A Philosophical Conundrum:
The Teaching of Philosophy in Ontario’s Secondary Schools

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
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Abstract

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In 1994 philosophy was formally approved as an Ontario Academic Credit (OAC) for secondary school seniors. This thesis examines two sharply contrasting conceptions of, and methodologies for, teaching philosophy in high schools, namely Matthew Lipman’s “Philosophy for Children” program and the recent Ontario curriculum. The context of the inquiry is the philosophical assumption that one of the most important general goals of education is to develop habits of mind and thinking skills appropriate to becoming autonomous human beings (or persons). After an extensive discussion of the concepts of a person, autonomy, indoctrination and education, it is argued that the study of philosophy is specifically well suited to enhance the achievement of this goal. Despite the highly significant merits of each program examined, both are also shown to have noteworthy design deficiencies that some rethinking of each in the light of the other might help rectify.
I don’t want to achieve immortality through my work. 
I want to achieve it through not dying. 

- Woody Allen

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As far as my friends are concerned, I am sure that they are all thankful that this thesis is now complete. I would like to thank them for putting up with me over the past year and a half and for all of the support that they offered me.
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Introduction

In 1994, the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training approved a curriculum guideline for a philosophy course designed for high school seniors. Each year since the release of this document more and more schools throughout the province have decided to add this course to their calendar, while schools that have been offering philosophy since its inception are reporting that the course, which initially had a high enrollment and was received by students with an abundance of enthusiasm, has become even more popular. As we approach the new millennium, however, one that is certain to see many more great technological advances, the global village become even more closely knit, and a job market that will require an even greater degree of specialized skill and knowledge, it would be appropriate to question why high schools are even bothering to teach philosophy or why such a course would even be approved by the Ministry. Wouldn't high school students be better off if instead they took courses in computer technology, business administration or even auto mechanics? How would understanding Plato, Descartes, or Hume help students find a job? How would being exposed to epistemological, metaphysical, or existential questions and theories help students cope in the 21st century? Is it realistic to expect that students would become more ethical after being exposed to a few theories of morality? Surely it would be agreed that a course should not be offered simply because it is popular amongst students, especially if the students could be gaining more valuable skills and more useful knowledge taking other courses.

While there certainly must be some good reasons why philosophy is presently being taught in many high schools, it would seem that a number of relatively convincing
arguments can also be advanced as to why such a course should not be offered. In the first chapter of this thesis, therefore, an examination of some of the arguments against teaching philosophy in the high schools will be examined. This will be followed, however, by a quick look at one of the primary reasons why philosophy should be taught in our high schools. In a nutshell, the argument that is going to be advanced here, and that is going to be further developed later on in this thesis, is that there is no subject better suited for helping high school students learn how to become autonomous human beings than philosophy.

In the second chapter, a more general question, "What is the purpose of a high school education?", will be examined. The answer advanced will be that the primary goal of high schools must be to educate students rather than to indoctrinate students. It will be argued, in other words, that what high school teachers and administrators must be most concerned with is helping their students learn the skills, knowledge, and habits of mind that will enable them to become autonomous human beings. This argument will be supported by first examining the role authority plays in education, then by distinguishing the process of indoctrinating from the process of educating, and lastly by examining what, exactly, it means to be an autonomous human being and why it is so important for students to learn to become autonomous human beings.

In chapters three and four what will be considered is the validity of Bertrand Russell’s claim that studying philosophy can “enlarge our conception of what is possible, enrich our intellectual imagination, and diminish the dogmatic assurance which closes the mind against speculation” (quoted in Annis and Annis 1979, p. 145). This will be accomplished by looking at two radically different methodologies that are currently being
used to teach philosophy in high schools and examining them in terms of the potential that they each have to help students develop the skills and habits of mind necessary to become autonomous human beings. Matthew Lipman’s Philosophy for Children program will be the focus of the third chapter, while in the fourth chapter the methodology that will be examined is that which is currently being used to teach philosophy in Ontario’s high schools. Some of the more specific questions that will be examined in these chapters, however, include: How effective can either of these two methodologies be in helping students improve their thinking, reasoning, and questioning skills? Is either of these methodologies ideal for getting students to become more curious and more inquisitive? Are students more likely to recognize the difference between a teacher who is acting “in authority” compared to a teacher who is acting as “an authority” as a consequence of being exposed to philosophy using either of these methods? Will students who have been exposed to philosophy using either of these methodologies be less susceptible to indoctrination?

In the fifth and final chapter, the arguments that were advanced earlier on in this thesis will be tied together to show why, provided that an appropriate teaching methodology is used, there are few subjects more ideally suited than philosophy for helping high school students learn to become autonomous human beings. It will be shown, for example, why taking a philosophy course should help most high school students learn how to perform more humanly. It will be shown how taking a philosophy course should help students learn to discriminate amongst those people who possess legal authority, who possess charismatic authority, and who possess authority with respect to knowledge. It will be shown how, as a result of taking a philosophy course, students should be less susceptible to indoctrination as
well as become more open-minded, more curious and inquisitive, as well as help them to question more effectively, reason more effectively, and think in a more analytical, critical, and creative manner. Prior to examining exactly how philosophy courses can help students develop these skills and habits of mind, however, it would be wise first to consider why high schools should even consider offering philosophy to their students.
Chapter 1

Why Teach Philosophy in High Schools?

There are many reasons, it would seem, why a philosophy course should not be included in the high school curriculum. The most obvious of these, perhaps, is that most of the information that the students would accumulate as a result of taking such a course would be of little practical use to them. Most adolescents do not care to know, nor is it really important for them to know or to be able to reproduce, what philosophers such as Plato, Descartes, Kant, Hume or Spinoza had to say. It is most unlikely that any employers would require that their employees understand the mind-body problem or that they be able to explain the difference between idealism and realism. In fact, this type of knowledge is highly unlikely ever to be required of CEOs, vice presidents, managers, or supervisors. The only individuals who must be familiar with this material are those who intend to become professional philosophers or who already are professional philosophers. It is probably not unreasonable to assume, however, that there are very few high school students at the present time who aspire to make philosophy their future profession. It is probably also relatively safe to assume that there are not too many parents today who would be overly disappointed if their sons and daughters did not eventually gain employment working as philosophers. Philosophers today simply do not receive the respect or the admiration that they did in earlier times. For example, people today, including most philosophers, do not share Plato’s view that only philosophers are qualified to govern a city. Moreover, rarely does an entire community come together upon the passing of a philosopher in order to pay their respects as
people have recently done upon the passing of Princess Diana and Mother Theresa and as the people reportedly did when Theophrastus passed away in 287 BCE (Hamlyn 1992, p. 171). In fact, in a relatively recent article published in the Globe and Mail that discussed the public’s reaction to the passing of Thomas Kuhn, one of the most respected philosophers of the twentieth century, John Naughton wrote,

Thomas Kuhn died June 17, and nobody noticed. . . . If you wanted a testimony to “the dumbing of America,” then this was it. A society that worships Forrest Gump and pays $100-million to see Disney bowdlerize Victor Hugo is hardly going to be surprised to learn that Dr. Kuhn is dead: it never even knew he was alive. (1996, p. A15)

Although “dumbing” may not have been the most appropriate word that Naughton could have used, he certainly is accurate in recognizing that present day philosophers no longer receive celebrity status or treatment in society. In fact, most people today would probably be hard pressed to name even one twentieth century philosopher and would have even a more difficult time recognizing one by face. Even though this is not necessarily a fault or a vice of society today, it is a testament to how times have changed.

In order to appreciate just how drastically times have changed since those days when Plato and Theophrastus were living, however, one only has to consider the amount of technology that is currently being used as well as how sophisticated technology has become. Most of the technology that presently exists, for example, and that is presently being used by people in their day-to-day lives, are things that those who lived during Theophrastus’s time, or for that matter, who even lived within twenty centuries of his time, would have never even thought could be possible. Things such as cars, televisions, telephones, fax machines, garage door openers, electric can openers, computers, and the Internet are things that were unthinkable to those who were living even a few centuries ago. There can also be little
doubt that a century from now technology will exist that many people today probably cannot even imagine. Taking all of this into consideration, it would seem that one thing that high schools must presently concern themselves with is helping students learn how to use technology, understand technology, and feel comfortable living in a world that is constantly becoming more and more dependent on technology. It would seem, however, that offering a philosophy course to students would in no way inherently further this objective. Although it could be argued by some that technology could be integrated into a philosophy course by having students examine philosophy sites on the Internet, this argument, at least on its own, is not a very convincing one since there are excellent web sites that students can examine on almost any subject imaginable. There are hundreds if not thousands of web sites that students can investigate that are relevant to geography, history, math, science, music, as well as almost every other subject that is currently being taught in high schools. In other words, it would seem that a philosophy course has nothing unique to offer students by way of helping them use technology, understand technology, or even just feel more comfortable living in a world that is constantly becoming more dependent on technology.

If the facts that students are taught in philosophy courses will not help them become more skilled at handling technology, or for that matter, be of any help to them in their search for a job or occupation, is it possible that the information that they will learn could at least

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1 Teachers, students, and other interested parties who are interested in looking at philosophy sites on the Internet or who would like to do some research on philosophy or learn about philosophy using the Internet should examine http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/~hsphil. This site has been created by a number of students at OISE and at The University of Toronto, including myself, under the supervision of Christopher Olsen. It provides links to many very good web sites that provide information on philosophers, philosophical schools of thought as well as philosophical topics. A number of bibliographies can also be found at this web site listing books and articles that would be appropriate for high school students and teachers teaching high school philosophy to consult.
help them become better citizens? One aim of education must certainly be to help students learn how to be, and the importance of being, just and moral citizens. If the information that is taught in a philosophy course could therefore teach students to act more ethically, as well as to be more just, then there might be some justification for including a philosophy course in the high school curriculum. Is it likely, however, that students will act more ethically or morally after being exposed to a few theories of morality? Is it likely that after being exposed to Kant’s ideas on ethics, for example, that students would begin to act according to the categorical imperative? Are students likely to give more serious consideration to whether their actions will bring the most happiness or the least unhappiness to the greatest number of people after learning about utilitarianism? The answer to all of these questions is most likely “no”. The information that students would obtain during a few lessons on ethical theories is highly unlikely to have any significant impact with respect to how individuals live their lives. In fact, it is highly doubtful that the information gathered throughout an entire course on ethical theories would drastically influence students’ behaviour.

Why then should philosophy be taught in high schools? Throughout the course of this thesis what will be argued is that one of the primary reasons philosophy should be taught and studied in high schools is because there is no subject better suited for helping high school students learn to become autonomous human beings than philosophy. Although it may be true that the information students take away from a philosophy course is not likely to impress many potential employers, the skills that they learn as a result of taking philosophy and the habits of mind that they develop likely will. This is simply because it is in
philosophy courses that students learn such things as how to detect fallacies in reasoning, how to dissect and refute faulty arguments, how to question effectively, how to reason effectively, how to communicate ideas effectively, as well as how to think in a more comprehensive, caring, critical, and creative manner (Breslin 1982, p. 364). Armed with these skills and habits of mind, students, in most cases, will be very well equipped to do such things as uncover errors in reasoning, solve problems, weigh evidence, distinguish facts from value judgments, respect ideas offered by others that are different from their own, and deal with change.

The greatest benefit that students might receive from taking a philosophy course, however, might very well be that it would provide them with some much needed time, as well as with probably a much needed context, for examining some of life’s most fundamental questions so that they can better understand what it means to be human and to live in the world that we do. At one time or another every individual has probably wondered about such philosophical conundrums as the nature of being and the nature of reality, about the nature of morality and what they are morally obligated to do, as well as about the nature of knowledge and what, if anything, can be known. In a recent article published in Time magazine, Daniel J. Boorstin states, “Man is the asking animal” (1997, p. 13). In his article, “Why Philosophy for Children?”, Will Robinson similarly suggests that we are all philosophers and that what we all seek is “meaning” (1995, p. 7). Taking these ideas into consideration, it is reasonable to assume that most people would welcome the opportunity to hear others’ ideas on topics such as these, including those offered by the great philosophers, and to then compare them with their own. Most people would also probably enjoy the
chance to bounce some of their own ideas about some of life's most fundamental questions off others in an academic setting and then to critically examine them with others. By doing this they would likely be able to gain a better sense of where exactly, why exactly, and how exactly they themselves fit into the world.

Although it may be true that students who study philosophy will not usually leave their classes or their courses with concrete answers to the questions that they examined, presumably they will leave having been exposed to a variety of different, and sometimes even conflicting, well reasoned opinions and arguments. At the very least, they will come away having had an opportunity to consider and reflect on their own ideas as well as a wide variety of ideas offered by others about what it means to be human and about what it means to live in the world that we do.

In his article “Education: The Engagement and its Frustration”, Michael Oakeshott suggests that it is exactly these types of opportunities that students need to receive in school. He claims that school years should be an “initiation into the mysteries of a human condition: the gift of self-knowledge and of a satisfying intellectual and moral identity” (1971, p. 26). He also takes the position that schools should not be overly concerned with trying to help their students satisfy their current wants or interests or with trying to provide them with the answers to “the ‘loaded’ questions of ‘life’” (1971, p. 25). What Oakeshott argues, rather, is that schools should strive to help each and every student learn how to be “at once an autonomous and a civilized subscriber to a human life” (1971, p. 26). It is the theme so succinctly expressed in this sentence that I take as a guiding principle for the inquiry to follow.
If Oakeshott is in fact correct, and one of the primary goals of schooling should be to help students become autonomous human beings, then the thesis to be advanced here is that there are few subjects more appropriate to include in the high school curriculum than philosophy to help achieve this goal. Engaging in philosophy should enable students to learn the skills and develop the habits of mind that will allow them to become more autonomous. They should learn how to question more effectively, reason more effectively, as well as think in a more analytical, critical, creative, and caring manner. They should also likely learn to be more open-minded as well as more inquisitive and curious. Engaging in philosophy should force students to examine seriously what it means to be human and to live in the world that we do. It should expose them to questions, ideas, and opinions that they never previously considered. Whether or not in fact students achieve these lofty goals as a result of studying philosophy is an empirical question beyond the scope of this thesis. It may also be virtually impossible to measure success for several of these goals since they pertain to the sorts of characteristics that are manifested - or not - in a person’s daily living long after that person has completed a formal education. Nonetheless, these goals are plausible enough as an expression of the goals of teaching and studying philosophy at a pre-university level. Prior to jumping to any conclusions, however, with regard to what high schools should and should not teach and what philosophy does and does not teach, a question that must first be examined is “What is the purpose of a high school education?”. This question, therefore, will now be examined.
Chapter 2

The Purpose of a High School Education

Becoming A Human Being

In “Education: The Engagement and Its Frustration”, Michael Oakeshott argues that human beings are much more than just physical objects composed of biological impulses (1971, p. 20). He also argues that it is wrong for anyone to believe that human beings can be defined or understood merely by considering their behaviour (1971, p. 20). What he claims, rather, is that human beings are only “what they understand themselves to be” and that they are composed “entirely of beliefs about themselves and about the world they inhabit” (1971, p. 19). As far as those individuals are concerned who do not yet possess beliefs or who do not yet possess an understanding of the world in which they live, Oakeshott simply claims that they are not yet fully human. He insists that such individuals are only “postulants” or “strangers to the human condition” (1971, p. 21). It is only when they acquire beliefs and develop an understanding of the world in which they live that he claims that they should be considered human beings. What makes human beings unique, he claims, and what distinguishes them from other beings and other things is their ability to understand, believe, and grasp meaning. The world that human beings live in, he asserts, is a world that is composed entirely of meanings - meanings which must be “recognized, identified, understood and responded to” in terms of some sort of understanding (1971, p. 21). All

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1 When Oakeshott uses the term ‘human being’ what he essentially means is the same thing that most others mean when they use the term ‘person’. That is, the concept includes much more than that of a species made up of biological organisms.
human artifacts, he points out, including even such basic things as "books, pictures, musical compositions, tools and utensils" are expressions that have meanings and which therefore cannot be used or enjoyed unless they are first understood (1971, p. 21). Something that must be appreciated, however, is that the process that people go through in order to acquire beliefs and develop an understanding of themselves and of the world in which they live is not merely a predetermined process of growth during which a potential becomes actual. There is no picture on a box, in other words, depicting how the puzzle will turn out. Human beings can only evolve, rather, as they discover, analyze, and interpret their world that is composed not just of "things" but of meanings as well (1971, p. 21). Becoming a human being, therefore, is something that must be learned and the type of human being one becomes depends largely on how one learns and what one learns. As Oakeshott writes,

> If this inheritance were composed of natural "things" or artefacts, then its transmission would be hardly more than a mechanical formality, a handing over of physical objects. But it is not. It is composed of human activities, aspirations, sentiments, images, opinions, beliefs, modes of understanding, customs and practices; in short, states of mind which may be entered into only in a procedure of learning. (1971, p. 22)

What Oakeshott is trying to convey, essentially, is that learning to become human and to perform humanly is an extremely complex task. A person is not a human being simply because he/she has been born a human being, because he/she has been given a birth certificate or because he/she possesses certain physical features. One must learn to become a human being, rather, and this involves "learning to look, to listen, to think, to feel, to imagine, to believe, to understand, to choose, and to wish" (1971, p. 22). It is a process that must be recognized as a "specific human engagement"; as a transaction that can only take place between generations of human beings (1971, p. 19). Newcomers to the world must be
initiated into the world that they are going to inhabit, and schools, Oakeshott believes, are the primary places where this initiation must take place. In fact, in his article, Oakeshott even goes as far as to state that teachers are the "only indispensable equipment" that schools possess (1971, p. 25). He states that teachers are the custodians "of that 'practice' in which an inheritance of human understanding survives and is perpetually renewed in being imparted to newcomers" (1971, p. 25). Those who teach, in other words, are responsible for, and must be held accountable for, making sure that those that they teach acquire the knowledge, the skills and the habits of mind that will enable them to be human.

