Kritikos: Democratizing Philosophy  
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia  
Occidental College  
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Background and Significance

“What valuable project is no one building? Do that.”
This contrarian question has always guided me to make big, life-altering decisions --- this proposal is one of them.

“Philosophy enables individuals to discover the diversity of intellectual currents in the world, to stimulate intercultural dialogue for major contemporary challenges, and to create the intellectual conditions for change.”¹ In Malaysia however, philosophy has been overlooked as a serious and viable educational medium to be integrated into our national curriculum. For example, we lack quality tertiary instruction for philosophy majors in Malaysia; deserving scholars often have to pursue philosophy at western institutions, notably in the US and UK.

In other words, due to an undeveloped national pipeline, philosophy has become inaccessible to people from less privileged backgrounds. Furthermore, getting the necessary buy-in from parents has proven to be difficult due to a lack of consensus of the subject’s nature. These are further exacerbated by Malaysia’s taboo culture of avoiding difficult but important conversations, such as resolving racial tensions and pursuing inclusive political agendas. To achieve lasting peace in my country, philosophical thinking remains to be one of the greatest untapped avenues to encourage productive, critical and necessary dialogues in our pursuit of lasting harmony.

“The word critical comes from the Greek word Kritikos. It means to discern, to make sense of, to recognize and comprehend.”² The long-term pursuit of promoting peace and harmony in a nation as culturally diverse as Malaysia, inspires the intellectual need for a medium where people from various backgrounds can have respectful, meaningful, and stimulating discourses --- philosophy (and philosophical thinking) encourages that space for clear thinking, rigorous argumentation, and critical examination of sophisticated topics. The result would be critically-enriched citizens who can navigate our increasingly complex world with a daringly open mind.

Project Breakdown

My proposal for Kritikos is to democratize philosophical thinking through philosophy exposure. My vision is to spark a new conscience among Malaysians where philosophy becomes less misunderstood and more accessible. Through Kritikos, I seek to empower individuals in terms of intellectual attainment, deepened introspection, and emotional confidence in expressing one’s values and ideas. I believe we can make a tremendous positive difference by encouraging the facilitation of philosophy in high schools and adult professional lives.

Over the three months, from May 15th to August 15th 2021, we are going to run three parallel (in-person or virtual) workshops with three target demographics who can benefit most from philosophical thinking. We will curate content based on the relevance of learning outcomes and topics for these demographics. We will be engaging:

1) **Local high school students** from a mix of public and private schools located in the city of Kuala Lumpur. Through word of mouth, we will reach out to headmasters and guidance counselors as the point of contact to establish interest and facilitate logistics. There will be a curated curriculum lasting 10 sessions in total, one session per week. If in-person, mentors are assigned a school and will meet registered students, once a week, with logistical details ironed out individually with the schools. Refreshments will be served as incentive to students. If virtual, we will conduct our sessions via Zoom with a mentor assigned to a deliberately mixed group of students that meet weekly. Electronic flyers will be distributed to schools.

2) **Educators** from a balanced mix of public, private and international high schools; with preference to educators of Form 4 (Year 10) and Form 5 (Year 11) students interested in facilitating philosophical enquiries. There will be a curated curriculum lasting 10 virtual sessions in total, one session per week. We will have a more webinar style delivery via Zoom with breakout rooms that are facilitated by mentors to facilitate discussion, address concerns and establish rapport. The short-term expectation being educators establishing an after-school club to facilitate effective introductory philosophy lessons.

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3) **Adults (or parents)** who are interested in getting exposure to philosophical topics and equipping themselves with metacognitive skills from philosophical thinking. If in-person, there will be a bi-weekly occurring workshop, 5 workshops in total. Topics will have a stronger emphasis on transferrable thinking skills and more direct application of wisdom to practical living, work and leadership. Light refreshments are served as incentive. If virtual, we will have a more webinar style delivery via Zoom as above.

We define success with three key performance indicators (for both in-person and virtual instruction):
1) The retaining number of high school students by the end of the program, of teachers/schools in our educator upskilling workshop, and of adult participants in our workshop geared towards adults.
2) The number of registrants in each respective demographic / workshop.
3) The number of school partnerships (via headmasters) that are willing to engage further (post-summer).

We will conclude with a strong request for filling up surveys, providing feedback and testimonials.

**Secured Partnerships**
1) **PPFPM**: The representative body to identify high school talents for participation in the International Philosophy Olympiad. I am personally one of the board members, that is composed of influential figures in education and a range of prominent philosophy academics. **PPFPM will supply skilled instructors who are fluent in Bahasa Malay and to design the most effective teaching methods.**
2) **MyPhilSoc**: Founded in 2017, Malaysian Philosophy Society is a non-governmental organization aimed at spreading practical philosophy to improve qualities of lives and society. **MyPhilSoc will assist promotional efforts and content collaboration.**
3) **EA Malaysia**: Effective Altruism Malaysian Chapter engages with the local community to share ideas and look at ways for how to do good more effectively. Their work involves community building, career coaching, promoting effective giving and local cause prioritization research. **EA Malaysia will assist on data evaluation and strategizing areas Kritikos can improve on effectiveness.**

**Sustainability and Posterity**
After our initial 3-month pilot program in the summer of 2021, we will spend till the end of September to gather engagement responses, evaluate our demographic data and interrogate on ways to improve. Any leftover resources such as premium Zoom accounts and developed teaching materials will be shared with our partners.

Our following tentative milestones include:
1) Embarking on our next phase to establish a high school club chapter system beginning with a mix of selected Malaysian public, private and international schools. We will adopt a randomized control trial on determining the most effective way to encourage sustained engagement for after-school clubs.
2) Establishing a sponsored Philosophy Fellowship program for driven high school students and Malaysian educators to deepen individuals with high interest-alignment, on their engagement with philosophy.
3) Collaborating with partners to create philosophical programming throughout November, in conjunction with World Philosophy Day on November 18th; a feat never been done before in Malaysia.
4) Work closer with EA Malaysia to highlight philosophy in action, where they scale the message of effective altruism, provide high-impact career guidance and promote more effective decision-making.

Having done a pilot philosophical program at this point, we can engage with schools and showcase to educators to sponsor our future programming. I don’t intend for Kritikos to rely on donations as a primary source of funding.

**About Myself and Related Experiences:**
I will be Founder and Head Coordinator of Kritikos. I am a sophomore intending to double major in Philosophy and Comparative Studies in Literature and Culture, and minoring in Cognitive Science. I represented Malaysia for our inaugural participation in the 2018 Philosophy Olympiad and made history winning an Honorable Mention; I trained intensively under 4 local philosophy mentors for 5 consecutive months after winning the regional round. I was invited by PPFPM to deliver 2 lectures to a class of university students, on Nietzsche and an overview of philosophy respectively. I delivered 4 webinar lectures for PPFPM in 2020: on Deleuze & Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*, Confucius’ *Analects*, Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and Martin Heidegger’s *Questions Concerning Technology*. I was an invited speaker for the Malaysian Philosophy Society’s workshop on *Camus and COVID-19*; 110 participants from around the world registered and around 60 stayed throughout. Lastly, I co-founded the Philosophy Club in SJIIM where I organized an inaugural Philosophy Month to inspire interest in younger students, and made a permanent Philosophy corner in the high school library with 55 introductory books.