Discourse:

Learning and Teaching in Philosophical and Religious Studies

The Higher Education Academy

Discourse:
Learning and Teaching in Philosophical and Religious Studies

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Discourse

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The journal of the *Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies* of the *Higher Education Academy*

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Future Discourse 2005

Editorial: **Paul Tomassi (1963-2005)**

It was with great sadness that we learnt of the death of Dr Paul Tomassi after a brief illness earlier this year. I had always found him to be a warm and caring person.

As a professional philosopher he made considerable contributions to scholarship in a number of fields, most notably formal logic. He was a keen supporter of students entering higher education through non-traditional routes and worked closely with the University of Aberdeen in this capacity, always seeking ways that students might be supported in their learning and higher education experience. His textbook *Logic* is an outstanding teaching text and we were honoured to have supported the development of on-line resources from it. Wittgenstein once remarked 'how can I be a logician before I'm a human being!'—Paul Tomassi showed greatness as both.

In this, the ninth issue of *Discourse*, we publish an interview with Jonathan Lowe, Professor of Philosophy at Durham University. This is the first in a series of interviews with leading academics to reflect the current real views of active and influential teachers. We also have papers from Rob Gleave and Christopher Cowley on web-based skills and benchmarking, and medical ethics respectively.

The second half of this issue contains a number of papers from the Subject Centre international conference in July 2005, *Future Discourse*. These are only a sample of the papers presented and we hope to publish other materials from the conference in future issues.

Plans are already afoot for a second conference in 2007—watch out for the call for papers in the new year.

With all good wishes for the holidays ahead,

David J Mossley
(editor)

Erratum
In issue 4.2 we alphabetically listed the authors of *'Like a Good Brisk Walk: The Relationship between Faith Stance and Academic Study in the Experience of First Year Theology Studies at the University of Oxford*; this was incorrect. The order has been corrected in the on-line version of *Discourse* and should be taken to be Rowland, Sabri, Wyatt, Savrakopoulou, Cargas and Hartley. We apologise to the authors and for any confusion caused.

News and Information

The Higher Education Academy

The Higher Education Academy's mission is to help institutions, discipline groups and all staff to provide the best possible learning experience for their students.

Its aims and objectives are:
1. to be an authoritative and independent voice on policies that influence student learning experiences;
2. to support institutions in their strategies for improving the student learning experience;
3. to lead, support and inform the professional development and recognition of staff in higher education;
4. to promote good practice in all aspects of support for the student learning experience;
5. to lead the development of research and evaluation to improve the quality of the student learning experience;
6. to be a responsive, efficient and accountable organisation.

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk

The Subject Network

The Subject Network is a network of 24 subject centres based in higher education institutions throughout the UK. It is funded by the four HE funding bodies in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It aims to promote high quality learning and teaching through development and transfer of successful practice in all subject disciplines.

Activities

The Subject Network supports a wide variety of activities:
- subject-specific information and resources including databases, knowledge banks, case studies, question banks, journals and guides;
- events, departmental workshops, teaching and student awards;

- brokerage and collaboration activities including mini-project funding, establishing partnerships and special interest groups;
- interdisciplinary collaborations addressing issues of concern to more than one subject area;
- subject-specific support for assessment, e-learning, employability and enterprise
- help for subject communities responding to the challenges posed by emerging policy issues.

The Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies,

The Higher Education Academy

The Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies is based at the University of Leeds and at a partner site at the University of Wales, Lampeter and covers the disciplines of Philosophy, Philosophy of Science, History of Science (including the History of Medicine and Technology), Theology, and Religious Studies.

Mission statement

The mission of the Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies is to support and promote Philosophical and Religious Studies disciplines, and enhancement of the learning experience for all in the context of an evolving higher education environment.

We provide the following services and resources:
- news and support advice on national developments and funding opportunities;
- individual consultations;
- regional and departmental workshops and conferences.
- departmental visits;

- grants and funding for learning and teaching mini-projects;
- a comprehensive website of electronic resources and reviews;
- *Discourse: Learning and Teaching in Philosophical and Religious*;
- *Discourse Supplement* for heads of departments and policy makers.

Visit the website for the Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies (formerly the PRS-LTSN) of the Higher Education Academy:

http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk

Departmental Visits, Workshops and Contacts

Departmental Visits

We have now visited almost all of the departments in our subject communities. We have contacted all the departments (either via your departmental Subject Centre representative or your Head of Department) and if we have not yet set up a face to face meeting then please do not hesitate to contact us at the address below to arrange one. The aim of the visits is to gather information about existing effective practice and to find out what the most pressing issues for your department and for individual lecturers and tutors are, so that we can better direct our resources and efforts to serve the PRS community in all learning, teaching and assessment matters.

Departmental Workshops

We also offer a full programme of workshops. These are designed to help us help you with issues raised in our first visits and to see how things have changed in your learning and teaching environment. We aim to provide workshops and support advice on any learning and teaching issue that has a subject-specific dimension. These workshops can be tailored to your departmental needs and time and can cover topics such as plagiarism, assessment and tutor training. Please contact us to discuss how we might help you with a workshop for your department, free of charge.

Contacts

Our list of departmental contacts continues to grow, but there is still a small minority of departments that have not registered a representative. If you would like to be a representative for your department, please contact:

Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies
School of Theology and Religious Studies
University of Leeds
Leeds LS2 9JT
Tel: 0113 343 4184
enquiries@prs.heacademy.ac.uk

All the Subject Centre news on workshops, resources, funding and events is available from our new website:

http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk

Also available are:

- our biannual ***Discourse Supplement*** (for heads of departments and policy makers);

- our occasional ***e-bulletin newsletter***. To receive the e-bulletin you need to be registered with Subject Centre (visit the website).

The e-bulletin will re-launched as a regular mailing early in 2006.

The e-bulletin will keep you up-to-date with:

- Events
- Funding
- Conferences in learning and teaching
- National developments

NB: some institutions block mass emails. If you are registered but do not receive the e-bulletin, please contact Julie Closs (jules@prs.heacademy.ac.uk) with an alternative email address.

Philosophical Writings
A Journal for Postgraduates and New Academics

Focus: Φ *Philosophical Writings* is an international journal published in the Philosophy Department at the University of Durham. We welcome submissions on any area so long as they are treated in an analytic style. Our remit is to provide a channel for the publication of original work by advanced postgraduates and new academics, though we also accept work by established academics. We have an international editorial board and past guest articles have been written by: Jonathan Wolff, Christopher Norris, John Gaskin, Anthony Flew and David Cooper. In publishing a wide variety of stimulating and original essays, the journal hopes to play a vital role in the growth and development of philosophical awareness in the next generation of philosophers.

Subscription Rates for 2005-06

	UK	Europe	North America	Rest of World
Institutions	£64	£74	£85	£85
Individuals	£22	£24	£28	£28

(Issues: 30 Autumn 2005, 31 Spring 2006, 32 Summer 2006)

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Theology *and* Religious Studies
or
Theology *vs* Religious Studies?

6-7 July 2006
University of Oxford

This is a two-day conference offering participants the opportunity to explore the relationship between Theology and Religious Studies and to consider the challenges of, and strategies for, teaching both.

<u>Speakers</u>
Gavin D'Costa (Bristol), **Kim Knott** (Leeds),
David Ford (Cambridge), **James Cox** (Edinburgh)

<u>Call for papers</u>
Abstracts of 150 to 300 words should be submitted no later than 31 January 2006.

Suggested topics include: Theology *and* Religious Studies; Theology *vs* Religious Studies; Teaching Theology; Teaching Religious Studies; the Future of both Theology and Religious Studies.

http://www.prs.heacademy.ac.uk/events/t&rs_or_tvsrs.html

Sponsored by the Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies
For more information contact Dr D L Bird at
darlene@prs.heacademy.ac.uk

Reading Spiritualities

Constructing and representing spiritualities through the medium of text: sacred, literary and visual

20-22nd January 2006

Hosted by the Department of Religious Studies, Lancaster University

Keynote Speakers

- Michele Roberts

- Ursula King

- David Jasper

http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fss/events/spiritualities/

Conference Organisers

- Dr Deborah Sawyer **d.sawyer@lancaster.ac.uk Tel:** +44 (0)1524 592415

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Articles, Discussion and Practical Teaching

The *Discourse* Interview

1. Professor Jonathan Lowe Durham University

Interviewed by: **David J Mossley**

Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies
University of Leeds

In the first of a series of interviews with noted academics, *Discourse* editor, David Mossley, talked to Professor Jonathan Lowe about his vision of philosophy, its place in the university, how it is taught and how he sees its future. The interview was conducted in Durham on 23rd August 2005.