If one now takes a moment to reflect on Oakeshott's conception of human beings, as well as his explanation of what it is to be a human being and what is involved in becoming a human being, it can be appreciated just what an enormous responsibility it is to be a teacher. As individuals placed in positions of authority, teachers, due to the nature of their job, can quite obviously have a tremendous influence over what their students believe as well as how they believe. They hold positions in which they can greatly influence what kind of human beings their students become.

To recognize just what kind of an impact teachers can have on their students and to appreciate what can happen if teachers do not take their responsibility seriously or if they act irresponsibly, one only has to consider what took place in Eckville, Alberta, during the 1970's and early 1980's. It was there and then that James Keegstra, the mayor of the community, as well as a high-school history teacher, was teaching his students that the Holocaust never actually took place and that Jews everywhere were conspiring to gain control of the world and destroy western Christian civilization (Collette, p. 9). Keegstra's
students, who respected him and trusted him, simply believed everything that they were being taught. They took notes in class based on his lectures, studied their notes so that they could reproduce what was said in class on their tests, and left Keegstra’s classes accepting every claim that he had presented to them as being true. The students assumed that because Mr. Keegstra was a history teacher, an authority on history, that he knew the truth, knew the facts, and was just teaching them history.

Although one hopes that there are very few James Keegstras currently teaching in this world, the above frightening example clearly illustrates just how much power and influence teachers can have over their students. It also exemplifies how an abuse of this power can affect what students believe, and, if Oakeshott is mostly right, essentially what kind of human beings they become. The above example also serves to show how important it is for both teachers and students to be able to differentiate between someone who is “in authority” compared to someone who is “an authority” as well as between someone who is “educating” compared to someone who is merely “indoctrinating” his/her students.

Authority in the Classroom

When teachers are managing their classrooms, disciplining students who are disregarding school rules, organizing and developing curriculums and assignments, or evaluating students’ work and abilities, they are usually acting from their positions “in authority” or according to what Max Weber would call their “legal authority” (Weber 1963, p. 64). They have usually been given the right, as Thomas Hobbes would claim, to make certain decisions, issue certain pronouncements, give certain commands and perform certain
significant acts within the classroom and school community that other individuals would not be allowed or authorized to carry out (in Peters 1967c, p. 85). The reason that the majority of students willingly submit to this authority, and the reason why parents, school administrators, and government officials agree to confer this authority upon teachers, is because they all recognize, at least to some extent, that in order for schools to function properly not only must someone in every classroom be “in authority” but that person’s authority must also be accepted as well as respected (Winch 1967, p. 99). They recognize, as David Bell does in his book *Power, Influence, and Authority*, that authority “is a mechanism *par excellence* for coordinating action among individuals. When authority is ‘working properly’, things get done” (Bell 1975, p. 63). If students were responsible for making *all* of their own decisions regarding what was right and wrong, what was appropriate and inappropriate, and what was acceptable and unacceptable within the classroom and the school community then schools, plainly and simply, would not work.

As Peter Winch states, however, “The decision as to what is right and wrong in a given case can never depend *completely* on one’s own caprice” (1967, p. 99). This, in fact, is why teachers, in almost every school community, have been given the power, or have been authorized, to enforce the established or presupposed rules and have been made responsible for making sure that certain standards are maintained and certain curriculum is covered. Like police officers, judges, referees, and political leaders, teachers are also usually provided “with a ‘backing’ of sanctions, both positive and negative” to help them carry out the various tasks over which they have been given legal authority (Bell 1975, p. 41). Teachers, for example, often have the power to do such things as fail a student if he/she does not meet
certain academic standards, recommend a student for an academic award, keep students in for detention, and prevent them from participating in extracurricular activities.

Respecting a teacher as “an authority”, however, is quite a different thing from respecting a teacher because he/she is “in authority”. What in most cases is being suggested when a teacher is referred to as “an authority”, is that that teacher should be respected because he/she possesses at least some degree of expert knowledge and/or expert skill in the subject(s) that he/she teaches (T. Russell 1983, p. 30). It must be understood, however, as R.S. Peters points out in his article entitled “Authority”, that there is no specified system of rules that determines whether or not a teacher, or any individual for that matter, should be regarded as “an authority” (1967c, p. 89). Instead a teacher usually “comes to be regarded as an authority” by others only when others become aware of his/her “training, competence and past success” (Peters 1967c, p. 89). It is likely, for example, that a high school history teacher would eventually come to be regarded as an authority on Canadian history by those within the high school where he/she teaches if it came to be known that he/she extensively studied Canadian history in undergraduate as well as in graduate school and that he/she frequently visits Canadian museums and reads books about Canadian history during his/her leisure time. As a result of gaining this status, students as well as fellow teachers would likely be inclined to come to this individual if they wanted to obtain any information on Canadian history and would also probably accept most of the information that he/she offered about Canadian history as being true without much hesitation. They would assume that because of his/her “training, competence, and past success” that he/she would be able prove or at least corroborate any of the claims that he/she offered with sound and valid evidence
As David Bell points out in *Power, Influence, and Authority*, however, if it was ever recognized that this person “repeatedly uttered egregiously incorrect statements about subjects in the field of his supposed expertise”, then it is likely that such a teacher’s influence and his/her status as “an authority” would quickly diminish (1975, p. 40). When acting *just* as “an authority”, a teacher does not have the power nor the right to impose positive or negative sanctions on individuals who do not respect him/her as an authority. In other words, a teacher cannot make his/her students believe or accept the claims that he/she offers. A teacher’s right to punish and reward students derives only from his/her legal authority or from his/her status as an individual “in authority”. When acting only as “an authority” and when being respected only as “an authority” a teacher is only in a position whereby he/she can try to influence others intellectually, or manipulate their perceptions (Bell 1975, p. 26).

There are many teachers, however, and it is not unlikely that Keegstra was one of them, who also possess what Max Weber calls “charismatic authority”. Individuals who possesses this type of authority, according to Weber, have the ability to influence others even though they do not necessarily possess legal authority over others and even though they may never have had any special training or possess any special competence. What draws others towards these individuals and what enables people who possess charismatic authority to influence others are special and often somewhat mysterious characteristics that they possess. Perhaps it is the person’s personality that entices others to obey him/her or believe what he/she says, perhaps it is the person’s reputation, perhaps it is the person’s stature, or perhaps there is just something about the person “which people recognize in virtue of which
they do what he says simply because he says it” (Peters 1967c, p. 91). The person might possess, for instance, what has come to be known as an “air of authority” or an “authoritative voice”. The point that is being made is that it is not unusual for a person who possesses charismatic authority to be treated as if he/she is “in authority” or as if he/she is “an authority” even though he/she does not necessarily have the qualifications that warrant his/her being treated in this way. Although teachers do have some legal authority within their classrooms as well as usually possess some expert knowledge, those who also possess charismatic authority have the ability to influence their students in areas over which they do not have legal authority or authority of knowledge. It is probably not unreasonable to assume, in fact, that many teachers who are successful at maintaining order in their classroom are successful not because of the legal authority that they possess but rather because of the charismatic authority that they possess, even if their “charisma” is not particularly remarkable.

In case it has not already been recognized, being “in authority” and being “an authority” are not by any means incompatible. That is, a teacher can, and often does, simultaneously take on both roles. In fact, as Thomas Russell points out in his article “Analyzing Arguments in Science Classroom Discourse”, “The teacher’s authority of knowledge is fundamental” (1983, p. 30). Rarely, if ever, are individuals hired to teach and, as a result, placed “in authority” if they do not possess at least some specialized skills or a certain level of knowledge (T. Russell 1983, p. 30). The history teacher, for example, is expected to have a certain background in history, the math teacher in math, the music teacher in music, and the physics teacher in physics. Similarly, elementary school teachers
who are responsible for teaching many subjects are expected to possess a certain level of knowledge about all of the subjects that they teach as well as probably some expertise regarding child development. Being an authority of knowledge in a position of authority, however, is what obliges teachers to provide reasons and evidence for the information they advance (T. Russell 1983, p. 30). As B.P. Komisar argues, teaching must not only involve providing students with certain information but must also involve providing explicit and valid reasons to support that information (in T. Russell 1983, p. 30).

The reason it is crucial for both students and teachers to be able to distinguish between someone who is acting “in authority”, between someone who possesses “charismatic authority” and between someone who is acting as “an authority” is because if this distinction is not appreciated then it becomes possible for teachers as well as others who are “in authority” or who possess “charismatic authority” “to present knowledge claims without reasons” (T. Russell 1983, p. 30). For example, it is not unreasonable to assume that it was largely because Keegstra possessed “legal authority” and “charismatic authority” that his students also assumed that he was, and perceived him as being, “an authority”. As a result, his students were willing to accept the information that he presented to them as being true based solely, or at least primarily, on his “word”. Moreover, Keegstra was able to use the classroom as a soapbox and present himself as “an authority” only because he possessed “legal authority” and “charismatic authority”. As Thomas Russell points out,

A teacher’s authority of position seems necessary to maintain or manage a classroom learning situation. Unintentionally and unknowingly, the same authority of position may be used by a teacher to “support” knowledge claims. Substituting authority of position for authority of knowledge
requires students to change beliefs by taking someone else's word for them, rather than by having reasons and evidence for the beliefs. (1983, p. 30)

Students who do recognize the fact that possessing "legal authority", possessing "charismatic authority", and being "an authority" are very different things, will likely be much less susceptible to indoctrination than those who are unable to make this distinction. One of the main reasons for this, quite simply, is that they will recognize how important it is always to keep at least one eye open for individuals who attempt to pass themselves off as having "authority of knowledge" that they do not actually possess. When they are in the presence of individuals who possesses "charismatic authority" or "legal authority", for example, they will be able to take extra precautions to ensure that they do not follow them or accept claims from them when they do not have good reasons for doing so. They will appreciate that an authoritative voice, a uniform, a title, a badge, or even the power to impose sanctions on another does not make one all-knowing. In fact, they will recognize that even those who are considered to be "authorities of knowledge" are only considered to be such because others are aware of their "training, competence and past success" (Peters 1967c, p. 89). They will appreciate that no set of rules actually exists specifying who should be considered as "an authority" or who must be believed. They will understand that everyone, regardless of their training, competence, or past success, is capable of making mistakes as well as of passing on erroneous information. In short, they will be able to

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3 It must also be recognized that teachers can use their position “in authority” to intentionally and knowingly present themselves as “an authority” and use this perceived authority as support for claims. This is how one might read later anecdotal reports of some of Keegstra’s students.
appreciate and respect authority for exactly what it is, and as a result be safeguarded against indoctrination.

**Being Educated as Distinguished from Being Indoctrinated**

Something else that schools can do to help their students become autonomous human beings is strive to make sure that both teachers and students are aware of the fact that educating and indoctrinating are antithetical practices that can occur within (so-called) educational environments. This does not mean that every teacher and every student should be able to, or must learn how to, provide precise definitions for each of these concepts nor that they should be able to pinpoint exactly when a teacher is no longer educating his/her students but is instead indoctrinating them. Even philosophers of education do not agree on how exactly to define these terms or how exactly to discriminate amongst the methodologies and they, for the most part, are the ones who have taken on the task of trying to define these concepts and distinguish their contrasting methodologies. What is being suggested in this thesis, however, is that teachers and students should try to possess a general understanding about how these practices differ from one another. The reason for this is because possessing such an understanding will help them prevent themselves as well as others from holding their beliefs and offering claims non-evidentially.

Although there is a significant amount of overlap in the way that philosophers have defined these terms, there are also numerous incongruities. Consider, for example, the concept “indoctrination”. There are some philosophers of education who insist that the only way to detect whether a teacher is indoctrinating his/her students is by examining the
methodology that he/she is using to convey information to his/her students (Snook 1972, p. 2). There are others, however, who believe that indoctrination has more to do with *what* is being taught in the classroom than *how* something is being taught in the classroom. These individuals assert that the way to determine whether or not a teacher is indoctrinating his/her students is by examining the information or the beliefs that the teacher is trying to pass on to them (Snook 1972, p. 2). There are still others, meanwhile, who claim that indoctrination has more to do with what the teacher’s intentions are than it has to do with the method that he/she uses to teach or the information that he/she tries to pass on (Snook 1972, p. 2). Since the aim of this thesis is not to provide a unique definition for either of these concepts nor to critically examine or analyze any of the various definitions of indoctrination and education that philosophers of education have thus far provided, no attempt will be made to do so. However, in order that the reader can gain a general understanding of what is meant when these concepts are used, and what the difference is between these practices, a few of the more well-known and well-respected ideas will be summarized.

To begin with, some competing ideas on what it means to indoctrinate will be outlined. As was previously mentioned, there are a number of philosophers of education who believe that the only way to know whether a teacher is indoctrinating his/her students is to discover the teacher’s intentions. J.P. White, for example, argues that a teacher is only indoctrinating his/her students if he/she is *trying* to get them “to believe that proposition ‘p’ is true, in such a way that nothing will shake the belief” (White in Snook, ed., 1972, p. 120). He holds that just because a teacher offers claims or provides information to his/her students without providing reasons and evidence for those claims or for the information does not
necessarily mean that that teacher is trying to indoctrinate his/her students. He points out, for example, that it would be ridiculous to accuse an elementary school teacher of indoctrinating his/her young students just because he/she was using non-rational means to get the children to obey certain rules. Young children, he points out, "cannot be given reasons for following these rules, for any reason that might be provided would be incomprehensible to them" (White in Snook, ed., 1972, p. 117). Provided, therefore, that the teacher is willing to engage in a rational discussion with his/her students or with others about the information that he/she provides and provided that the teacher had no intentions of instilling students with beliefs in such a way that nothing would shake them, White believes that the teacher should not be accused of indoctrinating. Teachers who teach using this methodology, he claims, are simply educating. R.M. Hare, however, perhaps expresses this position best when he states,

> Indoctrination only begins when we are trying to stop the growth in our children of the capacity to think for themselves about moral questions. If all the time that we are influencing them, we are saying to ourselves, “Perhaps in the end they will decide that the best way to live is quite different from what I’m teaching them; and they will have a perfect right to decide that”, then we are not to be accused of indoctrinating.

