

Book Reviews

Marinoff, Lou, & Ikeda, Daisaku (2012). *The Inner Philosopher*. Cambridge, MA: Dialogue Path Press

The Inner Philosopher: Conversations on Philosophy's Transformative Power

Beatrice Popescu^{*a}

[a] EJOP Founding Editor; University of Bucharest, Bucharest, Romania.

Europe's Journal of Psychology, 2013, Vol. 9(3), 640–642, doi:10.5964/ejop.v9i3.666

Received: 2013-07-27. Accepted: 2013-07-27. Published (VoR): 2013-08-30.

*Corresponding author at: 4-6 Bucur Street, Bucharest, Romania, 040292. E-mail: beatrice.popescu@ejop.org



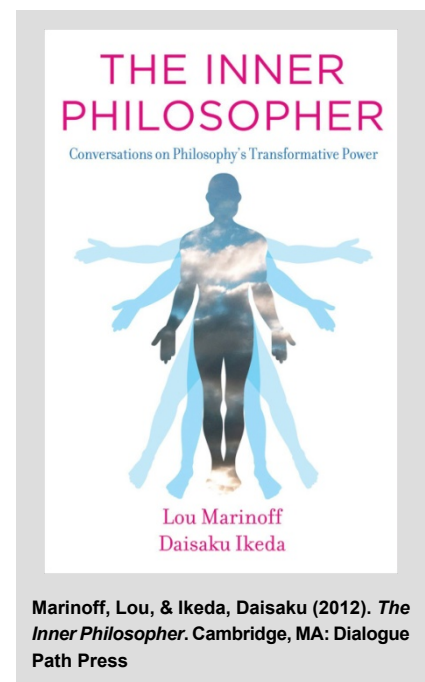
This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Lou Marinoff is professor and chair of philosophy at The City College of New York. He is founding president of the American Philosophical Practitioners Association. Marinoff has collaborated with global think tanks and leadership forums, including the Aspen Institute and the World Economic Forum in Davos. He is the internationally bestselling author of *Plato Not Prozac*, translated into 27 languages.

Daisaku Ikeda is president of the Soka Gakkai International, a lay Buddhist organization with twelve million members worldwide. He writes and lectures extensively on Buddhism, humanism, and global ethics. More than fifty of his dialogues have been published, including conversations with Mikhail Gorbachev, Linus Pauling, and Arnold Toynbee.

Personal growth through philosophic practice is the subject of Lou Marinoff's latest work, *The Inner Philosopher*, co-authored with renowned Buddhist thinker and leader Daisaku Ikeda. Students of western philosophy or Buddhism who are exposed to the two scholars' wisdom can witness they are determined to show that anyone can use valuable philosophical knowledge to improve their well-being.

In the sixteen vibrant conversations using a dialogue format, Dr. Lou Marinoff and Daisaku Ikeda delve passionately into the traditional questions of philosophy in a manner the readers find captivating and engaging. These essential yet entertaining conversations emphasize that philosophical questions are contested and open-ended. The characters in each dialogue advocate compelling answers to questions on religion, ethics, personal identity, op-



timism, purpose and connection, process of healing, peace and humanism, life and death, suffering and joy. Even though the answers may reflect personal opinions grounded in years of introspection, teaching, tutoring, mentoring, the two partners seem to share similar views on philosophy's transformative power, either Oriental or Western.

Philosophic positions are presented with clarity and persuasiveness, so that readers can appreciate all sides of an issue and make their own choices. *The Inner Philosopher* provides the necessary background for further study while vividly portraying the back-and-forth argument that is essential to the philosophical method.

The sixteen conversations, which began back in 2003, cover topics such as the distinction between life and death, healing, technological alienation of the consumer society, the practice of virtue or women's involvement in the peace culture, while addressing many of the profound social problems that flood Western societies: bullying, drug abuse, the worker exploitation.

