

Volume 1 | Issue 3
Fall 2022

Wisdom's Edge Newsletter



Dr. Stone's first p4c Pop Up in
Boca Raton, FL.



Dr. Ragasa's 4th grade class
with observers from the
Summer Symposium 2022.

Philosophy for Children

If children are our future, then they need philosophy, too.

This summer I had participated in the University of Hawai'i, Uehiro Academy of Philosophy and Ethics in Education Summer Symposium. Dr. Ben Lukey, Associate Director and organizer of the Symposium, created a full schedule. We visited five public schools in three days on Oahu, from kindergarten to high school, where they are practicing what is known as 'p4cHawai'i' or, 'p4c' – philosophy for children. p4c is an approach to teaching that incorporates four pillars: community, philosophy, inquiry, and evaluation. These pillars build the foundation for students and teachers to be considerate, compassionate, and curious lifelong learners – even in children as young as five years old. The first classroom I visited was Ms. Mackenzie Carpenter's 4th grade classroom at Ka'elepulu elementary. There, although they were new to p4c, the children organically inquired into the question, "what if there were no scientists?" The inquiry exhausted many possibilities, everywhere from, 'the planet wouldn't have people' to 'there would be no war, only peace'. Some of the questions raised included: why do we need medicine to keep us healthy? Could everyone be a scientist? What makes a scientist? Did cavepeople have scientists? My mind was blown as I watched ten-year-old students think about the question, holding their journals close to their chests, with furrowed brows, thinking deeply before they responded in writing to the prompt in their journals. The children were respectful and listened in a polite manner to one another. One of the most amazing things I witnessed was a fourth grader refer to what a student had said, not this time, but the last time they spoke, and challenged their claim, saying, "I agree and disagree." I saw a room of children, eager to speak, with many hands raised, but patiently waiting for the one holding the community ball to invite them to speak.

I witnessed a classroom where a blind child did not have a personal aide – because the children helped the student find a place to sit at the circle and would help her find objects that she needed. The children found cards I had dropped – handmade cards from the other children who welcomed us, even though they didn't know us – and they asked, "is this yours? I found them on the floor." Compassionate, considerate, conscientious and with care – p4cHawai'i "reshuffles the deck," as Dr. J says and cultivates future citizens.

I've brought the technique of p4c to my local neighborhood and have invited all the children, including my youngest son to participate. So far, only my son and one other child attends regularly. Yet I can already see what an influence the language and thinking games have on him. He is interesting to talk to and is patient with me when I discuss something. He has developed consideration and courage to inquire into any interesting thing that catches his mind. He has taken an interest in completing his homework, something that we had previously struggled with. "Your son is very smart," one person said to me today. I smile and wonder if it is that, or if it is p4c at work.

– *Sophia Stone, President, WE foundation.*

"Thanks so much for offering the p4c class to the kids. I don't know what magic you did, but I never have to remind my son to go to your class and he comes back happy.

He usually is quite picky at his extracurricular activities. I want to thank you for your generosity and dedication! We appreciate you very much"

- Mother of p4c neighbor participant 2022.

Help Fund Wisdom's Edge!

We have a new [donations page](#), with three levels of donors: craftsman (\$18), guardian (\$180) and philosopher king (\$1800). Our fundraising goal for 2022 is to have 100 craftsmen, 10 guardians, and 1 philosopher king. Funds will support participation at the [Summer Symposium](#) at the [Uehiro Academy for Philosophy and Ethics in Education](#). The symposium runs for a three-week series of weekly sessions with training in pedagogy and methods for teaching philosophy to diverse communities, focusing on the most vulnerable and yet most flexible thinkers – children. The intended outcome for Wisdom's Edge Dialogue Facilitator participation is for methodological and curriculum development used for programming in future collaborations with pre-K and K-5 public and private institutions. Our goal is to have all of our Dialogue Facilitators to have this training and to bring the p4c method back to the communities we serve.

Philosophy of Religion – Dr. John Houston

Course Description: Philosophy of Religion (Delivered in Summer, 2022)

This course applies the tools of analytic philosophy to the claims of major world religions, especially monotheism. Some of the questions we will address: Are there strong rational grounds for belief in God's existence? If God is omnipotent and loves us, why is there so much suffering in the world? Are miracles possible? What might religion teach us about human nature?