(1968, p. 52)

In "Education and Indoctrination", John Wilson does not agree with either White or Hare and provides a rather different perspective on what it means to indoctrinate. He begins his article by posing the question, “What is the difference between hypnotizing a boy to believe in Communism and hypnotizing him to master A Level physics?” (1964, p. 26). He then immediately responds to his own question with the answer, “Plainly it is not a difference in method: it is rather a difference in subject matter” (1964, p. 26). It is for this reason, in fact, that he argues that what determines whether or not a teacher is indoctrinating
his/her students is the rationality of the content that is being taught. A teacher must not, he insists, try to close the minds of his/her students on uncertain issues (1964, p. 27). If the information that a teacher puts forth is certain, then there is nothing wrong, he argues, with teaching it or presenting it as if it is certain. The concept of indoctrination, he asserts, only concerns and only should concern “the truth and evidence of beliefs, and our objection to it is basically that in the realm of belief we must put truth, evidence and reality first, and other considerations second” (1964, p. 28). It is only when teachers wish to provide information to their students that is not certain as though it is certain, that Wilson believes that they are crossing the border from education to indoctrination. More specifically, he states,

> The importance of evidence implies that we must grade our teaching to fit the logical status of the beliefs which we are putting forward. If they are certain, in the sense that elementary mathematics and Latin grammar are certain, they can be taught as certainties: if they are merely probable, as with some historical interpretations, they must be taught as probabilities: and if they are totally uncertain, they must not be taught at all - at least in the sense that we must not persuade people to adopt them. (1964, p. 29)

Thomas Green, meanwhile, offers yet another explanation as to what it means to indoctrinate and to be indoctrinated. In his article “A Topology of the Teaching Concept”, he suggests that indoctrination is that type of instruction that is “aimed at an unintelligible way of holding beliefs” or that “aims simply at establishing certain beliefs so that they will be held quite apart from their truth, their explanation, or their foundation in evidence” (1968, p. 34). In other words, according to Green, when teachers provide their students with information and expect their students to accept that information without providing reasons, evidence, or explanations, or without giving them an opportunity to object to the material or discuss the material, then they are indoctrinating their students and not truly educating them (1968, p. 33). Educating, Green argues, in the true sense of the term, involves “a certain
kind of communication . . . which includes giving reasons, evidence, arguments, etc. . . .,” (1968, p. 33). He makes this claim based on his belief that teaching must be more concerned with how students believe than what they believe (1968, p. 38). This being said, however, he does recognize that it is entirely possible, and that it quite often does happen, that individuals are indoctrinated into the truth (1968, p. 43). When this occurs, however, Green claims that students are not being educated. Although they may emerge from their classes or their courses correctly believing what they were taught to be true they will not emerge, he claims, actually knowing the truth (1968, p. 43). In fact, Green states that at best, “they will only know that it is a correct belief (1968, p. 43). Students who gain knowledge of the truth in this manner will not be able to provide any rational reasons as to why they believe what they believe or any sound evidence supporting their beliefs apart from the fact that they know that their beliefs are commonly held (1968, p. 43).

The practice of educating, according to Green, involves students and teachers constantly discussing issues concerning knowledge and belief (Kilbourn 1992, p. 72). In fact, he argues that students are only being educated if they come to learn the “truth” and develop their beliefs through “conversations of instruction”; episodes during which both the teacher and his/her students examine and provide reasons, arguments, evidence, and objections for the claims presented (Green 1968, p. 33). Conversations of this kind, Green claims, must be the essence of educating. In fact, he suggests that the less instruction is characterized by “arguments, reasons, objections, explanations, and so forth” the less the instruction resembles educating and the more it resembles indoctrination (1968, p. 33).
Although R.S. Peters agrees with Green that students are being educated only if they are being made to see "the 'reason why' of things" (Peters 1967a, p. 6), he disagrees with Green's suggestion that a teacher is educating his/her students only if he/she is enabling them to learn the "truth" through "conversations of instruction". In fact, in his article, "What Is An Educational Process?", Peters goes as far as to argue that the concept "education" is not one that refers to any one particular process. He claims, rather, that it "encapsulates criteria to which any one of a family of processes must conform" (1967a, p. 1). There are moral criteria, he suggests, that must be adhered to, as well as achievement criteria and task criteria. He asserts, for example, that it would be ridiculous if anyone were to suggest that a teacher was educating his/her students or that students were being educated by their teacher if the students in question were not actually learning something significant and worthwhile. Teaching, at least according to Peters, cannot be characterized without the notion of "learning" and "learning" cannot be characterized "without reference to the achievements in which they culminate" (1967a, p. 3). To learn something, he points out, "is to come up to some standard, to succeed in some respect" (1967a, p. 3). Peters concludes, therefore, that it is erroneous to state that someone is educating or to state that someone is being educated if the person being educated is not achieving a certain level of success as a result of the teaching. The learner must not only have become more well-informed as a result of what he/she has been taught, but he/she must also have developed an understanding of certain principles if he/she has actually been educated (1967a, p. 7). As Peters states, (T)he knowledge which a man must possess to qualify as being educated must be built into his way of looking at things. It cannot be merely inert. It is possible for a man to know a lot of history, in the sense that he can give correct answers to questions in classrooms and in examinations, without ever developing a historical sense. For instance he might fail to
connect his knowledge of the Industrial Revolution with what he sees when visiting Manchester or the Welsh Valleys. We might describe such a man as "knowledgeable" but we would never describe him as "educated"; for "education" implies that a man's outlook is transformed by what he knows. (1967a, p. 7)

As far as the moral requirements are concerned, Peters asserts that one way to judge whether or not a process or practice is actually educational is to evaluate whether or not what is being learnt and what is being taught is worthwhile. A teacher, he claims, is not really educating his/her students if what he/she is teaching them is trivial. Likewise, Peters believes that students are not really being educated if they are learning only trivial facts. Therefore, even if students come to possess more than just a "know-how" or "knack" and even if they come to understand the principles behind the knowledge, if the knowledge that they learn is trivial and not worthwhile, Peters claims that they have not been educated.

Peters also states that the manner in which teachers teach and students learn "must be regarded as morally unobjectionable" (1967a, p. 4). In fact, he states that if morally objectionable teaching methods are being used then what the teacher is doing is something other than educating. Teachers are educating their students, he asserts, only if they are "intentionally trying to get the learning process going by exhibiting, drawing attention to, emphasizing, or explicating some feature of what has to be learnt and putting the learner in a position where his experience is likely to become structured along desirable lines" (1967a, p. 9). As far as the learner is concerned, Peters argues that a student is being educated only if he/she knows what he/she is doing and is conscious of something that he/she is attempting to master, understand, or remember (1967a, p. 10).

Regardless of which definition is correct or which definition one accepts as being correct, one thing that is clear is that the processes of educating and indoctrinating are
significantly different. Those students who are able to recognize that they are different and who can come to possess a basic understanding of some of the differences between these practices can at the very least take precautions to prevent themselves from being indoctrinated. One thing that they could do, for example, is adopt the role of the skeptic within their classroom and demand that those who are teaching them provide sound reasons and valid evidence for the claims that they advance. Then, as Stephen Pepper, suggests, “If the grounds weigh heavily for the content, [they] will believe; if against it, [they] will disbelieve; if evenly on either side, [they] will maintain an attitude of suspense and unbelieving [sic]” (1942, p. 12). Another thing that students could do, however, is put pressure on those who are teaching them to present as many competing ideas and points of view on a topic as possible. If they consistently see or discover that their teacher does not like to present competing ideas to the ones that he/she advances even though others do exist, they will likely come to realize how important it is to keep an open mind when information is advanced by this teacher.

Schools that truly want to help their students become autonomous human beings, however, must do much more than simply teach their students how to distinguish between the processes of indoctrinating and educating on an intellectual level. As Thomas Green point outs, they must also make an effort to help their students learn how to detect the differences between these processes in practice (1968, p. 48). They must therefore teach their students such skills as how to weigh evidence, how to think analytically, how to think critically and creatively, as well as how to question effectively. In fact, schools that do not make an effort to teach these skills will not only leave their students in a position whereby
they will be very susceptible to indoctrination, they will also, in many senses, be promoting a dogmatic way of thinking; a type of thinking that Robin Barrow states “is one of the real evils of our time and one of the most potent sources of injustice” (1982, p. 23).

To be a dogmatist, at least according to Barrow, is to “act and think with unquestioning commitment” to a certain set of doctrines (1982, p. 26). It is an approach to life, he claims, that is “non-think” (1982, p. 40). Dogmatists are satisfied to accept certain things as true and hold their beliefs “without regard for evidence” (Green 1968, p. 42). Although the beliefs that they hold are not necessarily always wrong, their way of thinking is extremely dangerous. This is simply because non-evidentially held beliefs “cannot be modified by introducing evidence or reasons or by rational criticism” (Green 1968, p. 42). Therefore, even if an individual’s dogmatically held beliefs were accepted by society as being true at the present time, the possibility would always still exist that at a future point in time they would not be. New facts or new evidence could emerge or could be discovered one day that might prove the beliefs erroneous. If this happened, and if the person was so psychologically attached to his/her beliefs that he/she could not abandon them or alter them, then from that point on he/she would more than likely end up living his/her life, making his/her decisions, and acting based on his/her false beliefs.

To appreciate just how dangerous and far reaching the implications of dogmatism and indoctrination can be, however, one only has to consider what happened in Nazi Germany during WWII. The primary reason why more than 6 million Jews were brutally tortured and murdered during the Holocaust was because the majority of individuals who supported Hitler’s cause and followed his orders, allowed themselves to be indoctrinated by
him and the Nazi party. In fact, it was probably largely because of the legal authority and
the charismatic authority that he possessed that Hitler was able to convince so many of the
citizens of Germany that he was “an authority” when it came to knowing who was fit to live
and who was fit to be killed. The fact that he was looked upon as “an authority”, was also
probably what led many of his followers to become so dogmatic and to begin to “act and
think with unquestioning commitment” (Barrow 1982, p. 26) to his doctrines. They had so
much confidence in him as a leader and trusted him to such an extent that the majority of
them even proceeded to “interpret the world, live (their) lives, exhort, advise and abjure
others” in the fixed light of what he believed and said (Barrow, 1982, p. 26). No evidence,
not even the sight of fellow human beings being tortured or murdered could sway their belief
that Jews were somehow less than human.

Although the consequences of indoctrination and dogmatism are in most cases not as
severe as what took place during the Holocaust, the above example does clearly illustrate
why it is so important for schools to help students become autonomous human beings.
Everything that we do as well as everything that we say is governed by our beliefs. In fact,
according to Oakeshott human beings “are composed entirely of beliefs” (1971, p. 19) and
every performance that a human being makes is simply a disclosure of a his “beliefs about
himself and the world and an exploit in self-enactment” (1971, p. 20). If one’s beliefs are
false, one’s actions are much more likely to have undesirable consequences. It is therefore
not only essential that all human beings learn how to base their beliefs on valid evidence and
good reasons, but also that they learn the importance of basing their beliefs on valid
evidence and good reasons.
Teaching Students to Become Autonomous Human Beings

Although teachers should feel obliged to provide reasons and evidence for the claims that they present to their students in class, it is also essential that students learn to seek or demand reasons and evidence for the claims that they are presented with when none are provided or when only insufficient ones have been provided. It is neither fair nor practical to place the entire burden of offering reasons and evidence on teachers. Individuals, especially as they get older, must come to accept responsibility for the beliefs that they hold as well as for the kind of human beings that they are. In fact, it is for this reason that teachers should be expected to take on the responsibility of helping their students learn to become autonomous human beings.

In his book *Autonomy: An Essay in Philosophical Psychology and Ethics*, however, Lawrence Haworth points out that most human beings will come to develop a "normal" level of autonomy without ever even needing to be taught how to act autonomously or without ever even needing to be told what it means to be autonomous (1986, p. 54). As people mature, he claims, they naturally develop the ability to "reflect critically on their wants, needs and situation, and thereby to make their life their own in a sense not applicable to any creature incapable of critical reflection" (1986, p. 20). Even the majority of infants and young children, he insists, possess a minimal level of autonomy. They are able to exhibit some self-control, some self-rule, and they have enough competence to achieve certain things that they desire by using the skills that they possess (1986, p. 18). What teachers must strive to accomplish, therefore, is to help their students develop a level of autonomy that is
greater than the normal and minimal levels of autonomy that almost all human beings naturally come to possess.

In this thesis, therefore, when the phrase “autonomous human being” is used, it is being used only to refer to those individuals who possess a level of autonomy beyond the normal level of autonomy that almost all human beings naturally come to possess simply by virtue of being human. It is also, however, being defined in a fairly narrow manner. Others, such as Haworth (1986) and Dearden (1972), for example, have claimed that being autonomous encompasses a lot more than what is being specified in this thesis. Here the term “autonomous human being” is simply being used to describe those individuals who, at least as an ideal, refuse to accept presuppositions uncritically and unreflectively. They are those individuals who are constantly asking insightful questions, weighing evidence, and demanding justification for the rules, principles, and claims of facts that they are presented with or even acquire on their own.\(^4\) They are procedurally independent, competent, and possess an extremely high degree of self-control (Haworth 1986, p. 1). They undoubtedly also possess what Thomas Green calls, a “due regard for truth” and what Bertrand Russell refers to as “the habit of truthfulness”. They are thus open-minded to such a degree that they are always willing to reexamine and, if necessary, even revise their most firmly held beliefs in order that they may be able to understand correctly and make sense of the world in which

\(^4\) This first part of the definition was created by borrowing heavily from the writings of Thomas Green (1968), Robin Barrow (1982), Arthur Geddis (1982), and Brent Kilbourn (1980).
An ideally autonomous human being can perhaps best be characterized, however, as being the antithesis to the person who constantly acts and thinks like a dogmatist.

One thing that should be noted before proceeding any further is that autonomous human beings do not necessarily possess more skills or more knowledge than those who possess just a normal level of autonomy. The difference simply is, in many cases, that autonomous human beings are just more independent, possess more self-control, and use the skills and the knowledge that they possess more effectively and responsibly (Haworth 1986, p. 49). As Haworth states,

"The more autonomous an individual is the more responsible he is. To the degree that he possesses self-control, competence, and independence, his acts are his own; he is more completely the author of the changes he brings to the world. By freeing himself from control by others and from the domination of his impulses, and by having learned how actually to realize the changes he intends (by being competent), his life becomes more completely his doing. The result is that he becomes more responsible for it." (1986, p. 49)

Something else that must be appreciated is that it would be impractical to expect even the most ideally autonomous human beings always to demand reasons and evidence for every claim they were presented with or to reflect critically on every belief that they possessed. It would also be impractical to expect school teachers to offer reasons and evidence for every claim that they presented to their students in class. There is only so much time in a day or in a class period and if evidence was provided for every claim that was presented then this would eventually lead to an infinite regress of explanations. Evidence would have to be supported by other evidence, which would have to be supported by other

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5 This part of the definition was primarily taken from Thomas Green (1968). Green claims that those who have a "due regard for truth" believe that "truth is powerful, attainable and to be treasured whenever identified" (1968, p. 53).
evidence, which would still have to be supported by other evidence until eventually the individual providing the evidence would run into an infinite regress. It is possible, nevertheless, for individuals to be more than just normally autonomous human beings without always having to demand such extensive evidence or without always having it provided. They can do this by simply committing themselves to basing their decisions on good reasons, at least that is, “when it is appropriate to engage in reasoning or reasoned behaviour” (Barrow 1982, p. 27). For example, a student might autonomously and rationally decide, in a particular instance, to accept a claim as being true even though reasons and evidence have not been provided to support the claim. As Robin Barrow explains in his article, “Dogmatism”,

(0)ne may sensibly enough autonomously choose to follow the advice of another in particular matters . . . . One remains autonomous to the extent that one remains the ultimate judge of what one should do and think, including decisions to trust the advice of others. The rational man is necessarily autonomous, because he seeks to do what there is good reason to do, rather than what he is told to do or what authorities tell him to do. Here again, naturally, there is a question of degree. It is no more rational to ignore the expertise in areas where one is ignorant than it is to enslave oneself to authority. Rationality does not commit one either to following or rejecting authority as such. It commits one to doing what one sees good reason to do, and that may vary from person to person and place to place. But rationality cannot encompass any wholesale surrender of autonomy. . . . For although the rational man may make use of authorities, he can never regard the authority as being final. To the rational man authorities are always open to challenge. (1982, p. 30)

What is perhaps most important to take from this above quotation is that the autonomous and rational individual does only “what there is good reason to do, rather than what he is told to do or what authorities tell him to do.” Therefore, an individual who accepts certain claims without asking for reasons or without demanding evidence may still be acting autonomously provided he/she has made a conscious decision not to ask for
reasons or evidence and provided the decision he/she made was based on what he/she considered to be good reasons. As Haworth states, "The independence that makes one autonomous is procedural, not substantive" (1986, p. 20). One can act exactly the way others want one to act and believe exactly what others want one to believe while at the same time being completely autonomous so long as the decision to do so and to continue to do so are one's own. The rational history student, for example, who does not demand that his/her history teacher provide evidence for the claim that Canadian Confederation took place in 1867, may, quite possibly, have chosen not to do so for a number of good reasons. For instance, the student might not have considered the information to be important at that particular time, the student might have believed that evidence was going to be provided at a later date, the student might have recognized that the information could easily be verified or corroborated by looking in various Canadian history books, or he/she might have simply accepted the claim based on his/her knowledge or his/her belief that that particular teacher is honest and trustworthy, as well as being an authority on Canadian history. If the student did, in fact, act rationally and autonomously he/she would also have had made a conscious decision not to have asked for evidence as well as would have accepted the claim with at least some degree of scepticism. The point that is being made is that the less evidence that is provided, the less strongly, in most cases, will an ideally autonomous human being hold a belief. As Pepper states in his book, *World Hypotheses*, "the reasonable man ... will seek to make his attitude exactly proportional to the balance of weight in the grounds of belief" (1942, p. 12), and the grounds for belief should always be assessed "in terms of weight of
evidence, which means in terms of the amount of corroboration of evidence that can be achieved" (1942, p. 6).

