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### Re-Envisioning the Philosophy Classroom Through Metaphors

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# Re-Envisioning the Philosophy Classroom Through Metaphors

## Abstract

What is a philosophy class like? What roles do teachers and students play? Questions like these have been answered time and again by philosophers using images and metaphors. As philosophers continue to develop pedagogical approaches in a more conscious way, it is worth evaluating traditional metaphors used to understand and structure philosophy classes. In this article, we examine two common metaphors –the *sage on the stage*, and *philosophy as combat*– and show why they fail pedagogically. Then we propose five metaphors –teaching philosophy as *world-traveling*, *wondering*, *conducting an orchestra*, *storytelling*, and *coaching*– that can better respond to the needs of increasingly diverse student bodies. Further, these metaphors find their ground in long-standing beliefs about what philosophy is, how it is done, and what it can do for those willing to engage in it. While no single one of them is comprehensive, we think that these models can help us enliven our own thinking about our teaching and the roles we and our students play in our classrooms.

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## Introduction

When the words “philosophy professor” are said, what images might come to mind? Perhaps you think of Socrates in the *Apology*, engaging in the *elenchus* to suss out the faulty reasoning and misunderstandings of those who persecute him. Perhaps you think of an old white man at a podium, droning on about other, long-dead, old white men. Perhaps, being a philosopher yourself, you have a much more nuanced understanding of what a philosopher might “look like.” A different, but related, question is how do you understand what it is you do in the classroom? What images come to mind, what metaphors do you use to conceptualize what it is to run a classroom? In this paper, we examine two metaphors that have been common for understanding and structuring what it is to do philosophy in

the classroom – the sage on the stage and philosophy as battle – and explain how these fail. We propose five other metaphors to help us envision different ways to think through what a philosophy classroom might look like.

Here, we take our cue from Lakoff and Johnson (1985). According to Lakoff and Johnson, much of our thinking is shaped by conceptual metaphors that allow us to make meaning of our experiences. They write, “metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (1985, p. 4; see also Lakoff 2012, especially Part I). Metaphors both allow us to make sense of new experiences and expand our understanding of previous experiences. We use metaphors to “make coherent our own pasts, our present activities, and our dreams, hopes, and goals” (1985, 233-234). How we think about what we do in the classroom, how we conceptualize our presence and our students’ presence, changes our behaviors and our actions. So when we think through metaphors for teaching, we do not understand this only as illustrative, but also constitutive. Our hope is that concrete metaphors for teaching philosophy might help us imagine different possibilities in and for our philosophy classrooms, as well as invigorate our thinking about what philosophy professors’ and students’ roles might be.

It is important to point out the nature of metaphor and its potential tension with some of the goals of academic philosophy. Metaphors, by their nature, lack precision. When we use metaphors, we create or draw a similarity between a referent and an antecedent. The relationship between the two is never tautological, however. We call upon the antecedent because we attempt to point out some novel feature of the referent that we want others to see and understand. For instance, if we were to speak to teaching philosophy as planting or cultivating, we would emphasize the parts of teaching that are akin to prepping a nutrient rich soil, to diligent watering, to position the plans to allow the rays of the sun to cause them to grow. These pieces of planting might be said to refer to the teacher picking philosophical texts, developing classroom activities, and providing for students the conditions necessary to be open to the truths of the philosophy they study. While this particular metaphor is a rich analogy, there are analogues that remain unaccounted for, places of unclarity, and plenty of ways to dispute the sufficiency of the metaphor. And unclarity and imprecision are what academic philosophers often struggle to guard against. Arguments are fashioned by professional philosophers with an eye to preventing misunderstanding and to shoring up against counterargument. While metaphors might open our eyes to new ways of seeing things, they cannot stand alone as argument.

So what we do here is, in some ways, antithetical to many academic philosophical projects. We will present a number of metaphors for teaching philosophy, all of which have problems, all of which fall apart if they are inspected too closely, and none of which account for the whole of philosophical pedagogy or the types of pedagogues there are. Moreover, in order to make sure that our classrooms remain spaces open to all learners and different ways of knowing, we need a certain promiscuity in our relationship to metaphors. Relying too heavily on one metaphor for teaching not only disregards the diversity of classes, institutions, learners, and professors, it can stymie our creativity. No metaphor is rich enough to do that. Yet, given the ways in which metaphors both enlarge and constrain our understanding of activities and experiences, we must take the metaphors we use to conceptualize our work seriously. Although no metaphor will ever be perfect, the metaphors we appeal to, implicitly or explicitly, in order to envision the work that happens in our classrooms will impact what can happen in our classrooms.

## Metaphor and Pedagogy

Much has been written on the analysis of conceptual metaphors in general education. To begin with, metaphors are commonly used by teachers to describe the teaching and learning environment (Alger 2009, p. 744). For example, knowledge is often understood as a commodity (to be given and acquired), the mind as a container (to be filled by ideas), or the classroom as a workplace (where the activities are hard, boring, and must be compensated by external incentives) (Sfard 1998, p. 8; Alger 2009 p. 744; Strickland & Iran-Nejad 1994, p. 6).

But not everything is transparent in the metaphors we adopt. Sfard, for example, holds that analyzing learning metaphors can help “elicit some of the fundamental assumptions underlying both our theorizing on learning and our practice as students and teachers” (Sfard 1998, p. 4). One way of exploring metaphors is to try to distill many specific ideas –teaching is gardening, a teacher is like a second-mom, learning is like building– into basic types. Sfard finds that in the contemporary literature on education all come down to *acquisition* or *participation* (1998, p. 4). Bradley and Hollabaugh (2012) argue that metaphors can be categorized into *transmission*, *facilitation*, and *catalysts*. Alger finds six distinct types, of which four are teacher-centered (*guiding*, *nurturing*, *molding*, and *transmitting*) and two are student-centered (*providing tools* and *engaging in community*) (Alger 2009 pp. 744–745).

