AR: I'm Alex Richardson, and this is Examining Ethics, a show designed to bring insights from the cutting edge of moral philosophy and ethics education to the rest of us. For decades now, students and teachers in the discipline of ethics and in philosophy more broadly have cited anecdotal and testimonial evidence to suggest that the study of philosophy helps students develop intellectual virtues like curiosity, humility, and others. My guest today wanted to figure out if that's really the case and have coauthored a new study and an accompanying report supported by the American Philosophical Association on this very question. This is in addition to fascinating new empirical work assessing virtue development among students participating in ethics education programming even before they get to college. Michael Vazquez, Michael Prinzing, my friends, welcome to the show.

MP: Thank you. Glad to be here.

MV: It's really great to be here, Alex.

AR: Thanks. Let's start with each of you telling us a little bit about your work.

MV: Yeah. My name is Michael Vazquez. I'm a teaching assistant professor of philosophy at UNC Chapel Hill. I'm also the director of outreach at the Parr Center For Ethics. My research, my teaching, my service focuses on topics like ancient philosophy, ethics, and the philosophy of education.

MP: My name is Michael Prinzing, and I am currently a post-doc at Baylor, but very soon will be starting as a research scholar at Wake Forest. I'm a sort of philosopher turned psychologist hybrid weirdo. So I do a lot of stuff that's kind of at the border between those two fields where, broadly speaking, my work is about the good life. What does it mean to live a good life, to be a good person? What is well-being? That kind of thing.

AR: So you recently coauthored a new study and a report for the American Philosophical Association. Can you tell us a little bit about how that project came about?

MP: So we had actually just recently written a paper kind of posing this question of whether studying philosophy makes people better thinkers, and we reviewed some existing evidence from prior studies that people had run and and even had some data that we had collected or or found from other sources that were relatively small samples from

specific institutions. And the big takeaway from that paper was basically we don't have good data on this. It's, you know, really hard to say at this point whether or not there's any impact of studying philosophy. And so we took on this much larger project where we found and were able to access this really, really huge dataset from the Higher Education Research Institute. This is an organization based at UCLA. And so they have data from hundreds of thousands of students at hundreds of institutions across the United States from multiple decades. And so using those data, we're able to look at this in a much more comprehensive way than I think had ever been done before.

AR: The study is titled: Does studying philosophy make students better thinkers? What does it mean to be a better thinker? Is this just about academic success, or is there more to it than that?

MV: So I think one way to approach this question is to think about intellectual virtue. It's to think about the traits or habits of mind that lead people to seek out, to acquire truth, knowledge, and understanding, to care about truth, knowledge, and understanding in the same way that we'll talk about you you might talk about traits of character or virtues of character. So I think in part, what it means to be a better thinker is to have the dispositions that enable successful inquiry to to find the truth, to share it, and to persevere in your in your pursuit of it. That's one way to kind of think about pretty broadly what a better thinker is. I think there are lots of kind of other traits associated with pursuit of truth. You can think about analytical prowess, critical thinking, logical reasoning. Those are some of the traits I think that you might associate with intellectual virtue and somebody being a good or virtuous thinker.

AR: I hope you'll forgive a a fairly blunt question, but why is a study about the skills of academic philosophers of potential interest to those who aren't, in fact, academic philosophers?

MP: The question of whether or not studying philosophy makes people better thinkers is of obvious interest to philosophers because, you know, we like philosophy and we wanna kind of advocate for our own discipline, but it's also interesting for people outside of the field and so far as I mean, it seems like maybe everybody thinks this at all periods of history, but it feels like today, you know, people are not very good at earnestly pursuing the truth in an open minded and intellectually humble way and just kind of really reflecting on the available evidence and arguments and thinking things through and trying to figure out what to believe. They're generally much more interested, it seems, in just knowing what people that they like think and saying that and, you know, that kind of thing. And so to the extent that studying philosophy can help people to do better there, I think that should be of interest to a lot of people, even people who aren't going to, say, go to college and major in philosophy, which is, you know, what we're studying, but to the degree that studying

philosophy as an activity or practicing philosophy as an activity can make you better at doing this kind of thing. I think that's quite good, and you don't need to, yeah, you don't need to go major in philosophy in college to reap some of those benefits.

