

APPLIED PHILOSOPHY: AN EFFECTIVE INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY FOR NON- MAJORS

Synopsis: At schools where philosophy is a service discipline, and the majority of students have a non-academic orientation, it is possible to teach a worthwhile introductory philosophy course as a course in applied philosophy. My goals in the workshop are to 1) present participants with a conception of introductory courses in this context that they may not have thought of before, 2) provide participants exposure to, and practice with, numerous different topics, approaches, and assignments found in such a course.

A) What the presentation will cover:

Professors of philosophy in non-academic schools face obstacles that often make traditional Introduction to Philosophy courses difficult to teach well. The students we see at such schools are, for the most part, disinterested in philosophy. Many enter our classes needing intensive work to develop in them the intellectual dispositions necessary for even seeing philosophical study as a viable and a worthy pursuit—the goal of any Introduction to Philosophy course. There is not adequate time to do the necessary groundwork ridding students of misconceptions and biases so as to provide them with the clean slate necessary to begin to absorb and grasp the fundamental lessons of a more academic approach. Professors at non-academic schools often forget they are not constrained to teach students the standard fare as for academic philosophical studies.

With this understanding my introductory level course quickly began to change shape, until now I see it as having two distinct phases which I call (tongue-in-cheek) “deprogramming” and “indoctrination.” What is interesting in all of this is that, while researching anti-intellectualism and conservatism in order to better understand my students, I began to see that the dispositions and beliefs my students had were exactly the opposite of what a Socratically-minded philosopher of life should have. These beliefs and dispositions were not only preventing my students from understanding and engaging with the material in my courses, but were also retarding their maturity and personal development as human beings.

By making the focus of Introduction to Philosophy not names and schools, theories and arguments, but instead what it is to *be* a good human being (philosophically conceived), I found a way to reach students previously inaccessible and aloof. Teaching

students what philosophers *are*, and having them *actually practice* the skills that are hallmarks of intellectual virtue provides these students with tools and dispositions that they can use to improve their lives long after the course is over. One noted side-benefit of this work is that more students, once they have the dispositions to think philosophically and no longer have the beliefs that told them it was impossible, become actively interested in “traditional” philosophical issues such as theories of self, the problem of free-will, ethics, and so on.

Topics will include:

- The function and purpose of introductory philosophy courses at non-academic institutions
- Student critical thinking dispositions
- Student Relativism (SR)
- Mindfulness
- Limiting Beliefs
- Truth and Reality
- Control
- Creativity
- Epistemological Virtues
- Process and Flow
- The Socratic Conception of Philosophy

B) What the session seeks to achieve:

- Provide an alternative way of viewing the purposes and functions of introductory philosophy courses in schools where philosophy is a service discipline.
- Provide justification to professors and administrations for altering the function and purpose of introductory philosophy courses in order to make them more beneficial to students.
- Provide many examples of applied philosophical concepts and techniques that may be used in the introductory philosophy classroom.
- Provide a number of activities and exercises for the participants to experience, understand, and then use in their own classrooms.

C) List of references:

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[End of Proposal]