



AAPT NEWS

The Newsletter of the American Association of Philosophy Teachers

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WINTER 2005

From the President

Donna Engelmann

In August I was in Toledo with a congenial group of philosophy teachers, sharing support and good ideas for one another's teaching. It was the **American Association of Philosophy Teachers' 15th Biennial Workshop Conference on the Teaching of Philosophy**. I was energized as I always am by our conferences, and I came home with some great ideas for improving my teaching. I want to share just three of them.

Laura Duhan Kaplan was one of our plenary speakers. She shared with us a strategy, narrative philosophy, that she has been developing for a number of years. Her 2002 book, *Philosophy and Everyday Life*, is a companion to this strategy. In Kaplan's approach, students write a personal narrative, and connect themes and ideas in their own narrative to the philosophers they have been studying. I was excited by the way this strategy could help me focus better on the connection between the thinking of philosophers and my students' lives, and I'm experimenting by redesigning the assessment process in my introductory philosophy course. Also in my introductory philosophy course I have taken some suggestions from a presentation by Nils Rauhut, whose book *Ultimate Questions: Thinking about Philosophy* contains a series of Food for Thought exercises which offer students a way to consider the options around a particular philosophical issue. And finally, in my ethics course I am considering adapting a philanthropy exercise presented by Nancy Hancock. Nancy, Vice President of the AAPT, teaches at Northern Kentucky University. A local foundation provided funds to set up philanthropy projects in several university courses. Nancy's students in Environmental Feminism created criteria, solicited proposals, and awarded funding to local non-profit agencies. This seems like a very promising vehicle for

bringing community concerns into the philosophy classroom.

The conference, generously hosted by the University of Toledo Philosophy Department and its chair, Eric Snider, was a great setting for AAPT members to share these and many other innovative ways of engaging students in philosophy. Our thanks go out to our Executive Director, Betsy Decyk, our Treasurer, Bob Timko, our program co-chairs Mimi Marinucci and Joe Givvin, and all of the talented and hard-working AAPT members who contributed to the conference's success.

But then, where other than AAPT could you find a conference that brings together an international group of philosophers dedicated to teaching, sharing their ideas in interactive workshops with plenty of time for informal discussion, and great plenary speakers like Laura Kaplan, Michael Scriven, and our own past president, Daryl Close? (For more about the plenary sessions, see p.5.) Founded in 1976, AAPT offers its members these biennial conferences, a newsletter (this one), a listserv on teaching, and a website. In addition, the AAPT collaborates with the

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AAPT ELECTION RESULTS

AAPT to Endorse AAUP 2003 Policy Statement on Contingent Appointments and the Academic Profession:
YES

Elected Vice-President: Nancy Slonneger Hancock

Elected to Board as Members-at-Large:

Tziporah Kasachkoff

Linda Sartorelli

Laura Newhart

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MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

AAPT Membership Forms are available at the AAPT
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1st until December 31st in a given year. Please
check your address label for when your membership
expires and renew in a timely fashion.

SUBMISSIONS TO AAPT NEWS

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From the President *continued from page 1*

American Philosophical Association to offer sessions on the teaching of philosophy at each of **APA's** divisional meetings, and we co-sponsor with the **APA** a seminar on philosophy teaching for graduate students. This seminar is held in conjunction with our biennial conference, and has been led for many years by a master teacher, Martin Benjamin, recently retired from Michigan State University. Our organization has contributed to discussions of such issues as the use of technology in philosophy teaching, the role of part-time instructors in higher education, the assessment of philosophy learning, and the meaning of academic freedom. We have members teaching full-time and members teaching part-time. We have members who have retired from a career of teaching and graduate students who are looking forward to their careers in philosophy. We have members in every category of higher education including community colleges, liberal arts colleges, comprehensive universities, research universities and technical institutes.

Our officers and board are already at work planning our 2006 Workshop/Conference. Please consider joining us the first week in August 2006 for our 16th Biennial Workshop/Conference. Share this newsletter with colleagues and graduate students who, like you, are concerned about improving their teaching. Whether you are already an **AAPT** member, or are considering membership, we look forward to learning from you and supporting one another in the teaching of philosophy.

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THE PRS SUBJECT CENTRE: FOUR YEARS ON

George MacDonald Ross

Leeds University

At the AAPT International Workshop/Conference at Alverno College in 2000, I was invited to give a presentation on the recently established Philosophical and Religious Studies Centre of the Learning and Teaching Support Network. My presentation was published in *AAPT News*, 24/1, Spring 2001, pp.3–8.