“The Dialogue Facilitator was, I thought, exceptional at his job in creating a safe and open non-judgmental class discussion. He seemed extremely passionate about the topic he was teaching and took the material seriously.”

– Participant in Philosophy of Religion class 2022 from St. Cloud, MN.

“To more fully evaluate why I believe what I believe. Sometimes when I analyzed my beliefs more deeply, they affirmed and solidified my beliefs. With others, I realized I needed a better basis or grounds for my beliefs, and if I was unable to come up with any, I may need to re-think whether I should hold on to that belief.”

– Participant from St. Cloud, MN



Professor John Houston's Philosophy of Religion class in St. Cloud, MN

Testimonials from Philosophy of Religion:

“I would very much recommend this class. It is very well organized with many thoughtful and challenging readings. Dr. Houston's well lead discussions made for some very lively classroom conversations.”

“I would highly recommend this course to anyone who questions why different people have different beliefs and values, or to anyone who wants to explore and clarify their own thoughts and beliefs. Each class provided a lot to think about and mull over outside of class!”

Testimonials from Philosophy of Religion, cont'd:

“The class structure gave opportunities to share my views with others and to hear theirs. Questions and conversation were encouraged and brought diverse comments... Thanks for enriching my summer.”

– Participant in Philosophy of Religion

“I came to realize how very little I actually know about the beliefs I hold. I realize how very little I challenge my beliefs and how I take a lot for granted. I believe fear is the primary reason for not asking more about my beliefs.”

– Participant in Philosophy of Religion

“The W.E. session somehow nudges us to unravel a deeper slice of ourselves and our primordial sense of awe and wonder. In our everyday life, it sometimes becomes unaffordable to sit down and think and converse deeply with our loved ones. The W.E. session gifts us the time and space to stop and ponder, to grow, and to take those learnings with us as we transform our everyday lives.”

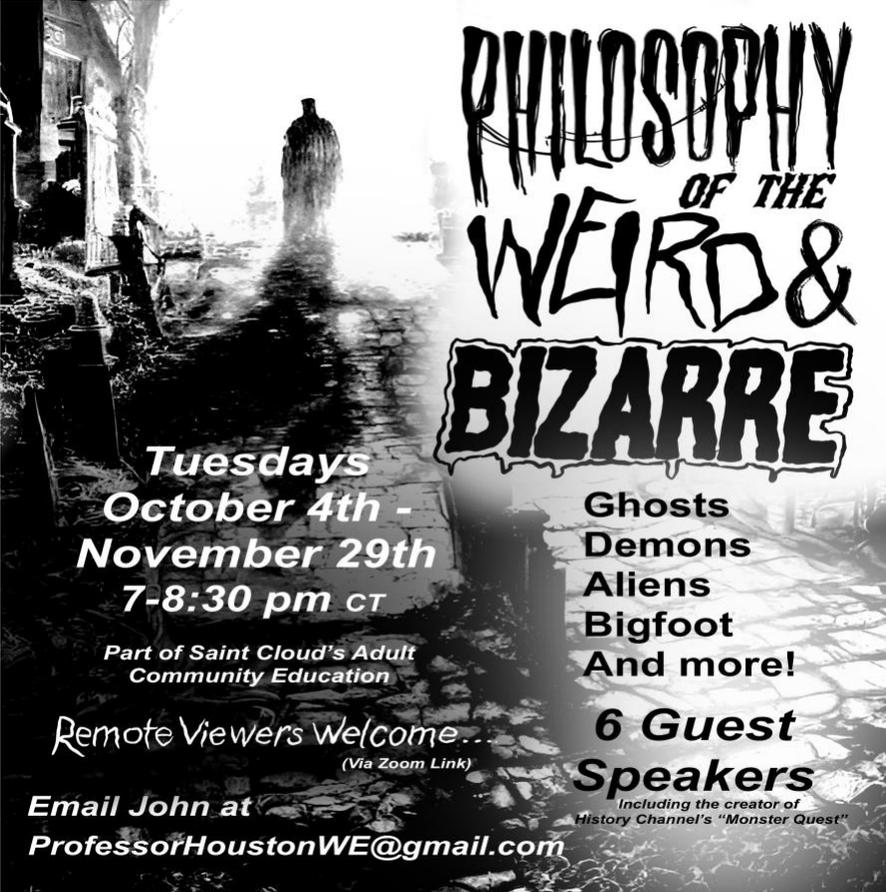
– Participant from the Wisdom's Edge Summer Reading Circle 2022

