



# AAPT News

*The Newsletter of the American Association of Philosophy Teachers*

VOLUME 24, NUMBER 2

SUMMER 2001

## REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

### *14<sup>th</sup> International Workshop-Conference on Teaching Philosophy*

Hosted by Thomas More College, Covington KY  
(Greater Cincinnati Metropolitan Area)

**July 31 – August 4, 2002**

**PRIORITY PROPOSAL DEADLINE: OCTOBER 1, 2001**

Second Chance Deadline: November 15, 2001

Notifications Sent by: February 1, 2002

### GUIDELINES

*Workshop and panel proposals* related to teaching and learning philosophy at any education level are welcome. We especially encourage interactive workshops and panels that deal with innovative and successful teaching strategies, the application of philosophy to any area or issue connecting philosophy with other disciplines, the use of new technologies, and the challenge of teaching in new as well as traditional settings. Applicants are welcome to submit more than one proposal.

Program and Registration forms will be posted as available at the AAPT Website: <http://aapt-online.dhs.org>

Information and pictures from the AAPT's 13<sup>th</sup> Workshop-Conference are available at: <http://aapt-online.dhs.org>

#### Submissions Must Include:

**Cover Letter:** A page separate from the proposal which includes your name, mailing address, affiliation (if any), phone number, and fax and e-mail address (if any); the title of your presentation; length of time requested (60 or 90 minutes); the style of presentation (e. g. workshop, panel, discussion, demonstration); a list of equipment to be used; and a one paragraph description of the presentation suitable for the conference program (100 -200 words).

**Proposal:** A one to three page proposal covering the title of your presentation (without your name for blind review purposes); a summary of the workshop/panel – what it covers and seeks to achieve, its methods and techniques, what participants will do and experience; a list of the handouts and materials you will provide; a list of A/V or computer equipment you will need; and any additional information that would be useful to the program selection committee.

#### Send Proposals by express or postal mail to:

Prof. Mimi Marinucci,  
Philosophy, Eastern Washington University,  
Patterson Hall 266, Cheney, WA 99004-2430

**By e-mail (Word or text-only format) to:**  
[mmarinucci@mail.ewu.edu](mailto:mmarinucci@mail.ewu.edu)

#### For information about the conference, or about joining AAPT, please contact:

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**TYPESETTING AND LAYOUT**

Philosophy Documentation Center

**SUBMISSIONS TO AAPT NEWS**

*AAPT News* is published in the Spring, Summer and Fall. Deadlines for submissions are January 1, May 1, and September 1.

Submissions may be sent as e-mail binary attachment files, to **bdecyk@csulb.edu**. Most major PC word processor file formats are fine, but WordPerfect (5.1 and later), Microsoft Word for Windows, or Microsoft Word for Macintosh 6.0 are preferred. Hard copies may be FAXed to (562) 985-7135 (attn: Decyk) or mailed to Betsy Decyk at:

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**ABOUT THOMAS MORE COLLEGE**

*Nancy Slonneger Hancock,*  
*Northern Kentucky University*

Located a mere eight miles south of Cincinnati, Ohio and less than ten minutes from the Northern Kentucky/Greater Cincinnati International Airport, **Thomas More College** will be the host of our 14<sup>th</sup> International Workshop-Conference on Teaching Philosophy (IWCTP). Named for the English saint, scholar and statesman, Thomas More College is located on 60 acres in Crestview Hills, Kentucky. Thomas More College is a Catholic liberal arts college that serves over 1,500 full- and part-time students. The purpose of the college is "to provide – within each student – the quest for truth, the ability to reason and the degree of wisdom that marked the life of its namesake." The college was ranked 31st among the best liberal arts colleges in the South in the 2001 *U.S. News and World Report* college guide.

Thomas More College is located in metropolitan Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky. Those attending the IWCTP will find that travel to the campus is easy and convenient, and that the surrounding area provides ample opportunities for family entertainment. The Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport was recently voted the best airport in North and South America in a worldwide survey of frequent flyers conducted by ACNielsen and OAG Worldwide. The International Air Transport Association has ranked the airport among the world's best each year since 1994. The airport offers 550 daily departures to 110 cities nonstop, including 18 daily international flights and nonstop service to Brussels, Frankfurt, London, Montreal, Nassau, Paris, Toronto and Zurich.

Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky features world-class museums, a renowned symphony orchestra, opera and ballet, professional sports teams, one of the nation's largest and best public libraries, and both a zoo and a new aquarium. First time visitors to the Northern Kentucky area should check out these web sites:

[www.cv-gairport.com](http://www.cv-gairport.com) and [www.nkycvb.com](http://www.nkycvb.com)

Thomas More College provides an excellent page of links to web sites for:

- Ž Museums  
[www.thomasmore.edu/admissions/cinci/museums.html](http://www.thomasmore.edu/admissions/cinci/museums.html)
- Ž Professional Sports  
[www.thomasmore.edu/admissions/cinci/sports.html](http://www.thomasmore.edu/admissions/cinci/sports.html)
- Ž Performing Arts  
[www.thomasmore.edu/admissions/cinci/arts.html](http://www.thomasmore.edu/admissions/cinci/arts.html)
- Ž Parks, Zoos and Aquariums  
[www.thomasmore.edu/admissions/cinci/parks.html](http://www.thomasmore.edu/admissions/cinci/parks.html)
- Ž Public Libraries  
[www.thomasmore.edu/admissions/cinci/libraries.html](http://www.thomasmore.edu/admissions/cinci/libraries.html)
- Ž Amusement Parks & Riverboat Trips  
[www.thomasmore.edu/admissions/cinci/amusement.html](http://www.thomasmore.edu/admissions/cinci/amusement.html)
- Ž Special Events  
[www.thomasmore.edu/admissions/cinci/events.html](http://www.thomasmore.edu/admissions/cinci/events.html)
- Ž Government Organizations  
[www.thomasmore.edu/admissions/cinci/govt.html](http://www.thomasmore.edu/admissions/cinci/govt.html)

# SHARING THE WISDOM AND JOY OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

*Arnold Wilson, AAPT President*

Many AAPT members know me as the founder and editor for 20 years (1975-1995) of the journal *Teaching Philosophy*. I continue there as executive editor. In that role I've paid special attention to what's come to be called "the scholarship of teaching." It's a nebulous idea that refocuses attention about teaching. It wars with the long popular idea that anyone who *knows* the subject can teach it. It suggests that we can approach teaching in a scholarly, heads up fashion. We can study, learn, document, share, and even teach the teaching of philosophy. In this regard, to the extent that we think of art and its production as ineffable—a gift of the muses—the scholarship of teaching is more a craft than it is an art.

In 1990, in a keynote address to the AAPT summer meeting in Bloomington, Indiana, I signaled my commitment to this idea. The title of the talk was "The Socratic Craft as a Profession"; the subtitle was "It's Not a Hobby Anymore." I argued that in 15 years the journal had produced a large body of scholarly material on teaching. We could see models of faculty approaching their own teaching in a scholarly fashion, identifying issues and problems for the whole profession. Others joined these discussions to contend, to refine, to deepen our understanding. I shared a lengthy list of articles on the "problem" of student relativism. That list is continues to grow and to be an exemplar of such scholarship.

I mentioned in that talk that early on it was obvious in the papers submitted to the journal how difficult it was for philosophers to communicate with each other about teaching. Many early papers went no farther than being "credo" papers, filled with nice sentiments and goals for teaching but with only the vaguest suggestions about how to achieve any of it. Many authors could not begin without first doing homage to Socrates, most often in the *Meno*, as the paradigm philosophy teacher. I take it now to be indicative of just how little thought we had given to teaching that Socrates rather than Plato was the paradigm. It was Plato that had an academy; Socrates had a hobby. Not to say they did not both know and love philosophy, but it was Plato who designed the divided line, the allegory of the cave, and gave attention to Socrates' Alcibiades' problem (will students attracted to your personality be unable to fully appreciate philosophy). David Fielding's article "Could Socrates Read and Write?" highlights our ready ease with a teacher who is no scholar, and a scholar whose teaching we ignore as inessential to his views, and to our view of him.

