The 9th International Workshop-Conference on Teaching Philosophy at the University of Vermont

The site for this summer's conference is sure to please. Burlington is a small city with most of the advantages of a metropolis...and none of the drawbacks. Sophisticated boutiques, entertainment, galleries, restaurants and museums alternate with picturesque outdoor markets in a charming New England setting. The world-famous Shelburne Museum, historic Montreal, Stowe, and other points of interest are all nearby, and well-worth seeing.

The University offers a variety of outstanding recreational facilities. Play squash, racquetball or tennis, jog, take a dip in the pool, or work out in the exercise rooms. Stroll down to Lake Champlain and enjoy boating, fishing and more. Sandy beaches and wooded bike paths are just minutes away. Water sports and golf courses are 3 miles away, mountains a 30 min. drive. Cultural, sports, and educational activities abound on and off campus.

AAPT will shortly be signing a contract with the University at which point details will be worked out. In the interim, the University informs us that accommodations usually consist of simple suites for 6-8 people: two single bedrooms and two or three double bedrooms, two bathrooms, and a small living room; most meeting areas are near lounges, dining rooms, residence halls, and parking.

How to Get to the University

By Air: The University is just minutes from Burlington International Airport, with regularly scheduled connections to all major cities.

By Train: AMTRAK rail service takes passengers to Essex Junction, just a short drive from campus.

By Bus: Vermont Transit Bus Terminal is just one mile from the campus, with service to all major New England towns and cities.

Transfer Service: Transfers can be easily arranged to and from all transportation terminals.

Car Rentals: All major car rental agencies have Burlington offices.

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The so-called "computer revolution" has been predicted for several decades now. Finally, it is actually occurring—computers have begun to affect many aspects of life, some of them quite profoundly. Over the next decade, philosophy teaching will be dramatically altered by computer technology. How?

In my own teaching career, I see computers playing a larger and larger role. For years I've used computers for word processing and record-keeping tasks associated with my classes (creation of syllabi, exams and assignment sheets; keeping and calculating grades; etc.). Now, I've begun to use international computer networks as teaching and lecture preparation tools; and I'm investigating "distance learning" and "multimedia/hypermedia "curriculum materials.

International computer networks like BITNET and INTERNET enable today's philosophy teachers to communicate with thousands of their colleagues at the touch of a key or the click of a mouse. On philosophy "lists" and bulletin boards, philosophy teachers can share teaching suggestions, syllabi, assignment suggestions, exam questions, etc. In addition, philosophy students can use such "lists" and bulletin boards to gather information for philosophy assignments, try out ideas and arguments, talk to other philosophy students, contact professional philosophers.

"Distance learning" is a new "buzz-word" in education. It employs television networks--local, statewide, national, international--to broadcast programs, workshops, lectures to a variety of sites at the same time. Many of these networks are "interactive," allowing teachers and students to see each other and talk to each other from a distance. Some philosophy teachers already use distance learning to offer standard courses like ethics, logic and intro to philosophy to scores, hundreds, even thousands of students. Special philosophical work-shops on topics like medical ethics, environmental ethics, philosophy of law, and so on, can now be made available to appropriate audiences in hospitals, government agencies, etc. via distance learning. And famous philosophers can be brought right to the students in their classes.

"Interactive multimedia/hypermedia "curriculum materials combine video, audio, graphics and text all in the same package. This enables the philosophy teacher to explain and illustrate ideas in colorful and memorable ways. Medical ethics cases can be shown and not just described, logic proofs can be constructed and altered before the students' eyes, art works can be experienced during an aesthetics discussion, philosophical experts can be brought into the classroom via video "bites", etc. The possibilities are endless, and more and more philosophers will take advantage of them.

As teachers of philosophy, it is important for us to identify new and more effective ways to explain, illustrate, elaborate and elicit philosophical concepts and examples. It is important for us to share our teaching ideas, triumphs, failures with colleagues. The new computer-based teaching tools will enable us to do all these things in fascinating and effective new ways, and our profession will never be the same. Let us take charge of these new tools and see to it that philosophy teaching is improved and enlivened by them. I look forward to the challenge with great anticipation!
"International Developments in Elementary School Philosophy" was the topic of a panel discussion at the APA meetings in New York in December sponsored by the APA Committee on Pre-College Instruction in Philosophy.

