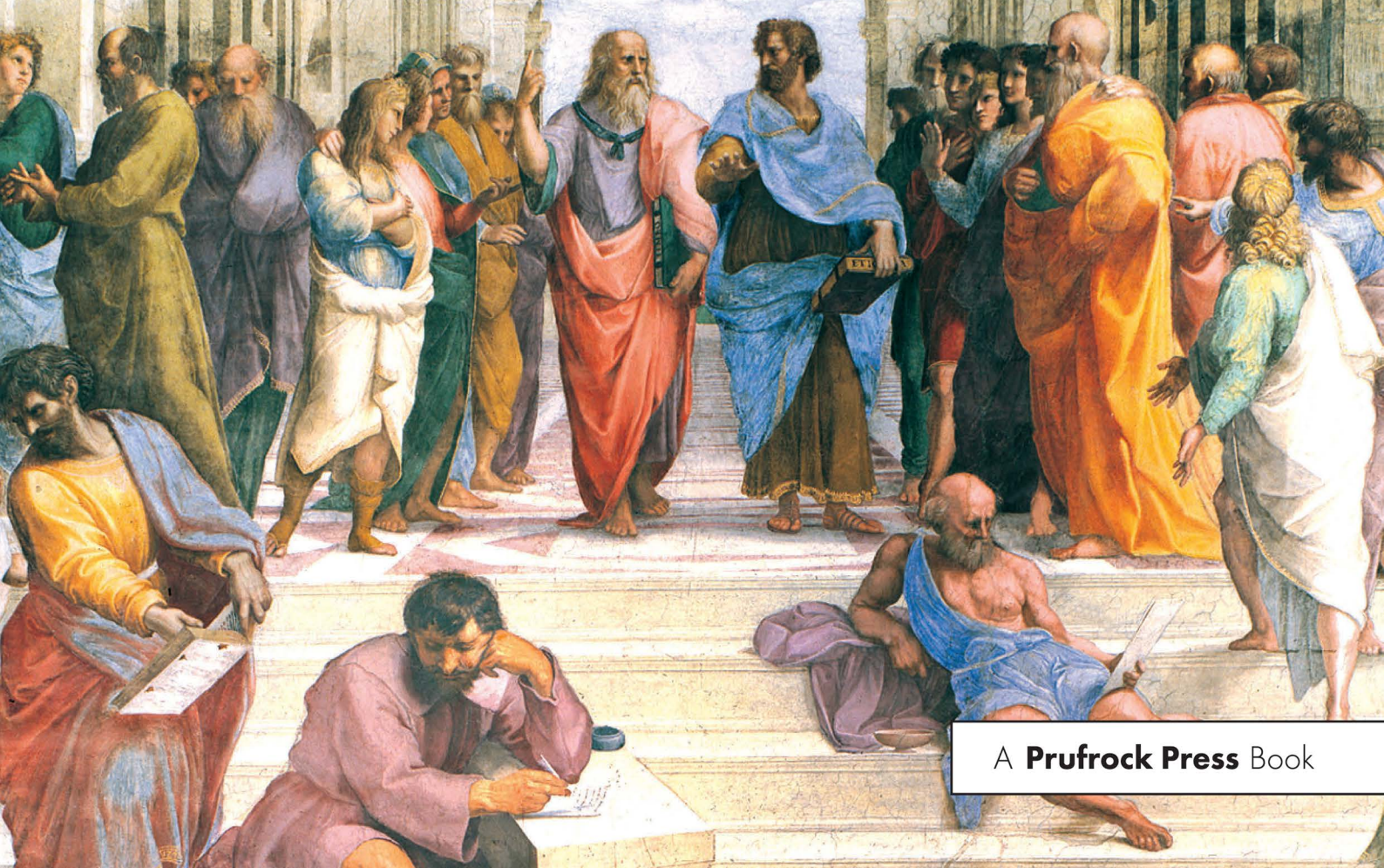


PHILOSOPHY *for* KIDS

**40 Fun Questions
That Help You Wonder ...
About Everything!**

David A. White, Ph.D.



A **Prufrock Press** Book

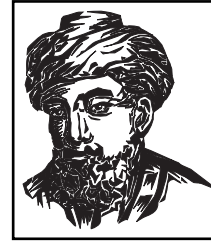
Philosophy for Kids



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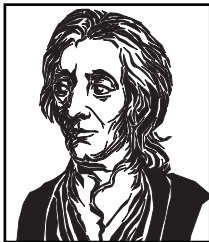
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40 Fun Questions That Help You Wonder . . .
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David A. White, Ph.D.

