

# Teaching Philosophy



SPRING 2017

VOLUME 16 | NUMBER 2

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APA NEWSLETTER ON

# Teaching Philosophy

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TZIPORAH KASACHKOFF AND EUGENE KELLY, CO-EDITORS

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## FROM THE EDITORS

Tziporah Kasachkoff

THE GRADUATE CENTER, CUNY, [TKASACHKOFF@YAHOO.COM](mailto:TKASACHKOFF@YAHOO.COM)

Eugene Kelly

NEW YORK INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY, [EKELLY@NYIT.EDU](mailto:EKELLY@NYIT.EDU)

Welcome to the spring 2017 issue of the *APA Newsletter on Teaching Philosophy*. In this issue we present four articles, a book review, and a list of recently published books that may be useful to teachers of philosophy.

Our first and second articles, “How Teaching Should Matter” and “How Teachers Succeed,” are both authored by Steven M. Cahn (Professor Emeritus at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York). Cahn notes that university philosophy departments that hire instructors to teach the courses that are on offer in those departments rarely require of job applicants that they demonstrate teaching ability (or, in some cases, even interest). Though successful job applicants will earn their university salary by teaching students, their application for a teaching position is, for the most part, assessed by appraisal of prior academic achievements and publishing record and promise. There is, therefore, a disconnect between what is required for being a successful teaching-job *applicant* and being an effective *teacher*. Cahn offers our readers specific advice on 1) what graduate programs in philosophy should do to better prepare their students for these students’ eventual teaching positions; 2) the criteria that philosophy departments should employ in evaluating candidates’ pedagogic skills and talents; and 3) fashioning criteria for promotion and tenure that reflect, in addition to scholastic competence, the pedagogic skills that encourage learning on the part of our students.

Cahn’s second article, “How Teachers Succeed,” focuses on the question of what, given the challenges that face us in the classroom, an instructor should do so as to meet those challenges and become a successful teacher. Cahn lists three “strategic concepts” that he claims are the key to effective pedagogy. None of these strategies is arcane and some may even seem obvious, yet we have all witnessed—and perhaps even engaged in—teaching that fails to exhibit them. As Cahn himself notes, the strategies he recommends are necessary not only for successful classroom presentations, but also for the delivery of public lectures in the field. We believe that philosophy students would also be well-served by the adoption of these

strategies in the presentation of their own views, whether orally in class or in written assignments.

Our third article is “Didactical Ordering and Emotional Moral Persuasion” by Shlomo Cohen (Professor of Philosophy, Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Israel). Professor Cohen first addresses the question of the *order* in which it is best to present the topics typically covered in an Introduction to Ethics course. In his own such course, Professor Cohen presents (through readings in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, Kant’s *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, and Mill’s *Utilitarianism*) what he terms “the three main systems of ethics.” But he has encountered the following problem, one that many instructors of introductory courses in ethics (except, perhaps, those who teach in a religious institution) will recognize: The principles of right conduct that these systems put forth are presented as objective and valid principles, but many beginning students proclaim themselves to be moral relativists or normative egoists. Given their self-identified commitment to moral relativism and normative egoism, though the students may learn to demonstrate how the ethical principles set forth by these systems are to be applied, they will not be able to take them seriously as truly valid options for the moral assessment of conduct. Professor Cohen argues that this problem is to be dealt with by deciding on a particular ordering of class readings and discussions, first attending to the topic of moral relativism and normative egoism, and only afterwards turning to the readings and discussion of the normative ethical principles that characterize Aristotle, Kant, and Mills (and other writers) on substantive ethics. Cohen goes to some length to explain his rationale for ordering his teaching in this way.

The second (and perhaps, for some, most controversial) part of Cohen’s paper is entitled “Moral Persuasion and the Sense of Shame.” Here Cohen describes a method he uses in class to get students to reconsider their self-descriptions as moral relativists and normative egoists. He suggests a way that the instructor can force students to confront the heretofore unrecognized limits that they themselves now believe should constrain the views that they enthusiastically endorsed as limitless before.

Our fourth and final paper, “Teaching ‘Introduction to Women’s Studies’ as a Critical Thinking Course,” is authored by Stephen J. Sullivan (Philosophy Professor in the Department of English and Philosophy, Edinboro University). This article is a detailed description of the course that Sullivan teaches, along with the rationale for constructing the course the way that he does. Issues regarding the treatment of women is, of course, a moral

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(as well as political, social, cultural, and, in some cases, a religious) issue that has long been dealt with by philosophers—Elizabeth Anderson, Annette Baier, Seyla Benhabib, Marilyn Frye, Jean Hampton, Sally Haslanger, Virginia Held, Janet Radcliffe Richards, and Christina Hoff Sommers, to mention only a few of the very many who have authored articles and/or books on this issue. So philosophical treatment of feminism issues has not been lacking. But what Sullivan does here is describe for readers how he brings a critical-thinking perspective to feminist issues for an audience of students who are largely college freshmen who have never taken a philosophy course (or even any college course) and who, through this course, are being taught to think systematically and carefully about issues, both factual and normative, that arise in connection with discussions of feminism. On the factual side, the class looks at, among other issues, gender representation (in advertising, for example) and gender privilege (both male and female). On the normative side, some of the questions explored in class are as follows: Can a feminist consistently hold a pro-life (i.e., an anti-abortion) position? and Is there any normative reason why the choice of being a full-time homemaker is not a good choice for a woman? Additionally, Sullivan explores with his students the view (advanced by Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon) that both male *and* female attitudes towards women—and the behavior that these attitudes inspire in both—are deeply influenced by pornography and so dealing with the former involves dealing with the latter. Also looked at in class are what might be regarded as “tangential” issues: the connection between feminism and racial equality; the connection between feminist concerns and those having to do with LGBT concerns; and what dating etiquette reveals about our gender attitudes, both obvious and veiled.

Helpfully, towards the end of his paper, Sullivan states explicitly the ways in which his teaching of the varied and sensitive topics that are covered in the course are infused with critical thinking.

Finally, Sullivan indicates the assignments he gives his students and on which students are graded. A bibliography appears at the end of the article.

***As editors of this publication, we would very much like to hear from readers who take up some of the suggestions made by those whose articles appear. What have you found useful? What advice would you like to add?***

Our book review section contains Nils Rauhut’s review of *The Stone Reader: Modern Philosophy in 133 Arguments*, edited by Peter Catapano and Simon Critchley. As Professor Rauhut explains, the book is a compilation of essays designed to reach a wide audience, and not merely to appeal to academic philosophers. Perhaps readers might want to consider the book for a course designed to reach non-philosophers, or philosophers and others.

We have, as usual, a list of books we have received for review. As always, we encourage our readers to suggest themselves as reviewers of books (and other materials) that we list or that they think may be especially good for classroom use. It is especially useful to receive reviews

of materials from those philosophy instructors who have previously used those materials in their own classrooms and so can comment from experience on the merits and/or disadvantages of their use (in reviewing material for our publication, reviewers should bear in mind that our publication is devoted to pedagogy and not to theoretical discussions of philosophical issues).

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## SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

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

Please submit the paper in electronic form. If this is not possible, four complete copies of the paper should be sent to one of the co-editors listed below. Authors should adhere to the production guidelines that are available from the APA. If you are writing your paper in electronic form, ***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 four reviewers and/or by the members of the editorial committee:

Tziporah Kasachkoff, The Graduate Center, CUNY ([tkasachkoff@yahoo.com](mailto:tkasachkoff@yahoo.com)), co-editor

Eugene Kelly, New York Institute of Technology ([ekelly@nyit.edu](mailto:ekelly@nyit.edu)), co-editor

Robert Talisse, Vanderbilt University ([robert.talisse@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:robert.talisse@vanderbilt.edu))

Andrew Wengraf ([andrew.wengraf@gmail.com](mailto:andrew.wengraf@gmail.com))

### Contributions should be sent to

Tziporah Kasachkoff, PhD Program in Philosophy, The Graduate School and University Center, The City University of New York, 365 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10016, or to [tkasachkoff@yahoo.com](mailto:tkasachkoff@yahoo.com)

and/or

Eugene Kelly, New York Institute of Technology, Department of Social Science, Old Westbury, NY 11568, or to [ekelly@nyit.edu](mailto:ekelly@nyit.edu)

## ARTICLES

### *How Teaching Should Matter*

Steven M. Cahn

THE GRADUATE CENTER, CUNY

Like other academics, philosophers pay lip service to the importance of teaching, but as a recent report published in *Teaching Philosophy* demonstrates, practice does not always accord with principle.<sup>1</sup> If teaching is to receive its due, graduate departments need to change how they prepare candidates for faculty positions, while departments seeking new members need to alter criteria for making appointments as well as strategies for encouraging strong performance.