Matthew Lipman, Director of the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children in Montclair, New Jersey began with a review of his program, which is currently receiving financial support from the U.S. Department of Education as a model for "break the mold" education in this country and has been adopted by a number of other countries, including Australia, China, Nigeria, and Rumania. The BBC has made a documentary film about Lipman’s program called "Socrates for Six-Year Olds," which has been shown throughout the world. Copies on video tape are available from Lipman.

Arsene Richard, from the University of Moncton in New Brunswick, spoke about his experience teaching philosophy in the elementary classroom, translating materials suitable for school-aged children, and in teacher training.

The third participant was Zaza Carneiro de Moura, Director, Centro Portugues de Filosofia Para Criancais in Lisbon, Portugal. She described a shift over the past fifteen years in the paradigm of education from an authoritarian model to democratization, the changes this required in student-teacher relationships, and the role that teaching philosophy by a dialogue method has played in accomplishing those changes. Philosophy has become a required course for all students in the last three years of secondary school, and a new course for grades 1-12 is being instituted.

Michael Sasseville from Laval University in Quebec, Canada reported on the growing interest in a course for university students on Philosophy for Children which began in 1987 with an enrollment of 3 and currently enrolls 120 students. He also described research projects he is involved in, one concerning the relationship between moral and logical thinking in children, a second assessing the impact of the Philosophy for Children program on children's self-esteem and the relationship between improvements in logical thinking and increase in self-esteem.

The final speaker was Catherine Young Silva, Director of the Brazilian Center for Philosophy for Children in Sao Paulo, Brazil. She reported on the introduction of philosophy for children into the schools as the result of political change which wanted to encourage children to be able to think for themselves, and she gave anecdotal evidence of the effects of the program on children, who develop great zest for learning and an ability to deal with different points of view. Many of these issues will be discussed at an international conference next summer in Graetz on the theme of Philosophy for Children and Democratization. For further information, contact Matthew Lipman at the address above.

Rosalind Ekman Ladd
Wheaton College
Norton, MA

9th IWCTP to be held in Burlington, Vermont

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Mass Transit: The Chittenden County Transportation Authority serves the campus and the community. Regularly scheduled buses run to all points of interest in the area.

Distances from the University to:

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Teaching Philosophy

Teaching Philosophy is a quarterly journal which serves as a forum for the exchange of ideas and information about the teaching and learning of philosophy. Articles, discussions, reports and reviews are published on topics as:

- theoretical issues in the teaching of philosophy
- innovative methods and classroom strategies
- experimental and interdisciplinary courses
- faculty development and student counseling

1992 Subscriptions: $22.50 individuals; $55 institutions. Order from the PHILOSOPHY DOCUMENTATION CENTER, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH 43403-0189 USA.

Edited by: Arnold Wilson, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH 45221-0206.
Call for Presentation Proposals

9th International Workshop-Conference on Teaching Philosophy

August 7 - 10, 1992
University of Vermont
Burlington, VT

Presentations on any area, problem or aspect of teaching philosophy are welcome. We would like to have you share your experiences and strategies in teaching philosophy. A variety of interactive styles are possible: workshops, posters, panels, conversations, demonstrations, activities, etc. You may submit more than one proposal. If you have questions about the suitability of a proposal, the program chair invites you to consult with her. Please call (310) 559-6080; evenings are best.

Presentation proposals must be sent in triplicate and organized as follows:

In 1-2 cover pages, separate from the proposal:

1. Your name, school affiliation (if any), address and phone number
2. Title of proposed presentation
3. Anticipated length of presentation (60, 90, 120 minutes are most easily scheduled)
4. Style of interactive presentation
5. List of any special equipment you will need
6. A one paragraph abstract (100-300 words) to be used to describe your presentation, if accepted, in the conference program.

A separate 3-5 page proposal which includes:

1. The title of your presentation, but without your name (for blind reviewing purposes)
2. A summary of your presentation: what it covers and seeks to achieve; its methods and techniques; what participants will do and experience.
3. Description of the role and place of this presentation in the overall theme of teaching philosophy.
4. A list of hand-outs and materials you plan to provide.
5. Anything else which the program committee might need to know.


