

APA Newsletters

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NEWSLETTER ON TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

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Welcome to the Spring 2005 edition of the *APA Newsletter on Teaching Philosophy*, our second issue published exclusively online. In this issue we are pleased to present three articles and five reviews of books that can be used in the philosophy classroom.

Our first paper—to which we solicit reader response—continues a section of our *Newsletter*—Puzzles in the Classroom—that we initiated in our Spring 2003 issue. In that issue we presented an article by Steven Cahn entitled “The Ethics of Teaching: A Puzzle” that described a situation that many of us encounter in our classroom and that might present a quandary for many philosophy instructors. Cahn raised the question in that article of how, ethically, it is best for philosophy instructors to respond in situations such as the one he described. In this issue Cahn once again presents to our readers material that might be of help in their classroom. But this time around, in an article entitled “Two Lives,” Cahn puts forth a hypothetical case around which certain ethical questions might be raised for classroom discussion. The case is simply and straightforwardly presented and, given the facts of university life, should resonate with our students.

Following Cahn’s “Two Lives” are some comments by one of the Editors (Tziporah Kasachkoff) on how Cahn’s “Two Lives” might be put to good use in classroom discussion of the ethical issues that might be raised concerning it.

The Editors welcome responses from our readers to the case that Cahn presents and/or to Kasachkoff’s discussion of it. We are committed to publishing the responses that we receive. We also would welcome “Puzzles of the Classroom” supplied by readers of our *Newsletter* so that quandaries that they have experienced in the classroom might be considered, and perhaps responded to, by others.

Our second paper, by David Benatar, “Teaching Ethics for Everyday,” describes a course that Benatar teaches in practical ethics. The course focuses on problems that, he argues, have relevance for most people as they concern issues that arise for most of us in general daily life and that are neither specific to particular professions nor of concern only to policymakers on a “grand” (that is, governmental) scale. In the course of his article, Benatar indicates why he makes explicit to students the stands that he himself takes on the issues that he discusses in the classroom, as well as the cost of making his views explicit.

He details the list of topics that he covers in the class, the responses he has received from students regarding the subject matter of the course, and the student assignments he gives in the course. Helpfully, Benatar has included some questions he has asked on the final examination for the course.

Our third paper, by Lisa Cassidy, is entitled “Advising an Undergraduate Philosophy Club” and is a description of the challenges and benefits of establishing a philosophy club within a college. Cassidy describes what she herself has done to generate student interest in attending the philosophy club that was established at her own institution, as well as the problems of recruiting new students for, and sustaining the interest of others in, the club. She shares with readers the various activities a club might provide as well as what, in her own experience, has succeeded and what has proved less successful. Cassidy’s description of the diverse activities that can be devised to attract and sustain student interest may be helpful to others who are seeking ways to expand enrollment in philosophy courses as well as raise awareness within the college community of the philosophy department and its offerings. Also of interest is a description of some of the pitfalls of advising a philosophy club and what might be done to avoid or lessen these. Readers who have experience with philosophy clubs are encouraged to respond to this article with descriptions of their own experiences, suggestions, and recommendations.

In our **Book Review** section, we are happy to present reviews of a very diverse group of books: one on theories of possible worlds; one that presents classical and contemporary texts in philosophy of religion; one that contains interviews with some leading philosophers on the nature and future of philosophy; and one that presents what the editor of that book takes to be the fundamental issues of philosophy (metaphysics, logic, epistemology, ethics, the history of philosophy, philosophy of mind, political philosophy, aesthetics, philosophy of religion, and continental philosophy). In addition, we are happy to include a review of Harry Frankfurt’s *On Bullshit*, which is, in book form, a re-issue of an article that Frankfurt published years ago. To the surprise (and, no doubt, delight) of the philosophical community, this little book has become a popular best-seller and was for many weeks on the list of the *New York Times* Best Selling Books.

We always encourage our readers to suggest themselves as reviewers of books and other material that they think may be especially good for classroom use. The names of books and other materials that we have received for review are listed in the *Newsletter*. But reviewers are welcome to suggest reviewing material that they themselves have used in the classroom and found useful, even if it doesn’t appear in our **Books Received** list. However, please remember that our publication is devoted to pedagogy and not to theoretical discussions of philosophical issues. This should be borne in mind not only when writing articles for our publication but also when reviewing material for our publication.

As always, we encourage our readers to write for our publication. We welcome papers that respond, comment on, or take issue with any of the material that appears within our pages.

The following guidelines for submissions should be followed:

- The author's name, the title of the paper, and full mailing address should appear on a *separate* sheet of paper or, if the paper is sent to the Editors electronically, on a note that will not print out within the text of paper itself. *Nothing that identifies the author or his or her institution should appear within the body or within the footnotes/endnotes of the paper. The title of the paper should appear on the top of the paper itself.*
- Unless the paper is sent in electronic form, four complete copies of the paper should be sent.
- Authors should adhere to the production guidelines that are available from the APA.
- If you send an article by post rather than electronically, do not send the disk on which it was composed. The Editors will request the disk when the paper is ready to be published. In writing your paper to disk, please do not use your word processor's footnote or endnote function; all notes should be added manually at the end of the paper.
- All articles submitted to the *Newsletter* are blind-reviewed by the members of the editorial committee. They are:
Tziporah Kasachkoff, The Graduate Center, CUNY (tkasachkoff@gc.cuny.edu), co-editor
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their work was in every respect unsatisfactory. Only the Dean would know of this special arrangement.

Joan rejected the position on moral grounds and continued trying to obtain a suitable opportunity in academic life. However, never again was she offered a faculty position, and she was forced to pursue a career path that gave her little satisfaction. Her potential as a teacher went unfulfilled, and her planned research was left undone. Throughout her life she remained embittered.

Marie also earned a doctoral degree from a first-rate university and sought appointment to a tenure-track position in which she could teach and pursue her research. She, too, received no offers and reluctantly was about to accept non-academic employment when an unexpected call came inviting her for an interview at the school that Joan had visited. The Dean made Marie the same offer that had been made to Joan, and Marie, after weighing her options, decided to accept the appointment, even though she recognized that doing so would require her to act unethically.

Marie went on to a highly successful academic career, became a popular teacher and renowned researcher, moved to one of the nation's most prestigious universities, and enjoyed all the perquisites attendant to her membership on that school's renowned faculty. When on rare occasions she recalled the conditions of her initial appointment, she viewed the actions she had taken as an unfortunate but necessary step on her path to a wonderful life.

Joan acted morally but lived unhappily ever after, while Marie acted immorally but lived happily ever after. So I ask you: Which was the wiser?

How One Might Use "Two Lives" in the Ethics Classroom

Tziporah Kasachkoff

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Steve Cahn has once again submitted a case whose consideration might profitably be used to bring out various salient moral points in discussion with students. I offer readers the following questions that might be used for such discussion.

We encourage readers to write in their own suggestions with respect to conducting a classroom discussion of "Two Lives."

1. Do students think that Marie was wise in her decision to accept the position, given that she herself believed her conduct to be unethical?
2. If students believe that Marie was wise in her decision to accept the position despite her viewing what she did as unethical, do the students believe that Marie was wiser than Joan in her decision to take the position?
3. If Marie *is* judged the wiser, are the grounds for this judgment that she did what in the end turned out to have best results *for her*?
4. If students answer "Yes" to question 3 and claim that Marie is to be judged the wiser based on the fact that she calculated the consequences of her acts *for her* and then correctly evaluated them in terms of their worth *to her*, it should be pointed out that it is not clear why, on these grounds, she is judged to be wiser than Joan. For it might be that Joan, being the sort of person she is, would not have had the life that Marie had, had Joan acted exactly as Marie did. Given Joan's

ARTICLES

Two Lives

Steven M. Cahn

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Joan earned a doctoral degree from a first-rate university and sought appointment to a tenure-track position in which she could teach and pursue her research. Unfortunately, she received no offers and reluctantly was about to accept non-academic appointment when an unexpected call came inviting her for an interview at a highly attractive school. During her visit she was told by the Dean that the job was hers, subject to one condition: she was expected to teach a particular course each year in which numerous varsity athletes would enroll, and she would be required to award them all passing grades even if

moral views and principles, had Joan done what Marie did, she might well have been miserable all of her life rather than happy at her professional success. Joan's life might have been plagued by moral regret and a loss of self-esteem that undermined all of her professional pleasure. In that case, even if the students judge Marie to have been wise, they might be brought to see that relative to Joan, she may not have been the wiser. Both Marie *and* Joan may each have correctly assessed the consequences of her doing what she recognized as unethical.

5. Students who judge Marie's act as wise (whether or not they judge her to be wiser than Joan) on grounds that she acted primarily to benefit herself in rather important ways should be asked to consider the following: Since Marie herself (according to the sketched scenario) regards her behavior as unethical, do the students themselves distinguish between the ethical and the wise, as Marie herself seems to?
6. If students say that they don't distinguish between the ethical and the wise then they must think that Marie is mistaken in seeing her conduct as unethical (given that they believe her conduct is wise). But if they accept that Marie's conduct is both unethical *and* wise, do they think that though wise, Marie acts in a way that she should be ashamed of?

At some point in the discussion, the point should be raised that what Marie does is not merely conduct herself in a way that is personally unethical. Rather, in being unfair to students who studied, and deceitfully awarding to other students grades that do not reflect what those grades are meant to signify, Marie subverts the norms of the profession to which she has committed herself and her professional future.

Are the students remembering to take into account:

- (a) the effects of receiving unearned grades on the athletes themselves? Does the athletes' knowledge that they are receiving grades they don't merit have negative effects on how they conduct themselves not only in general but *within the sport* in virtue of which they are given the unmerited grades?
- (b) the consequences on all who receive merited grades of the public knowing—as it invariably will—that academic credentials are sometimes awarded for reasons that have nothing to do with academic merit? (Although we are told that the Dean's condition of employment is known only to him and the person whom he tries to recruit for his faculty, that condition cannot be guaranteed to be secured from public disclosure.)
- (c) the fact that awarding false grades might contribute to skepticism (or suspicion) about academic credentials generally, once this policy becomes known as it invariably (though perhaps only eventually) will?

The general point to be made here is that *if* the judgment that Marie's act is wise is based on general consequentialist reasoning, it may be based on false assumptions about what those general consequences will be.

7. Suppose the students argue the following in justification of their view that Marie need not be ashamed of what she did: Had Marie refused the position as Joan did, then the academic position that she was offered would eventually have been taken up by someone who would accept the position with its attendant conditions. So Marie's standing on her principles and refusing the

position, though ethical, would not have made any real difference in the world. When doing the ethical thing will make no difference in the world but will have great personal/professional costs, then the wisest course of action is to secure one's own benefit at the cost of doing what is ethical. Since the outcome would have been the same were Marie to have refused the position (since someone else would have accepted it had she refused) then the wise thing for Marie to do is to reap the benefits of conduct that will in any case take place.

Students should be encouraged to see this line of reasoning as based on the view that wisdom consists in maximizing good results in the world—a position that seems intuitive enough. Such reasoning, students should be encouraged to see, is clearly directed toward the evaluation of conduct as wise or unwise in consequentialist terms.