I am embarrassed to say that I don't remember whether in that 1990 talk I gave any attention to another very important aspect of the scholarship of teaching evident at that AAPT conference. It was at that conference that Martin Benjamin first presented, as he has at each of the following conferences, his workshop for graduate students on teaching philosophy. First with support from a Matchette grant, and more recently with APA aid, he's worked with groups of twelve to twenty students, sharing his own approach to thoughtful and systematic development as a teacher. His workshop is based on his seminar at Michigan State which

is now required of all students who would teach. Key readings for the workshop are central papers from *Teaching Philosophy*. In the seminar version, furthermore, students are prescribed a term paper which would be suitable for publication in *Teaching Philosophy*, and two book reviews, following the journal's guidelines. In this we see teaching as the scholarly pursuit of a seminar, with refereed articles from other scholars published in the leading scholarly journal of the field as both the guide and the benchmark for the students' efforts.

A recent acknowledgment of the accomplishment of our profession in this regard, that is, the growing awareness of the value and quality of this work, comes from Great Britain. At the last AAPT summer conference in Milwaukee, George MacDonald Ross gave a plenary talk on plans to establish at Leeds University a UK center to promote better teaching in philosophy and religion. In this regard he has written that the US is thirty years ahead of the UK. His staff is undertaking to describe the quality of scholarship and broad scope of topics found in *Teaching Philosophy*, with on-line access to some they think important for UK professors.

Despite this level of achievement in the scholarship of philosophy teaching in the US, it is quite possible that Ross's efforts may make it all better known in the UK than it is in the US itself. This is due to the still marginal status that concern for better teaching plays in most graduate departments in the US. Most new philosophy instructors have taken no seminars such as Martin Benjamin's, and probably have never heard of AAPT or the journal *Teaching Philosophy*. Indeed, for the great majority of graduate faculty, whatever their own efforts at teaching improvement may be, the attitude continues to hold: To know is to be able to teach. And the great emphasis on research and scholarship never extends to the teaching of philosophy and issues and problems attendant to it.

How is this possible? Why has there been some level of success but not more? Especially over a period when jobs were increasingly hard to find, and more and more schools placed "teaching excellence" as a requirement in their job advertisements? It may be that some senior faculty are poor teachers and do not wish attention be directed to anything that might reveal their inadequacy. But I think the answer is more complex.

Over twenty years ago a senior colleague spoke to me of how much he was getting out of the new journal *Teaching Philosophy*. I was surprised and pleased to hear the praise from this veteran teacher. But my delight was short lived. He went on to explain that the articles and reviews he read there gave him greater confidence in what he'd been doing all along. For years I suppose I dismissed his comment. He was cynical about most stuff—college football budgets, etc. Why not also about the idea he might learn something about teaching philosophy even after many years of doing it? More recently I've come to believe that he may very well have been giving the journal as high praise as he could. Like

virtually all philosophers of his time, he had acquired what skills he had as a teacher the hard way. A couple of good models, more bad ones, and a few years struggle to find something “comfortable.” And he had found it. He wasn’t the most popular in the department, but not the worst. He won no awards but he was no embarrassment. And except for promotions he never visited a colleague’s classes. Talk was of what to teach, and how poor the students were—never of how to teach or why more students seemed indifferent to the charms of philosophy classics.

My own graduate work was with teachers like this, all “comfortable” with their teaching, or in a couple of cases, working to find that comfort zone. But however good they were, or whatever wisdom about teaching they had picked up over the years, they did not share it. You *might* see them “model” it, but there was no venue for them to talk about teaching, to engage fellow faculty or graduate students in thoughtful discussions about mutual issues or problems. Teaching was not a “problem” for them, and for anyone for whom it was a “problem” they had nothing to offer.

I know that many had better experiences in this regard than I did. Maybe because of that they are more “comfortable” with the level of teaching in our profession than I am. It seems to me that while our achievements in the past 30 years may be of some service in helping philosophers find “comfort” in the classroom or with their teaching habits, we will surely have missed the mark if we cannot draw out that wisdom, if we cannot learn to give it critical expression and appraisal, and to teach all to join in that exchange.

Every seminar teaches that we should question received ideas, especially when our acceptance or “comfort” comes too easily. And we must pursue the same in teaching. Moreover, if we do this, we will find the joy of better knowing the value of our efforts and in sharing that with others. My colleague mentioned above had become comfortable in his teaching, but never knew a joy of teaching that depends on confidence earned in mutual sharing and exchange with others. We need the models to do that. One is Benjamin’s seminar. But we lack the other models we need: for faculty interaction in departments (of various descriptions), and for the profession as a whole.

