

Gareth B. Matthews, *The Child's Philosopher*, by Maughn Rollins Gregory and Megan Jane Laverty (2022), Routledge.

In the latest publication from their series on the founders of the Philosophy for Children (P4C) movement, Maughn Rollins Gregory and Megan Jane Laverty (2022) have offered us an exceptional gateway into the life and work of Gareth B Matthews. Matthews, a renowned scholar of ancient and medieval philosophy, made intellectual contributions to P4C that fall into three areas of research—philosophy and children's literature, philosophy for children, and philosophy of childhood—which Gregory and Laverty distribute across the volume's five parts. Each part includes representative publications by Matthews preceded by commentary and critique from experts in the field. In this review, I will evaluate this work primarily from the perspective of a practitioner in the P4C movement.

In Part 1 of the volume, we are introduced to Matthews' approach to locating the seeds of philosophical dialogue in children's literature. Some stories written for children use philosophical whimsy and philosophical imagination to prompt deep philosophical questions about topics like causation, death and the meaning of life. Matthews was adept at finding, and then exploiting, such stories in his work with children. Practitioners within the P4C movement seeking guidance about how to select stories for this purpose will benefit from reading Matthews' explanations for his selections. Moreover, Karin Murriss' contribution provides greater richness and context to Matthews' works by commenting on the history of children's stories and drawing more deeply from his body of work. She also raises an important question in the form of a critique: is there something dangerous, or sinister, going on when adults provide children with stories that reflect their own conception of what a child is (p. 52)?

Although my impression of Part 1 was positive overall, there were times when I thought it could have benefited from greater conceptual clarity. For example, in 'Philosophy and Children's Literature', Matthews discusses a number of stories that exhibit a style that he calls philosophical whimsy: 'raising, wryly, a host of basic epistemological and metaphysical questions familiar to students of philosophy' (p. 61). Matthews' texts convey the general idea of philosophical whimsy, but I was left wanting a clear picture of how best to characterise it and distinguish it from related concepts. Murriss, in her commentary, explains that philosophical whimsy is 'a particular kind of humor that "makes a conceptual point," drawing on philosophical puzzlement about the world *as it is*' (p. 45). She distinguishes philosophical whimsy from two other means by which works of children's literature draw out philosophical

thinking: 'thought experiments, which prompt readers to take up philosophical questions for themselves', and by 'problematizing concepts in a way that invites their exploration' (p. 46). While we ought to be grateful for this tripartite distinction, as it helps illustrate distinct ways that children's stories draw out philosophical thinking, Matthews' conception, as presented in this volume, appears broad enough to incorporate many of the elements that Murriss distinguishes *from* philosophical whimsy.

Part II, when viewed at a high level of abstraction, is an invitation to grapple with the continuities and discontinuities that exist between the philosophising of children and the philosophising of adults. We are introduced to Matthews' own transcriptions of conversations in which, for example, children find novel solutions to Zeno's Paradox and engage thoughtfully with the Euthyphro Dilemma in ways that are continuous with 'the great philosophical dialogue' (p. 122). These demonstrations show that it is a mistake to condescend to children or pretend that they are limited merely to pre-philosophy or proto-philosophy (p. 122). At the same time, as Stephanie Burdick-Shepherd and Cristina Cammarano emphasise, Matthews is mindful of significant discontinuities. Children and adults bring diverse advantages to the activity of philosophising, such as greater openness and larger conceptual repertoires respectively (pp. 94-96). This suggests a way forward for educators: we should mind the gap rather than ignoring or exaggerating it, and we can do so by collaborating with children in genuine philosophising while celebrating the abilities that different participants bring with them.

Matthews makes his case primarily, in Part II, through a detailed exploration of examples from his teaching practice, and this approach is appropriately paired with Burdick-Shepherd and Cammarano's incisive commentary. They articulate six ways that children think philosophically and three benefits of intergenerational philosophy, and they clarify two of Matthews' innovations: his transcriptions of philosophical dialogues with children (mentioned above) and his five-step process for engaging in philosophical dialogue with children through story endings (p. 90). The latter, laid out with precision and care, is a considerable gift to P4C dialogue facilitators who are interested in applying Matthews' insights to their own practices.