In his article, "Freedom Versus Authority", Bertrand Russell makes a similar point. He writes,

> Truth is for the gods; from our human point of view, it is an ideal, towards which we can approximate, but which we cannot hope to reach. Education should fit us for the nearest possible approach to truth, and to do this it must teach truthfulness. Truthfulness, as I mean it, is the habit of forming our opinions on the evidence, and holding them with that degree of conviction which the evidence warrants. This degree will always fall short of complete certainty, and therefore we must always be ready to admit new evidence against previous beliefs. (1928, p. 197)

If this is, in fact, the way that we would like students to think as well as the way we would like them to hold their beliefs, it is reasonable to suggest that one thing that schools should try to teach their students in an attempt to help them become more adept at doing these things is how to evaluate arguments and how to keep an open mind such that they don’t jump to any conclusions until all points of view have been considered. This might involve, amongst other things, teaching students about formal and informal fallacies as well as about some of the basic rules of reasoning. Students could, perhaps, also be taught how to do such things as distinguish relevant from irrelevant information; how to distinguish facts from value judgments; how to identify biases; how to more effectively ask questions, as well as questions about questions; how to define, classify, and order ideas; how to detect ambiguities in lines of reasoning or in the use of concepts; how to think analytically; and also, how to keep an open mind about things to such an extent that they would always be willing to re-evaluate and re-examine any arguments, beliefs, or ideas if and when new evidence or new reasons emerged. Although it is true that these skills and habits of mind
could probably be taught in isolation, and that history teachers, science teachers, and English teachers could focus on developing these skills and habits of mind while also teaching the content that they are required to teach, what will be argued in this thesis is that at least one course should be offered to high school students in which they could focus the majority of their effort on developing these skills and habits of mind. One such course would be philosophy.
Chapter 3

Why High Schools Should Bother Teaching Philosophy

In the last chapter of his book, *The Problems of Philosophy*, Bertrand Russell makes a plea for more people to start studying philosophy. The reason that he makes this appeal is because he believes that if more people made a serious effort to examine the questions and issues that have been raised by philosophers and that are discussed in philosophy classes then we as a society and as individuals would “enlarge our conception of what is possible, enrich our intellectual imagination, and diminish the dogmatic assurance which closes the mind against speculation . . .” (quoted in Annis and Annis 1979, p. 145). Although at first it might seem as if Russell’s claim is rather far-fetched and overly optimistic, in this chapter as well as in the next it will be argued that he is really not, by any means, misguided. In fact, in these chapters it will be argued that, provided an appropriate teaching methodology is used, there is perhaps no other discipline more ideally suited for helping high school students learn to become autonomous human beings than the discipline of philosophy.

The question that must now be asked is “What methodology or methodologies are appropriate for teaching philosophy to high school students?” Although a teacher’s manual will not be provided at the end of this thesis, some conclusions on appropriate and inappropriate ways to teach philosophy to high school students will nevertheless be reached. These will be drawn by comparing, contrasting, examining, and analyzing two very different methodologies that are currently being used to teach philosophy to high school students. The first is Matthew Lipman’s Philosophy for Children Program which is outlined explicitly

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in many books and articles. The other is the methodology that is currently being used to teach philosophy in a growing number of Ontario’s high schools. Although this latter teaching methodology is not explicitly outlined or discussed in any literature, it is implicitly stated in the curriculum *Guideline* that was designed for the course.

**The Philosophy For Children “Movement”**

The Philosophy for Children program is a unique curriculum that was designed for the purpose of introducing elementary and secondary school students to the discipline of philosophy in an interesting, meaningful, and exciting way. Created by Matthew Lipman approximately thirty years ago, (Lipman and Sharp 1975, p. xi) it is now being used in more than one hundred different countries as well as in thousands of different classrooms (Lipman 1980, p. 51). The program is unique because specially created novels are used in order to expose students to different philosophical questions and ideas, as well as to intrigue them to start thinking philosophically. In fact, Lipman claims that few, if any, additional materials are needed in order to run a successful philosophy program at the elementary or secondary school level apart from the novels and the teachers’ manuals that he and his colleagues have created (Lipman 1980, p. 53). One thing that must be understood, however, is that the novels that have been written for the Philosophy for Children program are not narrative versions of the history of philosophy like Jostein Gaardner’s novel *Sophie’s World* (1991) is, nor are they simplified versions of any of the great philosophical works. The novels that have been written for the program are simply stories about fictional children and adolescents “engaged in dialological inquiry with regard to the philosophical puzzlement they find
themselves encountering in experience” (Sharp 1995, p. 47). They have been designed to inspire those students who are reading them to think seriously about some of the more interesting and profound philosophical questions that have been raised over time. They have also been designed with the hope that the students who are exposed to them will want to become “good thinkers” like the characters in the books. The purpose of the story Mark, for example, a novel written for students in grades 8-10 about a high school sophomore accused of vandalism, is to entice students to think about such social issues as “the function of law, the nature of bureaucracy, the role of crime in modern society, the freedom of the individual, and alternative conceptions of justice” using the same vigour and the same procedures of inquiry as the characters in the book use to discuss these issues (Lipman and Sharp 1975, p. 53).

This leads to another way in which the Philosophy for Children program is unique. Almost the entire emphasis of the program is on the doing of philosophy rather than on the learning of philosophy (Lipman 1980, p. 42). In other words, Lipman and his colleagues are not concerned with helping students learn who the great philosophers are, what the great philosophers said, or how to use or understand complex philosophical lingo (Lipman 1980, pp. 42, 84). In fact, this is the reason there is never any mention of the great philosophers within the Philosophy for Children novels and also why words such as “epistemology”, “metaphysics”, “idealism”, and “utilitarianism” are rarely, if ever, used (Lipman 1980, p. 84). In his book, Philosophy in the Classroom, Lipman even writes,

One of the greatest obstacles to the practice of philosophy for children is the formidable terminology of the tradition. . . The prestige and power of the vocabulary are quite overwhelming. They certainly suffice to intimidate any child happening to venture between the covers of a philosophy book. For this very reason, philosophy for children requires
the bypassing of that vocabulary. As nearly as possible, philosophical thinking among children should be encouraged to take place in the terms and concepts of the ordinary language with which the children are comfortable. (Lipman 1980, p. 43)

The book also states,

So that children can come to grips with the ideas and not merely with labels, no mention is made of philosophers’ names in the philosophy for children program . . . , and the teacher would be better off not using these names in class. (Lipman 1980, p. 84)

The Philosophy for Children program was designed by Lipman, rather, on the assumption that if students were given a sufficient opportunity of communally examining some of the more interesting and profound philosophical questions that have been raised over time in a rigorous, critical, caring, and imaginative manner then their general thinking, reasoning, and questioning skills in other areas would all gradually improve as a consequence.

Something that Lipman does concede, however, is that it usually takes much more than just an interesting or provocative question to inspire a fruitful philosophical discussion amongst students. What he claims, rather, is that a productive and meaningful dialogue is much more likely to evolve if it is orchestrated in an appropriate environment, under the proper supervision, and amongst people who are committed to certain procedures of inquiry (Lipman 1980, p. 45). In fact they claim that if these conditions are not present and are not satisfied then there is a good chance that any discussion that ensues will end up more closely resembling a “bull session” with students just trying to express their opinions and “get things off their chests” than a philosophical discussion characterized by “caring, collaborative deliberation, self-correction, inquisitiveness, open-mindedness, tentativeness, attention to criteria and context, commitment to reasonableness, and progress towards a solution” (Sharp 1995, p. 47).
As far as teachers are concerned, Lipman asserts that their main role within philosophy classrooms should be to model the proper procedures of philosophical inquiry and to ensure that these procedures are constantly and consistently being used by the students (Lipman 1980, p. 45). A skilled and talented teacher, Lipman suggests, should be able to do such things as elicit key ideas from his/her students, introduce alternative views through questioning, as well as point out inconsistencies, fallacies, and sloppy uses of reasoning when students fail to recognize them themselves (Lipman 1980, p. 45). The teacher, in other words, must be somewhat of an authority as well as must be regarded as an authority by his/her students when it comes to knowing how to philosophize properly (Lipman 1980, p. 45). It is important to understand, however, that this is the only way in which a teacher, according to Lipman, should present him/herself as “an authority”. In fact, Lipman claims that one of the greatest merits of his Philosophy for Children program is that it provides a model for dialoguing and for educating that is “non-authoritarian” and that is “anti-indoctrinal” (Lipman and Sharp 1975, p. 4). The teacher should not, Lipman insists, be viewed by his/her students as an individual who knows everything, who possesses all of the right answers or who is unwilling to be challenged. Students, rather, should be encouraged to present their own views and ideas even if they are different from those of their teacher and/or from those of the majority. What teachers should insist upon, however, is that their students try their best at all times to be coherent, consistent, and comprehensive in their thinking (Lipman and Sharp 1975, p. 7). Trying to decipher what is true from what is not true is one of the highest goals of any philosophy class.
This goal, however, is quite obviously not the only goal. One of the other reasons why philosophy is now being offered in high schools is because many individuals, like Russell, believe that studying philosophy or learning how to philosophize can help students become more autonomous human beings. Whether or not the Philosophy for Children program actually is an effective program for helping students become more autonomous or whether or not it can actually be used effectively to help students become more autonomous is something that will now be examined.

Assessing the Philosophy for Children Program

Prior to actually examining whether or not Matthew Lipman’s supposedly “non-authoritarian” and “anti-indoctrinational” Philosophy for Children program is an effective program for helping high school students learn to become more autonomous human beings, it must first be clarified what exactly Lipman means when he states that his program provides a model for educating that is “non-authoritarian” and that is “anti-indoctrinational”. At no point within his literature does Lipman ever make any attempt to explain what exactly he means when he uses the term “indoctrinate”. One thing that is probably reasonable to assume, however, is that he would not define the term in a manner similar to the way that either J.P. White or John Wilson do. He would not claim that the only way to determine whether or not a teacher is indoctrinating is by considering his/her intentions like White does (White in Snook, ed., 1972, p. 120), nor would he claim that one can determine whether or not a teacher is indoctrinating simply by considering the material that he/she is presenting to his/her students like Wilson does (Wilson 1964, p. 26). It is much more likely, rather, that
he would define the term in a manner very similar to the way that Thomas Green has defined the term. This assumption is based on the observation that both Green and Lipman appear to have very similar views as to the kind of communication that should take place in a classroom between a teacher and his/her students as well as amongst students. Lipman, for example, suggests that classrooms should be set up as communities of inquiry and that teachers and students should constantly be engaged in dialogue. Lipman, like Green, also claims that "the goal of any kind of education is the liberation of the student from unquestioning belief in doctrines that have been forced upon him" (Lipman and Sharp 1975, p. 6). Although it is probably true that White would argue this latter point as well, the difference between him and Lipman and Green is that Lipman and Green seem to insist that teachers should almost always provide reasons and evidence for the claims that they offer which is something that White does not insist upon. White argues, instead, that there are occasions when it is perfectly acceptable for teachers to teach by having their students learn by rote or by having them listen to lectures (White in Snook, ed., 1972, p. 120). White simply argues that teachers must not try to get their students "to believe that proposition 'p' is true, in such a way that nothing will shake the belief" (White in Snook, ed., 1972, p. 120). Green on the other hand, proposes that the most effective way for teachers to teach and for students to learn is if instruction is provided in such a way that it resembles a type of conversation. In fact, according to both Green and Lipman, what is imperative is that students and teachers interact and share ideas with each other within the classroom and that an attempt always be made by those individuals involved in the dialogue to support the claims that they offer with valid reasons and sound evidence. Green clarifies his views as
follows: "as the conversation of instruction is less and less characterized by argument, reasons, objections, explanations, and so forth, in proportion as it is less and less directed toward an apprehension of truth, it more and more closely resembles what we call indoctrination" (Green 1968, p. 33).

Perhaps the best indication that Lipman would accept a definition of indoctrination that is very similar to Green’s, and not define the term like White or Wilson have, are the comments that he makes about the teacher’s role within the classroom. Lipman insists, for example, that teachers who use the Philosophy for Children program do not present themselves to their students as "authorities of knowledge"; as individuals who possesses a "great store of information" and who are infallibly right all of the time. Instead, he asks that teachers present themselves to their students as individuals who are willing and anxious to learn from their students, as individuals who are interested in hearing alternative ideas and opinions from their students, and as individuals who are open to being challenged by their students. This does not mean that Wilson and White would object to this method of teaching nor that they would be against teachers’ presenting themselves to their students in this manner. What is being pointed out, though, is that neither philosopher would be nearly as adamant about teachers’ presenting themselves to their students in this manner as Lipman and Green would. White, for example, argues that what people should be most concerned with are teachers’ intentions and not with the way that teachers teach or present themselves to their students. Wilson, meanwhile, argues that if information is not certain then teachers should not even attempt to present this information to their students at all (Wilson 1964, p. 29).
Lipman, however, makes it very clear throughout his literature that teachers who use the Philosophy for Children program are not supposed to act as dispensers of information. Even if a teacher is completely confident that his/her values are “correct” and even if he/she is certain that particular information is correct, Lipman asserts that if a teacher tries to implant values or knowledge “what he is doing... is the destruction of philosophy” (Lipman 1980, p. 85). What he suggests, rather, is that teachers use the legal authority and perhaps the charismatic authority that they possess to facilitate procedurally correct philosophical dialogue within their classrooms. He explains,

> The teacher’s role is not to impart or dispense any given system of thought. Following Socrates’ example as a “midwife” of ideas, the teacher’s function is to help students learn to think by drawing them out and encouraging them to do the thinking and the discovery of ideas by and for themselves in a context of communicative competence and shared understanding. (Lipman quoted in Ghanotakis 1987, p. 4)

Students simply learn best, according to Lipman, “by talking and thinking things out” (Lipman 1980, p. 82). In fact, he claims that “Philosophy is empty if reduced to a memorization of ‘who said what, and when’ or ‘how one philosophical view compares with another’ as ends in themselves” (Lipman 1980, p. 83). He even goes as far as to state how “unfortunate” it would be “if the teacher in this program were to feel that there is a specific amount of content that must be covered every day, that must be extracted from each episode and eventually mastered by the students” (Lipman 1980, p. 102). What he argues, rather, is that the majority of time in any philosophy classroom should be devoted to dialogue with the teacher’s job simply being to stimulate and facilitate the dialogue taking place amongst the students (Lipman 1980, p. 103). It is only when complacency sets in or signs of self-righteousness become evident that teachers, through questioning, should introduce
alternative views. Otherwise, Lipman argues that their main task is making sure that their students are always using the proper procedures of philosophical inquiry. Teachers should not even be too concerned, he claims, if the conversation ranges “far afield from the initial logic” (Lipman 1980, p. 103). The important thing, he insists, is that students be engaged in dialogue and doing such things as discovering alternatives, examining their own assumptions and presuppositions, questioning others’ ideas, and thinking critically, creatively, and analytically. If this is taking place then students, he argues, will be receiving an excellent education.