At a workshop for the Milwaukee meeting last year I asked participants to divide into three groups, one to discuss individual improvement of teaching, another to discuss the department’s role, and a third to discuss what the national and international organizations can do. Everyone wanted to be in the first group. And why not? We struggle most in our own classes and wish most for our own students. We will be comfortable if we can handle that.

Confidence about adequacy of teaching in our departments and in the profession may seem beyond our reach. Haven’t we challenge enough in trying to share the wisdom and joy with other individuals? AAPT has been the forum for that effort for 25 years, and a very large number have gained in this, but until we have effective models for the development and ongoing training and support of philosophy educators at the department and national levels the striving for excellence in teaching philosophy will continue to be the “hobby” of the few rather than a commitment of the profession.

AAPT members are all committed to that “hobby” and we must not lose the joy we find in sharing at the individual level; but we should also see the need to find the resources for all philosophers to take a greater part in that sharing. And AAPT is the forum for those models and for the development of that vision.

## QUESTIONS: Philosophy for Young People

The *American Philosophical Association’s Committee on Pre-College Instruction in Philosophy* is pleased to announce the creation of a national newsletter illustrating young people engaged in philosophy. The theme of the pilot issue is “children’s rights,” and it includes transcripts of K–12 philosophical discussions, essays, drawings, and poems by young people, and articles offering advice and ideas for activities for teachers and parents interested in philosophical discussions with young people. Teachers and philosophers from eight states and three countries participated in this project.

The editorial board for *Questions* is composed of Christina Bellon, Betsy Newell Decyk, Lori Fells, Sara Goering, Ashraya Gupta, Rosalind Ladd, Jana Mohr Lone, Michael Pritchard, David Shapiro, Hugh Taft-Morales, and Wendy Turgeon. For free copies of the pilot issue, or if you are interested in becoming involved, please contact Jana Mohr Lone at [jmohrlone@hotmail.com](mailto:jmohrlone@hotmail.com) or (206) 221-6297.

## CONTRIBUTIONS ARE REQUESTED!

### TEACHING RESOURCES

[www.apa.udel.edu/apa/governance/committees/teaching/org](http://www.apa.udel.edu/apa/governance/committees/teaching/org)

The *APA Committee on Teaching* invites you to contribute Course Syllabi & Short Descriptions of Successful Practices. This Web Site intends to be representative of all types of educational institutions, philosophical schools and interests. Seed money for this project was provided by the Carnegie Foundation.

## AAPT LOGO CONTEST

*The American Association of Philosophy Teachers is looking for a new Logo!*

### Grand Prize:

- 1 year subscription to *Teaching Philosophy*
- 1 year subscription to *Aitia*
- 1 year membership in AAPT

Send submissions to: Dr. Nancy S. Hancock  
Soc/Anth/Phil  
Northern Kentucky University  
Highland Heights, KY 41099  
[hancockn@nku.edu](mailto:hancockn@nku.edu)

Postmark Deadline: September 1, 2001

Format for submission: Two camera-ready copies; one 3.5" PC disk in jpeg or gif format

Logos will be judged by members of the Board of Officers. The winner will be announced in the Spring issue of *AAPT News*. All submissions become the property of the American Association of Philosophy Teachers.

# COULD SOCRATES READ AND WRITE?

*David Fielding, Dawson College, Montreal*

*(Adapted from a version delivered at the APA Eastern Division Meetings in New York, December 2000.)*

These remarks are going to be shamelessly autobiographical. I want to tell you about the end of a love affair, or no, more than an affair, an Infatuation, which lasted for half a century. I'm talking about my long-term obsession, and more recently, my falling out of love with Socrates and my disenchantment over the last decade or so with some major aspects of the Socratic ideal.

When I first met Socrates, he was introduced to me as a pivotal figure in a cosmic drama—a man at the center of civilization and a model of morality and rationality. In the present context you can probably guess my problem: should I teach my Ancient Philosophy, which is an introductory course, in the standard traditional way, with Socrates as protagonist and hero? Or should I put my cards on the table right from the start and tell my students how I now feel? My present feeling *is that we are all, we aficionados of philosophy—I mean Western philosophy here—under an evil spell: the spell of Socrates.*

I should sketch in a little background. First, I have no serious doubt that there really was a fifth-century B.C. Athenian called “Socrates” who was tried and sentenced to death by poison on charges that really did include corrupting the young and calling into question the current beliefs of the community. It was a real person about whom Plato, Xenophon, and Aristophanes wrote. But it's possible to forget that each of these three writers also invented a Socrates—Aristophanes in the form of a caricature; Xenophon and Plato in the form of a more three-dimensional figure. There must have been many other versions of Socrates long since lost. For example, we learn that the brilliant, prolific, and long-lived Isocrates, whose school in Athens rivaled the Academy, considered himself another devotee. If so, he probably felt his version was the most accurate one. But it was Plato's Socrates who triumphed—this was the one who went on centuries later, as we know, to conquer the Western world. Before long he'll conquer the whole planet, if present trends continue.