Mossley: I would like to ask you some questions about your experiences as a teacher, how you feel about teaching and what has influenced you in teaching in philosophy. I wonder if you could start by saying a little bit about your own history as a philosophy teacher, how you came to philosophy, where you've taught and so on.

Lowe: I came to philosophy through a rather roundabout route, because when I went up to Cambridge as an undergraduate I did so to read natural sciences and in the course of my first year I became dissatisfied with that and changed to history—so my first degree was in history. Now, in the course of studying history I became interested in the history of political thought, and indeed after I graduated I intended to do a PhD in the history of political thought but then got more interested in pure philosophy. So I moved to Oxford to do the BPhil in Philosophy and then subsequently the DPhil. So I became a philosopher. My first job in philosophy was at Reading University for a year and after that I came to Durham and have been in Durham ever since.

M: You have three main areas of philosophical interest (metaphysics, Locke and the philosophy of mind) and we'll touch on these in some of the questions I'd like to ask. In a recent book *The Possibility of Metaphysics*, you defend a position on the nature of philosophy and metaphysics in particular—correct me if I misrepresent this—in which you say the purpose of metaphysics is to delimit what could possibly be objects of enquiry by giving us the limits of possibility.

L: Yes

M: Taking that as a starting point, would you like to say a little bit about that and how you see the role of philosophy within a university context—whether in multiple disciplines or overlapping disciplinarity?

L: Part of my thesis about this is based on the idea of the unity or indivisibility of truth: that all different human intellectual enquiries—or many of them anyway—are aimed at truth, or pursue truth, in their own individual ways, with their own methods and their own fairly limited subject matters. But truth is one and indivisible. What is true in one area cannot conflict with what is true in another and so it is part of our intellectual duty, as it were, to reconcile these different pursuits of truth and make them all compatible. Now it seems to me that this is one of the tasks of philosophy—more so than any other discipline— because it is all-embracing: everything comes within the purview of philosophy and it is partly this critical aspect of the pursuit of truth that informs my position. The other element is to do with possibility. The thought here is that however much we may claim to be

empiricists and say that knowledge (or large areas of knowledge) can be pursued only on the basis of empirical investigation and observation, observation or experience can only confirm or corroborate what is at least *possible*. I mean that you cannot empirically confirm a contradiction, or corroborate something which is incoherent, and again it is part of the task of philosophy to delimit what is, or is not possible, as a kind of precondition of empirical enquiry. And so it is for those two reasons—the unity of truth and the requirement, on any kind of empirical confirmation, of the possibility of what is being confirmed—that philosophy has a special interdisciplinary role. The implication, I suppose, for the university and other disciplines is that there is a philosophical dimension to *all* disciplines, whether they recognise it or not. In many cases, the disciplines' own practitioners will be able to engage with that philosophical dimension for themselves. But there is also a requirement to reconcile the philosophical dimensions of the different disciplines, and so there is an indispensable role for pure philosophy as a mediator between disciplines. Particularly within a university— since in a true university all disciplines will be represented— philosophy will have a special role in helping to coordinate and inspire the different activities of the various disciplines.

M: This is clearly a notion of the university which would be recognisable, I suspect, to John Locke—the university as grounded in enlightenment rationality, with a unified notion of truth. Would you like to say a little more about what you think a university is, then, because that notion of a university has been challenged recently in post-modern contexts?

L: Yes, well, I think at the heart of the notion of a university is the notion of an autonomous community of scholars, of people interested in the pursuit of knowledge, the pursuit of truth and the preservation and transmission of knowledge and learning to succeeding generations. That is essentially a cooperative enterprise, and even though the different practitioners are all involved in their own particular corners—their own particular disciplines—it is a moral community involving mutual obligations, both within that community and within society at large. It is charged with this special duty of—as I say—enhancing, preserving and transmitting knowledge and learning over the generations, something which is essential to any civilised

society.

My worry about some of the developments in universities at the moment is that there is an increasing commercialisation, commodification, and emphasis upon training for employment in all sorts of professions. Now there is some scope for that, obviously, but there is a danger that it could take over the traditional core role of a university as a repository of knowledge and learning, charged with the responsibility of perpetuating that knowledge over the generations.

M: It would shift the notion of a university from emphasis on the knowledge base to emphasis on the product? And thus to a reductive analysis of what a person is?

L: Indeed

M: Which brings me to the next point: I wondered if you'd like to say a little about what you think a person is, in terms of how a person is educated and how education works for an individual—and whether the philosophical notion of a person as a subject has a consequence for how education should be understood.

L: Yes, I think it does. As you've indicated, my view of a person is a non-reductive one. A person is not just some kind of assemblage of biological matter, or anything like that. A person is a self-reflective being that is capable of rational thought and action—that was Locke's view of personhood, essentially—and so, crucial for the very notion of a person is the notion of education. To become a person one has to go through certain educative processes in communion with other people, and the development of persons is the business of education both at pre-university level and, of course, at university level. And, as I say, this is a moral notion. The notion of a person is what Locke called a *forensic* notion: a person is a being that can acquire responsibilities, and be subject to praise and blame and so forth. So there is a moral dimension to education as well—one that is indissolubly linked with the intellectual dimension that should be reflected both in the structure and organisation and in the practices of a university. As well as recognising *individual* persons, we can think of communities of persons as being, in a sense, *corporate* persons—and a university is an example of a corporate person. It has a communal life, it engages in various actions, it has knowledge, and it is a rational—if sometimes

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also an irrational—being, with moral responsibilities to its members and to society at large.

M: If I may perhaps touch on a related point: if we look at a student coming to join this corporate person, what kinds of abilities, or skills, or outlook, or capabilities are best suited to a student entering a philosophy programme?

L: Well, there's not a requirement of any prior knowledge as such. It's more a matter of having the right attitude—an open mind, a willingness to engage in free and rational debate in an unbiased way, and an ability to listen to other people's arguments and to respond to them on the basis of the merits of those arguments, rather than being influenced by extraneous factors—personalities or preconceived ideas and so forth. Any student who has that aptitude—that willingness to engage in free and open debate—will, I think, be able to benefit from a philosophical education.

M: So, do you think there's anything particular about philosophy? Is what you've just said not equally true of, say, a student doing history or English?

L: Yes, it would be true for any intellectual discipline but partly, I would say, precisely because every such discipline has a philosophical dimension. But the special thing about philosophy is it doesn't really have *its own* subject matter. I mean that there aren't, as it were, philosophical *facts* which need to be assimilated by the discipline's 'novices' or 'apprentices'. In philosophy, everyone is equal, from the new student to the most eminent professor. There is no question of there being *authorities* in philosophy: everyone enters philosophical debate on equal terms and the debate proceeds in whatever way it does, depending on the merits of the arguments presented and not on the reputations of the people engaging in the debate. At least that's how it *should* be. It isn't always like that in practice, by any means, but it *ought* to be like that—not only amongst professional philosophers but also in debates between students and their teachers. But I don't think that it can be *entirely* like that in any other discipline, because in all other disciplines there is a body of accepted knowledge which has to be transmitted to the student. The novice physics student, for instance, can't question the principles of quantum mechanics, or

anything like that—a first year physics student can't do such a thing, but a first year philosophy student can challenge the views of the most eminent philosophy professor, and that's perfectly proper.

M: Do you think, then, there isn't any sense in which there is a philosophical canon?

L: Well, there's good and bad in philosophy—it's not that all the opinions of all philosophers, or of anyone who has ever spoken on philosophy, are of equal merit. Philosophy is—perhaps more than any other discipline—aware of its history. I mean: you don't get this constant awareness in, say, physics or mathematics. The study of past philosophers belongs to the very lifeblood of the subject, and that's partly because there's always a danger of philosophy becoming obsessed with what is fashionable and so just focusing on current concerns. By returning again and again to the history of philosophy we are able to see the same problems arising in different historical contexts, and we can see very often that those same problems have been viewed in a very different light in the past. This helps us to view them more objectively in our own present-day context.

M: So, students engage in this free and equal dialogue with their professors. What do they gain from this? How are they developed? How are they changed? To what extent is it a moral change?