MV: Everybody cares about the dispositions or traits that help you find the truth. I mean, the truth is quite useful for navigating the world. The truth is not some lofty pie in the sky ideal. To be able to make valid inferences, cogent arguments, to be able to critically navigate a complicated information environment, political climate, whatever it may be, professional world, a career. These are the traits and dispositions that enable you to do that successfully. So, I mean, this is related to kind of way I would frame this actually that it has it has kind of the idea of making people better thinkers has kind of two faces to it. I think the sense in which it's instrumentally valuable is that it's useful for things that most people already care about and agree are valuable. You know, getting along well with other people, succeeding professionally, advancing in the ways that people might want to. So being a better thinker helps you achieve goals you already have. I mean, I think that's one clear way to, you know, pitch it to somebody who's not already convinced, antecedently convinced that they should value these traits for their own sake, but that is the other side of it that the kinds of traits that make you a better thinker arguably are worth having for themselves in their own right, and things like truth, knowledge, and understanding arguably are worth having for their own sake.

AR: In your introduction, you mentioned kind of unlocking a larger dataset from the Higher Education Research Institute for this new study. Can you have a brief overview for listeners of your method of analysis and maybe summarize a couple of your key findings for us?

MP: Totally. So the basic strategy here is to try and go beyond just group comparisons, which is the sort of thing that people have done in the past. I mean, actually, like, since the eighties, philosophers have noticed that students who majored in philosophy tend to score really remarkably well on the LSAT, the prelaw test, or the GRE. If you're going to, you know, PhD program or something, you take that test. And so you can just kind of look at the, you know, the average score grouped by major, and philosophers are just always kind of towards the top or at the very top of those charts. And so, you know, we sort of love to advertise that. But, obviously, if you just compare 2 groups like that, you don't know is is this difference in outcomes a result of the grouping thing that we're looking at, in this case, the treatment of studying philosophy? Or is it a result of selection effects where students who are already really good at logic or verbal reasoning or whatever are more likely to study philosophy than people who are less good at those things? And so the kind of basic rationale of what we're doing is trying to get data from students at multiple points in time, not just at the end of their time in college, but also

at the very beginning. And if you can see differences in these kinds of traits at the very beginning of college, then, well, that suggests that, you know, some of these traits are influencing whether or not people study philosophy in the first place. But if then you can compare differences at the end of college, controlling for those baseline differences, if even after adjusting for SAT scores, students are still scoring better on the GRE if they majored in philosophy, well, then that's at least some evidence that maybe that's an effect of studying philosophy and not merely a kind of selection bias. And so that's the basic strategy across a few different kinds of measures that we're looking at. Some of it is standardized testing. Some of it is more like self reports that are encompassing intellectual traits like curiosity or open mindedness. But the overall strategy is adjust for those baseline differences where all the various things that could influence your score are gonna have their effect presumably by freshman year. So if there's just, like, you know, students from richer families or students who have more highly educated parents or whatever it is, all of these things that could differ that would lead somebody to study philosophy and maybe also score higher on some of these measures, You know, if we can adjust for the baseline level and still see a difference at the end of college, well, that suggests maybe philosophy is actually doing something here.

MV: And just what I think one way to put a really fine point on that idea is, you know, as Michael mentioned, going decades back, it's all it's been acknowledged that philosophy majors are scoring top of the charts on those postgraduate tests. For example, even in our most recent paper in the journal of the American Philosophical Association, it was kind of a presumption or a basic point that was already established that philosophers, you know, credentialed philosophers, people who have bachelor's degrees, PhDs in philosophy, tend to score higher on measures of things like logical reasoning, reflected reflectiveness, open mindedness, intellectual humility. There was already this kind of difference. And what Michael just described was is really an attempt to tease apart kind of what's responsible for that difference that I think is already observable and widely attested and and documented in a way that has not yet been done before.