We tend to forget that this Platonic person is a fiction. In our universities, he is presented as fact (and as perfectly innocent, even ‘pious’ in the Biblical sense, wholly free from its usual derogatory overtones). For years I failed to distinguish the fiction from the fact. One major difference is that while we may argue more or less meaningfully about Plato's Socrates on the basis of textual evidence, we can only speculate wildly about the historical one.

In the 1950s when I first began to read Plato's dialogues, I assumed that I was getting historical fact, or something close to it. I read the *Apology*, for example, as verbatim. In fact, the Socrates I subsequently came to adore and dream about for so many years was of course the one constructed by Plato. He was a figment of

Plato's imagination, an ethereal person who found his way into my soul and took possession of it. Did you experience anything like this, or was it just me?<sup>1</sup>

Plato's Socrates could certainly read, needless to say, and write (though are we to understand from the *Phaedrus* that he would have preferred not to?). In the *Thaetetus*, for example, he spells out his name letter by letter, and in the *Apology* he refers to “reading” the work of earlier cosmologists. Or did he mean “hearing oral readings”? The sense is disputed. But what about the historical Socrates? Is it possible that perhaps he couldn't actually read—not, at least, in our familiar sense of effortless silent reading—and maybe not at all? He belonged to the working class of a society that was still largely oral. If he had any formal education, which is far from self-evident, it would not have been book-oriented. And *what* could he have read? Papyrus would have been very pricey, well beyond his family's means.

The sophists too (by the way, his old adversaries—or were they rather Plato's adversaries?) must have received much the same kind of mainly oral education, though most of them would probably have come from a wealthier class. They wouldn't have read much either, in our sense of the word. (Notice: as soon as we use the word “sophist” we play Plato's game: the “*Socrates good, sophists bad*” game. Careful—or we'll never get out from under that spell.)

So much for the background. For many years Socrates was a source of inspiration to me, a model of how I thought life should be lived. Maybe in some way he still is. How can I explain this? Have humans evolved in such a way that in our youth we are in a state of readiness for an ideal—do we require some god-like person to look up to? And if so could this have something to do with the importance of group cohesiveness in the struggle for survival? We have learned to accept the possibility that human infants are biologically programmed to develop language. Maybe we are wired to identify, in our teens, someone as our guru.

I still enjoy reading Plato. I still find him thought-provoking in the best sense of that expression (when he's in top form as in parts of the *Republic* and the *Symposium*). The difference is that I no longer regard Socrates as my ideal. So how can I explain my change of heart about Socrates? For years I noticed nothing odd in Plato's story. But, take (for example) Socrates' death.

Look how Socrates treats death (again in the *Phaedo*)—with, as we like to say, “the contempt it deserves.” He doesn't exhibit any sympathy whatever for his friends at his deathbed when they show the usual signs of grief. What was there to be upset about? He was sure he'd done the right thing and fairly sure that he was going to a better place. He didn't show much sympathy for his

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps Confucius is another example. Is it possible that others believed, as I did for so many years, that in the *Analects* we read what Confucius, a real historical person, really said? Did Confucian scholars ever think that the *Analects* record actual conversations that really took place, the way priests and parsons used to believe, or sounded as if they believed, that the *Gospels* record the actual conversations and sermons of Jesus Christ? After the communist revolution of 1949 the population of mainland China learned to hate Confucianism: *Fan Kong!* “Down with Confucius!” Millions, yea 100s of millions, switched suddenly from hero-worship to hatred. But did the historical Confucius really say what the *Analects* say he said? If he said it who recorded it, and when, and how, what on and for whom? Were all those pre-revolutionary readers—Japanese and Korean as well as Chinese—as naïve as I was? Has there been a planet-wide disenchantment with former heroes and sages, a general discarding of naïve, a post-modern wising-up in the Eastern as well as the Western Hemisphere?

wife Xanthippe either, but then he'd had to put up with so much from her, hadn't he? "Take her away," he says. He doesn't try to comfort her with so much as one affectionate word. In fact we never see him address her directly at all in the *Phaedo*. Or anywhere else. We know that Xanthippe was a shrew. We have it on unquestionable authority—his defense lawyer, Plato.