L: It is very much a moral change. At least, it should be. Ideally what should happen is that the students will acquire—if you care to put it a somewhat high-flown way—a love of truth. So a love of an intellectual honesty should be the product—a propensity always to view one's *own* opinions with a critical eye; always to challenge one's own opinions and, when confronting the opinions of others, not simply to accept or reject them on prejudicial grounds, but always to subject them to critical scrutiny and to consider them for what they're worth; not to be taken in by rhetoric or clever language; but always to penetrate to essence of what is being claimed or argued. And I think that having such a propensity provides an invaluable protection against many of the snares and pitfalls of modern society that arise from the ways in which people try to manipulate one other.

M: If we could move on to the relationship between the teaching that goes on and the higher level of research that an academic will undertake, you've published hundreds of research papers and reviews as well as many successful books: so how do you see the relationship between teaching and research? And what kinds of role do the teaching and the research have, particularly in public life?

L: I see a very close relation between teaching and research. Many of my papers have emerged out of ideas that I have developed in the course of teaching and, similarly, when I give lectures or hold tutorials, very often the issues that I discuss or bring up are things that have occurred to me in the course of conducting my research. So I see the two as indissolubly linked. I am sure my research would suffer if I weren't teaching at all and, certainly, *vice versa*. Now, you ask about how all this affects public life. Well, this is a difficult and complicated matter. Of course, my own areas of philosophical specialism are not immediately practical—I mean, in the sense that I don't specialise in ethics or political philosophy, for instance, although I am in fact interested in both. Many people think of metaphysics as being a kind of 'ivory tower' discipline. Actually, I don't think that it really is—I think that metaphysics has many implications for the nature and conduct of public life. But metaphysics is not something that's easy to get across in 'sound-bites', by appearing on the radio or on television, or things like that. So I think that the main way in which metaphysics can affect public life is through a process of dissemination, through education—through, as it were, sending people out into the world who've gained some insight into and some interest in metaphysics, and who can bring that to bear in their everyday life and in their interactions with other people.

M: Coming back to your history and experience, how do you think that teaching has changed? This is a big question: there are a lot of aspects to this in terms of the way higher education has expanded and so on, and there also the changes to the political environment of higher education, but how do you think that things have changed during your career?

L: Well, I haven't changed the way that I teach, really … Actually, I don't think it's really right to talk about philosophy being *taught*. Philosophy can be *inspired*: you can inspire people to think philosophically, or to become philosophers; and the way that you do it

is by example. So when I give lectures, for instance, I never lecture from notes, because it seems to me that what should be on display is someone thinking through some philosophical problems freshly. In a lecture you should always be prepared to come to a different conclusion from the one that you came to the last time you gave a lecture on that subject. Now, I still do that in all of my lectures and tutorials: I always try to be as spontaneous as possible, because if you always tried to reduce philosophical issues to set formulas, then that would be the death of philosophy. The current culture of quality assurance does not make this way of proceeding as easy as it was in the past. I mean, I can fortunately still do it, because I can get away with it; but I do worry for a younger generation of philosophers, who have to go through various managerial hoops in order to get promotion, and for that reason might not find it so easy to do things this way. However, I do think that it's absolutely essential to real philosophy that it's done, as I say, *spontaneously*. So, in short, I haven't changed my own basic methods of teaching.

One of the things that certainly has changed is the sheer *number* of students that I have to engage with now, and the consequent reduction of their contact time with me—so that whereas 20 or so years ago I would know personally all of my undergraduate students very well, it's not that way now. In fact, I probably have more postgraduate PhD students now than I had 3rd year undergraduate students 20 or 30 years ago. So that has made it all much more impersonal, which is, I think very regrettable: the students get less time individually with me and I know less of them as individuals—and this is a loss for both of us.

M: I'm interested in the idea of philosophy not being taught but inspired, could you expand on that a little?

L: Well, as I say, part of the point here is that there aren't *authorities* in philosophy. There is no such thing as a 'right' answer, as such, in philosophy: there are just perennial questions, and these questions are only worth pursuing if people are interested in them. There's no obligation to pursue philosophical questions unless you're interested in them. But it's good for humanity that we're interested in philosophical questions and that's what one is trying to inspire—an interest in those questions. Now, they're really only interesting for people who think that they have a chance to answer them *for*

themselves—it's not especially interesting to hear someone else's solutions to philosophical problems; rather, it's most interesting to try to think them out for yourself. That's the real source of inspiration and that's what you've got to try to get across to people—to help them to see how interesting it is to pursue these questions for themselves.

M: You've written a number of books specifically for teaching purposes, or rather they are written for students, or aimed at a student audience (including *A Survey of Metaphysics*, two books on Locke and *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind*). Would you like to say a little bit about that and how you go about deciding what is appropriate for a student audience and what students need to hear?

L: All of those books have essentially emerged out of my teaching—out of lectures that I've given. This is particularly the case with my philosophy of mind book and my survey of metaphysics book, both of which fairly closely follow the kinds of courses of lectures that I would give in those subjects. So, in a way, a lot of thanks for them is owed to my students, because through a process of osmosis and feedback I learned what went down well, what were better ways to approach certain topics, and what topics interested them. On the other hand, as I said earlier, I do think that it is important that when you're actually giving a lecture or tutorial you should be spontaneous—and so I tell the students, 'If you want to know my official opinions about *X*, *Y* and *Z*, then go look at these books'. I'm constantly changing my mind, as Russell did—I'm not constant in my opinions—because you make mistakes, and realise that you've made mistakes. So that's another reason why I try not to make my courses too rigid. I don't provide lots of handouts and I don't determine in advance exactly what I'm going to say in a lecture, because I think that a lecture should be something that is alive and spontaneous—where you're taking a risk every time of making a fool of yourself, or taking a wrong turning, or discovering something new. And that has certainly happened to me in a lecture: I've realised something that I hadn't thought of before—and that's marvellous—or a student has raised a question or made a suggestion that I'd not anticipated. That makes it all very much more interesting than just going through some pre-planned exercise. And I would hope that this can be recognised as a good way to teach, particularly in philosophy. Indeed, I hope that younger philosophers won't feel so constrained by the current, rather

rigidly defined conception of quality assurance, that they can't teach in that way. That would be a very sad loss, I think.

M: It takes a great deal of confidence and skill to be able to lecture in that way, a lot of confidence to expose yourself to the possibility of error. Is there any advice that you could give to a junior lecturer on that score?

L: Yes, well, it's easy to say this, but I think that I would just advise them not to worry about it. If you trip yourself up, the students will be understanding, I believe. I think that they will appreciate it that you're trying to think on your feet, rather than delivering them something that they could just go and read for themselves, if they wanted to. I don't think that they will be critical or feel unkindly towards you because you've done it this way. Of course, you need to explain it to them when you start a course: you need to say, 'This is how I want to do it: I'm not going to regurgitate stuff for you, and I don't want you to regurgitate stuff for me in your essays and exam answers; it's part of the lifeblood of philosophy that it's a spontaneous and living activity, and that's why I'm going to do it this way and if I make mistakes, please point them out to me and then we can all make progress together.' I think that if you're 'up front' about it with the students to start with—honest with them and with yourself—then there won't be problem.

M: Philosophy has its own fads and phases. What do you think are the current driving factors in philosophy in the UK and internationally at the moment? What are the current trends as you see them?

L: Well, it's all becoming, in some ways, rather more segmented and disunified. For instance, there are many philosophers now who would describe themselves as philosophers of mind but who are mainly engaged in a dialogue with cognitive science and empirical psychology, and that's all very interesting, but they probably don't have much interaction with other philosophers working in, say, the philosophy of language or metaphysics. So it's a much less unified subject or discipline than it used to be, some 20 or 30 years ago. There are many more specialists nowadays: whereas, in the past, most philosophers in a university department could turn their hand to any branch of the discipline, today people are much more confined within

their own specialisms. I think that's a very bad thing, because philosophy, as I said earlier, has by its very nature a universal purview, so that this increasing compartmentalisation is very dangerous to philosophy: if philosophy itself becomes segmented, that's a danger to its survival, so that is worrisome. However, one good thing that I think has happened fairly recently—though perhaps you'd expect me to say this—is the revival in metaphysics. I think that's good, not just because I happen to be interested in metaphysics, but because I think that metaphysics should be—and inescapably *is*—at the heart of all philosophy, and indeed of everything in our intellectual life. There is a metaphysical dimension to absolutely everything, and so it's important that metaphysics itself has undergone this revival and that there is now more confidence in metaphysics as a 'doable' thing.