First, graduate departments should require all aspiring faculty members to take a course in methods of teaching. Such courses should involve discussing and practicing all phases of the teaching process, including preparing syllabi, motivating students, clarifying ideas, organizing materials, guiding discussions, constructing examinations, and grading papers. Emphasis should also be placed on the importance and multifaceted nature of a teacher's ethical obligations.

For many years I taught such a course at the City University of New York Graduate Center, and the results were dramatic.<sup>2</sup> As the semester progressed, students began to speak more slowly and clearly, to motivate the audience, and to lead listeners to understand and appreciate issues. The key to this course was that the students did not only talk about teaching; they actually taught in brief segments, then received feedback from others in the class. I should add, however, that when my colleagues sought to enhance the program's national ranking, they replaced comprehensive examinations with papers, eliminated required core courses, and abandoned the course in teaching philosophy. Such steps were thought by the majority to render our department more professionally acceptable.

Many letters of reference, of course, typically contain a sentence praising a candidate's pedagogical skills, yet without including evidence for such assessment. Here's a typical comment: "Although I have never seen Smith teach, knowing her as I do, I am sure she will be highly successful in the classroom." Without personal observation, such remarks should be discounted.

The importance of teaching is likely to be appreciated by graduate programs only if departments making appointments stress quality of teaching in their judgment of candidates. As a start, these departments should state that those candidates who have taken a course in teaching philosophy will be preferred. Once graduate programs receive that message, they will be motivated to include such a course in the curriculum. Publishing in a professional journal is viewed as an asset in obtaining a faculty position, so graduate programs emphasize the importance of publishing. If taking a course in teaching philosophy

were viewed likewise, graduate programs would stress its importance and encourage students to enroll.

In addition, first-round interviews should concentrate not only on a candidate's doctoral dissertation but also ask such questions as: 1) If you were to teach introductory philosophy, what texts would you use, which issues would you cover, and how would you evaluate students? 2) How about the same information regarding basic courses in areas in which you claim competence? 3) What do you think of the practice of grading students, and how would you plan to approach this task? The answers would indicate how seriously a candidate regards teaching.

Furthermore, when candidates are invited for campus interviews, they should be expected to present both a research paper and a talk on an elementary topic, organized and presented as if for introductory students. Only those candidates whose performance is proficient should be considered seriously. As anyone who has attended such a talk knows, a candidate's pedagogical ability becomes obvious after only a few minutes. Some individuals display the requisite skills, whereas others mumble and fumble. Just as those who cannot ably defend their research are passed over, the same fate should befall those who cannot ably teach. Years ago when I chaired the Department of Philosophy at the University of Vermont, the head of the philosophy department at a large state university asked me whether at my school, like his, enrollment in philosophy courses had been shrinking. I told him that, on the contrary, it had been growing. Amazed, he wondered how I accounted for this phenomenon. "Excellent teaching," I said. "We try to make sure that everyone we appoint offers both outstanding scholarship and outstanding teaching. What do you look for?"

"Good scholars," he replied. "We never appoint anyone who hasn't delivered a scholarly paper."

"Why not test their teaching, too?" I inquired.

"Never thought of it," he muttered.

If a baseball team hires strong hitters who are inadequate fielders, the result will be many hits and many errors. Likewise, if a department appoints strong researchers who are inadequate teachers, the result will be more papers published and fewer students enrolled.

Furthermore, just as new faculty members should be given permission to observe the classes of senior members of the department, so new faculty members should occasionally be observed, not to be formally evaluated but to be offered suggestions where appropriate. Professors provide one another assistance in their writing; why shouldn't they provide help in their teaching as well?

We would view with suspicion a surgeon who barred all other surgeons from an operation. We should view with equal skepticism any professors who wish to lock classroom doors against knowledgeable observers.

Regarding decisions for promotion and tenure, departments currently care enough about research to undertake an elaborate review of scholarship. Similarly, departments ought to be equally concerned about teaching to undertake an equally elaborate review of a professor's work in the classroom. Such a review should involve input from departmental colleagues who visit the professor's classes and examine syllabi, examinations, and test papers to assess teaching performance.

Some suppose that students should have the strongest voice in evaluating teachers, and, admittedly, some instructors who receive unflattering student evaluations deserve them. Other instructors, however, can be victims of their own unyielding commitments to tough course requirements, demanding examinations, rigorous grading practices, or unfashionable intellectual positions. Because these factors and others requiring expertise in the subject may not be appreciated in student evaluations, heavy dependence on them menaces academic standards.

While some educational researchers agree that students can provide useful information, hundreds of studies confirm that student evaluations need to be considered in the context of peer evaluations. Otherwise, as one study concluded, departments are "flying blind."<sup>3</sup>

One final point. Just as an outstanding researcher may be awarded tenure even with a weak performance in the classroom, so tenure should also be available to an outstanding teacher with weak research. Granted, the ideal candidate excels as researcher and teacher, but if an occasional exception is made so as not to lose a researcher of national stature, so an occasional exception should also be made to prevent losing a teacher of extraordinary accomplishment. Few teachers can attain such a level of excellence, but to lose one who does is shortsighted.

Doing so will also be unjust, for generations of students pay expensive bills for the privilege of attending classes. Any department that cares deeply about education will take all necessary steps to ensure that generations of students receive the first-rate instruction to which they are entitled.

**NOTES**

1. David W. Concepcion, Melinda Messineo, Sarah Wieten, and Catherine Homan, "The State of Teacher Training in Philosophy," *Teaching Philosophy* 39, no. 1 (2016): 1–24.
2. See my account in *Teaching Philosophy* 27, no. 4 (2004): 321–23.
3. Charles B. Schultz, "Some Limits to the Validity and Usefulness of Student Rating of Teachers: An Argument for Caution," *Educational Research Quarterly* 3 (1978): 12–27.

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## How Teachers Succeed

Steven M. Cahn  
THE GRADUATE CENTER, CUNY

Imagine trying to explain baseball to a person unfamiliar with the sport. Where to begin? With the roles of the pitcher and catcher? How about balls and strikes? Or the location

of the bases, the ways outs can be made, or the structure of an inning? The fundamental difficulty is that all these starting points presume knowledge of some of the others. How, then, can the the circle of intertwining concepts be broken and the subject be made accessible?

Philosophy is far more complex than baseball, and rather than a single listener, a class contains many students with varying skills, interests, and backgrounds. Thus, reaching the entire group is a major challenge. Yet some instructors succeed to a remarkable degree, and anyone fortunate enough to have studied with one of them is apt to remember the experience with gratitude.

The crucial question is what do these teachers have in common that others lack?

The answer is *not* that successful teachers know the subject better than others. Rather, they have mastered pedagogical skills that, surprising to some, are the same whether the students are children, teenagers, or adults.

But what are the fundamentals of pedagogic success? The essence is contained in three strategic concepts.

The first is commonly referred to as "motivation." Without it a class stagnates. After all, how long will you watch a movie that does nothing to capture your attention? Or read a novel that begins with a situation of no interest? The slower the start, the more difficult to generate enthusiasm. At best, the audience allows you a few minutes without much action. The same with teaching.

Consider the openings of the following two lectures, delivered in the years 1969 and 1970 as the presidential addresses of the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association.

One speaker was Wilfrid Sellars, who began as follows:

The quotation which I have taken as my text occurs in the opening paragraphs of the Paralogisms of Pure Reason in which Kant undertakes a critique of what he calls 'Rational Psychology.' The paragraphs are common to the two editions of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and the formulations they contain may be presumed to have continued to satisfy him—at least as introductory remarks.

If your interest has not been aroused, be assured that many in the audience shared that attitude, for although the subject matter was relevant to Kant scholars, not one word that Sellars offered motivated his other listeners. What could he have done instead?

