

BOOK REVIEW

**Laura D'Olimpio. *Media and Moral Education:
A Philosophy of Critical Engagement***

**Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge
2018, 127**

The call for critical engagement is for everyone: global citizens, educators, professors, academicians, administrators, learners, doctors, lawyers, philosophers, theologians, etc. However, this book will be of particular interest to academics, researchers, and graduate students in education in general, philosophy of education, ethics, critical theory and communication, film and media studies. As members of a community of learners, we need to educate people to be able to think and act ethically for themselves. We can use philosophy as a tool and guide in dealing with dilemmas in social media, technology, multimedia, internet, among others. Matthew Lipman (2003) started the Philosophy for Children known as P4C and argued that philosophy need not be confined to universities.

We can reappropriate our philosophizing using critical, reflective thinking and acting ethically in the classroom, at conferences, in the café, or anywhere. We could sharpen critical thinking skills through the use of dialogue in the classroom. The Community of Inquiry (CoI) model illustrates learning for a group of individual learners through an educational experience. This is the focus of Laura D'Olimpio's book entitled, *Media and Moral Education: A Philosophy of Critical Engagement*. D'Olimpio (p. 2) intended to establish:

...how critical perspectivism may be cultivated by the philosophy in schools or philosophy for children (P4C) pedagogy, which includes the community of inquiry (CoI) methodology. In an educational context, there is an increasing awareness of the need to prepare students not simply for exams but also for life.

This book is relevant, timely, and wise and such an excellent material in continuous learning. Because of its simplicity and wide applicability, it would be useful to everyone regardless of age and profession. It is engaging, stimulating, and it inspires action. It encourages readers to be actively open-minded, ethical, creative, reflective, critical, and compassionate. The role of philosophy in critical engagement cannot be over-emphasized. The author rightly points to philosophy's critical educational principles and their broad usefulness in pedagogy, detailing how they affect the selection of teaching methods and heighten the role of the teacher as facilitator. With the continuous advancement of science and information technology, it is proper to realign the social values and level up critical thinking skills and

intellectual virtues. More and more, there is the need for vigilant discernment. We need to think, reflect and engage wisely. In the words of D'Olimpio (p.1):

We need to discern between reliable sources of information, misinformation and social media, hoaxes, scams, and fake news. The discerning citizen will be able to engage critically, creatively, collaboratively, and compassionately with multiple sources and diverse perspectives encountered on a daily basis.

I find the author's views on critical perspectivism and compassionate desire as a philosophy of critical engagement quite striking. She argues compellingly on how moral and intellectual virtues are powerful educational resources for the cultivation of knowledge and wisdom; that it is through engagement or dialogue that we learn and solve problems and issues. Critical perspectivism empowers the learner to engage with one another in a critical and yet compassionate manner. I would say it is a loving, dialogical, holistic, and pragmatic mindset. "In order to be engaged in a critically perspective manner, one must be educated to be critical, compassionate and collaborative in one's approach to learning, receiving and transmitting information" (p. 2). It can start as an attitude or a model, then a habit, and hopefully become an intellectual virtue.

Doing critical thinking with compassion can also be shared with learners by employing the Socratic dialogue or method. A philosophy of education is the theory of philosophic thought that defines our views about the learner, the teacher, and the school. I always maintain that being mindful of the many philosophies of education is important in developing and continuously re-examining one's teaching philosophy (Macaranas, 2021). Perspectivism is a critical practice of analyzing a context and a situation from different points of view. Inherent in the appreciation of philosophies of education is perspectivism. Mindfulness of one's philosophy of education is consistent with the practice of perspectivism. Critical perspectivism augments every educator and philosopher's depth in serving as a facilitator of learning. In addition to remembering that the learner is always the center of the educative process, in the classroom, one must also create a space in which learners can practice being critically perspectival. I certainly agree with the author when she said, "Critical perspectivism sees philosophy as a praxis, and the work of the philosopher as educator or public intellectual can complement and supplement the valuable work of philosophy in the academy" (p. 2). The philosophy of critical engagement amplifies the urgent call for teaching reasoning and argumentative skills.

The book is divided into six chapters. Each chapter is thematic in tackling the topic with a convincing conclusion and excellent research. The introduction part presents the highlights of each chapter, which will entice the reader to read further. Critical thinking and reflective skills are truly needed today with the advancement of technology, education, and mass media. "In seeking to be ethically engaged, the moral agent will critically and compassionately investigate claims and assumptions, stereotypes and values conveyed by multimedia sources" (p. 1).

