

WHAT HAPPENS IN PHILOSOPHICAL TEXTS: MATTHEW LIPMAN'S THEORY AND PRACTICE OF  
THE PHILOSOPHICAL TEXT AS MODEL

Darryl Matthew De Marzio  
University of Scranton, USA

Abstract :

This paper explores Matthew Lipman's notion of the philosophical text as model. I argue that Lipman's account of the philosophical text is one that brings together the expository and narrative textual forms in a distinctive way--not one in which the tension between the expository and the narrative is overcome once and for all, but in such a way that the expository and the narrative are brought into relationship within the very form of narrative itself. Drawing upon Michel Foucault's reading of Descartes "Meditations," I argue that Lipman's philosophical novels serve both a demonstrative and ascetic function, allowing us to situate Lipman's novels in the history of philosophical discourse, as well as point to the task of creating philosophical texts, and curriculum, in the future.

Keywords: curriculum; philosophical texts; narrative; Matthew Lipman, Michel Foucault

Lo que sucede nos textos filosóficos: La teoría y la práctica de Matthew Lipman del texto filosófico como modelo

Resumen:

Este trabajo explora la noción de Matthew Lipman del texto filosófico como modelo. Sostengo que la visión de Lipman del texto filosófico reúne las formas textuales expositivas y narrativas de una manera destacada, no porque la tensión entre lo expositivo y lo narrativo se supere de una vez por todas, sino porque lo expositivo y lo narrativo están puestos en relación dentro de la misma forma de la narrativa. A partir de la lectura de Michel Foucault de las *Meditaciones* de Descartes, sostengo que las novelas filosóficas de Lipman cumplen una función tanto demostrativa como ascética, permitiendo que situemos esas novelas dentro de la historia del discurso filosófico. También apunto a la tarea de crear textos y currículos filosóficos en el futuro.

Palabras clave: curriculum; textos filosóficos; narrativa; Matthew Lipman; Michel Foucault

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O que acontece nos textos filosóficos: a teoria e a prática de Matthew Lipman do texto filosófico como modelo

Resumo:

Este artigo explora a noção de Matthew Lipman de texto filosófico como modelo. Argumento que a visão de Lipman do texto filosófico reúne as formas textuais expositivas e narrativas de uma maneira destacada – não no sentido de que a tensão entre a narrativa e a expositiva foi superada de uma vez por todas, mas no sentido em que a forma expositiva e a narrativa são colocadas em relação dentro da própria forma narrativa. A partir da leitura de Foucault das *Meditações* de Descartes, argumento que as novelas filosóficas de Lipman cumprem função tanto demonstrativa quanto ascética, nos permitindo situar as novelas de Lipman na história do discurso filosófico, como também nos permitem apontar para o papel da criação de textos, e currículos filosóficos no futuro.

Palavras-chave: currículo; textos filosóficos; narrativa; Matthew Lipman; Michel Foucault

## WHAT HAPPENS IN PHILOSOPHICAL TEXTS: MATTHEW LIPMAN'S THEORY AND PRACTICE OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL TEXT AS MODEL

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### *Introduction*

Toward the end of his career, Matthew Lipman maintained a significant degree of concern over the status and future of the philosophical novel, at least in terms of how the philosophical novel was figured into the Philosophy for Children (P4C) movement. He was not altogether concerned about the status and future of *his* novels—*Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*, *Pixie*, *Kio and Gus*, and the like—for he understood completely well that these were not timeless literary masterpieces, and that the colloquialisms used to incite children to philosophical thinking in the mid-1970s would eventually fail to hit the mark over a quarter-century later. In this sense, Lipman encouraged everyone to tinker with the content of the philosophical novel—to make the stories for children locally and culturally relevant, to continue to make them timely springs for philosophical inquiry.<sup>1</sup> Instead, it was not the content of the philosophical novel but the status and future of its form with which Lipman was primarily concerned.

