

Volume II | Issue 3
Summer 2023

Wisdom's Edge Newsletter



**Philosophy for Children –
building community by
making a community ball in
Boca Raton, FL.**

Intellectual Safety

"In an intellectually safe place there are no put-downs and no comments intended to belittle, undermine, negate, devalue, or ridicule. Within this place, the group accepts virtually any question or comment, so long as it is respectful of the other members of the circle" (Jackson, 2001, p. 460).



Statement by Dr. J on Intellectual Safety

"I come away from these discussions enriched by ending my day with lessons central to the purpose of life after a day of activity, much of it of little effect on the man I hope to be. Thank you for these opportunities you offer us."

– Bob, 94 years old.

Reflection from our
Mathematics and
Philosophy Reading
Group

Philosophy enriches lives and relationships.

The closest friends I have, including my husband, I met in a philosophy class or in a philosophy program. Yet philosophy can be a tough sell to those who like shiny, pretty, expensive things or for those chasing youth.

Socrates, according to Plato, shamed the jurymen at his trial, claiming they care more for riches & reputation– than they care about virtue or the quality of character. Wisdom's Edge is founded on Socrates's claim that the unexamined life is not worth living and every time I engage in philosophy with others, it is time worth spent.

Families are trying this out, too. You'll see pictures of moms with their daughters and me with my sons, discussing philosophical ideas such as Plato's Allegory of the Cave, Gyges Ring, and the Prisoner's Dilemma. Reports from parents and grandparents say that their children and grandchildren continue the discussions after our sessions have finished and inquire more into the ring of Gyges and how else the prisoner's dilemma can be applied to modern problems. One of our regular participants on-line reported that he discussed atomism with his grandson rather than discuss troubles of money or health or complaints about technology. The antidote to superficial and disappointing relationships is philosophical engagement with others.

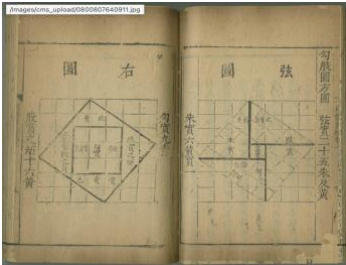
This summer I had the privilege of leading a summer camp at the Montessori School of Fremont in Northern California. The mornings we followed a curriculum based on four big ideas in philosophy, the afternoons the children were free to follow their interests and create their own projects. Learn more about what was taught and the learning outcomes in this newsletter. Children as young as seven can engage in philosophical discourse. I'm hoping to bring these lessons to communities that cannot afford them.

You'll find opportunities in this newsletter to join one of our sessions. Whether you are in South Florida, Minnesota, California, or around the world, we have in-person and online programming and a special pilot Zoom program for children called "Wonder". Professor John Houston is offering a three-part course from Eric Weiner's book Socrates Express, and there are still opportunities available to join one of our p4c pop-ups or Philosophy in Nature in Boca Raton. Get inspired. Be connected. Come as you are, you are always welcome.

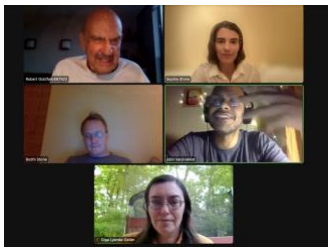
– *Sophia Stone*, President, Wisdom's Edge Foundation.

“These are the first systems in the world. Never before in a class was I exposed to a variety of systems from different cultures and ages.”

– Participant from our Mathematics & Philosophy Reading Circle.



Screenshot of the Zhu-Bi, the oldest mathematics text from ancient China.



Participants from our last Mathematics & Philosophy III Circle

“We can often imagine things that do not exist in reality, and there cannot be any such relationship with reference to what is non-existent.”

– Avicenna, translation by F. Rahman (1952, p.44)

“‘A state of affairs is thinkable’: what this means is that we can picture it to ourselves.”

– Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 3.001 (transl. E. Anscombe, edited by Bazzocchi (2021)

Mathematics & Philosophy III Reading Circle

We completed our third Mathematics & Philosophy reading circle, each one a continuation of the previous. The first circle read volume 9 of the ancillary books from the Great Books library my uncle sent to me during the pandemic. We read Whitehead, Russel, Peirce, König, Newman & Katz, etc. The second circle we just read the first three books of Euclid’s *Elements*, discussing the proofs, discovering inconsistencies and assumptions, such as the assumption that space is uniform. When organizing this circle, originally, I wanted to focus on three texts: Euclid’s *Elements*, Book I, Spinoza’s *Ethics*, and Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Yet mindful that these are all from the West and from the Ancient Greek or Judeo-Christian traditions, I wanted to diversify the readings and sought out other texts that seemed to be structured like Book I of the *Elements*. My text advisory board came through and we added Avicenna’s *On the Soul* from Islamic philosophy and the *Samkhya* an ancient text on the universe from Indian philosophy. I did a little searching myself and found the Zhu-Bi, one of the oldest mathematics texts from ancient China.

While learning about the systems of the world was interesting and enlightening, the best part about our sessions was the conversation and the community we built each week. There were five regular participants, sometimes less, sometimes more, but we always had something interesting to say and something to dispute and something to ponder over. In a way, these discussions were also magical since we were talking with participants from the Mid-West and the South of the United States and participants from India who would rise at 5:30 am to talk with us. In graduate school, these kinds of conversations and opportunities are ubiquitous but after graduate school, especially if one is teaching at a small university or liberal arts college or professional college, these conversations become quite rare. Please read the reflections about the last session on Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* to glean what participants gain from attending our sessions. Perhaps you’ll want to join us next time? Our next circle will focus on Émilie Du Châtelet’s translation of Sir Isaac Newton’s *Principia*. Sign up at wisdoms-edgefoundation.org.

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 2023 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 our Dialogue Facilitators participate in this training and to bring the p4c method back to the communities we serve.

Reflections from Mathematics & Philosophy III, last session:

"By reality and perfection, I understand the same thing."

– Spinoza, Part II, *Ethics*,
Edwin Curly, editor. (no date)

"Thus, a cause must contain not only the principle of the actuality of the thing of which it is the cause but also the sufficient reason for this thing, that is to say, what makes it possible for an intelligent being to understand why this thing exists. For any man who makes use of his reason must not be content with knowing that a thing is possible and that it exists, but he must also know the reason why it exists."

– Emilie Du Châtelet,
Foundations of Physics
(2009, p. 131) Bour &
Zinsser translation

"We considered the possibility that there could be thoughts that cannot be expressed using language, as Wittgenstein is understood to have suggested. Sophia asked me if the subject-object distinction in Samkhya can be related to this aspect of inexpressibility. Jobin quite speculatively responded that there may be aspects of the purusha (the experiencer in Samkhya), which cannot be expressed. Jobin went on to ask everyone what Wittgenstein meant by "All philosophy is "Critique of language". Bodhi responded to it by pointing out that what Wittgenstein probably meant was that philosophical problems are probably the result of linguistic confusions and if they can be clarified our problems could be solved (at least partly, I guess). Jobin then went on to ask if the logical representation of sentences developed by Russell using quantifiers and operators was what Wittgenstein meant by logical form. His guess (he keeps guessing) was that the logical representation when related to the real world gave the meaning (at least partly) of the sentence."

"I came away from our discussion of Wittgenstein with a sharper awareness of the central role of language in articulating a proposition or, indeed, any profound idea. He says--and it resonated with me--that language is clothing that covers the form. Also very illuminating was that propositions describe facts, the internal properties of a fact. They convey fresh information to us, a new awareness using old language. Thus, the risk propositions bear is that the language describing them might not express their central purpose."

"[I remember] our discussion about language and why it became so vital for philosophy: people mentioned Frege and Russell, and I added that it's not just these three thinkers, but the entire phenomenon that later received the name of "the linguistic turn", both in analytic and continental philosophy;

[I remember] the (im)possibility of getting out / beyond the limits of propositions to analyze the world, and about the tautologies, specifically, about "autologies", or "autological words", as they are called in linguistics, e.g., "word" is a word, "noun" is a noun;

[I remember Bodhi's] reminder that late Wittgenstein rejected or transformed many of his own earlier ideas, including his perspective on the very nature of language. In particular, he stopped believing in the possibility of constructing an ideal language or a language reducible to atomic facts."