Proposals submitted by the 1st deadline date will be given preference in the schedule. Proposals submitted by the 2nd deadline date will be accepted as schedule space permits. Presentation proposals should be sent to:

Betsy Newell Decyk, Program Chair
Department of Philosophy
California State University, Long Beach
1250 Bellflower Boulevard
Long Beach, CA 90840-2408
I have noticed a tendency among philosophy teachers to speak of student relativism (SR) with dread, almost as if it were an evil which one should avoid if possible. At the AAPT session of the 1991 APA Central Division meeting, I questioned this attitude and urged philosophy teachers to take a more positive attitude toward SR. I argued that the only way to avoid SR is to avoid teaching philosophy, and that this is undesirable. We must recognize that the expression of SR by students signals that they have reached an important and necessary stage in intellectual development, and we as teachers ought to adopt an active role in facilitating development beyond that stage. But I left an important question unanswered: how does one facilitate such change? It will be helpful to begin by first discussing the nature of SR and then identifying its role in intellectual development. This much done, I will make a suggestion for promoting students’ transition to the next cognitive stage.

I take SR to be a view expressed by such proclamations as “It’s all just a matter of opinion,” “Who’s to say what's right/wrong (good/bad)?,” “Who are we to judge?,” etc. Precisely what view is being expressed by such statements is unclear. In one class, after hearing “It's all just a matter of opinion,” I distributed a questionnaire (for extra credit, of course!) asking questions designed to reveal the underlying motivation and meaning to such assertions. One of the more common motivations was a feeling of frustration with how the debates seemed to be unending (as one student put it, “for every argument there are two objections”), or a feeling that one’s beliefs were being threatened because one was inadequate to defend them. It seems, then, that students do not have in mind some sophisticated philosophical theory when they assert that it’s all just a matter of opinion. In this much I agree with Stephen Satris, who draws a distinction between SR and philosophical relativism. Whereas philosophical relativism is the view that moral truth is determined by or relative to an individual’s (or society’s) beliefs, sometimes SR is a defense mechanism employed by students when their beliefs or opinions are challenged and sometimes it is just a way to express frustration at not being given THE answer to a complicated moral issue. Furthermore, SR is particularly resilient. The brute tenacity with which students hold on to SR suggests that it is not the well-thought-out philosophical view with which it is sometimes confused.

But SR serves another role for students, about which they are not necessarily aware. The realization that there isn’t always one right answer, especially when it comes to complicated moral issues, is an essential stage in the cognitive or intellectual development of every person. William G. Perry, Jr. has divided cognitive and ethical development into several stages. I take the three main ones to be:

- **Dualism** - There are right answers and there are wrong answers. The authorities know the right answers and it is the task of students to learn them.
- **Relativism** - Authorities don’t have the answers to everything. Where the authorities don’t have an answer, everyone has a right to his own opinion; no one is wrong (especially me!).
- **Commitment** - We all must make commitments/decisions in many cases where there is no right answer (or we can’t know what the right answer is).

Once students have reached the stage at which they discover Relativism, they might exploit Relativism to achieve one of two ends. They may use it to escape from Commitment - that is, they may use Relativism as an excuse to avoid making decisions. On the other hand, they may use it to avoid changing the Commitments they had already made prior to their discovery of Relativism, or to avoid subjecting prior Commitments to potentially dangerous scrutiny. For example, when discussing the issues of abortion or the existence of God, the tendency seems to be to use Relativism to maintain the status quo. In discussions of topics about which students had made no prior Commitments (e.g. neomort banks), the tendency was to use SR to avoid making Commitments or entering into what seems like an unending debate. It is this tendency among students to use SR as a shield against philosophical inquiry which causes philosophy teachers such anguish.
What we really want is for students to move on to realize that even in cases where they think there is no right answer (or at least the authorities don't know it), philosophical discussion is worthwhile. "Merely" having an opinion (or Commitment) is not sufficient. Friends ask students to support their opinions with facts or argumentation; blind or apparently foundationless adherence to belief is unacceptable. Equally so, avoidance of philosophic discussion is worthwhile. "Merely" having right answer (or at least the authorities don't know it), or being able to support one's opinions with facts or argumentation is not sufficient. Friends ask students to support their opinions with facts or argumentation; blind or apparently foundationless adherence to belief is unacceptable. Equally so, avoidance of Commitment is unacceptable. We as moral agents and members of a society are often called upon to make choices or decisions and to take some course of action with regard to many moral issues which we may never have considered before. Thus, it is important to be able to come to a reasoned decision and form new moral Commitments with regard to such issues. Indeed, philosophy classes demand precisely this from students - that they learn to support their opinions and that they make nonarbitrary or well-grounded moral Commitments.

