



8th International Colloquium on Dialogical Practice & Dialogical Philosophising

Philosophy in the Community

Thursday 12 to Sunday 15 September 2024

Thirty-three participants from various parts of the UK and Europe gathered at Grey College, Durham University, UK, for the Colloquium. Our theme was 'Philosophy in the Community', framed by three overarching questions:

1. What are some of the benefits and challenges of engaging people in community philosophising?
2. How do we reach people who would not normally think of doing philosophy, and how do we facilitate groups of people from diverse economic, cultural and religious backgrounds?
3. What is the potential of dialogical philosophising for healing conflict, inspiring collective action for change and empowering groups and individuals?

Following an introductory evening on Thursday 12 September, the work of the colloquium included a range of inspiring and dynamic dialogues, workshops, poster presentations and music.

A choice of three Socratic Dialogues was offered on Friday 13 September:

1. What do we mean when we say we respect someone or something? facilitated by Anu Virtanen, Finland.
2. What is courage? facilitated by Pieter Mostert, UK.
3. Are there ideas which we should not discuss in the public space? facilitated by Sára Pokorná, Czech Republic.

Workshops offered during the Colloquium included:

- Evaluating themes around 'managing challenging situations' developed through dialogical practice by the trainee medical community during the COVID pandemic (2020 – 2021), Miriam Armstrong, Mike Jones and Julie-Marie French Devitt, UK.
- Creative connections in community arts-based philosophical inquiry, Rosie Carnall, UK.
- Socratic conversations without questions, Pieter Mostert, UK.
- Dialogical plays and activities, Evelina Ivanova, Bulgaria.
- Debate and Dialogue: what interaction? Tatiana Arrigoni, Italy.
- Towards dialogue through shared experience, Sára Pokorná, Adam Lalak, Lukáš Mareš, Eliška Havlová, Czech Republic.
- Working with the business community through shorter dialogical exercises, Anna Bromley, UK
- Freedom and fellowship, Kresten Thue Andersen, Denmark.
- In dialogue with nature, Rachel Kellett and Sarah Banks, UK.

In our evening marketplace of ideas sessions, various posters and ideas were presented and discussed:

- Dieter Krohn, Germany, gave us a brief history of the formation of Society for the Furtherance of Critical Philosophy (SFCP) through a set of posters.
- Miriam Armstrong, Mike Jones and Julie-Marie French Devitt, UK, talked about the challenges of developing dialogical practice in the medical community during the COVID pandemic.
- Maureen McDevitt, UK, presented a poster and brought along graphic novels, to show how they can be used to teach about the holocaust in Religious Education.
- Anu Virtanen, Finland, presented a poster with discussion on Socratic dialogue for developing wisdom in teacher education.
- Paolo Dordoni, Italy, presented a poster with discussion on promoting dialogue with health care professionals: hints from Socratic Dialogue and from moral deliberation in the ethical discussion of clinical cases.
- François Gillet, Belgium, introduced the Head, Heart and Hands and Soul (HHHS) approach to communication in social work.
- Michael Imison, UK, introduced the concept and practice of the 'ethical jury' approach.
- Paul Doran and colleagues, UK, presented a poster with discussion on Philosophy in Pubs.

In warm September sun, on the Saturday afternoon many participants enjoyed a walk along the river to the remarkable Norman cathedral of Durham.

At the final evaluation and closing session on Sunday morning, participants returned to the three questions that had framed the event, breaking into groups to consider what insights we might have amassed that were relevant to those questions.

1. **What are some of the benefits and challenges of engaging people in community philosophising?** Key points emerging from this group included: **Benefits:** getting to know people you wouldn't usually meet and developing greater understanding between people of different opinions; respect for others' thinking; challenging one's own convictions: developing greater clarity of one's own views; being pushed to test our practice in real life situations. **Challenges:** identifying a community to work with; adapting approaches for different groups; how to help people to listen; how to motivate and engage people, including introverted and neurodivergent participants; finding the time; meeting individual needs; people who are new to the process not knowing how to participate appropriately; a shortage of facilitators. **Strategies** for overcoming some of these challenges included: being flexible in the process; valuing different aspects of the process; understanding what is alive for the participants; enabling the group to understand the value of how dialogue works; sharing the learning of practitioners.

2. **How do we reach people who would not normally think of doing philosophy, and how do we facilitate groups of people from diverse economic, cultural and religious backgrounds?** Key points emerging from this group included: **Who** are we reaching out to? Low hanging fruit - people already curious; decision makers, e.g. local government; minorities; schools. **Where?** Go to where people are; open cafes so people feel welcome; write invitations clearly; be provocative to awaken curiosity; use existing community structures; festivals; theatres. **What?;** use common speech; avoid philosophical language; engage on topics that matter; be accessible.

3. **What is the potential of dialogical philosophising for healing conflict, inspiring collective action for change and empowering groups and individuals?** Key points emerging from this group included: There needs to be a will to change; we need to find new ways to reach people; starting with individuals as 'grains of sand' and seeking common ground; the slow, careful and respectful work of dialogue can offer creative spaces to build trusting relationships and collaborative structures; skilled facilitators are important.

The weekend ended by handing the 'Olympic flame' - a feather - to Czechoslovakia, the hosts of next year's colloquium in Prague.