Since our purpose is to elicit reflection about the metaphors we explicitly or implicitly adopt in our teaching, we deal with metaphors somewhat differently. First, we are concerned with metaphors *about philosophy and philosophy teaching*.<sup>1</sup> There is an obvious reason for this choice: philosophy has many home-grown metaphors, available in numerous places in different philosophical traditions.<sup>2</sup> But many metaphors about philosophy, and some about philosophical education, are unexamined from a *pedagogical* point of view. The reality of philosophy college education, both for majors and in the general education context, requires that we examine the way *we teach* our discipline.

In the larger scholarship of teaching and learning, metaphors have also been used as instruments to effect change in beliefs, attitudes, and practices about teaching and learning, and we believe philosophy has much to learn from this. As Alger explains, metaphor analysis has been a useful tool in making teachers aware of implicit beliefs and theoretical assumptions, as well as promoting reflection, revision, and improvement in classroom practices (2009, p. 744). Strickland and Iran-Nejad (1994) have proposed a link between the descriptive and the therapeutic uses of metaphors: new metaphorical understandings play a part in the individual teaching development (along with experience and reflection), and are necessary in reorganizing and improving pedagogical practices.

We agree with Sfard when she says that metaphors get their richness from crossing “the borders between the spontaneous and the scientific, between the intuitive and the formal.” Speaking of how these two domains can interact in metaphors, she continues: “Conveyed through language from one domain to another, they enable conceptual osmosis between everyday and scientific discourses, letting our primary intuition shape scientific ideas and the formal conceptions feed back into the intuition” (Sfard 1998, p. 4). The formal domain in our case are the philosophy pedagogical practices, and we trust that our analysis of both good and bad metaphors can help us make way in invigorating our teaching and improving the experiences of our students.

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<sup>1</sup> Our scope is limited here to Western philosophy.

<sup>2</sup> While contemporary philosophers use metaphors to talk about teaching issues, we are not aware of an exploration of different philosophy metaphors, like the one we offer here. In “Teaching philosophy through metaphors,” Panayiota Vassilopoulou makes a persuasive case that metaphors can be used as tools to teach philosophy. In highlighting the power of metaphors to assist in doing the conceptual work that is done in philosophy (say, in studying different ways of conceiving of the relationship between body and soul), and that can be done in the classroom, she writes: “To engage in the metaphoric process involves being sensitive to the unconventional aspects to which the metaphor draws attention, while attempting to identify the basis on which a metaphor may be justified, the reasons for its being productive or misleading. In the course of this process we may gain a deeper understanding of the questions that prompted any given metaphor in the first place, we may evoke other metaphors in order to further elaborate or correct the initial one, and we may address the limitations of relevant literal expressions” (Vassilopoulou, 2009 p. 118). These are, precisely, some of the reasons why we think that metaphors can help us reflect and improve our teaching practices.

We first analyze two standard ways of thinking about philosophy teaching: *the sage on the stage* and *philosophy as battle*. We aim to show how they fail as pedagogical models and how they exclude certain groups of students and privilege one type of learning and knowing. Then we move on to the positive metaphors of our analysis (see Table 1). We have selected five representative metaphors, and aim to open them up to show different ways of looking at the activity of teaching philosophy: what it entails for teachers and learners, for philosophical knowledge, for the collaboration between students, and for the goals of teaching philosophy to our students today.

**SEE TABLE in the next page**

<b>Metaphors</b>	<b>Teacher is...</b>	<b>Students/classmates are...</b>	<b>Classroom time is...</b>	<b>Assignments are...</b>	<b>Content/Texts are...</b>	<b>Family resemblances</b>
Sage on the Stage	Sage	Wisdom seekers and supplicants	Liturgy, lecture, honoring tradition	Exams, papers, book reports	Fodder for lectures, revered literature	Preaching, gadfly
Philosophy as Battle	Warrior and referee	Warriors and the beleaguered	Battle, struggle, strife, competition	Debates, defense papers, exams	Puzzles to be torn apart	Debate, negotiation, gadfly
Coaching	Coach	Players and teammates	Getting players ready to play, running drills, building skills, playing games	Exams, games, drills, presentations, full class projects	Plays, famous games, master gambits, monumental errors	Doctor, midwife
World Traveling	Tour guide	Travelers and fellow explorers	Exploration, reporting of experiences, discussions with new people	Exegesis, group projects, interviews, travel reports	Terrain, artifacts, tourist sites, main and side streets	Playing a game, scavenger hunt, acting and role-playing, rehearsal
Wondering	Wonderer with training	Wonderers	Introducing students to wondrous works of philosophy, encouraging students to think about the mysteries of existence, letting wonderer interests drive the classroom	Reflections, self-created projects, conversations, self-inspired research	Icon, the force of nature, the starry skies above, the vast universe	Meditation, contemplation
Storytelling	Master teller	Listeners and budding storytellers	Telling a narrative about philosophy, helping listeners construct their own narratives about philosophy, helping listeners tell their stories in light of philosophy	Storytelling projects, comparative essays, written dialogues, group projects	Stories, letters, dialogue, co-storytellers	Craftsmanship, lab, art-making
Conducting an Orchestra	Conductor	Orchestra members	Tuning the orchestra, practicing classic pieces, drill work, performing	Exegesis, full class projects, drills, small group work, rehearsals	Scores, scales, variations on a theme	Tuning an instrument, couple or group dancing

# Faulty Metaphors

## Sage on the Stage

Still prevalent in the philosophical social imaginary is one of the most traditional models of teaching: the sage on the stage. We know all-too well how it goes: the teacher possesses something valuable that the students lack. Students must work for it: if they wise up, they listen attentively and take notes profusely. This model of teaching and learning seems structured following a basic metaphor: one must be initiated by an expert in order to attain learning. The professor controls that initiation, and can invite students to become initiates, but this only works if individual students are committed to listening well. As the holder of the invitation, the professor also has a certain gravitas and respectability that must be acknowledged, deferred to, and admired. On some levels, this metaphor works. Professors are, by and large, experts in their field, who possess knowledge their students do not have. Although the cliché that professors learn as much from their students as their students do from them is common, it is also nonsense. A professor who learns more from her students than she teaches them should be fired. This is not to say that professors cannot learn from their students, but that expertise in one's discipline is an indispensable part of being a professor.