Nature journal paintings
from our Philosophy in Nature
sessions



Come join us in November for Philosophy in Nature!

Are you looking for a reason to visit South Florida early winter? Why not consider joining us for one of the three Sundays in November? We meet at a previously disclosed location upon registration that focuses on a natural object: trees 11/5, lake 11/19 and the ocean 11/26. We read passages from poets and philosophers about the natural object. After discussion, we write paint and draw in our nature journals. One-time materials use fee provides a take home nature journal and use of watercolors. \$36 per session. Student prices available in the drop-down menu for the ocean session. For more information visit our page [link](#).

Online reading group for fall: Eric Weiner's *Socrates Express*

Join professor John Houston for four online gatherings, in his next installment of his three-part course on Eric Weiner's *Socrates Express*. November 7, 14, 21 & 28 from 7:00-8:30 pm Central Time, discussing Eric Weiner's *Socrates Express*. Professor Houston will supplement the chapters with original texts from philosophers as well as review and teach the arguments and philosophy as they relate to the chapters. Here is the session breakdown:

"Many times, I do not find philosophers to be easily understood but I appreciated the points of Marcus Aurelius getting up in the morning, Socrates standing in the middle of the road all day, thinking, Rousseau walking, and Thoreau looking. It was from those perspectives that they gained much insight, and I find that also to be true."

Testimony
from Professor Houston's
Philosophy Express I

The Philosophy Express: Life Lessons from Dead Philosophers, Part I

Focused on practical wisdom for living well. Learn how to get out of bed like Marcus Aurelius; wonder like Socrates; walk like Rousseau; and see like Thoreau.

The Philosophy Express: Life Lessons from Dead Philosophers, Part II

Focused on practical wisdom for living well. Learn how to enjoy like Epicurus; pay attention like Simone Weil; fight like Gandhi; and be kind like Confucius.

The Philosophy Express: Life Lessons from Dead Philosophers, Part III

Focused on practical wisdom for living well. Learn how to have no regrets like Nietzsche; cope like Epictetus; grow old like Beauvoir; and die like Montaigne.

Small registration fee. For registration, please reach out to Professor John Houston at professorhoustonwe@gmail.com.

For other programs offered by Dr. Houston, please view his website [here](#).



Madame Olga Picasso, 1922-23

Come join us for a free online session with retired art historian Carol Salus on Sunday, October 29th, 7 to 8:30 pm, EST.

Ever wonder what it is like to participate in a Wisdom's Edge session but don't want to commit to six weeks of learning? Then join us for this introductory session. The stimulus is Professor Salus and her talk on Pablo Picasso's life. We'll use the Good Thinker's Toolkit for our breakout room sessions using the Plain Vanilla technique showcased in our p4cHI pop-ups in the Boca Raton neighborhoods and in our philosophical outreach. Registration is free but necessary for this Zoom session. For more information, please visit our page [link](#).



Dr. Thomas Jackson, Professor, University of Hawai'i, Manoa. Dr. J designed the Good Thinker's Toolkit used in all the p4cHI activities.

Excerpt from Dr. Stone's notes on the Summer Symposium, 2022:

On the first day we observed Ms. Makenzie Carpenter's 4th grade class (ages 9 – 10) at Ka'elepulu Elementary. The stimulus had something to do with Earth science, but we were not given any details. The students posed the following questions:

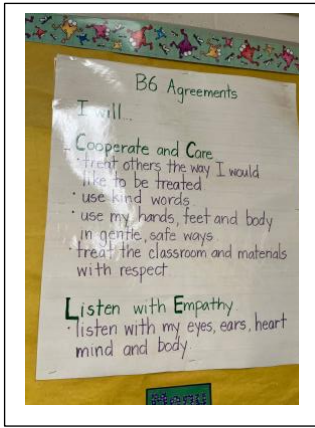
1. How would we survive if there were no Earth?
2. How would we survive if there were no animals on the earth?
3. Does nature really guide us?
4. How would the planet be changed if there was no gas?
5. What if there were no electronics?
6. What if there were no animals?
7. What if there were no scientists?
8. What if there were no sun, moon and stars?
9. What if there were no schools?
10. What it would be like with no hospitals?
11. What would happen if there were no farmers?
12. What if there were no volcanos?