At some point, the instructor should draw students' attention to the notion of personal integrity, and what that might mean both generally and in connection with the two lives that are described by Cahn. Given that in some situations our ethical behavior may have no chance of changing the world and that sometimes we can make things better for ourselves *only* by doing what is unethical, what is the wiser choice—achieving the future we want by behaving in ways of which we are ashamed, or losing out on the future we wanted by holding onto a sense of our integrity? Is it so clear that one course is wise while the other isn't? Each course of action has terrible costs, and which costs we are willing to pay determines for good and for ill not only what we achieve professionally but who we are personally. Perhaps rather than thinking that one course of action is wise and the other is not, it is wiser to think that both courses of action reflect a decision on the part of the agent to sacrifice something she regards as a great personal good for something else that she very much values. The choice "Two Lives" presents is not an easy one: Which life is the better life, all told—a life with a future that has no hope of realizing one's dreams and talents, or a life based on a past that one is ashamed of?

As Cahn tells the story, Marie has a "wonderful life" and lives "happily ever after," so we can assume either that Marie is not ashamed of behavior that she herself regards as unethical, or else that her feelings of shame do not interfere with her ability to be happy. What are students' responses to this? *Ought* one to feel shame at behavior one regards as unethical, though necessary? Does it make sense to say that one should or should not allow that sort of shame to interfere with one's happiness?

Questions to raise for discussion are:

- Is there a difference between prudence and wisdom?
- Does being wise have any connection with being moral?
- Is there any *moral* difference between feeling shame for what one has done in the past and allowing that feeling to interfere with one's happiness, and living "happily ever after" even at the cost of behavior that one regards as shameful?

Advising an Undergraduate Philosophy Club

Lisa Cassidy

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Introduction

Clubs can be a good way to introduce students to a discipline, recruit students to a major, gain real experience doing research, or just interact on a more personal, informal level with faculty and other students.¹ Student clubs can present challenges and opportunities for institutions, organizations, advisors, and students.² In this paper I offer suggestions for philosophy club recruitment, organization, activities, and service projects. From my own experiences, I reflect upon the challenges and the rewards of advising an undergraduate philosophy club.

Origins of the Philosophy Club

My workplace is a state-funded, liberal arts college with almost six thousand students enrolled. While the college did have a philosophy major in years past, this major was eliminated in the 1990s due to “budgetary constraints.” The philosophy minor program since then has graduated three to five students each May. A concerted effort by the philosophers was recently undertaken to reinvigorate the philosophy program; the philosophy club has been central to that effort.

Equipped with funds from my dean, we advertised with flyers that the philosophy club was “thinking ‘til it hurts,” with free pizza and soda on Tuesday at 5:00 PM in an empty classroom. Since that time our philosophy club has become a campus award-winning organization.

Recruitment, Organization, Activities, and Service

Recruitment. The philosophy professors announce philosophy club meetings to their classes, and the “Introduction” class is a main feeder for club recruitment. Recruitment also takes place via flyers displayed on campus, usually in simple graphics with a memorable tag line (“Philosophy Club: We don’t fight. We have ‘discussions’.”). A bulletin board advertising philosophy courses offered, news clippings, flyers, etc. also sits in a prominent hallway. Those who attend meetings are included in an online group that is maintained by the philosophy club officers. We also have an online message board. I distribute flyers promoting our special events to faculty and ask my colleagues to announce these events to their classes. All of our special events are listed on the “campus events” calendar. Finally, there is evidence (from a self-study questionnaire) that word of mouth from one’s friends is a significant factor in recruitment to joining the club or attending club events.

Organization. In accordance with college guidelines, our philosophy club was required, in order to be recognized as an official club, to write a constitution and elect an executive board (consisting of a president, vice president, treasurer, and secretary). The student-written club mission statement begins: “The Philosophy Club provides a forum for the free expression of thought and speech. We are interested in philosophy because it provides us with opportunities to meet new and interesting people and talk about current issues in our society.” As this statement indicates, the objective of the club is intellectual discussions on campus in a social setting. (This mission statement is not exactly what I would have written because it does not explicate how an interest in philosophy can deepen and enrich discussions of pressing issues. However, the mission statement is one that students wrote for *their* club. More reflections on letting students lead the club are included in the conclusion.)

Becoming an official club (a process that may take some time) is essential at my college for receiving a budget allocation. Fortunately, my college has ample funding for student clubs, but funding is only allocated after a probationary period. Budget funds most often cater events, though funds also are used for off-campus transportation, fees, or on-campus club publicity. Our club budget is currently approximately three thousand dollars for one academic year; these funds are awarded based on the strength of our budget application, though we do not anticipate using all of the funds. Depending on one’s workplace, a philosophy club may face significant institutional challenges as a new organization (such as little or no allocation for club budgets and paucity of classroom meeting space).²

Activity: Weekly discussion meetings. Most of the philosophy club activity consists of weekly hour-long meetings, held at 5:00 PM. (A second weekly meeting has been difficult to arrange.) Weekly attendance ranges from five to twenty-five students. All the topics are selected by students, usually by a member of the Executive Board, though as advisor I have made some suggestions for possible topics. The topic for the week’s meeting is sometimes circulated electronically in advance to members via the club’s e-mail list and message board.

The day of the meeting, the topic of the hour-long meeting is written on the classroom board by a club officer as people file in, arrange themselves in a circle, and get coffee. Past topics have included:

- Multiculturalism in education
- Suffering and redemption
- Religion vs. spirituality
- Sex and violence in American culture
- Lying
- The morality of killing
- Literacy
- Life crises as learning experiences
- Marriage
- Consumerism in American culture

The discussion is very loosely moderated by one of the members on the Executive Board, who usually starts the session by making a few comments on the day’s topic. (I try to limit my own participation in the discussion, in most cases only speaking occasionally.) This activity is student run, and student attendance is generally very good.

I have found that the weekly discussion topics that are most successful in generating lively exchanges are those with which students make an immediate and personal connection. Therefore, weekly meeting topics are almost exclusively in the realm of social or religious philosophy. Also, it is important that the weekly meetings have a relaxed, welcoming atmosphere so that attendance does not feel like “school.” Any topic that requires highly specialized knowledge would stray too far away from that casual environment. Finally, only some of the club members have taken the upper-level philosophy courses needed for a discussion of more specialized topics. Thus, the weekly meeting is not to be viewed either as a study session or an analytic seminar.

Activity: Roundtable lunches. The philosophy club co-hosts special event roundtable lunch meetings with other student clubs. These roundtables are not held during our regular club meeting time but during lunch on a day when most faculty have commitments on campus. We recently set a goal of holding one roundtable lunch per month. On average about ten or fewer students attend the roundtable lunches, though that number is often matched by faculty attendance. This roundtable lunch series was initiated by faculty, based on student interest, with

topics generally selected by faculty. Roundtable lunch topics are advertised in advance electronically, on flyers, and in the “campus events” calendar. Past topics for roundtable lunch events have included:

- Freedom vs. Determinism
- Romanticism
- Let’s Talk about Freedom (in celebration of Black History Month)
- What is Feminism?
- Fear and Violence

The discussion is moderated or co-moderated by faculty. (We have experimented with various techniques to launch discussions, sometimes using handouts with quotations, poems, philosophical passages, statistics, definitions, or “brain-teaser” problems that are relevant to that day’s discussion.)

This roundtable series has been very successful in raising the prominence of philosophy on campus, particularly among faculty from other disciplines. Because the lunches draw faculty from different disciplines in the humanities, one can leave the lunch having shared a truly interdisciplinary treatment of the day’s topic. For example, during the Romanticism Roundtable, historians, philosophers, and literature professors each discussed short passages of Romantic works that exemplified that movement for each field. The discussion leapt from Burke and Kant on the sublime to the poems of Poe. Participants gained a comprehensive view of Romanticism, even as individual professors disagreed, for example, about the ultimate significance of that movement.

Student attendance at roundtable lunches is low in comparison with our weekly meetings and in comparison with the Socratic Dialogue events (described below). Student attendance may be low simply because the roundtables are not scheduled during our regular meeting day or time. However, weak student attendance is only part of the problem; faculty dominate the discussions. I imagine it must be very intimidating for a student to speak up in this setting, where there is an equal student-faculty ratio, and faculty are more than willing to share their considerable erudition.

Some steps may be taken to curb faculty dominance when colleagues come to student club events. For example, the moderator may pose an open-ended question to the attendees and add, “Let’s let students comment on this topic first.” Another technique to encourage students to speak up is to ensure that the roundtable topics are accessible to a diverse audience. (The Romanticism topic, for example, might have been at once too abstract and too historically specific to engender student participation.) It might also be wise to start out an event by thanking everyone in attendance, but reminding faculty that student participation is vital for a successful event. (Tackling the problem of faculty members dominating club events calls for some diplomacy, particularly for the *untenured* club advisor. Additionally, one does not want to offend colleagues who generously sacrifice their time to attend a club event.)

Activity: Socratic Dialogue. The most successful “special events” launched thus far were the “Socrates Dialogue” events (christened “Socratic” by the club leadership). These events were held during the evening and drew about thirty students for each topic. The topics for the Socratic Dialogue event “What is pornography?” and “Who is God?” arose out of particularly heated regular club meetings and were advertised heavily on campus. Other student clubs were invited to cosponsor the event, which consisted of dinner and discussion of the topic. About five faculty members attended each event. (For the “Pornography” topic, the executive board of the club decided to split attendees into two groups in adjoining rooms to make

the discussion groups more manageable.)

The Socratic Dialogue events generated good student attendance and promoted genuine philosophical reflection on the nature and significance of pornography and on the divine. I used a short self-study questionnaire for the first event to determine which factors best contributed to student involvement in club events, which study was prompted by my concern that our roundtable lunches were not particularly well-attended by students. The questionnaire asked students to check off all the factors that contributed to their attendance in that day’s event, the factors offered as choices being: a) free food; b) learn about the topic; c) my friends were going; d) meet new people/make new friends; and e) discuss philosophy and current events. Of nineteen attendees that answered the questionnaire, choice “e) discuss philosophy and current events” actually garnered the most responses—more than free food!

Activity: Plenary lectures. Lectures from faculty at other colleges and universities are an excellent way to expose students to different areas of professional interest and to provide them the opportunity to listen to and ask questions about original work. We have plenary lectures during our regular meeting time, which allows a half hour for the lecture and about the same amount of time for questions. The event is catered, and we promote it on campus. Student attendance is good, but we have not had faculty in attendance. The topic of the lectures varies, but given the small size of our department, I try to expose students to branches of philosophy that our courses do not cover. Furthermore, since our budget is small, lecturers need to be willing to appear on campus without an honorarium. A potential hazard is that plenary lectures might come to too-closely resemble classes and hence lose the extracurricular, fun atmosphere of a club meeting. This might be avoided by inviting dynamic, interesting, and exciting speakers.

Activity: Film series. Film night is an easy club activity. Assuming a campus has facilities to project a video or DVD, one just needs to choose the movie, rent it from the library or video store, and promote the movie event. There are many popular films with philosophical content, as well as lesser-known and foreign titles.

A film event might be enhanced with a discussion afterward, led by either faculty or students. I find some books (such as those in the Philosophy and Popular Culture Series by Open Court Press) helpful for prompting student reflection on film (or television). For example, to lead a discussion on the film *The Matrix*, one might consult *The Matrix and Philosophy* (Irwin 2002). Copies of articles might also be circulated in advance of the film presentation. A film series could be a successful recruiting tool to attract new students to the club because a well-chosen film should be able to draw new students to the event, and the discussion afterwards might retain these new students as members.