The metaphor does fall apart, however, and in two ways. In the first case, the part of the metaphor that insists that it is *a sage* on the stage does not necessarily hold. The sage is not a mere expert in his field (his, because sages are so often male), but has attained wisdom beyond academic learning. Instead, the sage has come to a particular awareness of the truth, one that he has seen because he has lifted a veil or climbed out of the cave. The sage is *wise*: the sage is able then *to see behind* what is obvious, and to *connect back* to everyday life. But students can only grasp by participation what the sage offers. The sage can only point students to the light, lead them to the veil. The students must do the climbing and the lifting. The true insight of the sage is not transferable like the discrete knowledge of a discipline might be, and it is only by the “gods’ dispensation” that students are able to grasp that wisdom (Plato 2016, 493a). There are similarities between the sage and the stage and a more obvious and common set of pedagogical metaphors: that teaching is transmission, learning is acquisition, and that the mind is a container to be filled with information. Under this schema, knowledge is akin to wealth. What the *sage* element adds to this picture, and



why it changes it, has to do with philosophy's self-image. Despite the widespread access to philosophy classes, philosophy retains an esoteric aura, and often the philosophy professor seems to be in this light himself.

This metaphor fails in a second and related way. If wisdom itself cannot be dispensed like discrete knowledge and the sage can only do but so much to help students acquire wisdom – by being sage-like and pointing them to the existence of some sort of wisdom the students do not have – then what becomes of pedagogy? It becomes mystical, rather than practical. It becomes easy to blame students when they fail to see truth and seek wisdom. If the professor is a sage, he becomes above reproach, or at least not responsible for innovation and meeting the needs of his students. The Socratic method, the *disputatio*, the lecture-format worked for Socrates, Aquinas, and brilliant sages of the past. If these do not work in the contemporary sage's classroom, then it must be because students have changed or failed to rise to the challenge. If students who do not immediately buy into the search for wisdom, the goal of being in the classroom remains arcane and the students never become initiated. The motivational force that is required for this search will not come if philosophy teachers cannot share with students what is good about the practice of philosophy in a language they understand. The sage must deign to operate at his students' level, but given the framework from which he operates, he may not see the value of doing so.

## Philosophy as Battle

Another well-spring of problematic metaphors for teaching is found in Greek *agonism*, or strife. While *agonism* can be painful and involve tension, it can also be productive. As Debra Hawhee points out, there is a distinction between antagonism and *agonism*, differences in forms of strife. She cites Hesiod, who explains that while there is one kind of strife that is destructive and often defined by death (war, for instance), there is also productive strife. This is the strife as a play of forces that allows crops to grow (Hawhee 2004, pp. 25-26). We might think fruitfully here of one of the most famous metaphors for teaching philosophy: the

philosopher as midwife.<sup>3</sup> There is strife involved in labor, at least strife as a struggle or endeavor to channel warring energies into the act of creation. There is little doubt that labor is painful, bloody, and even sometimes deadly, but out of that struggle comes new life.

*Agonism* has sometimes been perverted, though, when philosophers have thought through what it is to do philosophy, and thus how we teach our students to do philosophy. Janice Moulton (1983) describes this in her “The Paradigm of Philosophy: The Adversarial Method.” She writes:

On this view, all philosophic reasoning is, or ought to be, deductive. General claims are made and the job of philosophic research is to find counterexamples to the claims. And most important, the philosophic enterprise is seen as an unimpassioned debate between adversaries who try to defend their own views against counterexamples and produce counterexamples to opposing views...Under the Adversary Paradigm, it is assumed that the only, or at any rate, the best, way of evaluating work in philosophy is to subject it to the strongest and most extreme opposition. And it is assumed that the best way of presenting work in philosophy is to address it to an imagined opponent and muster all the evidence one can to support it (152-153).

While confronting potential objections to philosophical argument is a necessary and proper part of philosophical pedagogy, the privileging of fighting an adversary in this method means that philosophical work is thought of as a battle, as war, or as philosopher Norman Swartz famously claimed, as “blood sport.” In “Philosophy as Bloodsport,” Swartz recounts his first experience at a paper presentation at the APA during which an audience member stood up, said to a paper presenter, “Everything you said is wrong. Here is what you should have argued.” The audience member then spoke for a few minutes, the bewildered presenter looking on, and then the audience member left the room. Swartz, a graduate student at the time, first believed this incident to be an anomaly, but came to realize otherwise over his long career.

Understanding the philosopher as the adversary, the person whose goal is to be the gadfly who leaves welts on those who are wrong in their beliefs, can make the classroom a space in which the professor and students are constantly on the defense. If the highest form philosophy takes is the critique of arguments, then the work of the classroom is to show where others have failed, not necessarily to build strong arguments of our own. While teaching rigorous argumentation,

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<sup>3</sup> While this metaphor might be understood as a step in the right direction -- the inclusion of women in the practice of philosophy -- the metaphor of philosopher as midwife has done little to counter the maleness of philosophers. This is a metaphor that co-opts midwifery and labor, realms normally occupied by women, and spiritualizes them to make them genderless (or male, as he is the midwife) and bodiless. There is a generative aspect of philosopher-as-midwife, one that is potentially transformative of the ways in which we do philosophy, but the metaphor comes so laden with history, we choose to focus on others.

including dealing with counter arguments effectively, is essential to philosophical pedagogy, we must consider the way we frame the goal of argumentation. It is clear from Swartz' example the commenter at the conference was not interested in dialogue and mutual search for some truth. Instead, this person attacked and then, assuming their attack was fatal, retreated. The adversarial method presumes a battle between philosophical interlocutors, one in which there are clear winners and clear losers – one in which the goal is to survive and not necessarily make sure others survive with you. When we imagine teaching philosophy in this way, we equate quickness with brilliance, outspokenness with philosophical acumen, and memorization of facts as wisdom. This discounts the generative role of philosophy in creating new ideas and developing new frameworks of thinking. It also runs the risk of chasing out students who are not by nature assertive or aggressive. If students cannot play with ideas, offer readings of difficult texts, or engage in conversation without risk of being attacked, they very may well fall silent. Heavy reliance on the adversarial paradigm means that the necessary “adversarial moments” in our classes, like creating counter arguments, can make our classrooms an intimidating space for our students. Adversarial moments must be balanced with creative moments and encouraging moments.

