

Maughn Rollins Gregory and Megan Jane Laverty, editors

## *Gareth Matthews: The Child's Philosopher*

London: Routledge, 2022

REVIEWED BY STEPHEN KEKOA MILLER

Oakwood Friends School

I had been eagerly awaiting the edited volume on the work of Gareth Matthews since I first heard that it was underway. As someone who has been highly influenced by Matthews but is still far from an expert on his whole oeuvre, I really looked forward to both a full-career context and access to some of his more obscure works. This book delivers and then some!

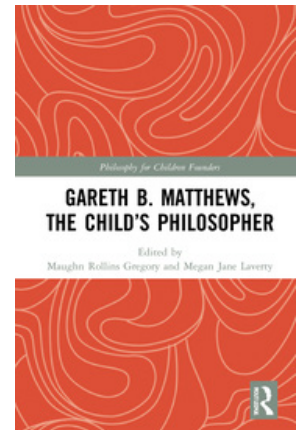
For someone like me who never got to meet Gary Matthews but knows many people who worked with him, one of the most moving parts of this book is the stories, from the opening one by Stanley Cavell to the afterword by Jana Mohr Lone. Everyone who writes in this book who knew him makes a point of sharing these stories. Not only do they make us like him a lot, but they also help us to see his work with children and philosophy in a different light. We learn a great deal from accounts of how he interacted with kids, his own students and colleagues, from how he crafted questions and how he brought out astounding insights from young thinkers. For those of us who work with younger students, it certainly makes us take a breath and wonder if we could ever be so natural and engaging as these stories make him out to be.

First, let's look at the structure of the text. Gregory and Laverty have divided the book thematically into five parts: philosophy and children's literature, children's philosophical thinking, the Socratic teacher, philosophy of developmental psychology and the philosophy of childhood. Each part consists of an essay which gives an overview of that particular aspect of Matthews' work while also generally offering critical insights into where that field has gone since Matthews' death in 2011.

These essays are uniformly fair-minded and effective at situating Matthews' work with other

thinkers in that particular area. Their critiques, too, seemingly suggest how excited Matthews would be to see some of the new work being done in these fields, some of which he could be credited with creating. Karen Muris' essay focuses on children's literature, describing Matthews' appealing focus on philosophical whimsy, but also showing how potentially politically problematic some children's literature is when suggesting how "natural" children must act (52).

Stephanie Burdick-Shepherd and Cristina Cammarano's discussion of the child as philosopher in Matthews is particularly delightful; here, they show how Matthews emphasized the role of children as colleagues who could forward the aims of philosophy itself. In citing Matthews' wonderful call to "cultivate the *incipient* grandparent in each of us" (98), they ask us to extend this idea and to think about issues of positionality that may prevent true engagement with philosophy and also to extending the chances to do intergenerational philosophy . . . even with ourselves at different times in our lives! Peter Shea takes on the often equivocated concept of Socratic teaching. Here, we get to see Matthews engage with Plato and Aristotle in earnest. Shea ends up making us ask the question Matthews didn't answer fully, "Should philosophy be done differently at different ages?" (139). Jennifer Glaser takes on the question of developmental psychology, in particular Matthews' critiques of Piaget and Kohlberg. She ends up suggesting that Matthews leaves the concept of Moral Imagination underdeveloped (180). Finally, Walter Omar Kohan and Claire Cassidy explore the field Matthews kind of invented, the philoso-



phy of childhood. Here they help us focus on what Matthews called the “five desiderata for . . . any adequate and defensible philosophy of childhood” (216) before ending by sharing a host of very different perspectives developed since or concurrently with Matthews that he didn’t address, all of which look at childhood separately from “a stage in human life” (227).

Another important aspect of this book as a whole is to give readers a sense of the outsize role Matthews plays in the movement to bring philosophy to children. In particular, it helps us to see both the similarities and differences with some of his contemporaries, especially Matthew Lipman and Ann Margaret Sharp. Laverty and Gregory give a very helpful introduction to the book that lays out the similarities and differences clearly. In doing so, it certainly inspired me to look again at their earlier, similarly arranged volume on Ann Margaret Sharp.

There will always be room to question what’s in and what’s not in a book on someone who had such a long career that spanned so many seemingly different areas. I, for one, was hoping to learn more about Matthews’ work on Augustine, especially since he had so much to say about children. While there are two pages in the Burdick-Shepherd and Cammarano essay on Augustine’s *The Teacher*, there isn’t much else on this. Matthews’ work on ancient philosophy, particularly his work showing how much of interest we can find there about children and childhood is here mostly confined to what he found in Plato and Aristotle. Of course, Matthews wrote about philosophy of lan-

guage, philosophy of religion, philosophy of mind, philosophy of life and death, metaphysics in addition to ancient and medieval philosophy. It would be unreasonable to see material on all of this, but those areas that intersected with his work on children and childhood would have been nice. This critique simply shows how delightful the rest of the book is, however; I wanted more when I got to the end.

This book is very highly recommended. I think it’d be a great introduction to Matthews’ work, but it will also be frequently referred to by people already in the field. I found much new material in this book, but I also enjoyed re-reading some of my favorite articles. Matthews’ calls for us to start taking the contributions of young philosophers seriously and as a result to make a point of spending time with them doing philosophy still rings true, but sadly is still largely unheeded. We still need much work to further his first steps towards a robust philosophy of childhood. Our school systems, social structures and parenting manuals still assume a deficit model of childrens’ cognition. We still treat childrens’ ideas condescendingly. All of this shows why Gareth Matthews is still as timely as ever, as needed as ever. Make sure to read this book, even if you already know Matthews’ work. I know I’m thankful for this volume for the chance it gave me to reconnect with this material. It inspired me and gave me impetus to work even harder to carry out the mission of helping to create spaces for children to do philosophy, and to be heard when they do. ■

**Stephen Kekoa Miller** has taught *Philosophy and Religious Studies* at Oakwood Friends School and Marist College in Poughkeepsie, New York for 19 years.