Activity: Professional Conference trip. Attending a professional conference can be a very exciting experience for students, though this activity will not have the broad appeal of some of the other activities. Fortunately, my college’s metropolitan location makes trips to local conferences fairly easy. About four students have attended various conferences, and even this small number is the result of a good deal of encouragement. (I research and announce upcoming conferences at club meetings and in our online forums.) Transportation, funds for conference fees, or hotels might need to be arranged, so one’s ability to take students to conferences might be limited by such expenses. In addition, a trip to a conference will require an attendance commitment (from both students and advisor) that a campus club meeting or event does not.

If the conference is small enough, it might be possible to ask the conference organizers if students might be welcome as commentators, or if students might submit papers to form a special student panel. My experience with students presenting papers or commenting at conferences has been very good. (One of our students has presented a paper at a local conference in a student panel, and two others have given commentaries. The papers presented were not submitted to blind review but were submitted to conference organizers by me as student submissions for inclusion in a special student panel. The students who participated in the conferences are among the most dedicated in the philosophy club and have returned from conference experiences very impressed and enthusiastic about the discipline.) However, conference trips are not suitable for everyone, and it may be too optimistic to expect many students to participate at this level. Nonetheless, the rewards of conference travel are numerous. Students experience a broad exposure to professors, philosophical debates, and styles of writing, and they are able to see “real” philosophy happening before their eyes. Students really enjoy attending their own professor’s panel if he or she is also presenting. Finally, intercollegiate philosophy club activities could be initiated at conferences if undergraduates from philosophy clubs at other institutions are also in attendance.

There is, however, a down side to conference trips. Having one’s paper rejected from a conference might be demoralizing for someone just starting out in the field, and some students might feel either overwhelmed by or bored by the conference. Additionally, as we all know, there are some conferences where presenters or audiences are less than cordial, and this could be troubling for a novice. An undergraduate-only philosophy conference is an excellent alternative to a professional conference.

Activity: Off-campus Cafe Philo trip. The Cafe Philo movement brings philosophical discussion out of the academy and into restaurants and cafes. These discussion groups are organized and moderated by philosophers in cities across the world. According to Bernard Roy, moderator of the New York City Cafe Philo,

Marc Sautet (1946-1998), a Parisian professor of philosophy, accidentally started philosophical discussion in the Cafe des Phares in Paris in 1992. Within a year, the informal exchanges grew into a national French phenomenon. Since September 1998, approximately twenty participants meet every other week at a restaurant for the New York City Cafe Philo. It is a good mix of students, faculty, retired teachers, artists, auto mechanics, etc. At the end of the discussion, participants propose topics for the next Cafe Philo. The topic that gets the most votes gets picked.³

Our philosophy club has organized a trip to attend a New York Cafe Philo.

The three students who traveled to the Cafe Philo enjoyed a lively and stimulating discussion about superstitions (that day’s topic), and one student even contributed. It is always possible that students might feel intimidated attending a philosophical discussion group where they are the youngest and newest members. But discussions at Cafe Philo can help students envision how philosophy might continue to fit into their lives after they finish their undergraduate education.

Activity: Toga Party Reading of Plato’s Republic. Our club has scheduled a toga party for an upcoming semester. I am planning this activity based on a friend’s description of his own undergraduate philosophy club days. The toga party

involves reading the *Republic* aloud, a project that takes about twelve hours. Multiple copies of the book are required, as are refreshments and home-made costumes. Philosophy club members gather in a popular campus location and simply take on the different roles, reading the work aloud in bed-sheet togas with character name-tags. Since the reading takes so long, students sign up for two-hour reading shifts in advance.

Service. Service is essential for campus clubs; club budgets may be tied to the performance of service or fundraising projects. Our club’s service commitments include at least one on-campus and one off-campus service project per semester, though service requirements are institutionally specific. On- or off-campus service opportunities may already be organized by the Student Council or Activities Association. If that is the case (as it is at my college), organizing service activities should be straightforward. Our philosophy club’s past service projects include: a campus environmental clean up, a fundraising yard sale for tsunami relief, a student “fast-a-thon” (in which family and friends pledge money to students who fast) for world-hunger relief, and serving food in a soup kitchen. Usually the club’s Executive Board members decide which service projects to perform. The challenging part of any service project is recruiting committed volunteers. I leave service projects to the club members themselves to research, organize, and perform. In the past this has proved adequate, though it is possible that an advisor might need to be more active on service projects if the student leadership in the club is not able to meet its service requirements.

Some Challenges and Rewards of Advising Philosophy Clubs

My first concern with the philosophy club (as it currently is constituted) is that it is populated almost entirely by white students and that men tend to dominate the club’s activities. It has been demonstrated that women and ethnic minority men are less likely to speak out or take leadership roles in college classrooms,⁴ tendencies that may be replicated in clubs. For example, one study showed ethnic minorities are less likely to participate in extracurricular activities at community colleges.⁵

Our philosophy club membership is even “whiter” than the college overall. I have attempted to attract more students of color and make them feel welcome once recruited, though my efforts have met with minimal success. I have reached out to other campus groups (the Black Student Union, Ebony Women for Social Change) to invite those group members to our meetings, but this has not worked especially well. I had hoped that the roundtable lunch that focused on freedom (as part of Black History month) would interest nonwhite students in the club, but only a few such students attended the event, and none has come to another philosophy club meeting. In addition, although there generally is an equal ratio of men to women at weekly meetings, the men are more vocal. I have witnessed an exaggeration of the already well-documented tendency of white men to speak out more than women and minority men in classrooms.⁴ Since the club meetings are essentially social events where I exert no special control, my imperfect solution to this challenge is casually (I hope) pointing out that someone in the group is not being heard. Usually I phrase this by saying, “Ashley, I didn’t quite catch that...” I regret to admit that the gender dynamics can be exasperating. (Once I reduced myself to sputtering, “Boys, quit it, I can’t hear the girls!”) I have not been able to convince any women to attend an off-campus conference or Cafe Philo trip. Though a woman does sit on the Executive Board, the real leadership in the club comes from the men. So far I have not been able to encourage any of the women in the club to take a significant leadership role.

An argument in favor of diversity is well beyond the purview of this paper, so let me say simply that it seems to me to be unhealthy for our club (and for philosophy as an enterprise) to be so homogeneous. I discuss this challenge not because I have any facile answers to it—surely the nexus of race, gender, and philosophy defies such simplicity. The diversity challenge is worth noting because it is one that philosophy club advisors are likely to face. I am eager to learn how others respond to this challenge.

Another challenge for any student club is maintaining vibrancy and activity over generations of students.² Since the club I advise is a new one, I will confront this challenge in the coming years. Student clubs need student interest to be successful. I suspect that the key to maintaining student interest is to offer programs and events that will appeal to students, to promote these events tirelessly with campus publicity, and to welcome new students into the fold, making them feel as if they can become club “insiders” easily. I fear that the philosophy club membership could wane as the founding generation of students graduates. To keep this from happening, I am actively recruiting new members from the freshmen and sophomores in “Introduction to Philosophy” classes. Every student who visits me during office hours always gets a personal invitation to come to our meetings, and I continue to send e-mails to all the students in my classes to apprise them of upcoming events.

A philosophy club advisor will also face the delicate challenge of managing club event discussions. This challenge might be experienced in any number of ways. For example, some club meetings may get overheated resulting in religious or political partisan bickering that is antithetical to reasoned debate. Discussions will lose their philosophical thread and degenerate into students taking highly inflammatory potshots at each other. On the other end of the spectrum, some discussions might become boring and flag, prompting students simply to crack jokes. Finally, some particular students may dominate meeting discussions (see above), leaving others to feel excluded and unwelcome.

This challenge leads one to wonder exactly what the proper role of a philosophy club advisor is in meetings. Should one be a discussion facilitator? A discussion referee? A club member with no special status? The answer to all three is “Yes.” There are times when each of these roles would be appropriate. For the most part, I myself strive for the latter role but do step into the former two as needed. For example, during most regular club meetings, the discussions are both courteous and lively so that I contribute to it only when I have something to say, as any other participant might. However, circumstances sometimes call for an advisor to have a more interventionist role. I am not afraid of students discussing hot topics and instinctively feel that there are few topics or exchanges that cannot be intelligently and rationally considered. (For example, the “Who is God?” Socratic Dialogue was co-hosted with the Interservice Christian Fellowship, which made for a spicy but well-grounded exchange with our mostly agnostic club.) But, no doubt, occasionally a topic can be too hot for some individuals to handle without resorting to name-calling, shouting, outrageous accusations, and the like. In these cases the advisor should perhaps take on the role of referee. I try to redirect a passionate exchange toward the matter at hand, perhaps by referring to a previous, calmer point in the discussion by saying, “Let’s get back to what Erin was saying before...” In effect, this lets us re-do the discussion. At times an even stronger approach may be needed, but more often than not it is the more level-headed students themselves who will act as referees by demanding in an overly-contentious discussion that the participants calm down. Finally, one may also need to act as a facilitator when a discussion falters. One

can re-phrase the issue in a way that prompts students to make their own inroads. One should, however, resist the temptation to over-facilitate and transform a club event into a classroom lecture. I think it is important to remember that philosophy club advisors serve the club, not vice versa.

The last challenge speaks to the substance of philosophy club meetings and events. It might appear thus far that our philosophy club might just as well be a current affairs discussion group, a political forum, or an informal debating team. It is important that a philosophy club has a distinctly philosophical character. We might assert that what distinguishes philosophy from other enterprises is its emphasis on the construction and critical evaluation of arguments, and philosophy club activities ought to reflect this emphasis.

I have several recommendations in this regard: one might choose topics for meetings or special events that explore classic philosophical questions, such as “Freedom vs. Determinism.” Though generally students choose topics, one might suggest that club events alternate traditional philosophical matters with more contemporary concerns, such as “Multiculturalism in Education.” Also, one can encourage students to carry over discussions from philosophy class to club activities. I have found that if a classroom discussion is sufficiently interesting, students will spontaneously continue it into a club meeting. (A discussion from an “Aesthetics” class spontaneously carried over into a club-meeting topic: “Who is the best judge of beauty?”) In addition, if philosophy club discussions stray too far from the evaluation of arguments with students, for example, merely relaying personal anecdotes with little philosophical content, one can subtly steer students back to philosophy by demanding that the students give reasons for their position. In my experience students who have previously taken philosophy courses will understand this cue and challenge themselves to return to the day’s topic more earnestly. Finally, in the final minutes of a club event, participants can be instructed to each share a “final thought” on the topic. These “final thoughts” might sharpen a discussion that will continue next time. For example, participants could share “thoughts that shed a new light on today’s topic,” or “my best reason for holding a position,” or “what another participant said that made me rethink my reasons.” I acknowledge that asking students for the reasons for their position and to give their final thoughts may be contrivances that interfere with the student-led club dynamic that I have advocated here. But it serves the purpose that is paramount with respect to a philosophy club, namely, to keep philosophy central to the club.

The challenges of advising a philosophy club are more than offset by the rewards. The most immediate reward of starting a club is encouraging student interest in philosophy. This can benefit a philosophy department by increasing enrollments in philosophy courses and encouraging students to choose philosophy as their major or minor. But there are less formal rewards as well. Weekly meetings and regular events stimulate student excitement for the discipline in ways that even the best-taught course might not because students enjoy thinking about philosophical topics in a grade-free, social setting that makes philosophy joyful. (One might wonder if club participation results in better performance in philosophy class. I see no evidence for this, and I would certainly caution against viewing club participation as instrumental for doing better on class exams.)

Another reward of the philosophy club is the opportunity to mentor a few dedicated individuals. The philosophy club allows an advisor to encourage students to have significant learning experiences beyond the classroom. Not everyone who joins a philosophy club will be so taken with the discipline. But those

students who do want to pursue philosophy as a career will be better prepared having been mentored by a club advisor.