One answer is found in the address given a year earlier by Stuart Hampshire. He, too, wished to give an exposition of a text but offered a far more provocative opening:

I want to speak today about a philosophy of mind to which I will not at first assign an identity or date, except that its author could not have lived and worked before 1600. He is modern, in the

sense that he thinks principally about the future applications of the physical sciences to the study of personality. As I speak, I hope that it will not at first be too easy for you to tell whether or not he is our contemporary, whether indeed he is not present in this room. I attempt this reconstruction as a way of praising a philosopher who has not, I think, been at all justly interpreted so far.

Hampshire's withholding the name of the author was a brilliant stroke, because members of the audience were immediately curious as to whom he was referring. As they looked around, wondering if the subject was there, they also listened carefully, treating Hampshire's every sentence as a clue. Finally, a few minutes from his conclusion, Hampshire revealed that the author in question was Spinoza, and ended by quoting the passage from Spinoza's *Ethics* that had been the unspoken focus.

Had Hampshire begun by quoting the text he intended to discuss, the philosophical substance would have been unchanged, but doing so would have been a pedagogical disaster, for few would have listened with special care. But by making his talk a puzzle, Hampshire captivated his audience, and, having been present myself, I can testify that the quiet in the hall was striking.

No one can offer a formula for developing effective motivational devices. Yet they are crucial to successful teaching.

Even with a motivated student, however, a successful teacher needs to know how to take advantage of such interest. A key element is organization, presenting material in a sequence that promotes understanding.

Previously I referred to trying to teach the rules of baseball to someone unfamiliar with the sport. Consider the following explanation:

"In playing baseball you try to score runs. Only the team to whom the ball is pitched can score. You run around the bases and try to avoid outs. Four balls result in walks. The game has nine innings."

This attempt at teaching is a fiasco. Not that any of the statements is false. Each is true, but, unfortunately, not only disconnected from the previous ones but presuming knowledge that the listener doesn't possess.

The first statement refers to "runs," but the learner hasn't been told how a run is scored. The second statement refers to a ball being "pitched," but the role of the pitcher hasn't been explained. The remaining statements refer to "bases," "outs," "balls," "walks," and "innings," but none of these terms has been put in context. If you don't already understand baseball, you won't learn anything.

The crucial point is that a presentation can be accurate yet not pedagogically well organized. To demonstrate this principle, consider the example of teaching beginners how to play bridge. Even if you're not familiar with the game, all you need know is that it has two parts: the bidding and the

play. The bidding comes first and is a prediction of what will happen when the cards are played.

In teaching bridge, which should be explained first, the bidding or the play? Although during the game bidding comes first, understanding the bidding depends on understanding the play. In other words, the logical order of the game—bidding first, then play—is not the best pedagogical order. If you are considering buying a guide to elementary bridge, check the book's table of contents. If it begins with a chapter on bidding, forget that book, for it will only prove frustrating.

Imagine another experience, common in the days before cars were equipped with GPS. You're driving through an unfamiliar town looking for the highway, and you ask directions from a passerby who responds: "It's easy. Just turn right as you approach the supermarket, then turn left at the second light before the firehouse, then turn right at the stop sign near the post office, and you can't miss it." The problem is obvious: If you are a stranger and don't know where the landmarks are, how can you know when to turn?

Poor teachers may not care whether their students understand a presentation, but successful teachers are eager to explain basic points to those who have trouble grasping them. If someone has no interest in offering such help, that person is not cut out to be a teacher and is akin to a surgeon who complains that all the patients are sick.

Every student making an effort to learn should have the opportunity to do so. That aim can be achieved, however, only if material is presented in an effective order.

Even a well-organized presentation, though, will be unsuccessful if the material is not presented with clarity.

One problem is speaking too quickly. No matter what your content, if you speak too rapidly, you won't be understood.

Indeed, the most obvious sign of a poor lecturer is rushing. When those who are inexperienced come to a podium, they hardly ever speak at a proper pace. Yet when you hear a genuine orator, the sentences come slowly. No student will ever object to your speaking too slowly, but many will complain if the words cascade.

Another problem is using terms the audience doesn't understand. If I remark that for a year I worked at the NEH, which has a different mission than the NEA but is not connected to the DOJ, Washington insiders will know that I'm referring to the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Department of Justice, but others will be lost. Should they know these acronyms? Maybe, maybe not. Either way, if many are unfamiliar with them, that's reason enough not to use them without explanation.

Imagine listening to an instructor who says, "To paraphrase the author of *The Pastorals*, a sparse supply of cognition is a minatory entity." Few in any class are likely to understand this remark. If the problem is pointed out to the speaker,

the irritated reply may be, "It's obvious that I'm referring to Alexander Pope." "But who," a student might ask, "is Alexander Pope?" At this point the instructor is likely to burst out with frustration: "How can you not know?" Perhaps needless to say, this person is not cut out to be a teacher. And even if the students were told that Pope was a celebrated eighteenth-century English poet, they probably still wouldn't realize that the teacher was paraphrasing Pope's line, "A little learning is a dangerous thing," which, in fact, may itself be unknown to many.

And why use the word "minatory"? Hardly anyone will know its meaning, which is derived from the Latin word *minari*, meaning "to threaten." Yet, inept teachers proceed in such confusing ways all the time.

Another reason for lack of clarity is omitting steps in reasoning. Suppose an instructor offering an example of mathematical thinking says, "Given that  $17-11=3x$ , we all know that  $2x=4$ ." Some students in the class are sure to be lost because the teacher has failed to take the time to explain how the first equation proves that  $x=2$ , hence  $2x=4$ .

But can't you omit what seems apparent? The question brings to my mind an incident, reported by a number of witnesses, involving W. V. O. Quine. While his textbook on symbolic logic was widely used, he didn't relish teaching the subject at the introductory level but was occasionally asked to do so. Once in such a course, after he wrote a proof on the board, a student raised his hand and asked impatiently, "Why bother writing out that proof? It's obvious." To which Quine replied, "Young man, this entire course is obvious." Of course, what was obvious to Quine was not always obvious to others, just as what is obvious to a teacher may not be obvious to the students.

In sum, a successful teacher provides motivation, organization, and clarity. If students aren't motivated, don't see how matters hang together, or are confused by the presentation, then regardless of what the teacher may believe, the quality of the instruction has fallen short.

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## *Didactical Ordering and Emotional Moral Persuasion*

Shlomo Cohen

BEN GURION UNIVERSITY OF THE NEGEV, ISRAEL

It is a truism that teaching—surely in the humanities—stands better chances of being successful (effective, mind-opening, persuasive, enjoyable, etc.) the more the students perceive the ideas studied as relevant. This arguably gets special importance in teaching ethics: to the extent that ethical ideas seem irrelevant to our lives, it will be hard to understand why they should motivate us, or anyone.

## **DIDACTICAL ORDERING**

The first point I wish to make in this respect is that consideration of the *order* of the topics discussed can and should at times be determined specifically by the goal of enhancing the students' sense of relevance of what is taught.

I teach Introduction to Ethics to first-year philosophy students. The main point I want to address with regard to the syllabus of this course is that alongside studying "the three main systems of ethics" through readings in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Kant's *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, and Mill's *Utilitarianism*, we also learn about normative egoism and moral relativism. Now, in preparing the syllabus, there arises a question about the ordering of the above topics—specifically, about whether to place the discussion of egoism and relativism before or after that of the main systems that aspire to moral objectivity.

The scholastics distinguished between the order of things and the order of understanding (between the *ratio essendi* and the *ratio cognoscendi*); in parallel, we should be mindful of possible differences between the order intrinsic to the ideas themselves versus the optimal order of teaching them (between the *ratio essendi* and the *ratio explanandi*, if you will). Although the two will often overlap, this is not necessarily the case. Specifically, while the first may be neutral with respect to some element of the order, the second may not. Concern with the optimal *didactical* ordering of the topics should not aspire to universal truth, but rather should be tailored to a particular audience.