In one of his last published articles to appear in the journal *Thinking*, Lipman addresses his concern over the philosophical novel. He writes, “If I were asked to say what I find to be the chief flaws of the philosophical stories for children I have seen in recent years, I would say that some of them were all story and no philosophy while others are all philosophy and no story.”<sup>2</sup> And then, in a cutting but humorous style that

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<sup>1</sup> Though I am convinced that Lipman came to hold this view toward the end of his career, there is certainly evidence to suggest that Lipman had favored a more culturally neutral approach to the philosophical novel. For example, in the first edition of *Thinking in Education*, Lipman writes the following: “When the [philosophical] text takes the form of the novel, it is possible to portray dialogues in which the contextual elements of time, place, and circumstance are largely omitted and contending arguments can be seen in their idealized purity or universality, just as *Peanuts* cartoons, by avoiding depictions of environments (or of adults), focus attention upon the children’s dialogue. Cultural and historical contrasts then drop away, and we are left with vignettes that move us in the direction of a philosophy of childhood.” See, Matthew Lipman, *Thinking in Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 217.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Lipman, “Where to P4C?” *Thinking: The Journal of Philosophy for Children* 16, no. 2 (2002): 12.

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can only be called 'Lipmanesque', he adds, "some bury the philosophy so deeply into the narrative that it would take a Derrida to ferret it out, while others sprinkle it on the surface so that it could hardly be missed by a first grader with reading disabilities."<sup>3</sup>

On paper it seems a simple formula. The right amount of philosophy –and by "philosophy" Lipman almost always means philosophical thinking, not the history of philosophy –and the right amount of narrative make for a good philosophical story. Lipman, though never the master novelist, was indeed a master of working the formula of the philosophical novel. Why? Lipman had a clear and unique understanding of the essential features of this formula –that is, Lipman understood 'philosophy' and 'narrative' as the organizing structures of the philosophical text. He also understood that one of the essential features of philosophical thinking itself was its narrative form, so that when it came to displaying philosophical thinking, rather than simply implying it, Lipman could easily conjure up scenes of children in a classroom, a family at the dinner table, or a child thinking to herself, and allow these fictional communities of inquiry to become the springboard and model for readers. And this is what Lipman ultimately saw the role of the philosophical novel to be –that it would serve as a *spring* for the community of inquiry and for philosophical thinking, and that it would also serve as a *model* for them as well.

In this paper, I would like to explore this latter notion of the philosophical text as model –not just through the example of Lipman's own philosophical novels, but rather through an analysis of Lipman's own account of how the text functions as a model. What is Lipman's understanding of the text as model –an understanding that, as I suggest above, allows him to master the craft of writing the philosophical novel? Though Lipman's idea of the text as 'spring' of inquiry is important and crucial to understanding the role of the curriculum in P4C<sup>4</sup>, I would instead prefer to focus on his

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> For an excellent discussion and qualitative study which shows how literary texts, specifically poems, function as springboards for a community of inquiry, see, Selena Nemorin, "The 'Poem' as Beginning for a Community of Inquiry," (MA thesis, Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada: 2008).

notion of the text as model for two main reasons. First, through the notion of the text as model, Lipman develops the idea of the philosophical text *par excellence*—that is, he identifies the genuine philosophical text as one that is both rational and creative, a blend of both expository and narrative discourse. Though the coming together of the rational and creative dimensions of thinking is a well-known hallmark of Lipman's theory of higher-order thinking, I think that an underrecognized aspect of Lipman's account of the philosophical text is his attempt to reconcile this tension between the expository and narrative forms. In what follows, I will analyze some passages where Lipman seems to suggest that both are needed in the philosophical text. But I think that, in the end, there can never be a true synthesis of the expository and narrative in Lipman's account of the philosophical text, and that Lipman will always fall on the side of the narrative as the privileged mode of discourse for philosophy.

The second reason I would like to focus on this notion of the text as model is that, with this understanding of the text, I believe, Lipman connects to a lost tradition of philosophy in which the role of the text was recognized as performing a transformative function. This tradition, covered over for many centuries, but which has now been rekindled over the last half-century through some important work in the history of ideas, understands the philosophical text as reflecting—in the terms of Michel Foucault and Pierre Hadot respectively—a 'technology of the self' and 'spiritual exercise', in which the reader assimilates the text's manner of thinking so as to transform their own.<sup>5</sup> Lipman's understanding of the text as model, I suggest, maps on well to this ancient tradition. In the final section of this paper, I link Lipman's account of the philosophical text to the "Cartesian moment" in the history of Western philosophical writing—to that historical moment when, according to Michel Foucault, Western philosophy experiences a profound rupture so that philosophical writing is no longer concerned with the transformation of the thinking of the author or reader, but instead becomes

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<sup>5</sup> See, especially, Michel Foucault, "Self Writing," in *Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997), 207-222; and, Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," in *Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth*, 223-251. Also see, Pierre Hadot, "Spiritual Exercises" in *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, ed. Arnold I Davidson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1995), 81-125.