Finally, the social interaction with students outside the classroom makes advising a philosophy club rewarding. If one has a heavy teaching load, or one's classes only allow for formal lecturing, a philosophy club is a great opportunity to know students more personally. Indeed, it is very satisfying for an instructor to hear students apply or debate philosophical ideas from the classroom in their "off hours" at a philosophy club event. Teaching can be exhausting, but philosophy club events are for me curiously energizing because they are fueled by student enthusiasm.

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Teaching Ethics for Everyday

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Teaching practical ethics

The teaching of practical ethics courses provides special opportunities and poses special challenges. Among the former is the opportunity to teach material that readily engages student interest. Whereas students sometimes have to be convinced of the importance of other philosophical questions, some of which strike ordinary people as silly, students typically do not have to be convinced of the importance of questions in practical ethics. Practical ethics is thus a valuable vehicle for attracting students to philosophy courses and then for teaching philosophical skills. Among the special challenges, however, is the fact that students usually enter a practical ethics course with strongly held opinions about the topics that will be discussed. The challenge instructors thus face is to help students to overcome the students' (often uninformed) prejudgments on these topics.

Instructors must assist students to think critically about these prejudgments, but such critical assessment is often extremely uncomfortable for students.

The scholarly area of practical ethics has burgeoned in recent decades. One feature of this has been the proliferation of sub-areas of practical ethics, including bioethics, legal ethics, business ethics, educational ethics, environmental ethics, and others. When I was asked to teach our department's undergraduate practical ethics course about eight years ago, I began to give some thought to what topics I might teach. For various reasons I ruled out most of the conventional areas of practical ethics. (I already taught bioethics in our medical school and did not want to teach the same material in a second course. I wanted to avoid questions in legal ethics because many of our students go on to law school where these topics might be taught. I know next to nothing about business and thus thought it unwise to teach business ethics.)

Ethics for everyday

I thought that the ethical questions of everyday life—what we might call "quotidian ethics"—would make an exciting theme for a practical ethics course. These questions are to be distinguished from moral problems faced by those deciding issues of public policy¹ or faced by individual people only in their professional roles or in unusual circumstances.

The questions of quotidian ethics, of all the questions in practical ethics, have the greatest relevance for the largest number of people. We all (or almost all) face these sorts of problems and we face many of them daily. Although the social and professional issues are often much grander, they are also less immediate in most people's lives. A second reason why the problems of quotidian ethics are more relevant to the largest number of people is that unlike decisions about the big social policy issues, decisions about quotidian ethical questions can be implemented immediately by an individual. If one decides that capital punishment is right or wrong, one cannot immediately implement that decision (unless one is one's country's dictator). Indeed, the chances are that one will have nearly no influence in bringing about a change in social policy. By contrast, a decision about some matter of quotidian ethics can be implemented forthwith.

Having decided to teach a course on the quotidian ethics theme and discovering that there was no suitable text,² I decided to develop one. Over the following few years, while I worked on compiling the anthology, I experimented with different topics and papers in my course. Since publication of the collection,³ I have used it as the course text.

Teaching ethics for everyday

Theory:

Some instructors like to introduce a practical ethics course with some attention to normative ethical theory. My own preference is to teach theory in one course and practical problems in another. This gives more time to both theory and practice. Although not all my students who take the practical ethics course have taken the theory course, resolution of the theoretical issues is not usually necessary for reaching conclusions about practical moral problems. However, I do give a very brief overview of the major theories in order to help students who encounter reference to theories in some of the readings.

Sitting on the fence or taking a stand?:

Many instructors prefer not to divulge their own views to students. They argue that it is better for instructors to be impartial in the classroom, particularly when discussing highly emotive issues. Although that approach has its merits, I prefer

not to hide my own views. Although the approach I prefer has its costs, which I shall discuss shortly, it also has a number of advantages. First, those instructors who do not take a stand often unwittingly foster the impression that whatever view one takes of an ethical issue is simply a matter of opinion because there are arguments both pro and con for each position. In arguing for one view, I show that I think that the balance of evidence and arguments supports one view. This enables students to see and participate in the activity of philosophy, which is not simply a listing or even examination of competing views but a structured argument toward some conclusion. Second, when I think that the prevailing orthodoxy on some question is mistaken, it helps me to challenge that view much more effectively. Third, students learn a valuable lesson in those cases where I *am* undecided. I can show that one should suspend belief in those cases in which it is unclear what view is best. Because I take a stand on other issues, my indecision in some cases is not a symptom of “fence-sitting” but rather the consequence of the arguments and evidence not being decisive (in my view). Given how many people hold firm opinions on topics about which they are not fully informed and about which they have not thought enough, it is good for students to learn that suspending belief is sometimes not only *an* option but the *best* option. Finally, I am able, at the end of the semester, to show students that the views I have defended during the course cannot be boxed neatly into one category—such as liberal, conservative, revolutionary, or reactionary. I note how people’s views on one topic are too often predictable once one knows their views on another topic and that this is often because people are not thinking sufficiently critically about each of the issues. It may well be the case that one should be liberal about some matters and conservative about others.

There are a number of potential costs of my defending specific views. First, students might confuse my arguing for some conclusion as an indication that I am not open to the alternative view. Second, students may feel reluctant to defend alternative views in their essays and exams. There are a number of steps I take in order to ameliorate these problems even though they cannot be avoided entirely. I indicate that I *have* changed my mind on some issues, and I sometimes explain what led me to change my mind. I tell the students that I would change my mind yet again if I were persuaded that my current views were wrong. I show which arguments against my position are strongest and why. Sometimes each view has both strengths and weaknesses and the question is which set of strengths and weaknesses one thinks is best (or least bad). I show that it is sometimes the case that reasonable people could disagree in this judgment. Finally, I emphasize that I have failed papers that support views I hold because they defend those views poorly and awarded first-class passes to essays defending opposite views because they defend those views as well as they do.

Topics:

There are many possible quotidian ethical issues—and obviously many more than can be taught in a semester-long course. My preference is to focus in greater depth on fewer topics, but one could decide instead to cover more ground more superficially.

I usually begin with the ethics of humor. This is partly because the articles that I use discuss pertinent issues concerning harm, and harm has relevance for all other practical moral problems. More importantly, I start with humor because it is both a fun topic and one about which people are very sensitive. Humor has been one of the major victims of political correctness, and people have lost their jobs or been ostracized on account of telling allegedly unethical jokes. Before I begin this topic, I ask students to write down a joke or two that they

find morally troubling and to hand these in (anonymously, unless they prefer otherwise). Usually the examples are about race, women, or Jews, but they sometimes also include jokes about dead babies or tragedies such as the Holocaust or famine. I often draw on these examples to illustrate points in our subsequent discussions. I argue against the prevailing view that all jokes turning on stereotypes must *always* be morally wrong, even though such jokes often are. And I argue that it is not always wrong to tell jokes about dead babies, the Holocaust, famine, Diana Spencer’s death, and the space shuttle accidents. Once we have finished this topic, I screen “The Yada Yada” episode of *Seinfeld* in which Jerry’s Catholic dentist converts to Judaism and Jerry is offended at how quickly he takes to telling Jewish jokes. The dentist similarly takes exception to Jerry’s jokes about dentists and Jerry is accused of being an anti-dentite.

Next, I turn to sex and examine either promiscuity or adultery, and then homosexuality. Student views on promiscuity are quite sharply divided. Some think that it is immoral, while others think that there is nothing wrong with it. I advance an argument about sexual ethics that is deeply unsettling to both groups.⁴

Most students are opposed to adultery, but disagreement can be generated by considering adultery in “open marriages.” Parties to such marriages make no undertaking of sexual exclusivity and indeed expressly allow one another the option of extra-marital sexual relations. Students tend to be more divided on the ethics of adultery in such contexts (and on the ethics of entering into such marriages).

Most students in my classes think that there is nothing wrong with homosexuality, although there is a non-negligible minority that does not share this view. Some instructors are reluctant to teach this topic because they think that we ought not to turn some peoples’ sexual preference into a topic for moral debate. That is not a view I share. Although I think that there is nothing morally wrong with homosexual activity, I think that those who disagree need to be persuaded and not ignored or dismissed. It is antithetical to the philosophical approach to close off questions. In any event, discussion of homosexuality is helpful for its application to other questions of sexual ethics. Discussion of homosexuality invariably raises questions about “abnormality,” “unnaturalness,” and “God’s will,” which also arise in the context of other sexual practices.

After examining the ethics of various sexual matters, I turn to moral problems that pertain to the rearing of children. Sometimes I include the question of children’s rights and children’s liberation. I present the strongest arguments in favor of the liberationist position—that children are entitled to equal rights and that paternalistic interventions in the lives of children are unwarranted. Most students do not accept this position. Since I too reject it, I found that the students are not made as uncomfortable by the liberationist arguments as I would like. Although I present these arguments as compellingly as I can, students are too easily rescued from their unease by the arguments I then raise against the liberationist position. Instructors committed to the liberationist view might have more success here.

One topic on children that I have found challenging is the physical punishment of children. My students are quite sharply divided on this issue. The intermediate view I defend on this topic—that corporal punishment is usually wrong but cannot be ruled out categorically—is a challenge to the views that most of the students bring to the class. Toward the end of our discussion of this topic, I present them with a rich case in which it is very difficult to decide whether corporal punishment would be wrong.

The next question we examine is whether it is morally permissible to eat animals (and use their bodies and flesh for other purposes). Most students think that there is nothing wrong with eating meat and are deeply disturbed by the best arguments to the contrary—arguments from which I do not rescue them. Of all the topics we discuss, this one generates the most interest. I suspect that this is because not only is the prevailing orthodoxy challenged but the implication of doing so is that most people are engaged in behavior that is not merely mildly wrong but very seriously wrong. I am careful to show that some arguments for vegetarianism or veganism are very poor, and I show that there are some quite sophisticated (although, in my view, nonetheless fatally flawed) arguments for the view that eating meat is acceptable. I spend more time on this topic than I do on most others, primarily because I have found that students need ample time to work through all the arguments, often more than once. Once we have finished this section, I show some videos about the rearing and slaughter of animals. I am sensitive to the obvious concerns about doing so. I take the following steps to ameliorate these concerns. First, I warn students in advance that the material may upset sensitive viewers and offer students the option of not attending class that day without penalty. Second, I advise students of the ways in which people can be manipulated by visual images and urge them to guard against these. However, I do note that the images can also inform in a way in which mere descriptions cannot. For instance, students can witness the behavioral responses of animals being slaughtered. I indicate that some may be reflexive but that others suggest distress and pain. Third, the videos that I show are not ones that depict unusually cruel treatment of animals but rather show quite ordinary scenes—disturbing enough though these are. Finally, I allow ample time for discussion after the screening of these videos, during which students can raise any concerns they might have.

The next topic to which I usually turn is the question of the extent to which we are obliged to help those of the world's poor who are starving to death. This topic has all the gravity of the previous one. I present Peter Singer's challenge and then show how the various most plausible responses to it suggest that, at most, our duties are only a little less extensive than he suggests. However, I do raise a few tentative responses of my own that, if sound, would suggest that the extent of our duties is much more like most people's views than like Peter Singer's. I indicate the tentative nature of these responses and that I am not entirely convinced of them. While many students grab at these arguments, others rush to Peter Singer's defense. This divide lends itself to some helpful debate. Many students draw connections between the questions of eating meat and helping the world's poor. This opens the way to discussing the similarities and differences between our responsibilities for the suffering of animals and the suffering of poor humans.

