

3:AM Magazine

:: Article

Celebrating Philosophy in Monaco

By Steve Light.



When we think of important centres of philosophy we have not hitherto thought of Monaco. Yet, because of the passion for philosophy on the part of Charlotte Casiraghi, daughter of Princess Caroline and granddaughter of Grace Kelly, philosophy has now established an admirable and happy presence in the Principality. Moreover, the circumstances that have led to this presence are the outcome of that always very happy and wonderful event in life that is the happy and beautiful *coincidence* albeit that in the present case, alas, this happy denouement was initially impelled by a grievous event.

When Charlotte Casiraghi was four years old, her father, Stefano Casiraghi, was tragically killed in a boating accident. Consequently, her mother, having lost her husband decided to move the family to Fontainebleau in order to create a more private and serene upbringing for her children away from the celebrity and paparazzi in big cities. And so it was that Charlotte Casiraghi, in her last year of studies at the Lycee Francois Couperin, encountered the philosopher, Robert Maggiori, who was the professor of Charlotte's philosophy class. And Robert Maggiori's teaching led Charlotte Casiraghi to fall in love with philosophy. Yes, the initial moment leading to this lovely coincidence was a tragic one, and the happy coincidence in question cannot provide solace for the initial tragic loss, yet we can feel and know the charm carried in the happy coincidence in question.

Of course, for those who know Robert Maggiori, the fact that one of his students—indeed many of his students—should fall in love with philosophy does not come as a surprise. Robert Maggiori is one of the great philosophy professors of our time just as was his teacher at the Sorbonne, Vladimir Jankelevitch, in his time, and just as were those such as Alain and Leon Brunshvicg in the days when Jankelevitch was a student in the

years immediately following WWI. Maggiori was a student Jankelevitch especially esteemed and admired (Jankelevitch was one of the greatest and most original of 20th Century philosophers) and Jankelevitch's 1980 expanded and revised three-volume version of one of his major works, [*Le je-ne-sais-quoi et le presque-rien*](#) (The I-know-not-what and the almost-nothing), which originally appeared in 1957, bore a dedication to Robert Maggiori. Certainly Jankelevitch was one of the great teachers of philosophy and Robert Maggiori in his marvelous little book, [*La metier de critique: journalisme et philosophie*](#) (The craft of criticism: journalism and philosophy), which describes and presents his practice for almost forty years now as the principle reviewer of books of philosophy (and books in the human sciences) for the newspaper, *Liberation*, writes that "teaching philosophy is among the most beautiful of professions".

In his teaching Robert Maggiori combines in great virtuosity the most supple and incisive of presentations, analyses, and depictions together with an ethical and ethico-pedagogical attention and tenderness whereby he is ever and always in tune with the many specificities and textures in the thinking and perceiving of his students.

Consequently he is ever able in his expository and explanatory discourse to create in an always collaborative effort just that meeting point of possible comprehension on the part of his students with the contours and layers of his pedagogical portraits of concept and idea and their various constellations and figures. All this to also say that Robert Maggiori is a philosopher par excellence of generosity at once in his writing and philosophical works and above all in his pedagogical practice.

Furthermore, his classroom teaching is always imbued in his journalistic practice with *Liberation*. To bring philosophy and all its dense and difficult notions to a general public is not an easy task and it is all the more difficult because complicated ideas and extensive tomes must be presented in the very short and condensed space of a newspaper article. In addition Maggiori always and properly wants to present not just the ideas of a book but the biographical features of the book's author and the historical and socio-historical conditions and geographies of author and book so that he is presenting a preliminarily extensive and intensive picture. And time and time again in article after article, year after year, decade after decade, he has done just this and always with such admirable clarity and virtuosity. Many of these articles have been collected over the years in wonderful books that he has brought forth and in this sense in the wonderful gifts he has given us all.

Yes, it makes so much sense, indeed, how could it have been otherwise, that Charlotte Casiraghi would fall in love with philosophy and develop a passion to pursue the philosophical life. And yet if Charlotte Casiraghi fell in love with philosophy it is not just because of Robert Maggiori's teaching but—and even more and this is the paramount truth and resonance in all good and happy pedagogy—because of an already existing desire and passion for learning, learning *in life*. What she already brought to his teaching is what, precisely, made this teaching in all its most admirable affects and effects, in all its admirable modalities and qualities, possible and *actual*. Life! Philosophy if it is to truly be a vocation of the mind must necessarily be an existential vocation, the vocation of our living immediacies and trajectories.