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primarily a mode of exposition, and the systematic demonstration of knowledge. But just as Lipman's understanding of the philosophical text links him to a lost past, I also suggest that his account signals a call for the reconstruction of the philosophical text as a project for the future. In this regard, Lipman's hope for the philosophical text to strike a balance between the narrative and the expository form offers a substantial challenge for both philosophers and educators.

### *Lipman's Account of the Text as Model*

To be sure, much turns on the notion of the text as model in Lipman's rendering of P4C. We might even suggest that, in Lipman's view, as the formation of a classroom community of philosophical inquiry (CPI) stands as a necessary condition for the emergence of P4C, so the philosophical text stands as a necessary condition for the emergence of CPI. It is no surprise, then, that as Lipman frames the formation of CPI in its barest, most essential outline-form, he places "Presentation of the Text" as the initial step in the process.<sup>6</sup> The philosophical text reflects the model of the CPI which children have come together to form on their own, while at the same time, the text's inherent problematic dimension serves as the spring for the collective inquiry that is to ensue.

Lipman understands completely well, however, that the text's capacity for serving as a model is not the reason as such for making the philosophical novel necessary for P4C. Rather, it is *what* and *how* the text serves as a model that is the key. All texts are potential models of some form of thinking and behavior, even though they are not intended to be so by their authors. To take two kinds of texts as examples—kinds of texts that, as we shall explore in greater detail later, Lipman sees the

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<sup>6</sup> The outline Lipman gives for the formation of a community of philosophical inquiry is both modeled on and inspired by John Dewey's famed, "Pattern of Inquiry." See, John Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1938), 101-119. For versions of Lipman's outline, see, Matthew Lipman, *Natasha: Vygotskian Dialogues* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1996), 11-12. An earlier version appears in the first edition of *Thinking in Education*. See, Lipman, *Thinking in Education*, pp. 241-243. It also reappears later in, Matthew Lipman, *Thinking in Education*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 101-103. Interestingly, Lipman chooses the phrase, "Offering of the Text", in the *Thinking in Education* versions, perhaps to emphasize the formation of CPI as a, potentially, ritualistic and sacred mode of human experience.

philosophical novel as uniquely bringing together—the expository text and the narrative text both contain models of thinking that are potentially formative. The expository text, the form of which entails explaining and describing the factual reality of the world, models rationality through its systematic organization of facts and principles. And though the expository text may have originated without the intention of modeling this manner of thinking, its form can still serve as a model insofar as one who desires to learn this manner of thinking could, in principle, study the text for this very purpose. In other words, the expository text contains within it a certain mode of thinking—what we can schematically call the ‘rational’—and thus potentially serves as a formative model.

Similarly, the narrative text, characteristic of literature, also contains a manner and form of thinking that we might refer to as ‘creativity’. And though a great literary work—George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*, for example—may not have been intended to form its readers in any specific way, such works still contain a mode of thinking that is potentially formative.<sup>7</sup> In other words, one could learn how to create stories, and even learn to tell their own stories, from reading narrative texts. In this respect, it strikes a strange note when we consider that, presently, most advanced-level study of English literature consists of reading literature in order to critique it by producing expository texts, while in advanced creative writing programs, students usually do not read other works to learn *how* to write, but instead hone their craft in workshop environments. In both cases, the potential for the narrative text to serve as a model for creative thinking is lost.

For Lipman, both the expository and the narrative forms contain modes of thinking—rationality and creativity respectively—that are key ingredients of higher-

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<sup>7</sup> Many believe, however, that one of the predominant features of Victorian literature is its intended project of cultivating various sorts of human virtues and sensibilities. Perhaps Martha Nussbaum is the most noted proponent of this view. See, Martha Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). For more specific references to Eliot’s *Middlemarch* in the light of Nussbaum’s argument, see, Rohan Maitzen, “Martha Nussbaum and the Moral Life of *Middlemarch*,” *Philosophy and Literature* 30 (2006): 190-207. (I am grateful to Anne De Marzio for reminding me of this point.)

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order, philosophical thinking. And if we are to use texts to promote philosophical thinking in children, then the ideal texts would be those that have the right blend of rationality and creativity contained in them. That is to say, the texts must be good models of rational and creative thinking.<sup>8</sup> But where might we find such texts?