Let us return, then, to the question of the optimal order of discussion in class between, on the one hand, the three systems of ethics and, on the other hand, the two topics of normative egoism and moral relativism. As far as the order intrinsic to the ideas themselves is concerned, there seem to be equally sensible reasons to teach these two great challenges to objective morality either before the main systems, as major potential obstacles to be addressed, or after, as notable criticisms of the systems we have studied. It is my experience, however, that didactically it is much preferable to discuss egoism and relativism before rather than after the teaching of the main systems. The reason lies with a mindset that, I would argue, is rampant among my students (and, I suspect, among many students in liberal democracies), which tends to view moral objectivism as deeply suspect and, therefore, some unarticulated form of moral relativism as true by default. This mindset is often also associated with the view that egoism represents the sinister truth about us humans—a truth that a good-enough scratching of the surface would reveal. Although these positions are not necessarily fully aware or consciously endorsed, it is my diagnosis that they have enough of a presence in students' minds to serve as "distracting factors" that can potentially undermine receptivity to arguments for any theory that purports to offer objective moral prescriptions. Unless the teacher first "releases these pent up demons," whatever we teach is in danger of being experienced as irrelevant to a degree, as it would seem fatally vulnerable to those disturbing skeptical "truths" that lurk in the background, that are suspected to be "the real trumping cards" in the debate, but that have not been addressed.

The teacher must be mindful of the fact that to the extent that students believe they have trumping cards in the debate, the arguments taught, no matter how otherwise convincing, will seem to them of dubious relevance, and their motivation to engage them will drop. Significant learning will then be inevitably compromised. Even if those “demons” were addressed fully satisfactorily at the end of the course, this would be *too late*, as this would not compensate for the pedagogical loss incurred during weeks of inevitably deficient engagement with material perceived as dubiously relevant. For this reason, I spend six to seven academic hours on the two skeptical positions, during which time I witness the gradual “releasing of the steam” that fuels students’ attraction to them. (See further description below.) The study of Aristotle’s ethics can then be approached with healthy receptivity, without a sense that something unspoken in class is roiling beneath the surface. Students need not, of course, be convinced that relativism or egoism is false; what is important is that they no longer harbor the sentiment that they are in possession of obvious trumping arguments. Such sentiments are potent distractions to good learning—they should therefore be addressed first.

#### MORAL PERSUASION AND THE SENSE OF SHAME

After I present the *prima facie* allure of normative egoism and moral relativism in class, I turn to the critical assessment of these views. Naturally, I do this first and foremost by providing general arguments against them; yet this is not the entire story. What I want to discuss here is an additional, ancient method of persuasion that I find both important and effective in this case, namely, harnessing the power of the sense of shame. I shall first say a few words about how this works and then turn to discuss the merits of using this teaching method in view of the most obvious criticisms against it.

The *locus classicus* for the method of harnessing the sense of shame in moral persuasion is Plato’s *Gorgias*.<sup>1</sup> In that dialogue, Socrates appeals to his three interlocutors’ sense of shame in order to refute their views. A sense of shame makes Gorgias concede that he could and should teach his students about justice; it makes Polus concede the superiority of justice over injustice; and it makes Callicles concede the wrongness of hedonism. Socrates’ method of persuading by means of eliciting a sense of shame seems to realize its full potential vis-à-vis Callicles, who is forced to renounce his strong hedonist thesis on pain of endorsing pleasures that elicit *in him* intense shame (notably, the pleasures of the catamite and of the coward). I use the same technique to draw from my students a recognition of the limits of the plausibility of holding either egoism or relativism.

I ask those students who argue forcefully (either sincerely or as devil’s advocates) for either of these two positions what moral positions they themselves would be willing to endorse. The questions refer to cases that are progressively more difficult to swallow. Thus I may ask the proponent of egoism whether she would be willing, for instance, to betray her best friend once she sees that it has become in her interest to do so. I have not yet met anyone shameless enough to declare she would. In a similar vein, I ask the

proponent of relativism to affirm that he does not see any superiority of the moral prescription of treating every human being with equal respect over that of turning women of a different faith into sex slaves and beheading them if they refuse (as is done under the rule of ISIS). Again, a sense of shame prevents even students who appear to be die-hard moral relativists from endorsing such a moral equivalence.

What can such a didactical exercise teach us? The reservation that arises immediately is that such an appeal to shame may be no more than a cheap trick of emotionally manipulating one’s interlocutors into agreeing with that which was not independently convincing through rational persuasion. I believe that, to the contrary, the appeal to shame need not be merely manipulative but can be a valid tool for serious moral exploration. I thus agree with Plato’s insight. In this space I can make but a few salient remarks about the true pedagogical and didactical benefits of the appeal to shame, as I see them.<sup>2</sup>

In forcing my students to confront the limits set by their own sense of shame on the positions that they hold, I help them restrict their arguments to what, *from their own perspective*, falls within the boundaries of reasonableness. This is important, since once an intelligent person adopts any principle, he or she can, with enough shrewdness and imaginativeness, find ways of holding on to it against almost any objection. Even logical limits, at which we supposedly must balk, can with enough ingenuity be circumvented—as in making extra conceptual distinctions to circumvent a contradiction. If we had infinite time in the classroom, maybe we could gain some minor benefits from pursuing such tedious dialectical exercises. We do not have infinite time, however, and it is important pedagogically (especially for first-year philosophy students) to learn that interesting intellectual explorations are normally limited to pursuing those objections that seem, to the objector at least, at all relevant. (The alternative would turn the philosophy classroom into unbearable hell.) The appeal to shame sifts out hyperbolic moral skepticisms that students do not really hold, except under the guise of combative philosophy students who play the game of universal doubting. It is important both pedagogically and materially (i.e., for the successful clarification of the issue at hand) that students learn to distinguish between what they really doubt and what they merely claim to doubt when playing the game of doubting. Students’ sense of shame sets limits that help them realize this difference.

People, including the most sophisticated, often do not know which arguments they truly stand behind and which, on the other hand, they advance merely because they sound like they *could* be right (either in general or in a particular context). Not even the wisest and most experienced have clear internal inventories of all the beliefs they really hold versus those they merely toy with or acknowledge as possible. A fortiori this applies to young students. Socrates was, of course, a master in exposing the uncertainties behind the presumed experts’ façades of sound convictions. When a person recoils with shame from endorsing a position, that person then learns that he or she does not really hold it, even if he or she argued for it just a moment before, on the grounds that its general

formulation seemed to “make sense” and one had enough intellectual power to continue arguing for that position without succumbing to self-contradiction. Eliciting one’s sense of shame can help one realize that being carried forward by the force of intellectual power alone can take one where one does not intend to go.

But isn’t this appeal to shame a form of *ad hominem* reasoning? Yes, it is. And isn’t *ad hominem* reasoning problematic? It can be, but I believe that at other times it can be a very good and helpful tool.<sup>3</sup> I want to make two main claims regarding this point. Firstly, the challenge mentioned before of not knowing where one stands with regard to a deep philosophical question (as egoism and relativism each is) is not merely the epistemic challenge of having clear enough introspection into the right container of beliefs “inside” one’s mind, so to speak. Rather, in the absence of personal conviction, there is normally *nothing to be known*. Correspondingly, the justification of the appeal to shame rests not merely on its legitimacy as a potent *tracker* of good reasons but on its important role in helping to *determine* which reasons one finds to be good reasons. The argumentative exercise that appeals to a sense of shame is thus integral to real moral persuasion: when the issue is not one of knowledge of truth but of constituting truths (regarding one’s beliefs), the run-of-the-mill objection to *ad hominem* reasoning arguably loses its essential ground.

The second point, which complements the first, is as follows. It can be plausibly argued that the sense of shame—one can alternatively refer to it as a sense of self-respect—is basic to being human. The more a feature is essential to (our conception of) our humanity, the more plausible it is to view its influence on us as non-contingent. Hence the influence of the sense of shame on human moral judgment is arguably not contingent. Charles Kahn writes: “Shame reflects a Platonic conception corresponding to our own notion of an innate moral sense, but which Plato describes as a universal desire for what is good.”<sup>4</sup> It is thus not surprising that Socrates tells Polus, “I do believe that both I and you and all other people think committing injustice worse than suffering it, and not paying the penalty worse than paying it” (474b). Socrates is convinced that what he reveals to Polus is not restricted either to himself or to Polus. Plato (if Kahn is correct) had in mind a moral sense that tracks a metaphysical truth. I, on the contrary, am speaking of a moral sense that is an essential feature of humans and may be unique to the human perspective.<sup>5</sup> For some discussions in metaethics and moral theory this is not an insignificant difference, but for my current point on the legitimacy of *ad hominem* reasoning in moral education the upshot is similar. Basic moral intuitions (whether they refer to eternal cosmic truths or “merely” to truths for humans) cannot be argued for, because they do not rely on reasons, but are, rather, the source of reasons. In this sense we rely on our interlocutors to see the truths once we provide the right stimuli. This process can then ideally be repeated with each and every interlocutor, indeed with each and every student. This is a unique way to show general validity: instead of providing universal arguments, we provide *ad hominem* arguments that can ideally be repeated universally (as they target an attribute that all

humans share). In this way, eliciting a sense of shame with respect to certain moral positions can help uncover non-contingent moral truths, be that in the Athenian *agora* or in our classrooms.

