Queens Public Philosophy
Report for the American Philosophical Association

Overview

We offer our sincere thanks to the American Philosophical Association for the opportunity to get this project started, and to our contacts at the Queens Public Library, particularly Doris Jones and Sumiya Nowshin, for their support and philosophical insight during our sessions.

The Queens Public Philosophy (QPP) project collaborated with the Forest Hills branch of Queens Public Library to engage the public in philosophical conversation groups focused on three specific topics: Love, Knowledge, and Consciousness. Discussions took place on the following dates:

1. Oct. 22, 2022 – 2:00-4:00 p.m.: What is Love?
2. Nov. 5, 2022 – 2:00-4:00 p.m.: What is knowledge?
3. Nov. 19, 2022 – 2:00-4:00 p.m.: Consciousness

The marketing and advertising for the events was done in collaboration with the Queens Public Library via their website and social media, newsletter, and promotional flyer (see attached).

As stated in the project proposal, our two goals with this project were (a) to engage the public in community-based conversation to foster “communities of inquiry”, and (b) to “develop on-the-ground, direct, and grass roots community action to develop meaningful, intergenerational, and cross-cultural philosophical dialogue between young people in academic philosophy, and non-academic members of the community of Queens”.

Outcomes

a. Attendance – Each session had between 16 and 22 participants. This number allowed our conversations to be such that everyone who wished to contribute was able to do so without being drowned out by a larger group size.

b. Satisfaction Survey (See attached) – the results of our satisfaction survey were as follows.

We used a 5 point scale, 1 being “Strongly Disagree”, 3, “Neutral”, and 5, “Strongly agree”.

- “The session expanded my knowledge or interest in philosophy”.
  - 78% of responses rated this either 4 or 5
- “I learned something new and useful from this session”.
  - 92.8% rated either 4 or 5
• “The quality of presentation satisfied my expectations”.
  ○ 92.8% rated either 4 or 5
• “Overall, this session was a helpful experience”.
  ○ 78% rated this 4 or 5

Comments from the surveys were overwhelmingly positive. A sampling is included below:

• “Love the topic, group size, & diversity of the group. The flow of discussion was natural & intellectually stimulating. Looking forward to more sessions!”
• “This was a great session. I learned a lot about the nuances of love”.
• “Fun!”
• “A good balance between academic and casual/personal discussion”.
• It was a great session. Very knowledgeable. Learned a lot from different perspectives”.
• “For me personally this was a good experience because I have not been with people for quite some time. I appreciate what the library is doing”.

Internship

The funding provided by the APA was to hire and pay two public philosophy interns to assist with the organization of the sessions, and to help guide/lead the discussions. The two interns selected—Timothy Ramanand and Phone Myint (Huzaifah) Maung—were both alumni of LaGuardia Community College, Queens Residents, and philosophy majors while studying at LaGuardia. Both interns transferred to 4-year CUNY institutions where they are currently pursuing their undergraduate degrees in philosophy. In addition to brainstorming, organizing, and facilitating discussions with representatives from the Queens Public Library, one of the aims of the internship was for the interns to lead the discussion with participants by the third session. Session 1 (Oct. 22) was led primarily by Dr. McFarland. Session 2 (Nov. 5) was a mix between Dr. McFarland and the interns, and Session 3 (Nov. 19) was led solely by the two interns. The internship application, along with the interns’ final reflections about the project, have been included below.
DISCUSSION GROUPS
with Queens Public Philosophy

Come to Forest Hills Library to participate in engaging, philosophical discussions with fellow Queens residents regarding some of the big questions in life. Each session will cover a different philosophical topic. This is not an “ivory tower” discussion, but a welcoming space for open minds, stimulating thoughts and respectful discourse. No philosophy or specific academic background is needed.

These sessions are coordinated by Queens Public Philosophy, a local group which promotes philosophical discussions and activities within Queens.

Love | October 22
• What kinds of love are there?
• Is love good or bad?
• Are there right and wrong ways to love?

Knowledge | November 5
• What is knowledge?
• What is truth and belief?
• How reliable are our means of spreading information?

Consciousness | November 19
• What is consciousness?
• Are the mind and body separate?
• Can Artificial Intelligence think like a Human Mind?"