It is at this point—that is, the point of searching for the right philosophical texts for children—that we can begin in earnest to reconstruct Lipman's account of the philosophical text as model. The reason is that Lipman's account truly starts as an overall critique of traditional curriculum. Hitherto, Lipman suggests, curriculum has failed to promote philosophical thinking in children because it has emphasized either the rational at the expense of the creative, or the creative at the expense of the rational—though mainly it has been the traditional curriculum which is suspicious of the narrative form, suppressing the creative and narrowing the rational to such an extent that it is sapped of any creative insights altogether. What is needed, ultimately, is a curriculum that *intends* to form philosophical thinking in children, a curriculum that seeks to bring the rational and the creative, the expository and the narrative, into closer harmony. Hence, Lipman's philosophical novels.

In contemporary society we assume that schools are, Lipman says, first and foremost, places to which people are sent to acquire knowledge, thus “we continue to construct texts that we believe will reveal factual reality to the student.”<sup>9</sup> This expository form of the text dominates throughout all stages of the curriculum—from the very first, the child is introduced to the voice of the text in the third-person, the voice “from on high, the voice from without rather than from within...the voice of the all-seeing, all-knowing, totally rational Other...the objective, authoritative, legitimate voice.”<sup>10</sup> Our culture's reliance upon the expository form in education, so we like to convince ourselves, is mainly for epistemological reasons—after all, the primary

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<sup>8</sup> A similar point was made at the outset of this paper, where Lipman, in 2002, indicated that the philosophical novel should consist of the right blend of philosophy and narrative. Though the terms have changed—substituting ‘rational’ for ‘philosophy’ and ‘creative’ for ‘narrative’—I still think that the line of thought remains coherent.

<sup>9</sup> Lipman, *Thinking in Education*, 215.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.



purpose of education is to come to have knowledge of the world, and the most reliable means for bringing about this knowledge is through the medium of expository texts. But Lipman, interestingly, also cites moral reasons for why we give preference to the expository form. In contrast to the narrative form of literature, we instead place our trust in the formative potential of the expository text because it has proven so effective at maintaining the social values and norms that prevail: “To the watchful puritan in us,” Lipman writes, “literature does more than provide us with other worlds to dwell in. It suggests to us other ways of living in and thinking about the world we inhabit—*ways that might be at odds with propriety and common sense.*”<sup>11</sup> So, as the traditional curriculum would have it, the expository form of the text functions best at explaining the world as it is, but the narrative form, says Lipman, offers us alternative ways in which to live and think about the world. The narrative form, therefore, reflects a posture of critique and of questioning. It is in this sense that we can best see how the narrative form functions as a springboard of inquiry. It is the form that supports the thoughtful interrogation and the testing of the world—as well as our lives within it—in contrast to the orderly and structured re-presentation of the predominant interpretations of the world.

Running alongside this tension between the expository and narrative textual forms is, of course, the tension between rationality—reflecting an interest in systematically arranging the facts of the world—and creativity, reflecting an interest in questioning the world and exploring alternatives. But Lipman problematizes any overly neat and easy distinction between the expository and the narrative, between rationality and creativity. In the traditional curriculum, he says, “[a] story that could serve as [an expository] text is inconceivable.”<sup>12</sup> The reason is that, typically, we identify thinking as reflecting *either* rationality, which in textual form “seeks to enclose itself in monologue,” or as creativity, “which exposes itself in dialogue.”<sup>13</sup> In contrast, higher-order thinking, Lipman says, “involves a constant shuttling back and forth, a

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 215. [emphasis added]

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

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constant dialogue, between rationality and creativity.”<sup>14</sup> Yet Lipman also says that the text can (and has been shown) to overcome this dichotomy, where “each movement of thought can be seen as cooperative with and complementary to the other. Monologue and dialogue, rationality and creativity are simply the warp and woof of the texture of thinking.”<sup>15</sup> For achieving higher-order thinking, Lipman declares, “we need texts that embody, and therefore model, both rationality and creativity.”<sup>16</sup>