But the question is how do we get students to move on in the right direction? When throwing one's arms up and saying "It's all just a matter of opinion" is so easy and prevents the mental torture of re-examining and perhaps revising previously unquestioned lifelong beliefs, how can we motivate students to engage in philosophical inquiry? This past summer when SR cropped up in my Contemporary Issues course, I responded with a combination of approaches: (1) by sharing Perry's article with the students, conducting a discussion of the process of intellectual growth through the three main stages; and (2) by providing students with everyday scenarios in which they, on the basis of their moral Commitments, must make decisions and take action.3

Our discussion of the stages in ethical and cognitive growth was sufficient to show some students that it is necessary to make informed or reasoned moral judgments and that to do so it is necessary to move beyond SR. The psychological context of the discussion shifted their attention away from the immediate threat to their beliefs and into a more theoretical (and definitely less intimidating!) discussion of belief-formation. They began to realize that they did not want their beliefs to be merely a matter of opinion, and that they wanted to be ready with answers when challenged to support their beliefs by others. Aha! This is what philosophy can teach us.

Others, however needed further motivation, as if the benefit of being able to justify one's beliefs to others was not worth the risk at which cherished beliefs are placed in the process of philosophical inquiry and discussion. Some students do not see why they should have to justify their beliefs to others - "I've got my opinion and you've got yours" - and so do not care to engage in philosophical discussion about them. When this concern was expressed, I responded by identifying situations in which people must reach a group decision about a course of action to take concerning some moral issue. Pointing to current political activities in various states concerning for example, the legalization of assisted suicide, living wills, or euthanasia provided the students with concrete examples of the value of being able to argue for or defend one's beliefs. We are constantly being called upon to make important moral decisions and act on them, and we no more want ourselves to be arbitrary in making such decisions than we would want others to be arbitrary.

Although this approach seemed to be an adequate response to SR, I believe that had the course been structured differently from the beginning, SR might not have been a problem. The next time, I will try beginning the semester with a discussion of the stages in cognitive and ethical development couched in terms of a more general discussion of the purpose of the course, making it clear to students that at least one of the goals of the course is to get them to re-examine their own beliefs as well as to critique the views of others. It is important to point out to students that one of the values in doing this is that when students must choose a course of action their decisions will be well-thought out and their arguments more convincing. Then throughout the course of the semester I will try to make students aware of possible situations within society where they will be forced, as a group with diverse opinions on important ethical issues, to make a group decision concerning a course of action to take (e.g., enforcing or prohibiting certain actions by law).

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"It's All Just a Matter of Opinion" Survey

Please answer each of the following questions sincerely and as best you can:

1. When you say "It's all just a matter of opinion," what do you mean? - E.g., what is a matter of opinion, what do you mean it's just a matter of opinion, etc.? Why do you say it?
2. What are the consequences for this class (its value, purpose, whether we should be discussing moral issues, etc.) if it really is all just a matter of opinion?
3. What are the consequences for your own beliefs? For example, does it mean that all of your beliefs are without grounds and "merely" a matter of opinion? If so, then why do you have the beliefs you have instead of the opposite beliefs? Does it matter how you form new beliefs (e.g., about the moral permissibility of "harvesting the dead")?
4. What are the consequences for others' beliefs? For your actions with respect to their beliefs? Must you respect their beliefs or, since it's just a matter of

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Teaching introductory philosophy entails two basic challenges: how to make the material clear, and how to choose between depth and breadth. I have met with success in both areas using T. Z. Lavine's *Socrates to Sartre: the Philosophic Quest*.

I found this book not in stacks of catalogues from publishing houses, but in a popular book store. It seemed reasonable to believe that if a book store sold a book about philosophy it must be understandable to the average person. Three years of using this text with over one hundred students a semester have shown this belief to be correct.