M: Looking back on this whole view that you have of philosophy and its role within the university, and taking into account what you've already said, what do you think is your greatest achievement as an educator? And I say educator rather than teacher…

L: Well, I hope that I've inspired some students—as many as possible—to be interested in philosophy. Now, of course, I'm aware that some of my past students have gone on to become professional philosophers, or to do work that is related to philosophy, and that's very heartening to know, but, on the other hand, in a way the more important thing to have done is to have transmitted a love of philosophy to people who aren't going to become professional philosophers. It's going to be with them for the rest of their lives; they're going spread it around to their own children and friends. It's so important that philosophy shouldn't be seen—as I'm afraid it often is by the public at large—as some kind of ivory tower, airy-fairy discipline. It should be something that interests everybody and people shouldn't be afraid of it. And the more widely that one can disseminate it, the better. That's one very good thing about the expansion of the universities and the increased student numbers that we have to deal with: although it spreads philosophy teaching more thinly, at least it's spread more widely.

M: Are there any educators, any people, that you feel influenced you in any way?

L: Well, it's complicated, because, oddly enough, the person who probably influenced me the most was my director of studies in history at Cambridge. As I mentioned earlier, I wanted to change from natural sciences to history in my first year, even though I had only science A-levels. And, with some difficulty, I managed to do this, partly because my director of studies in history had confidence and faith in me. He was also a very inspiring and exacting teacher and I learned a lot from him. He had faith in my ability to make this change and, I have to say, I think it's a change that would be impossible in any UK university today—for someone in his or her first year as an undergraduate science student, with no A-levels in arts subjects, to change to History, which I did successfully as it turns out. That's one reason why I dislike the growing rigidification of the university curriculum.

M: Is there anything you would like to say generally about the state of philosophy in the UK?

L: In some ways, it seems to be in a much healthier state than it was back in the days when I was appointed in Durham in 1980, because that was a time when a number of philosophy departments were about to be closed. There was a reduction in the number of philosophers in the country and indeed of philosophy students. But it has all expanded a lot since then. It now has more vitality, I feel, and I'm glad to say also, that the international dimension has grown. There's much more interaction now between UK philosophers and other philosophers all over the rest of world, partly through the growth of the internet and other things like that. And there's less back-biting and less of a hierarchical attitude around in philosophy now than I think there was in those early days when I was a junior philosopher. Now it seems much more egalitarian in spirit, and there are many more opportunities for free debate—and that's a very positive development, I think.

M: Thank you very much.

Web-based Exercises and Benchmarked Skills

A report on the mini-project 'Creating Web-based Exercises for Theology and Religious Studies Students'

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Introduction: Benchmarking Skills

Within the Subject Benchmark Statement for Theology and Religious Studies (TRS), published by the Quality Assurance Agency in 2000, there is a list of elements of knowledge and understanding, subject-specific skills and key skills

which graduates in degrees in TRS are expected to have acquired during their degree programme. The QAA describes Subject Benchmarks as follows:

> Subject benchmark statements set out expectations about standards of degrees in a range of subject areas. They describe what gives a discipline its coherence and identity, and define what can be expected of a graduate in terms of the techniques and skills needed to develop understanding in the subject.[1]

The statements 'represent general expectations about the standards for the award of qualifications at a given level and articulate the attributes and capabilities that those possessing such qualifications should be able to demonstrate.'[2] No serious attempt has yet been made to measure specific degree programmes against these Statements by bodies external to the award-giving institution. In Subject Review, reviewers were permitted to measure programmes against the Statements only if the department under review explicitly referred to the statement in their Self-Evaluation Document. The Benchmark Statements are to be revised. Revisions were timetabled ('In due course, but not before July 2003, the statement will be revised')[3], but at the time of writing nothing, to my knowledge, has yet been initiated. Therefore, we may (or may not) be getting new statements in the future.

In the TRS Statement, the level of skill attainment is divided into 'threshold' and 'focal'. The difference between threshold and focal skill attainment is rather like the difference between (my own team) Crewe Alex and Arsenal. Both play football, but Arsenal does it better. For example, students on a programme which offers only a 'threshold' level should:

> Be able to summarise, represent and interpret a range of both primary and secondary sources including materials from different disciplines.[4]

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[1] **http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/default.asp**
[2] **http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/honours/theology.asp** (Introduction)
[3] **http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/honours/theology.asp** (Subject Benchmark Statements).
[4] **http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/honours/theology.asp** (Knowledge and Understanding)

Students on a programme which offers a 'focal' level should be able to do this, but also:

> Be able to evaluate and critically analyse a diversity of primary and secondary sources, including materials from different disciplines.[5]

The difference is between those who can only 'summarise, represent and interpret' and those who can 'evaluate and critically analyse' these materials (ignoring split infinitives), and these materials constitute a 'range' (for 'threshold') and a 'diversity' (for 'focal').

Now, it seems obvious to me that any teacher of TRS in higher education will want his or her modules, units and programme to conform to the 'focal' level. Who wants to play for the Railwaymen, when you could play for the Gunners?

Unlike with Subject Review, where we all set our own 'Aims and Objectives', benchmarking aims to set universal standards against which we may all be tested. With Subject Review, a department which aimed low and achieved low could get 24 (not that we ever added up the scores, of course). Benchmarking is supposed to plug this loophole and maintain quality through national, agreed standards. Quality assurance has moved on since the Benchmark Statements were written, and we now have Institutional Audit. Time will tell how the Benchmark Statements will fit into this new 'light touch', though there are regular references to Benchmark Statements in Institutional Audit reports.

Whether one likes the TRS Benchmark Statement or not, it seems clear that it (or something like it) will remain one of the quality criteria against which programmes of TRS are measured. *Who* will do the measuring and *how* they will interpret the document may change over time, but there *will* be a document. Interpretation (as all scholars of religious texts know) is crucial: my 'critical analysis' may be your mere 'summary and representation'. The current Statement may be updated, and its content may be altered, but the principle that there should be a 'Benchmark Statement' and that TRS degrees (and TRS components of degrees) should be measured against it is not (it seems) open to question. In my view, it is highly unlikely that any future UK government will abandon the idea of nationally agreed standards in

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[5] **http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/ honours/theology.asp** (Knowledge and Understanding)

knowledge, understanding and skills. Ditching the principle of benchmarking would be seen as an unacceptable loss of public accountability within the sector.

Fortunately, the drafters of the TRS Benchmark Statement have devised a document which is sufficiently 'flexible' (some might say 'vague') to be applied to a large number of different programmes, and is not prescriptive in terms of the structure of a TRS degree. This was a wise move—it enables the community of TRS teachers in HE to define how they want the subject to develop, and it will hopefully ensure the continued existence of distinctive TRS degree programmes around the country. We will continue to play different games. Some will play biblical studies and Christian theology; some world religions. Some will see religion as a generic category, and only later divide study into specific traditions; others will see traditions as central and view generalising categories with suspicion. This is fine for subject-specific knowledge. The story may be different in terms of subject-specific and key skills. Here there will undoubtedly be a call for more uniformity. An employer will want to know that a 2.1 TRS graduate from university X will have better 'skills attainment' than a 2.2 TRS graduate from university Y, even if the Y graduate 'knows' more about Sikhism or Christianity or whatever.

With these observations in mind, I applied for, and received, a mini-project grant from the PRS-LTSN[6] to devise web-based learning exercises and report on their success in developing key skills. The project was entitled 'Creating Web-based Exercises for Theology and Religious Studies Students'. During the completion of these exercises, students would hopefully develop some of the skills outlined in the Benchmark Statement. The aim of the project was not simply to enable conformity with the Benchmark Statement. It would, of course, be useful for a department under review to point to exercises like these when asked by a review team, 'How and where do you teach the skills laid out in the Benchmark Statement?' This is, if you like, one advantage of formalising skill attainment through setting specific exercises (whether web-based or not). The broader aim was, however, to find ways in which the skills outlined in the Statement could be integrated more explicitly into the curriculum. I do not consider the skills themselves to be contentious. I cannot imagine any modern TRS teacher saying 'Well, actually I do NOT want my

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[6] Now the Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies

students to be able to evaluate and critically analyse a diversity of primary and secondary sources. I want them to accept everything they read at face value (particularly if it is my own work) and read only one type of source.'   In politically incorrect terms, the skills are motherhood and apple pie.