It might seem that Lipman seeks to overcome this tension between the expository and the narrative, the rational and the creative—dichotomies which have been fostered by the traditional curriculum—by gesturing toward a third form of text, one which constitutes a synthesis of both sides of the tension. According to this reading, this is what the philosophical novel would in fact be—a synthesized form emerging from and over a prior antithesis. However, I do not think that this is what precisely Lipman has in mind with his understanding of the philosophical novel. As I stated at the outset, I think that Lipman understands the philosophical text *par excellence* as a blend of the rational and the creative, the expository and the narrative, but not to the extent that both sides will eventually disappear and pave the way for a new genre. Rather, like the tri-partite soul in Plato’s *Republic*, in which the rational, the spirited, and the appetitive elements all must be present so as to stand in a specific relationship to one another for the attainment of virtue and justice, so too do the rational and the creative, the expository and the narrative, elements of the text exist in relation to each other for the philosophical text to emerge. And again, like Plato’s story of the tri-partite soul, in which one element—the rational—stands above the others as the privileged element, so too does Lipman suggest that one element in the philosophical novel maintain a privileged position. That element, I believe, is the creative or narrative element of the text. Why?

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

Let us look more closely at one of the passages from Lipman that I have just cited. There he states that, for the formation of higher-order thinking “we need texts that embody, and therefore model, both rationality and creativity.” The reason we need these sorts of texts is that higher-order thinking itself “involves a constant shuttling back and forth, *a constant dialogue*, between rationality and creativity.” I have highlighted the phrase, “a constant dialogue,” because, as we have seen, dialogue itself is reflective of the creativity/narrative couplet, as opposed to monologue, which is reflective of the rationality/expository couplet. So, for higher-order thinking to take flight, the rational and the creative must stand in dialogical relation to each other. And the form of that dialogical relationship, ultimately, is itself a creative and narrative form. So, the philosophical text is that text which brings the rational and the creative, the expository and the narrative, into dialogue within a creative and narrative form.

In this way, I think that an interpreter of Lipman’s like David Kennedy is mainly correct when he describes P4C as a profound reconstruction of philosophy in that “narrative has replaced exposition in our understanding of philosophical discourse” and that CPI “represents an embodied narrative context in which truth comes to represent the best story, in a discursive location in which there are always multiple stories.”<sup>17</sup> If I were to amend this passage from Kennedy I would do so only slightly by suggesting that, rather than replacing exposition, narrative has regained a privileged position in relation to exposition in our understanding and rendering of philosophical discourse. This would help sharpen the focus on P4C’s location in the history of philosophy with regard to its reconfiguration of narrative as the privileged form of philosophical discourse. In the concluding section of this paper I will connect Lipman’s rendering of the philosophical text back to that historical moment when the narrative form last held sway. I will also look to Lipman’s projection of the future of the philosophical text. Before that, however, I would like to turn this discussion of the

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<sup>17</sup> David Kennedy, “Philosophy for Children and the Reconstruction of Philosophy,” *Metaphilosophy* 30, no. 4 (1999): 339.

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narrative and creative dimensions of the philosophical text back to a focus on the notion of the philosophical text as model.

So *how* does the philosophical text, as Lipman sees it, serve as a model? And, *what* does the philosophical text model for its readers? We have already begun to generate some initial answers to the latter question. For one, in a general sense, the text is supposed to serve as a model of rational and creative thinking—that is to say, it is to model philosophical, or, higher-order thinking. Second, and in a slightly more specific sense, the philosophical text is intended to model a CPI. But the question of how the philosophical text actually does this remains. And, further, even more specific examples of what the philosophical text models needs to be determined. In other words, what specific philosophical content does Lipman see the philosophical text—and his own philosophical novels in particular—as reflecting?

At this stage it might help to get clearer on what senses of the term, 'model', Lipman seems to employ. On the one hand, Lipman is using the term as a noun—he refers to the philosophical text as a model in that it is a smaller, schematic description of a larger, more systematic and rationally organized phenomenon. This noun-sense of the term would therefore account for the content, or '*what-ness*', of the philosophical text. On the other hand, Lipman is using the term as a verb—he refers to the philosophical text as a model in that it works to form and fashion the thinking and behavior of its readers. This verb-sense of the term 'model' would account for the '*how-ness*' of the philosophical text, and its distinctive manner of functioning.