The book came into being as a televised philosophy class produced by the College of the Air of the Maryland Center for Public Broadcasting for Public Broadcasting. The three-credit philosophy course has been included in the curriculum of the National University Consortium. T. Z. Lavine is Elton Professor of Philosophy at George Washington University.

Several features enhance the clarity and usability of the text. It includes headings and subheadings which help the student focus on the main points of each chapter. Each of the book's six major subdivisions includes a bibliography of primary and secondary sources to point the student to further readings. A glossary explains the important terms. Brief quotations of up to a dozen lines of original material appear throughout. For example, under the subheading, "Hume's Theory of the Self" the author quotes Hume.

When I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never catch myself...

I have seriously considered changing texts several times, but one feature of this one has convinced me to retain it. Unlike many other texts, it covers only six major figures, which form the six subdivisions of the book: Plato, Descartes, Hume, Hegel, Marx, and Sartre. Since an average of sixty pages is devoted to each thinker, it allows considerable development of the background of the times, the problems each tried to solve, the development of his thought, reactions to his solutions, and the effects of his thinking. Understanding what the philosophers accomplished in their day shows that their efforts were not frivolous or irrelevant to contemporary thinking. For example, Marx's view that capitalism and industrialization will eventually impoverish the middle class might seem odd to some students today, especially in light of the prosperity of workers in capitalistic economies and the comparatively low standard of living in Communistic ones. But when his view is presented in the context of his times—the early abuses of the industrial revolution and before the successes of labor unions—the student can understand why Marx thought things would continue to get worse for workers in capitalistic countries. And for another example, the student can better understand the despair of French existentialism in the light of the devastation of wars and depression experienced by twentieth century France.

Lavine's clear and readable style combats another common misconception of philosophy: that it is inaccessible to the average person.

Since the six philosophers attempted broad interpretations of the world that included such areas as epistemology, religion, politics, and history, the student is exposed to alternative frameworks for interpreting the world, rather than mere analysis and interpretation of narrow segments of it, as valuable as that can be. While most students have encountered views that differ from theirs on a number of topics (and will continue to do so while in college), they rarely encounter entire world views that differ, except perhaps in a class on world religions. Encountering other world views helps them analyze their own, and helps them understand why people with other world views differ with them on a number of subjects.

The six philosophers in the book are not the only ones the author could have chosen for his purposes. It is not clear precisely why, for example, Plato was chosen over Aristotle, or Hume was chosen over Kant. Aristotle and Kant do appear as transitional figures, along with Socrates, Aquinas, the British Empiricists, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard. Yet the six philosophers are good choices because of their influence and the scope of their thought.

I have asked students who have taken the course using this text if they would prefer a text that surveys many more philosophers. They have told me they would
not trade the depth for greater breadth. Many feel that covering more philosophers in less depth would tend to be confusing and fragmented, and would not give them as clear an idea of what each thinker was trying to accomplish. Admittedly, many find one or two of the philosopher's ideas rather odd, especially Plato's forms, Descartes' methodological doubt, Hume's views of causality, Hegel's rationalism, and Marx's view that economics determines methodological doubt, Hume's views of causality, Hegel's dialectic. Yet many also come to respect Plato's allegory of the cave, Descartes' search for certainty, Hume's skepticism regarding the adequacy of senses alone to give us knowledge, and Hegel's dialectic.

My course lectures are organized around the philosophers covered in the book so that each of the six thinkers forms a point of departure for a particular area of philosophy. While they are reading about Plato (and the transitional section on Aristotle), I introduce critical thinking and logic, which began in the form we know it with the Greeks. They began to abstract categories from particular instances (i.e., universals from particulars) facilitating judgments and reasoning about such things as "justice," for example, rather than merely this or that particular act of justice. I use the Lavine reading more as a point of departure than as a source for extrapolating specific principles of logic. The lectures on logic are accompanied by about twenty single-spaced pages of syllabus (out of a total of eighty pages for the course). It includes brief, simplified sections on material covered in a typical logic text, such as Copi's Introduction to Logic: distinguishing forms and uses of language (e.g., informative, emotive, objective, subjective, manipulative), informal fallacies, deduction (categorical and conditional arguments) and induction (how it differs from deduction, and how to make a strong inductive argument). The syllabus gives exercises, which we work through in class.