Illustrations by Cheryle Chapline

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Dedication



First, to the many young people whose enthusiasm and energy have allowed me the unique privilege of feeling the fire and sensing the vision of their thinking on the fundamental issues of philosophy. And second, to all the teachers who have been so gracious and cooperative in sharing their classrooms and their experience.



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Common Core State Standards Alignment Sheet

Philosophy for Kids

All lessons in this book align to the following standards.

Cluster	Common Core State Standards in ELA-Literacy
College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading (K-12)	<p>CCRA.R.1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.</p> <p>CCRA.R.2 Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.</p> <p>CCRA.R.3 Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.</p> <p>CCRA.R.8 Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.</p> <p>CCRA.R.10 Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.</p>
College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening (K-12)	<p>CCRA.SL.1 Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.</p>
College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Language (K-12)	<p>CCRA.L.4 Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.</p> <p>CCRA.L.6 Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.</p>



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Preface

In 1993, after many years teaching philosophy in colleges and universities—frequently to jaded and unresponsive audiences—I began giving programs in primary-source philosophy to elementary school students in Chicago schools, grades 6–8, and also to high school students. These programs were sponsored by the Chicago Public Schools. Since 1993, I have also presented a variety of philosophy courses in grades 4–9 for Northwestern University’s Center for Talent Development.

These programs consist primarily of analyzing brief passages from important philosophers throughout the history of the discipline—punctuated by considerable interaction between me and the students. Simply put, we argue a lot. In fact, a treasured memory is the comment of an especially contentious (and perceptive) sixth grader who one day stopped en route to his next class and said, with great gusto: “*I really like philosophy; it’s the only class where we get rewarded for arguing!*”

These youthful audiences were neither jaded nor unresponsive. Indeed, my overwhelming reaction after the seven years (and counting) I have spent philosophizing with young people is that they are very thoughtful about important issues. If appropriate topics are suitably presented, young people do wonderful things with these ideas. They love to think about such questions, to express their thoughts and to argue about their views—often with great intensity and insight. This interest is reflected in how I am occasionally greeted—“*Hey, philosophy dude!*” I am in no sense a “dude,” but the fact that students think of me in this way suggests that for them it is “cool” to do philosophy in the classroom.

Philosophy for Kids opens the door to the cool way philosophers wonder about the world through a format combining the precision of philosophical thought with a light and, at times, loony touch. Anyone 10 or over is invited to browse through this book and participate in thoughtful activities evoking the wondrous world of philosophical ideas. My public hope is that thinking about these questions will prove exciting, informative, and fun. My private hope is that, once this excitement thrills their minds, young people will start reading about philosophical questions on their own. Such a response would realize a philosophy teacher’s dream!



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Acknowledgments

Many people contributed to the genesis and final form of this book and I would like to thank them: Linda Klawitter, who once upon a time urged me to direct my experiences with young people and philosophy into the written word; Lisa Leonard, who first suggested the idea of a “fun” book on philosophy for kids; the teachers and administrators who participated in the field testing of *Philosophy for Kids* and made a number of useful suggestions for improving both the content and design of the work; Gillian Barr, Elena Crushshon, Stephanie Daczyszyn, James Heller, Linda Klawitter, Mark Klein, Luba Markewycz, Suzanne Ranalli, Suzanne Saposnik, Sheila Schlaggar, Cynthia Sprague, Charlotte Stiritz, and JoAnna Theodore.

Special thanks go to Dr. James Delisle, who took time from his indefatigable labors on behalf of gifted students everywhere to read and evaluate the text and to use it with students and student teachers; Dr. Jennifer Thompson, who incorporated her own experience in teaching philosophy to gifted students and her keen sense of clarity and philosophical rigor into many valuable comments and suggestions; Dr. Judith Stoffel, who did not allow her inescapable destiny as my sister to interfere with the ability to draw on her considerable experience with young people’s literature for purposes of offering a host of useful suggestions and critical comments on the text, as well as providing assistance with the bibliography; Lydia Rossi and Manya Treece for their gifts in combining philosophical rigor with visual art (and humor!). And a sincere “thank you” to Joel McIntosh of Prufrock Press, whose interest in the idea of this book, suggestions for organization, and efforts to see the final product into the world were an inspiration throughout the process of production.

Closer to home, I want to thank Daniel and Colin White for their stoical patience and assistance in dealing with my studied inexpertise with the computer and also Mary Jeanne Larrabee for many kindnesses, both large and small, in helping to produce the manuscript in its final form.