Although all metaphors are doomed to failure, the sage on the stage and philosophy as battle metaphors have dominated the philosophical landscape for so long that we need to be especially concerned about the ways they have failed. While this paper is about inspiring teachers of philosophy to re-envision their role in their and their students' roles in their classrooms, we would be remiss if we did not mention the ways in which operating from these metaphors has often made the discipline of philosophy hostile to our students who do not see themselves represented in our discipline, such as women and people of color. Given the work done by Sally Haslanger and Jennifer Saul on implicit bias and stereotype threat in philosophy, presenting philosophy as battle or the teacher of philosophy as a sage who has acquired other-worldly wisdom students must supplicate themselves to receive, there can be little doubt that these metaphors have chased budding philosophers away from our classrooms (Haslanger 2008, Saul 2013). We must take great caution in appealing to these metaphors in our own teaching if we hope to serve well our students who hail from underrepresented groups.

These failures also have the potential to constrain our imaginations about what it is possible in our classrooms. These metaphors may have shaped what we expect from our students, what we think our students should expect from us, how we envision what counts as academic success for our students, and may have limited our creativity regarding classroom assignments and activities. But the biggest problem might be that these metaphors may have stopped us from

examining ourselves and allowed us to fall into problematic pedagogical patterns. In our next section, we hope to enliven thinking about the nature of teaching philosophy by pointing to metaphors for teaching philosophy hitherto unexplored in philosophical pedagogy literature.

## New Metaphors

### World-traveling

Talking of journeys, the writer James Baldwin said that in a journey “you cannot know what you will discover [...], what you will do with what you find, or what you find will do with you” (Peck 2016). Most philosophy teachers will probably agree that they *experienced* philosophy when new ideas caused them to change their way of thinking and acting. Thinking of a philosophy class as traveling is to focus on the encounter with new ideas, new reactions to old ideas, or the transformation these novel perspectives cause in us. This is when we hear our students say that “they have never thought about something that way,” or that “they had read it before but had never made this or that connection.” And we know that when those newly acquired insights lead to transformations in the way students think, we have done something right. There is a lot more involved in traveling: the traveler has to leave their home, be open to explore places and people unknown, stretch their ideas and imagination to understand new things, to share impressions with traveling buddies, and to recognize that without these efforts traveling may not be that rich. But what does this mean concretely for the classroom?

Philosophy is like world-traveling because one has to leave home. In this sense, traveling is what happens to the character in Plato’s cave that is freed from chains and takes on a journey, learns and changes, but cannot share his insights to those who have *not* traveled. The contrast is between the characters that leave their beliefs and the characters that never change their beliefs. One does not take these travels alone, however and in this way, philosophy is like world-traveling: we have travel companions, we meet people in the places we travel, we rely on others for transit. All of these require a certain openness to otherness. A philosophy class is group-traveling. It is a social process in which the sojourners encounter and come up with different perspectives. For Kant, the possibility

of *thinking* depends on the possibility of thinking “in community with others whom we communicate our thoughts and who communicate theirs to us” (quoted by Arendt 1990, p. 41).

Philosophy is like world-traveling because, upon arrival, one must *explore* a new place and may not even know how to explore it. Physical arrival is not yet travel. Arriving opens the world up to new possibilities, but they must be realized. The best travels are participatory; the traveler must find themselves making meaning of the places visited and the people with whom they interacted. In a philosophy classroom it is important to remember that the people we read, the ideas we present are new *to* our students. This is why we, professors, should be companions, perhaps akin to good tour guides. Just as in a new city a tour guide would point to landmarks worth seeing or once-shiny neighborhoods worth exploring to find hidden gems, in a class, a professor would point to concepts, arguments, or sections of the text, or would lay out lesser-known texts that articulate important ideas. And as a tour guide would share the history of the places or stories about them, and would sometimes leave the travelers free to explore after a general introduction of an area, a professor would present the history of concepts and their relationships as the class conducts a close reading of a text, or would encourage students to explore texts on their own, much in the way a carefully crafted reading guide might have open-ended questions. In this context, student presentations would be that moment when travelers come to share what they discovered, to enrich one another, after an inviting tour guide has laid out the land, the territory.

These are all ways of exploring a new territory, or proving conversations with a writer and with classmates.<sup>4</sup> It is in this sense that we are travel companions. We cannot know what connections our students will make (what side streets and detours they will take), and we certainly cannot tell them there is nothing to learn in a place they have not visited. A syllabus, then, is an itinerary for a conceptual city tour, the texts are the terrain, and the class itself is an invitation to travel.

