

# Philosophy is Dangerous

DON'T CUT BACK ON CRITICAL THINKING AT LCC

**M**y name is Caroline Lundquist; students call me Dr. L. I teach ethics and critical thinking at Lane Community College. But I may not teach them next year. Philosophy at Lane is on the chopping block.

No one likes hypocrisy; we feel indignant when we learn that our elected officials live in ways that are inconsistent with their professed values. But we are all susceptible to it. This is at least as true of institutions as it is of individuals. We might plaster a campus with posters that say “Think Critically,” for example, while proposing that we eliminate the discipline that offers courses called — are you ready for this? — critical thinking.

The sad truth is that we are all capable of behaving in ways that are inconsistent with our own values, especially when times get tough. But we do not *have to*.

The history of philosophy tells us stories of people who lived according to their values, and indeed were willing to die for them — people like Socrates. Of course, we only hear Socrates’s side of the story, and perhaps we think him wise as a result, but we ought also to acknowledge the wisdom of those Athenians who sentenced him to death. They have something to teach us, too ...

You see, a great deal has changed between that time and now, but there are some things that have not changed, and this is one of them: *philosophy is dangerous*. The Athenians understood this, hence to kill Socrates — to kill philosophy — was indeed most prudent.

Philosophy is dangerous, because:

It teaches us that there is a difference between a fact and an opinion, and renders nonsensical the distinction between facts and “alternative facts.”

It teaches us to require evidence in support of factual claims.

It teaches us to require reasons in support of opinions, whether aesthetic, ethical, or political.

It teaches us to demand persuasive reasons for accepting and abiding by policies and rules.

It teaches us to understand the difference between prejudice and sound judgment, and between reasoning and rationalization.

It makes us harder to dupe, harder to manipulate and harder to command.

It corrupts the youth, by allowing— indeed encouraging— the youthful inclination to ask “Why?”

It teaches us that care for the mind, for the soul, for character and for personal integrity matter more than the pursuit of profit.

It envisions a better world than the one we have, and instills in us discontent with the latter.

It teaches us to exercise the principle of charity; to assume the intelligence and the goodwill of the people with whom we disagree, such that we recognize our shared humanity, and think ourselves capable of solving shared problems together, within and for our own communities.

It inoculates us against the divide-and-conquer strategies that have ever been popular among tyrants.

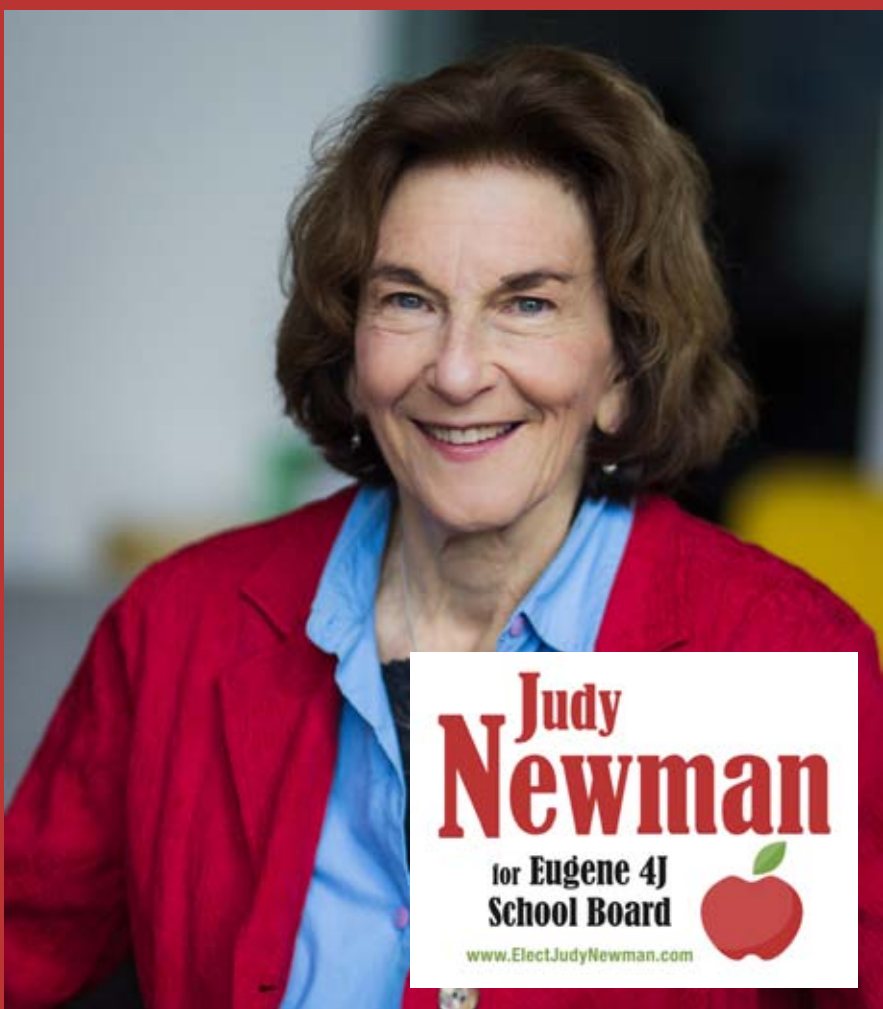
Philosophy is dangerous, and that is precisely why our students need it.