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Introduction

About This Book

The ancient Greeks believed that philosophy begins with wonder. If this belief is true, then young people should make excellent philosophers since they naturally wonder about many things. If you have ever wondered about why you felt a certain way when things happen to you, or why animals or plants do what they do, or why stars shine at night, or why a machine works, then you might be a philosopher.

Philosophy for Kids is intended to foster that sense of wonder and to aim it in many directions. The word *philosophy* was coined by the Greeks and it means “love of wisdom.” A philosopher is not necessarily wise, but a philosopher wants to *become* wise. Wise about what? In the traditional sense of philosophy, wise about everything—yourself, the people around you, the world you live in.

For example, have you ever wondered whether someone who you thought was your friend is really your friend? Have you ever wondered about what time is, which is a very different question from “*What time is it?*” Did you ever wonder what happens to numbers when you aren’t thinking about them during your math class? Did you know that the answer to the old question about whether a tree makes a sound when it falls in the forest with no one around is very important to philosophy? These are only a few of the ideas you can explore in this book. There are many others equally as interesting.

Philosophers have been thinking about these questions for almost 3,000 years. Philosophers come in all shapes, races, nationalities. They can be men or women, older, middle-aged, younger. Some can even be your age. In this book, you will find 40 questions that philosophers have often asked. Perhaps you’ve already thought of some of these questions. For example, “*Should you ever tell a lie?*” or “*Can computers think?*” But others will probably be new—“*How do you know for certain that things move?*” or “*Is it possible to think about nothing at all?*” Look over the questions in the Table of Contents and see how many of them you have already asked yourself or, perhaps, someone else. If you find a question that looks interesting, turn to that question in the book. It’s time to try philosophy!

When you begin to explore a question, you’ll see an introduction briefly explaining it. This discussion is followed by an activity inviting you to think about the question and helping you to learn about it in an interesting and enjoyable way. An important philosopher’s answer to the question is included in the

discussion so you can see what that individual thought about the question. (The philosopher's name appears at the top of the page.) After you have been introduced to the philosopher's thoughts, there are more questions and activities (in the section called For Further Thought) to help you discover *your own* answer to the question. Also, there is a Glossary at the end of the book to remind you of the meanings of important philosophical words.

It is essential to realize that philosophy is not like mathematics, where answers to problems appear at the back of the book. In fact, philosophers often keep thinking about a question even after they feel they have answered it. Thus, although the discussions and activities in this book are fun, they are also challenging. For example, "*Can you think about nothing at all?*" is a question that might sound easy to answer but, in fact, is not (as the discussion of this question will show). All 40 questions are answered in such a way as to make you want to think even more about them. So, have fun wondering about—and learning—philosophy!

Philosophy and Questioning

If you are reading this, then you are probably curious. If you are curious, then you wonder a lot. If you wonder a lot, then you ask questions. And if you are serious about the questions you ask, then you want answers to your questions.

Philosophy asks questions—lots of them. These questions are about concepts or ideas that concern everyone in one way or another—justice, friendship, time, truth, and so forth. But, the questions are not easily answered because they are about very basic issues and because it is challenging to reason about these issues, as philosophers typically do. In fact, some of the questions are in the form of a paradox—an especially fascinating paradox will present you with a simple three-word sentence and you will be mystified as to whether this sentence is true or false! Another paradox, over 2,000 years old, will make you wonder whether you have ever really seen anything move!

Thinking about all the issues contained in this book will help you to understand them and also, in the process, help you to understand more about yourself. Here are some examples of questions that will increase your self-knowledge: "*Are you a fair and just person?*" "*Should you be rewarded for your effort in school?*" "*Are you the same person you were five years ago?*" Once you begin to start thinking about these and other questions, you will enjoy it. You will learn about all sorts of things and see the value in wanting to be wise. You will be a philosopher.

As you browse through the questions in this book, you will think of many things. You will also notice that one question almost always leads to other questions, some of which will be discussed in other parts of the book. But, many of



the new questions you'll discover won't be discussed. The reading list at the end of the book—Additional Reading in Philosophy—should be useful in giving you some hints for where you can go to learn more and to become involved in more thinking and more discussion.

Reading about philosophical ideas is an important source of information, but it is equally important to talk to people about your own thoughts—classmates, friends, family members and, of course, your teachers. Many of the activities are more interesting—and more fun—when done with your friends or classmates. Then you can compare your philosophical ideas and, in the process, match wits with other young philosophers. We can learn a great deal from talking, and listening, to others about philosophical issues. We can also learn a great deal by listening to ourselves as we think about these issues.