Philosophy is like world-traveling, further, because there are persons, ideas, and places that will remain unknown, misunderstood, or deformed by us when only viewed from our standpoint, especially those places and people that are outsiders to our mainstream worlds. In proposing how to relate to others in a

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<sup>4</sup> It is in this sense that Descartes said that “reading good books is like having a conversation with the most distinguished men of past ages – indeed, a rehearsed conversation in which these authors reveal to us only the best of their thoughts” (1985, p. 113).

loving, non-arrogant way, Maria Lugones recommends a type of playful flexibility that should guide our relationships with them. She calls it world-traveling, which involves “consulting something other than one’s wills and interests and fears and imagination” (1987, p. 8). In the work of recognizing the same humanity in oneself and others, we must see things from the point of view of others, inhabit their worlds. She makes this point in speaking of her mother:

To love my mother was not possible for me while I retained a sense that it was fine for me and others to see arrogantly. Loving my mother also required that I see with her eyes, that I go into my mother’s world, that I see both of us as we are constructed in her world, that I witness her own sense of herself from within her world. Only through this traveling to her “world” could I identify with her because only then could I cease to ignore her and to be excluded and separate from her. Only then could I see her as a subject even if one subjected and only then could I see at all how meaning fully arise between us. We are fully dependent on each other for the possibility of being understood and without this understanding we are not intelligible, we do not make sense, we are not solid, visible, integrated, we are lacking. So traveling to each other’s “worlds” would enable us to be through loving each other (p. 8).<sup>5</sup>

Because traveling is experiential in this sense, because it opens up worlds for the traveler and requires the traveling to be open to visit new places, there is no information able to be simply transmitted, no sage whose experiences are central, and no mere receiver of information anywhere in the equation. There is no plain reception, but traveling to places, exploring the novel, and experiencing ideas. We change while we travel, because we travel. To say that a philosophy class is traveling to new places is an expression of the hope that when we come back, we will not be exactly in the same place and we do not come back the same.

## Wondering

The idea that philosophy begins in wonder is an idea as old as philosophy itself. In the *Theaetetus*, we hear Socrates saying: “this feeling of wonder shows that you are a philosopher, since wonder is the only beginning in philosophy” (Plato 1921, 155d). This wonder and surprise is initially disorganized and often not-yet-in-focus. No wonder that Theaetetus, asked whether he understands the seeming contradictions between absolute and relative sizes, declares: “I am *lost in wonder*

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<sup>5</sup> In the process of writing this article we learned of the death of Maria Lugones. May this section be an homage to her, to the doors she opened for making visible the experiences of outsiders in mainstream contexts, especially the experiences of women, immigrants, and persons of color.

when I think of all these things, and sometimes when I regard them it really *makes my head swim*” (1921, 155c, emphasis ours). In this section we want to remain in wondering and say not that philosophy begins *with* or comes *after* wondering, but that philosophy *is* wondering.

Wonder is vague and because of its vagueness, it does not seem very helpful when teaching philosophy. Often, philosophy teachers might prefer to deal in clear ideas: class time is limited, learning outcomes are precise and demanding. Despite its vagueness, the experience of philosophizing does begin with a sense of puzzlement, and such a sense should be cultivated and it should animate part of our teaching endeavors. When we say that philosophy is wondering, we mean that when teaching philosophy, we should try to get our students to be surprised beginners.

We can make a distinction between two moments, even two kinds, of wonder: wonder as awe and wonder as puzzlement. As awe, wonder has an element of being overwhelmed by something noteworthy that, at the moment, we do not even seek to understand. This sense is captured by words like surprise, astonishment, astoundment, amazement, marvel, and admiration. But in itself, it cannot be captured by words: it begins, as it were, with a “wow.” Awe leaves us speechless at the beginning—we can’t speak because we are just breathing in. To be open to awe, to stand in awe is to have our eyes or ears wide open: it is aperture. At this stage, there is an acknowledgment that awe-inspiring reality *fills us* in some way, just as Kant declared the starry sky above him and the moral law within filled him with wonder.

We get to awe sometimes by accident, like when reality overwhelms us even if we are not looking to be surprised. Deep social injustices can be awe-inspiring in this way, and the awe generated might hurt. Or we might get there by disinterested contemplation, but not contemplation as *theoria*, which seeks causes and principles, but as contemplation or admiration a work of art. It is interesting to note that no complexity is required for wonder. In fact, the simplest of things can lead to wonder.

To teach philosophy as an exercise in awe may be difficult since real amazement cannot be controlled. It is tempting to say that the philosophy teacher is in this sense an eye opener. But it might be better to think of us as inviting students to direct their gaze somewhere. The subtle but meaningful distinction here is that we cannot force someone to be awed. We can force someone’s eyes to open, but we can never force them to see something. The professor has the difficult task here to invite and to suggest where to look and to be open to different types of surprise and awe at the same reality.

The second type of wonder is *puzzlement*. Here, we wonder about what makes things be thus and so, what would make a person just, what would explain the workings of nature. This is the type Aristotle referred to in *Metaphysics*, linked to the recognition of ignorance and the desire to move away from it: “someone who wonders and is at an impasse considers himself to be ignorant (for which reason the lover of myth is in a certain way philosophic, since a myth is composed of wonders). So if it was by fleeing ignorance that they philosophized, it is clear that by means of knowing they were in the pursuit of knowing” (1999, 982b15ff).

In puzzlement, we start to wonder –to question– and this is why coming to an impasse is for Aristotle key. At that moment there is a contrast between what we think we know and what we cannot explain: an acknowledgement of ignorance. To teach philosophy as puzzlement is to let awe lead the way to questioning, and to let ourselves and our students get to impasses, to riddles. In this second moment, to do philosophy as wondering requires that we help students see why our answers are insufficient. Part of the difficulty here lies in making the effort to lay bare the motivation behind asking the questions. We must determine how to convey the meaningfulness of the question about the constitution of the cosmos. We must make clear what led someone to say that everything is made out of water, or that the essence of it all is strife. We must show students that the fundamental questions like “what is it all made of?” are significant, despite their intractability.

*Awe* leads to *puzzlement*. Acknowledgment of a surprising reality leads us to ask questions about it and realize the insufficiency of what we know. And yet, we have not even figured out our questions. Wondering, taken altogether, is precisely to open up a space for questions to arise in a personal way. Students can better appreciate a philosophical theory when they see what question the theory is attempting to answer and *experiences* the question as one worth pursuing. As difficult as it is, if philosophy is wondering, the task of the philosophy professor is to invite wonder-ful, wonder-filled, questions – for those are questions whose answers can motivate self-transformation through the experience of the other that philosophy can offer.