“I felt this course very beneficial. It covered many thoughtful aspects and perceptions of religion. I think it helped me focus a years-long struggle/curiosity about the idea and purpose of religion.”

“I found it quite interesting to hear the diversity of beliefs and perspectives of the class. Listening to my classmates explain and work out the basis for their beliefs was helpful as I did the same with my own. Professor Houston was very thorough in working through the readings and that was very instructive about how one might go about analyzing different ideas, whether pertaining to this class or other subjects.”

“I realized that many of my religious beliefs were based on tradition and the convenience of beliefs that had been passed on to me throughout my upbringing. This class made me analyze why I believe what I do. It solidified some beliefs with more thoughtful grounds. For other beliefs that I already questioned, the concepts in the class helped clarify my difficulties with those concepts.”

New virtual course offering from John Houston:



**PHILOSOPHY
OF THE
WEIRD &
BIZARRE**

**Tuesdays
October 4th -
November 29th
7-8:30 pm CT**

Part of Saint Cloud's Adult
Community Education

Remote Viewers Welcome...
(Via Zoom Link)

**Email John at
ProfessorHoustonWE@gmail.com**

**Ghosts
Demons
Aliens
Bigfoot
And more!**

**6 Guest
Speakers**
Including the creator of
History Channel's "Monster Quest"

Wisdom's Edge Philosophy of the Weird & Bizarre

*"There are more things in
Heaven and Earth,
Horatio, than are dreamt
of in your philosophy."*

– Hamlet

Course Description:

Lions and tigers and bears—they exist. But what about ghosts, demons, Bigfoot, psychics, and other reported unexplained phenomena? Join horror author and Wisdom's Edge philosophy professor John Houston as we explore the world of the weird and bizarre. Believers and skeptics welcome!

*"It is the height of human
arrogance to suggest there
are not some things we
cannot explain. And it is
the height of human
cynicism to suggest that
people who have
experienced the
inexplicable are either
liars or lunatics."*

– Anonymous

Wisdom's Edge thanks **Compassionate Financing** for sponsoring a student to participate in the Philosophy of the Weird and the Strange.

Compassionate Financing supports funding to students and families in need who otherwise wouldn't be able to participate in training for self-improvement.

New Course! Philosophy of the Weird & Bizarre

Professor John Houston of Saint Cloud, Minnesota designed a new course for Wisdom's Edge in honor of the Halloween season.

Dr. Houston has spent the better part of two decades puzzling over the odd and anomalous, and he is preparing a course that surveys the peculiar through a philosophical lens.

Our world is full of claims of the strange and mysterious, from alien abductions to sightings of Sasquatch and ghosts. What can philosophy do to assist us as we encounter and evaluate weird claims? Quite a lot.

In Philosophy of the Weird & Bizarre we will apply the philosopher's toolkit to evaluate strange claims, working hard to distinguish pseudoscientific from scientific reasoning; evaluating evidential standards; considering the relevance and weight of anecdotal evidence vs. statistical data; and the phenomenology of uncanny experience. Most importantly, we will practice listening carefully and respectfully to people who are going to share with us their own encounters with the weird & bizarre.

There are currently six guest speakers scheduled, including a career paranormal investigator, two long-term Sasquatch researchers, an assistant exorcist (who is also a philosophy professor!) and the History Channel's creator and executive producer of Monster Quest. Sign up if you want to go down this rabbit hole!

Where: Online via Zoom.

When: Tuesday evenings from 7:00-8:30 beginning October 4. (Eight sessions)

Here's a link to register:

<https://isd742.ce.eleyo.com/.../philosophy-of-the-weird...>

Wisdom's Edge Awarded Grant from the City of Boca Raton!