Following her year in Robert's class Charlotte Casiraghi pursued the two year study course for preparation for the Ecole Normale Supérieure entrance exam and then pursued university studies in philosophy at the Sorbonne. But throughout these studies and ever thereafter her dialogue with Robert Maggiori continued ever renewed and ever invigorated. And so we could say that just as Robert Maggiori brought to Jankelevitch his own beautiful aptitude for philosophy and for the philosophical life and quest so to did Charlotte Casiraghi bring to Robert Maggiori her own aptitude and talent for philosophy and for the development of her own admirable philosophical culture and quest. And in this conjuncture she conceived the idea of bringing philosophy to Monaco and to its publics. Enlisting Robert Maggiori and also two other philosophers, Joseph Cohen and Raphael Zagury-Orly, a plan was devised whereby once each month from October to April several philosophers or thinkers in other fields would be assembled to give presentations on various topics within a theme chosen for that year. Following this in June a two day conference would be held with a larger gathering of philosophers and thinkers and also a book prize would be awarded from an initial list of nominations of books appearing during the year. And the theme chosen for the first year, 2015-2016, of the newly established [*Philosophical Meetings of Monaco*](#) was, perfectly, *Love*. Various topics of discussion included "Being in Love", "Jealousy", "Betrayal", "Self-Love and Love of Another", "Can We Forgive Everything", "Loving One's Neighbor as Oneself", and "The Gift of Love". And the year-ending two day conference in its various themes exhibited the expansiveness and relevance of philosophy in all its realms, i.e. "Philosophy and Children," "Philosophy and Dance," "Philosophy and Sports," "Philosophy and

Music,” “Philosophy and Theater,” and “Philosophy and Cinema”. The conference was dedicated to the memory of Umberto Eco who was due to speak at the April session but, alas, passed away just prior to that. Sadly there were to be further commemorations since two of the speakers from the first year, the philosopher, Ruwen Ogien, and the psychoanalyst and philosopher, Anne Dufourmontelle, passed away subsequently, Anne Dufourmantelle’s death the result of a successful effort to rescue children caught in a rip tide at the beach, but which effort led to her own drowning. Courage and generosity, cardinal virtues in any philosophical or existential “treatise of virtues”, were translated directly by Anne Dufourmantelle.

In the second year of the Philosophical Meetings the theme was “The Body” and the year-end conference topic was devoted to “Conversation” in its various temporalities and forms. And in the present year the theme has been so pertinently, “Responding to Violence”. As for the book prize, in the first year the philosopher, Vinciane Despret, won for her book [*Au bonheur des morts: recit de ceux qui restent*](#) (Happy are the dead: A narrative for those who remain)” and in the second year Emanuele Coccia won for his book, [*La vie des plantes*](#) (The Life of Plants) whereas Jean-Claude Milner won the associated Prize of the Principality for the body of his lifetime work. Additionally, various lectures and talks have been collected together in a print journal that has now reached its third number.

Robert Maggiori writes in presenting the project to the public: “No one is foreign to philosophy simply because the problems which philosophy treats are those that traverse every human life: love, justice, truth, time, desire, power, technology, freedom, the nature and role of society, art, etc. The Philosophical Meetings of Monaco have as their ambition to create an unprecedented ‘place’ in which philosophy can find its home, giving thereby hospitality to French thinkers and those of other countries who today nourish philosophy with their research and in this way assemble a large public to which philosophy can bring the necessary tools and forms of reflection necessary to understand the world, society, people other than ourselves but also ourselves as well. Consequently in organizing a series of lectures and colloquia, in bringing together the most eminent personalities of philosophy such as it is practiced today in France and in Europe, and what is more in including students in high schools and younger students as well the Philosophical Meetings of Monaco aims to become one of the most important occasions for the elaboration, communication, and sharing of philosophy in its contemporary elaboration.”

