IPO is just a chance to do philosophy for young adults. However, the format of competition can help to encourage to do philosophy; sometimes, the experience of participating in IPO itself can make the students enter the new world of doing philosophy.

Grødal: The competition is a necessary meeting point, in order for all the other important things to take place.

4. What are the most important aspects in the evaluation of essays?

Prudovsky: The important aspects in the evaluation mirror my opinion on the important aspects of teaching philosophy. *Relevance* reflects the virtue of attentive listening. In my understanding of this evaluation criterion, it has to do with the ability of the student to discern the deep concerns that drives the quotation to which he or she relates. *Originality* reflects the virtue of commitment to sustain the philosophical community through sincere contribution to its ongoing inquiry. In my reading of this criterion, we do not expect that high school students will present novel philosophical ideas, but that they will manifest their commitment to be a part of the philosophical conversation by laying on the table *their own* considered opinion.

It is important to note that the criterion of relevance cannot be met without some philosophical understanding; and originality also demands a measure of knowledge as well as the power of argumentation, or else the expression “*considered* opinion” is vacuous.

Lee: For me, the most important aspect is whether the essay is the authentic inquiry of the students’ own questions based on a logically well-formed argument.

Kajitani: How students meet the philosophical essence in the topic with their interest and how they can construct their thought philosophically (in a logically coherent way with deep insights).

Grødal: Philosophical understanding expressed through the power of argumentation and/or originality. What this means? It is not easily definable, but it does not entail namedropping.

5. What should be taken up from the e-IPO 2020 for future IPO's?

Lee: I think that e-IPO 2020 suggested to us a good way of saving money and time, and of a new experience to open the “unexpected” world. However, I hope for our “face-to-face” meeting and discussion in future IPO's.

Prudovsky: The 2020 e-IPO was a great success. The physical encounter is indispensable, but we did witness the possible efficiency of virtual meetings. In future IPO's it will be possible to invite luminary guest speakers for a unique experience like the one we enjoyed with Michael Sandel. Or we could create many Zoom sessions on the chosen topic with experts from all over the world. Another option to use video technologies is to conduct meetings of IPO institutions in this manner. In this way these technical matters will not demand precious time during the physical IPO. The preparations of the juries may also be done in Zoom. We may envision prolonged preparations that are conducted as online workshops. In such sessions, groups of teachers may be given past essays for assessment and then discuss the way in which they applied the criteria. Such workshops can be offered to wider audiences of philosophy teachers as means of improving the quality of evaluations in regular teaching practice.

Grødal: The continuation of the focus on engaging the students in meaningful and stimulating ways.

Kajitani: It was great that former IPO students joined like alumni do (we can make it!), and many people (teachers, guest speakers) could participate through the internet. We should make use of such online participation as much as possible.

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