Each of *The Inner Philosopher's* discussions includes references to ancient philosophers from both Western and Eastern traditions. Despite the differences in their metaphysical worldviews, Marinoff believes that both can contribute to the development of wisdom. Marinoff states: "Philosophy, notably Buddhist and Greek philosophy, is the remedy for what the Japanese call 'lifestyle maladies'—widespread cultural problems afflicting affluent nations. Philosophy has a valuable role to play in treating culturally-rooted epidemics, including obesity, bullying, hedonism, and consumerism."

In Conversation One, the role of philosophy in everyday life is emphasized. Readers are advised not to look at philosophy as something divorced from their lives or the exclusive property of professional thinkers, but to apply it broadly in daily life as a source of 'great life of hope illuminating the future of humanity' as Daisaku Ikeda magnificently expresses.

Philosophy and psychology both can provide a source of robust optimism. (Conversation Four) Optimism in Martin Seligman's positive psychology is regarded as hope, not the absence of suffering. As Mahatma Gandhi, Gorbachev, or Mandela, incorrigible optimists are people who encountered a lot of upheavals in their lives but despite circumstances they managed to cultivate hope and overcome all challenges with serenity. This is what Marinoff regards as the ability to 'convert poison into medicine' revealed in Nagarjuna's teachings in *The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*. Epictetus, as a precursor of cognitive behavior therapy, has also acknowledged that men are disturbed not by things, but by the principles and notions which they form concerning things. Marinoff concludes rhetorically: "Is this not positive psychology plus positive philosophy in a nutshell?"

In 'The Healing power of dialogue' (Conversation Nine), Marinoff examines from philosophical viewpoint the therapeutic alliance, which is seen in psychotherapy as a key factor for a successful outcome. As Dr. Irvin Yalom observed in the most of his case studies of existential therapy and as Marinoff also noticed in his own philosophical practice, the power of dialogue itself, regardless of the method or the theoretical orientation, has the ultimate healing effect. "Thus the essence of healing, whether philosophical or psychoanalytic, seems to reside in empathic dialogue" says Marinoff.

A particularly interesting view is shared by both dialogue partners on higher education. In Conversation Thirteen (*The Arts and the Human Spirit*), Daisaku Ikeda criticizes the continuous strive of the twentieth century universities to produce 'talented animals' as Nichiren Buddhism identifies these products of a strictly pragmatic educational

system. The current economic crisis may have even been, in Marinoff's view, the result of the educational systems that have failed to instill their students with humanistic virtues.

Through this lively and full of wisdom dialogue, Lou Marinoff and Daisaku Ikeda invite us to unlock our 'Inner Philosopher' in the quest to find answers to our most ardent questions, perhaps even to the 'Big questions' of life. It is not the first time Lou Marinoff urges us not to accept victimhood as the by-product of a modern life. This book is another courageous attempt to teach his readers in an accessible and entertaining language how to use centuries of wisdom in order to answer these essential questions and increase their sense of wellbeing. While specialized philosophers in the academia may consider this book too philosophically simplistic, the book is targeted to literate individuals that seek guidance on a series of existential matters and may not need established forms of psychotherapy or psychological counseling. *The Inner Philosopher* is a precious self-help philosophical guide that should be read with a highlighter in hand by everyone interested in personal development. At the beginning of their dialogue, Marinoff shares with Ikeda: "Our challenge is to reclaim philosophy from the hands of the pure theoreticians - whose cogitations are abundant but whose applications are scarce - and return it to ordinary people". By writing this book they certainly faced up to the challenge, in equally thought-provoking and entertaining way as Allain de Botton does it in his essays.

The Inner Philosopher is published by Dialogue Path Press, the publishing arm of the Ikeda Center (<http://www.ikedacenter.org/>). The Ikeda Center, founded by Daisaku Ikeda, is an institute for peace, learning, and dialogue located in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The Center's books have been used in more than 800 college and university courses. In addition to *The Inner Philosopher*, Dialogue Path Press's titles include *Creating Waldens: An East-West Conversation on the American Renaissance* and *Into Full Flower: Making Peace Cultures Happen*.