In the UK, there had never previously been a forum for publishing articles or conducting discussions specifically concerned with teaching philosophy. In those early days, I naively expected that there would be scores of philosophers scattered throughout the UK eager to share their ideas about teaching philosophy, and to publicise their innovative methods of teaching and assessment.

give of our own personalities in our teaching, and we are sceptical whether we can learn from others, or whether others can learn from us. We are prone to the ‘not invented here’ syndrome when – taking over a course, we prefer to start from first principles, rather than adopting materials which have been prepared by others.

- We may be more conservative in our teaching methods than other disciplines. We use tried and tested teaching methods with a history of two and a half thousand years, and philosophy provides fewer opportunities for innovative methods such as problem-based learning, or websites with jazzy graphics, videos, or interactive

The Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies
Learning and Teaching Support Network

CONFERENCE NOTICE

Future Discourse: Learning and Teaching in Philosophy

A two-day Philosophy Conference, 1-2 July 2005
University of Leeds, UK

<http://www.prs-ltsn.ac.uk/philosophy/events/conference.html>
and
enquiries@prs-ltsn.ac.uk

This turned out not to be the case. Although we now have a growing resource of articles and reviews in our journal *Discourse* and on our website, these are mostly the outcomes of projects we have funded with grants of up to about \$5,000. We still have difficulty persuading people to write for us voluntarily, or to attend workshops and conferences – much more difficulty than subject centres covering other disciplines. It is worth considering possible reasons for this:

- Philosophers tend to be cats rather than dogs – we do our own thing rather than working in teams. We

tests. In the UK, all philosophy departments were recently visited by teams of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, and its overview report mentioned very few examples of innovative practice.

More generally, there are special factors in the UK which militate against research into teaching issues and the free exchange of ideas:

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The PRS Subject Centre *continued from page 3*

- Although all UK universities (bar one) are mainly funded by the Government, much of the funding follows student numbers. So there is enough of a free market for departments to be reticent about giving away the commercial secrets which put them ahead of their competitors in terms of the quality of student learning.
- In addition to funding for teaching, there is funding for research. The funding for research is determined by a formula, of which the main components are (a) the number of research-active academic staff, and (b) a departmental quality rating. The quality rating is the outcome of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), which takes place every 6 years. Every member of every department submits up to 4 items published during the relevant period, and the quality of the items is assessed by a panel of subject specialists. Each department is then given an overall score, on a bizarre scale of 1, 2, 3a, 3b, 4, 5, 5*, 6*. Departments rated below 4 get nothing, those rated 4 get a small amount, and the rest get progressively more. If a department gets a higher or lower rating from one RAE to the next, this can mean a funding difference of hundreds of thousands of dollars a year for the following 6 years. (There are going to be a number of changes in the next RAE, due in 2008, but the broad principles remain the same.) Naturally, with so much money at stake, there is huge pressure on staff to concentrate on research at the expense of teaching, since there is no direct financial reward for improving the quality of teaching. As it happens, publications on teaching can be submitted for the RAE, but there is widespread scepticism that panels will take them seriously.
- The RAE has intensified the idea, which took root in the UK around the middle of the 20th century, that the primary function of a university is its research function. Before that, the life of the institution focussed on the teaching of undergraduates, and research was an optional and unfunded extra. Now it is virtually the other way round. Unlike the USA, the teaching of philosophy is almost exclusively confined to research universities; and the few colleges where it is taught aspire to eventual university status – so there is still the pressure to pursue research at the expense of teaching. We simply do not have a critical mass of college teachers whose primary vocation is teaching.
- Although there has recently been an exponential growth in educational development units, academics in general, and philosophers in particular, are hostile to their approach to improving the quality of teaching. They are equally hostile to managerial attempts to standardise methods of teaching and assessment, and to external inspection regimes. Despite our attempts to get the message across that the Subject Centre is all about helping departments to improve their teaching in ways that are specific to philosophy and without any prescription, we are still perceived in many quarters as somehow associated with these hostile agencies.

So our original aim, to create a culture in which it is normal practice to exchange ideas about teaching just as we already do about research, has faced many obstacles. We are gradually making an impact, but we still have a long way to go.

The most recent development is that the old Learning and Teaching Support Network has been absorbed into a larger, more prestigious, and better funded institution called the Higher Education Academy (launched in October 2004). We hope that this will mark a change of gear in the journey towards parity of status for excellence in teaching.

One final point of comparison with the USA is that of sheer numbers. If you calculate the proportion of members of the APA who are sufficiently interested in teaching to join the AAPT as well, it comes out at about 2% after 30-odd years of existence. In the UK there are about 600 professional philosophers, and the Subject Centre has been going for less than 5 years. If we had identified 2% as teaching activists, the resulting number would be 12. I think we can do better than that!