The 'benchmark' skills which the exercises were designed to develop (and in a formative manner, assess) are set out in the table below.

Table: Target skills for the mini-project 'Creating Web-based Exercises for Theology and Religious Studies Students'[7]		
Skill No.	**Threshold**	**Focal**
	In 'Knowledge and Understanding'	
1.[8]	Be able to summarise, represent and interpret a range of both primary and secondary sources including materials from different disciplines.	Be able to evaluate and critically analyse a diversity of primary and secondary sources, including materials from different disciplines.[9]
	In 'Discipline Specific and Intellectual Skills'	
2.	Be able to represent views other than the student's own with fairness and integrity and as appropriate express their own identity without denigration of others.	Be able to represent views other than the student's own sensitively and intelligently with fairness and integrity, while as appropriate expressing their own identity without denigration of others, through critical engagement in a spirit of

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[7] All these skills are cited in the Subject Benchmark Statement for Theology and Religious Studies. See, **http://www.qaa.ac.uk/crntwork/ benchmark/theology.html** (Indicative statements of threshold and focal levels of achievement in Theology and Religious Studies)

[8] The numbering of skills is my own, and is for ease of reference later on in this article.

[9] Whilst the drafters of the Statement include this in the section 'Knowledge and Understanding', it seems clear to me that this is a skill—perhaps generic, perhaps subject specific. To 'be able to evaluate and critically analyse a diversity of primary and secondary sources, including materials from different disciplines' is an ability (surely?) not a piece of knowledge or understanding. It could be argued that we should measure the student's ability to understand primary and secondary sources, but such an ability is not (necessarily) subject specific. An ability 'to evaluate and critically analyse a diversity of primary and secondary sources' is a skill; what the student gains from using that ability is understanding. This is why I have included it as one of the 'skills' covered by the exercises in the Project.

		generosity, openness and empathy.
In 'Key Skills (transferable skills)'		
3.	Be able to communicate information, ideas, arguments, principles and theories by a variety of means.	Be able to communicate information, ideas, arguments, principles, theories, and develop an argument by a variety of means… which are clearly and effectively organised and presented.
4.	Be able to identify, gather and discuss primary data and source material, whether through textual studies or fieldwork.	Be able to identify, gather, and analyse primary data and source material, whether through textual studies or fieldwork.
5.	Be able to attend to, reproduce accurately and reflect on the ideas and arguments of others.	Be able to attend to, reproduce accurately, reflect on and interact with the ideas and arguments of others.
6.	Be able to use IT and computer skills for data capture, to identify source material and support research and presentations.	Be able to use IT and computer skills for data capture, to identify appropriate source material, support research, and enhance presentations.

With this aim in mind, I set about designing web-based exercises; I then set them as tasks for my students as elements of the formative assessment in specific units.[10] The rest of this paper is a reflection on my experience using these exercises. There is no quantitative analysis of questionnaires. Rather, I have opted to give summaries of the students' comments during feedback sessions after completing the exercises.

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[10] 'Units' is the University of Bristol term for what most people call 'modules' and 'courses'. Modules and courses do not exist at the University of Bristol.

The Web-based Exercises

Since I teach Islamic Studies, most of the exercises I designed revolved around material related to that subject. The exercises can be found through the links on the gateway page I set up for students doing my units: www.bris.ac.uk/depts/THRS/IS.Webexgate.htm. They are not particularly sophisticated exercises. I am not a particularly sophisticated web designer.[11] I, with my limited abilities in web design, did have one advantage for the project over a professional designer—my labour was cheap. The exercises were employed in a 'blended' learning environment, combining IT usage with classroom time.[12]
The exercises divide into three main types:

1. Explicit skills training exercises
2. Research and evaluation exercises
3. Comprehension exercises

Some of the exercises include elements of all three characteristics.

1. Explicit skills training exercises

These exercises are comprised mainly of PowerPoint tutorials, made available through the Web. The students could complete these tutorials in their own time. No work was submitted, but by placing the tutorial on a Virtual Learning Environment site (in this case Blackboard), I could check which students had completed the tutorials and which had not. Blackboard records which students view

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[11] I benefited from some of the references found in recent literature on teaching Theology with technology. The main sources are referenced in L. Mercadante, 'High Tech or High Touch: Will Technology Help or Hurt Our Teaching?' *Teaching Theology and Religion*, 5.1 (2002), p.56 and more recently, S. Delamarter, 'A Typology of the Use of Technology in Theological Education' *Teaching Theology and Religion*, 7.3 (2004), pp.134-140.
[12] On blended learning approaches, see J. Seaman, 'Is blending in your future?' *Sloan-C View*, Vol.3.2 (2003), p.3.

particular elements and sections of the site as the students have given their username when accessing the site.

The tutorials were aimed at training students in skills which were an essential element of the unit in question. The most heavily used tutorial was designed to train students in the analysis of classical Muslim texts.[13] Through following the instructions in a series of 118 slides,[14] students acquired skills in genre recognition, contextualising sources, describing text context, recognising elements of an author's argumentation and use of sources. These skills were developed through reference to a specific 'test text' which the students had access to through a work pack given out in class.

Example slides taken from the PowerPoint tutorial: 'Analysing a Muslim Text'

Figure 1:

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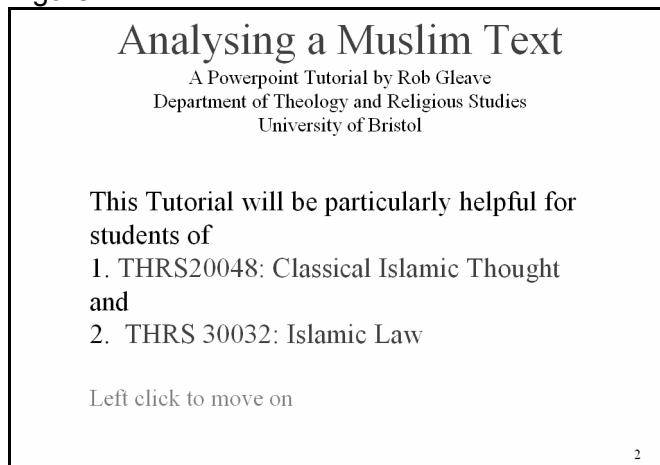
[13] **http://www.bris.ac.uk/depts/THRS/IS.MuslimText.ppt**
[14] See Figures 1, 2 and 3, for examples taken from the PowerPoint tutorial.

Figure 2:

Quick Hops

If you have done this tutorial before, or you want to go straight to particular sections of the tutorial, this page will help you go straight to the sections. Click on the button to move to the sections of the tutorial. To carry on with the tutorial introduction click here.

1. CONTEXT: setting the text in context ➡
2. GENRE: identifying and describing the genre ➡
3. DESCRIPTION: what does the text look like and say ➡
4. ARGUMENTATION: how does the author argue his ➡ position
5. QUESTION: tackling a question at the end of a text ➡
6. CONCLUSIONS: How to sum up a presentation or ➡ commentary.

3

Figure 3:

ARGUMENTATION

Lets look at the second hadith:

It is also established from Anas that he said, "The Companions of the Messenger of Allah used to travel together, some fasting others not".

Here the basis of the argument is slightly different. The majority are saying that the Companions of the Prophet used to this or that, and that their behaviour reflects the law of God. Why? Because they had lived with the Prophet and knew how to behave – they had learned it from him, so if we do not have an existent *hadith* from the Prophet himself (its lost or someone has forgotten it), then we have supplementary evidence of the *Sunna* – the companion's behaviour.

Click to continue   85

Having completed the tutorial, students should then be armed with the skills necessary to carry out their own textual analysis of a classical text and present this analysis in class as part of a seminar paper. Textual analysis also formed part of the summative assessment for the unit, as a compulsory examination question involved the analysis of a text (or texts). Through the tutorial, I was aiming to develop skills numbers 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6 listed in the table above.

I had used something similar to this tutorial for a number of years, and I had felt it worked quite well in my classes on Classical Islamic Thought and Islamic Law. In these classes, students are faced with complex and demanding texts which are written in a dense style. The texts were written for specialists, and in order to understand them one must also become, to an extent, a specialist. Without the tutorial, I was having to explain the meaning of each text in class. With the tutorial, students had made the first step towards reading and understanding the texts themselves. It not only freed classroom time to cover other material, it also enabled more sophisticated seminar discussion. I felt that the tutorial was a useful contribution to the unit materials.