**A Freirean Perspective on the Philosophy for Children Methodology**

One individual who would likely applaud Lipman’s directive to teachers as well as his entire Philosophy for Children program would be the famous Brazilian humanitarian, philosopher, and educator Paulo Freire. The reason, quite simply, is that Lipman’s curriculum encourages teachers and students to be constantly engaged in dialogue, something that Freire argues in his 1968 book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, must be at the forefront of any curriculum and any good system of education. In fact, Freire, who devoted practically his entire life to helping people who were being oppressed become more responsible for and more in control of their own lives, argues that “education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction” (1970/1993, p. 53). It is downright dangerous, he argues, for anyone to think of teaching as if it is an act of depositing “in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor” (1970/1993, p. 53). He asserts that students who are taught in this way or who believe that this is what being educated is all about will
inevitably end up turning into automata which, he claims, is "the very negation of their ontological vocation to be more fully human" (1970/1993, p. 55). Instead of holding their own opinions and being allowed to discover for themselves what is true, they will grow up, he asserts, with other individuals' consciousness imposed upon them and will believe that the truth is something that is "given and immutable" and that should never be questioned. Education can only be authentic and beneficial, according to Freire, when "A" works with "B" and engages in dialogue with "B" (1970/1993, p. 74). Freire explains,

Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. In this process, arguments based on "authority" are no longer valid: in order to function, authority must be on the side of freedom, not against it. (1970/1993, p. 61)

What should be clear is that Freire, Green, and Lipman all present persuasive arguments as to why teachers should structure their classes in such a way that the majority of the time the students are engaged in dialogue with each other. Students who are taught primarily by means of the lecture method and who are not given a sufficient amount of time to discuss with each other the claims that have been offered in class or to question the information that has been presented to them in class, are in a position whereby they are extremely susceptible to being indoctrinated and even dehumanized. As Freire states,

If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings. Dialogue is thus an existential necessity. And since dialogue is the encounter in which the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world which is to be transformed and humanized, this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person's "depositing" ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be "consumed" by the discussants. (1970/1993, p. 70)
Students, meanwhile, that are given the opportunity to engage in serious dialogues on a consistent basis about things that are meaningful and important to them are much more likely to improve their ability to reflect and respond critically and creatively to claims that are offered by others. This is especially true if the teacher who is facilitating these dialogues is somewhat of an expert regarding the proper procedures of philosophical inquiry. In fact, if he/she has expertise in this area and is effectively able to do such things as elicit key ideas from his/her students, introduce alternative views through questioning and point out inconsistencies, fallacies, and sloppy uses of reasoning, then it is also much more likely that the students will learn how to reason more effectively, express themselves more effectively, compare and contrast ideas with others in a more productive and meaningful way, as well as learn how to respond to other people and respect other people even if they have radically different interests, ideas, and opinions. Presumably, the teacher will encourage everyone who is involved in the dialogue to demand that everyone else provide sufficient reasons and evidence for the claims that they offer as well as encourage them not to let anyone get away with using sloppy or fallacious reasoning. Lipman, as a matter of fact, even claims that “it is here that every difference makes a difference” (Lipman and Sharp, p. 2). He explains,

That is, any difference, not [sic] matter how slight, in the child’s mode of thinking, can conceivably modify his entire thought process. For example, a child may, until this year, have been operating on the assumption that things are pretty much what they seem to be, and suddenly he discovers that maybe they are not. That one discovery can change his whole life. (Lipman and Sharp, p. 2)

The truth of what Lipman argues becomes especially evident upon considering Michael Oakeshott’s comments about human beings. If human beings, as Oakeshott states, are “composed entirely of beliefs about themselves and the world they inhabit” and if they
are only "what they understand themselves to be" (Oakeshott 1971, p. 19), then it is not
difficult to see why "every difference makes a difference" when it comes to detecting false
beliefs or changing the way one thinks or believes. When one changes the way one thinks,
changes the way one believes, or detects a false belief, what one is essentially doing,
regardless of how inconsequential it may seem, is redefining oneself as a human being and
becoming more human. The way that person acts will be different, the satisfactions that that
person pursues will be different, and the way that person understands the world and the
artifacts contained within it will be different. The reason, quite simply, at least according to
Oakeshott, is that the beliefs one holds strongly influence, if not determine, the way one
acts, the choices one makes, and the way one understands oneself as well as the world.
Freire even states, "The man or woman that emerges is a new person" (1970/1993, p. 31).

Some Empirical Evidence

Although there is no conclusive evidence that confirms whether or not Lipman’s program is
an effective program, or that shows exactly how effective having students constantly
engaged in dialogue is, over the past few decades a number of studies have been performed
which seem to support Lipman’s claims. For example, John Niklasson, Ragnar Ohlsson, and
Monika Ringborg performed a qualitative study in Sweden during the mid 1990s and they
found that students who were exposed to philosophy twice a week using Matthew Lipman’s
Philosophy for Children program seemed to argue better and also seemed to be more self-
reliant than those students in a control group who did not use the program (Niklasson 1996,
p. 17). In their article, "Evaluating Philosophy for Children", they write,
The result seems to confirm the idea that systematized training in philosophy according to the IAPC method results in significant differences in the way the children discuss philosophical problems. The differences are not so striking when it comes to the ability to propose philosophical ideas: many children seem to be able to discuss philosophical problems and come up with good ideas, which confirms the hypothesis behind Philosophy for Children, that children in a way are natural philosophers. The most significant differences are to be found in the way the children talk together, how they use the ideas of their comrades, and how they are able to question the ideas of the “teacher”. The philosophy-trained children seem more autonomous and self-reliant. At the same time they form a community of inquiry in a way the other children do not. (Niklasson 1996, p.21).

Meanwhile, in his article, “Pre-College Philosophy: Will It Get Its Day In Court?”, Paul Wagner makes mention of a few other qualitative studies that have been performed in an attempt to see how effective Lipman’s program actually is. He reports that what these studies seem to indicate is that so long as the teachers who use the curriculum have minimal training in philosophy, students’ reasoning skills, creativity, mathematical, and reading abilities are all likely to significantly improve (Wagner 1984, p. 11).

Does this mean that all schools should now jump on the bandwagon, and begin to teach philosophy using Matthew Lipman’s Philosophy for Children curriculum? Before doing this, some criticisms of the program should first be examined.

Criticisms of the Philosophy for Children Program

While it will not be disputed that Matthew Lipman’s Philosophy for Children program has a lot to offer most students, it will be argued that the program also has some shortcomings. One problem with the program, for example, is that it is most effective only when it is being used in classrooms in which the teacher is skilled in the art of philosophizing. The reason why this poses a problem is simply because at the present time it would most likely be the
case that there would be far too few qualified teachers available to teach the course even if it was decided that all high school students should be exposed to philosophy using the Lipman methodology. The second serious shortcoming that the Philosophy for Children program has is that it does not expose students to "real philosophy". Students do not get an opportunity to read the works of any of the great philosophers, nor are they exposed to what the great philosophers have said about the philosophical questions that they examine in the program. This, in fact, is a drawback for a number of reasons. Prior to examining these reasons, however, the first criticism must be looked at in more detail.

Although it is stated within Lipman's literature as well as within his brochures, that students will benefit from the Philosophy for Children program regardless of whether or not their teacher actually has any experience doing philosophy, he also admits that the program will usually be much more beneficial to students if their teacher knows how to philosophize and has had ample experience philosophizing. This fact, however, would probably not surprise many people. The same could probably be said for most courses. The difference, however, is that it is highly unlikely that there are many high school teachers at the present time who have a significant amount of experience doing philosophy. While there is probably no shortage of individuals who are qualified to teach subjects such as math, history, science, and English, the same cannot be said for philosophy. As Paul Wagner points out, "People who study philosophy seldom become teachers and people who become teachers seldom study philosophy" (1984, p. 6). Moreover, in many places, such as in Ontario, philosophy is not even considered to be a "teachable subject". What this means is that individuals cannot go to teachers' college or to faculties of education to be certified to
become philosophy teachers. There are no courses available on teaching philosophy and there is no certification to teach it as there is for courses such as English, math, chemistry, physical education as well as for most other "approved" secondary school subjects. This being the case, there is little, if any, time for individuals who desire to become high school teachers to take philosophy courses while attending university since the majority of courses that they must take must be in disciplines that are recognized as "teachable subjects". To become a high school teacher, at least in Ontario, one must be qualified to teach two "teachable subjects", and a prerequisite for even being accepted into teachers' college so that one can be taught how to teach a subject effectively is that one must have taken a sufficient number of courses in that subject while enrolled in university. The net result of this is that there probably would not be enough qualified teachers available to teach a philosophy course that used the Philosophy for Children curriculum even if it were ever decided that Lipman's program should be made available to all high school students.

Lipman is not the only individual who believes that it is extremely important for teachers who teach philosophy to have a lot of experience doing philosophy. In a report that was presented to the American Philosophical Association in 1958 on the feasibility of offering a philosophy course or philosophy courses to high school students, Professor Charner Perry and Professor Douglas N. Morgan wrote that one reason why it may be difficult or inappropriate to teach philosophy in high schools is because there are not enough teachers who are qualified to teach such courses. In fact, in the report the two professors even wrote, "This is a most serious objection. . . . It would be better not to offer philosophy at all where only incompetent teachers are available" (quoted in W. Moore 1969, p. 114).
In his article, “Pre-College Philosophy: Will It Get Its Day In Court?”, Paul Wagner advances a similar argument. He writes,

A particular text, a provocative question and a willingness to listen is not all there is to doing philosophy. To do philosophy one must know how to use a particular text philosophically. To do philosophy one must know how to pursue a provocative question in a rigorous and systematic manner. To do philosophy one must not only listen to what others are saying but be able to discriminate among common fallacies such as affirming the consequent, equivocation and amphibole. One must be able to recognize which terms need further definition and at what point the speaker has adequately clarified his position. All this and more is part of what it means to do philosophy and this is not the sort of stuff one picks up simply by reading the introduction to a teacher’s manual. Philosophy is a skill and as such it must be treated as a skill. To learn a skill one cannot simply read about it, one must have the opportunity to practice it. (Wagner 1984, p. 8)

What must be appreciated, therefore, is that if it was in fact ever decided that the Philosophy for Children program should be offered in all high schools, then not only would some serious teacher recruiting have to take place, but faculties of education would also have to begin teaching the skills, methodologies, and knowledge that are necessary to teach philosophy in high schools.

To his credit, Lipman has taken some steps in an attempt to alleviate this problem. For example, during the summers, on many weekends, and on some holidays he now offers various courses and training sessions to teachers who are interested in learning how to philosophize effectively as well as how to use his Philosophy for Children curriculum effectively. He has even developed a graduate program at Montclair State University that individuals with a background in teaching or a background in philosophy can apply to if they wish to study the theories and the methodologies of the Philosophy for Children movement. Graduates of this program not only receive their M.A. or their Ph.D. but also become certified by the Institute for the Advancement in Philosophy for Children to become teacher
trainers so that they can train unqualified teachers how to use the curriculum. In fact, the only other individuals that Lipman will permit to be Philosophy for Children teacher-trainers are those individuals that possess a doctoral degree in philosophy, who have experience teaching at the elementary or secondary level, and who possess an attitude or a disposition "that transmutes readily in an educational setting to teaching that is 'pedagogically strong, yet philosophically self-effacing'" (quoted in Gazzard 1996, p. 15).

Although what Lipman is doing is obviously a step in the right direction, it is also far from ideal. First, the courses that he offers to teachers are extremely expensive and they are not offered in very many locations. Second, as Gazzard mentions, at the current time very few individuals are qualified to be teacher-trainers and the process of becoming a teacher-trainer is a relatively lengthy one (Gazzard 1996, p. 13). Therefore, even if many teachers decided that they wanted to learn how to use the curriculum and even if faculties of education decided that they wanted to start teaching their teacher candidates how to use the curriculum, at the present time there would not be enough teacher-trainers available to do so. It would take an extremely long time to train enough teachers adequately, especially when one considers the fact that the number of people who can be trained at any one time is limited since those who run the training sessions want to ensure that everyone involved receives sufficient practice actually engaging in procedurally acceptable philosophical dialogue (Gazzard 1996, p. 13).

Even if this problem is rectified, however, and somehow a sufficient number of qualified teachers can be found, another concern still looms. This concern regards whether or not high school students should be exposed to the great philosophers, to the works of the
great philosophers, and to the different branches of philosophy. Lipman’s position on this matter, as has already been mentioned, is that it is not important for students to learn this material (Lipman 1980, p. 81). In fact, he even strongly advises against it. He argues, rather, that what is beneficial for students to learn is how to philosophize (Lipman 1980, p. 26). It is not important, he claims, for them to learn what the great philosophers have said and also insists that students do not need to be exposed to the great philosophers in order to learn how to philosophize effectively. In fact, as noted earlier, he claims that if students are exposed to the actual work of the great philosophers then it is likely that they will just become frustrated and disheartened with philosophy due to the difficulty and complexity of many of the readings and arguments. The “prestige and power” of the vocabulary, he states, is “quite overwhelming” and is certainly sufficient “to intimidate any child happening to venture between the covers of a philosophy book” (Lipman 1980, pp. 42, 43, 84).

Although it will be conceded in this thesis that it is not very important for high school students to know or to be able to regurgitate what various philosophers have said and argued, it will not be conceded that there is little or no value in exposing high school students to the work or the ideas of the great philosophers. In fact, it will even be argued that high school students should be provided with an opportunity to learn about the great philosophers and the different schools of thought in their philosophy classes as well as strongly encouraged to read the great philosophy books or at the very least, excerpts from them. One reason why this position is being taken is because it is likely that if students were exposed to some of the actual questions that some of the great philosophers have raised and if they were shown how, exactly, these philosophers articulated these questions, as a result
they would become much more motivated to think about these questions as well as be better equipped and more willing to raise their own questions about these or other issues. This does not mean that Lipman’s novels should have no place in philosophy classrooms or that the idea of using fictional novels in philosophy courses is a bad one. On the contrary, it would probably be very beneficial for students if their teachers used novels and stories, such as the ones that have been written by Lipman, to supplement the primary resources and the information that they offer in class. The novels could be used, for example, to introduce specific topics or questions, to clarify certain points, or to inspire philosophical dialogue amongst students. The novels should, however, not just be used in isolation. As John Dewey states, “thinking cannot, of course, go on in a vacuum; suggestions and inferences can occur only to a mind that possesses information as to matters of fact” (quoted in Hare 1995, p. 1).

If high school students are going to learn how to philosophize successfully by engaging in philosophical dialogue, then it would be of great benefit to them, no doubt, if they were at least made aware of some of the more important accomplishments and errors that have already been made within the discipline. This, in fact, is another reason why at least some primary resources should be used in high school philosophy courses and why at least some philosophical content should be taught. As Jose Ortega Y Gasset states in his book *The Origin of Philosophy*,

> Each philosophy profits from the mistakes of previous ones and is born, secure a limine that it, at least, will not fall prey to those same errors. And so on successively. The history of philosophy can now be likened to a scalded cat fleeing the house in which it was burned. In this manner, as time moves on, philosophy accumulates in its saddle bag a collection of recognized errors, which *ipsa facto* are transformed into truth-seeking aids. The shipwrecks that Bossuet spoke about are perpetuated in the guise of
buoys and beacons that provide warnings of reefs and sand bars. . . . Therefore the past appears to us as an arsenal and a treasury of errors. (1967, p. 20)

Moreover, by examining the actual work and writings of some of the more well known philosophers, students would not only come to appreciate what answers have already been provided to some of life's most fascinating questions, but they would also come to see how these problems were approached. Seeing how some of the greatest philosophers have approached certain questions and how they developed their arguments would be just as valuable as seeing what questions they have raised and what answers they have provided.

