

Teaching Partnership, Partnership Teaching

This past semester of Spring 2019, my partner Jen Taylor and I taught philosophy together at the University of Connecticut and Middlesex Community College. The result of our teaching partnership was powerful and inspiring. Not only did we model teaching and learning as an inherently collaborative, non-adversarial process that can leave behind the ego-trappings of conventional academic competitiveness, the philosophy of partnership itself became an overarching theme of the course, serving to integrate many topics and more importantly, to offer an invitation to the students to experience education as a radical emancipatory opportunity.

While I have been teaching philosophy for twenty years, Jen's teaching in the past has been focussed on mindfulness and yoga, with an eye towards integrated body-mind education, and teaching the skills of relationship and collaboration. While she has appeared as a guest lecturer in my courses once or twice a semester for many years, the course became a more collaborative effort this year. At the University of Connecticut we taught a philosophy class called "Ethics and Social Philosophy," which surveyed classical and contemporary work in modern social and political philosophy beginning with the French Revolution and ending with contemporary issues such as mass incarceration and white supremacy, climate change, the Deep State, Animal Rights and Wealth Inequality and Monetary Reform. The course was a great success, benefitting from a rich fusion of our perspectives on social justice.

Jen taught Riane Eisler's classic *The Chalice and the Blade*, introducing the students to the "Partnership Lens." The lectures were very well received and the framework offered crucial clarification on several key problems.

(1) How to Think About Hierarchy - A key question in modern social and political philosophy is the topic of social hierarchy. This topic is central to debates between socialists, free market Libertarians, anarchists and technocrats. Students often struggle to make sense of a truly egalitarian society, and question whether human beings are capable of genuine reciprocity. Jen introduced the class to Marija Gimbutas' and Riane Eisler's work on the sociology and archeological evidence of partnership societies through out history, challenging the narrative that dominator ideologies have always prevailed in human culture. Employing Eisler's pivotal distinction between "hierarchies of domination" and "hierarchies of actualization" helped shift the conversation, opening up conceptual space to question many of the enduring assumptions about what humans are capable of. It is not hierarchy itself which is problematic, but hierarchies based on domination and the threat of violence. Authority granted to teachers based on their abilities to actualize the enfolded potential of students - this is an emancipatory kind of hierarchy, a concept generally foreign to academic ethics and political philosophy classes, and sorely missing.

(2) Restorative Justice as a Partnership System - We dedicated several weeks to looking at the phenomena of mass incarceration, white supremacy and structural racism during the semester, exploring many of the ethical problems with modern carceral justice, and ending with a look at the prison abolition movement and the promise of restorative justice practices. Looking at these issues though the Partnership Lens

helped the students to both question more deeply the moral psychology of retributive justice,

(3) by seeing modern carceral justice as sustained by a dominator ideology, it helped the students to place abolition democracy activism into a larger context, connecting the possibility of a future America without prisons to the restorative justice practices of Old Europe before the Advent of patriarchal systems of oppression.

(3) Incorporating Race, Class and Gender into Ethics - At the end of the semester, many students shared how much they appreciated that the course had not limited itself to the narrow analytical framework of a typical academic ethics course but instead delved into the social, historical, class and gender dimensions of ethical problems. This unique richness and relevance of the course material is again the result of our philosophical partnership. Philosophy remains to this day, the academic discipline most dominated by white, male, heterosexual philosophers, and so remains ideologically hobbled by unquestioned assumptions therefore. It was Jen's influence that led the course to include powerful female philosophers such as Riane Eisler and Angela Davis, and black philosophers like Charles Mills and Ta Nehisi Coates, that really opened up the perspective, making it much more exciting and relevant and engaging to the diverse student body at University of Connecticut.

Our partnership at Middlesex Community College garnered comparable responses from students. Jen and I co-taught two sections of an Introduction to Philosophy course, where Jen lectured on animal rights, the social justice of climate change and the partnership perspective on citizenship. In addition, two female students inspired by Jen's partnership lectures from the previous semester, requested an Independent Study, focused on the Philosophy of Partnership. This study found Jen and I meeting with these two brilliant young women, delving into the subterranean connections between anarchistic critiques of the State, restorative justice and forgiveness practices, Indigenous ethical systems and the Partnership Lens. The results were deeply gratifying.

Jen and I are excited to continue to explore the synergistic benefits of teaching partnership philosophy while modeling a way of being a philosopher which values cooperation over competition, love over fear, individuality over individualism, and the joy of learning over the fear of being judged by a righteous professor.

- Justin Good / May 29, 2019