Ms. Makenzie instructed the children to vote with their eyes closed as many times as they'd like for a question. Then, on the second round, when questions 4, 5, and 8 were chosen, she instructed the children to vote only once. The question the students chose was, "what if there were no scientists?"

Just listening to the other children's questions was part of the instruction, for the children, the teacher, and us observing – as we can see how the children understood the material and what questions arose for them. The students then were given two minutes to write a response to their question. The students were really thinking hard. You could see their looks of contemplation as they held a notebook close to their chest to think, or had a tip of their tongue out on their upper lip as they wrote a sentence. Students furiously wrote their thoughts. The whole class, sitting in a circle on stools facing each other, was engaged.

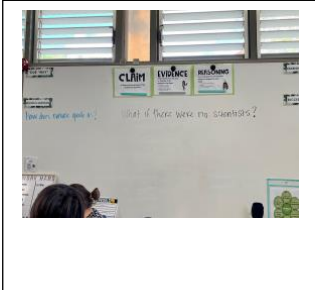
Did you know?

You can choose Wisdom's Edge to be your birthday charity on Facebook? Two friends of Wisdom's Edge have chosen us for their birthday celebration, raising hundreds of dollars to supplement our programs. Every dollar counts: every dollar will go directly to funding our programs so that we can continue to offer free or at reduced cost philosophy programs to communities that are on limited or no income.



Then the teacher reminded them of the rules. Students keep track by tally marks how many times they contributed to the conversation – when there were five tally marks, they know to stop. The children already knew the plain vanilla rules – everyone has the right to speak, the right to be heard, the right to ask for more time to think, and the right to invite others to speak.

I heard: if we didn't have scientists, we wouldn't know when the dinosaurs were extinct. A child's dad was a pharmacist, how would his dad get medication for his patients if there weren't any scientists? We wouldn't get facts for understanding. We wouldn't know much about animals. How would we know what electricity is, without scientists? How would we know about microscopic animals? How would we know how we were born? After these initial questions, students began offering their own claims, supported by reasons...

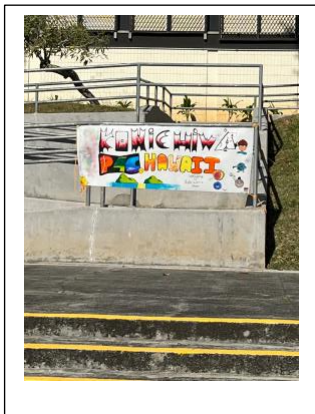


We would die faster because we wouldn't know how to heal people, we'd live like cavemen. We wouldn't have fossil museums. When we'd have Covid-19, it would be hard to cure people.



Then Dr. Ben, the Associate Director of p4cHawai'i, asked for clarity: What is a scientist and how did they come about?

A student responded, "I'm rethinking who is a scientist." The teacher responded, "what Emory and Kiran said is making me wonder what a scientist is – that they discover new things. I discover new things – is everyone a scientist?" I'd like to invite Wiley to speak. Wiley, "why do we need medication to always solve our problems?" Another student responds, "would we even have people if we didn't have scientists?" "If we didn't have medication, wouldn't we all just die?" "We wouldn't be protected from the wild; but we wouldn't have war, we'd have peace.



The teacher came up with a counter example: "maybe our earth would be better without scientists?" Then some of the students agreed and disagreed and gave their reasons.

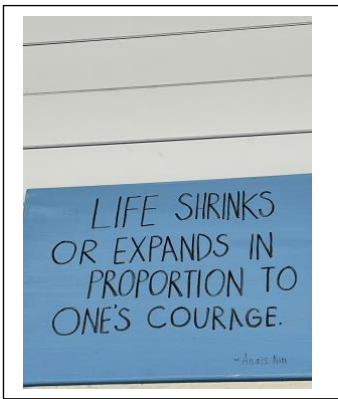
After some more time, the teacher then asked them to write from the prompt: Do you have to be called a scientist to be a scientist?