The events we have organised so far have been on relatively specialised topics, such as teaching logic, the use of computers in the teaching of philosophy, and techniques for getting students to read difficult texts. We feel we are now in a position to celebrate our fifth anniversary with a major international conference at which any topic relevant to the teaching of philosophy will be welcome. Our provisional target is an attendance of 100, and we would be delighted to have as many participants from the USA and elsewhere as are able to join us.

STUDENT MASTERY IN PHILOSOPHY & HOW TO EVALUATE IT

Donna Engelmann
Alverno College

If you want to know what issues and concerns philosophy teachers have, there is no better place to look than the AAPT's Workshop/Conference on teaching philosophy. In designing and offering sessions, philosophy teachers share their current teaching challenges, and the innovative ways in which they are meeting these challenges in their classrooms. Two interconnected themes of the plenary sessions at this year's conference were: what kind of work should philosophy teachers look for from their students, and how should it be evaluated. The presidential address by Daryl Close entitled "Fair Grades", and presentations by Michael Scriven, "Novel Approaches to Testing in Philosophy," and by Laura Duhan Kaplan, "Coaching Students to Write Personal Philosophies," offered three very thoughtful responses to these questions.

In his address, Daryl Close laid out conditions for the grading and evaluation of learning. Academic grading, he pointed out, is one of the few experiences of merit-based evaluation that nearly everyone shares. "A fair grade," Close said, "is a grade that the student merits based on his or her knowledge of the subject matter of the course." If grading is based on merit, then grades are not scarce resources, and a teacher's grade distribution cannot be treated as evidence of fair or unfair grading. Grading on the curve, because it assigns students grades in relation to one another's work, is inherently unfair.

Close rejected both the idea that grades are rewards and punishments, and that grades are the goal in the classroom. He argued instead that grading is a way to convey a judgment about a student's mastery of course content to interested parties, such as the student, other educators, and potential employers. To secure the reliability of this information, grading must be impartial and consistent. This has several consequences. One is that whatever a professor takes into account in determining a grade should have a determinate value. So, for instance, if an instructor puts a value on class participation in judgments of student work, then that participation should be given a determinate grade value. Also, domains of student work that will be the basis of grading, and standards for that grading, must be published in advance. And areas of student performance not related to the mastery of the course content, such as a student's behavior outside of class, or students' personal beliefs, should

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SOME REFLECTIONS on presentations and discussions at the AAPT 15th Biennial Workshop/Conference

Tziporah Kasachkoff
City University of New York

In what follows I offer my reflections on the recently concluded AAPT workshop/conference at Toledo, Ohio. I invite others to respond to these reflections and join in a discussion of the issues raised here with an eye towards seeing whether these issues might profitably be further explored at future sessions of the AAPT – either at our sessions held in conjunction with the APA division meetings or at a future workshop/conference.

First, a caveat: My thoughts are offered only in response to those sessions of the workshop/conference that I myself attended and are not meant to generalize over all of the sessions that were offered. I was not present at all of the sessions and, given the variety of the presentations at the conference, no one session or group of sessions is reasonably viewed as representative of the rest.

Among the sessions that I attended, it seems to me that two distinct, though not unrelated, questions were raised, sometimes explicitly and sometimes only by implication. Each of these questions was highlighted in one of the plenary sessions. They are: 1) What is the empirical evidence that, as teachers of philosophy, we are accomplishing our goal of getting our students actually to learn philosophy? (And what does this evidence imply about what we should do to improve our performance as teachers?) 2) What *should be our goals* as teachers of the various courses that we offer? Answers to the first question were clearly the focus of Michael Scriven's plenary address, and were further addressed in the discussion that followed the workshop that Scriven led regarding machine-readable examinations in philosophy. The second question was the explicit focus of a workshop conducted by Bruce Suttle. It was also clearly in the background of Daryl Close's plenary remarks concerning grading: for if, as Daryl argued in his presentation, it is unjust to use grades as assessments of accomplishments that are extraneous to the subject of philosophy (for example, coming to class on time, being considerate listeners of fellow classmates' views, handing in work on time, participating in class discussion, etc.), then we had better sort out what is extraneous and what is intrinsic to the teaching of our subject.

Unlike the first question, which is unambiguously empirical, the second question is clearly a normative question that requires decision rather than discovery. But answers to the normative question are presupposed by any answer to the empirical question of how we should assess how well our

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I HAVE MET THE ENEMY AND THEY ARE WE*: Academic freedom from faculty colleagues

Joel Marks and Matthew Griffiths

University of New Haven

An ambiguity lurks in the heart of academic freedom. It is easy to overlook until it is driven into the open by competing faculty interests. At our university we have recently seen an example: One of the authors, call him *A*, suffered an attack on what he took to be his professional prerogative and suddenly discovered that the supposed bulwark protecting the individual was made of sand. The other author, *B*, participated in the attack. We are discussing the matter in a dialogue, as colleagues, because we both believe the issue is a real one, not a matter of good guys *versus* bad guys.