AR: So I wanna zero in on some more specific traits and measures. The study finds that those studying philosophy show more growth on particular intellectual traits compared to non philosophy majors. Which traits stood out to you the most, and why do you think philosophy education might be particularly effective when it comes to their development?

MP: So we've looked at, as I was mentioning, some standardized testing outcomes as well as some more self reported kind of things. And the ones that really stand out for us are the GRE verbal and the LSAT. And then also the Higher Education Research Institute that I mentioned before has these self report measures that they've developed to

capture things that they think of as the kinds of behaviors and traits that are important for academic success, but also just kind of learning across the lifespan and also things that are gonna set you up to live and work in a diverse society where different people have reasonable disagreements about all kinds of important questions. So we've been looking at all of these different kinds of outcomes and actually been finding some kind of interesting differences there. Even after adjusting for those baseline differences, we find that, for example, philosophy majors have the highest average score on the GRE verbal out of all the majors, same with the LSAT. The self report kinds of measures, we see a similar kind of trend where they're, in that case, not number 1, but they're pretty close on the, you know, in the top 10 or top 5 or so.

MV: I think it's really interesting to dig into some of the particular items in the 2 self report kind of measures that the Higher Education Research Institute uses. So you have the side of intellectual virtue that has interpersonal and civic implications. That is an intellectual virtue as a kind of civic virtue, as the oil for social interaction that can enable people to interact in polarized and diverse pluralistic contexts. But interestingly, while those two measures are kind of composite measures, that is each one is composed of a number of different items, when you dig in, you might find some differences. So let's take a look at the pluralistic orientation measure in particular. This includes items about one's ability to discuss and negotiate controversial issues, one's ability to see the world from someone else's perspective, openness to having one's own views challenged, the ability to manage one's time effectively. We saw, for example, in our analysis that philosophy majors showed larger increases in their, of course, self rated, in this case, ability to discuss and negotiate controversial issues and their openness to having their views challenged. I think those are notable for their kind of civic value and importance. If we think of intellectual virtues as the kinds of traits that enable not only successful inquiry that's good for you and good for your navigating of the world, but also important for society and important kind of civic aim of education, including higher education in this country, then I think results like that should be affirming and should maybe draw our attention towards them and and maybe emphasize their importance for a kind of civic education in the college years.

AR: Interestingly, you find that philosophy students show particularly distinctive growth in their sense of self understanding when compared to other students. Why do you think that is, and how could that be a potential benefit to students outside their academic lives? For instance, socially, professionally, or maybe civically?

MP: Yeah. This was kind of a you know, we were just taking a look at something. We didn't really have as much of a prediction here as you might have for, like, you know, logical reasoning or something where,

like, if you're a philosophy student, you just take logic classes, so you might expect that to grow. But in this case, we were we found yeah. So philosophy students gain a greater sense of self understanding during their time in college than non philosophy students. And, you know, we're not really totally sure why that would be, but it could be that doing philosophy prompts a kind of deeper reflection and just thinking about big questions about life that, you know, if you're studying chemistry or if you're studying, you know, some other technical field, you might be just you're busy working on this kind of concrete thing. Whereas with philosophy, you're sort of stepping back and you're asking these kinds of big questions about life, your life, you know, how to live, who are you, what do you want to do with your life in a way that that might have these more personal kinds of benefits alongside the more intellectual virtue kinds of things?

MV: I think one really affirming aspect of that finding is the way, you know, self understanding gets to the core, at least of my understanding of the history of our discipline. So it was Socrates who spent a lot of time reminding people to know thyself, to look inward and look examine themselves, scrutinize their own ways of thinking and being in the world. And it's affirming in a way for philosophy to have that effect that is to to make people more reflective and reflective even, and perhaps most importantly about themselves, which is maybe one of the more difficult kind of things for us to do. It might be a kind of blind spot for many thinkers and knowers. So I in a way, I find that affirming, and I would it hearkens back to kind of Socratic roots of the discipline.

AR: I often hear the joke that no one comes to college wanting to be a philosophy major. Right? It's a kind of thing you happen into or fall in love with along the way. This is kind of borne out in the study. Were you surprised by that? What implications do you think this has for the discipline?