On one or two occasions I have concluded the course with an examination of the question of sexist language. However, I have found that doing so is an anticlimax. I do not know whether this is because the question seems so trivial after discussing such momentous topics as eating meat and giving aid to the world's poor, or whether today's students have so accepted the feminist critique of language that the sexist-language question is a non-issue for them. One way to test which of these hypotheses is correct, assuming that they do not both play a role, would be to teach about sexist language immediately after humor. Depending on whether the topic then engaged student interest, one could determine whether it was the topic or the timing that was the problem.

Another topic I often incorporate toward the end of the course is smoking. Although also much less momentous than

either eating meat or giving aid, it engages student interest much more than does the problem of sexist language. This may be because smoking in the presence of others is thought to cause so much more harm than the generic use of the male pronoun and of "man" (and its compounds). I argue, however, that a case can be made against smoking in the presence of others (without their permission) even if the harms of second-hand smoke are ignored.

Student responses:

Most students respond very favorably to the course content and the approach to it. At the beginning of the semester, I ask students to answer some questions about their views on the topics that will be discussed during the course. At the end of the semester, I often ask them to answer the same questions in order to determine to what extent, if any, they have changed their minds. It is always interesting how many students do change their minds. Many of them are struck by how their received views on various topics have been turned on their heads. Practices that they thought were morally troubling they come to think are not so bad, while other actions that they assumed were morally permissible they come to think are deeply worrying. Whether or not students change their minds, they seem pleased to have examined moral problems that impact on their daily lives.

Examining ethics for everyday

Students write two essays during the course, but the final exam accounts for 60 percent of the final grade. The course content lends itself to exciting exam questions. I divide the final examination into two parts. The first consists of questions requiring short answers. These are designed to test students' understanding both of particular concepts and of the central ideas of the readings. The second part of the exam consists of essay questions. Here are some examples:

1. On 11 March 2004, the *Cape Argus* contained the following report:
"Radio DJ Gareth Cliff has been suspended for two days by 5fm after complaints about an interview purporting to be with Jesus Christ. The interview, aired on Tuesday, was pre-recorded with Cliff interviewing himself speaking with a fake Israeli accent. He asked 'Jesus' what viewers would get out of seeing the movie *The Passion of the Christ*. 'Jesus' replied that moviegoers didn't need to buy popcorn as he could multiply one box into many more. The comment upset a number of listeners. Cliff apologised yesterday. He said he had not intentionally aimed to disparage any religion, merely to parody the Mel Gibson film. Nick Grubb, the programme manager at 5fm, said: 'We believe that the segment was inflammatory, and could have been interpreted negatively by a large portion of our listeners. While Gareth is often irreverent and controversial, he merely overstepped the mark this time'. Cliff will be back on air on Monday."
Was this bit of radio humor morally wrong? Justify your answer.
2. On a tour around Britain this year, to celebrate Queen Elizabeth's fifty years on the throne, Prince Philip, the Queen's husband, said the following to a blind woman who was wheelchair-bound and who had a guide dog: "Do you know they have eating dogs for the anorexic now?" (*Toronto Metro*, 2 May 2002)
Do you think that it was morally acceptable for Prince Philip to offer this humorous comment to this woman? Why?

3. Imagine that Bill Clinton has consulted you, as a moral philosopher, inquiring whether adultery is always immoral. Write back to him with your well-argued response. (From the 1999 exam)

4. Would it be morally acceptable to spank your children in the following circumstances?:

Your twelve-year-old son and eleven-year-old daughter conspire with one another to lie to you in order to avoid punishment for some other wrongdoing. You suspect, but are not sure, that they are lying. You ask them directly what the truth is, indicating the seriousness with which you view lying about this matter, but they continue adhering to their original story. You investigate the matter further and establish (without their knowledge) that they have indeed lied. You ask them once again what the truth is and they continue with their lie. You then disclose that you have established the truth via an independent source and they confess to having lied.

5. Must a utilitarian be a vegetarian? Justify your answer.
6. Can one consistently judge bestiality (having sex with animals) to be immoral if one does not judge the killing of animals for food to be wrong?
7. Is Peter Singer's example of the child drowning in the pond an appropriate analogy for those of the world's poor who are dying of malnutrition? In answering this question, consider various objections that could be levelled against the analogy and demonstrate either (i) that these objections undermine his conclusion about the extent of our duties to the poor, or (ii) how these objections could be met.
8. What duties, if any, do we have to provide aid to those people who suffer from absolute poverty?
9. In her book, *The Trouble with Blame: Victims, Perpetrators and Responsibility*, Sharon Lamb offers the following "Note on Terminology":

"Throughout this book I have used the male pronoun for perpetrators and the female pronoun for victims, counter to the practice of some of my colleagues who strive to remain gender neutral. The overwhelming preponderance of perpetrators of abuse are male, whereas the majority of victims are female. I have therefore decided that it is less ambiguous and more accurate to use the gendered pronoun throughout. This should in no way diminish the very real experiences of the large number of male victims of sexual abuse."

Is the author's convention of using gendered pronouns (for the reasons she cites) sexist? If not, is it also morally acceptable to use the male pronoun when talking of mathematicians or engineers if the majority of them are male, and to use the female pronoun when talking of nurses and teachers if the majority of them are female? And would it be morally acceptable to use one or other gender pronoun even where the group to which one is referring is not dominated by the relevant sex?

10. Is smoking in the presence of nonsmokers morally equivalent to urinating in a public swimming pool (as long as other swimmers know that one is relieving oneself in the pool)?

As should be evident, in devising exam questions I sometimes draw on topical issues, as I did in questions 1

to 3 above. Some questions (such as 1, 2, 4, and 9 above) require students to apply what they have learned to a case. Some questions about a topic (such as 3 and 8) are of a very general kind, while others (such as 5 and 7) are more focused. Occasionally, I include a question that requires students to draw on ideas not raised in class or readings in addressing some topic we have covered. Question 10 above is an example. I had not discussed urination in public swimming pools and then asked students to think about the similarities and differences between this and smoking in the presence of nonsmokers. Very occasionally I include an even more challenging question (such as question 6), which requires students not only to think across two topics (sexual ethics and eating meat, in this case) but to do so without our having discussed these in class. When I include such a question, I also include a warning that this is a more difficult question. I indicate that those answering it well will be rewarded but suggest that those unsure of themselves not attempt it.

Conclusion

I have found that quotidian ethics makes a very rewarding theme for a course in practical ethics. For instructors it is a pleasant change from the usual fare.⁵ For students, the topics are not only very engaging but also highly pertinent to their daily lives. Insofar as "relevance" is a desirable attribute of course material, quotidian ethics must surely score highly.⁶

Endnotes

1. There is a difference, for example, between the question of whether gambling ought to be legally permitted and the question of whether, given legal permission, it is morally acceptable for somebody to engage in gambling.
2. I later discovered Christina and Fred Sommers's popular *Vice and Virtue in Everyday Life* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985), but this collection has a distinctly different focus. As its title suggests, it is concerned more with questions of character than with moral dilemmas about what one should do. There is nonetheless some (but very little) overlap between that collection and the one I developed. There are a few other books on everyday ethics. Joshua Halberstam's *Everyday Ethics: Inspired Solutions to Real-Life Dilemmas* (New York: Viking, 1993) is intended for general readership and is less suited to a class text. The focus of this book is also more on character, virtues, and relationships than on the kind of dilemmas about what to do that predominate in the text I developed. *Moralities of Everyday Life* by John Sabini and Maury Silver (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) also focuses on issues of character, and its approach is more psychological than philosophical.
3. David Benatar (ed.). *Ethics for Everyday* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2002). The book comprises seven parts, with each part containing a number of chapters. Part 1 is about communication and contains chapters on humor, sexist speech, gossip, and lying. Part 2 contains a chapter on premarital sex, promiscuity, and masturbation, and chapters on adultery and homosexuality. In Part 3, there are chapters on rearing children and on familial and filial duties. Part 4 is devoted to eating meat, wearing leather, and keeping pets. Part 5, on money matters, covers copyright violation, giving aid, gambling, and tipping. In Part 6, there are papers on smoking, recreational drug use, gastronomic pleasures, and a chapter on the environment, cars, and consumption. The final part examines forgiveness, modesty, politeness, gratitude, jealousy, and envy.
4. For more on this, see David Benatar, "Two Views of Sexual Ethics: Promiscuity, Paedophilia and Rape," *Public Affairs Quarterly*, 16:3 (2002): 191-201.
5. Some instructors may be deterred from teaching quotidian ethics because they lack the time or energy to prepare a full course of entirely new material. They should note that because of the overlap between quotidian ethics and the

more usual content of applied ethics courses, the amount of new preparation can be reduced.

6. I would be grateful to hear about the experiences of instructors teaching quotidian ethics and about the work of philosophers writing on quotidian ethics problems. (I can be reached at: dbenatar@humanities.uct.ac.za)

BOOK REVIEWS

Ten Essential Texts in the Philosophy of Religion, Classics and Contemporary Issues

Steven M. Cahn (Oxford: Oxford University, 2005), 512 pp.

Reviewed by Jerome Gellman
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This volume joins a number of previous textbooks Cahn has produced for philosophy of religion. It is a really good collection of forty-three readings, all the way from Plato to Plantinga. The readings are not snippets or “selections from” but are full essays or entire chapters, or in some cases a complete work. So this is a text for a serious, probably year-long, course that aims to discuss issues in philosophy of religion in depth. There might not be a comparable textbook out there.

If you are curious why a book of forty-three readings is entitled “Ten Essential Readings,” the answer is that the ten readings are supposed to be the centerpieces around which come supplementary readings, “a variety of essays...that provide background for the texts, discuss the texts directly, or develop themes on subjects related to the texts” (from the Introduction). So we have ten units, based on ten texts.

Here are the ten texts: (1) Plato’s *Euthyphro*, (2) a selection from Boethius’s *The Consolation of Philosophy*, (3) Anselm’s *Proslogion*, Gaunilon’s reply *On Behalf of a Fool*, and Anselm’s reply to him (all as “one text” of the ten!), (4) Aquinas’s section I,1,2 of the *Summa Theologiae*, including the five proofs, (5) Hume’s *Of Miracles*, (6) Hume’s entire *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, (7) selections from Kierkegaard’s *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, (8) James’s *The Will to Believe*, (9) two whole chapters from James’s *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, and (10) the old-time favorite, the Flew, Hare, and Mitchell debate, *Theology and Falsification*.

The set-up of central texts surrounded by others, however, is bound to confuse students. The reason is that in some of the units the supplemental readings tend to relate to what is quite tangential to the central reading or only vaguely connected to it. Here are some examples:

In the unit on Anselm’s *Proslogion*, because Anselm mentions omnipotence, we have two articles, by Frankfurt and Mavrodes, on the paradoxes of omnipotence, unrelated to Anselm. And because Anselm mentions forgiveness, we have an article on that topic, by Anne Minas, once again not related to Anselm.

The section leading off with James’s “The Will to Believe” appropriately follows with Clifford’s “The Ethics of Belief,” which was the occasion for James’s essay, and but one article on James’s essay. But the rest is only tangentially related to James’s specific pragmatist stance, instead dealing with the entire question of whether belief requires evidence. This rest has Pascal’s wager, a critique of it by Simon Blackburn, and an

exchange between Alvin Plantinga and Michael Martin on the former’s idea of basic propositions, which require no evidence. It would have made much better sense to structure this unit with Clifford’s essay—demanding evidence for all beliefs—as the central text, followed by Pascal, James, Plantinga, etc., as responding to Clifford’s demand. That way James’s pragmatist reply to Clifford would have lined up with non-pragmatist attempts to recognize the warrant of non-evidentially based beliefs, all contra Clifford.