The incident began when a student, *S*, filed a formal complaint about a grade given by *A*. *S* did not question that the grade was in accordance with the specified grading system of the course; instead, *S* argued that the grading system itself was illegitimate. That grading system was a version of what is sometimes called contract grading, where course grades can be based on factors other than a teacher's judgment of the students' demonstrated understanding of the course material. In the case of *A*'s course, the sole criterion was the amount of time a student claimed to have spent fulfilling the course requirements. Since *S* had produced work of high quality in relatively little time, *S*'s grade was lower than might have been expected from a strictly quality-based assessment; hence, *S* argued, the grading system was unfair.¹

A defended his use of the grading system and, by implication, the grade he had assigned to *S*, on the following grounds: (1) *A* had the academic freedom to teach the course as he saw fit, provided that the method chosen served the legitimate academic purposes of the course and (2) The method chosen did in fact serve those purposes. While *A* could understand why *S* was displeased, he felt that *S*'s grade was in the end the result of *S*'s own choice to ignore the rules of the game, which were themselves justified. Indeed, *A* believes that far too many intelligent students such as *S* become used to getting high grades on the basis of very little work and, hence, do not receive the education they are capable of receiving.

In any case, *A* was perfectly confident that his colleagues in the faculty committee hearing *S*'s complaint would decide in his favor. As our university's faculty constitution puts it:

Faculty members, hired on the basis of valid credentials and teaching experience, are professionals fully equipped to discharge their academic responsibilities. Therefore, the individual instructor has the prerogative as well as the responsibility of making use of such methods, techniques, books, and materials as he or she considers useful to fulfill his or her objectives as an educator; and the intent and purpose of the course.

In a word, academic freedom gave *A* not only the right, but the responsibility to choose the grading system he considered best for the course in his professional judgment.

But *A* was knocked off his perch by his colleagues' decision, which could not be appealed, in favor of *S*, whose grade was changed to reflect the quality rather than the quantity of *S*'s performance in the course. In effect, the sort of contract grading employed by *A* had been found to be illegitimate.

While *A* was still reeling (and seething), additional efforts were made to solidify the committee's decision. *Ex post facto* guidance regarding contract grading at the university was sought by the committee's chair from the faculty senate. This initiative backfired, however, when the senate unanimously approved a resolution that "the forum for discussion of methods of instruction and grading is generally an academic rather than a legislative one."

Now feeling vindicated by this apparent *de facto* repudiation of the committee's actions, *A* is prepared to recognize that an interesting procedural issue remains unresolved. To put it one way: What is the locus of academic freedom? *A* took for granted the faculty constitution's reference to "the individual instructor." Where else could freedom reside?

Developing his response, *B* counters that academic freedom operates within a system subject to other constraints. *B* asks us to consider an extreme that none will deny is outside our allowable actions. It would be an unforgettable education in the Christian tradition to drink human blood in a comparative religion class. This could fulfill one of our "objectives as an educator," but it would cause great offense to some and disgust to others. Our pursuit of education is restricted at least by our state and federal laws. Are there any other sorts of legitimate constraints on our educator prerogatives? Certainly. As our faculty constitution and *A* himself acknowledge, freedom to teach is bounded by the content area of a course. *B* goes on to assert that there are other constraints, which include limits on what are acceptable grading practices.

But who decides these limits? As with any academic matter, *B* asserts, it is the collective body of the faculty that decides. In fact, this setting of limits is itself an expression of academic freedom, namely, the freedom of the faculty body. *B* could posit, therefore, as a first response to *A*'s question, "Where else (than in the individual) could freedom reside?" that it also resides at the collective level. We the faculty have the freedom to make our collective decisions on academic issues. We collectively decide what constitutes a course, and we do so by deliberating on issues such as content, qualification, and, central to our current debate, grading method. So some

of our academic freedom lies pooled in our faculty senate and committees.

It could even be argued that the collective of the faculty is where academic freedom essentially resides. Academic freedom is an assertion and guarantee of the corporate faculty's right to conduct its own proper affairs. It is intended as a protection against forces external to the institution – specifically political ones – that would seek to interfere with academic policy and practice, but it also protects against forces external to the faculty but internal to the institution, such as boards and administrators. When it comes to our intra-faculty grading issue, *B* maintains, individual academic freedom is pitted against our collective faculty interests, and the conclusion of considerations by collective faculty should hold sway.