It is an ambitious project, of course, and it is now, happily, in its third year and has seen its audiences’ grow and its range and activities increase. Indeed, it has expanded beyond Monaco to Paris where from time to time lectures and colloquia have been held at the Paris Institute of Oceanography. Certainly Charlotte Casiraghi has had access to considerable resources in Monaco and Mont Blanc is the official sponsor of the Philosophical Meetings and various important institutions in Monaco and in France serve as partners in support. But better that resources for such an admirable project be available as opposed to being provided for much less worthy projects.

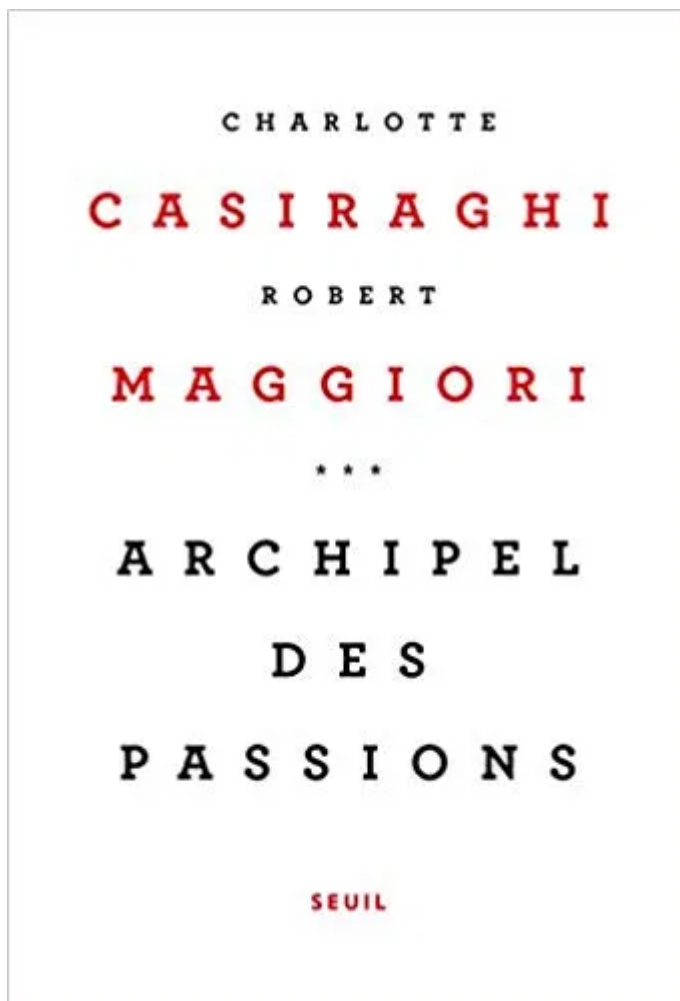
But there is more to praise. The Philosophical Meetings of Monaco have from the very start been mindful that philosophy is relevant and important to those of all ages including students in their youngest of school years. On several occasions the philosopher, Edwige Chirouter, who has been at the forefront of engagement in a project to bring philosophy to children and indeed the youngest of children, has given talks in Monaco and Paris sessions. She is it should be noted a leading member in an enterprise that UNESCO has established in relation to the bringing together of philosophy and children. Additionally the film of Fanny Clement, *Ce n’est qu’un debut* (This is only the beginning) devoted as it is to the presentation of very young children in engagement with philosophy and its pedagogy, indeed with children as young as four years old, has been shown under the auspices of the Philosophical Meetings and has been the theme of a conference involving one of the producers of the film, Cilvy Aupin, along with Robert Maggiori, Joseph Cohen, Edwige Chirouter, and Jean-Philippe Vinci. The film with subtitles is already making its way to other countries and it is to be hoped that it will be shown in Anglophone countries.

In this regard, the Philosophical Meetings have been devoted to an outreach program to high school students in Monaco. On a regular basis philosophical speakers visit high school philosophy classes for philosophical discussions with the students. As the program of the Philosophical Meetings states: “[A program] will be established in the high schools of the Principality whereby each month an invited philosopher will meet with high school students and present at their school a talk on a theme decided upon in collaboration with the students. In this manner meetings of rare intensity can take place animated by a desire for investigation and questioning and for comprehension in a most vigorous and unconstrained way. These meetings can, thereby,

give rise to an authentic and emphatic enthusiasm for philosophical thinking, dialogue, and transmission in their most vivid and vivacious instantiations.”