So students are likely to be confused: anticipating supplemental readings dealing with major themes of the lead-reading, they might find that the supplemental readings do no such thing. And what is presented as a unit based on the central reading can turn out to be instead a unit based on a *topic* of which the central reading is no more than a part.

In addition to collecting the readings, Cahn gives introductions to each unit. Here, much attention is given to the lead article and not enough to supplemental ones, especially when they are technical. The description of the supplementary articles tends toward the perfunctory.

My recommendation: Forget about the structure of “Ten Essential Texts,” which doesn’t work too well. Instead, just use it as an excellent “reader in philosophy of religion” that happily brings together in one volume lengthy selections of some of the best in the field throughout history.

Possible Worlds

John Divers (New York: Routledge, 2002), 380 pp., \$125 hardback, \$34.95 paper.

Reviewed by John Nolt
University of Tennessee-Knoxville

The groundbreaking work of Saul Kripke, David Lewis, David Kaplan, Alvin Plantinga, Roderick Chisholm, and others made modal metaphysics a hot new area in the analytic philosophy of the 1960s and early 1970s. Since then, though much of the vast conceptual territory that these thinkers opened up remains *terra incognita*, some has been explored in great detail. In *Possible Worlds* John Divers surveys the results of these subsequent explorations.

The book’s coverage of theories of possible worlds is, as Divers concedes at the outset, less than complete. These are either realist, which hold that many possible worlds exist, or antirealist, which deny this. Divers treats only the realist theories in depth—though among them he includes actualist theories, which regard possible worlds as one or another kind of actually existing abstract entities. Among all the realist views, Divers favors (and devotes most of his attention to) what he calls “genuine realism,” a position typified by Lewis’s work. Divers does not, however, dismiss antirealism; indeed, he had originally planned to cover it, but, he says, “I became convinced that the literature on possible worlds as it stood did not offer an appropriate basis on which to proceed. So the work on antirealism was postponed, and the present book emerged as an attempt to clear the ground for that work” (p. xi).

The book as we have it is divided into four parts. Part I is an introduction to possible worlds and their philosophical uses, Part II a discussion of genuine realism, and Part III a treatment of actualist realism. Part IV provides a brief summary and conclusion.

Regarding Part I, “I hope,” writes Divers, “that the introductory material will serve both the philosophy undergraduate who

comes to the topic anew and those more familiar with the subject matter who would value a general perspective on the taxonomy and evaluation of the realist and antirealist positions” (p. xii). But while none of the book is technically demanding, all of it, including Part I, presupposes familiarity with so many areas of recent philosophy that it would be an extraordinary undergraduate who could get much out of it. To understand even Part I, the student would need more than a passing acquaintance with first order logic and its semantics, modal logic, Cantor’s theorem, Kripke semantics, analytic metaphysics (especially Lewis’s works), various topics in the philosophy of language, and recent work on supervenience and causation in the philosophy of science. All of this is presupposed rather than explained—or, where explanation is provided, it is too sketchy for the novice. I would not, therefore, recommend even Part I, much less the rest of the book, for undergraduate courses.

Part II is largely a defense of Lewis-style “genuine realism” against a multitude of objections. Divers here defines genuine realism as the view that “takes unrestricted first-order quantification to range over a domain of individuals, among which only some actually exist” (p. 21). Included among these individuals are possible but nonactual worlds. Here Divers makes what I consider to be one of the few mistakes in this remarkably careful and accurate book, for this definition also fits certain *antirealist* views, since one can accept first-order quantification over nonactual individuals and worlds but deny that this quantification affirms their existence. (Divers apparently presumes that so-called “existential” quantification always affirms existence, but that is a contested point.¹)

Possible worlds as the genuine realist conceives them are spatiotemporal entities of the same kind as the actual world, many containing people, places, and things quite like familiar people, places, and things, but whose spaces and times are totally disconnected from our own. The idea that such things exist and account for the truth of our modal assertions seems, to put it mildly, zany—and yet, as Divers shows, it is not easy to refute. Over the course of five chapters, he painstakingly catalogs and evaluates thirty years of objections to the view and, in the end, concludes that none of them succeeds in defeating it. Most threatening is the objection that genuine realism requires a seemingly inexplicable a priori knowledge of worlds and things existing outside our universe. But because no one has developed a satisfactory modal epistemology, he does not regard even that as decisive.

Like Lewis, Divers couples genuine realism with counterpart theory, which requires that all individuals be worldbound (i.e., inhabit the domain of only one world). But the two views need not be so tightly joined. One can, as in many-worlds interpretations of quantum mechanics, accommodate denizens of the domains of many worlds within a nonactualist realism. (Many-worlds interpretations also differ from Lewis’s realism in allowing distinct worlds to have overlapping spatiotemporal regions.) Divers, however, dismisses quantum mechanics as irrelevant to philosophical talk of worlds, since “it is a matter of absolute contingency whether quantum theory is true” (p. 39). But even if we grant the irrelevance of quantum mechanics (as I think we should *not*), it does not follow, as Divers seems to assume, that nonactualist realism requires worldbound individuals. Though Divers’s discussion of nonactualist versions of transworld identity is thus too thin, still his account of counterpart theory is exceedingly rich.

In Part III, Divers argues that, on balance, all the available versions of actualism have fewer benefits and more costs than genuine realism. Actualists aim to analyze possible worlds as actual abstract objects of some sort: maximal consistent sets of propositions, maximal states of affairs, set-theoretic

combinations of actual entities, world-natures, world-properties, or the like. Divers argues convincingly that each actualist analysis is crippled by some combination of the following ills: covert appeals to unanalyzed modal concepts, inability to provide a rich variety of ontological constructs, conflict with our semantic intuitions, ontologies that are not both “safe and sane,” logical paradoxes, and difficulties regarding transworld identity and transworld identification.

Divers concludes the book as follows: “we have now reached a stage at which those who would persist in the use of possible-world talk and avoid commitment to genuine realism should look beyond actualist realism to the antirealist options” (p. 297). I agree and look forward to reading what he has to offer on that subject.

This is a fine scholarly work—detailed, clear, and accurate—with an extensive bibliography and an excellent index. While undergraduates would find all of it daunting, it will be valuable to seasoned graduate students and researchers with an interest in modal metaphysics.

Endnotes

1. See, for example, John Nolt, “What Are Possible Worlds,” *Mind*, 95 (1986): 432-45.

On Bullshit

Harry G. Frankfurt (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005) \$9.95

Reviewed by Eugene Kelly
New York Institute of Technology

This little gem of a monograph appears at first to be an exercise in irony: The dedication, the reader’s first point of entry, reads “To Joan—truly.” To *you*: no bullshit! Poor Joan, whoever she is. To have a book on bullshit genuinely dedicated to you seems a dubious honor. Yet the book is not intended as a joke, or *jeu d’esprit* of linguistic analysis, for readers are asked to take it as an analysis of a serious contemporary problem. Nietzsche spoke of using his nose to evaluate a philosophy, and the evaluation of bullshit, as a character of bad philosophy or at least of bad discourse, would naturally require serious olfactory attention. However, someone at Princeton University Press must have smelled money in a reprint of this essay, which the author, Harry G. Frankfurt, wrote many years ago, and, indeed, it soon appeared on best-seller lists—surely a rarity for a philosophical essay. Bullshit, as Frankfurt notes, gets a wide hearing. If the book had been titled *Frankfurt on Baloney*, the author would have spared his readers the scatology and conveyed the same content, but the study would have lost its attractive aroma.

In a PBS interview and in an interview with the *New York Times*, Frankfurt attributed a certain moral urgency to his theme. The purposes of his analysis are practical and political. He asks on the first page of the book two leading questions: Why is bullshit a “salient feature” of our culture, and why do we “take it for granted?” These questions of fact suggest more theoretical ones, namely, just what is bullshit, and what function does it serve that makes it as prevalent as it is? These in turn raise a political question—What can we do about it?—which Frankfurt does not pursue at length. His theoretical analysis (which takes off from, and is parallel to, an earlier analysis of “humbug” by Max Black) emphasizes two distinctive features of bullshit, that it is discourse without a concern for the truth, and it is intended to mask the real beliefs and intentions of the speaker. Bullshit appears, he believes, when a person speaks

without concern for the truth, whether to get himself out of a sticky situation, to fool people about his intentions, or to appear wise in a situation in which he is called upon to speak of matters he knows little of.

Frankfurt's procedure is linguistic rather than phenomenological. He adverts frequently to entries in the *OED* for examples of the term's usages. No doubt the connotation and legitimate usages of the term in English discourse are vague, and any analysis that seeks to give us a univocal account may be doomed to failure. Some of this effort to get a clear sense of how the term "bullshit" functions in English is similar to asking too many questions about the plot of a film, or of the *Ring of the Nibelungen*: the story loses its initially coherent appearance. Much in language, especially slang, is simply not coherent, consistent, and unambiguous. Frankfurt recognizes early on that the term is often employed quite loosely—simply as a "generic term of abuse, with no very specific literal meaning" (p. 2). Further, he notes, the phenomenon of bullshit is "amorphous" and, therefore, any "crisp" analysis of it must take some arbitrary liberties.

But the *phenomenon* Frankfurt has in mind surely has intuitive content. Bullshit, it seems to this speaker of frequently salty English, appears in a relationship between the speaker (the bullshit artist), the hearer, and the discourse (the purported bullshit): it is, as it were, a relationship between the thrower, the thrown, and the target. Thus, the attribution of bullshit does not apply to an object but rather to a complex human interaction containing subjective and evaluative phenomena, on the back of which bullshit appears. The same content, the same spoken words, may be perceived as bullshit in one context and not in another. This becomes clear from Frankfurt's preliminary example of bullshit, that is, of the pre-bullshit phenomenon of humbug, although he does not seem to see this point. A politician is giving a Fourth-of-July speech. The orator speaks of "our great and blessed country, whose Founding Fathers under divine guidance created a new beginning for mankind" (p. 16.). This Frankfurt calls humbug, if not bullshit. The intentions of the orator, he says, are not to deceive his audience about the qualities their nation possesses but to deceive them about himself: he wants them to perceive him as a true patriot. But his audience may not see the matter in this way, and neither may the orator: proud to be selected to give the Fourth-of-July speech, the politician gives ceremonial voice to the natural pieties the average person feels toward the sources of his or her country's origins, values, and the greatness of its traditions. Simple folk in the audience, perhaps a lady clutching at her deceased husband's Silver Star, may be moved to tears by words whose banality is perceived only by more sophisticated listeners. Humbug and bullshit appear in this context only to a hearer who is on to wily politicians, who is fully aware of the ills his nation has suffered and the evils it has perpetrated, and who is nauseated by the stench of what he hears as very, very bad poetry. He smells bullshit in the thrown, insincerity in the thrower, and foolishness in the audience. Of course, he may be right—but then he may be wrong, also, since bullshit lies in the intentions of the speaker to victimize the audience by what he throws at them. A sophisticated and candid target of such speeches, smelling bullshit in the words of the orator, will cry out, "Aw, you're full of (bull)shit!" thus disengaging the thrower from the thrown, unmasking his foul intentions, and sparing his other targets the indignity of being spattered with the hypocrisy and disdain for the truth that Frankfurt identifies as the very core of bullshit.