In the feedback sessions after the use of the tutorial, I asked students their reactions to the tutorial. Many said they would have been lost without it, as the texts were just too difficult to understand 'cold'. A number asked the question, 'If I were to analyse a text using a different method (that is, without using the headings of genre, context, description, argumentation etc), would I be penalised?' The students felt that in the tutorial I was describing how a student must do an analysis of a Muslim text if they wish to get a good mark, rather than teaching them how one might go about an analysis of a text. To complement this attitude, there were students who slavishly followed the tutorial headings and contents, afraid of producing any original approaches to the texts. Their commentaries contained little of their own reaction to the text and were more of a perfunctory run through of the different sections than an exploration of what the text might mean.

In order to ensure that students had a chance to develop their own opinions on the content of the texts studied in the unit, I added questions and additional reading to both the tutorial and the texts they were studying in class. The questions were open questions such as 'What is your opinion of X's argument for theological position Y, and is his argument convincing?' or 'If you were to argue for position Y, which of X's arguments would you use and which would you discard?' This helped and student reaction was positive. Presentations began to contain more argued opinions from the students. However, I do recognise that a large part of the presentations was rather mechanically drawn from the skills learned from the PowerPoint tutorial. In future years, it will undoubtedly be necessary to encourage students to use the tutorial as a prompt for

their own analysis of a text, and to achieve this purpose, a certain amount of redesigning will be required.

The other type of web-based skills training exercises were PowerPoint tutorials and web pages aimed at developing translation skills for students learning the language of a sacred text and tradition (in this case, Arabic). Here there were a number of exercises which, once again, were purely as aids to enable skill attainment.[15] There was no work (formative or summative) associated with these exercises. The material in the exercises included Quranic passages accompanied by sound files to improve students' reading skills, and grammatical exercises. The latter consisted of passages which were the subject of translation classes, and each word of the passage was linked to a reference in the grammar book where the form and grammatical properties of the word are explained, together with a hint. Students were supposed to translate the passage from Arabic into English with the help of the web-based teaching aid. They may not have always needed the references and hints, but when they ran into difficulties, they could click on the word and know where to go in the grammar book to find a description of the relevant grammatical construction for this word described. As tutor I noticed that one result of setting the exercise was an improvement in the quality of the 'rough' translations the students brought to class. Furthermore, the students began to recognise grammatical constructions more quickly and developed the ability to look up elements of grammar and vocabulary they did not know or were unsure about.[16]

In the feedback session on the use of these exercises, students said they found the grammatical exercises useful. However, they also complained that the hints were too elliptical, that the interface was rather primitive and that they needed more help on how to use the grammar book as an aid in translation. These exercises were prototypes and clearly need major revisions before they will function well within a language class. A similar exercise was designed by a colleague for his Hebrew class.[17]

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[15] **http://www.bris.ac.uk/depts/THRS/IS.ArabicGate.htm**
[16] See figures 4 and 5.
[17] **http://www.bris.ac.uk/depts/THRS/JS.Hebrew1.htm**

Pages from the Arabic Translation web-based exercises
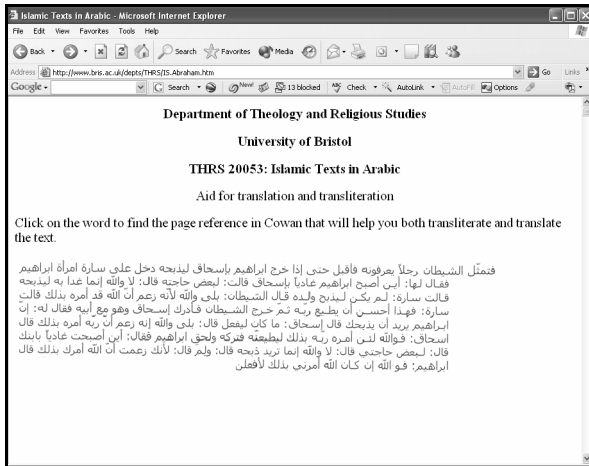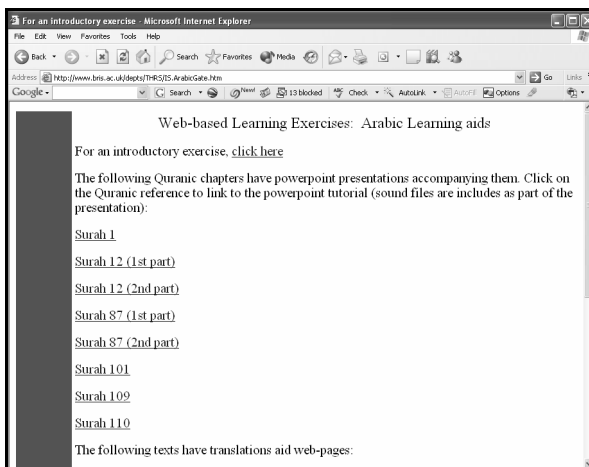
Figure 4

Figure 5

The PowerPoint tutorials on Quranic Arabic were considered enjoyable by the students, and they liked listening to the sound files and hearing the Qur'an recited by experts. However, I was less happy with the effect these exercises had on classroom progress. Some completed the exercises and improved their reading skills. However, I do not know if this improvement was due to the exercises or was a natural element of progress on the unit. Those students who were struggling with reading the script did not gain much from the exercises, though they said they found them 'fun'.

In terms of web-based exercises which aim to train (but not assess) students in specific skills, on the basis of the above I would conclude the following:

1. Exercises should be designed such that the skills attained are re-enforced within the classroom setting as soon as possible after the completion of the exercise.
2. Students need to feel an investment in the exercise—that is, they need to see the skills being useful not only within the class (ie for seminar papers and discussion) but also within the assessment for the unit/module more generally.
3. Exercises should not give the impression that they contain the 'formula' for a correct answer. Rather they should function as an introduction to the possibilities for analysis and progress opened up by acquiring the skill. In this way originality and innovation on the part of the student will not be stifled.

2. Research and Evaluation Exercises

This category of exercises involves students researching using web-based materials and collating material on which an evaluation and student-authored piece of work is then completed and sent to the tutor. The exercises lead the student, through a series of links, to material on the basis of which they compose an original piece or pieces of work.

The first of these involved a worksheet, downloaded, completed and printed out by the student.[18] The answers to the questions on the worksheet were prose responses of 50 words, answered through reference to web-based materials accessed through a series of web-pages. For example, the students were sent to read two on-line encyclopaedia articles concerning the same topic. The questions asked them to compare and contrast the encyclopaedia articles to identify lacunae in the presentation, emphasis which they might consider appropriate or inappropriate in the entries and the general utility of the articles for a student's research into the subject. The worksheets were printed out and brought to class and formed the basis for discussion in buzz groups which then reported back to the class as a whole.

Figure 6: Page from web-based exercises for the unit Modern Religious Movements in Iran
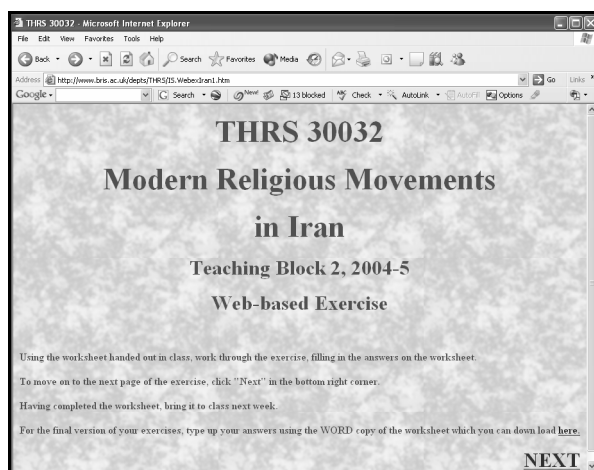
The feedback from the exercise indicated that whilst the students had gained much from it, they would have appreciated more guidance on how to research and evaluate web-based materials. They were suspicious of web-based materials because, as a department, we have warned them of the pitfalls of using the web as a primary source for essay writing and research. An exercise like this was useful, but, in truth, the skills it assumed in terms of evaluation were insufficiently

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[18] **http://www.bris.ac.uk/depts/THRS/IS.WebexIran1.htm** and see figure 6.

embedded in the curriculum as a whole. In short, students at the end of their programme of study (these were third year students) found it difficult to distinguish between good and poor quality material on the web: items on the reading list have already been vetted by the module/unit tutor whereas they were required to evaluate the material without being experts in the subject.