As Francis J. Breslin states,

Such a course would consider the various answers which have been given to these and similar questions over the centuries; try to understand the historical era within which an answer arose; empathize with each answer to understand it better; analyze its respective arguments, objections, and rebuttals. By observing how each position interacts with another, how each qualifies, compliments, or critiques the other, the student would explore not only the contours of a specific question, but the very texture of critical thought itself. He or she would learn how to detect fallacies in logical reasoning; how to dissect and refute faulty arguments; how to determine what can and cannot be proven; in short, not what to think, but how to think. (Breslin 1982, p. 364).

While it may be true that versions of these arguments could be presented in fictional novels using simpler language specifically geared for high school students, in most cases it is probably also true that they could not be presented as effectively. Philosophy is a discipline in which the words one uses to argue a point must be chosen very carefully since they are all sure to be scrutinized very carefully. All key terms, in other words, must be clearly defined and no room should be left for the skeptic to interpret since it is the job of the skeptic to point out how the words can be misconstrued, causing the argument to fall apart. In fact, one of the reasons why most of the great philosophers probably came to be known as great
philosophers was because they were able to present their unique answers to some of life's most puzzling questions in a concise, articulate, and convincing manner that both invited and withstood the skeptics' probing. In most cases, at least, this could probably not be captured as effectively in a short novel using layman's language.

It is probably also reasonable to suggest that an effective way to help students develop their questioning skills, their reasoning skills, as well as their critical, creative, and analytical thinking skills, would be by having them learn about some of the different arguments that various philosophers have advanced as well as by getting them to examine the actual work of some of the more well known philosophers critically and analytically to find the errors that exist within them. As well written and as well thought out as most of the arguments are in these works, most do still contain some errors or overlook some facts. Moreover, most are also usually presented "as positions to be examined, disputed, argued" (Goosens 1976, p. 2), and not as if they are final products or absolute truths. In fact, by examining the work of some of the great philosophers, students would not only gain a lot of practice questioning, reasoning, and thinking critically, creatively, and analytically, which are skills that are essential for autonomous human beings to possess, but they would also likely gain a lot of confidence in themselves knowing that they have found flaws in the works of people who are so highly respected for their brilliance. In fact, after recognizing some of the errors that extremely intelligent individuals have made, students might very well come to learn not to be so afraid or ashamed of making mistakes themselves as well as recognize that people are not "stupid" or "dumb" just because they make mistakes or because their ideas are shown to be erroneous. They would recognize, as J.L. Austin
observed, that “there are many mistakes it is no disgrace to have made: to make a first water, ground floor mistake, so far from being easy, takes on (one) form of philosophical genius” (quoted in Malone 1986, p. 130). In fact, it is probably not unreasonable to assume that once students came to recognize this that they would become much more willing to share and examine their own ideas, as well as much more likely to critically assess claims that they are presented with, even if these claims are presented by individuals who are highly regarded as authorities of knowledge.

If the main drawback to the Philosophy for Children program is, in fact, that it does not expose students to “actual writings of major philosophers” or teach them about the different philosophical schools of thought using the language used by professional philosophers, then one would think that it would not be all that difficult for Lipman and his colleagues to rectify the problem and improve the curriculum. The biggest challenge that they would probably face, if they acknowledge that this is a problem, would be deciding how much philosophical content and actual writing high school students should be exposed to.

There are other programs, however, that have been designed for teaching philosophy to high school students. In fact, in many of Ontario’s high schools at the present time a radically different methodology than that promoted by the Philosophy for Children program is being used to teach philosophy to high school students. In the upcoming chapter the strengths of this program as well as its shortcomings will be examined.
Chapter 4

Ontario’s High School Philosophy Course

Like Matthew Lipman’s Philosophy for Children program, Ontario’s high school philosophy course can be seen as having the very general aim of helping students become more autonomous human beings. This can be recognized by consulting the curriculum Guideline that the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training published for the course. The Guideline states, for example, that one of the reasons it was decided that a philosophy course should be offered to Ontario’s high school students is because studying philosophy “develops skill in critical thinking and sharpens understanding by uncovering presuppositions, identifying core premises, and evaluating arguments both in everyday life and in systems of thought” (OAC Philosophy Guideline, 1994, p. 3). The Guideline also states that studying philosophy “requires creativity in dealing with new problems and developing new perspectives” (1994, p. 3) as well as reminds those who are engaged in it of “the necessity of questioning underlying assumptions and considering . . . work in a broader context” (1994, p. 4). In fact, within the Guideline it is even stated that upon completion of the course students should be able to do such things as:

- identify assumptions that underlie theories, arguments, and positions
- demonstrate imaginative, creative, and reflective abilities by articulating philosophical insights
- detect fallacies and evaluate arguments by assessing validity and soundness and the relevance of conclusions to premises
- demonstrate increased use of reasoned argument to support their views
- articulate counter-arguments to their own positions
- ask questions to clarify problems further (1994, p. 5)
When one considers the rationale that is provided in this *Guideline* for offering philosophy as well as the learning outcomes that are listed, it is not difficult to appreciate that one of the primary aims of the course is to help students become more autonomous human beings. The skills that the students are expected to learn and the habits of mind that they are expected to develop are essentially the same skills and habits of mind that one must possess in order to be an autonomous human being.

Despite the fact that the Lipman program and the Ontario program were designed for somewhat similar purposes, however, they are taught in very different ways. In Ontario, for instance, philosophy is taught to high school students using a much more traditional and conservative methodology than the methodology proposed by Lipman in his literature. The most drastic difference, perhaps, is that in the Ontario high school philosophy course students must spend a significant part of the course working independently on a major project or essay (*Guideline* 1994, p. 8). Another major difference, however, is that in Ontario’s high schools students are expected to read “actual writings of some major philosophers” as well as learn about some of the great philosophers, their ideas, and the different schools of thought (*Guideline* 1994, p. 5). Moreover, even though it is stated in the Ontario curriculum *Guideline* that classroom discussions should be encouraged and that they should take place on a regular basis, it is also suggested that students will most likely come to develop their “imaginative, critical, analytical, and problem solving skills” as a consequence of being acquainted with “well-argued philosophical prose” and as a result of listening to oral presentations (1994, p. 4). In fact, the *Guideline* even goes as far as to assert that “as students become acquainted with philosophical questions and methods, they
will be able to think with more insight and clarity about issues in their own lives” (1994, p. 4).

As far as the teachers’ responsibilities are concerned, teachers who teach philosophy in Ontario high school classrooms appear to be expected to do significantly more than those teachers who explore philosophy with their students using the Lipman methodology. For example, in Ontario, aside from just being responsible for leading philosophical discussions and for making sure that the proper procedures of philosophical inquiry are being used at all times, teachers are also responsible for making sure that their students learn a certain amount of philosophical content. They must make sure that their students, upon completion of the course, can “demonstrate knowledge” of some of the main concepts and theories in major areas of philosophy such as ethics, epistemology, philosophy of human nature, social and political philosophy, logic, the philosophy of science, aesthetics, and metaphysics (Guideline 1994, p. 7). Within the Guideline, though, very little direction is given to teachers on how exactly they should or even could go about teaching this course or ensuring that students come to learn this information. Teaching this course, in other words, requires a significant amount of ingenuity. One can presume, however, that at least some of the time, most teachers, in order to make sure that all of the information is advanced, stand at the front of their classrooms and dispense information with the help of such standard teaching tools as an overhead projector, a chalkboard, a textbook, and some additional reference materials. They inform their students about the arguments that various philosophers have advanced and try to explain to them how these philosophers attempted to support their arguments as well as how other philosophers have tried to refute them. The students,
meanwhile, in an effort to learn this information, take notes in class based on what their teacher says and then later study their notes so that they will be able to demonstrate their knowledge on a test. To clarify things that they don’t understand the students ask questions and when the situation calls for it the teacher would open the classroom up so the students could discuss and examine some of the more controversial and interesting ideas amongst themselves. Most teachers, however, would also likely make an attempt to tie the information that they are teaching in class to present day social issues such as abortion, euthanasia, drugs, artificial intelligence, equality, and rights to help students understand the material better and to enable them to see how philosophy is relevant to their lives and to today’s society.

As far as where the teachers get their information from, it is not unreasonable to believe that many of the teachers would obtain much of it from consulting introductory philosophy textbooks. This can be inferred by considering a letter that Frank Cunningham wrote in 1995 to "interested parties" as well as to those who helped him design the OAC philosophy curriculum Guideline. In this letter, Cunningham, who is a philosophy professor at the University of Toronto, suggests that high school philosophy teachers be encouraged to visit his department’s in-house library so that they can “get ideas about texts” (1995, p. 2). In fact, in this same letter he also mentions how a number of the members of the team who worked with him to design the curriculum Guideline have been “urging publishers to commission Ontario-specific (philosophy) texts” (1995, p. 2). These, one would assume, would be designed to help teachers teach and structure the course according to the Guideline’s specifications. They would most likely cover the same seven major areas of
philosophy that the Ontario curriculum Guideline recommends⁶ should be covered as well as most of the same sub-topics. This information would also, presumably, be arranged in a coherent and logical manner. Teachers, therefore, would be able to organize the course and teach the course, if they so desired, going through the textbook chapter by chapter, occasionally deferring to suitable primary resources (i.e., actual writings of some major philosophers) as well as to other suitable secondary resources such as other books, articles, video tapes or films.

Assessing Ontario’s High School Philosophy Course

The question that must now be asked is whether or not this methodology is a more effective methodology for teaching philosophy to high school students than the methodology promoted by Lipman. Would students learn to be more autonomous as a result of taking the Ontario philosophy course than as a result of taking a philosophy course that uses Lipman’s curriculum? Are the two curriculums equally effective but just accomplish their goal in two very different ways? Is it possible that some students would benefit more from Lipman’s program while others would benefit more from taking the Ontario course? What are the strengths and the advantages of the Ontario philosophy curriculum? In what ways, if any, is the course deficient? These questions, as well as others, will now be addressed.

As was previously mentioned, one of the biggest differences between the Ontario high school philosophy course and Matthew Lipman’s Philosophy for Children program is

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⁶ According to the OAC curriculum Guideline for philosophy the seven major areas of philosophy are: (1) Philosophy of human nature, (2) Ethics, (3) Social and Political Philosophy, (4) Epistemology, (5) Logic and the Philosophy of Science, (6) Aesthetics, and (7) Metaphysics.
that students who take philosophy in Ontario high schools are taught about some of the great philosophers, the great philosophers’ theories, as well as about the different philosophical schools of thought. Although a number of arguments have already been advanced as to why it is beneficial for students to read the works of the great philosophers and to be exposed to their theories, perhaps the most convincing arguments that exist supporting this methodology have still not yet been examined. These arguments can be derived from the position expressed by Michael Oakeshott in his article “Education: The Engagement and Its Frustration”.

Although Oakeshott never actually discusses whether or not philosophy should be studied in high schools or how a philosophy course should be taught, many of the arguments that he does advance within it are very relevant to these topics and shine some much needed light on many of the controversial issues. One of the things that Oakeshott argues, for example, is that a beneficial education must always involve a study of the past, or more specifically, a study of the ideas, the values, the traditions, and the people who shaped our culture. In fact, within his article he writes that the engagement to educate “is a transaction between the generations in which newcomers may enjoy what they can acquire only in a procedure of learning; namely an historic inheritance of human understandings and imaginings” (1971, p. 27; emphasis added). Students, he claims, must learn to recognize that the way they view the world is not by any means the only way that the world can be taken in or even necessarily the right way or the best way. They must instead come to appreciate that the ideas, the traditions, and the values that they uphold have been influenced by those who inhabited the earth before them. In fact, Oakeshott goes as far as to argue that enabling
students to recognize this fact is what schools must be most concerned with. Every school’s main focus, he argues, should be on initiating the youngsters that they teach into “an inheritance of human achievements of understanding and belief” (1971, p. 22). He writes,

Being human is recognizing oneself to be related to others, not as the parts of an organism are related, nor as members of a single, all-inclusive ‘society’, but in virtue of participation in multiple understood relationships and in the enjoyment of understood historic languages of feelings, sentiments, imaginings, fancies, desires, recognitions, moral and religious beliefs, intellectual and practical enterprises, customs conventions, procedures and practices; canons, maxims and principles of conduct, rules which denote obligations and offices which specify duties. (1971, p. 21)

Students who do not receive this type of education, he argues, will have a difficult time becoming autonomous human beings. They will likely be very closed-minded, susceptible to indoctrination, reluctant to critically examine their beliefs, and will have little motivation to question claims that others provide them, especially if these others are regarded as having the “authority of knowledge”. The reason for this is that they will never have had an opportunity to explore or examine how our knowledge and our beliefs have really evolved. They will instead grow up, as Thomas Kuhn points out in his book, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, likely believing that all knowledge has simply advanced “in a tidy, uncontroversial, linear manner” and that we now know what the “world is like” (1970, p. 135). In other words, they will go through life unaware of the fact that throughout the course of history many very different ideas and opinions have been offered by a number of intelligent people concerning what should and should not be considered as “true” and “real”. They will also proceed through life unaware of the fact that not all of the information that is now accepted as being true was always accepted as being true. Consider, for example, our current belief that the earth revolves around the sun. Today, this is almost
unanimously accepted as being true. At one point in our history, however, this was not the case. Instead, it was accepted that the earth was at the centre of the solar system and that the sun as well as all of the other planets revolved around the earth. In fact, when Copernicus first proposed the idea that the sun was at the centre of the solar system in the early 1500's, and that the earth as well as all of the other planets revolved around the sun, he was thought to be crazy by most of the other people in society and was labeled a heretic.

The point is that a number of things that human beings' have accepted as being true have changed radically over time. People who are at least aware of this fact will likely be much more inclined than those who are not to examine, rethink, and adjust their beliefs upon being presented with evidence that contradicts what they currently accept as being true. Instead of believing that the truth is known and that what we accept as the truth will not change, they will instead accept, as Bertrand Russell claims they should, “that knowledge is attainable in a measure, though with difficulty; that much of what passes for knowledge at any given time is likely to be more or less mistaken, but that mistakes can be rectified by care and industry” (Russell 1960, p. 30).

One reason, therefore, why the methodology being used to teach philosophy in Ontario’s high schools might be more appropriate to use than the Lipman methodology, is that in Ontario students really do get initiated “into an inheritance of human achievements of understanding and belief” (Oakeshott 1971, p. 22). High school students who take a philosophy course in Ontario will learn what various philosophers throughout the course of history have argued about such things as human nature, the nature of reality, and the nature of the world in which we live. They will learn, for example, that Thales believed that “all
was water”, that Anaximenes believed that “all was air”, that Plato believed that the truth existed only in the “forms”, and that Berkeley argued that material things do not exist.

What every student who takes the Ontario high school philosophy course should come to see, in other words, is how ideas have evolved over time and what a wide range of ideas and opinions have actually been presented on various topics over the course of history.

According to Oakeshott, at least, having this opportunity will enable students to see themselves “in the mirror of an inheritance of human understanding and activities” and that as a result of this opportunity each student should come to feel empowered “to throw back upon the world his own version of a human being in conduct which is both a self-disclosure and a self-enactment” (1971, p. 22).