The grant will support philosophy circles for families and children affected by active-duty service members who must spend long periods of time, three or more months, away from their families to serve our country. P4c circles will support the remaining families who stay behind and manage the household and work while taking care of their children. These groups will provide a safe, intellectual space for children to inquire into and discuss the challenges of having to function and play as a family when the whole family unit is not able to be together. Our aim is to provide emotional and intellectual support for these families, and to help motivate the children to be more understanding of the challenges that mom or dad face when they have to take care of the house and for parents to understand the needs of their children that might not be getting met if there is only one parent in the house.

Wisdom's Edge Community Self-Healing Circle: We'll have another circle next winter, 2023, starting in January. If you'd like to be placed on the reserve list, please email wisdomsedgefoundation@gmail.com. If you are on Facebook, please like our [page](#).

Wisdom's Edge Mathematics and Philosophy Reading Circle: Euclid's Book I, Spinoza's *Ethics*, Wittenstein's *Tractatus*, and texts, from the East and Islamic West. If you'd like to be placed on the reserve list, please email wisdomsedgefoundation@gmail.com.

Wisdom's Edge welcomes acclaimed author Eric Weiner to our Text Advisory Board:

[Eric Weiner](#) is an award-winning journalist and bestselling author. I came to know Eric's work through *The Socrates Express* and held one of our first book circles to discuss his work. If you were to read any of his books, you'd discover that he makes philosophical ideas easy to understand while he sparks your intellectual curiosity. Because he is a wide reader of all kinds of philosophy texts, both from the east and west traditions as well as from ancient and modern writers, I invited him to be on our Text Advisory Board. We are delighted he said, 'yes'. His recent books include *The Geography of Bliss* and *The Geography of Genius*.

Teaching self-esteem to women in transition:

Did you know?

You can choose Wisdom's Edge to be your birthday charity on Facebook or have your purchases on Amazon Smile contribute money for Wisdom's Edge Foundation:

Here is our unique charity link:

<https://smile.amazon.com/ch/84-2745117>

At the end of the spring semester, I reached out to Val Stanley to see if I could offer free philosophy classes to the women at the Lord's Place. The Lord's Place is a successful non-profit organization in South Florida that seeks to stop the cycle of homelessness. Ms. Stanley is the director of the women's program, and she oversees three houses of women. She invited me to give lessons on self-esteem to the women at Burckle Place. Once a week on Mondays for six sessions I travelled to Lake Worth Beach and visited with the women, gathering around their long dining table, and I introduced the women to Plato's allegory of the Cave, the stoics Seneca and Musonius Rufus, writings from Buddhism and Taoism and contemporary writings from pema chödrön. There were three women who consistently attended, sometimes there were six participants. The women were given journals to write their daily reflections, where they could account for the happenings of the day and to get clear on what went well and what didn't, but ultimately, they learned to let go of the little things that tend to build up and hurt our self-worth. They learned the practice of meditation. One participant, who was mostly quiet for all of the sessions, was the most outspoken after our session reading pema chödrön, when we practiced meditation. She had said that most of the time, participants go to the Christian Bible to reflect on their actions, but since she grew up Buddhist, she felt out of place. This was the first time she felt entirely welcome in the classes offered at Burckle Place. This is why it is important to draw on many philosophical traditions, so that we can reach as many participants as possible. The language of love and compassion is much wider than any faith. The language of understanding and self-healing has the power to transcend boundaries of exclusion and difference when done in an intellectually safe environment. – Sophia Stone, Dialogue Facilitator and Founder

“Geometrical constructions often have a small unnoticed error at the beginning with which all the rest is perfectly consistent. That's why every man must think a lot about the first principles of anything and investigate them thoroughly to see whether or not it's correct to assume them.”

Talking about Mikhail Bakhtin, Paul Ricœur, Walter Benjamin, Simone Weil and Leonard Harris.