Important Things to Remember About the Activities

Philosophy for Kids includes activities in order to help you understand philosophical ideas and to enjoy yourself while doing so. Some of the activities resemble the kind of exercises that many people have done in school: true/false questions, multiple-choice questions, fill in the blanks. However, these activities are *not* tests; they just look like tests so that you will think hard when you answer them. The questions—and answers—are discussed, so you should not consider the activities as homework or as work of any sort. So, keep this element of playfulness in mind when you are doing an activity for a question such as “*Are impossible things ever possible?*” (which is, by the way, a very important philosophical question). Also, many of the activities can be repeated after a time, so it might be a good idea to use a pencil if you want to write your answers in this book.

Some activity questions—and every now and then some of the answers—are a bit silly. This is part of the fun. But, the fun part of philosophy only begins here. The really interesting part of philosophy comes later, when you start to read the writings of the philosophers and think about their ideas on your own and in conversations with others.

When you become fascinated by these questions and activities, you may have a feeling of novelty, or even strangeness, at something you have never thought about before or something you have thought about, but not in the way you are thinking about it now. This feeling is perfectly normal. In fact, it shows that you have been doing very well as a philosopher. Remember that thinking is fun, but also challenging. If you start to wonder about something and then begin to think



about it, try to keep thinking until you have increased your understanding of the basic idea. A true philosopher keeps striving to become wise. So, the more you think about and discuss these issues, the more philosophical you will be.

Finally, all the questions contain, here and there, a short saying by a famous (and, occasionally, not so famous) person. These sayings are intended to help you focus your thinking about that question. The sayings often express the point of the question in a vivid or witty way, as a poet or comedian might. However, now and then the saying will challenge the point of the question with another possible way of approaching that question. Also, as you think about the questions, keep in mind the following quotation wherever you explore in *Philosophy for Kids*:

"When a thing is funny, search it for a hidden truth."

George Bernard Shaw, playwright and author

Notes for Teachers and Parents

Philosophy is an ancient and universal discipline. The questions posed in this book receive answers from philosophers who span almost 3,000 years of history and who represent a wide variety of cultures.

Young people will be initially attracted to, and intrigued by, the concrete questions asked. And yet, all these questions are fundamental or closely related to basic issues in philosophy. It is important to keep in mind, however, that many other questions equally fundamental are also well worth considering, and it would be prudent to anticipate that young people will quickly become aware of this feature of philosophy.

Encourage browsing among these questions. It is characteristic of wonder that it can appear at any time and be directed at almost anything. Try not to stifle this precious resource.

It is also characteristic of philosophical questions to exhibit an interlocking effect. Thus, to start on any one question will naturally lead the investigator to a multitude of others. The discussions of each question reflect this feature: In fact, they invite it by making references to other questions that are discussed elsewhere in the book.

It is unlikely that all kids will find each question to be interesting and engaging. This is normal. But what often happens, fascinating and wonderful to behold, is that a student who had been indifferent to philosophy suddenly becomes intrigued by a question and then appreciates the importance of this kind of intellectual endeavor. So, the message here at the outset is to be patient if some students do not find the initial exercises in philosophy to be worthwhile.



A teacher could use *Philosophy for Kids* as a textbook in philosophy by introducing students to some of the questions—and “fun” responses—that philosophers have asked over the centuries. But, *Philosophy for Kids* is not primarily intended as a textbook. It is intended to be fun and philosophical. As a result, a young person can browse through the contents, looking at any of the 40 questions, hopscotching around the book until this or that question prods interest. And then another . . . and another . . .

A section intended primarily for teachers (and parents) does, however, appear at the end of the book. This section—How To Philosophize If You Are Not a Philosopher—contains discussions intended to facilitate the use of this book: Organization, Classroom Procedures, Question Review and Teaching Tips, and Curricular Integration. This material may be helpful if teachers wish to use *Philosophy for Kids* in a more formal setting in the classroom.

About the Cover

The cover of *Philosophy for Kids* is *The School of Athens*, a fresco in the Vatican Museum by the Italian master Raphael, painted in 1510 and restored in 1996. The figures depict a group of Greek philosophers and mathematicians (as well as several representations of Raphael himself). The two thinkers highlighted in the center are Plato, pointing upward to indicate the true reality is spiritual, and Aristotle, pointing downward to emphasize to his teacher Plato that reality on earth also matters. Socrates stands at Plato’s right, looking away in thoughtful conversation. Heraclitus reclines below Plato, with Parmenides close at hand. Zeno is to the far left. All these philosophers appear at various moments in *Philosophy for Kids* (the book Aristotle is holding is the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the source of Question #2 on friendship). This “timeless academy” evokes with beauty and power the historical sweep of philosophical ideas, which is one of the central features of *Philosophy for Kids*.