Something else that Oakeshott mentions in his article that is worthwhile considering, since it lends support to the methodology being used to teach philosophy in Ontario’s high schools, is that the term “school” (or “scholē”) was originally used to describe those places in society that individuals went in order to learn about things that were not directly connected to or relevant to their daily concerns or their everyday experiences. In fact, Oakeshott expresses in his article how strongly he is opposed to those schools and school systems that have become, for the most part, only concerned with trying to provide their students with the skills and the knowledge that they will need for their future employment or that will help them in their quest to cope with the stresses and changes that they presently encounter and that they can expect to encounter in the future. This goal, he states, is not appropriate for schools. Education, he argues, must not simply be about “acquiring a stock of ready-made ideas, images, sentiments, beliefs, etc.;” (1971, p. 22). He suggests, rather,
that being educated must involve “learning to look, to listen, to think, to feel, to imagine, to believe, to understand, to choose and to wish” (1971, p. 22). In fact, he argues that if schools are really concerned with providing their students with a worthwhile and beneficial education then they must, at least to some extent become “a place apart”. He explains,

‘School’ is a place apart in which the heir may encounter his moral and intellectual inheritance, not in the terms in which it is being used in the current engagements and occupations of the world outside (where much of it is forgotten, neglected, obscured, vulgarized or abridged, and where it appears only in scraps and as investments in immediate enterprises) but as an estate, entire, unqualified and unencumbered. ‘School’ is an emancipation achieved in a continuous redirection of attention. Here, the learner is animated, not by the inclinations he brings with him, but by intimations of excellences and aspirations he has never yet dreamed of; here he may encounter not answers to the ‘loaded’ questions of ‘life’, but questions which have never before occurred to him; here he may acquire new ‘interests’ and pursue them uncorrupted by the need for immediate results; here he may learn to seek satisfactions he had never yet imagined or wished for. (1971, p. 25)

Although Oakeshott is probably at least slightly off base in advancing this argument since high school students at the present time who do not receive an education that prepares them for their post secondary goals will have a very difficult time achieving their goals, he does, nevertheless, bring up an excellent point. Schools do have a responsibility to do more than simply prepare their students for the work force. One way, however, that schools could do this is by giving their students an opportunity to learn and study philosophy. In most philosophy classes students will not be presented with answers “to the ‘loaded’ questions of ‘life’” (Oakeshott 1971, p. 25). Instead, they are usually exposed to questions and ideas that have never before occurred to them or that they have never previously taken time to examine seriously. In a philosophy course students are invited to consider such things as whether or not we have free will, what, if anything really exists, can anything be known objectively, and what is the relationship between mind and body. In other words, one of the things that
students who take a philosophy course gain is an opportunity to encounter their moral and intellectual inheritance as well as pursue the answers to intriguing and interesting questions uncorrupted by the need for immediate results. As Michael Malone states in his article, "What Could A Philosopher Teach?",

Philosophy remains, then, as the one subject that does not need to settle anything, has nothing at stake in settling or accomplishing anything, has no subject matter other than criticism per se. To pursue it is to learn to acquire a critical attitude or habit of mind in all that one learns, thinks about, or in a sense even does - and nothing more! (1986, p. 134)

In his article “Education: The Engagement and Its Frustrations” Oakeshott is also very critical of the idea that students should be let loose in the classroom simply to “discover” during “free” group discussions (1971, p. 28). Although he is not opposed to having students engage in dialogue, he does state that “to discover nothing” should not be “preferred to being told anything” (1971, p. 28). Teachers, in other words, must accept responsibility for their students’ learning. It is their job to make sure that the students that they teach come to learn how to perform humanly, as well as come to develop an understanding of what it means to be human. In fact, he states that so long as the students’ understanding is at no time being restricted, it should not be of any great concern to outsiders whether teachers decide to pass on this inheritance by suggesting things to their students, by lecturing to their students, by demonstrating things to their students, or by drilling their students (1971, p. 26). Teachers, he claims, must be left to make this decision on their own. He writes,

A teacher is one in whom some part or aspect or passage of this inheritance is alive. He has something of which he is a master to impart (an ignorant teacher is a contradiction) and he has deliberated its worth and the manner in which he is to impart it to a learner whom he knows. (1971, p. 25)
If one now examines the Ontario curriculum *Guideline* for philosophy, then one will see that within it a very similar message is conveyed. The first thing to take note of is that because it is mandated by the Ontario government, all of the knowledge, the skills, and the values that the students are supposed to acquire as a result of taking this course are defined in terms of observable and measurable learning outcomes. The *Guideline*, in fact, specifically states that upon completion of the course students “will be able to” demonstrate that they possess certain knowledge, that they have learned certain values, and that they have acquired certain skills (1994, p. 5). It does not just state, for example, that “it would be nice” if students acquired this knowledge or these skills and values or that students “must be taught” this knowledge or these skills and values. The wording, rather, is very deliberate. The *Guideline* specifically states, “Students will be able to . . .” (1994, p. 5). In other words, it is the teacher’s responsibility to ensure that all of his/her students achieve the specified level of success and it is the teacher who must be held accountable if his/her students do not achieve this level.

The second thing to take note of is that very few instructions are given to teachers in the *Guideline* with respect to how any of this knowledge, these values, or these skills should be taught, and the instructions that are given are extremely vague. Although it is stated, for example, that students should receive guided practice in analytical reading and writing (1994, p. 4), nowhere in the document is it ever specified how, exactly, teachers should go about providing students with this practice. Another thing that is stated is that students should be made to read actual writings of some major philosophers (1994, p. 8). The *Guideline* never mentions, however, which philosophers should be read or, for that matter,
which books or passages should be read. The only thing that the Guideline states is, "There shall be readings . . . , and they shall be drawn from more than one historical period and more than one philosophical tradition" (1994, p. 8). It would appear, therefore, that so long as the learning outcomes are met, at least four of the seven major areas of philosophy are covered, and no attempt is made to indoctrinate the students, teachers who teach the course have quite a bit of freedom to use the strategies, the techniques, and the materials that they believe will work best.

Something else that can be inferred from this, as well as from the fact that students are expected to spend a significant part of the course working independently on a major project or essay, is that those who created the Ontario curriculum Guideline do not agree with Thomas Green that the process of educating must necessarily involve a certain kind of communication between teachers and students "which includes giving reasons, evidence, arguments, etc. . . ." (Green 1968, p. 33). The Guideline appears to be designed, rather, in a way that corresponds much more closely to R.S. Peters’s ideas. Recall, for example, that Peters argues that the concept "education" is not one that is intended to refer to any one particular process (Peters 1967a, p. 1). He states, instead, that the term "encapsulates criteria to which any one of a family of process must conform (1967a, p. 1). So long as students achieve a certain level of success, so long as what they are studying can be shown to be worthwhile, and provided that the methods that the teachers are using to pass on the information and teach the values and skills are not morally objectionable, teachers should have the freedom to structure their classes and help their students achieve success in the way
they think they can do this best. This same message can easily be read into the Ontario philosophy curriculum *Guideline*.

One question that would probably be appropriate to ask at this juncture is what the likelihood would be that students would significantly improve their thinking, reasoning, and questioning skills if the course were structured in such a way that the students were primarily reading philosophical texts and learning about the different philosophers, the different arguments that philosophers have advanced, and the different philosophical schools of thought. It would seem that students who take the Ontario high school philosophy course do end up spending a significant amount of time in class doing exactly these things. The answer to this question, however, is that it is not by any means unlikely. In fact, it would probably not even be that unreasonable to say that the likelihood that students would develop these skills, values, and habits of mind is fairly high. Philosophy, it should be noted, is unique discipline. As Barry Beyer points out in his article, "What Philosophy Offers to the Teaching of Thinking", philosophy is the only discipline "that has thinking as both its subject and its method of inquiry" (Beyer 1990, p. 55). Unlike mathematics, the sciences, and courses such as history and geography, the theories that one learns in most philosophy classrooms and that are presented in most philosophical texts are not usually presented as if they are final products or absolute truths (Goosens 1976, p. 2). Students are not just exposed to findings and results but also to many questions, problems, issues, difficulties, and distinctions (Goosens 1976, p. 3). In fact, the theories and arguments that students usually encounter are presented "as positions to be examined, disputed, argued" (Goosens 1976, p. 2).
It is highly unlikely, for example, that any student could read Berkeley’s argument refuting the existence of material objects, or Hume’s argument stating that the idea of cause and effect is something that exists only in the mind and not in objects completely passively and uncritically. Philosophical arguments such as these have the power to provoke those who seriously examine them to try to find the errors within them as well as to refute them. On the one hand most of the arguments that can be found in the “great books” seem to be incredibly convincing. They are usually well written, very well thought out, and very well reasoned. On the other hand, however, many, at the same time, also come across as being completely preposterous. Of course the white billiard ball causes the black billiard ball to move upon contact, and of course things such as turnips, pencils, baseballs, and socks exist. The thing that probably irks people the most upon examining such arguments is trying to figure out how exactly these theories can be proven erroneous. Obviously, they say to themselves, there is a flaw in the line of reasoning but where exactly is it? Is it possible perhaps that these theories and arguments could actually be correct? What must be appreciated, essentially, is that philosophical arguments, by their very nature, are such that they force those that are examining them to examine their own secure, uncriticized, common-sense beliefs more closely. As Stephen Pepper writes in *World Hypotheses*,

One may accept common sense and thoughtlessly roam in its pastures, but if one looks up and tries to take it in, it is like a fantastic dream... It accepts the principle of contradiction and ignores it. It insists upon a fact and equally insists upon its contrary. It is vague and unclear without reason, capriciously, and seemingly in the wrong places... Sometimes it will stand up to unlimited criticism, and then again break down at the first critical probing. It is unreliable, irresponsible, and, in a word irritable. (1942, p. 44)
What is being suggested, in short, is that most students would probably come to realize how irresponsible, unreliable, and inaccurate their common-sense beliefs actually are simply as a result of reading philosophical works, being exposed to some of the great philosophical arguments and as a result of learning about the various philosophical schools of thought. They would come to appreciate that, aside from just being "cognitively irritable", their common-sense beliefs also sometimes require further attention, examination, and thought. They would, therefore, likely be motivated to think more about the problems that are raised in class as well as about the problems and questions that they encounter in their daily lives more carefully, more critically, as well as more analytically. In fact, it is quite likely that as they are exposed to more arguments and more theories, and as their common sense beliefs are challenged more and more, they would inevitably also begin to question what they see, hear, and believe more and more. What can be recognized, in other words, is that students would in fact receive a significant amount of practice thinking critically, creatively, and analytically if they were taught philosophy using the methodology outlined in the Ontario high school curriculum *Guideline* for philosophy.

There can be little doubt, however, that if teachers who teach the Ontario high school philosophy course really want to help their students become proficient in their ability to think, reason, and question, then they must do much more than simply teach their students philosophical arguments and have them read philosophical texts. To some extent, at least, other things must take place as well. One thing that teachers must do, for example, and this is stated in the *Guideline*, is expose their students to as wide a range of philosophical ideas and perspectives as possible. As Ann Gazzard states,
Instruction . . . which fails to communicate accurately the range of opinions concerning a particular philosophic issue or which involves the assertion of controversial philosophic views without reasoned consideration of the broadly held contending views, can be indicted for inculcating biased views. (1996, p. 11)

The fact that the Guideline states that students should receive “guided practice in analytical reading” (Guideline 1994, p. 4) is also very positive even though little elaboration is given with regard to how exactly teachers are supposed to guide their students. Reading philosophy books is usually not an easy task. In most cases, they must be read in a manner very different from the way science books, history books, and novels are read. The experience of reading philosophy books, therefore, would likely not be as beneficial for students as it could be if teachers simply gave their students copies of the “great books” and then instructed them to read them. The experience would be much more beneficial, rather, if teachers actually spent time in class helping their students learn how to read philosophical works. In his article, “What Could A Philosopher Teach?”, Michael Malone supports this view. In fact he asserts that the first thing that any philosophy teacher should do if teaching the subject to students for the first time is “teach them to read” (1986, p. 128). He explains,

The first stages in introducing students to the classics, then, amounts to helping them to learn to read, in the most basic sense of all, and getting them to think about what an idea is, how it differs from an opinion, and what it has to do with understanding - or living - a person’s life, or being a participant in a culture. As they begin to recognize ideas in what they and the others around them say, one can begin to get them to reflect on how the author might present the logic of an idea in a literary form and how someone might engage in a dialogue with the author. It is only at this level of understanding that they can begin to respect the classics, because it is only at this point that they have any comprehension of what they are about. Only then, for example, can they begin to appreciate the classics as eloquent, articulate, subtle, and forceful presentations of ideas we have heard or discovered to be latent in our own thinking. (1986, p. 129)
Michael Oakeshott offers a similar opinion in “Education: The Engagement and its Frustration”. He states,

[Learning to read or to listen is a slow and exacting engagement, little or nothing to do with acquiring information. It is learning to follow, to understand and to re-think deliberate expressions of rational consciousness; it is learning to recognize the fine shades of meaning without overbalancing into the lunacy of ‘decoding’; it is allowing another’s thoughts to re-enact themselves into one’s own mind; it is learning in acts of constantly surprised attention to submit to, to understand and to respond to what (in this response) becomes a part of our understanding of ourselves; and one may learn to read only by reading with care, and only from writings which stand well off from our immediate concerns: it is almost impossible to learn to read from contemporary writing. (1971, p. 24)

If it is the teacher’s job to help their student learn how to read philosophical texts in an effective manner then one would assume that teachers, themselves, must know how to read this material effectively. They too, one must assume, must know “what an idea is, how it differs from an opinion, and what it has to do with understanding - or living - a person’s life, or being a participant in a culture” (Malone 1986, p. 129). Teachers, however, who teach philosophy in Ontario’s high schools are not required to have any background or experience in philosophy. One must wonder, therefore, how effectively a teacher who has little or no experience reading or doing philosophy could help his/her students do such things as read a text philosophically. This, in fact, is one of a few serious criticisms that can be levied against the Ontario high school philosophy course.

Criticisms of the Ontario High School Philosophy Course

Although the Ontario high school philosophy course does have a great deal to offer students who take the course, and although it is likely to help students become more autonomous human beings, it too, has its shortcomings. One criticism that can be levied against the
course, for example, is that teachers who teach the course are not required to have any background or experience in philosophy. At the present time, at least, the course “may be taught by teachers from any department” and there is no “formal requirement of university-level education in philosophy” in order to be hired as a philosophy teacher (Cunningham 1995, p. 1). While those who designed the course have stated publicly that they “hope that the course’s popularity will come to provide a basis for its being made a teachable subject” (Cunningham 1995, p. 2), until this happens and until only teachers with a background in philosophy are teaching the course, it is likely that the course will not be nearly as beneficial to students as it could be. One reason for this, as Paul Wagner mentions in his article, “Pre-College Philosophy: Will It Get Its Day In Court?” is that most individuals who do not have a background in philosophy or who do not have any academic training in philosophy usually envision philosophy “as something similar to history or social studies” (1984, p. 11). On the other hand, he points out that individuals who have studied philosophy, even minimally, tend to see philosophy as a discipline “dissimilar to subjects such as history and social studies” (1984, p. 11). The consequence of this, he claims, is that teachers with no background in philosophy will teach the course in a very different way, and most likely in a much less effective way, than individuals would who have such a background. In fact, within his article he offers the following hypothesis:

If there exists a strong positive correlation between training in philosophy and philosophical proficiency, and certainly, this is not an unreasonable assumption, then lack of training in philosophy must be similarly correlated with a lack of philosophical proficiency. Consequently, we have to suspect that teachers with no training in philosophy know very little philosophy. Teachers with very little knowledge of philosophy will teach even less. And, finally, teachers with very little knowledge of philosophy can be depended upon to say some outlandish things about philosophy such as “a person can teach philosophy having little or no
knowledge of philosophy as long as they know enough pedagogical techniques.” (1984, p. 12)

When one considers how much freedom Ontario’s high school philosophy teachers are given to teach the course the way that they think is best, one can see how far reaching the consequences of allowing inexperienced teachers to teach may actually be. Teaching philosophy involves much more than just passing on information. It also involves teaching students such things as how to read and think critically and analytically, how to reason effectively, how to uncover fallacies, and how to weigh evidence. Teachers who have never taken a philosophy course before will not likely know how to teach these skills or how to do such things as use a text philosophically, how to pursue a philosophical question with the rigour and vigour that it warrants, how to uncover or discriminate amongst fallacies, or be able to recognize when terms need to be defined more precisely. Classroom discussions, moreover, are much more likely to resemble “bull sessions” with students just offering their opinions if teachers do not have a background in philosophy, rather than being characterized by “caring, collaborative deliberation, self-correction, inquisitiveness, open-mindedness, tentativeness, attention to criteria and context, commitment to reasonableness, and progress towards a solution” (Sharp 1995, p. 47).