A thoughtful hearer, like Frankfurt, may respond as a philosophical geneticist to these piles of bullshit, and to bullshit artists: let us explain why bullshit happens. Of course, people

always and everywhere have tried to mask their own intentions short of lying about them. Frankfurt observes, first, that the large measure of bullshit in the air today may correspond to the greater amount of communication of all kinds we enjoy today: there is more opportunity for bullshitting. Then, too, I think, the amount of bullshit sophisticated auditors experience may be due to their tendency to smell bullshit where the speaker has political convictions different from their own.

Frankfurt's second response to the plethora of bullshit is psychological: we trouble ourselves so little about the awful bullshit that surrounds us because we sense a tendency in ourselves to bullshit our way through situations where outright lies would be ineffective or dangerous. We tolerate it in others because we tolerate it in ourselves. But more lies at its origins and our toleration of it than that. Faust certainly bullshits Gretchen when she asks him how he stands with religion. Nothing that he tells her is entirely a lie, but the whole truth would have cost him her affection. Thus he masks his beliefs, if not his intentions. Gretchen, no doubt, senses this fact (she continues to question him after his first response), but she accepts his bullshit because *she* wishes to retain her affection for *him* (He's not really lying, she thinks. Even the preacher says as much, after all—in somewhat different words). Similarly, most of us wish to believe the bullshit artists we hear on television talking about the struggle for freedom in Iraq or the virtues of Viagra, because we have a stake in those things, they are telling us what we want to hear, and thus we bracket our sophistication for a while. Felix Krull, like other confidence men, draws people and their fortunes to him by dint of his attractive mask. Bullshit, as noted earlier, often smells sweet; like Gretchen, we become complicit in our own victimization.

The moral seriousness of Frankfurt's essay becomes most clear toward the end: although we may do little to protect ourselves from the bullshit flying about, and clever bullshit artists may profit from our connivance, the cultural loss is considerable. For the bullshitter degrades the values of truth by his indifference to truth and falsity (in this way he differs from the liar and, Frankfurt says, from fraud and humbug) and by encouraging a similar indifference in his hearers. Frankfurt's final remarks on his theme are interesting even if, to my mind, somewhat questionable. A paraphrase risks misinterpretation, but he seems to believe that our tendency to bullshit people has not only made us tolerant of bullshitters but also has given us a pervasive skepticism regarding our knowledge of how things really are in the world ("Who really knows the truth, anyway?" we ask ourselves skeptically). Yet we believe we know our own feelings directly and, therefore, think we can be sincere in our accounts of them. If bullshit is inevitable, at least sincerity about ourselves is possible and desirable. But we have no reason to believe, Frankfurt holds, that our knowledge of ourselves and our feelings is any better founded than our knowledge of the world—indeed, given the instability of our selfhood, our knowledge of ourselves is less certain than of the external world. If so, he argues, the fetish of sincerity produces, in the end, nothing but bullshit.

The pedagogical issues Frankfurt brings to the surface in this little book are weighty: selfish and lazy inattention to the demands of truth is the bane of contemporary discourse, and the reason for the urgency of Frankfurt's analysis. We need a theory of bullshit to recognize and resist the threat it poses to effective thinking. Instructors of philosophy, I have heard, are haunted by the thought that students think of their courses as so much bullshit. Do students refer with that phrase to the phenomenon that disturbs Frankfurt, that philosophy courses display no concern for the truth? Do students believe that teachers are blathering about the gods, the Good, and the

Greeks to be amusing, to assume the mantle of wisdom or of profundity, or to earn an easy living by babbling? Do they hear from their professors big words about obscure questions that have no moral or spiritual foundation in the speakers' lives? Then, of course, they will think themselves to be recipients of bullshit, like the sophisticated hearer of the Fourth-of-July speech. Only if the words, ideas, and text can transform them internally, only if the teacher becomes the Master, in touch with the issues that lie at the root of our common humanity, can the specter of bullshit be banished. What is intended to affect the heart must come from the heart. Of course, we can try to bullshit our way through this accusation of being bullshit artists. And we may have the students on our side, in this matter at least. Outrageous bullshitting is interesting if ephemeral, and the enduring values of philosophy as difficult as they are rare. Doesn't our audience demand bullshit and feel relieved when the professor's concern for the truth does not require greater discipline and commitment from them than they are willing to give him?

A Parliament of Minds: Philosophy for the New Millennium

Michael Tobias, J. Patrick Fitzgerald, and David Rothenberg, eds. (State University of New York, 2000), 320 pp., \$23.50 paper

Reviewed by Bruce B. Suttle
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Soon after the end of World War II, there first appeared anthologies of philosophical views addressing the task of philosophy in the latter half of the twentieth century. Then there were more specific collections on current pragmatic, analytic, linguistic, Marxist, existential, phenomenological, and post-analytic philosophies. There were also collections of interviews and dialogues ranging over the territories of philosophy. No decade since WWII has lacked such anthologies of articles or collections of interviews. *A Parliament of Minds* joins this tradition.

The occasion for the interviews contained in the volume under review was the 1998 Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy held in Boston. Of the three thousand philosophers at the conference, twenty-four were chosen. The interviews were conducted by Michael Malone of the long-running PBS interview program *Malone* and, at the time, the newly appointed editor of the *Forbes ASAP* magazine. Few APA members will be familiar with all those interviewed, yet most will know the thoughts or reputation of more than a few. The editors saw the occasion as "an opportunity for the profession of philosophy, at the end of the century and the beginning of a new millennium, to take stock of itself, to ask what philosophy has done to contribute to the betterment of humanity and what philosophy should contribute toward the future of life on earth and life in human communities—political, emotional, spiritual and contemplative life." The philosophers chosen for this project were diverse in nationality, gender, age, voice, and interests; they ranged from accomplished senior philosophers to younger faculty members from various universities (but none from four-year colleges or community colleges). The series of interviews was to have a dual purpose: first, to offer a wide representation of contemporary philosophers in such a manner as "to demystify and humanize the formal discipline of philosophy"; second, to aid in making philosophy more accessible and relevant to the public at large and, ultimately, "to lend lyricism and urgency

to the perennial concerns of philosophic traditions." (For an alternative view of philosophy and its relation to the public, see John Lachs's "The Future of Philosophy," *The Proceedings and Addresses of The American Philosophical Association*, November 2004: 5-14.)

Despite the diversity in their backgrounds, credentials, and areas of specialization, these philosophers shared a common belief that while philosophy is extremely important and valuable, the discipline has recently become overly self-contained, prompting the realization that "philosophy's place in the world at large has got to change." We are reminded that early in the last century John Dewey said that philosophy starts to lose its footing when it concentrates on "the problems of philosophers, not the problems of human beings." And the editors ask, "Why has philosophy failed its public?" Eighty-nine-year-old Marjorie Grene has a crisp response:

The philosopher's room is a chamber that's sealed. All doors are shut firmly against reality. It's this self-contained game. And an awful lot of it has no connection with anything. I don't understand how young people get interested in this whirligig, though some of them are terribly clever. And some of them I like listening to because they're just so damn smart, but they aren't talking about anything at all.

Others join in disparaging how philosophy has become professionalized, compartmentalized, has turned into a career rather than a passion, something to specialize in rather than being an essential element of the life that any educated person would aspire to lead. Furthermore, there seems to be a consensus that in-fighting among philosophers must come to an end. All schools of thought deserve to be part of philosophy in the new millennium, rather than "one tradition above the others."

Hence, philosophy is pictured as having lost its way. It has strayed from being the arch-generalist discipline, being neither poetry nor science, law nor religion, art nor trade. Contemporary philosophy has elevated itself above the demands and confusions of daily living. And in so doing it has "failed its public." But is this charge accurate? Granted, in one respect, the issues of philosophy have become more esoteric, with philosophers talking only to other philosophers. Yet, in another respect, as Michael Malone observed, "Bookstores are full of philosophy, but not being written by philosophers." Apparently, the challenge is for professional philosophers to recapture what it took to be in contact with the public. But, we might ask, in what sense did philosophy in the hands of Descartes or Kant succeed in ways that contemporary philosophers are now claimed to fail?

Are we really to believe that William James's *Essays in Radical Empiricism* and *A Pluralistic Universe*, as well as Husserl's *Idea: A General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* were on virtually everyone's coffee table or bed stand?

We should keep in mind that currently there are journals on applied, practical, and social philosophy; on the philosophical issues connected to public policy and interests; on medical, environmental, and bio-ethics; on ethics and international affairs. Philosophers are now writing articles and reviews for major weeklies; there is a fine, well-established Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children, and philosophy is currently being taught in prisons and military academies. Finally, there are ever-increasing numbers of Socrates' cafes. Clearly the judgment that the discipline of philosophy has cut itself off from the non-philosophical community, and is no longer involved with or caring about the human condition, is somewhat exaggerated.

There seems to be another problem with the general theme of this collection. While, on the one hand, the public is characterized as ready and waiting for professional philosophers to get their act together and start talking with common folk, “to change the ineffectual aspects of the field into something that could engage a greater populace,” philosophy is characterized, on the other hand, as “valuable because it encourages us to think for ourselves; to question our everyday reality as well as the past’s and the future’s; and to take responsibility for what happens to us and what we have faith in, rather than turning these tasks over to some other authority.”

But is it accurate to say that the public really desires greater involvement with philosophy when philosophy is portrayed as wanting us “to question everything we have been told, everything we imagine we need to believe...” and promises “nothing but doubt”? I, for one, doubt it.

A recent study on the time those in Congress have for reflective thinking concluded that, on average, they have only seventeen minutes a week. Most people, even those with the high responsibility of making laws and setting public policies, are not desirous of filling their heads with doubts. Most people want answers—clear, simple answers. Sadly, I don’t think anyone will be converted to the pursuit of philosophy, nor will philosophical specialists be prompted to become generalists, as a result of reading *A Parliament of Minds*.

This brings us to the issue of who would most likely use this text, as distinct from the question of its intended audience. While I enjoyed and learned from many of the interviews, I can’t conceive of a course in which this collection would be required reading. Fellow philosophers certainly could very well have the same positive experience I had in appreciating how rich and varied are the lives and interests of our peers. But I doubt that reading *A Parliament of Minds* can even begin a change in professional philosophers’ direction, scope, and areas of concentration, nor capture and hold the attention of the general public.

In addition to an “About the Editors” section, the text has an informative biography of each of the contributors, including good photographs. While there is no bibliography, there is an index of nearly seven pages (albeit with many entries having only a single page reference).

Fundamentals of Philosophy

John Shand, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2003), 445 pp.

Reviewed by Mark Zelcer
City College, The City University of New York

As survey texts in philosophy go, John Shand’s *Fundamentals of Philosophy* is pretty good. It is a hefty collection of fourteen articles and an introduction, which together span all of Western philosophy. There is one essay each for epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, and logic. They are followed by individual essays in aesthetics, the philosophies of mind, language, science, religion, and politics. There are also three chapters on the history of philosophy. Unsurprisingly, the latter cover the ancient, medieval, and modern periods. The final chapter addresses continental philosophy. Each chapter is written by a different expert.

The book is like an atlas of philosophy. It starts with an attempt to define the discipline as a whole and then describes what it takes to be its core areas, followed by the main historical topography, then some more finely detailed surveys, and, finally, what is sometimes taken to be the far reaches of the

philosophical landscape, namely, continental philosophy. This approach, though not completely uncontroversial, is helpful.