Monaco like France is unique in that philosophy has long been taught in the final year of high school which is unfortunately not the case in the United States. Moreover if in Italy students in the specialized Classical High School (Liceo Classico) study philosophy for three years, yet these high schools are quite limited in their enrollments whereas if in France only students on the Baccalaureat track take the philosophy course, nonetheless the number of students studying philosophy is significantly larger. It should be hoped that at some point the teaching of philosophy in high school might be something that could begin to take place in the U.S. although it would in many respects be marred by the complete dominance of analytical philosophy where-in philosophy is considerably reduced and constricted in its vitalities and vivacities. Elsewhere, in Ireland, for example, just a couple of years ago philosophy became a subject available in high schools, all though it is not required but merely an elective so that the number of students reached remains quite small.

Vladmir Jankelevitch wrote that we can very well “live without philosophy *but not so well.*” Yet we could counter that we can live without philosophy and still live just, ethical, and happy lives, indeed that we could still live well, but it is also true that philosophy, when it is undertaken and lived in its better forms, can very well, and happily, enhance life and all its ethical and socio-existential compartments. Living well is not a necessary outcome of living with philosophy but no doubt it is an ever happy and available potentiality.



Enhancement! In this third and thus far most fecund year of the Philosophical Meetings of Monaco, Robert Maggiori and Charlotte Casiraghi have also published a book written together, [*Archipels des Passions*](#), which is the result of the aforementioned [dialogue](#) they have carried out since they first encountered one another.

Life is passion, life is affection. Doubtless passions can bring difficulties to our lives and as Robert Maggiori says we can certainly live passions in a way damaging to our lives and the lives of others but, as he sagaciously adds, without passion life cannot be lived well at all. The *manner and mode* by which we live our passions and affections, that is ever and always the key—and in this sense, precisely, a manner and mode of truth. Philosophy is not indispensable in helping us find a way to live in the best and most just of ways ethically and existentially, but in its proper and supple manners it can be a boon and benefit. In their book

Robert Maggiori and Charlotte Casiraghi present forty entries, each writing about half of the entries on their own but always with the other's voice and thoughts in mind, at once in agreement and disagreement, and in relation to which the differing aptitudes of the one and the other come together in syntheses of greater aptitude, insight, notion, and, if you will, truth. And so they write of joy, sadness, adoration, disaffection, love, jealousy, malevolence, kindness, ennui, cruelty, benevolence, guilt, pity, fraternity, and so on and so forth. The book is not only a little treatise of passions but is also a history of passions, since these states of our soul are ever in transformation and tumult, ensconced as they always are in the existential vibrato of our lived-trajectories and tribulations. As Charlotte Casiraghi writes, each of our passions always "puts us to the test, a test which, however, can enable us to emerge stronger, more fortified, more able." Each entry then is a modulation of their dialogue and in this sense the book, in its assemblage is a book of—beautiful affection—*friendship*. And the Philosophical Meetings of Monaco are and seek to be the ever renewed friendship of thinking and life, of the thinking of the good and of the good of every ethico-existential and socio-existential action, gratitude, and *generosity*.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

[Steve Light](#), a basketball point-guard following upon Nate Archibald, Pete Maravich, and Willie Somerset—and akin as well to Steve Nash, Chris Paul, Stephen Curry, and Earl Boykins—is also a philosopher and poet. He is the translator of Jean Grenier's [Islands: Lyrical Essays](#) and his translations of poems (and in instances essays) by the Italian poets Pasolini, Solmi, Ungaretti, Quasimodo, Saba, and Carraba, the French poets Jean-Baptiste Para and Alain Suied, as well as Rilke, Mandelstam, Tsvetaeva, and Pasternak have appeared in the U.S., Canada, and the U.K. His own writings have appeared in the U.S., Canada, Jamaica, the U.K., Australia, France, Italy, Japan, Russia, Spain, Germany, China, Kenya, Argentina, and Brazil.