Teaching philosophy is an invitation for students to do philosophy: to travel the ever-renewed road from reality to questions to answers. The best philosophy teaching is not simply the transmission of theories, because those are of limited value if we do not understand what they are answering, and if we do not see the questions they answer as questions in need of answer. This is true for both general education students and for philosophy majors. General education



students, in particular, may not take philosophy classes because they want to, but because they have to. The challenge may then be greater. They are true novices in philosophy: if philosophical theories are to mean something to them, there is a question that should be *felt*.

Philosophy-is-wondering is a metaphor about beginnings, we know, and it is also an *orientational* metaphor. While wondering cannot tell us how to get the answers, it can help us decide where to look for those answers. We do not know where we are going, and yet we are called in the direction of our amazement. Wonder gives us reasons to look for and to think, and then it helps us orient ourselves. In an important way, this metaphor is the cultivation of a disposition: allowing oneself to be puzzled.

## The Conducting of an Orchestra

The idea of philosophy as a sort of tuning of the instrument of soul is well-trodden territory. Plato contends with the Pythagorean theory about the soul as a harmony in several of his dialogues, from the *Phaedo* to *The Republic* to the *Gorgias*. What we propose here is that teaching philosophy is not like the tuning of an individual instrument, however. Instead, it is the conducting of an orchestra.

A part of conducting is the tuning of instruments, for sure. When we teach students philosophy, we ask them to tune their souls – the instruments with which they do philosophy – so they seek and hopefully find harmony within themselves that produces *ataraxia*, a state of tranquility from which to approach new and challenging ideas (Hadot 1995). Students must both be prepared to face philosophical challenges – difficult texts, fraught conversations, sitting with indeterminacy – with calmness, and know that when these challenges arise, they can sort their way through them, even if no final solutions or exact answers are possible. This sort of soul tuning allows for students to embrace, even if they never love, the ambiguity that is part and parcel of philosophy.

This individual tuning is not an end in itself, however, just as the tuning of individual instruments is not the end point of tuning an orchestra. A conductor brings together the different instruments to tune the orchestra as a whole. What starts as a cacophony of individuals struggling to get themselves into tune comes together as a shared pursuit of harmony. As mentioned above, philosophy is never a solo pursuit. Our classrooms bring together students to engage with others in the search for wisdom, beauty, and truth. We ask our students to tune their instruments so they may be part of the orchestra of our classrooms, as

well as the collective of voices that make up the history of philosophy. In order for a classroom to be successful, all must participate, and all must find ways to allow others to participate. In a truly harmonious classroom, students support one another, accentuating their colleagues' ideas, pushing them further, increasing the tempo where appropriate. When there are moments of discord, in a good classroom, these further the musical score, alerting listeners and musicians to a change in perspective, a new movement. Of course, in a less than harmonious classroom, the percussion or the woodwinds or the brass dominate like a middle school band. In every classroom an errant piccolo can ruin the whole bunch, one offbeat drummer can shatter the classes' rhythm.

Just like performances by orchestras, sometimes our classrooms are rich and dreamy. They transport us and our students to places we would not have traveled otherwise, they get us to imagine differently, to see the duck through the oboe in *Pétya i volk*, to understand the cowardice of tending our own garden while the world burns in *Candide*. If you teach long enough, you will have that magical class, where students play unique roles, where they support one another and work together to create something more out of the same texts you have taught for years, out of the same assignments other students have undertaken, more out of the classroom space itself. Conversely, if you teach long enough, you will have a class that never gels, that does not coalesce in the ways you wish, whose performance is so stilted, the students so at odds or checked out, it feels like you are conducting a zero-period middle school band, with nothing in your toolkit to motivate the students to do the work necessary to make real music.

Just like philharmonic orchestras and the composers whose music they play, our classrooms can remain uncritically privileging canon that is not inclusive to underrepresented students in the field, such as women and people of color. While a performance such as that of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony with the Berliner Philharmonic conducted by Herbert von Karajan (1972) is emblematic of Western classical music, exclusive focus on the "masters" of the Romantic symphonic tradition limits the range of identities and repertoires that could be represented. In contrast, an orchestra could choose composers that are traditional yet little known, like Louise Farrenc (1804-1875), a XIXth century French female composer, pianist and teacher, who wrote three symphonies, among other works. Such a choice signals an openness to go beyond the canon. In this case, the instrumentation and romantic style remains, but the female identity of the composer defies the maleness of the classical canon. Another orchestra could challenge the canon by including a composition such as Chen Yi's Percussion Concerto (1998). While well recognized in the field of contemporary music, it represents a breach from the canonical tradition since it features a percussion solo,

which was not a possibility in the XIXth century.<sup>6</sup> In the same vein, philosophy professors' choices about the philosophers we read and the activities students perform with them will make our field, and our classes, more or less inclusive. Who do we read? What lines of argumentation are we open to explore? Are foundationalist projects over-represented? Do we allow the exploration of links between philosophical concepts and the lived experiences of our students?

Finally, an orchestra exists to perform music, to interpret musical texts and make them present. Whether good or bad, every classroom and every retrieval and interpretation of an historical text is unrepeatable, just as every performance by an orchestra is unrepeatable. Every performance, even of an historical piece, involves interpretation by concrete persons, is impacted by individuals' flaws and talents, by a groups' cohesion or discontinuity. Every time a class reads the *Republic*, it is different. The students who hear your lessons are different, the connections they make are different, the lessons they learn are different. Students reading about the collapse of democracy in *The Republic* in 2008 will react to and understand these passages differently than those learning about the collapse of democracy in 2018. More than this, the orchestra that is making the past present will creatively retrieve the works with considerable input from their conductor. Gardiner's *Fifth Symphony* and Furtwangler's *Fifth Symphony* are not the same. Levi Strauss' *Republic* is not Karl Popper's *Republic*. There can be worlds between Beethovens and Platos, and those worlds are shaped and molded by those doing the work of making Beethoven and Plato present.