The author would like to thank Prufrock Press editors Jim and Christy Kendrick for suggesting this cover and also for all their labors in the production of what is, for the author, a book of thoughtful and elegant design duly fitting both its content and its intended audience.

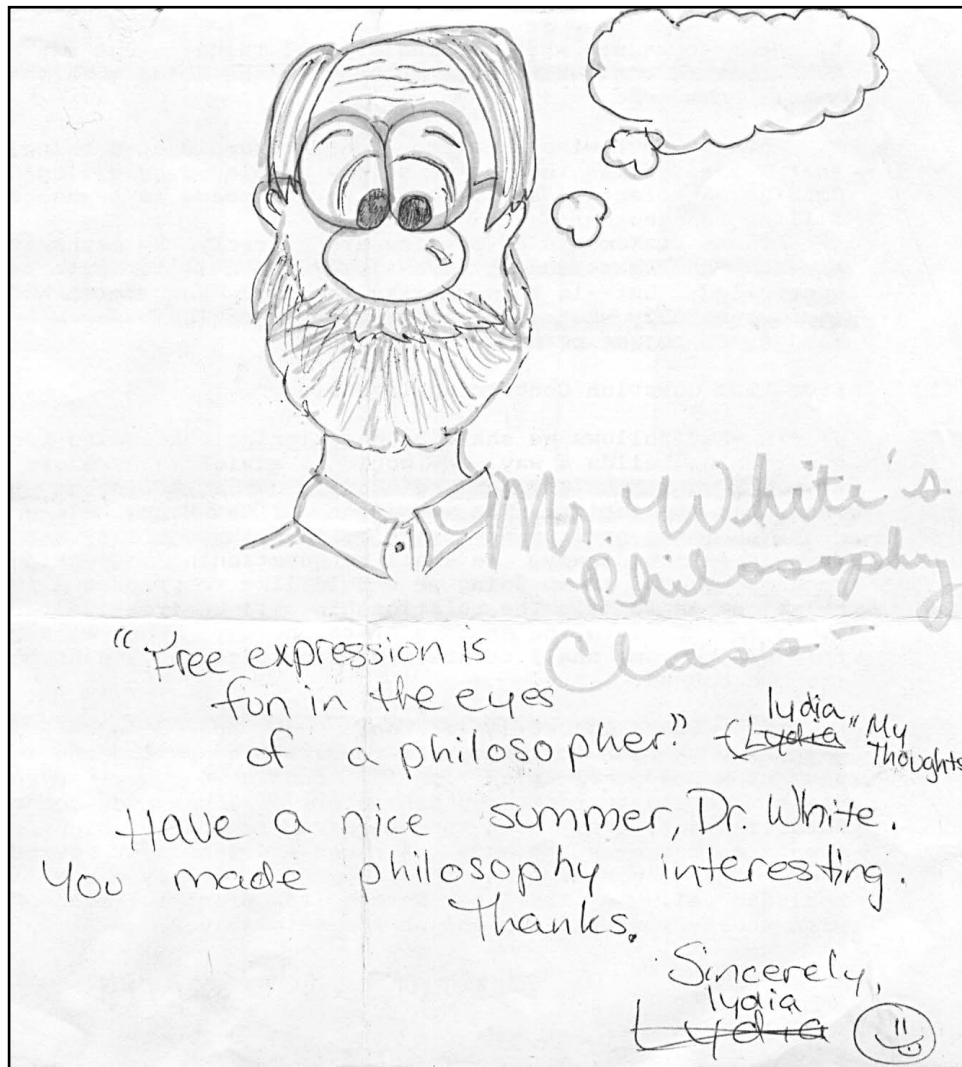
The author of *Philosophy for Kids* would be very interested in hearing reactions of readers, teachers, parents, or young people who have in any way used this book. Please send your comments to him at: dwhite6886@aol.com



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This delightful depiction of a typically befuddled philosophy teacher—the author of *Philosophy for Kids*—was done by an eighth grader. Just before the first session of her final year in the philosophy program at her school, she spotted me waiting outside the classroom and commented, “Oh, it’s *you*,” in a glacial tone intimating that the sight of the philosophy teacher looming on her educational horizon was as exciting as an impending trip to the dentist. Then, sensing that something should be done to preserve a measure of teacher-student goodwill, she added, “Don’t take it personally. I just don’t like philosophy.” Ten weeks later, she presented this drawing to me after the final session of the program. I have managed to convince myself that the quality and wit of this portrait suggest that she did not find the experience of philosophy to be too horribly painful after all.