Our summer reading circle engaged in insightful discussions on challenging topics and difficult texts. My friend Melissa from graduate school, now Associate Professor in Spanish Literature and Language at Florida Southern University suggested Bakhtin's book *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. By no means an easy read, yet the kernels of wisdom we discovered there carried us through by providing

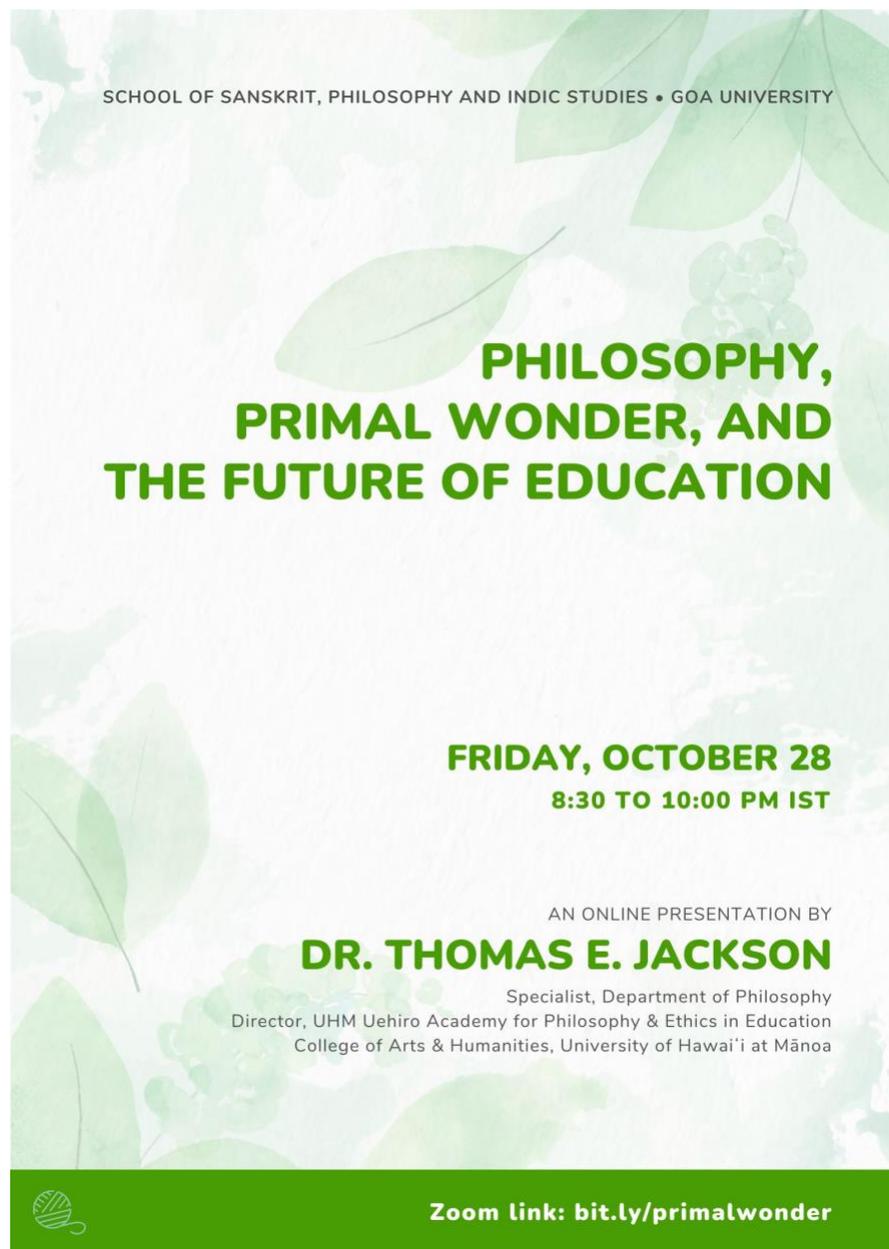
contrast and context for the other works. Bakhtin talks about the world of culture and the world of life - he writes that "An act of our activity, of our actual experiencing, is like a two-faced Janus. It looks in two opposite directions: it looks at the objective unity of a domain of culture and at the never-repeatable uniqueness of actually lived and experienced life." (p. 2) I highlight this quote because it pairs well with the final piece that we read from Dr. Leonard Harris Professor at Purdue University, "Dignity and Subjection". In that text, he argues for a different account of dignity, one that is not a property someone is born with just because they belong to the human species, but it is predicated on "efficacious agency and viable aspirations," (p. 57). When Professor Tharakan asked why bring in viable aspiration, Professor Harris replied that viable aspiration as well as self-efficacy is feasible only in a social reality that is not self-degrading. He gave the example of a domestic violence victim, often the victim blames themselves, and so, they'll lack viable aspiration. Professor Harris explained that dignity is valuable for the least well-off; it is a good that encourages you to be self-regarding as opposed to other regarding. Implied here is that other regarding is only a good when it is a choice by the person, for servants and slaves who can only be other regarding, then it is bad. He explained that dignity is a sortal - take a wooden ship, for example. It is made from wood, but there are different kinds of wood, oak, pine, teak...the wood is the unifying element. There is no single derivation manual to go to from this ship is made of wood to this ship is pine wood. Similarly, in contrast to say, Aristotle, who argued that all human beings have a function, and that function is to "live well according to reason" (Nicomachean Ethics, Book I), Professor Harris is saying that that there isn't a predetermined, aspect of ourselves that grants us dignity, just because of who we are. Dignity is determined by the conditions one is living in. If one does not have efficacious agency, one does not have dignity. He said that dignity is antithetical to subjection: if we have dignity, then we wouldn't have subjection. In our discussion before Professor Harris joined, Olga mentioned that dignity is transient and conditional, it is like a mathematical equation, dignity is a function of conditions. Dr. Tharakan remarked that efficacious agency marks the condition of agency, dignity is not predefined, that there are various components to dignity. Melissa connected our first and last authors, she said, in a way, we circled back. She said that with Bakhtin, we have Being as an event, with Harris, we have dignity as an event. Vidya asked, if rights are inalienable to us, then why do we need to be reminded that we have them? She said that dignity requires work. I would add that it requires the work of us all, to ensure that we are not contributing to systems that subjugate. Ideally, we would work towards ensuring self-efficacy of the least well off.