The children got one minute to write their answer.

Then the teacher instructed, "those who didn't mark their participation box are invited to share." After they shared, then it was time for the circle to evaluate itself:

Think about the safe circle rules and whether you followed those today:

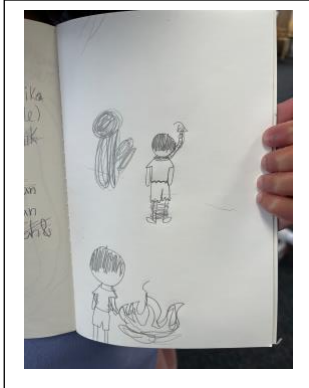
- 1 – not at all
- 2 – some
- 3- I followed all
- 4 – I went above and beyond



Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations* said that it was possible to write a philosophy book entirely out of questions. By empowering young minds to formulate questions and then consider each question on its merits based on interest, coupled with Plain Vanilla inquiry and evaluation as witnessed above, the teacher cultivates a community of thinkers and compassionate listeners, sparking that desire to know and wonder. Imagine if every teacher used this practice. For more information on the Summer Symposium program, visit p4cHawaii.org.

Summer Camp at Montessori School of Fremont

If you are lucky enough to live in the Bay Area in Northern California and have children, Montessori School of Fremont is an exceptional school. The teachers and staff work together to support children in their independent learning and self-reliance for self-care. The parents unconditionally support the teachers, collaboratively sharing the school pets among families and bringing in school supplies when requested. It was a natural environment for me to try out what I had learned the previous summer in Hawai'i.



Camper's journal entry on Plato's Allegory of the Cave.

I built the camp p4cHI curriculum around four big ideas in philosophy: Intellectual Humility, Intellectual Rigor, Skepticism and Ethics. I chose these four ideas rather than the typical subjects we are taught in the university such as metaphysics or epistemology because I wanted flexibility in the content of what I taught and thought that these are valuable ideas to learn in philosophy. Focusing on a big idea such as Intellectual Humility, I first broke down the word into its parts, i.e., what intellectual meant, what humility meant, and what they mean together when combined. I started with intellectual humility because that is the big idea that Plato teaches us in his *Apology of Socrates*. There, Socrates says that the worst form of ignorance is thinking that we know when we don't know – but how do we know what we don't know? The campers as young as seven and as old as eleven learned how easy it is to make a mistake in reasoning. We often make mistakes about predicting the future, figuring out the motivations of others, and we often commit fallacies in our reasoning if we are not careful. Campers learned to be careful in their thinking and to acknowledge when they think they don't know something. They learned specific question stems to find information they are looking for. Through gently Socratic questioning, they learned that a question meant for Google leads to many unchecked assumptions if one does not have access to Google (as we did not – technology was not allowed at camp!).



Dr. Stone & campers reading Plato's Allegory of the Cave.

Intellectual Rigor followed intellectual humility as it taught the campers how to be careful in their reasoning. They learned how to think in terms of systems and how to be systematic in their activities, whether it was cleaning up or following a recipe. I discovered that children loved learning about systems, and they quickly realized how smart and sharp their thinking can be when using a system.



Campers learning about the *Tao Te Ching*.

Skepticism is the twin of Intellectual Humility. Whereas intellectual humility is one's use of caution in reasoning about what one knows or what one claims to know, skepticism is one's use of caution regarding others' claims about the world. The campers learned the evolutionary thinking of the solar system, beginning with the early pre-Socratics and how they viewed the Earth. Then they compared the Aristotelian planetary system with the Earth at the center to the Copernican system



“Dr. Stone has a unique style of teaching and the values and concepts that she is sharing with the students I feel are missing in the modern school systems and are highly needed. I hope and wish that she will continue to teach and share her knowledge with kids in coming years too.”
Rupan Ramnik, mother of 2nd grade camper.

“Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of Life’s longing for itself. They come through you but not from you, and though they are with you, yet they belong not to you. You may give them your love but not your thoughts. For they have their own thoughts.”

Kahil Gibran in *The Prophet*.