MV: So it is clear from the from the data that most students who major in philosophy discover it after starting college. And, you know, beyond that point, we're left to speculate, but I do think you can draw some plausible inferences for departments that are thinking about enrollment, getting more, you know, seats filled in philosophy classes. And it it just seems clear to me that that fact that most people who end up majoring in philosophy discover it after starting college puts extra weight and importance on things like those gen ed requirements, those 1st year seminars, those co-curricular ethics centers, those various channels or avenues for entry into philosophy, into the study of philosophy, exposure to it as a discipline, that you might not otherwise get. Clearly, for the vast majority of students entering college, and we should have known this when you think about the landscape of k twelve education in this country to begin with, they either have never taken a philosophy course or have little to no

exposure to philosophical methodology or philosophy coursework in particular. So it's clear that those early, you know, entry points are very important at the college level. And so I think departments can reasonably speculate here that that is one of the main mechanisms for getting on the radar of students. If it's not gonna happen in a pre college context, then it's gonna happen when they get here.

AR: Interesting. So what are some of the limitations of this kind of study that we should be aware of? Based on the findings, a lot of what you say is suggestive of further research design principles. What do you think these should look like? Well, the ultimate goal here, of course, is we're trying to make a causal inference.

MP: We're trying to understand the effect of studying philosophy on how people think. And so we think we've gone a lot further in doing that or supporting those kinds of inferences in this analysis than in, you know, prior stuff. But obviously, this is not a randomized experiment that would, you know, be the kind of gold standard for that. There are all these techniques people have used and that we're using that are, you know, developed in fields where randomized experiments are rare or difficult like economics or epidemiology or things like that. But, you know, causal inference is always kind of a a tricky fraught business when you're not able to do that kind of randomizing. So, you know, that's kind of the main grain of salt to take with the findings.

MV: One other kind of potential limitation, but also just way of thinking about what future research might look like and that that we have ourselves have undertaken and sort of proposed that more philosophers and interdisciplinary collaborators undertake in the future is the current analysis follows a a very simple pre post structure where you've got students in their freshman year and students in their senior year. But I think it's very plausible that there's a lot more interesting variation happening in between, or you could conduct more fine grained analyses and studies kind of semester to semester based on particular courses that people do or do not take. And so that's that's one way to think about a kind of future avenue of research is just to zoom in and look at how specific philosophy courses and maybe the very pedagogical approaches that come with those courses contribute to shifts and changes in growth and intellectual traits like these.

AR: So you gestured at some of this already, but given your larger scale findings here, what kind of recommendations would you make to a professional society like the APA or to individual departments or institutions?

MV: I think the way I would start to address this question is just to focus on the broader trend or the situation of the humanities and especially in higher education in the United States. There is

heightened pressure on colleges and universities and departments within colleges and universities to demonstrate the relevance and impact of their curricular offerings. And I just think, you know, given the variety of evidence that our analyses show, we've got self report data on intellectual traits that are widely appealing and and viewed as important even by non philosophers. We have standardized testing results. The convergence of all this evidence at the very least suggests that philosophy is useful. Philosophy has an impact, and that, you know, this isn't the only way to think about the value of philosophy, and I think it would be in a way impoverished to only think about the value of philosophy in this way. But I think there's a kind of clear retort here, a clear response on behalf of philosophy in particular that its place within the university, within the general education curriculum should be secure, that it has a place there, and it can promote the aims of the university to make students better thinkers. I think that's essentially one of the bottom lines here. Of course, we should quickly add that we acknowledge that there are limitations and further avenues for future research. It's not as though the case is closed and shut, but this is remarkably suggestive evidence in response to a very specific question that every discipline, every department must answer for itself, which is what is our relevance? What is our impact?

AR: So I think philosophy has this reputation whether it's earned or not, and it might be, as being out of touch or out of step with the average person, kinda the province of the abstract. So how do you think the findings here might confirm or challenge common perceptions about the value of philosophy? How might we use the work to rethink what we might think are misconceptions about what philosophy is and does?