The reading on Descartes begins a lecture section on epistemology, a topic which he helped bring back into prominence. In class we discuss: whether we can have knowledge (skepticism); what truth is (the correspondence, coherence, pragmatic views); how we know truth (subjectivism, empiricism, rationalism, pragmatism); and schemes for justifying knowledge (foundationalism, coherentism). Hume provides background for philosophy of religion, Marx for political philosophy, and Sartre for ethics.

The readings on each major figure in Lavine's book are supplemented with primary readings by that philosopher in Gould's anthology, Classic Philosophical Questions. Other primary readings from Gould are selected on the topic covered in lecture. Everything is coordinated together so that, for example: in lecture we discuss philosophy of religion, the class reads about Hume in Lavine's book, reads an essay by Hume in Gould's book, and also reads essays in philosophy of religion by other philosophers in Gould's book.

Accountability is by six objective tests covering each section of Lavine and the corresponding section of lecture. The tests ensure understanding of the content. Higher levels of understanding such as analysis, correlation, and synthesis, are developed in class discussions. Students also write a one-page summary and critical response on each of the twenty-seven assigned readings from Gould. They cover about two essays a week throughout the semester. This builds their ability to understand and analyze what each philosopher is saying, to summarize it, and to critique it. Discussion of these in class each week also builds their ability to verbally communicate their understanding, insights and reactions, as well as respond to the views of others. Encouraging their personal reactions on the written response and in discussions encourages the participation of timid and less analytical students, and develops the attitude that philosophy is relevant to them personally.

This combination of accountability has proven best for balancing subject knowledge, analysis, creativity, and ability to communicate verbally and in writing. The use of objective tests allows them to get the results almost immediately -- a proven builder of motivation.

During the semester they do three "topic assignments" to develop more depth in specific areas. The one on logic is an exercise in which they identify about fifty informal fallacies. In philosophy of religion they write a two-page response to someone who disagrees with their religious view. In ethics they write a two-page response critiquing present policy and attitudes toward AIDS (writing about a topic which is complex, timely, and about which they are likely to have strong opinions further reinforces the idea that philosophizing -- thinking deeply about important questions -- is relevant and useful).

They also do a final project on a topic of their choice. This can be done in one of several formats, including a traditional term paper, report and response to extra reading, or an interview with someone whose expertise relates to philosophy (such as an artist on aesthetics, or a law enforcement officer on the use of deadly force). This assignment allows them to pursue their interest in philosophy and discover how to find answers on topics that interest them. The different formats allow for different learning styles and personalities, a factor which I try to take into account throughout the course by encouraging reactions to views as well as a cognitive understanding of them, and by including in the course some alternate forms of teaching, such as a video on AIDS, or a guest speaker (a director of personnel to talk about work ethics, an undercover officer to talk about the ethics of deception, etc.).

Alas, correlation of Lavine, Gould, and lecture
AAPT Book Review

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has some gaps because the books were not produced with such an approach in mind. For example, there is no reading by Hegel (understandable for an introductory level book). In spite of one or two of these problems, coordinating Lavine with primary readings works quite well. Students read an excerpt by Anselm when we discuss the ontological argument, by Aquinas when we discuss the cosmological, and by Paley when we discuss the teleological. Excerpts from Kierkegaard and Pascal correlate with the discussion on whether an attempt to demonstrate the existence of God is worthwhile. Excerpts from Hume (in the new seventh edition) and Hick correlate with the section on the problem of evil.

The one regret I have about Lavine's book is that it lacks a major section on linguistic philosophy. This approach to philosophy has been so influential in our century that it is difficult to grasp contemporary philosophy without knowing something about its origin and methods. The author treats it in a fifteen page survey at the end of the book (pp. 397-412). Perhaps adding Wittgenstein as a seventh major figure would help fill this gap (the existing survey could also be lengthened). Although another figure could also be used, his views are of broad scope and would thus fit the others in the book. Others have applied his views to such areas as religion, psychology, and science. Also, the views of other linguistic philosophers can be traced from him, making it easier to follow the development of the linguistic approach to philosophy.