As a student in the 1950s, I understood the *Phaedo* to depict the exemplary behavior of a great man in his last moments. *That was the way to go!* I assumed that in his marriage, which by the way produced three children as he tells us in his *Apology*, the behavior of Socrates was faultless—that it was his wife who had the problem. This was just the effect Plato was striving for—very successfully in my case. Actually nobody has ever suggested to me that there could be any doubt about it. And the whole scene appealed powerfully to my vision of myself. I wanted so much to be like that.

As an undergraduate, surely I must have been warned that Plato was not to be believed in every detail. But when it came to the fundamental question, believe I did. *Do you accept Socrates into your heart? . . . I do.* I even believed the part in the *Phaedo* about the jailer handing Socrates the cup of hemlock and bursting into tears. And remember the way Socrates lies down calmly and allows the poison to take its course, dying feet first? I believed all that.

I now see it as one more case of Plato's beatification of Socrates and as one more exhibition of contempt for ordinary decent human feelings. It links in my mind with the extraordinary arrogance of that "I know that I know nothing, and you don't" of the *Apology*. Was I the only one so simple as to swallow all this? Or were there others out there?

Let's take another example. It's 404 B.C. on a winter evening and Socrates has been invited to a party. One of his wealthy, talented, and trendy friends, Agathon, is celebrating his Oscar, won for his musical production of the previous day. On the way to Agathon's, you may remember, Socrates bumps into another old friend, Aristodemus, and invites him to tag along, but just they get to the front door he decides that there is something he wants to think over by himself. He tells Aristodemus to go on in while he stops in a neighbor's gateway to meditate. When he finally makes his entry, fashionably late, the other guests are waiting for him: "So, Socrates, you must have solved your problem," says Agathon, "or you'd still be there." That's at 173d—I am not, as Dave Barry would say, making this up. But Plato clearly is. We may have a tendency to overlook this.

At the party, the guests make speeches in praise of Love, and Plato makes Agathon give a stunningly elegant and poetic performance. Socrates then questions him about it. You remember the result: Agathon has to admit: "I didn't know what I was talking about." A little later another member of the old boys' club bursts in along with some cronies, all rather drunk, and insists on making a speech in praise of Socrates. It is the infamous military genius, politician, poet, playboy, swinger, and man about town, Alcibiades. He tells the guests how Socrates risked his life to save him on the battlefield and how he responded—offering him his beautiful body as a reward by climbing into bed with him. With inebriated honesty he says that Socrates was unmoved and didn't so much as touch him (we gasp in astonishment). The party continues. Socrates drinks them all under the table and leaves next morning, cold sober. James Bond couldn't have done better.

I've heard myself describing the *Symposium* to my students as one of the high points of world literature. Some of the speeches (Aristophanes' of course, and Agathon's) still strike me as superb. But when you think about it, don't you feel that those two uninvited

friends are there essentially for cheap rhetorical effect? And aren't we supposed to be breathless with adoration—first at the way poor artisan-class Socrates insists on resolving his philosophical problem before joining the most sought-after soiree in town, and then at his stoicism on the battlefield, and finally in bed? Is "tacky" the word? Isn't Plato pandering to the very sentiments he pretends to despise?

The *Symposium* also makes a point of showing Agathon treating his slaves graciously. "You guys take charge," he tells them (175b). As a schoolboy I was deeply impressed to learn that slaves in ancient Athens were generally treated this way: Diogenes being hit by a beam of wood carried by a slave in the street. *Slave*: "Watch out!" *Diogenes*: "Why, are you going to hit me again?" I liked the opening scene of the *Frogs* of Aristophanes for a similar reason: master and slave change places and master looks like an idiot. Later I was shocked to learn that the Nazis revered Greek civilization. But not until much later—maybe it was after reading Darwin's observations about torture in Brazil—did it get through to me what slavery is all about. In the *Republic* Socrates jokes about tormenting the strings of the lyre to make them confess the truth about the minimum difference between semitones. The rack was one of the standard ways of getting evidence from slaves—as Aristotle reminds us in the *Rhetoric*—a commonplace of everyday life in ancient Greece.