The second exercise in this category aimed to encourage evaluation and composition skills through the study of particular verses of the Qur'an.[19] First, an introduction to Muslim techniques of commentary on the Qur'an was presented through a series of web-pages. In particular, the students studied the variety of ways in which a single verse can be interpreted. Students had to select a preferred interpretation, and justify this preference. The justification was submitted to the tutor on a web form, reaching him/her as an e-mail. In the second part of the exercise, students were required to research, through reference to a number of on-line commentaries on the Qur'an, the interpretation of another Qur'anic verse. Having done this, they composed their own interpretation, surveying the interpretations of the verse in the past, and arguing for a particular understanding of the verse. Again, this was sent to the tutor as an e-mail through a web form.

The students found this task more difficult. The responses ranged from bland or frivolous to excellent and detailed. In feedback, they pointed out that the commentaries consisted of difficult and complex passages, and being first year students, they did not feel they had sufficient knowledge to perform the task well. Furthermore, since most were not Muslims, they did not feel they had the 'right' to offer their interpretation of the Qur'an. This last comment, concerning who has the right to interpret scripture, really has nothing to do with the web-based platform for the exercise. It is a fascinating question for a teacher of TRS, but it is not relevant to the evaluation of the success or otherwise of the exercise. The final piece of feedback concerned the submission of an on-line form. This was considered preferable to a printed handout, and students had direct access, by e-mail, to the tutor after the exercise for comments on their answers.

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[19] **http://www.bris.ac.uk/depts/THRS/IS.Webex1.htm** and see figure 7.

Figure 7: Page shot from web-based exercise on interpreting the Qur'an
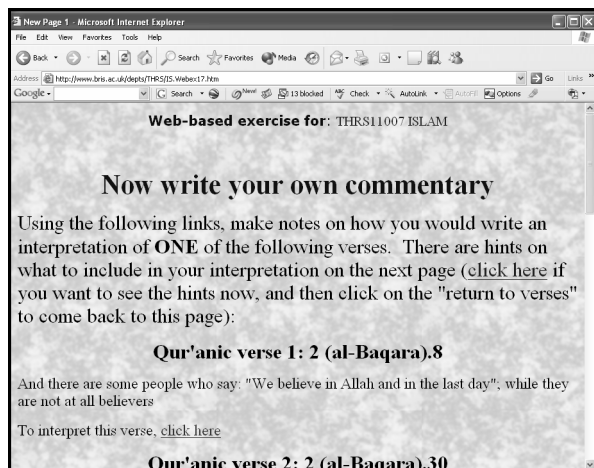
On reflection the research and evaluation exercises were only a partial success. Points to consider in designing future exercises include:

1. The exercises need to utilise skills already covered elsewhere in the curriculum. That is, the skills need to be attained before they can be developed and employed in a web-based exercise such as the ones trialled here. This was particularly true concerning the evaluation of on-line material.

2. Mixing media (ie print media with web-based material) works well for skills training exercises (see above). However, in research and evaluation exercises, where the students are submitting work, it is easier for the students to work within one medium (here, electronic mail and the web) rather than switch between print and screen.

3. For formative assessment, the anonymity provided by the web forms (in the second exercise) enabled students to take some risks in the construction of their answers. The responses were subsequently discussed in class, enabling the students to get anonymous feedback. Students who wished for further personalised feedback from the tutor, though, had to identify themselves. This hindered some from seeking this feedback, even though the exercise was purely formative.

3. Comprehension Exercises

The three exercises in this category involved answering specific questions in response to a particular external source. The questions were more often than not 'factual' rather than evaluative, testing students' background understanding of the subject matter as well as how carefully they had studied the external source. Two involved reading sections of an academic article and providing answers to set questions through a web-form.[20] The last (not in Islamic Studies) involved answering questions on a web-form after the viewing of a film in class.[21]

The exercises sprang from a perception amongst departmental staff that students were finding it difficult to study difficult primary and secondary sources carefully. These sources may be advanced and technical articles, or they may be in other media. In order to encourage and develop this close reading of sources, the exercises asked questions which were relatively easy to answer if the student had 'read' the source carefully. There were no tricks, and few evaluative elements. The skills developed and assessed in the exercises were primarily comprehension and analysis. As a package the exercises developed and assessed skills 1 (though with less emphasis on evaluation), 3, 5 (though with less emphasis on reflection) and 6 outlined in the table above.

There were some technical problems with the operation of these exercises. If the student had missed the film in class, the exercise would be meaningless unless they had access to it out of class time. In the case of the exercises based on academic articles, the copyright restrictions on electronic media meant that students faced difficulty accessing the articles off-site (on-site university access was more easily achieved).

Figure 8: Page shot from the web-based exercise interpreting the political theory of Ayatallah Khomeini.

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[20] **http://www.bris.ac.uk/depts/THRS/IS.WebexR&Rintro.htm** and
http://www.bris.ac.uk/depts/THRS/IS.WebexIranintro.htm and figure8.
[21] **http://www.bris.ac.uk/depts/THRS/useandabuse.htm**
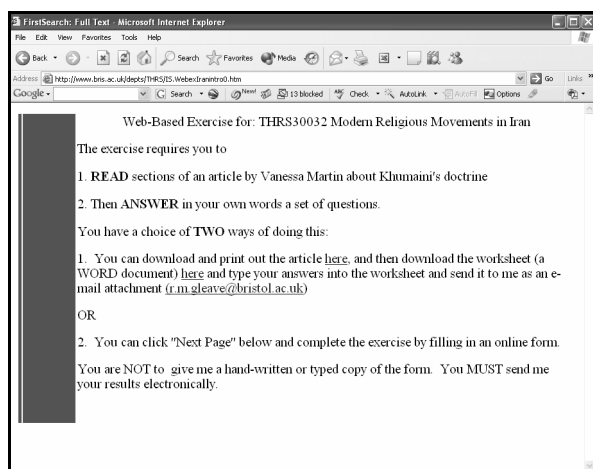
In spite of these, the student feedback was generally positive. The exercises highlighted how infrequently our students read one source carefully. The students found the exercise hard because they would normally 'skip through' an article, looking for relevant sections, rather than read the article as a whole to gain an author's overall argument. They become adept at this 'skim reading', and can construct excellent essays on the basis of this type of reading. Skim reading is an extremely valuable skill for a student, when performed well. It should not be belittled by those of us with the time and inclination to read all the sources carefully. Looking at a piece of writing, and picking out the elements relevant for one's own aims, is a 'key skill' which will be used regularly in the world of work. Many academics have themselves developed and honed this ability. These exercises, however, require a re-focussing of the reader's attention to a single source, read (or watched) carefully in order to gain information demanded by another, rather than information relevant to one's own aims and objectives. It is, perhaps, unsurprising that students found it quite difficult.

Another interesting element of the feedback from these exercises involved the ability (or lack of it) of students to do this kind of close reading on screen. Most students eventually printed out the articles in full, and only then filled in the relevant web-forms. They did not read the source on-line. This may mitigate some of the conclusions reached in the evaluation of the second category of exercises described above. There, it seemed that mixed media (print

and electronic) was a hindrance to the students completing the exercise. Here it seemed the main means whereby the exercise could be completed.

Finally, the students felt that the skills of close reading of texts cannot be carried out entirely electronically. By this they not only meant that mixed media was necessary, but that there must be classroom preparation and follow-up to the close reading of complex texts. Without this, the exercise is insufficiently embedded in the curriculum.

The conclusions from the evaluation of the comprehension exercises can be summarised thus:

1. The exercises may demand skills which the students rarely use themselves. They have grown accustomed to skim reading and the speedy acquisition of information. An exercise which develops skills of close reading needs to be designed with due consideration given to the difficulty of reactivating this skill in the students.
2. The skills of close reading required by comprehension exercises may mean that a mixed media environment functions best—as print and electronic (or film and electronic) are blended.
3. The skills of comprehension, employed in the close reading (or watching) of sources, cannot be divorced from the curriculum of a unit/module, or indeed a programme. They are not skills students can attain without reference to a broader learning experience.

