

The Newsletter of the American Association of Philosophy Teachers

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SUMMER 2006

16th International Workshop on Teaching Philosophy

August 2 - 6, 2006

Washington & Jefferson College Washington, Pennsylvania Conference Information: http://aapt-online.dhs.org

Sixty-five Teaching Workshops! APA/AAPT Teaching Seminar for Graduate Students! Philosophy Film Festival! Table Discussions! Camaraderie!

Presidential Address Donna Engelmann, Alverno College Can (and Should) Learning Philosophy Be Assessed?

Martin Benjamin, Emeritus Michigan State University

Moral Pluralism, Vulgar Relativism: What's the Difference, and How Can We Teach It?

Robert Ennis, Emeritus University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana Appraising Critical Thinking Tests and workshop: Writing Critical Thinking Test Items for Classroom Use (see p. 8)

AAPT NEWS SUMMER 2006

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SUBMISSIONS TO AAPT News

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Submissions may be sent as e-mail attachments to bdecyk@csulb.edu.

Microsoft Word is preferred.

Hard copies may be FAXed to (562) 985-7135 (attn: Decyk) or mailed to: Betsy Decyk Department of Philosophy California State University, Long Beach 1250 Bellflower Boulevard Long Beach, CA 90840-2408

If you need help, call Betsy Decyk at (562) 985-4346.

AWARD TO GEORGE MACDONALD ROSS

In the UK, there have been various initiatives to raise the status of teaching, in compensation for the much more obvious and lucrative awards for excellence in research. One such scheme has been an award of 50 National Teaching Fellowships (NTFs) with project funding of a little less than \$20,000 and the opportunity to bid for leadership of much larger projects. Each university is entitled to nominate up to three candidates.

Most universities have set up internal schemes for University Teaching Fellowships (UTFs) in order to select faculty as candidates for NTFs. In 2005, George was the only academic, and the first philosopher, to obtain a full three-year UTF at the University of Leeds. Ironically, the financial reward is greater than for an NTF, since he has been granted a research fund worth about \$25,000 together with an annual honorarium of nearly \$2,000. He will spend the research money to develop electronic multiple-choice questions which do not presuppose right-or-wrong answers, but which lead students through different interpretations of key passages of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason and require them to think about why one interpretation is better than another. This technique should be transferable to other philosophical texts, and to other disciplines.

More recently it has been announced that George will be one of the University's nominees for an NTF. He is sceptical about his chances of success, because the criteria seem to be stacked against philosophers who improve the quality of their teaching by reflection and analysis rather than by methods preferred by educational researchers. This is part of the wider phenomenon that humanities academics generally have not been successful in attracting funding for educational research. The Philosophical and Religious Studies Subject Centre, of which George is the Director, has commissioned an inquiry into the reasons for this, and the outcome will be published shortly on the Subject Centre's website at

http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk

FROM THE PRESIDENT Donna Engelmann

These days there is a lot of attention in the teaching and higher education literature to active learning and student engagement. While many faculty reject talk of active and engaged learning as merely the latest higher education fad, others have found inspiration for new strategies to encourage more active and engaged students.

For instance, the National Survey of Student Engagement (http://nsse.iub.edu), administered in over 970 colleges and universities across the country, is premised on the idea that students learn best and achieve academic success when they are actively engaged in the learning process, both in and outside the classroom. In their report of the characteristics of institutions that achieved outstanding survey results, Student Success in College, George Kuh and his associates correlate student success with, among other factors, active and collaborative learning. Students learn better, they claim, when they are encouraged to make sense for themselves of their learning, when they can apply their learning in different contexts, and when their learning experiences take the form of collaboration with peers in projects and group activities. The authors also correlate student success with institutional cultures that encourage faculty experimentation with engaging pedagogy.

Another source of advocacy for active learning is a book being read by many educators around the country: How People Learn by John Brandsford, et al. The authors discuss relationships between brain science and teaching strategies that enhance learning. One of their key findings is that circumstances in which students take control of their own learning is critical to their success. What this means is that students need to be more than passive recipients of information; they must continually examine for themselves whether they have understood. Teachers who encourage this "metacognitive approach" challenge students to make sense of their learning, to assess the state of their knowledge and ability, and to reflect on the progress of their learning. Brandsford and company claim that encouraging these activities on the part of students makes it more likely that those students will be able to transfer their learning from one setting to another, and to their life beyond college.