MP: I think philosophy has had that kind of reputation about as long as it has existed. I mean, from Socrates' day, like, that was what people were saying. You know, you got your head in the clouds. Get down to earth and, like, do real stuff here with real people. So it is funny that, like, if if it's true and it seems like philosophers have long responded in this way that we now actually have some empirical evidence to support that, well, I mean, it cultivates really valuable intellectual skills, abilities, virtues, things that seem like they're important for a just society and a flourishing life. That's a big deal.

MV: So here, I think it does matter that there's quite a bit of variety within the study of philosophy. I mean, it asks you can ask philosophical questions of every facet of human life. If if philosophy is that reflective impulse to step back and ask why, what's the ultimate explanation of this or that, the ultimate justification of this or that, and you can apply that to kind of any aspect of human life, the natural world, social and political organization. Naturally, you get a kind of wide variety of philosophical inquiries. And I think

that's true when you look at the philosophy curriculum, the standard curriculum of a philosophy major. You'll do ethics, the philosophy of mathematics, epistemology, metaphysics. You will cover a wide range of questions and topics. And I I just think for some of those questions, yes, they're going to appear lofty and abstract. I mean, I think questions about ethics, how we should live, and how we should organize ourselves politically and socially are about as practical and concrete as they get. Questions about the nature of reality and the nature of knowledge, formal logic, those do seem rather abstract, but what the data suggests at a general level is that students who, you know, pursue the course of study that is philosophy with all its variety, topics, and courses you can take end up with skills that are undeniably tangible, useful, employable, sought after, and beneficial.

AR: So this question is less about the study and more about you as thinkers and researchers. As both of you, philosophers yourselves, how has doing this work influenced your own views about the value of what you do? Was there anything in your findings from this study that particularly intrigued you, surprised you, or, I don't know, made you angry?

MP: I frankly was surprised that we found such a clear and consistent set of results as we did. Earlier, we referenced this sort of prior paper where we had first looked at what does the evidence say? And it was really not that promising. It was it was really looking like, yeah, there are these big differences between people who've studied philosophy and people who haven't. But there's also these huge selection effects where they're just already different. So just to give you a sense of this in the earlier paper, we found one of the really well established findings is that philosophy majors or students of philosophy, so that could include just anybody who studied philosophy in the past, tend to score really high on measures of what's called cognitive reflection. So the cognitive reflection test has these questions that are kind of drawing you towards an intuitive but incorrect answer. Like, one of them is if it takes 5 machines 5 minutes to make 5 widgets, how long would it take for 100 machines to make 100 widgets? And a lot of people feel the urge to, I'm 100. But if you stop and think about it for a minute, you go, no. It's 5. Because 5 machines, 5 minutes, it's 1 per minute. Okay. Okay. Each machine makes 1 in 5 minutes. So so philosophy majors and students of philosophy score are just way above average on this kind of measure. I mean, a full standard deviation difference, which is a huge effect size. So what we did is we looked at philosophy 101 students day 1. Is there already a difference between these students and the US population in general? And there was by about a standard deviation. So on day 1 of their first philosophy class, these students are already dramatically better at this on this test than a typical person would be. And so that was that kind of result was had previously made me think it's all selection effect. It was I was getting really, really skeptical that there was anything here. But now that we have this huge

dataset with a much more comprehensive ability to examine these things, I completely turned around. I completely changed my opinion about this in light of these results.