## Storytelling

To say that doing and teaching philosophy is storytelling is to shine light on the creativity we need to satisfy our curiosity. Philosophy is seldom seen this way (and it certainly is not the image many young students have of philosophy when they first sit in our classes!). For many of our new students, philosophy often seems rigid and calculative, whereas creativity is free-flowing. It is as if in philosophy we have to follow a pre-established path whereas in more creative endeavors we make our own path as we walk. But of course, how would you know the pre-established path if you are a beginner, and perhaps not a confident one?

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<sup>6</sup> We are thankful to musicologist Dr. Matteo Magarotto and Stefani Rossi for the suggestions in this area.

Instead, many of us have asked students, implicitly or explicitly, to try to find and walk the well-trodden path. Inadvertently or not, justified by time-constraints or not, we often nip our students' ideas in the bud. Naturally, we do it for all good reasons: since we are to model proper inquiry, it is part of such skill to know when an idea is not worth exploring. Those of us adept at playing the devil's advocate, of being three or four steps ahead, do not let those nascent responses grow. The net result here is that many students, and perhaps more those who are not easily inclined to philosophize (in the usual ways), hesitate in sharing their ideas about a philosophical problem. There should be a way of making the practice of philosophy more welcoming for all our students, even those that look at philosophy with an ounce of reticence.

We think that the playfulness and the creative aspect of storytelling have something to offer in response to the tendency to deny certain student intuitions and ideas. It is not that stories and storytelling are alien to philosophers. Logos and mythos are an important part of our canonical texts. Stories and storytelling are even part of our professional development as philosophers and are part of the education provided to us as we work on academic credentials. In professional settings, it is not uncommon to share stories of philosophical heroes and villains and of conferences gone by. For women and minorities in our field, stories serve as ways of warning about predatory faculty and hostile and dangerous programs. Knowing and telling these stories means that you have made it into the club of professional philosophers. But we want to suggest that the metaphor be more fully embraced in our conceptions of pedagogy.

For starters, telling stories is the most common way of explaining things. We all tell stories, and we do it because it is a natural way of making sense of things. In this sense, storytelling is a way of understanding, and it is this basic feature what connects it with philosophy. What makes a story a good story, J. David Velleman says "is its excellence at a particular way of organizing events into an intelligible whole" (2003, p. 1) . And what makes it intelligible, he continues, is that events and characters are linked as a series of probable and necessary causes, assigning inevitability to some connections, likelihood to others, and leaving some to sheer luck. These elements are present, or try to be, in the most sophisticated theories as well as in the simplest of stories.

Let us look for a moment at storytelling. First, when we start telling stories, we are looking for good, plausible stories but not necessarily for *the* perfect story. Stories do not always need to be unique or exceptional to be worthwhile, though some rare ones are both. Telling stories, then, is low stakes. Even if the story fizzles out at the end or is confusing in the middle, the attempt at creativity has not necessarily failed – it has only begun. This is because stories are

revisable. In this way, they exemplify the heuristic nature of our philosophical questions and answers. The philosophical tradition is, in this sense, a long exercise in storytelling—a long and collaborative philosophical enterprise in which one story about how the universe works or how we should live with one another is tested against another. It is just as important to bring our students to see philosophical ideas and theories as creative answers to concrete questions as it is to invite them to see that those theories are not definitive answers and to ask them to point out argumentative flaws.

In our classrooms, storytelling inserts itself where wondering leaves off. When we wonder we have a sense of what we do not understand, and often we do not know how to continue, we do not know how to move forward. Storytelling is the bridge between questions and answers. Stories explain how the questions first arose, and allow us to tell about our search for the answers. In this, as in many other areas, Plato is second to none. Socrates stages a story with his questions and uses them to frame problems and deploy characters: *Might the mind be like an aviary? Is the body like a sitar? What if we found a ring that made us invisible so we can do as we please without fear of repercussions? Is the philosopher like a fly that bothers a sleepy horse?* Part of the richness of the serious playfulness of Socrates' questioning is to remember that, however organized by logic, however constrained our questions and our answers are by other answers, the activity of philosophy is impossible without creativity.

But perhaps even more important than the ways in which stories can elucidate philosophical concepts is the way in which understanding teaching philosophy as storytelling shines a light on how philosophy has marginalized certain voices. When we tell stories, the stories we do not tell can be as enlightening as those that we do. We need to be aware of the stories we are not listening and are not telling. Hilde Lindemann's work on the moral nature of stories is useful here. Stories, according to Lindemann, are identity-constituting. Identities are “complex narrative constructions consisting of a fluid interaction of the many stories and fragments of stories surrounding the things that seem most important, from one's own point of view and the point of view of others, about a person over time” (Lindemann 2001, 20). Thus, the stories we tell about ourselves and others tell about us and the groups to which we belong either enlarge or constrain our possibilities in the world. Our moral agency is either fostered or hindered by these stories. When we understand teaching philosophy as storytelling, then, we should become acutely aware of what stories are being told, whose agency is being supported, and whose voice is not being heard. If there are no voices of women, people of color, indigenous people, or LGBTQ+ people in your classroom, what does that say to your students about how philosophy values those

communities? Moreover, if there is not space for your students to find their own voices in your classroom, especially for your students from groups historically underrepresented in philosophy, there would be little reason for these students to assume that there is a place in the discipline for them. Philosophy as storytelling asks us to critically examine our pedagogy for the silences in our own classrooms and to take those silences as seriously as we do the dominant voices in the canon.

We ask our students to tell us stories all of the time, even if we do not realize it. We ask them what Aristotle would have said to Plato, we ask them to explain the significance of a philosophical concept in their lives now, we ask them to relate a contemporary work of fiction or art to what they are reading. All of these requests require an understanding of the persons involved – the philosophers, the artists, and the students – and how they relate with one another. A story is not good in the abstract—nor are philosophical theories. Who is it the story for? Who are the characters? Why might our students be interested in the stories? What do these stories mean for their lives? These questions we hope to answer for our students, and occasionally, we ask them to answer for us. We can make room for all of our students when we ask for their stories and make sure that we take seriously the need to counteract the way in which our discipline has silenced and ignored the stories of anyone who is not white or male for most of its history -- or worse, told stories about non-white, non-male persons that diminished their agency and denied their humanity.