Everybody's talking about it, but is everybody right? Should teachers of philosophy take the risk and invest the effort in creating new learning experiences and forms of assessment for students, when the traditional methods, such as lecture and large group discussion, have their own track record of success? Is philosophy a discipline that can be taught through group work and service learning projects, or do these strategies rob philosophy learning of the rigor that characterized previous approaches?

I confess I am a long-time advocate of active and engaged learning, and my own teaching takes the form of introducing students to the practice of the discipline through a variety of active learning experiences. But I have great respect and sympathy for my skeptical colleagues in philosophy who are not sure that this new pedagogical limb will hold their weight. The American Association of Philosophy Teachers and its biennial conferences have for thirty years offered a forum where the best ways to teach philosophy can be discussed, debated and demonstrated. The AAPT has attracted a group of talented and innovative teachers, eager to share what has been working for them in their teaching. Our conference format is an active learning format: the conference is deliberately called the International Workshop-Conference on the Teaching of Philosophy, and we encourage presenters to demonstrate their successful techniques for their fellows. We ask plenary speakers to address the conference on the strength of their contributions to the teaching of philosophy. And there is plenty of time for participants to share their own challenges and successes as philosophy teachers.

Also, because of our concern to prepare new teachers to be the best teachers of philosophy they can be, at our conference we co-sponsor with the American **Philosophical Association** a teaching seminar for graduate students. This year the seminar will be led by master teachers Martin Benjamin, who has led the seminar for years, and Betsy Decyk, Executive Director of the AAPT. This year there will be some 16 graduate students from universities and colleges coast to coast, and from Canada and England.

Elsewhere in this newsletter you will find more information about our conference. We invite you to join us. Discover ways to achieve more satisfaction in your life in teaching philosophy by engaging your students more deeply in their philosophy learning!

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MAKING PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE ACCESSIBLE -- AND USEFUL -- TO NON-MAJORS: FIVE INNOVATIONS WORTH TRYING

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Editor's Note: This is an abbreviated and modified version of an article forthcoming in the APA Newsletter on Teaching Philosophy. Readers who would like to see the full syllabus are invited to contact the author.

Philosophy of Science is not ordinarily thought to be a suitable course for introducing curious potential philosophy majors to the discipline, or for providing non-majors with some exposure to philosophy. The standard set of ideas covered in the course and the classic texts in the field appear to be more demanding and less accessible than those that can be presented to undergraduates in, say, ethics. Moreover, the subject-matter is rather specialized in the sense that understanding it depends somewhat upon conversance with substantive scientific fields. Finally, it lacks obvious applicability to the practical life choices of college-aged students.

Yet there are greater possibilities here than might be apparent. Needing to teach Philosophy of Science to my students at the Naval Academy – none of whom are philosophy majors, and most of whom are required to take this one philosophy course for their General Science major – I have sought to make a virtue of necessity by devising a curriculum that attempts to overcome the traditional limitations of the course and its lack of perceived accessibility and practical relevance. Below I will spell out five innovations with which I have experimented, supplementing my explanation with excerpts from the course syllabus.

To begin: the subject matter. The focus of the class remains on classics of the literature. I use Janet Kourany's *Scientific Knowledge* anthology as the central course text. But I have directed the emphasis toward areas of greatest student need and interest, in order to make the course more relevant and understandable to those lacking strong background in the natural sciences and to build student skills.

from the syllabus

texts: Janet A. Kourany, Scientific Knowledge: Basic Issues in the Philosophy of Science, 2d ed (Wadsworth 1998) Theodore Schick, Jr. & Lewis Vaughn, How to Think About Weird Things, 4th ed. (McGraw-Hill 2005) Frank J. Sulloway, Born to Rebel: Birth Order, Family Dynamics, and Creative Lives (NY: Vintage 1996)

course objectives (what you should aim to gain from this course)

- Acquisition/Improvement of skills
 - Reading of challenging, complicated texts with comprehension; attentive, perceptive listening to ideas expressed by others.
 - Awareness of your own confusions and gaps in understanding.
 - Critical questioning and analysis of positions taken by yourself and by others, orally and in writing, in science and elsewhere; revision of your own beliefs.
 - Clear, fluid, logically organized oral and written expression of ideas.

Learning of content:

- The methods & standards used in the scientific community to produce knowledge.
- The standards of rational defensibility used for beliefs & theories, including in everyday life; how and why these beliefs and theories change over time.
- The thinking that goes into doing a scientific research project, from design through analysis of data and write-up.

Innovation 1. As indicated in the course objectives just above, I have shifted much of the course's focus away from philosophical content and toward improving students' crucial, and oft-neglected, skills of reading comprehension, logical thinking and writing, and clear oral expression of complicated ideas. At first, I tried requiring designated students to present prepared lectures on the readings, but this provided little motivation for the others to prepare conscientiously for class. So I rethought and revamped the entire incentive structure of the course.