One place where such consideration occurs is in the course approval process. Since the corporate faculty had long ago approved the course in question on the basis of a course description that does not specifically mention the use of contract grading, it is not obviously the prerogative of an individual instructor who is teaching that course subsequently to adopt such a grading method. The corporate faculty's approving, or disapproving, a course using such a method is, in *B*'s opinion, an example of corporate academic freedom. However, it follows that an individual faculty member is thereby constrained from teaching in a way that contradicts that judgment.

A replies that there are both practical and theoretical grounds that favor individual academic freedom in grading and other academic matters. The practical consideration is that most courses are approved on the basis of a general outline, which is necessarily tentative and meant to be merely illustrative. That is because faculty outside the specialty are called upon to pass judgment on the course as it wends its way through various committees and in the faculty senate, and because over time a variety of instructors other than the original proposer(s) may be teaching the course, each with his or her own take on the subject matter and on pedagogy.

Our collective faculty, while incorporating descriptions of grading policies in course approvals, understand that it is current practice for individual instructors from time to time to change the grading system from that described in the course proposal, and so they expect instructors (i.e., themselves!) to deviate from the initial description. *A* maintains that he is not the only deviant at the university; in fact he believes that deviancy is a rampant and unchallenged practice on campus. It is only the deviance of his method from some presumed norm that has been picked out arbitrarily for "correction," and not even with the consistency of "correcting" anybody else's use of that or a similar grading method.

The particular course that *A* taught was approved in antiquity, the approval process has evolved considerably since the original approval, and information on the original approval is probably unrecoverable. The course is now understood in terms of its recent history, syllabi, textbooks, etc., and by the course description in the catalog, none of which could be

considered to limit the method of evaluation.

The theoretical reason for claiming that individual academic freedom trumps corporate academic freedom is that rights generally inhere in individuals. In a democracy, that would seem to be the whole point of a right. The Bill of Rights of the U.S. Constitution, for example, would hardly be what it is if it were not trying to protect the individual from the "tyranny of the majority." Therefore, insofar as faculty governance is intended to be democratic, it would seem in need of its own bill of rights for individual faculty, to protect them from just the sorts of interference that academic freedom is designed to do. This is, implicitly, what the cited passage from our own faculty constitution, with its explicit reference to "the individual instructor," is all about.

In reply, *B* grants that course approval does not prescribe exactly the manner in which grading must be done and, hence, that the individual instructor's academic freedom does include freedom to change the method of evaluation. But *B* suggests that the approved method is best described as a guideline to which the individual instructor can tailor his or her approach. We could see our argument as a question of scale – How deviant can one be? But *B* sees a qualitative change that goes beyond deviancy; the issue is not a question of "How are you grading?" but "Are you grading?"

For an example of scale, *B* sees no problem with one instructor favoring quizzes where another favors papers. But *B* would have a problem with an instructor of a course that was approved with A through F grading offering only an A or an F – that is, switching to a sort of pass/fail system. *B* submits that this would be going unacceptably far; in terms of our course approval process, this would be regarded as a change to the course itself.

B also believes that the instructor is transgressing the bounds of individual academic freedom if he or she delegates the grading responsibility to any other person or persons, and particularly when that other person is the student whose grade is being decided. In our particular case, *B* maintains that with the prescribed method used, the instructor was not grading. Yes, the instructor put the system in place, but with knowledge of the system the students then graded themselves. Can we assume all our students to be more honest than Presidents in their State of the Union addresses or "Kenny Boy" at Enron? It is our collective expectation that the instructor perform the grading, and this limits the individual instructor's freedom in this case.

A agrees that academic freedom is not absolute – no more for the individual instructor than for the faculty collective. Such strictures are already laid out explicitly in the faculty constitution and elsewhere, the main ones having to do with unlawful discrimination. However, to have the collective faculty micromanaging the grading and other teaching functions of the individual instructor to the degree suggested by the previous

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We Have Met the Enemy *continued from page 7*

paragraph would be to reduce the latter's academic freedom to a practical nullity. At the very least, it would inhibit innovation, both because of the lag time in seeking approval for a novel method whenever an instructor wanted to employ one and because teachers generally would err towards the conventional lest some complaint committee second-guess them after the fact.

Even more to the point is that a faculty member such as *A* would occasionally be overruled by faculty members such as *B* just because the latter had different preferences or intuitions about teaching methods. And, to underscore one of the grounds for resisting this sort of tyranny of the majority,² the difference of intuitions could have a lot to do with the academic disciplines to which the respective faculty members belong. For example, in the present case, it may not be a coincidence that *A* belongs to the humanities while *B* belongs to the physical sciences.