As for more specific examples of the what-ness of the philosophical text, I think that Lipman sees the philosophical text as a model of two main phenomena. The first is what we might call—in contrast to the 'concepts' of thinking—the 'schemata' of thinking.<sup>18</sup> A schema is a systematic and rational organization of the facts of the world,

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<sup>18</sup> The distinction that I am making here between 'concepts' and 'schemata' is my own, though it is, I believe, implicit in both Lipman's reflections on the philosophical text as model, as well as in his philosophical novels. In making this distinction, I draw heavily on Lipman's more explicit statements regarding the distinction, found in both editions of *Thinking in Education*, particularly in, Lipman, *Thinking in Education*, 219-222; and, Lipman, *Thinking in Education*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 181-184. Lipman does,

but unlike the concept which tends toward the static and mass assembling of facts, the schema is a more organic and dynamic mode of organization. To further illuminate the difference between concept and schema, a helpful example might be that of the historian attempting to give an account of a notable person's life. A conceptual mode of organization which may be helpful to the historian might be the *concept* of chronological time, so that the facts of the person's life can be organized in 10-year increments—the 1970s, the 1980s, 1990s, etc. A *schematic* mode of organization, on the other hand, like a story, might help the historian capture the felt movement and direction of that notable person's life. As Lipman puts it, "In a story, which is in many ways the ideal form of the schema, every detail counts and adds to the quality of the whole."<sup>19</sup> The schemata of thinking, therefore, would serve as the manner of organization of the philosophical text. Throughout all his philosophical novels, Lipman employs an array of schemata to organize and stage the stories, as well as to mobilize the thinking among any given CPI. For example, *Pixie* can be said to be organized around the schema of relationships, *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery* around the rules of formal and informal logic, while *Lisa* is organized around the schemata of ethics.<sup>20</sup> Again, the texts are not organized by systems of concepts, which would reflect an inert arrangement of 'digestible' facts, but rather the texts are organized according to schemata, which can be thought of as the tools or skills with which we question and make sense of the world and our place in it—that is to say, with which we engage in philosophical thinking. In this sense, the schemata of Lipman's philosophical novels are but one aspect of the what-ness of the philosophical text—they are the stuff according to which the text is organized, as well as the content of the text that there is to be learned. As a model of the schemata of thinking, the philosophical text fulfills its role as an expository text in that it works to

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however, make note of in many places an emphasis on the organization of concepts in the philosophical novels. See, for example, Matthew Lipman, "Integrating Cognitive Skills and Conceptual Contents in Teaching the Philosophy for Children Curriculum," in *Studies in Philosophy for Children: Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 10-13.

<sup>19</sup> Lipman, *Thinking in Education*, 220.

<sup>20</sup> For an early plan for the schematic arrangement of the P4C curriculum, see Matthew Lipman, Ann Margaret Sharp, and Frederick S. Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 51-3.

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describe and explain specific phenomena, but does so in a narrative way so that the phenomena remains dynamic, propelling movement and direction of thought.

The second main aspect of the what-ness of Lipman's philosophical novels is the very history of philosophy. But as suggested above, the history of philosophy is treated schematically, rather than conceptually. It is not presented as a series of historical epochs (e.g., ancient philosophy, modern philosophy, post-modern philosophy), or a series of systems of thought (e.g., idealism, rationalism, empiricism), or an orientation to the major figures of philosophy (e.g., Plato, Descartes, Kant). Rather, the philosophical novel models the "central themes from the history of philosophy... translated into ordinary language."<sup>21</sup> Such ordinary-language renderings of some of the pivotal moments in the history of philosophy are clearly and pleasantly discovered throughout the novels. In *Elfie*, for example, we find the following appropriation of Descartes' First Meditation:

Last night I woke up, in the middle of the night, and I said to myself, "Elfie, are you asleep?" I touched my eyes, and they were open, so I said, "No, I'm not asleep." But that could be wrong. Maybe a person could sleep with her eyes open. Then I said to myself, "At this moment, *am I thinking?* I really wonder."  
And I answered myself, "Dummy! If you can wonder, you *must* be thinking! And if you're thinking, then, no matter what Seth says, you're for real."<sup>22</sup>

The manner in which the history of philosophy becomes reconstructed in this passage from *Elfie* is revealed not in the text's close approximation to the actual discourse and demonstration of the "real" Descartes, but rather in the manner of Descartes' thought which is typical of the manner of thought found in the history of philosophy. In this way, we can make a distinction between the history of philosophy as a mode of discourse, and the history of philosophy as a mode of thinking. And as

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<sup>21</sup> Matthew Lipman, *Philosophy Goes to School* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988) 183.