Students are now expected to highlight, or otherwise mark up, their texts as they read them (with me examining their texts occasionally); to provide extemporaneous lectures on (parts of) the readings (not knowing who will be called upon, all are given several minutes to prepare

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and their text markings are invaluable for this task), and offer 'friendly amendments' to others' lectures; and, most important, to submit a demanding four-part Daily E-mail for every reading assignment in the course.

from the syllabus

- Readings. Our reading assignments are comparable to a tough & varied cross-country course. Some parts are level, with good footing; others are extremely demanding steep ascents over boulders & loose gravel; the rest fall somewhere in between. Everyone who runs the course-no matter how well or poorly-will be better off for doing so, better able to run this course and others in the future, even if you happen never to encounter such challenging terrain again. Analogously, you can expect to find some (maybe many) of our readings difficult, frustrating, even exhausting. But they're not beyond the reach of normal college upperclassmen. Force yourself to do them, however slowly, and you'll become a stronger reader. Marking up the text (highlighting, underlining, marginal commentary) will help, and is therefore required of all students for all reading assignments.
- Lectures & Friendly Amendments. Some classes will feature at least one student Lecture that aims to summarize & explain all or part of the reading. When Lecturing, none of the content is to consist of your own ideas or commentary. Make believe you are the author, trying to convey the central ideas of 'your' article. You may use only your own notes/outline + your marked-up text. (You'll have only a minute or two to review the text before being called on to Lecture, so it'll really pay off if your markings on the text are careful enough that they let you quickly recall its main arguments & overall organization.) Do NOT quote or read from the text, or rely upon the author's phraseology.

In the Daily E-mail, the students must (1) provide an accurate and reasonably comprehensive summary <u>Recap</u> of the day's reading, (2) <u>Contrast</u> the present reading with the prior one (by setting out points of agreement and disagreement), and then, in an exercise that encourages creative and critical thinking, (3) <u>Challenge or Extend</u> some idea that they have found in the reading. (The fourth part is described in the next section.) I then provide concrete, individualized feedback via e-mail to every student on nearly every E-mail throughout the entire semester. This is somewhat arduous, but do-able since class size is limited to 20 or fewer students. With a larger enrollment, one might elect to provide written feedback to, say, half the class each day.

Innovation 2. I have also shifted the course's substantive orientation away from one exclusively devoted to the philosophical investigation of scientific method, which tends to be of little inherent interest or practical value to most of my students, and toward a more accessible and focused, yet more universal, examination of the nature of knowledge and belief-revision generally, using science as the comparison and model. The aim is to enlighten the students on both scientific and everyday belief systems – and the rational, and irrational, methods of revising these – by shifting back and forth between the two realms. I hope, too, that this heightens each student's awareness of how s/he does – and ought to – oversee his or her own belief system.

This reorientation allows more freedom for class discussions to roam into areas of belief and theory that the students find most interesting (e.g., socializing and dating; or supernatural phenomena, a topic in one of the course texts. How to Think About Weird Things). It also provides extra motivation for students to work at the difficult readings, and an additional angle of approach that helps illuminate the ideas in the text. Asking themselves "How do these practices of scientists compare to those that we use every day?" the students are required, as part four of the Daily E-mail assignment, to supply an Everyday Analogue to a feature of scientific practice discussed in the reading. (At the instructor's option, the consideration of Everyday Analogues can be removed from the Daily E-mail assignments and shifted exclusively to classroom discussion. This permits a lightening of the homework load upon the students, even if the task is then replaced by, say, having students write out a specific text-provoked 'Confusion' that they hope to have clarified.)

from the syllabus

Everyday Analogue: Ask yourself how the scientific method of knowledge acquisition, as discussed in this reading, compares to the 'Everyman' method of knowledge acquisition in everyday life. Provide a specific example from the latter that (totally, or partly) illustrates the former, & discuss whether the author's claim about science applies also to your everyday case. If, and only if, you're unable to do this, you may offer an analogue from a non-scientific field of human endeavor/activity (eg. journalism, carpentry, military affairs, the arts, basketball, politics, religion, history, law/ police/detective work).

turn the page

Some question of non-scientific application is ordinarily included on the Final Exam for the course, and students are apprised of this fact (or of the question itself!) early in the semester, thus providing a further incentive for them, as we proceed through the term, to think through the course's substantive issues with an eye to their broader implications.