### CLASS ATTENDANCE

Lastly, the preceding discussion helps explain why I make class attendance mandatory. Studying moral philosophy is not restricted to moral persuasion by means of the cognitive assimilation of abstract arguments; it is also a matter of openness to undergoing a process of elicitation of moral sentiments. And it is unlikely that this process will be set in motion by reading other students’ notes.

### NOTES

1. For an excellent discussion of the nature and uses of shame in the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*, see Jessica Moss, “Shame, Pleasure, and the Divided Soul,” *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 29 (2005): 137–70. I learned much from Moss’ discussion. (For criticism of Moss, see D. B. Futter, “Shame as a Tool for Persuasion in Plato’s *Gorgias*,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 47 (2009): 451–61.)
2. The full development of the place of shame (and possibly other emotions) in moral education and moral justification would touch on many complex issues in moral psychology as well as metaethics, which naturally cannot be dealt with in this piece. Some relevant weighty issues that may affect the precise form as well as strength of the argument include the nature of moral judgment, of moral motivation, of practical reasoning, the status of moral intuitionism, the right philosophical account of emotions, the definition and ethics of manipulation, etc.
3. A successful (not fallacious) *ad hominem* argument shows that the particular person targeted cannot consistently argue for *p* because his own previous arguments have already committed him to non-*p*. In a strict logical sense, *ad hominem* refers to the relation between propositions, and a sentimental stance, as that of shame, is indeed not a proposition. However, I use *ad hominem* in a *rhetorical* sense (which I see as the most basic): it is sufficient that the target person has clearly *committed* himself to non-*p*, even if it was by emotional expression and not by uttering previous propositions. For views sympathetic to *ad hominem* arguments, see Lawrence Hinman, “The Case for *ad hominem* Arguments,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 60, no. 4 (1982): 338–45; Alan Brinton, “A Rhetorical View of the *ad hominem*,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 63, no. 1 (1985): 50–63; Andrew Aberdein, “In Defence of Virtue: The Legitimacy of Agent-based Argument Appraisal,” *Informal Logic* 34, no. 1 (2014): 77–93.
4. Charles Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 138.
5. On morality being a reflection of the kind of creatures we are, see Shelly Kagan, *Normative Ethics* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 280–94. On the idea that virtue (as in having a sense of shame) is indispensable for practical reasoning see Kieran Setiya, *Reasons without Rationalism* (Princeton University Press, 2007). (Setiya is, of course, developing a deep insight of Aristotle’s.)

## Teaching “Introduction to Women’s Studies” as a Critical Thinking Course

Stephen J. Sullivan  
EDINBORO UNIVERSITY (PA)

### SECTION I: PRELIMINARIES

At my university, any member of the interdisciplinary Women’s Studies Program may teach Introduction to

Women's Studies, subject, of course, to administrative approval and (relatedly) considerations of academic supply and demand. There is no blueprint for the course, just a generic catalog description. Consequently, it may be taught in very different ways, depending on the discipline, knowledge, and pedagogical proclivities of the instructor (among other factors). I am a member of the Department of English and Philosophy and emphasize critical thinking in all of my courses: mostly philosophy but also women's studies and research writing courses. I write this paper with the hope that my pedagogical approach to Introduction to Women's Studies will be of interest and use not only to faculty who teach introductory courses in women's studies or feminist philosophy but also to faculty who include gender issues in their critical-thinking courses.<sup>1</sup> I especially have in mind faculty who, like me, teach at a university with a largely working-class demographic and many first-generation students.

I should note initially that this lower-level course has no prerequisites and so is open to freshmen, and that enrollment is currently capped at fifty-five (rather than, say, the educationally preferable twenty-five that applies to the version of the course that I have taught for our First Year Experience Program). In my experience, it readily has an initial enrollment of around fifty (mostly women); presumably this high enrollment exists mainly because it enables students to meet the Cultural Diversity and Social Pluralism requirement of our General Education Program. The result, of course, is that many (perhaps most) students who take the course lack any serious initial interest in the subject matter—a familiar fact in many introductory philosophy courses as well. Rather than let that fact discourage me, I try to take it as a challenge—as I'm sure many other faculty do in comparable situations. In the case of Introduction to Women's Studies, it helps that there are always some students who are already genuinely interested in gender issues and may even think of themselves as feminists.

The course is divided into four units, covering the following topics: What is feminism?; the case for feminism in the United States (to be explained below); the relationship between feminism and other social-justice movements; and "trivial matters" concerning sexist language, married names, and dating etiquette. Two features of the course design may already stand out. First, it is not a historical course: we do not cover the history of the women's rights movement in the U.S. (though I do talk briefly about the waves of the movement and about racism in the first wave). Second, we focus almost entirely on the situation of American women and girls. I have colleagues, especially in history, who are much better qualified than I to teach women's studies courses with a historical or an international focus. Moreover, the narrower focus of my course allows me to devote more time to Unit II: the heart of the course, as will become clear below.

## SECTION II: A DETAILED ACCOUNT OF THE OPENING UNIT

As indicated above, the topic of Unit I is the nature of feminism. I make no assumption at the outset that my

students have a clear or roughly accurate understanding of what feminism is. I begin by calling on individual students and asking them to tell me (if they're willing) what the word "feminist" means to them. I have noticed in recent years that fewer and fewer of my students seem to view feminism as mainly a vehicle for bashing or subordinating men; the "man-hating lesbian" stereotype rarely emerges, though the "feminazi" one does sometimes. Typically the answers I elicit in this early class make some kind of reference to gender equality, often with the suggestion that a feminist is an activist for women's rights. When I ask how many students consider themselves to be feminists, generally only a smallish minority raise their hands (though it is a larger percentage than in my similar-sized Introduction to Moral Issues classes in which we spend a week or so on gender issues).

I then offer the following preliminary definition. A feminist is someone who (a) believes that women and girls in at least some parts of the world are systematically subjected to unfairly unequal treatment due to their gender, and (b) is opposed to such treatment. (The second clause, as I tell the class, is included because I once had a student who informed me that he held the belief expressed in (a) but just didn't care about unfairly unequal treatment of women and girls.)<sup>2</sup> Then I ask the class, in effect, how many students fit the definition, and typically a large majority raise their hands.<sup>3</sup> This leads us smoothly into a discussion of why relatively few students are willing to apply the "f-word" (as some of my women's studies colleagues are wont to call it) to themselves. Even students sympathetic to feminism may say they don't accept the label because they aren't *activists* for gender equality. Other students express concern about the *anger* (especially, though not only, toward men) they perceive in feminism; it's at this point that the term "feminazi" may be used, invariably by a male student.

I tell the class that the definition isn't carved in stone on some feminist mountain: they can take it or leave it, though it will serve as a working definition in much of the course. But I stress that it seems to fit the overwhelming majority of self-professed feminists and that it is quite flexible. The definition tells us that you needn't be a woman—much less a lesbian—to count as a feminist. (I am careful to add that I am *not* implying there's anything wrong with lesbianism; it is so easy to be misunderstood. We return to LGBT issues in Unit III.) You needn't be an activist, though if you willingly accept or demand female subordination in your own life, then your satisfaction of clause (b) is negated. If you are a woman, you needn't shun traditionally feminine modes of appearance. And so on.<sup>4</sup>

One at least potentially controversial feature of the definition is that it allows someone to count as a feminist who holds that women and girls no longer face systematically unequal treatment in First World nations such as the U.S. I call such an individual a "conservative feminist," giving Christina Hoff Sommers as a likely example, but acknowledge that many women's studies faculty may regard that term as something of an oxymoron (and Sommers as an enemy—indeed a "frenemy"—of feminism).<sup>5</sup> In class I distinguish conservative feminists from both liberal feminists and (in a broad sense) radical feminists. On my simplified

account, liberals and radicals agree that women and girls even in developed nations still face systematically unequal treatment; but while liberal feminists believe that this injustice can be largely overcome by means of continued reforms, radical feminists believe that these nations are oppressive patriarchies that must be completely overhauled.