Chapter one defines critical perspectivism. Critical perspectivism demands two simultaneous stances: one has to be critical and, at the same time, compassionate. It is

a “moral attitude that may be practiced and adopted when engaging with multiple sources of information” (p. 4). We must seek to evaluate information, facts, and details morally. We must assimilate useful information, discard misinformation, and avoid fake news, hoaxes, and scams. Chapter two elucidates on compassionate engagement. D’Olimpio draws upon the moral philosophy of contemporary virtue ethicist Martha Nussbaum. This part focuses on how ethical agents engage in a compassionate and imaginative manner with others, with the claim that “...this loving attitude may be practiced in response to narrative artworks, which may assist in the moral education of readers” (p. 5). The author’s focus is on “whether Nussbaum’s loving and compassionate attitude as a moral attitude to be adopted towards others is adequate for those engaging with mass information and multimedia sources” (p. 5).

Chapter three explicates critical engagement. This part further explores why a moral agent must be critical and cautious when negotiating technologically mediated sources of information. It sets the scene by “engaging with the approaches taken towards mass art within the field of philosophical aesthetics” (p. 6). Chapter four elaborates on social media and multiliteracies. It is so important to teach learners to adopt an attitude of critical perspectivism. The author used three examples of the perils and pitfalls of social media, namely: hoaxes, scams, and catfishing, where she defended “the sentiment echoed by those theorists who speak about multiliteracies” (p. 7).

Chapter five discusses teaching critical perspectivism. This part highlights the need to cultivate in children and adults the habit of engaging critically with what they see and hear. Still drawing from P4C and CoI pedagogy, she presses for the wider use of philosophical praxis “to habituate critical, caring, creative, and collaborative citizens who are democratic but also still make normative judgments with respect to what is good” (p. 9). She argues that acquiring the attitude of critical perspectivism would involve educating via CoI and applying on various engagements. Certainly, “Our judgments and actions become ingrained the more we practice them” (p. 10).

Chapter 6 centers on philosophy in the public sphere, with the author pushing for a more active role of the philosopher as a public intellectual. Here, the author considers the role of the philosopher in numerous places outside of the academy and with various members of the general public. Therefore, philosophical engagement outside the classroom is a good practice of philosophical thinking skills, such as the use of good argumentation.

Overall, the book is excellent, scholarly written, and a must-read for everyone. It is a good exposition of the importance of critical perspectivism in the life of philosophers as public intellectuals as well as in the development of learners’ moral responsibility. Citizens, whether national or global, must be equipped with philosophical thinking. Her clear and consistent reasoning is mirrored in this snippet: “Critically and compassionately engaged members of society will necessarily be engaged socially, politically, economically and morally because we are social creatures who live and work in communities” (p. 14). On the same page, she describes her vision of global citizens who are “compassionate as well as critical, rational but practical and open to new information and ideas.” Consequently, they will be ethical consumers who would promote and support sustainability. Learners will then grow into critically perspectival citizens. They will be skillful and wise in approaching any

educational technology and in the use of any social media or any new trends and practices.

On a personal note, the book reminds me to be updated and be in touch with the signs of the times. As a philosophy teacher, I must participate in the promotion of creative and critical perspectivism in the public sphere. As a pracademic, I continue to be a pragmatic philosopher. I resonate with the call of D'Olimpio to be compassionate and critical when we are engaged, online or offline. I am in total agreement with her on the need to habituate philosophical communities of inquiry, starting with my students whose critical thinking skills must be infused with care for fellow critical thinkers in "seeking truth, knowledge, and wisdom" (p. 110).

I will end my review with another quotation reflecting her constant call to critical engagement:

The best approach for educators to take is to educate citizens to be critical, creative, compassionate, and able to work with others collaboratively, both online and face-to-face. Educational institutions need to catch up and keep up with the speed of individual technological literacy (p. 119).

I highly recommend this book, her first book to be read and shared with others. No wonder the book won the 2018 PESA (Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia) Annual Book Award. I am excited to read her upcoming second book, *The Necessity of Aesthetic Education: The Place of the Arts on the Curriculum*, which is due to be published with Bloomsbury anytime this year, 2021.

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