“Wisdom’s Edge has given me a new outlook on the way I look at things. I feel Dr. Stone has presented this course in a way that everyone should understand and get something good out of it. I feel like a new person in certain places inside of me.”

Resident in transitional housing for women at Burckle Place in Lake Worth Beach, FL

with the sun at the center and made models of these systems. They learned that skepticism could lead to further inquiry and discoveries of new truths, such that the Earth is round, not flat, that the orbits of the planets and the sun are elliptical, not perfectly circular as natural philosophers before Kepler believed.

We completed our second week learning about different approaches to ethical thinking. Campers learned the differences in valuing character (virtue ethics), the end result (consequentialism), and rule following (deontology). Using Taoism, campers learned an eco-centric ethic as opposed to a human centric ethic.

The lessons are included in a handbook written for teachers and parents to use in teaching their own philosophy sessions with children. I’m grateful to the Director, Ms. Rio Garcia for allowing me to pilot this program at the Montessori School of Fremont and to Eric Alexander who helped fund my training in Hawai’i. When the handbook is finished and available, you’ll read about it in the Wisdom’s Edge Newsletter.

WONDER – A New Pilot Program for Children, online.

Would you like your child to participate in one of our p4cHI sessions? Dr. Stone is leading a Zoom session called Wonder. In these sessions, Dr. Stone will give a ten-minute (or less) lesson on a philosophical idea or problem and the children will ask questions and discuss the idea, following the method of Plain Vanilla Inquiry. The sessions will be recorded, and the audio edited for a possible podcast where philosophy with children will be discussed. No charge. Interested? Sign up [here](#).

Opportunities from our Text Advisory Board:

Join Eric Weiner, *New York Times* bestselling author and former NPR international correspondent, for a journey to Iceland in October 2023 and uncover its secrets to happiness.

Everyone wants to be happy, but what exactly is happiness or, better yet, where is it? Author Eric Weiner explores those very questions in his best-selling book, *The Geography of Bliss: One Grump’s Search for the Happiest Places in the World*—soon to be a five-part TV series starring Rainn Wilson. Now you can join Eric on a tour of incredible Iceland, one of the happiest places in the world. From the art and culinary scene in the capital Reykjavik to the stark beauty of the Eyjafjallajokull volcano to the idyllic town of Stokkseyri you will see Iceland in a way few travelers do: through the lens of happiness. You will meet with Icelandic locals, linguists, and even the former mayor of Reykjavik, who will help shed light on their small country’s outsized bliss. For registration, see this [link](#).

Healing Within – Friday, September 8th, 2 to 3pm, EDT.

Dr. Stone presents her mission to help others help themselves by showing them different ways of thinking, different ways of framing their perspective on life’s problems, ultimately finding truth and beauty in the world. Online presentation hosted by Dr. Cyrus Ali Zargar, Al-Ghazali Distinguished Professor at the University of Central Florida. Free. To register, click [here](#).

The Journey

By: Mary Oliver, published in Lyubomirsky's *The How of Happiness* (2008).

One day you finally knew
 what you had to do, and
 began,
 though the voices around you
 kept shouting
 their bad advice –
 though the whole house began
 to tremble
 and you felt the old tug
 at your ankles.
 "Mend my life!" each voice
 cried.
 But you didn't stop.
 You knew what you had to
 do,
 though the wind pried with its
 stiff fingers
 at the very foundations,
 though their melancholy was
 terrible.
 It was already late
 enough, and a wild night,
 and the road full of fallen
 branches and stones.
 But little by little,
 as you left their voices behind,
 the stars began to burn
 through the sheets of clouds,
 and there was a new voice
 which you slowly
 recognized as your own,
 that kept you company
 as you strode deeper and
 deeper
 into the world,
 determined to do
 the only thing you could do –
 determined to save
 the only life that you could
 save.

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Our mission is to bring philosophy and philosophical discussions to communities that don't normally have access to the university, communities transitioning from homelessness or incarceration, communities caring for others, communities too young for the university or communities on limited time or income. Our mission also supports philosophers by funding their projects so that they may provide free or at reduced rates quality philosophy courses to the public.