Innovation 3. I have taken the unusual step of introducing into the course a lively book about birth order and receptivity to innovation (scientific and otherwise), Frank Sulloway's Born to Rebel, in order to serve multiple purposes. The book presents a theory about the development of scientific knowledge that competes with others studied in the course. Furthermore, it is itself an example of a research report in (social) science, and a controversial one at that, and so offers an illustration of the scientific method in action that is illuminating in its own right but that also serves as 'test case' for some of the more abstract theories studied in the course. Finally, its liveliness and obvious applicability to the experience of every student provide another useful contrast (like the Weird Things text) to the denser, more abstract, more demanding classic readings in philosophy of science. And there is one further, important purpose that this book serves:

Innovation 4. It forms the basis for the fourth major experimental aspect of the course: a hands-on, team-based, multi-stage Research Project that teaches the students about scientific practice from the inside. Students are to do original research that applies and tests Sulloway's theory on some novel population, obtaining the data via interviews, questionnaires, and/or research in the library. Many students find this to be the most gratifying part of the course.

from the syllabus

Research Project, Report, & Presentation. Early on, we will read a substantial portion of Frank Sulloway's Born to Rebel, which presents a theory about the relationship between birth order and personality (in particular, openness to new ideas). You will have the opportunity, working in a 2-person team, to do original research that applies and tests Sulloway's theory. You will plan out your research in detail, revise the plan in response to comments, gather the data (keeping careful records of how you do so), analyze it, offer your own theoretical explanations for it, and assess its relevance for Sulloway's theory.

Note that while you will design your Project and collect data as a team, you will write up your own individual 8-20-page Research Report, without collaborating on this with your teammate (or anyone else). Finally, our last class meetings will see us share our results via 10-15-minute presentations in class.

Research Project stages

- individual Research Project Concept (format to be supplied)
- 2. individual Peer Reviews of RPCs
- formation of teams → team submission of Revised RPC, now including draft Research Instrument
- team oral presentation of Revised RPC for feedback
- team submission of RPC Modifications (simple email list of revisions made to Research Project plans in light of feedback received)
- team execution of the study: obtaining data, analyzing data
- individual (collaboration forbidden) write-up of Research Project Report (format to be supplied)
- team oral presentation of Research Project and findings to class (informal is fine, but visual aids—eg, diagrams, graphs, charts—are required)

Innovation 5. Finally, I send the students regular emails of enriching and entertaining Optional Readings about up-to-the-minute theoretical debates and practical applications in the world of science. These provide significant insights into the nature of scientific knowledge and scientific method. I also include my Philosophy of Science 'alumni' on the mailing list for these Optional Readings (those who do not take up my offer to opt out), in order to provide a form of continuing education (and enjoyment!). Though I have not yet researched how often or how seriously the supplemental materials are read by the students overall, I know that some students do value these glimpses into the application of course ideas in the wider world.

Conclusion.

A Philosophy of Science course thus restructured presents a serious challenge to the students who take it. The workload is a not uncommon source of complaints – but its educational value for the student of that hard work is substantial. Most important, perhaps, is that the students can appreciate this fact themselves, particularly if the teacher openly explains the pedagogic purposes of the labor (as I try to do in my syllabus). They can thus be more actively in charge of their own learning, a result not often enough achieved, but much to be desired.

AAPT and IACAP: PAST AND FUTURE Marvin Croy UNC Charlotte mjcroy@email.uncc.edu

APT has a long and healthy history, and I was A reminded of this in a personal way at the 2004 Workshop-Conference at the University of Toledo. Twenty years earlier, I had attended the 1984 AAPT conference held there. That was my second AAPT conference and my first conference presentation. My presentation was part of a panel on the use of computers in teaching logic. The panel was chaired by Nelson Pole, who in 1986 hosted a "Workshop for CAI (Computer-Assisted Instruction) in Philosophy" at Cleveland State University. That conference became the first in a series of annual Computing and Philosophy (CAP) conferences. For several years a small group of those interested in CAI for philosophy, particularly logic, participated in both AAPT and CAP conferences. CAP conferences ultimately led to an international association. Today, the International Association for Computing and Philosophy (IACAP) is composed of three geographical regions: North American, European, and Asian-Pacific. Each region holds annual conferences. It has been extremely rewarding to witness the flowering of the initial CAP enterprise along with its move to the international scene, and the roots of this evolution can be traced back to AAPT!