In the end, both *A* and *B* agree that the individual should assume academic freedom, exercise it, and not feel inhibited from pushing at the limits. We also agree that some of these limits lie in the hands of the collective faculty, yet neither of us wants to see grading methods legislated. But when are the collective faculty micromanaging and when are they wisely looking out for our collective academic interest? And how do we make judgment calls between such incommensurables as student learning benefits on one hand and the faculty's collective interest in the meaning of the 'Quality Point Ratio' on the other? These issues do indeed appear differently to the two of us.

FOOTNOTES

* With apologies to Walt Kelly.

¹ *S* also argued that the system was unfair because it permitted cheats to get better grades than honest students, since the students were on their honor to report the actual time spent completing their course assignments. Resting the grade so obviously on the integrity of the individual student was one of the reasons *A* adopted the system in the first place. This was an ethics course, and *A* saw it as his prerogative, and indeed responsibility to make the students aware of the ethical decisions they make. Thus, the form of the course was designed to manifest its content by highlighting an ethical issue, namely, honesty in completing assignments. Discussion of that obligation was a centerpiece of the course. (A detailed description of the method can be found in Joel Marks, "Cheating 101: Ethics as a Lab Course," *Teaching Philosophy*, 26:2:131-45, June 2003.)

² It can also be noted that the so-called "majority" will sometimes be a tiny minority who happen to dominate some committee that has jurisdiction over the matter or could be a bottleneck in an approval process.

Some Reflections *continued from page 5*

students have learned what we think it important for them to learn. This point surfaced in the discussions following Scriven's plenary address and subsequent workshop (though I do not recall its having been explicitly raised in these discussions). It surfaced in comments to the effect that the empirical data that Scriven presented with respect to multiple-choice and other machine scannable examinations concerned how much *propositional* knowledge students acquired in their philosophy class, but left untouched the question of whether students had mastered other facets of what some members of the audience regarded as part of a good philosophical education. According to these members of the audience, the tests that Scriven spoke about aimed at assessing what a student had learned about a philosopher, or about a particular position, or about the history of a philosophical debate. Perhaps, too, such tests might be used to determine whether a student could correctly discriminate between good and bad arguments and could correctly discern the faults committed in the latter. But if one views the teaching of philosophy as the imparting of attitudes or dispositions, or of consisting in the instruction in the various skills necessary for constructing arguments and positions (and not merely for discerning and analyzing them), then the sorts of tests one can reliably use to assess the success of one's teaching will be quite different from the sorts of tests that Scriven spoke about. It seems to me that members in the audience who voiced this view were implying – even if not explicitly arguing – that we cannot devise empirical tests to ascertain our success in teaching without first deciding what constitutes the legitimate aims of our teaching: which tests are best used to evaluate student competency in philosophy – clearly an empirical question, as Scriven maintains – depends on an answer to the normative and prior question of what sort of competencies in philosophy we think it important teach.

I believe that there is no single set of philosophical competencies that we should try to aim for in each and every one of the diverse courses that we teach (though no doubt there will be some overlap). We teach for one set of competencies in a History of Philosophy course, another in a Critical Thinking course, another in a Political or Social Philosophy course. Before we can decide how to frame the empirical tests that assess any one of these competencies, we must decide what these competencies are. Since this is a normative question that raises the fundamental issue of what, as teachers of philosophy, we ought to be doing in our classrooms, there will be some disagreement, even controversy, concerning how it should be answered.

(I became aware of just how different our various perspectives on this question might be as a result of a conversation that Donna Englemann, Nancy Hancock and I had in which we aired our respective views on whether, in a

political philosophy course, we should have as one of our aims encouraging our students to become not merely acquainted with modern-day political issues but politically active with respect to those issues. This conversation, and the differences among us that emerged, reminded me of some of the vast literature concerning the legitimate aims of courses in ethics, and especially in applied ethics. Ought we, when we teach ethics, to aim solely at clarification of the issues, the disentanglement, so far as that is possible, of the factual from the normative, the drawing of correct inferences, and the discernment of what is and what is not relevant to a responsible ethical decision in a given case? Or ought we to aim at something more personal, namely, not merely students' acquisition of those skills necessary for responsible ethical decision-making, but their acquisition of both the desire and the disposition to use those skills in the making of actual ethical decisions? For those instructors of ethics who would respond that it is the latter, what means might be suggested for achieving this?)