Our conversations, along with the cumulative readings and conversations about them, made a profound impact on me in the way that I look at the world. When I was on the Hawaiian island, Oahu, I noticed that there is a discrepancy between the rich and the not well off, and then the homeless. The Hawaiian islands have a tragic history of subjection and many of the indigenous people that remain are living in slums, yet the street signs have the names of past Hawaiian kings and values, and rarely a tourist or wealthy resident knows how to pronounce the names, nor know what they mean. The University of Hawai'i's undergraduate program has 80% Hawaiian residents and 20% foreign and out of state residents, but at the graduate level, those numbers are reversed. Many indigenous Hawaiians don't recognize the state as belonging to America and argue that the University, the space telescope...all shouldn't be here. Their anger and loss are understandable. But we can't change the

past and the islands are a great tourist destination and paradise getaway for many families, wealthy or middle-class. So, this noticing and awareness of my surroundings have been influenced by the reading we did from Simone Weil. The memorials of Pearl Harbor and the native Hawaiians remind me of Paul Ricœur's third cause of our fragile identity: the inheritance of founding violence - and these marks of violence are everywhere. They are in the memorials, the statues, the slum highrises and exclusive neighborhoods.

We can't change the past, but we can totally affect our present. Every day we have the choice to be compassionate and show kindness or to remain indifferent.

Listen to Dr. J talk about primal wonder and why it is so important to engage in philosophical conversations with our children! 11:00 am EST, 8:00 am PST.



SCHOOL OF SANSKRIT, PHILOSOPHY AND INDIC STUDIES • GOA UNIVERSITY

**PHILOSOPHY,
PRIMAL WONDER, AND
THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION**

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 28
8:30 TO 10:00 PM IST

AN ONLINE PRESENTATION BY
DR. THOMAS E. JACKSON
Specialist, Department of Philosophy
Director, UHM Uehiro Academy for Philosophy & Ethics in Education
College of Arts & Humanities, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

 Zoom link: bit.ly/primalwonder