MV: When Michael and I embarked on this collaborative work, which spans not only the college studies, but precollege studies on programs like the National High School Ethics Bowl, I had a hunch, I had a feeling, and I had a whole lot of anecdotal evidence to suggest that philosophy is not only intrinsically valuable, worth doing for its own sake, but also quite useful and conducive to socially and civically important ends. I had a hunch. I had that feeling. I wanted to sort of suspend judgment out of a a sense of humility to not presume that philosophy did indeed have this these effects or uniquely so, at least, because I think one aspect of this that's really worth highlighting is not only whether philosophy has certain kinds of effects, but uniquely or in a privileged way. I think that's maybe the more interesting question because you always have to situate this in terms of the variety of curricular options students face in college where there's quite a bit of liberty to choose and put together your course of study, and then in the precollege years when there's decisions being made for children about what's included, what's on the curricula in the curriculum. And I wanted to suspend judgment on this question. I think I was surprised in a way at how clear the evidence, you know, pointed in favor of philosophy's usefulness. Again, I don't think you can you can or should rest the case for philosophy solely on its usefulness, but I think I was I was so I was surprised about the clarity with which, the case emerged. I think that's absolutely right. I remain convinced, and, of course, none of these investigations, you know, threatened or pertained to the question of is philosophy worth doing for its own sake, but I do remain convinced that it is, and that colleges and universities that are in the business of holistic education, formation of future citizens that have any sense of a liberal arts core to their mission and to their curriculum would be making a big mistake to diminish the role or the place of philosophy or to eliminate it altogether. And I think what we have here is just now the opportunity to make that case from 2 angles. 1, that's about the intrinsic satisfaction, desire, and value of knowing and seeking the truth, and the other that is about the usefulness of this particular course of study among the many, the bewildering number of options available on college campuses and at universities.

AR: Thus far, we've been talking almost exclusively about your study of philosophy education for undergraduate students on university campuses. I understand you're also doing some work with precollege audiences as well. So do you think there are compelling correlate kind of values or skills for younger students? Put slightly differently, would you make some of the same kinds of recommendations to, say, k 12 teachers or administrators?

MP: I think a lot of the same points apply. Yeah. And we have less

data to lean on for pre college students. But, Michael and I have been running some studies and collecting some data, and the results aren't quite in yet. But we've been working with some middle school students and high school students. And, I mean, if anything, it seems like the younger maybe the better in some sense if it if it's about cultivating habits and intellectual traits. The older you get, presumably, the more solidified those tend to become and so the harder to change. So starting early is probably a great idea.

MV: I think in K–12 schools, one way to approach this question is to focus on the problems plaguing education at those levels. You know, post pandemic, certainly even before the pandemic, disengagement is one of the great problems of k to 12 education. Something about the traditional schooling environment leads a good number of students to disengage from the learning process and to lose out on all kinds of benefits from an early period. And I think one thing that is clear, both anecdotally and suggestively from some of our early findings, is that philosophical inquiry, especially for example, about ethical dilemmas, really engaging questions that invite you in and draw on your intuitions and make you feel like you've got something to offer to the conversation, those get students fired up. They are more curious. Their kind of passion for learning is ignited. And if you think of trying to play the long game from k all the way through college, you need, especially among those habits and traits you're cultivating, to make students desire to learn. And I think philosophy is perhaps uniquely able to do that kind of thing.

MP: I think that's a great point. And it actually in my own life and experience, there was a very similar kind of story where I was one of those high school students who just, like, didn't care at all. I had I had no interest in academics at all, basically, and was going to high school for the theater classes and the multimedia class and the auto shop and stuff like that. And and it wasn't until I discovered philosophy in a community college afterwards that I actually became I had, like, a little intellectual renaissance as a as a, like, 18 year old where it was the first time I had ever had to think about a question myself and decide, what do I actually think about this? And there isn't just an answer that's given to me, and I have to memorize it and regurgitate it onto a test in a week or 2. It was empowering and exciting, and I wish it had come a little earlier.

AR: The kind of energy you're describing and the kind of fired up desire to deeply engage with a complicated question, particularly in ethics, sounds a little bit like what an ethics bowl match kind of feels like. Some of the methods and measures that you're interested in from a research standpoint have grown out of some early work assembling a quasi experimental impact study for the National High School Ethics Bowl. Can you tell our audience a little bit about that project?

MV: I think the ethics bowl is also such a great example because it's a structured activity that is designed it's it's very pedagogical design is to create opportunities to practice and cultivate intellectual and civic virtues. And I think, again, this is just a way of highlighting that fact, the developmental point that the earlier years are all the more critical for developing, practicing, modeling, being an intentional community about intellectual and civic virtues. And I think what the genius of ethics bowl is to incentivize and reward the very traits that we care about. It's to kind of play on, especially among young students, their competitive edge, their desire to kind of be engaged and stand out among their peers, but to channel it to really productive ends such that from a very early point, they're kind of practicing the habits of mind and talk that we think are so important to sustaining, you know, democratic life.