I think the normative question about what we should be doing in our various courses, and our discussions concerning our various answers to this question would be valuable to explore in future sessions of the AAPT. It may be that we will come to the conclusion that just as there may be no single way to teach a given subject, there may be more than one legitimate goal that shapes the teaching of a particular subject. But we might also come to the opposing view that there are some goals that we are not well-equipped, or are ill-suited, or are just plain wrong to pursue.

Since an answer to the normative question raised here provides the rationale for the way each of us constructs our syllabi and chooses our course readings, might this question set the agenda for a future discussion within our organization?

Student Mastery in Philosophy *continued from page 5*

never be the basis for grading. Close insisted that grading is the responsibility of faculty alone (never administrators), and that peer evaluation must not be the basis of grade assignment. Furthermore, attendance, punctuality, or student behaviors deemed desirable from an institutional point of view should not be the basis of grades, unless these can be directly related to "mastery of course content." Close did acknowledge that it would be legitimate to evaluate communications or critical thinking skills, if these were clearly necessary to the demonstration of mastery, though he considered grading based on such factors as "civic contributions" or "sensitivity to others" unfair.

In his presentation, Michael Scriven examined ways that teachers of philosophy could mitigate the subjectivity and unreliability of grading. He began from the assumption that

continued from previous column

student learning is mastery of subject content, and he rejected the use of essay tests as a basis for grading because of the extreme difficulty in evaluating essays fairly. He described a testing approach, a multiple rating items test that, unlike standard multiple-choice tests, asks students to grade each of four possible answers to a given question. Such a test requires students to do more than merely remember information and select correct responses from among possibilities; it requires that students evaluate answers, an activity higher on Bloom's taxonomy, and closer to what most professors hope philosophy students will be able to do when they learn. Scriven encouraged the design and use of such tests, but in their absence, he encouraged teachers to grade blind, to grade by assigning points to questions and not by evaluating a whole test, to establish inter-rater reliability by having colleagues grade one another's tests, and to avoid giving students a choice of topics (which encourages teachers to give points for the selection of difficult topics).

While Laura Duhan Kaplan shares with Scriven and Close the goal of having students master the subject matter, she has a very different approach to developing and evaluating students' learning. In her approach, narrative philosophy, the instrument for the development of student thinking in philosophy, and for understanding and application of the ideas of philosophers – the personal philosophical essay – is also the basis for the evaluation of their learning. In Kaplan's approach, the students' experiences are a philosophical text: she asks students to write about a significant personal experience, and then to link this experience to the ideas of philosophers being studied in the classroom. A significant element of the learning for Kaplan is the self-report of students about the development of their own thinking. The student's reflection on her own thinking is an element absent from Scriven's multiple rating items test, and may or may not fall outside the list of behaviors relevant to student mastery of content, as Close describes them. Kaplan's focus on the student as a thinker-in-training requires a different articulation of what philosophy learning is, and requires different modes of evaluation, perhaps even a different way of thinking about fairness and objectivity in grading student work.

These three thought-provoking presentations at the Toledo AAPT Workshop/Conference, as well as other sessions there on the assessment of learning, student learning outcomes, and pedagogies for engaging students in the practice of philosophy, contributed to our association's ongoing dialogue about what constitutes learning in philosophy, how to measure it, and how to evaluate it. It's a dialogue certain to continue at the 2006 conference.

EXPANDING *APA* AND *AAPT* SERVICES

Stephen Bickham

There was a good deal of discussion among Board members and others at the Toledo conference concerning the health of our organization. While there is a solid core of member support for the AAPT and conference attendees still rate their conference experience very high, it is a fact that both regular membership and conference attendance show a downward trend over a number of years. At Toledo we needed thirty or so more participants for conference registration to have been at an optimal level. It is clear that we need more members.

The APA also has a significant current need, according to its Executive Director, Michael Kelly, who attended the conference. The APA needs money and is now considering whether to mount a major capital campaign to obtain it.

I think the APA and AAPT face, on the part of those they wish to convince, similar skeptical attitudes that must be overcome for the organizations to be successful in their new efforts. In the case of AAPT, why should someone become a new member? In the case of APA, why should a foundation or a philanthropist donate a large sum of money? While the first reaction of loyal members might be to say that we need more because of all the fine things

we already do, the best response by each organization, in my opinion, would be that we need more because we have an active plan to do more. My proposal is that each organization establish service programs to currently underserved members of its natural clientele. I think all this can be done under one rubric, that of continuing education. By "continuing education" I do not have in mind the offering by our colleges or universities of non-credit courses for adults, but continuing education as this takes place in the medical profession.

So what new services could AAPT perform for its potential members? Here are two suggestions that, I believe, deserve discussion.