These distinctions are far from precise, of course, and blur important differences—especially among radical feminists (for example, between Marxist and non-Marxist ones). But they do indicate again the flexibility of our working definition of “feminist,” and thereby encourage students to consider a variety of ways that someone might accept and develop the central feminist claim about the reality of unfairly unequal treatment based on gender. Let me note in passing that many students seem initially to find conservative feminism to be the most plausible of the three options.<sup>6</sup>

A second feature of our working definition that may be at least as controversial as the first one is that the definition doesn’t clearly require support for abortion rights. Though I am a staunchly pro-choice feminist myself, I take this to be a virtue of the definition. We pro-choice feminists—especially those of us in academia—need to offer *arguments* for the connection between abortion rights and gender equality, not assume it dogmatically. Dogmatism on this issue not only clashes with the critical thinking that is central to the mission of a liberal arts university but also alienates potential supporters of the feminist movement. And indeed the first debate topic in my Introduction to Women’s Studies course is whether a feminist can be both pro-life and anti-choice on abortion.<sup>7</sup>

### SECTION III: THE CONTENT OF THE SECOND UNIT

The theme of this long unit is the question of whether American women and girls systematically face unfairly unequal treatment because of their gender; it is in that sense that we explore the case for feminism in the U.S. The specific issues we cover include the following: gender-role socialization; workplace discrimination (especially the significance of the gender gap in wages); sexual harassment (in the workplace and in school, but also online and in the street); sexual violence (society-wide, on campus, and in the military); partner violence and stalking; female subordination in religion and ethics; and gender privilege. Sexual violence—especially against students—is, of course, the most sensitive issue, though harassment and partner violence may also hit close to home. At the start of the unit I warn the class about the grimness of much of the material: a “trigger warning” of sorts, though students should know in advance that we will be talking about sexual violence, partner violence, etc., and when (from the syllabus class schedule and my own routine reminders) we will be doing so.<sup>8</sup> I make sure that we begin Unit II with less grim material: gender-role socialization, the wage gap, etc. Indeed, the first thing we do is to watch a DVD of Jean Kilbourne’s excellent “Killing Us Softly 4: Advertising’s Image of Women,” a multimedia presentation (2010) that is always thoughtful and sometimes amusing. It generates

much lively discussion and helps set the stage not only for our coverage of gender roles but for our examination of sexual violence, partner violence, and gender privilege. We end the unit with an exploration of gender privilege: female as well as male, for balance and comparison. This examination helps the class to pull together the other topics of the unit and is independently interesting to most students.

There are five debates in Unit II, on the following issues:

- Are there any good feminist reasons for disapproving of full-time homemaking as a choice for women to make, or for regarding it as less than ideal?
- Is California’s “affirmative consent” law concerning campus rape and sexual assault a good idea?
- Are Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin right to claim that opposition to pornography should be central to the feminist movement because porn so deeply and harmfully influences male and even female sexual attitudes and behavior?
- Which of the following views of religion makes the most sense from the standpoint of commitment to gender equality? (a) God is male. (b) God is female. (c) God is beyond gender, i.e., neither male nor female. (d) God is both male and female. (e) There are two or more Gods, and at least one is female. (f) There is no God. (g) It doesn’t matter which of the foregoing views is correct. (There are usually only three or four debate teams for this topic!)
- Which of the following positions on gender privilege in the U.S. makes the most sense? (a) Men are more privileged by our society. (b) Women are more privileged by our society. (c) Neither gender is more privileged. (Option (b) is rarely chosen. Students often focus on earlier material in Unit II concerning workplace discrimination, sexual and domestic violence, etc.)

### SECTION IV: THE LAST TWO UNITS OF THE COURSE

By the time we have reached the end of Unit II in Week 12, the class is understandably rather tired: the material in and the pace of that nine-week unit have been demanding, and the course is 80 percent over. Consequently, the last two units of the course are much shorter and less intense. But students know that they will need to return to the topics of Unit II on the final-exam essay, which I will describe in the next section.

In the two weeks that make up Unit III (Feminism and Other Social-Justice Movements), we consider the connection between the feminist movement and racial justice, and then the connection between the feminist movement and LGBT rights. This is the part of the course in which students learn—often for the first time—about the “intersectionality” of unequal treatment of women and other historically

disadvantaged groups. I bring in two guest speakers: one an African-American feminist who talks about the concerns of black feminism, the other an LGBT feminist who talks about the relationship between feminist and LGBT issues. In my own discussion of these matters, I focus especially on Patricia Hill Collins' views on the stereotyping of black women and on the relationship between homophobia and traditional gender roles. (In the future I would like to spend some time in the course on the conflict between transgender rights and some forms of radical feminism.)

In Unit IV ("Trivial Matters"), which is confined to the final week of the term, we talk about some gender issues often dismissed as trivial (especially by nonfeminists but even by some feminists): sexist language, the custom of women taking their husband's name, and heterosexual dating etiquette. The emphasis here is on discussion linked to students' personal experiences and preferences, and on the possible social origins and moral grounds of those preferences.

## SECTION V: COURSE READINGS AND REQUIREMENTS

### Going without a textbook

I used to assign a valuable anthology called *Feminist Philosophies* (Kourany, Sterba, and Tong, 2000); I appreciated its diverse perspectives and its inclusion of practical as well as theoretical selections. But even then I supplemented it with many articles and handouts, placing them on electronic reserve. Now that the latest edition of this anthology is out of print and somewhat dated, I have taken to using e-reserve resources exclusively, organized by topic: What is Feminism?, Feminism and Abortion, Gender-Role Socialization, Sexual Violence, Feminism and Religion, Feminism and Race, Feminism and Sexual Orientation, etc. These readings retain the pluralism and variety of the text selections while enabling my students (many of whom are struggling financially) to forego the cost of buying an expensive book.

### Varied assignments

There are three tests in the course: two short-answer tests (worth 20 percent each) at midterm and late term and then a final essay exam (worth 30 percent) consisting in one elaborate question that is explained initially in the syllabus, giving the class the entire semester to prepare for it. The exam is closely tied to Unit II, which I have already described as the heart of the course, and the central question (as formulated in the syllabus) is this:

According to the working definition of "feminist" with which we began the course in Unit I, feminists claim that women and girls are systematically treated unequally in unfair ways. Using at least five issues from Unit II, evaluate this claim in connection with American society. That is, using these issues, answer the following two questions: (a) Is the claim that American women and girls face such treatment correct and reasonable? (b) Why or why not? You will be permitted to bring in one page of notes to the exam.

Every student must participate in at least one of the six debates mentioned earlier. Members of each debate team prepare together using classnotes, online readings, and any other sources they care to consult. I grade individual debaters separately (their letter grade counting for 10 percent of their course grade), but the winning team—as determined by audience vote—earns extra credit points for its members. The audience is told it is duty bound to vote based on which team defended its case most effectively rather than on which one they agree with. The moderator is always a student, who earns extra credit by playing this role.

The remaining 20 percent of students' overall grades is determined by the seven one-page "reaction responses" they write over the course of the semester on the following topics:

(1)(a) Do you believe that women and girls in at least some parts of the world face unfairly unequal treatment—and not just in isolated cases—because of their gender? If so, give an example. If not, why not? (b) Do you consider yourself to be a feminist? Why or why not? (c) Given your understanding of what a feminist is, can someone be a feminist if that person is male? Against abortion rights? A homemaker? Christian? Heterosexual? Fond of pornography?

(2) What are the more important points that Jean Kilbourne makes in the "Killing Us Softly 4" DVD we viewed in class (or that you viewed on YouTube)? Do you think she defends those points persuasively? Why or why not?