## Coaching

Although many of us might feel that as professors of philosophy we have more in common with Lewis and Gilbert, the nerds in the 1984 classic *Revenge of the Nerds*, rather than the tormentors of those nerds, the Alpha Betas who made up the film's university football team, for ancient Greek philosophers, sport was a realm of human excellence that was not to be neglected. Athletic competitions were a venue for displaying virtues, and for Plato and Aristotle, athletics and sport were an essential component of a full education, and thus necessary for human flourishing (Reid 2011). While we make no claims regarding the necessity of sport for human flourishing, we are inspired by the idea that sports are more than simple pastimes or games, and that the coaching of sport might offer a helpful metaphor for thinking about what we do and can do in philosophy classrooms. The philosopher as a coach is a fundamentally different character than the

philosopher as sage or adversary. The goal of a coach is never to merely transmit the theory of the game she coaches. The coach wants their players to understand how the game works, yes, but ultimately, wants their players to play the game. Insofar as theoretical knowledge is necessary for understanding how to play the game well, they coach them in that. But this is never the final goal.

Teaching the history of philosophy – the conversations between the major “players” and the circumstances in which those conversations happened – is an important part of a philosophical education, to be sure. But ultimately, the goal of the philosophy teacher is to transform the way their students live. In Pierre Hadot’s reading of ancient philosophy, “Philosophy...took on the form of an exercise of thought, will, and the totality of one’s being, the goal of which was to achieve a state practically inaccessible to mankind: wisdom. Philosophy was a method of spiritual progress which demanded a radical conversion and transformation of the individual’s way of being” (Hadot 1981, 265). Although this is a lofty goal for a contemporary academic classroom, it is hard to imagine a philosopher not wanting their students to leave their classroom personally transformed in some way. It is not just that we want our students to understand the differences between the formulations of Kant’s Categorical Imperative, but that they come to think about the nature of ethical deliberations differently after we share with them how philosophers have reasoned through the nature of good and just actions. A coach might explain the physiology of the shoulder to their pitcher, but not merely as a physiology lesson – as a science applicable to the actions and craft of the sport the pitcher plays.

Yet it is not the case that a good coach does not try to instill a love for the history of the game, for the sport itself, in their players and tap into that love when it is already there. NFL coaches ask professional players in the NFL to learn a bit of the history of the teams that they join in order to help them understand their place in the team’s history and future. They invite former players to speak with new players and take new players to the team’s history museum (Jeffery Howard, Text Message, July 2020). Good philosophy professors do the same with historical texts and conversations, explaining to students that they now take part in keeping these conversations alive and in some instances, advancing those conversations. We make clear that famous philosophers, like our students, were people trying to make sense of the world and how to live in it, people who were caught up in histories and contexts that motivated their questions, just like our students find themselves motivated by questions.

Contra the adversary, teaching philosophy is also like coaching insofar as a coach wants their players to become better than them – they long for their students to make philosophical advances, academic or otherwise. There is no competition between the coach and their players – they desire for their players to become the best they can at the game they play, even if it means surpassing the level of achievement of the coach. Similarly, the coach works with all members of the team, even those who will not be superstars, even those who warm the bench. In our classrooms, good teachers of philosophy recognize the value of both the star pupils in the classroom, as well as those who may not have an inclination for philosophical work, but still show up to the class ready to try.

Good coaches, like good philosophy teachers, find ways for their players to work together to help each other become better as individuals and as a team. Coaches know how to leverage the assets of each team member to improve the experience and performance of the whole. A good coach, like a good philosophy teacher, recognizes that their players must not only improve their individual performances to make a team better, but the players must work to shore up each other's weaknesses and use each other's strengths. This works out in the classroom when we purposefully pair students or group students to ensure that every group has a student who is (more than) willing to talk in front of the class and a quiet student who is an excellent reader of texts and a student whose enthusiasm for philosophy is infectious. We leverage our students' gifts in our classes in order to encourage those gifts in other students.

And just like in coaching a sports team, the coach can only do their job well if their players are willing to put forth effort. A team composed of players who do not desire to be on the team will make for very different coaching possibilities than one composed of players who are excited to be playing and ready to work. Without an initial desire, or at least enough interest that the students in a class might eventually desire to learn, there is only so much a professor can do to increase the energy of a classroom. Thankfully, it is a rare class that lacks energy or desire entirely, so a professor who understands their role in the classroom as a coach can harness what energy there is to the class' advantage.



## Conclusion

One of the possibilities of metaphors is that they allow us to understand ourselves. They allow us to compare who we are to who we want to be. But there is no escaping our use of metaphor in the work of conceptualizing ourselves differently – we can only imagine ourselves differently through other metaphors. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) explain, “...metaphors are not merely things to be seen beyond. In fact, one can see beyond them only by using other metaphors” (p. 238). Given the ways in which our field has privileged the perspectives of particular groups, specifically of white men, traditional metaphors about teaching philosophy have given us a field that can be hostile to difference and made our field an unwelcoming place for women and students of color. Imagining ourselves and our field otherwise, how we teach our discipline and who participates in our discipline, requires the adoption of new metaphors in order to transcend the limitations of the old metaphors. Inclusivity, equity, and anti-racism require imaginative work and require us to ask how we can transform ourselves and our classrooms to redress the problematic legacy of so much of Western philosophy. Although there is important conceptual work to be done in these areas, one of the most important loci of the transformation of our field will be where we *do* philosophy and teach others to do philosophy — in our classrooms.

In this paper, we suggested that we must examine closely the metaphors we use to conceptualize what it is for us to be teachers of philosophy. If we fail to do so, we run the risk of not seeing potential riches as yet to be mined in our classrooms, of not seeing new ways to engage and inspire our students to do the work of philosophy, and of not challenging ourselves to become otherwise than what we already are. May we and our students get to travel in our classes. May we coach them to be better and more thoughtful people. May we tell stories, conduct symphonies, set hearts alive with wonder.

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