1. AAPT could form three- or four-person groups of recognized junior and senior Philosophy teachers who could visit a graduate institution on a Saturday or Sunday and conduct a series of seminars on undergraduate teaching for the Philosophy graduate students (and any interested faculty). This would resemble our conference workshops in one sense, and in another Martin Benjamin's famous graduate student seminar. The major selling point of this proposal is that the service is delivered at the home site of the department, so the attendees don't have to travel. Also, ideally we would apply for a grant to initiate the program, which would make it inexpensive

FUTURE AAPT EVENTS

WITH THE APA:

AT THE PACIFIC DIVISION ♦ SAN FRANCISCO ♦ WEDNESDAY, MARCH 23, 2005 4-6 P.M.

THINKING THEATER: USING DRAMA TO TEACH PHILOSOPHY TO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Faculty and students from John Carroll University

"Wonderings: A New Philosophy Textbook for Thinking Theater" - Sharon Kaye

"Bringing Philosophy Alive: An Experiment Course in Thinking Theater" - Paul Thomson

"The Role of Documentary Video in Thinking Theater" - Robert Prisco

"Our Experience as TAs for Thinking Theater" - Dan Matusicky & Rhiannon Lathy

AT THE CENTRAL DIVISION ♦ CHICAGO

PANEL: PHILOSOPHY AND THE SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Nancy Slonneger Hancock, Northern Kentucky University

Michael Goldman, Editor, *Teaching Philosophy*

David Keller, Editor, *Teaching Ethics*

Gregg Wentzel, Editor, *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*

for the graduate department. The benefits of this to AAPT are obvious. We make new contacts with both graduate students and faculty members. I think that it is reasonable that even a relatively few of these visits would increase nationally our visibility and credibility as an active and innovative organization – and we would be dealing from our strength.

2. We could have other teams that would visit colleges, universities, or community colleges to help Philosophy (and perhaps Humanities) faculty in their teaching. Here, again, we could use a collaborative seminar or workshop format to invigorate or re-empower a faculty. One of the main benefits to AAPT in this approach is that it gives us an entrée to administrators. Right now we have nothing to offer these individuals; our only contact people are the faculty members we hope to gain as members. But with a program in place such as this we could contact Chairs, Deans, Academic Vice Presidents, Deans of the College, etc. with something that might resonate with them. Furthermore, we have always been open to community college philosophers, and this would give us a chance to increase our connection with this important segment of the philosophical community. Again, this approach would be aided powerfully if we could obtain a grant for the development work we would need to do, as well as for the publicity.

I have a similar suggestion to make to the APA. Many faculty members in teaching institutions have difficulty staying abreast of new developments in their scholarly areas. There are also times when an individual's teaching assignment is changed or broadened. And, finally, some philosophers who have spent considerable time in administration return to the classroom. The only program that I know of which aids such individuals even peripherally in maintaining or upgrading their knowledge level is the NEH Summer Seminars. These, however, are geared to helping individuals from teaching institutions create and publish their research rather than to upgrade their knowledge.

What I have in mind is the creation by APA of several small teams of recognized, publishing scholars who would offer regional or state-wide study workshops for Philosophy teachers in areas such as Ethics, Medical Ethics, Theories of Mind, Philosophy of Science,

Phenomenology, periods in the history of Philosophy, etc. These study workshops, which would emphasize recent developments in the relevant areas, would have as their goal not the promotion of publication, though these might result, but an increase in the breadth and depth of knowledge of the attendees.

A program such as this would constitute a major service by the APA to teaching faculty members and their institutions, something that really does not exist at this time (pace the *APA Committee on Philosophy in Two Year Colleges* and the *Newsletter on Teaching*). Of my three proposals, this APA proposal is closest to the model of continuing education in the medical profession. Physicians recognize their communal duty to guarantee to the public the maintenance of an ongoing, high level of professional understanding and skill. There are all sorts of programs, training sessions, workshops, lectures etc. that are offered to medical professionals everywhere, and physicians do not consider this demeaning. *I am not suggesting that analogous offerings in Philosophy should be in some way required*, as is medical continuing education. However, having parallel study workshops, as I have outlined, would evince recognition by our major national organization that we philosophers who are not in a research institution recognize the advisability of periodically revalidating the base competence level that our teaching and our research depend on. It also would mark a first step by the APA towards providing member services outside its three annual conferences, and, as stated above, to a currently underserved philosophy populace.

In addition, such an APA program might allow AAPT to “piggyback” by offering workshops on teaching at these APA sponsored session.

I am confident that the AAPT Board will give this overall notion a good hearing. Dealing with the APA is a taller order, but the best way for us to move our largest Philosophy organization towards a greater service orientation would be by proceeding from a demonstrated base of APA membership support.

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