(3) Do you think there is anything morally objectionable about the practice of cat-calling or wolf-whistling at a stranger on the street? Why or why not? Be sure to indicate whether you would be offended if a stranger of the opposite sex did this to you, and also if a stranger of the same sex did so.

(4) Identify the thesis or main point of Ellen Goodman's short essay "What is the Real Cost of the Gender Tax?" (Be sure to make clear what she means by "gender tax.") Do you think she defends her point persuasively? Why or why not?

(5) Do you agree with the difference-feminist claim that women and men differ significantly in psychological ways, that is, in how they think and feel? Why or why not? Give at least two examples to illustrate your position, and be sure to indicate whether you believe (with Carol Gilligan) that women and men differ in how they think and feel about morality.

(6) What are the most important points made by our guest speaker on feminism and race? Do you think the speaker made them effectively? Why or why not?

(7) What are the most important points made by our guest speaker on feminism and sexual orientation? Do you think the speaker made them effectively? Why or why not?

Only the top five responses' grades count for each student, but she can get an A+ overall only if she does all seven.

## SECTION VI: CRITICAL-THINKING EMPHASIS

In accordance with university policy, the course objectives for Introduction to Women’s Studies are given in the syllabus. Here is an abbreviated account:

This women’s studies class is being taught by a professional philosopher, and so, like virtually all philosophy courses, it is a critical-thinking course designed to promote clear thinking and careful, thoughtful reasoning. In particular, the course is primarily intended to help you to clarify your own views about gender issues and to defend them in informed, intelligent judgments.

I immediately add the following assurances about professorial neutrality:

The course is in no way designed to convert students to my own views about feminism or about the various specific issues we explore; and no one’s grades depend on sharing those views, nor on accepting the label “feminist” or on being a feminist. I will generally remain neutral on the relevant issues, but I will feel free on occasion to express my own opinions. But if you ever think I’m being unfair to some point of view, you should tell me so, inside or outside of class.

The foregoing statements from the syllabus are by no means pro forma. First, the promotion of critical thinking is undeniably central to a liberal arts education in general (as mentioned in passing earlier), and also—arguably—to philosophy in particular. Second, it is my conviction that teaching critical-thinking skills in a philosophy course is incompatible with indoctrinating students: that is, with demanding that they reach preconceived conclusions about controversial issues such as the reasonableness of feminism. Women’s studies courses have often been accused of indoctrination.<sup>9</sup> Third, I believe that pedagogical neutrality on those issues is especially desirable when all or most of one’s students are freshmen or sophomores. But I don’t deny that colleagues who abandon neutrality can with due effort avoid indoctrination,<sup>10</sup> nor that perfect neutrality is impossible.

There are two specific ways that I emphasize critical thinking in Unit II of the course.

First, I emphasize from the start the importance of *reliable* information about such issues as rates of sexual violence, domestic violence, etc. I share government statistics whenever possible, without, of course, treating them as infallible. I let my classes know that data from advocacy groups (even ones to which I have made donations!) are inherently suspect, though sometimes—as in the case of street harassment—they may be the best we can get. Relatedly, I correct common misconceptions about gender data, such as the idea that the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ well-known wage gap between women and men gives information on equal work done by equally qualified women and men.

Second, I stress the importance of supplementing data on victimized women with corresponding data on victimized men. For example, Center for Disease Control data on sexual violence against women and men indicate a huge gap in vulnerability (roughly, 1 in 5 vs. 1 in 71); the gap concerning serious partner violence is much smaller (roughly, 1 in 4 vs. 1 in 7), though still, of course, disturbing. Such contextual details are crucial to understanding information about the mistreatment of women, especially when the overarching issue is unequal treatment based on gender.<sup>11</sup>

No doubt there are many legitimate and effective ways to teach Introduction to Women’s Studies. I have offered an approach that highlights the importance of critical thinking and that, for this and other reasons, may have distinctive appeal to philosophers (perhaps especially those of an analytic bent).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to anonymous referees for their helpful comments, and to co-editor Tziporah Kasachkoff for her encouragement.

## NOTES

1. An anonymous referee wonders what makes the course worthy of the name “philosophy.” The answer, it seems to me, is primarily the ethical/political normativity of its central issue: whether American women and girls are systematically subjected to unfair treatment because of their gender. (There is more on this issue in Sections II and III, especially.) Roughly speaking, this is a course in social ethics, and thus in applied or practical ethics. Fortunately, the traditional exclusion by Anglo-American linguistic philosophers of practical ethics from “philosophy proper” is rarely taken seriously anymore.
2. The definition has been influenced by Janet Radcliffe Richards, according to whom feminism requires the belief that “women suffer systematically from social injustice because of their sex” (Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist: A Philosophical Enquiry*, 1). One page later she adds that this involves “opposition” to this injustice, a proviso that excludes my indifferent male student.
3. I say “in effect” because I generally phrase this question more carefully: “How many of you believe that at least in some parts of the world, women and girls are systematically subjected to unfairly unequal treatment because of their gender?” (pause for show of hands); “and how many of you are opposed to this treatment?”
4. According to former students of mine, a Women’s Studies faculty member at the university they were attending used to tell her classes that a woman can’t be a feminist if she wears makeup. An inaccurate report? If so, this was an unfortunate misunderstanding. If not, what a foolish and counterproductive thing to say.
5. Among Sommers’ books are *Who Stole Feminism? How Women Have Betrayed Women* and *Freedom Feminism: Its Surprising History and Why It Matters Today*. My own view of her work is that although she is generally wrong on major feminist issues, such as campus rape and the extent of gender equality in the U.S., she performs a valuable service to the feminist movement by continually challenging other feminists to defend their claims and to show more care in making them.
6. I also distinguish in class between equality feminism and difference feminism in relation to the question whether women and men are psychologically as well as physically different. In Section II we talk about Carol Gilligan’s moral-voices version of difference feminism.
7. As I see it, the answer is yes, though I believe anti-choice feminists are confused about abortion or gender equality or both. I do not dictate this answer to my students, leaving it to each of them to work out their own answer. There is much more on critical thinking in Section VI.

8. In some versions of the course, I have also offered reassurance that the unit is not about “male bashing” but about an important ethical/political issue concerning the nature of contemporary American society. In recent years there seems to be less need for such reassurance.
9. See, e.g., Sommers, *Who Stole Feminism?*, and Patai and Koertge, *Professing Feminism: Cautionary Tales About the Strange World of Women’s Studies*; Martha Nussbaum offers a thoughtful, often incisive reply in *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*, Ch. 6.
10. Nussbaum defends this possibility in *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*, 205ff.
11. Regarding street-harassment data, see Kearl, “Unsafe and Harassed in Public Spaces: A National Street Harassment Report.” Regarding the gender gap in wages: the 79-cent figure, for example, concerns median annual wages of full-time working women and men: that’s it. (In class I note that according to many economists, a significant gap in wages persists even after adjusting for hours worked, qualifications, etc. I try to keep abreast of the latest information about this issue, and to share it with my students in non-technical articles from such sources as the *Washington Post*; see, e.g., Samuelson, “What’s the Real Gender Pay Gap?” Regarding sexual and partner violence, see CDC, “National Data on Intimate Partner Violence, Sexual Violence, and Stalking” Fact Sheet, 2014.

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## BOOK REVIEW

### *The Stone Reader: Modern Philosophy in 133 Arguments*

Peter Catapano and Simon Critchley, eds. (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015). 816 pp. \$24.36. ISBN-13: 978-1631490712.

Reviewed by Nils Ch. Rauhut  
COASTAL CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

There are exceptional times, times which the Germans call “Sternstunden,” when philosophy shapes the cultural and intellectual life of a society. We might think of Socrates’s impact on Athens, Voltaire’s influence on

France, or the role Idealism played in the cultural life of Germany. Unfortunately, these times do not seem to occur often. During many historical periods, including our own, outstanding philosophical work seems to happen without affecting the broader cultural life and without having much impact on how ordinary people think of life, meaning, and religion.