<sup>22</sup> Matthew Lipman, *Elfie* (Upper Montclair, NJ: Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children, 1988), 2-3. [emphasis in original]

Lipman puts it, “A philosophy text for children should be representative of the *thinking* that has historically been the case in the discipline of philosophy.”<sup>23</sup> And as we have seen, the text that models philosophical thinking operates within the narrative form, while the text that models philosophical discourse operates exclusively within the expository form. And yet, the history of philosophy as stuff and as content—as what there is to be learned—is very much present throughout Lipman’s novels. In this way we can see how the expository elements of the text—its rational organization by way of the schemata of thinking, as well the text’s appropriation of the history of philosophy through the reconstruction of philosophical modes of thinking—are situated within its narrative form.

### ***Back to the Future: The Cartesian Moment and Philosophical Narrative***

It is somewhat fitting that in the preceding section we saw how Descartes’ First Meditation gets appropriated into the philosophical novel, *Elfie*, as a prime example of Lipman’s reconstruction of the history of philosophy as a mode of thinking within a narrative textual form. Now, I would like to turn to a unique reading of Descartes’ *Meditations* offered by Michel Foucault in order to bring Lipman’s account of the philosophical text—and his rendering of that account through the philosophical novels—into greater historical perspective. As I will try to show, Lipman’s account of the philosophical text—as a text which embodies both the rational and the creative, the expository and the narrative, so as to transform the thinking of the reader—is quite similar to Foucault’s reading of Descartes’ *Meditations* as a text which embodies both the “demonstrative” and the “ascetic”. But more than just making a hermeneutical point about the *Meditations*, Foucault also makes a case about the *Meditations* reflecting a moment of rupture in the history of the philosophical text. I will conclude by suggesting that Lipman’s account of the text as model allows readers to go ‘back to the future’, positioning readers to once again stand at the intersection of exposition and narrative. In order to make this case it will be helpful to consider first the essay, “My

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<sup>23</sup> Lipman, *Natasha*, 34. [emphasis added]

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Body, This Paper, This Fire", where Foucault provides a thorough interpretation of Descartes' *Meditations* in the form of a response to Jacques Derrida's criticism of Foucault's earlier reading of Descartes in the *History of Madness*.<sup>24</sup> A brief consideration of Foucault's lectures of 1982—ten years following the original publication of the essay on Descartes—will highlight the aforementioned historical significance of Descartes' *Meditations*.

As part of his response to Derrida—the main details of which are insubstantial to the discussion here—Foucault offers a brief argument which suggests that the *Meditations* constitute two textual forms. On the one hand, Foucault writes, Descartes' text is "a group of propositions, forming a *system*, which each reader must run through if he wishes to experience their truth."<sup>25</sup> In this way, the *Meditations* is a 'demonstrative' text, a text whose "enunciations can be read as a series of events, linked to each other according to a certain number of formal rules."<sup>26</sup> With the demonstrative text—the organization of which is rational and systematic, governed, as Foucault says, by "formal rules"—the subject of the text is "neutralised".<sup>27</sup> The demonstrative text impersonalizes the author's voice, and renders the reader in the position of fixed passivity—both are "in no sense implied in the demonstration."<sup>28</sup> Foucault's 'demonstrative text' is similar to Lipman's 'expository text' in that what the text says comes from without not from within. Its demonstration—its exposition—is, as Lipman writes, "what 'it' or 'on' or 'es' says; what is said impersonally, by 'one,' by 'them,' by everyone."<sup>29</sup> In the writing and reading of the philosophical text, the subject is not at stake, only the demonstrations and their truth are what matter. On the other hand, Foucault says, the *Meditations* can

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<sup>24</sup> Michel Foucault, "My Body, This Paper, This Fire," in *History of Madness*, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa (London: Routledge, 2009). This essay appears originally as an appendix to the 1972 French edition of *Histoire de la Folie*. For many years the essay never appeared in the abridged English version, with the title, *Madness and Civilization*. For Derrida's critique of Foucault, see Jacques Derrida, "Cogito and the History of Madness," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) 31-63.

<sup>25</sup> Foucault, "My Body, This Paper, This Fire," 563. [emphasis in original]

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 562.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 562-3.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 562.