A second criticism that can be offered against the Ontario high school philosophy course is that far too much content must be covered. The Guideline insists, for instance, that “students shall explore four of the seven major areas of philosophy, including at least one of the following areas: philosophy of human nature, ethics, and social and political philosophy” (1994, p. 7). Each of these areas, however, is extremely broad and far reaching. The
Guideline recommends, for example, that teachers who choose to let their students explore the philosophy of human nature, cover at least some of the following topics:

- free will and determinism
- the meaning of life
- egoism and altruism
- mind and body
- responsibility
- personal identity
- consciousness (Guideline 1994, p. 7)

If one were to look in any university course calendar, however, what one would most likely notice is that entire courses are usually devoted to just one of these topics. In fact, quite often entire courses focus on just one or two aspects of one of these topics or even on just one or two philosophical works that have examined one or two of these topics. In other words, it would be extremely difficult for teachers to cover all of this material in a meaningful way. In fact, in many senses, it would be like insisting that one science course be able to teach high school students everything that they need to know about biology, chemistry, physics, and psychology. Plainly and simply, it could not be done effectively. The Ontario high school philosophy course would most likely be much more beneficial and meaningful to students as well as much more manageable for teachers, if only one or two major areas of philosophy had to be studied.

The last criticism of the Ontario high school philosophy course will also be the most serious. Although those who created the curriculum Guideline should be applauded for insisting that students read the “actual writings of some major philosophers” and learn about the different philosophical arguments that have been advanced throughout history for reasons already mentioned, they can also be criticized for insisting that students, upon
completion of the course, be able to "demonstrate" their knowledge of this information. There is no practical reason why students need to know what Plato, Descartes, Kant, Hume, or Spinoza had to say. As Michael Malone states in his article "What Could A Philosopher Teach?": "Such study is fodder for the persiflage of cocktail parties, and the striving of great minds for understanding is reduced to items for Trivial Pursuit" (1986, p. 127). One would think, rather, that it would be more than sufficient if students were simply exposed to the various philosophers and their theories without requiring them to demonstrate their knowledge at the end of the course regarding what this particular philosopher or that particular philosopher said or believed.

While no teacher is going to encourage his/her students to forget what they have learned or to forget what they have read, one must seriously question why teachers should have to be so concerned with making sure that their students be able to demonstrate knowledge of "some major philosophers or schools of thought" (Guideline 1994, p. 5) at the end of the course. The reason that the course is being offered, according to the Guideline, is to help students improve their thinking skills, their questioning skills, their reasoning skills, and their communication skills. It is, as I have argued, to help students become autonomous human beings. It is not to teach students what Aristotle, Locke and Leibniz argued or what epiphenomenalism or solipsism mean. The point is that if teachers did not have to be so concerned about content and devote so much time and effort making sure that their students were able to recall philosophical facts, then they would be able to spend significantly more time helping them develop their questioning skills, their reasoning skills, and their creative, analytical and critical thinking skills. Students would be able to spend more time, for
example, engaged in philosophical dialogue and more time could also be spent examining intriguing questions in depth. Instead of being forced to move on from one topic to the next to meet time constraints, students and teachers could use the extra time that they had to really work through philosophical arguments to try to uncover the fallacies, examine competing ideas, as well as come up with their own well reasoned and well thought out answers.

It is by no means an easy task to figure out how much content is appropriate to include in a high school philosophy course. In fact, one of the greatest challenges that probably faces most individuals who try to develop a philosophy curriculum for high school students is figuring out how much content is too much to teach and how much content is too little. The goal that anyone who takes on this task should have in mind, however, is to find the medium that will best enable students to acquire the knowledge, the skills, and the habits of mind that they must come to possess if they are to become autonomous human beings. It is mainly because philosophy has so much potential to help students become autonomous human beings that a philosophy course should be offered. I discuss this further in my final chapter.
Chapter 5

Human Beings, Autonomous Human Beings, and Philosophy

In the first chapter of this thesis the question was posed, “Why should philosophy be taught in high schools?” In the second chapter, the question, “What is the purpose of a high school education?” was examined. By now, however, the answers to these two questions should be clear. One of the main aims of schooling must be to educate students so that they will learn to become autonomous human beings and philosophy should be taught in high schools because, provided an appropriate teaching methodology is used, it is a subject that is extremely well suited for helping high school students achieve this objective.

Although it is true that in chapters three and four it was argued that neither Matthew Lipman’s Philosophy for Children program nor Ontario’s high school philosophy course use methodologies that are entirely “appropriate” for helping high school students become autonomous human beings, examining these two curricula did reveal what knowledge, skills, and habits of mind students could acquire in a well-taught and well-designed philosophy course that would help them to become (a) human beings in Oakeshott’s sense, and (b) autonomous human beings. One of the things that was shown, for example, is that in a well-taught and well-designed philosophy course students would come to appreciate how their ideas and beliefs have been influenced by the great thinkers who lived before them. They would come to learn from whom and whence much of our knowledge and many of our basic philosophical beliefs originated as well as how our knowledge and philosophical beliefs have evolved over the course of history. It was also shown, however, that if students take a
philosophy course that uses an appropriate methodology that they should come to be more curious, more open-minded, as well as learn how to hold their beliefs more rationally. Perhaps most importantly, though, what was shown is that in a well-taught and well-designed philosophy course students should come to learn how to question more effectively, reason more cogently, as well as think more effectively.

In this last chapter, what will be provided is a summary of the arguments advanced earlier on. The arguments will be tied together to show what exactly makes philosophy so amenable to helping high school students acquire this knowledge, these skills and these habits of mind, as well as to show why possessing this knowledge, these skills, and these habits of mind should not only help high school students become human beings in Oakeshott's sense, but also help them become autonomous human beings.

Using Philosophy as a Vehicle for Helping High School Students Become Human

It will be recalled that one of the arguments that Michael Oakeshott advances in his article “Education: The Engagement and its Frustration”, is that human beings are essentially what they believe. He states that because our beliefs so strongly influence what we say, what we think, what we do, and how we understand, that it is our beliefs that essentially define us. In fact, he suggests, that what truly distinguishes us from other things and other beings is our ability to develop beliefs, hold beliefs, and alter our beliefs. To the extent, therefore, that an individual’s beliefs are not his/her own or at least are not evidentially held, an individual cannot live his/her life “authentically”. He/she will not be properly in control over what he/she says, does, thinks, or believes. Individuals who have come to possess their beliefs as
a consequence of indoctrination, for example, will not be able to understand themselves as human beings must. They will not know why they hold the beliefs that they do or what reasons can be provided to support holding the beliefs that they hold. Even if it is the case, by chance, that the beliefs that they hold are true, as Thomas Green (1968) points out, they still will not know that they are the truth. At best, they will only know that the beliefs that they hold are correct and that they are held by others as well.

One of the things that students do when they engage in philosophy, however, that can help them become human beings, is that they examine their own beliefs as well as the beliefs held by others very carefully. They consider to what extent sets of beliefs are internally consistent as well as consistent with the empirical evidence that exists in the world. They also explore what reasons can be provided to justify holding certain beliefs as well as what reasons can be offered to refute them. Students, therefore, who take philosophy must always be ready to defend their beliefs with sound reasoning and valid evidence when they are confronted with conflicting evidence or by the skeptic who wants to know “why?”.

Answers such as “Because” or “That is just my opinion” are not acceptable in philosophy. What students learn in philosophy, rather, is how to hold their beliefs rationally and how to provide sound and valid arguments to support them. As a result of taking philosophy, therefore, students’ beliefs become their own if for no other reason than they come to understand and appreciate why they hold them. This, in turn, should enable them to live more authentically and to become more fully human. Since the beliefs that hold will be their own, they will have control, for the most part, over the choices that they make, the actions that they perform, and the statements that they provide.
Another way, however, in which a philosophy course can possibly help students to become human is by exposing them to the great philosophers as well as to the arguments and to the ideas that they advanced. The reason that this should be beneficial to students is because it would provide them with an opportunity to see how many of the ideas and beliefs they possess have been influenced by individuals who lived before them. Individuals, according to Oakeshott, who do not recognize that they are living in a world in which customs, desires, ideas and beliefs are constantly evolving, cannot be fully human, as he defines “being human”. Part of what is involved in developing a belief system, he insists, and becoming a human being, is recognizing what those in the past believed, felt, imagined, fancied, and desired. In fact, he states, only individuals who recognize that their beliefs have been influenced by those who lived before them, will be able to truly understand themselves and develop unique identities. By studying philosophy, meanwhile, and by being exposed to some of the ideas that some of the great philosophers of the past have advanced, students should be able to better understand why they hold the beliefs that they do which should in turn help them to become human beings.

Helping students simply become human beings in Oakeshott’s sense, however, must not be all that schools strive to achieve. What every school must strive to do, rather, is help their students develop the knowledge, the skills, and the habits of mind that will enable them to become autonomous human beings and that will give them the power to transform the world as well as live full and rich lives.
Using Philosophy as a Vehicle to Help High School Students Become Autonomous Human Beings

Human beings who are autonomous are not just composed of beliefs about themselves and the world in which they live. They are composed of beliefs, rather, that are almost all rationally and evidentially held. Not only have their beliefs been considered and explored, they have also been rigorously examined as well as put through numerous tests of logic and experience. The reason for this, quite simply, is because autonomous human beings are determined to make sure that the beliefs that they hold are true and that their understanding of themselves and of the world that they live in as accurate and as thorough as possible. As a consequence of possessing this attitude and holding their beliefs in this way, to the extent that it is possible, and to the extent that they want to be, autonomous human beings will usually find themselves in control over what they do, say, think, and believe. They will have the ability, as Freire states, to act upon and transform their world. They are also always willing to take full responsibility for their actions. They are not like sheep who just follow a shepherd or like robots who just do what they are programmed to do. Instead of letting another person’s consciousness be imposed upon them, their thoughts are always entirely their own. Even on those occasions when they do decide to follow others and even when they do decide to accept claims from others, they only do so because they believe they have good reasons for doing so. To make sure that their reasoning is sound and their evidence is valid, they ask insightful questions, seek evidence, weigh evidence, and demand justification for the rules, principles, and claims of facts that they are presented with or that they even acquire on their own. Perhaps most importantly, however, they are always willing to
reexamine and, if necessary, even revise their most firmly held beliefs in order that they may able to understand correctly and make sense of the world in which they live.

One thing that must be understood, however, is that individuals do not come to possess this level of autonomy naturally. According to Freire, at least, autonomy can only be acquired “by conquest . . . It must be pursued constantly and responsibly” (1970/1993, p. 29). Certain skills and habits of mind must be acquired before individuals can become autonomous. They must, for example, come to develop a keen sense of curiosity as well as learn how to be open-minded. They must also learn how to ask questions effectively, reason effectively, as well as become highly skilled analytical thinkers, critical thinkers, and creative thinkers. One discipline, however, that can help students develop these skills and habits of mind is philosophy. Exactly how will now be considered.

**Philosophy Teaches Curiosity**

It is not too difficult to recognize why in a well-taught and well-designed philosophy course students should learn to become much more curious. The types of questions and arguments that are examined in philosophy classes are such that they almost force those who are considering them to more closely examine their own previously unexamined, secure and uncriticized common-sense beliefs. By exploring competing answers to such fundamental questions as, What is beauty?, What is time?, What is knowledge?, and What exists?, students would almost inevitably come to realize that their common-sense beliefs, even about the most basic things in life, regularly require further attention, examination, and
thought. This should lead them to inquire into things that they are uncertain about on a more regular basis since they will recognize the dangers of taking things for granted.

It is probably also true that students would become more curious simply because the questions that they would be exposed to would capture their interest or their imagination to such an extent that they would be driven to explore them further. The questions that students examine in philosophy courses are the same questions that have intrigued human beings for centuries. In fact, as the Ontario high school philosophy curriculum Guideline points out, the reason why disciplines such as mathematics, psychology, history, and physics came to exist was because individuals wanted to devote more time and attention to specific philosophical problems that captured their imagination (OAC Guideline, p. 4).

**Philosophy Teaches Rationality and Open-Mindedness**

Taking a well designed and well taught philosophy course should also help students learn to become more open-minded and to think more rationally. The main reason for this is that in any such course students will be exposed to a wide range of well argued, well reasoned, and well thought out ideas. Although most of these ideas, at least upon first inspection, will come across as being extremely convincing to high school students, many of them will also turn out to contradict each other. Students, in other words, will not be able to accept all of the arguments that they examine as correct even though they will probably find most of them to be quite persuasive. The more that they examine competing and conflicting ideas, however, the more they should realize how important it is to keep an open mind when presented with an argument or with any information. They should learn that even those
arguments and those facts that upon first inspection appear to be extremely convincing, sometimes turn out to be wrong or misleading. They should also come to appreciate how important it is to examine competing ideas before reaching any final conclusions. Regardless of how persuasive an argument or a set of facts may be, other ideas might even be more persuasive, and upon inspection might even be more correct.

**Philosophy Teaches Students to Question, Reason, and Think More Effectively**

In any well taught and well designed philosophy class students will do much more than just learn what a sound and valid argument is, what a fallacy is, and be exposed to a variety of different philosophical questions and arguments. They will also learn how to philosophize using the proper procedures of philosophical inquiry and be required to engage in philosophical dialogues on a regular basis with others as well as with the philosophical texts that they read. Their ideas, in other words, will be constantly challenged and they will be forced to defend them using sound and valid reasoning. Students will also be given an opportunity, and even encouraged, to challenge ideas offered by others. They will be asked to expose fallacious reasoning as well as any unsound claims. In fact, they will learn not only how to ask probing questions, but also how to ask probing questions about questions. What is important to recognize is that during these dialogical engagements teachers as well as other students will not let matters be settled “by resort to mere opinion” (Wagner 1984, p. 18). Instead, they will insist that those participating in the dialogue look at the problems respectfully, critically and analytically and then try and come up with creative well-argued
solutions. The more practice students received at examining philosophical problems and ideas in this way, as a matter of fact, the quicker their thinking skills, their reasoning skills, and their questioning skills would most likely develop.

**Where Do We Go From Here?**

Although neither Matthew Lipman’s Philosophy for Children program or Ontario’s high school philosophy course proved to be ideal for helping high school students acquire the knowledge, the skills, and the habits of mind necessary to become autonomous human beings, each did have a significant amount to offer. In fact, very little work would probably have to be done on either of these programs to make them significantly better. To improve the Philosophy for Children program, for example, Lipman and his colleagues would simply have to include more philosophical content in the novels and expose students to some actual writings of some of the major philosophers. If this was done students would likely begin to dialogue much more effectively and dialogues would also, likely become much more productive and beneficial. One reason for this is that students would be aware of what has already been accomplished in philosophy and would therefore be able to use the time that they have for dialoguing to build on those accomplishments instead of wasting their time examining frivolous problems. Secondly, if students were exposed to the great works they would be able to try and emulate the way that the great philosophers formed their problems and developed their arguments. In other words, they would have a chance to learn from the best. Third, as a consequence of examining great philosophical works, students would come to see that even individuals who are revered for their intelligence have made mistakes and have produced work that contains flaws. Once students recognize this they themselves would
probably be more willing to take risks while engaged in dialogue and would not be as afraid to be proven wrong. Lastly, by examining what the great philosophers of the past have argued and believed, students would gain a sense of where many of their philosophical beliefs originated which in turn, at least according to Oakeshott, should help them better understand themselves and help them become more fully human.

As far as the Ontario high school philosophy course is concerned, it could be significantly improved by de-emphasizing the teaching of content. At the present time, the Guideline places so much emphasis on teaching and learning content that little time is apparently left for students to engage in discussions or for teachers to help students develop important skills and habits of mind. If students are going to improve their ability to think, reason, and question then a significant amount of time must be set aside for them to practice these skills. One way that this could be done would be if teachers had their students engage in dialogue on a regular basis in a manner similar to the way that the Philosophy for Children program promotes. In fact each program could probably greatly benefit by borrowing ideas and strategies from the other.

The biggest stumbling block for both of these high school philosophy programs, however, might very well be finding teachers who have a background in philosophy and who have experience doing philosophy. Although Charner Perry and Douglas Morgan might be correct what they state in their report to the American Philosophical Association that “it would be better not to offer philosophy at all where only incompetent teachers are available” (quoted in W. Moore 1969, p. 114), the response to this is obvious: develop effective methodologies and interesting curricula and individuals who have philosophical training and commitments will be drawn to the teaching profession. Until this happens, however, teachers
that are willing to teach the course should be permitted to do so, provided that individuals more qualified are not available. Philosophy is too well suited for developing knowledge, skills, and habits of mind that will help students become autonomous human beings not to offer it in our high schools. Hence, better some philosophy at the present time than no philosophy at all.
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