Peter Catapano and Simon Critchley are on a mission to change this. Since 2010, they have edited the popular *New York Times*’ philosophy series “The Stone,” which tries to show that “well-wrought and jargon free philosophical essays” (page xx) can help a broader audience think differently, and presumably deeper, about current events and society. In *The Stone Reader* Catapano and Critchley present 133 essays from the *New York Times*’ series in one volume. The book does not present the essays in the chronologic order in which they appeared in the *Times*, but divides them into four broad sections: Philosophy; Science; Religion and Morals; and Society. The essays reflect a wide variety of different philosophical perspectives and methods. Some of them, for example, Galen Strawson’s “Your Move: The Maze of Free Will” and Laurie Shrage’s “Is Forced Fatherhood Fair?” are concise presentations of particular philosophical arguments. Other essays, such as Andy Martin’s “Sartre and Camus in New York” and Avital Ronell’s “Stormy Weather: Blues in Winter?” resemble biographical reflections. Still others provide succinct introductions to particular philosophical positions, such as David Sosa’s “The Spoils of Happiness,” which introduces readers to an objective conception of happiness, and Graham Priest’s “Paradoxical Truth,” which introduces the basic idea behind dialetheism. Finally, a good number of essays reflect on contemporary phenomena, and some essays reflect on the current state of academic philosophy. An example of the former is J. M. Bernstein’s analysis of the Tea Party in “The Very Angry Tea Party”; an example of the latter is to be found in Rae Langton’s “The Disappearing Women” and in Justin Smith’s “Philosophy’s Western Bias.”

Despite this diversity of content and orientation, all essays have some features in common: they are all short (nearly all are between three and seven pages long); they are all accessible; and they are all clearly written and a pleasure to read. With this the editors achieve what they set out to do, namely, show that “philosophy and journalism are a natural fit . . . and complement each other” (Introduction page xvi).

Given these features, it is clear that the book is perfectly suited for introducing a wider audience to current philosophical thinking. It is the ideal gift for somebody with a busy life who would like to get a quick impression of what philosophy is and what philosophers have to say about current issues.

Is the book also suited for teaching philosophy in the academy? My answer here is mixed. In my view, the book is *not* an optimal choice for teaching a course in Introduction to Philosophy. The short essays in the *The Stone Reader* are no substitute for reading classical pieces like Plato’s *Apology* or Bertrand Russell’s *The Value of Philosophy*. Indeed, the brevity of the essays becomes a disadvantage when what is called for are explanations of a particular

philosophical position and development of arguments for those positions.

However, there are other, more promising and more exciting, possibilities for using the text in the academy. For example, for courses in informal logic/critical thinking and for courses that introduce students to ethics, *The Stone Reader* provides a rich resource of short, engaging, and well-argued essays which are perfectly suited for learning about argumentative writing in these areas. Here the brevity of the texts becomes an advantage because one can easily read an essay in the classroom together with one's students in less than five minutes. Reading the essay together with one's students eliminates the (all-too-common and persistent) problem of having students in the class who have not read and so are not familiar with the text that is being discussed. Moreover, many of the essays deal with engaging contemporary issues such as gun control, race, just war, solitary confinement, and feminism—topics which are likely to spark debate among students more easily than many other topics dealt with in traditional texts.

In addition, *The Stone Reader* provides the opportunity to introduce students to philosophical dialectic by including essays that are direct critical responses to other essays. For example, "The Dangers of Pseudoscience," by Massimo Pigliucci and Maarten Boudry, is a direct critical reply to "The Enigma of Chinese Medicine," in which Stephen T. Asma argues that there are good reasons for being open to the use of acupuncture and other treatment methods of traditional Chinese medicine. I can see a very effective writing assignment emerging from these two texts that requires students to describe and assess these two texts' opposing arguments. Similar assignments suggest themselves for Philip Kitcher's response to Thomas Nagel's essay "The Core of Mind and Cosmos" and Timothy Williamson's response to Alex Rosenberg's "Why I am a Naturalist." Clearly, there are many ways in which these essays could play a useful and enriching role in various college classes. It would be especially rewarding if these essays could find their way into English composition classes so that these well-written philosophical essays could serve as a role model for students who wish to become both better thinkers and better writers.

One reservation I have about *The Stone Reader* concerns the section on religion. Surprisingly, the essays in this section are, unlike the articles in the other sections, rather uniform and lacking in diversity. Characterizing all of the essays in this section is the narrow perspective that sees all religions belonging to the Abrahamic tradition as reducing the question, "Should I be religious?" merely to whether one should be a Jew, a Christian, or a Muslim. Interestingly enough, this is exactly what many of my students find problematic. They have an interest in spirituality, but they resist the attempt to understand their spiritual life in terms of traditional religious beliefs and practices. In this respect *The Stone Reader* is not up to date with the religious and/or spiritual concerns of its potential readers.

Moreover, none of the authors who writes in this section is either a full-blown atheist like Richard Dawkins or a committed theist. Instead, most essays are written from the perspective of a benevolent outsider. Simon Critchley's essay, "Why I Love Mormonism," for example, explains and defends the basics of Mormonism while ultimately describing it as "a gloriously presumptive and delusional creation from the same climate as Whitman" (454). Clearly, there is something missing in this defense, just as there is something missing in Samuel Scheffler's belief in an afterlife or in Tim Crane's defense of the separation of science and religion.

A welcome addition to the anthology would have been inclusion of essays in which authors took some aspect of traditional religion seriously rather than modifying religious claims such that they then fit easily into a humanistic, naturalistic, and ultimately secular worldview.

*The Stone Reader* is, however, a very worthy and successful attempt to bring philosophy to a wider audience. I recommend it highly to everyone with an interest in philosophy, and I hope that it will be used widely within a variety of different academic disciplines in the academy.

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## BOOKS RECEIVED

### **BLOOMSBURY**

Allen, Sophie R. *A Critical Introduction to Properties*. 2016.

### **BROADVIEW PRESS**

Bailey, Andrew, and Robert M. Martin, eds. *First Philosophy: God, Mind, and Freedom—Fundamental Problems and Readings in Philosophy*, 2nd ed. 2011.

### **HACKETT PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC.**

Cavendish, Margaret. Edited, with an Introduction, by Eugene Marshall *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy, Abridged, with Related Texts*. 2016.

Cohen, S. Marc, Patricia Curd, and C. D. C. Reeve, eds. *Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy: From Thales to Aristotle*, 5th ed. 2016.

Delapp, Kevin, and Jeremy Henkel, eds. and Intro. *Lying and Truthfulness*. 2016.

Montesquieu. *Persian Letters, with Related Texts (with Introduction and Notes)*, trans. Raymond N. MacKenzie. 2014.

Pullman, George. *A Rulebook for Decision Making*. 2015.

Stanlick, Nancy, and Daniel Collette, eds. *The Essential Leviathan: A Modernized Edition*. 2016.

Tiwald, Justin and Bryan W. Van Norden, eds. *Readings in Later Chinese Philosophy: Han Dynasty to the 20th Century*. 2014.

Williams, Thomas, translation and introduction, with a commentary by Christina Van Dyke and Thomas Williams. *Thomas Aquinas: The Treatise on Happiness · Treatise on Human Acts*. 2016.

**INDEPENDENT THINKING PRESS**

Worley, Peter, ed. *The Philosophy Shop: Ideas, Activities and Questions to Get People, Young and Old, Thinking Philosophically*. 2016.

**PROMETHEUS BOOKS**

Holochak, M. Andrew. *Thomas Jefferson: Uncovering His Unique Philosophy and Vision*. 2014.

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## ADDRESSES OF CONTRIBUTORS

**Steven M. Cahn**

The Graduate Center, The City University of New York  
Department of Philosophy  
355 Fifth Avenue, 7th Floor  
New York City, New York 10016  
Email address: [SCahn@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:SCahn@gc.cuny.edu)

**Shlomo Cohen**

Ben Gurion University of the Negev  
Department of Philosophy  
P.O.B. 653  
Beer Sheva 84105  
ISRAEL  
Email address: [shlomco@mail.huji.ac.il](mailto:shlomco@mail.huji.ac.il)

**Nils Ch. Rauhut**

The Jackson Family Center for Ethics and Values  
Coastal Carolina University  
P.O. Box 26195  
Conway, SC 29528-6054  
Email address: [nrauhut@coastal.edu](mailto:nrauhut@coastal.edu)

**Stephen J. Sullivan**

Edinboro University  
Department of English and Philosophy  
Edinboro, PA 16444  
Email address: [SSULLIVAN@edinboro.edu](mailto:SSULLIVAN@edinboro.edu)