In the Introduction, philosophy is defined (with some refinement) as “what happens when you start thinking for yourself” as opposed to maintaining “the habits of received belief.” This is plausible enough. Then there is a taxonomy of philosophical topics such that logic, epistemology, and metaphysics are located at the core of philosophy; ethics, philosophy of science, language, and mind are in the middle; and everything else, including history of philosophy, is at the periphery. The expansion outward is taken by the editor to represent increasing generality. But this seems (to this reviewer) to be somewhat dubious and, at the least, needs defending. (Why is philosophy of science or ethics taken to be more general than metaphysics?) For this reason, I find the introduction to the volume to be the philosophically weakest section of the book.

Each of the subsequent fourteen chapters has features both to recommend it, and some with which one might quibble. But that is the nature of philosophy. None of the chapters has enough shortcomings to prevent me from recommending it.

I shall not examine each chapter in detail but shall point out the main features of each. Though many chapters are quite friendly to the novice, the volume as a whole is probably not for the philosophically uninitiated. Alan Goldman’s chapter on epistemology, for example, cannot be read without at least some background. It sets out the nature, scope, and structure of knowledge, and states the problem of skepticism and offers a contextualist response to it. It looks at the justified true-belief account of knowledge, the Gettier problem, and some solutions to that problem. Michael Jubien’s section on metaphysics concentrates on Leibniz’s Law, on properties, on the paradox of non-being, on actualism and possibilism, and on the metaphysics of death. Here the discussion is a bit more beginner-friendly than the preceding Goldman chapter. The chapter on ethics, by Piers Benn, covers the usual suspects: relativism, egoism, consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics, and is overall fairly accommodating to neophytes. None of Benn’s discussions focus on the history of their questions, but are all problem-oriented in their presentation.

The chapters on the history of philosophy were all done extremely well. The chapter containing the Presocratics, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle is by Suzanne Stern-Gillet. The chapter in this collection I personally derived the most benefit (and enjoyment) from is Dermont Moran’s on medieval philosophy; perhaps because my own knowledge of the medievals was extremely limited, or perhaps because the chapter is the longest one (forty-eight pages). It deals lucidly with many of the problems, schools, and individuals in the medieval philosophical tradition. Richard Francks’s chapter on modern philosophy covers the “big-six”: Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Berkeley, Locke, and Hume.

In the chapter on philosophy of mind, Stephen Burwood begins by looking at mind via the Cartesian problem and then discusses the reductive legacy in science. He then discusses some theories of physicalism and functionalism, explaining each position, exploring the implications of each, and offering critiques of each. Alexander Miller’s chapter on the philosophy of language deals unfortunately almost exclusively with reference. We learn only of Frege, Russell, Kripke, and of Putnam’s Twin Earth. Alexander Bird’s section on the philosophy of science covers laws, explanation (mostly the deductive nomological model), natural kinds, the problem of induction, and realism.

The chapter on political philosophy is particularly elegant. Dudley Knowles asks: 1) Does the state have a legitimate claim to authority? 2) How should the state be constituted?

3) How much should the state be constrained by citizens' rights? and 4) How do we determine a just allocation of goods? The elegance of the chapter lies in the fine balance it strikes between its discussion of the issues raised by these questions and its discussion of the history of these issues within the larger field. All the major historical philosophers are nicely represented.

Colin Lyas's chapter on aesthetics starts by attempting to draw a distinction between aesthetics and philosophical aesthetics. Various questions about the philosophy of art are addressed, including those relating to the definition and value of art. Under the rubric of "art's value," Lyas asks what we get from art, and whether art has intrinsic value. Problems of ontology, such as the difference between an original artwork and a copy, and questions about the significance of the author's intention in making an artwork are also raised, as are questions pertaining to particular art forms such as tragedy and musical expression. He raises a question about tragedy that Schopenhauer and Nietzsche disagreed on: Why would people involve themselves so intently with something so distressing? Slightly distracting in this chapter are the author's frequent references to specific works of art that might not be familiar to the reader. A short description of the referred-to works would have been helpful.

W. Jay Wood's essay on the philosophy of religion deals with some of the traditional questions in the philosophy of religion, such as: Does God exist? Should belief in God require evidence? What is God like? What does the existence of evil say about God's existence? The issues here are clear, but the arguments that the author refers to are only described rather than laid out. Spelling out the actual arguments would have been useful.

The last chapter is Simon Glending's introduction to continental philosophy. This chapter gives a list of what Glending takes to be the fifty-one major figures in the field, together with a brief one-paragraph philosophical biography of each. I found reading straight through the list fairly unhelpful in getting an understanding of the philosophical terrain, though as a reference to its representative writers in the field it may prove useful. Following that is a somewhat more useful list of the fifteen major schools of thought that are usually collected under the heading "continental philosophy." There is also a somewhat perplexing "map" listing and arranging of all the mentioned philosophers, attempting to illustrate "movements in the stream." Neither the movements nor the relationships between the philosophers are articulated clearly, though. The remaining space in the chapter is dedicated to defining what continental philosophy is. The author denies that it is any one particular movement or school but, rather, an amalgamation of views traditionally shunned by so-called analytic philosophers. While I would have preferred more actual philosophy in this chapter, it is quite illuminating with respect to the concerns of the philosophers who take themselves to be in the continental tradition. The author's case that there is no clear line between analytic and continental philosophy is also quite convincing. In an important sense, the chapter is an introduction to continental philosophy for non-continental philosophers. It is written "from the inside" for outsiders, by someone who understands how continental philosophy is perceived by both. This should be useful to the average reader of this collection.

I think that in a collection such as this a chapter on non-Western philosophy would be as appropriate as one on continental philosophy. Perhaps a future edition will include one.

As far as the book's structural properties, the chapters are not exactly uniform in style, but that does not detract from its quality. All the sections have good bibliographies, and a few

exercise questions that are quite thoughtful and many of which can be adapted as assignments or starting points for exploratory or clarifying discussions. There is an index at the end, and all of the chapters are of manageable length.

The essays are mainly expository, but some are also mildly polemical. As one might expect, one can take issue with almost any stance presented in the text (which is not to say that this in any way works to the detriment of the volume). One can, for example, be a cultural relativist and still get maximal benefit out of the ethics chapter, despite Benn's anti-relativist discussions. But one's own biases are still worth keeping in mind so as not to come away with the impression that what is presented here is the final word, as indeed there are few final words in philosophy.

Finally, many philosophers will find that their favorite problem or problems are not represented in the volume at all. (My personal favorite, the interpretation of probability, is not in the philosophy of science chapter.)

In this book, one will not learn, say, logic from Greg Restall's section on logic or, say, epistemology from Goldman's chapter. But both chapters offer a way of getting a glimpse of a philosophical field in one fell swoop without the reader getting lost or overwhelmed. Indeed, it would be very difficult in one volume to summarize philosophy better than our authors have in this book. When even undergraduates in philosophy are being pushed to specialize more and more, and students enter graduate programs with extremely varied philosophical backgrounds, this book offers an excellent resource both for the undergraduate and for the early graduate student, as it can serve to fill in lacunae and round out their philosophical education. Anyone taking a beginning class in a field represented by one of the chapters would be extremely well advised to read the chapter on that field both before and after the semester. Courses often get bogged down among philosophical trees; this book will force the student to notice the forest.

What If...Collected Thought Experiments in Philosophy

Peg Tittle (New York: Pearson Longman, 2005).

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Undoubtedly, there is a feeling that all of us have had as both scholars and educators of philosophy. Giving a lecture, grading a paper, or listening to a student's question, one may get the feeling that whatever it is that we have been calling philosophy has in fact become the history of ideas. One student, rather than struggling and working through an idea, impatiently demands "the answer." Another, undoubtedly studious, nevertheless turns in a paper that looks like a virtual transcription of your last lecture. Philosophy has a rich intellectual history filled with thinkers and theories that need to be taught more than ever today. Of course, there are facts about that history. The content of the problems philosophers face and the particular methods of dealing with them are important to learn, but our undergraduates (to say nothing of ourselves) ought not to look at philosophy as dogma. At a moment when education is increasingly reduced to a vocational training that considers the critical thinking skills offered by the humanities as a decorative afterthought, questions of pedagogy are not just relevant—they are absolutely

crucial if the exigencies of philosophy are to resonate outside the occasionally rarefied air of our departments. Peg Tittle's *What If...Collected Thought Experiments in Philosophy* seeks to facilitate such a resonance. It is a stimulating teaching aid that offers thorough consideration of the canon's main themes through exposure to problem-solving skills. In doing so, it makes an introduction to philosophy an invitation to thought itself.

Tittle's approach is to provide a catalog, as it were, of philosophy's key problems. On each page, she isolates a specific philosophical dilemma and then, on the facing page, analyzes its presuppositions and implications. *What If* brings together problem sets stretching in historical breadth from Zeno to Searle. They are thematically arranged in the manner of many introductory courses in philosophy, and, for this reason, professors of almost any undergraduate course can find here a thought experiment to invigorate whatever it is that they might be teaching: metaphysics, epistemology, logic, philosophy of mind, personal identity, ethics, and political theory. Instead of merely rehearsing arguments concerning, say, intentionality and idealism, *What If* encourages educators to ask their students about those trees in the forest. Readers are provoked by Berkeley's *Principles of Human Knowledge* in the way he would have intended. Instead of leaving in isolation Kant's arguments that space is an a priori form of sensibility, Tittle's analyses place Kant in dialogue with, in one instance, Strawson's no-space world. The book operates as an elenchus of sorts, provoking an aporia in some cases and demystifying in others.

Surely there are some topics that professional philosophers might find conspicuously absent. Philosophy of religion, one of three parts of the metaphysics section (the largest section of the text), curiously begins with Gaunilo's island without having a separate experiment for Anselm's ontological argument. There is equal treatment given to theoretical and applied ethics, but there is scarcely a word on virtue ethics. The social and political philosophy section is weighted primarily toward liberal and libertarian thought. It could be balanced and enriched with some discussions from communitarian and social-democratic philosophy. There is virtually no consideration of contributions from contemporary continental philosophy on any of the topics. Such omissions notwithstanding, the scope of the book is remarkable, particularly given its concise length. And the absence of certain topics is incidental to every introductory text in philosophy, where authors always run the risk of doing too much or too little.

Since over simplification is a real threat in teaching philosophy, the text is best used as a supplement so as not to reduce the vibrancy from which these problems arise. Despite the topical division of the text, each section lacks any kind of introduction to highlight key themes and enduring issues. As such, it is not a reference as much as it is a kind of workbook to be used in conjunction with other materials. It should be obvious that the design here is not to create a substitute for sustained exegeses of primary sources. Nevertheless, the text could definitely make for fruitful and thoughtful reading outside academic settings. Those with a casual interest in philosophy who pick up *What If* will find a concise introduction to the field through the very problems with which philosophers grapple.

If, as Aristotle has said, philosophy begins with wonder, then *What If* is surely a great place to inspire it in beginners. Tittle's analyses aim to supply the reader with just enough provocation to initiate thought, while at the same time stimulating further interests and inquiries independent of the specific problems under consideration and, thus, independent of any course in which they might be taught. And this, of course, ought to be the goal of any study of philosophy—to incite an interrogatory comportment within the world while developing tools for critical

reflection that may come to permeate our very being. This is a tall order for all of us, indeed, but it is one toward which we must work lest philosophy be relegated to the ends of the seesaw of its stereotype as either another academic requirement consisting of meaningless memorizations or a semi-mystical discipline trapped in its sophistry.

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