MP: Definitely. So the idea here is to do something kind of similar to what we were doing with the undergraduates where we don't have a fully randomized experiment, but we can look at changes over time in intellectual traits for students who are involved in, in this case, the National High School Ethics Bowl Program versus just their peers. Students at the same schools, but who aren't involved in that program. We're looking at things like intellectual humility and open mindedness, the degree to which when you know that you disagree with someone about an important ethical question, how does that color your attitude towards them? Do you feel a little bit of sort of coldness and and distance and and negativity towards them, or do you feel like, no. You know? We we have reasonable disagreements maybe about some question, and that's fine. It's a similar kind of approach where we're hopefully gonna be able to say something about the effect of these kinds of educational programs even in the absence of a, you know, truly randomized experiment.

AR: The first study on the National High School Ethics Bowl you did includes self report measures like an intellectual humility scale as well as performance based testing like the critical reflection test or the more recent over claiming questionnaire. Given a pretty high level of self reported humility among students and the knowledge of the selection effects that you mentioned earlier, How might these kinds of approaches kind of pull at or, I guess, by contrast, complement each other?

MP: It's sort of analogous, I would think, to the standardized testing versus self report thing from the from the college context where, you know, these different kinds of measures have strengths and weaknesses. So on the one hand, it's really great if you have a test where there's right and wrong answers and it's, do you get the right answers? There's just a fact of the matter about whether you got it right, and no sort of desire to present yourself in a positive light is gonna influence that. That's a nice strength. But on the other hand, you might worry some of these measures that are test like, well, you know,

they might be able to assess logical reasoning or or something like that in this very, like, you have this very specific skill, but they don't capture some of the stuff that we think is valuable about studying ethics or philosophy more generally. That's about what you might call intellectual virtue. And so to assess those, you do have to pivot to a kind of self report measure. Yeah. I guess the way I would say think of it is there's pros and cons and to each approach. And so if you if you take just one, then, you know, maybe that's sort of limited evidence. But if you've got both and they have converging lines of evidence, then that presents a much stronger picture than either one individually.

MV: I think this question also invites us again to think about the pedagogical design and goals of activities like the ethics bowl. So one way I interpret, for example, the match scoring criteria of an ethics bowl where judges, a third party, observe students engaging in ethical deliberation, you know, across teams, across schools, is if you read the scoring criteria, they're assessing in part the intellectual virtue demonstrated by one team or another, their constructiveness, but also their humility, their recognition of the limitations of their arguments, their open mindedness, their willingness to change their view in inappropriate circumstances. And I think it invites this interesting methodological question that we have thought a lot about, which is what are some other ways of measuring intellectual virtue, whether in an individual or group context? And the ethics bowl in a way is a kind of test for intellectual virtue in this way of understanding the scoring criteria, for example. And what's nice about it, one of the benefits is you avoid some of those worries of the self report data, but it also gives you information about the students in kind of a real life context, a real world exchange about real world issues. And I think that's just kind of an exciting frontier methodologically that we've been giving a lot of thought to and then I think invites further reflection.

AR: So I'm kinda dying to ask, what's next for this research program? In the course of our conversation here, you've gestured at a handful of future projects, maybe a lot of them actually. So what can we expect next from you two and your collaborators in the public philosophy and ethics education space around the country? With the full disclosure for our audience that I am indeed one of them.

MP: One of the areas I think is gonna be really interesting to look at is to go a little more fine grained. So we've talked a bit about how, you know, philosophy is this incredibly heterogeneous discipline. We can do all kinds of different things and talk about all kinds of different topics. So is there a different kind of impact of studying ethics or focusing on ethics from, you know, logic or metaphysics or something like that, philosophy of science or something. We've got our projects ongoing with the National High School Ethics Bowl, but it'd be cool to contrast that with something that was more focused on a

different area within philosophy. And, also, similarly, kind of looking at different age groups or different populations, we've done this stuff with the high school students and the college students, little bit with middle school. What about, you know, older adults? All kinds of different stuff I think could be done there that would be really interesting to look at.