In recent years, however, the overlap between CAP and AAPT has waned. My view is that more can, and should, be done to strengthen the ties between AAPT and IACAP. Computers raise significant practical, ethical, ontological, and epistemological questions both within the teaching of philosophy and within the quest for a philosophical understanding of the world we inhabit.

I currently serve as the regional director for the North American CAP enterprise, and it's clear that the prospects for an increasing pedagogical presence within North American CAP conferences are good. The proposal review committee includes a series of special areas or "tracks", some of which are pedagogically related. Recently, Peter Boltuc has been named as track coordinator for the on-line instruction track, and Michael Byron has taken on the role of track coordinator for the use of computers in teaching logic. Pedagogical connections can be made to other computer topics as well.

Both IACAP and AAPT have ties to the American Philosophical Association, and both hold sessions at APA divisional meetings. One possibility is that AAPT and IACAP could hold sessions at each other's conferences or sponsor joint sessions at APA conferences. Working together on common projects is also feasible. I know that there are innovative ideas being put forward concerning ways to improve AAPT. Some of these I heard from both officers and members in Toledo, and some I've read in the pages of AAPT News. For example, projects such as those outlined by Stephen Bickham ("Expanding APA and AAPT Services," Winter 2005) could involve IACAP when these engage computer-related endeavors. In sum, AAPT and IACAP should explore ways to create synergistic approaches to common aims. As regional director of North American CAP, I hope to facilitate such interaction.

Membership in IACAP, which currently requires no more than signing up for the mailing list, provides e-mail notices concerning upcoming conferences and related deadlines for all regions. Visit

http://www.iacap.org/.

For a look at the 2005 North American CAP conference held at Oregon State University, visit http://oregonstate.edu/groups/cap/2005/program.html

For a look at the 2006 North American CAP conference which is coming August 10-12 at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, visit

http://www.cogsci.rpi.edu/conferences/cap/.

Join us if you can!

While in Toledo I walked around the UT campus a bit, but honestly could recognize little of it. Much had changed in twenty years. Happily, at AAPT functions I recognized a few faces from the 1984 conference, but, more importantly, I realized that the feel of an AAPT conference has endured over the decades. While many of the faces have changed, the ingenuity, commitment, spirit, and camaraderie of the AAPT community has not. There is good reason to believe that the same will be true over the next twenty years and beyond.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION CONCERNING BOB ENNIS' WORKSHOP: This test-item-writing workshop will assume familiarity with the presentation of the plenary session. Participants are invited to bring 20 copies of a one-paragraph to one-page passage containing an argument or something they want their students to be able to think critically about, preferably something containing an assumption that they might want their students to be able to ascribe to the argument or to the arguer, and, if possible, also something that calls for judging the credibility of the source. The passage should be simple so that we can focus on the item-writing problems. Bringing a passage is not required, but hopefully some will. People planning to bring sample items are requested to send a copy to Bob Ennis in advance of the conference so he can think about them. (rhennis@uiuc.edu).

AAPT WC	ORKSHOPS AT APA DIVISIONAL N	MEETINGS	
APA EASTERN DEC 2005	APA PACIFIC MARCH 2006	APA CENTRAL APRIL 2006	
Chair: Harold Brown William Evans "Perpetual War ys. Perpetual Peace"	Chair: Donna Engelmann Karen Hornsby "Building Ethi- cal Reasoning Skills Through	Learning to Teach Informal Logic: Aligning Graduate Education with Hiring and Work	
Margaret Cuonzo "Teaching the Paradoxes of War" John Chaffee, "Socrates: Sol-	Active Learning" Barry DeCoster "Writing Our- selves into the Moral Stories of Others"	Realities Chair: Betsy Decyk Rod Bertolet, Purdue University	
dier, Thinker, and Supporter of Legitimate Government" James P. Friel, "Pope John Paul	John Zavodny "'The Play's the Thing': Teaching Ethics Through Theater"	Ralph Johnson, University of Windsor Tony Blair, University of	
II's Views of War and the War in Iraq (as Philosopher and Pope)"	Betsy Decyk "The Coordination of Collaboration: Insights from Student~Faculty Conversa- tions"	Windsor Andrianne McEvoy, Mansfield University	



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American Association of Philosophy Teachers

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All memberships expire at the end of the calendar year. The expiration date of your membership will be listed on the address label for each newsletter. If you have any questions about the status of your membership, contact the Executive Director at bdecyk@csulb.edu or write to Betsy Decyk, Executive Director AAPT, Philosophy Dept., California State University, Long Beach, CA 90840-2408.

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AAPT WORKSHOP CONFERENCE 2006 - WASHINGTON & JEFFERSON COLLEGE

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