In the *Meno* we are shown how a wholly uneducated slave boy can prove the theorem of Pythagoras if asked the right questions. (Margaret Anscombe apparently replicated the experiment recently with a little girl in Oxford.) It's comforting to learn that any child can do geometry, and doesn't this dialogue also demonstrate that Plato recognized that slaves were human? In fact isn't this a bit of a break-through for civilization, rather like that moment in the *Republic* when Socrates advocates equal education for women?

Look again. What does the slave boy ever say other than "Yes"? Socrates does all the talking and shows no interest whatever in the slave or his mind. What is the boy's name? Does he even *have* a name? Socrates treats him like a piece of furniture or a robot. It reminds me of the way he treats Xanthippe in the *Phaedo*. Did it ever occur to Plato that a knowledge of mathematics, innate or not, will only develop in the child's brain step by step, in its own time? For Socrates the boy's age and his person are entirely beside the point.

But what caught your imagination most when you first read Plato's dialogues? What turns on our students most? Wasn't it, and isn't it still, that story in the *Republic*, "The Allegory of the Cave"?

Remember the story? Of course you remember, it's one thing you'll never forget. Underground prisoners sit in chains and spend their lives looking at shadows on the wall in front of them, mistaking them for reality. Behind the prisoners, but in front of a fire further back, people walk by on a path. They are screened by a fence so that only the various replicas (of men and animals) which each holds aloft cast shadows on the wall. When these people talk as they go by, it is the shadows of these replicas that seem to be talking—that's how it seems to the prisoners bound in such a way that shadows are all they ever see. They try to predict which will appear next and in what order; which are in constant conjunction, and so on. This they compete over; it's their whole life.

Then one of them is freed from his chains and shown the source of his illusion. Dazzled and confused, he at first denies, but in time recognizes, that he had been mistaking shadows for realities. Then, to the still greater discomfort of his eyes, he is dragged to the outside world. This bright sunlit world of physical objects perceived by the senses will later turn out to be itself only a replica, as we aficionados know, of the Domain of Mental Objects grasped by

the intellect alone. In the end the freed prisoner returns to the chamber—Plato means of course our everyday illusory world, but we can't help thinking of cinema and television—with all those other prisoners still shackled there. The newly freed slave now knows something those others don't know. He sees that they are deluded and that their predictions, competitions, and rivalries are unspeakably petty. He's no longer able to take them seriously. And anyway his eyes have been spoiled for the task of looking at shadows by exposure to the light of day. So he is regarded as a fool. He tries to explain. They don't want to hear. Instead of being grateful to him they hate him. Anyone who wants to free them from their cave, their prison, makes them angry. They'd kill rather than leave the world they know, or think they know.

I don't know about you, but whenever I introduce this story I always emphasize that it is purely imaginary. I don't want some bright spark at the back of the class to be the one to point out that these totally immobilized prisoners in real life would not have been able, for example, to perform certain necessary bodily functions. ("Which way is the bathroom? I fear I can hold out no longer.") I must have been familiar with Plato's fable for several decades before it dawned on me that it is fact based on real life. There's no reason to doubt that slaves spent their lives laboring in mines for many centuries, maybe millennia, before Socrates. But there had never been any doubt in my mind: the whole point of the Cave was that it was strictly fictional, a thought experiment.

Why *does* this little story have such extraordinary appeal? A part of the reason may be that we suspect that it contains an element of truth—our brains must be equipped with (no doubt put in place under instructions from our DNA) some kind of neural *template-algorithm-blueprint*, for want of a better metaphor. These templates, blueprints, or whatever they are, must correspond—who knows how?—to the various kinds of things that exist in our world. They enable us to make sense of what we sense.