FREE ADMISSION

Saturdays
October 22; November 5, 19
2pm-4 pm
FOREST HILLS
108-19 71 Avenue • (718) 268-7934
E F M 7 to 71 Continental Avenue • LIRR
Q23, Q60, Q64

This program is facilitated by LaGuardia Community College.

QueensLibrary.org  Queens Public Library is an independent, not-for-profit corporation and is not affiliated with any other library system.
# 2022 Queens Public Philosophy Satisfaction Survey

Thank you for attending Queens Public Philosophy! Please respond to each item about the session using the following scales.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The session</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expanded my Knowledge or Interest in Philosophy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I learned</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Something new And useful from This session</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The quality of Presentation Satisfied my Expectations</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall The session Was a helpful Experience</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Please write any comment you have regarding the session.

Please contact queenspublicphilosophy@gmail.com with any questions regarding future sessions or if you’re interested in getting involved with public philosophy.
Internship Application
Queens Public Philosophy
LaGuardia Community College

Internship dates: May – November 2022
Due: April 30, 2022
Email to Dr. McFarland: amcfarland@lagcc.cuny.edu

Requirements and compensation:
- $750 compensation + all materials included
- Applicants should be vaccinated and available for in-person workshops, training, and brainstorming sessions

Application

Name:

What Philosophy classes have you taken, if any?

Email address:

Phone number:

Are you fully vaccinated and available for in-person workshops? The time and day of these are flexible as we plan in collaboration with the Queens Public Library:

Please write a brief paragraph of 500 words or less explaining why you think you would be a good candidate for a Queens Public Philosophy internship and what you hope to learn from the experience. What ideas do you have for what our public philosophy workshops would look like?
Intern Reflections on Public Philosophy

During my time as an intern at Queens Public Philosophy, the definitive takeaway wasn’t so much the reinforcement of the idea that everyone is a philosopher, but that everyone wants to think philosophically. To some degree, there was a cathartic element in the conversations in respect to the attendees being able to engage in discourse utilizing critical thinking which everyday life does not usually afford. The experience led me to realize that public philosophy is very much so a worthwhile endeavor worth pursuing and engaging with - and further, despite my distance from utilitarianism, I believe it is a net positive for society as a whole. The best part of partaking in Queens Public Philosophy was having the opportunity to engage with non-academic philosophers on not well known topics such as Mind and Epistemology which are usually given the aura of being encased within a philosophical ivory tower - an engagement I have entertained with friends and seen success with now in the public sphere. And the benefit of that I find is that public philosophy helps people to understand what philosophy is, and what the various kinds of philosophy are as well.

-Timothy Ramanand, QPP Intern

Participating in the three sessions of public philosophy at the Queens Public Library has been a transformative experience for me as a philosophy student. It has not only expanded my understanding of philosophy but also reinforced my belief in the importance of making philosophical discourse accessible to a wider audience.

One of the key takeaways from these sessions was the realization that philosophy should not remain confined within the ivory towers of academia. Public philosophy serves as a bridge between the often esoteric discussions that occur in academic settings and the real-world issues that people grapple with daily. It brings philosophy out of the abstract and into the realm of practical application, making it more relevant and relatable to a diverse audience.

Engaging with the community at the library allowed me to witness firsthand how philosophy can empower individuals to think critically, question assumptions, and engage in meaningful dialogue about pressing societal concerns. The interactive nature of these sessions encouraged people from various backgrounds to share their perspectives, fostering a rich exchange of ideas.

Furthermore, I found that public philosophy promotes a sense of inclusivity and democratization of knowledge. It breaks down barriers, making complex philosophical concepts accessible to everyone, regardless of their academic background. This aligns with the democratic ideals of public libraries as spaces for learning and intellectual growth.

In conclusion, my experience with public philosophy at the Queens Public Library has
reinforced my belief that philosophy should be a tool for societal engagement and personal growth, rather than a discipline reserved solely for scholars. It has shown me the power of philosophy to inspire critical thinking and foster meaningful conversations in a community setting. This experience has deepened my appreciation for the value of public philosophy in making philosophy more accessible, relevant, and impactful in the world.

-Phone Myint Maung (Huzaifah), QPP Intern