In all, Socrates to Sartre: the Philosophic Quest gives students a knowledge of the historical development of thought, a clear and in-depth understanding of six major philosophers, and a sense of the philosophic task. It encourages respect for philosophy by showing it to be accessible to the average person and relevant to the times.

Brian Morley
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Newhall, CA 91322

[3] One unexpected bonus was that by circulating a questionnaire designed to help me understand more about SR, students began to really think about the meaning and consequences of "It's all just a matter of opinion" and to realize that there was more to their beliefs than mere opinion. I have included a revised version of this questionnaire at the end of this paper.

Philosophy Teaching Exchange

(Continued from Page 6)

opinion, can you ignore what they have to say?

5. What are the consequences with respect to the actions you may or may not take on controversial issues?

6. If everyone thought that beliefs with respect to the controversial issues we are discussing in this class were "just a matter of opinion," what would our society be like? What would our laws be like? How would people have to treat each other?

Recently in class we discussed the stages in intellectual development and the need to take action with respect to the issues we are discussing. In light of this discussion, please answer the following questions:

1. If before this discussion you thought "It's all just a matter of opinion," do you still believe that?

2. If you do still believe it, what would falsify that belief (or make you change your mind), if anything?

3. If you do not still believe it, what changed your mind?

4. If you never did think that, why don't you?

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AAPT Executive Director Announces Resignation

Richard A. Wright announced his resignation as Executive Director of the American Association of Philosophy Teachers at the AAPT Executive Board Meeting in December, effective at the conclusion of his term in August 1992. Dr. Wright stated in his letter of resignation, "I believe it is time for new faces and new ideas to emerge into the leadership roles of AAPT, thus I hope the ensuing search for an executive director will enable this emergence."

The position of Executive Director will become open at the end of the current Executive Director's term of office. This is a volunteer position for a term of at least four years. The Executive Director is selected and appointed by the AAPT Board of Officers. For more information, write or call Terrell Ward Bynum, AAPT President, Department of Philosophy, South Connecticut State University, New Haven, CT, 06515, (203) 397-4423.
On occasion the QQs Center has tried to identify some of the problems that plague you philosophy teachers who are normal (the rest of you are on your own) and, if not to cure or solve the problem, at least to offer condolences and sympathy and to let you know that you aren't the only philosopher out there who has incurable or unsolvable problems. Well, this column is devoted to those of you who are suffering from anxiety that in some way is caused by your very own self.

One such cause is the fact that you have to put up with too much knowledge every day. As the following insightful QQ points out, all that incoming knowledge makes you ignore your self and the bottom line is that you're afraid of yourself:

"People are very intelligent and capable of comprehending more knowledge every day. With all of this knowledge that is stored and new knowledge coming in, does one really know oneself? Is it not odd that one can gain knowledge of things around them, but yet one tends to overlook oneself. This is because the self is feared, for one may realize that one has thoughts, beliefs, and perceptions other than what one wants to accept as existing."

This suggests a possible way to overcome anxieties with this particular cause: First you must prohibit so much knowledge from coming in and getting stored in order to make room for knowledge of your self; this in turn will pacify your self because you are no longer overlooking it. If your self is a happy self, you will not have to fear it, for a happy self is a friendly self. And a friendly self would make sure that all the thoughts and beliefs and perceptions you have are ones that you gladly accept as existing.

On the other hand, maybe it's hopeless to even try to know things about your self; if so, then your problem is meaningless because it has no solution. However, we weren't really sure if that is hopeless so we thought we'd better ask Doctor Reality and this is what we were told:

"I do not find it odd that with all the things that we know about we know about ourselves the least. A human being is a very complicated and confused being and we can not understand the way it functions so it would be useless for us to know about it because it would be like me trying to read Japanese."

In other words, says Doctor Reality, even if you did know about a human being (which, in this context, we assume is your self) that would be useless because you couldn't understand it in the first place being as how it is so complicated and confused. So stop whining about a problem you have that you cannot even understand.

However, we thought Doctor Reality didn't sound very sympathetic, maybe because the Doctor had never had a case of EA. When we mentioned our reservation, we got the following response:

"I feel when trying to figure out who I am, it becomes apparent that it is a waste of time because of all of the contradictions in beliefs and lack of reasons why I believe something."