LCC is a community college. Our student body is a cross-section of the most vulnerable populations in our community. Our students are people who have not had the world handed to them. They will have to fight systemic injustices — misogyny, racism, xenophobia, classism, ableism, ageism — at every turn. They will have to learn to navigate systems that have been constructed — whether intentionally or through incompetence or thoughtlessness — to disenfranchise them and prevent their flourishing.

Philosophical education *arms* them against this world that they did not create. Time and again I have seen our students take up these arms and use them in self-defense; they are doing it right now, as they fight to save a discipline that they understand the value of.

By some accounts, Socrates died in name of preserving democracy. We appreciate the irony of this view. Philosophy is dangerous because it is the *praxis* of a genuine democracy, the kind of democracy most of us wish to resuscitate. As a college, and as a country, we cannot afford to sentence it to death. We need critical thinking and ethics now more than ever. I ask nothing more of our LCC Board of Education than this: Resist the urge to jettison your values — the values of our institution — simply because times are tough. Think critically, and find a better way.

*Caroline Lundquist teaches philosophy at Lane Community College.*



**“I will continue to do what I have done for decades, fight for all our children and our public schools.”**

— Judy Newman

Founder and Director of ECCares, reached 20,000 special needs children  
 Successfully lobbied in Salem for millions more in education funding  
 Faculty at UO College of Ed for 35 years  
 A proven champion for all children

**ENDORSED ACROSS THE COMMUNITY:**

Oregon School Employees Association, Democratic Party of Lane County  
 Mayor Lucy Vinis, Former Mayor Kitty Piercy

**Education Leaders:**

Nancy Golden, George Russell, Paul Duchin, Merri Steele, Jennifer Geller,  
 Alicia Hayes and Mary Walston

**State Leaders:**

Rep Phil Barnhart, Rep Paul Holvey, Rep John Lively, Sen Lee Beyer, Sen James Manning

**Community Leaders:**

Sabrina Parsons, Laura Illig, Marshall Peter, Greg Rikhoff, Paulina Romo, Val Hoyle, David Saez

**Children’s Advocates:**

Pilar Bradshaw, Val Close, Minalee Saks, Annie Soto, Joy Marshall

Learn why hundreds of community leaders endorse Judy  
**Visit [electjudynewman.com](http://electjudynewman.com)**

**“I’ve known Judy for 20 years. She has worked tirelessly for social justice: she gets the job done for our children.**

**Our kids need Judy Newman on the 4J School Board.”**

— Nancy Golden, former Chief Education Officer of Oregon