MV: I think one dimension of the future research has to do with thinking about philosophy as a more or less one off intervention or a sustained course of study. And I kind of think we wanna be in both spaces. So at the precollege level, we are looking not only at sustained engagement with modes of philosophical inquiry, like the National High School Ethics Bowl where students participate for an entire season. They deliberate together. They prepare the cases as a team and participate in the regional competitions. And if they're lucky, they go to divisionals and the national competition. Those are sustained forms of engagement, but we're also looking at one off interventions. Maybe a couple of workshops, maybe just one during the school day where students get exposed to or get an opportunity to kind of activate the same kinds of dispositions that they would if they participated in ethics bowl. Of course, there must be limitations to that kind of one off, two off form of engagement. But as we're thinking about the future of philosophy, it's placed in K to 12 schools, it's placed in colleges and universities, we have to also be thinking about the portability of philosophy as an intervention. You can think as well about general education requirements in colleges and universities where maybe you integrate ethical reflection or critical thinking into a gen ed requirement without the expectation that most people will go on to study philosophy in the sustained way that is to be a major and to accumulate something like 30 credit hours and lots of different courses. And I think there's great value in also kind of making the case for philosophy in that vein as well. So we're engaged in both, and I I think there's reason to be optimistic that philosophy can be impactful even in that more limited form. Of course, I think it would be overly optimistic to think you could get all the benefits of a sustained course of philosophical study just from a one off or two off kind of engagement with it. But, certainly, some of it can be translated and made more portable. And when you think about k twelve schools in particular, I think it's all the more important where there just is not a lot of room in the curriculum with testing pressures, with pressures on teacher bandwidth. There is not a lot of room for adding a whole new class, certainly not for traditional public schools and just for quite a number of k twelve schools. But there often is room for university based researchers and practitioners to bring circumscribed or fairly limited workshops and interventions into schools, to run a few ethics workshops, maybe ultimately to start an ethics bowl team, but even even in that kind of more limited way to to make an impact and to study that impact.

AR: Your emphasis there on these kinds of more limited interactions

and interventions bring me to what I think will be my last question. It strikes me that a large part of our audience, whether they be academic philosophers or maybe practitioners in that ethics education space, are likely interested in learning more about or getting involved with your research. So what kinds of things can they do at various levels, to do so?

MV: Off the bat, if you are an ethics bowl coach, if you already participate in the National High School Ethics Bowl, we very much see the studies underway as as the beginning of ongoing efforts, and we hope you'll get involved. There's kind of an easy avenue to get involved in future years as this study winds down. You know, respond to the calls that will go out to the regional organizers and to the coaches in the ethics bowl network to get involved. If you're not yet or not already in the National High School Ethics Bowl Network, you don't have a team, you're not a coach, I would still encourage you to get in touch with us. If you're thinking about the possibility of philosophy or ethics, for example, in a k twelve context, we would be happy to share our resources, our thinking about ethics workshops, philosophy programming that can be offered in a pre college context. So I would invite educators more generally to get in touch with us.

MP: One other thing that, you know, people can do is if they're interested in this kind of question is is start collecting some data yourself. And so if you teach philosophy classes or you know somebody who does, you can start collecting data and and measuring the kinds of outcomes you think are interesting, whether they be about intellectual virtues or something else. And I'm sure Michael Vazquez and I would both be happy to chat about, you know, ways of doing that and and how to how to do that well. And it's definitely been a learning process for us figuring out how to do this, how to measure the things we care about, and get good data from large numbers of people, and so we'd be happy to share some of our insights.

AR: This has been a conversation with Michael Vazquez and Michael Prinzing, the Michaels, as I like to call them, on their newest paper, does studying philosophy make better thinkers, Which is available now and linked in our show notes. This project is supported by the American Philosophical Association. Gentlemen, thanks so much for coming on the show.

MP: Thank you.

MV: Thanks for having us.

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