<sup>29</sup> Lipman, *Thinking in Education*, 214.



also be interpreted as a “group of modifications forming an exercise, which each reader must carry out, and by which each reader must be affected, if he wishes in his turn to be the subject enunciating this truth on his own account.”<sup>30</sup> In this way, the *Meditations* is an ‘ascetic’ text in that it implies the presence of a reading subject “who is mobile and capable of being modified by the very effect of the discursive events that take place.”<sup>31</sup> This reading of the *Meditations* as an ‘ascetic text’ which works to transform the reader by its very form as an exercise, or, an *askesis*, is similar to Lipman’s understanding of the narrative text, the very form of which models for the reader the mode of philosophical thinking contained in it.

But more than just reflecting these two distinct textual forms – the demonstrative and the ascetic – Descartes’ *Meditations*, Foucault says, actually requires a “double reading.”<sup>32</sup> That is to say, as readers we must become positioned where the two textual forms intersect, where, in the case of the *Meditations*, “the exercise modifying the subject orders the succession of propositions, or commands the junction of distinct demonstrative groups.”<sup>33</sup> Lipman, borrowing from Gregory and Mary Bateson, calls this positioning of the reader at the intersection of the demonstrative and the ascetic the metalogical capacity of the text – that is, the capacity of the text to position the reader in such a way that the narrative event in the text exemplifies the content of the text.<sup>34</sup>

Lipman explains:

[in] the ideal dialogical novel, a philosophical discussion of, say, fidelity would be engaged in by characters who also exhibit in their behavior faithfulness or betrayal...Such a treatment provides the maximum impact upon the learner, for it achieves a perfect cognitive-affective equilibrium.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Foucault, “My Body, This Paper, This Fire,” 563.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Lipman, *Thinking in Education*, 218. [Lipman cites the following source: Gregory Bateson and Mary Catherine Bateson, *Angels Fear: Towards an Epistemology of the Sacred* (New York: Dutton, 1987), 210.]

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

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The philosophical text as model, whether it be Descartes' *Meditations*, or the appropriation of Descartes' *Meditations* in Lipman's *Elfie*, exercises this metalogical capacity through the exposition/demonstration of a specific mode of thinking (rooted in the history of philosophy) in narrative form as part of an ascetic performance in which the reading subject becomes modified and transformed, appropriating that very mode of thinking into their own.

The reason that Foucault finds Descartes such an important figure in the history of philosophy is not so much that Descartes revolutionizes modern philosophy as a completely new mode of discourse, one in which the writing/reading subject of that discourse will no longer operationalize the narrative-ascetic form in favor of an exclusively demonstrative-expository textual form. Rather, it is because through Descartes—or, specifically, at this precise “Cartesian moment” of the *Meditations*—will we no longer be called upon as readers of philosophical texts to transform or modify ourselves as part of the exercise of reading philosophy. From Descartes onward, Foucault says in his 1982 lectures, the reader can simply be exposed to the truth that the text demonstrates “without anything else being demanded of him and without him having to change or alter his being as subject.”<sup>36</sup> This is not to say that the reader is no longer subject to any conditions which would allow them to be exposed to the truth of the text—the internal conditions of knowledge, the cultural conditions of being educated, etc. Rather, it is that the reader will no longer be the subject of an exercise of philosophical thinking that is modeled by the precise philosophical text being read.

The philosophical text as a technology of the exercise of philosophical thinking—as an instrument with which we think philosophically, rather than being merely exposed to philosophical thinking—is the true legacy of Lipman's philosophical novels. And by bringing us back to the Cartesian moment, at the moment when philosophical discourse and the traditional curriculum began its long march of exposition and

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<sup>36</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), 17.

demonstration, Lipman has brought us also to the future of the philosophical text and the future of curriculum. In this vein, Lipman writes:

The text of the future must therefore be a new hybrid genre (although not so new as all that, when we recall Plato's earlier dialogues), a work of art that has a specific job to do—to be consummatory in providing the experience which reflection will take place, and to be instrumental in providing trails leading toward that reasonableness and judiciousness that are characteristic of the educated person.<sup>37</sup>

Lipman's philosophical novels, no matter how colloquially outdated, are still the timely texts of a hoped for future. And if the legacy of a philosophical author resides in the texts that they've left behind, it is not to be found in the tasks that their works have completed for us, but rather in the tasks that their works have left for us to do. The task of Lipman, then, is to continue to create the philosophical texts of the future—the text as model of philosophical thinking and life in a community of philosophical inquiry.

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<sup>37</sup> Lipman, *Thinking in Education*, 221-2.