This explains why the Doctor said a human being was a complicated and confused being. The implicit advice we get here is that if you try to figure out who you are, you will be wasting your time because that will only result in your figuring out how really incompetent you are with all your contradictory beliefs and lack of reasons for them. In light of this, it is especially important for you to avoid trying to figure out who you are since contradictory beliefs and lack of reasons for them are the sorts of things we point out to students in justifying the big fat F we put on their papers. As philosophy teachers we must make sure at all times that they see us as supremely, intellectually superior to them and that we would never be guilty of the stuff we accuse them of.

In spite of such a tight argument against trying to figure out who you are, you might be one of those irritating philosophers who takes great pleasure in getting on your colleagues' very last nerve by arguing with them about everything, and so you will insist that it is not a waste of time to try to answer who you are and you will
continue to insist that we tell you how to answer it. We aim to please, so here you have it:

"We have to take an inner glance inside the person to see what is the real answer to who you are."

Of course we don't pretend that this answer will make philosophers like you happy; after all, you probably will want to know who "we" refers to before you consent to our taking an inner glance, and no doubt you will want to know if such a procedure requires an anesthetic, not to mention the fact that you will threaten to sue us if our inner glance gives us a false answer. In response we can only remind you that we are directing this column to normal philosophy teachers and that we at the QQs Center have REALLY HAD IT WITH JERKS LIKE YOU.

Now, let us re-focus our attention on you philosophy teachers who are normal and who are merely having an anxiety problem and examine another possible cause of it.

Normal philosophy teachers sometimes suffer from the kind of anxiety caused by wondering if maybe you should change your self or just keep on being the same old rigid self. If this happens to be true in your case, we have a very simple rule:

"Yourself should not ever change on a daily basis or sooner."

We realize that this does not solve the problem completely since it does not preclude your ever changing your self on some basis other than a daily one, such as a monthly or a yearly basis; but at least you don't have to worry what you should do about your self daily or even sooner, hence you can put off having to deal with it.

Then there is the kind of anxiety that results from the mind trying to boss the body around and getting mad when the body won't listen:

"[C]onsciousness is one's innerself, the innerself that converses between mind and body, telling the body what should be done or should not be done, or what is right and what is wrong. However, the body does not always listen to the mind (consciousness), and problems arise."

If your anxiety is due to your body being so stubborn and darned independent, all you need to do according to the above is simply convince it to be more cooperative and listen to your mind. And you might want to remind your mind that it needs the body because "if the mind did not have the body it would not have a place to work out of."

However, it's a good idea to get your body to leave your mind alone so it can be the head honcho because then you will be able to take lots of vacations. Here's why:

"The mind is a precious tool that will let one journey into another world. One can go anywhere if one lets his mind take him."

We think it's a good idea to run away from problems rather than deal with them and so we suggest that you let your mind take you as many places as possible to avoid dealing with anxiety. (We assume it will be footing the bill since it is implicitly issuing an invitation here.)

Your anxiety could also be a result of your wondering whether you exist or not and, if you do believe you exist, whether you are justified in believing that. We dealt with this problem in a previous column but we think it merits additional discussion because it appears to be a rather prevalent concern. First of all, it is quite acceptable to say,

"I do believe...that I do exist, without a doubt."

And we will even give you your justification to save you the trouble of coming up with one on your own. All you have to say in response to a demand for justifying your belief that you exist is--

"However, I also believe this not because it was proven to me after much research and intense thought, but because I simply believe it is so considering I don't necessarily have to touch or see or rationalize every aspect of my life to have faith in its existence."

Just knowing that you only need faith that every aspect of your life exists will surely alleviate some of this sort of anxiety.

We will end with a QQ that is a very upbeat reminder about how great it is to be a human being:

"[The best part of being human is] being able to have the knowledge to understand how one feels or one can establish for themselves what kind of atmosphere they are in."

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April 23-25, 1992 - American Philosophical Assoc. (APA), Central Div., Louisville. Contact Karen Hanson, Philosophy, Indiana U., Bloomington, IN 47405.


April 24, 1992 - APA Committee on Pre-College Teaching in Philosophy (with APA). 1:45-4:45 PM.


April 25, 1992 - Central Conference on Teaching Philosophy (with APA). Topic: Rethinking the Introductory Course. 9 AM - 12 PM.