In Part III, we are introduced to the relationship between Matthews qua scholar of ancient philosophy and Matthews qua teacher. Observing the integration of these two parts of his life is edifying for at least two reasons. First, we find a model towards which the rest of us can aspire. Not everyone is capable of drawing from Plato and

Aristotle in the ways that Matthews did, but epistemologists, metaphysicians, philosophers of science, and, of course, ethicists, can search for ways of leaning into their specialised training when dealing with philosophical questions that arise in the context of their pedagogic practices. Second, there is value both in the specific questions he raises and the progress he makes while pursuing them. For example, in 'Whatever became of the Socratic elenchus', Matthews contrasts two Socratic methods: the elenctic method of questioning someone about 'what some F-ness is', without the assumption that the questioner himself has an answer, until the questionee reaches a state of perplexity; the method of Socratic instruction, through which one leads a student to a conclusion through questioning (pp. 152-153). Matthews argues that both methods are valuable and can play the distinct roles of clearing away our unsatisfactory conceptions and leading us towards the truth respectively (p. 160).

Peter Shea's commentary helps us appreciate Matthews' skill as a teacher, the stark differences between his approach and that of Matthew Lipman, and the relationships of care and nurturance that characterised his interactions with his students (to name a few). We learn that Matthews did not merely *understand* the distinction between Socratic instruction and elenchus, but he was adept at switching from teaching in the spirit of one of these methods to that of the other (p. 129). This mastery of both approaches and proficiency at switching between them prompts us to ask questions like the following: when should I direct the inquiry in my classroom, when should I see myself as a participant in the inquiry, and how am I to switch between these roles? Shea's text prompts another question: how should we compare the value of Matthews' clear stories that were curated to provoke particular lines of inquiry against Lipman's messier stories that were far more open-ended (in terms of which lines of inquiry might extend from them) (p. 131)? Although there may be no all-things-considered answer to either of these questions, educators would do well to consider them both carefully in light of Shea's contribution to this volume.

In Part IV, Jennifer Glaser explains Matthews' critiques of, and alternatives to, the stage theories of Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg. Glaser's contribution is more than a helpful overview of Matthews' thinking on the subject (although it serves that purpose well), as she provides valuable historical context for Matthews' body of work and includes her own insights (e.g. she argues that the disagreement between Matthews and Piaget involves a fundamental disagreement about the relationship between language and thought rather than simply a methodological critique or the mere rejection of Piaget's recapitulation theory) (p. 170). The two texts from Matthews

in Part IV provide two brief examples of his engagements with the educational psychology of his time: a critique of the stage theories of Piaget and Kohlberg and a critique of Ellen Winner's claim that children understand metaphor and not irony.

Part IV is analogous to an *elenchus* that clears away inadequate conceptions of childhood and sets the stage for what we are offered in Part V: Matthews' general picture of the philosophy of childhood. Although Matthews describes his goal as modest, he pursues an end that strikes me as being quite bold: defending criteria that must be met by any 'any adequate and defensible philosophy of childhood' (p. 232). For example, he argues that a philosophy of childhood should 'make clear how there can be goods of childhood whose value is neither derivative from the goods of adulthood nor vulnerable to devaluation by developments in later life' (p. 240). P4C practitioners will benefit from evaluating their own favoured philosophies of childhood through the lens of Matthews' criteria. Moreover, Walter Omar Kohan and Claire Cassidy, in their contribution to Part IV, offer useful suggestions for how one might search for new possibilities for philosophies of childhood beyond the options that Matthews considered during his life (pp. 226-229).

I am going to close this review by zooming out and commenting briefly on this volume as a whole. First, note that it is structured in such a way that one cannot appreciate it fully by reading once through its parts in order. For example, it is worthwhile to read Stanley Cavell's introductory essay before approaching Parts I-V, but one will have a greater understanding of its connection to the other pieces in this volume when returning to it after digesting Shea's commentary in Part III. And while the contribution by Burdick-Shepherd and Cammarano must be read at the start of Part II, its discussion of Winner is worth reviewing after reading Part IV. To borrow a metaphor, the point I am making is that the contributors in this volume do color within the lines suggested by the way its sections are ostensibly organized. This is not a criticism, but a recommendation to approach this work with the thoughtfulness that it deserves.

Finally, in case I haven't been clear, this is an excellent volume that I would highly recommend to anyone working in, or adjacent to, the field of P4C. In the time since I started writing this review, I have incorporated Matthews's ideas into the ways that I teach college students (e.g., using philosophical whimsy to present philosophical questions for discussion) and the ways that I teach and practice dialogue facilitation (e.g., contrasting Matthews's approach to that of Lipman). I look forward to

continuing to learn and grow as I digest the lessons in this volume, and I would invite you to do the same.

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