But what was the main reason for the story's appeal to me? Here's my hypothesis: it invited me to imagine that I, the initiated, was not like all those other TV and movie watchers. Those poor benighted yo-yos were competing with each other over trivialities, illusions. I was above all that. The story granted me superior intellectual and moral status, instantly and effortlessly. Isn't Plato here too catering to the very vices—arrogance and competitiveness (or meta-competitiveness: "*I don't even need to compete with you*") that he pretends to despise? And isn't this entire story motivated by the characteristic Socratic disdain for ordinary people whose lives, according to the famous formula, are *unexamined* and so *not worth living*? As a student in philosophy in my first year of university, it was just what I wanted to hear. *I'm not like those others. I'm above their petty rivalries and desires.* Didn't you need an advanced degree in mathematics before you could even be admitted as a student to Plato's Academy, let alone achieve its dazzling insights? The Allegory of the Cave is so much easier than Calculus 101 or even the theorem of Pythagoras. The only qualification you really need is a readiness to fall in love with your own image.

I've been trying to suggest that when I fell in love with Socrates I fell in love with a particularly obnoxious aspect of myself. Of course Socrates is not uniquely responsible but he sure as hell made his contribution. If the history of Western philosophy can be understood, in Whitehead's relentlessly regurgitated aphorism, as a set of footnotes to Plato, isn't Socratic narcissism its Achilles' heel?

Or is it just me?

## From the Executive Director

### BE INFORMED!

We want you to have information about the 2002 AAPT workshop-conference. Note: AAPT memberships run from January 1<sup>st</sup> until December 31<sup>st</sup> in a given year. Please check your address label for when your membership expires and be sure to renew your membership in a timely fashion to receive all the news.

### SUCCESS: APA/AAPT TEACHING WORKSHOPS

This year there were AAPT workshop sessions at all three APA divisional meetings and all were a success.

The topic of the APA/AAPT workshop at the Pacific Division was "Encouraging Philosophical Writing." The workshop featured three different presentations that gave us new ways to approach writing in our philosophy classes. Paul Green (Mount St. Mary's College, Los Angeles) initiated the workshop with a discussion of "A Process Model for Teaching Philosophical Writing." Sharon Kaye and Paul Thomson (John Carroll University) discussed both conventional and on-line assignments in their presentation "The Multiple Draft, Peer-Review Assignment, On-Line and Off." And Donna Engelmann (Alverno College) helped the participants focus on articulating the goals of their writing assignments as she led the discussion "Assessing Writing in Philosophy: Creating Criteria for Assessment." If you wish to know more about these presentations, check the AAPT website for the presenters' abstracts and the way to contact each of them.

The topic of the APA/AAPT Central Division workshop was "Side Doors: Alternative Ways to Enter Philosophical Discussions." Dean Kowalski (Loras College) and Tom Riley (Clarke College) led us in viewing the witch-hunt scene in Monty Python's *The Holy Grail* which prompted a lively discussion of the arguments and the variety of ways this film clip could be used in a logic/critical thinking course. Sara Goering (California State University, Long Beach) provided her reflections on using literature in philosophy classes and a rich set of examples that could be used. Workshop participants provided additional contexts and examples.

**YOU, TOO!** If you are interested in presenting an APA/AAPT workshop in 2002, please contact me by September 15, 2001.

### MONEY!

Gary Talsky, AAPT Treasurer, reports that as of March 31, 2001 there is \$33,307.63 in the AAPT combined accounts. \$160.00 is set aside in a "virtual reserved fund" for the Lenssen Award.

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## ANNOUNCEMENT & INVITATION

### THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF PHILOSOPHY TEACHERS

### *14th International Workshop-Conference on Teaching Philosophy*

**July 31—August 4, 2002**

Thomas More College  
Crestview Hills, KY (Cincinnati Metro area)

Meeting information, Request for Presentations, Program and Registration Forms will be posted as available at the AAPT Website: <http://aapt-online.dhs.org>, or through the AAPT Listserv: [AAPT@LISTSERV.UC.EDU](mailto:AAPT@LISTSERV.UC.EDU)

*For information by mail, write to:*

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## GRADUATE STUDENT SEMINAR

For the past several conferences, the AAPT and the APA have jointly sponsored a seminar on teaching philosophy specifically for advanced graduate students. The seminar has been led by Martin Benjamin who pioneered the graduate teaching seminar at Michigan State University. The seminars have run concurrently with the AAPT conference so that participants could attend the seminar sessions in the morning and all other AAPT workshops and events the rest of the day. Many of the seminarians have remained active members of the AAPT and have become our next generation of leaders.

We expect to be able to offer this seminar again in conjunction with AAPT's 2002 conference. For information contact:

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