Conclusions

In the course of the project I designed 22 web-based learning exercises, trialling them with students, with a view to developing the skills laid down in the Benchmark Statement. In general I witnessed skills progression in the students on completion of the exercises, and this was confirmed in the feedback sessions. The seminar presentations improved and in language classes, student reading skills also improved. Similarly, the essays I received on completion of the unit showed some progress in the close analysis of specific texts and the development of evaluative skills in the assessment of sources. Of course I cannot say how many of these skills would have been developed without the exercises. That is, merely by progressing through a degree programme, students develop and hone skills. Whether or not the exercises were crucial to this progression is unknowable. Student feedback, however, did indicate that the students felt that their skills levels had progressed as a direct result of the exercises.

I did, however, learn a number of important lessons along the way concerning the design and development of the exercises. Firstly, it is clear that the exercises cannot be seen as a substitute for classroom teaching.[22] Students at universities (or at least students at my university) want class contact with tutors. Web exercises need to be incorporated into this contact forum, and cannot exist separate from it. Sometimes the skills assessed by the exercises need to be developed within the curriculum as a whole. At other times an exercise needs to be introduced in detail before the student's completion of it, and be followed by extensive feedback sessions on student performance, both individually and as a cohort. In short, web-based exercises can, if designed well and carefully integrated into the curriculum of a particular unit/module, ensure the attainment of a number of the skills laid out in the Benchmark Statement for TRS.[23]

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[22] For similar conclusions, see Jill Sweeney, Tom O'Donoghue and Clive Whitehead 'Traditional face-to-face and web-based tutorials: a study of university students' perspectives on the roles of tutorial participants' *Teaching in Higher Education* vol.9.3, (July 2004), pp.311-323.

[23] For comparison, see Kim McShane, 'Integrating face-to-face and online teaching: academics' role concept and teaching choices' *Teaching in Higher Education* vol.9.1, (July 2004), pp.3-16.

However, tutors should not see them as a possible avenue for reducing their workload (they do not, believe me), nor should they see them as a simple way of fulfilling benchmark requirements. A unit/module which did not use web-based materials cannot simply have these exercises tacked on to satiate the demands of quality assurance. In my experience, the unit/module has to be redesigned with these exercises in mind, and this, unsurprisingly, requires thought and consideration on the part of the tutor.

Why Medical Ethics Should Not be Taught by Philosophers

By Christopher Cowley

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I n many UK medical schools,[1] the ethics content seems to be delivered, or at least co-ordinated, by academic philosophers. Presumably philosophers are considered most qualified for this role in virtue of their particular training in analysis and exploration of ideas and in clarifying concepts, assumptions and consequences; and there seems to be no apparent reason why such training cannot be brought to bear on the problems that characterise the world of

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[1] Most of what I have to say about medicine, medical schools, medical students and medical ethics will probably apply to the other people-oriented professional schools, such as nursing, physiotherapy, and social work. My own experience has been entirely in a medical school, and so I shall draw from that in what follows.

medicine. Philosophers are obviously the best people to teach moral philosophy to philosophy students. But I want to suggest that they are not the best people to teach medical ethics to medical students and that medical ethics is not best conceived of in philosophical terms. Instead, I shall briefly sketch some alternative directions that medical ethics could take.[2]

In philosophy departments, philosophical skills are developed over a three-year undergraduate programme. Honours students will typically write at least twenty essays before they graduate. Understandably, there is much less room for philosophy and ethics in the medical curriculum, and so the question arises of how best to use the space available.

Now there are certain things that ought to be taught, and that philosophers *can* teach, but which have little to do with ethics: critical thinking, for example. However, there is no particular reason why natural or social scientists couldn't teach this, since they make use of the same sort of principles and skills in their own work. Similarly, there certainly ought to be some basic elements of the philosophy of science and the philosophy of mind in a medical curriculum, but again, these could perhaps be adequately taught by scientists who are already involved. But if a philosopher is handy to teach the above, then all well and good.[3]

The legislative and dramatic

This paper is only about the medical ethics content, however. And I shall claim that teaching medical ethics to medical students ought not to be a scaled-down version of teaching moral philosophy to philosophy students. The main reason for this is because of the

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[2] As the lecturer in ethics in a UK medical school, I am therefore effectively arguing myself out of a job.
[3] There is also a place for philosophers (perhaps together with economists) when discussing the recurrent problem of scarce resource allocation. Insofar as this is a managerial problem for the health services, then it is a good matter for philosophical discussion. But insofar as it involves decisions made by individual healthcare staff, e.g. triage nurses and ICU consultants, then I would suggest that the philosopher is less able to discuss it, for the reasons that will follow.

essential double-aspect nature of ethics, making it unlike any other scientific subject (not controversial), but also unlike any other philosophical subject (more controversial). The two aspects are familiar under a number of labels, but I want to call them the 'legislative' and the 'dramatic' aspects. The legislative process involves *discussion* about, for example, the ethically best option from among those available in a generalisable situation, or the ethical duty that one person might have toward another; this is what philosophers do in the philosophy seminar. I choose the word 'legislate' in a Kantian spirit, because of the essentially impersonal and universalisable nature of the process and the outcomes, insofar as they aspire to recognised philosophical legitimacy. In moments of ethical perplexity, any decision about what I ought to do, claim the legislative enthusiasts, must be preceded by a discovery of what ought to be done.

What I call the dramatic process, on the other hand, involves the *cultivation* of appropriate behavioural dispositions, of ethical sensitivities to the relevant situational features, of the capacity to imaginatively engage with the likely consequences, and of a rudimentary grasp of ethical concepts; and this process is most familiar to those responsible for the day-to-day care of children. The successful cultivation of such dispositions and sensitivities will result in the adult knowing what to do in many situations *without* experiencing ethical perplexity. I call it 'dramatic' because the theatre seems to be a closer model than the parliament.

Most philosophers concentrate on the legislative aspect and leave the dramatic aspect to educationalists, psychologists and parents. However, a close look at what actually happens in ethical disagreement and ethical persuasion among adults reveals a much greater role for the dramatic than philosophers assume. Certainly I will sometimes be persuaded to change my ethical opinion on the basis of another's good reasons; but I am equally disposed to change my mind when presented with a compelling portrait of, say, the suffering that would necessarily follow from holding a particular opinion. As such, Dickens is as great a moral philosopher as Kant; and it would not be embarrassing for a social activist to reveal that he had

first been moved (rather than persuaded) toward activism by reading *Bleak House*.[4]

It is true that some philosophers have rediscovered 'virtue ethics', but again they are involved in *discussing* the virtues and their cultivation, rather than in trying to actually cultivate them among their students. The ideal of the (university-level) philosophy course remains to teach the adult students how to deliberate over, discuss and write about philosophical problems as well as the tutors do. The goal of a medical ethics education, they will say, is to improve (adult) students' ability to deliberate and discuss as much as the time available will allow, in order to help them to discuss and deliberate over ethical issues better once they become doctors.

The dramatic aspect of ethics seems to have been neglected, and I want to argue that this is a mistake: indeed, I believe the dramatic aspect should predominate over the legislative aspect in a restricted curriculum. This is of course not to deny the important place of law in the medical curriculum, and this will lend itself to the didactic and legislative model, and many legal problems will turn on important ethical questions. Interested students can also be encouraged to discuss medical ethical issues legislatively with a philosopher in an 'after-school club'. In what follows, however, I discuss the nature of the core ethics elements of the medical curriculum, and eventually adumbrate possible structures for dramatic teaching.

The medical world

In many ways, medicine is just another university course, and just another career. The medical training occupies no special place in the university prospectus, and the hospital staff are organised along the same bureaucratic lines as any large institution. Off-duty, doctors and nurses dress and speak and drive like the rest of us. But this similarity occludes striking dissimilarities, and it is easy to forget just how

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[4] An excellent discussion of this kind of ethical persuasion is to be found in Cora Diamond 'Anything but Argument?' in her *The Realistic Spirit*, MIT press 1995. See also Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, OUP 1990.

extraordinary medicine is in so many respects. Consider the GP: only in one other context (sexual pursuit) would we undress in front of a complete stranger, and allow him to touch us, sometimes intimately. Some of the information requested by the GP we wouldn't give to our closest friends or family, let alone a stranger: drinking problems, sexual problems, problems with continence. This represents a huge amount of trust, and gives the GP a huge amount of power, whether he wants it or not.

Consider the surgeon: in no other social context would a competent adult give his consent to have another person stick a knife in him. What on earth gives him *the right* to do so? I don't mean a legal right based on his elaborate skill and knowledge and ultimately on his certification by the appropriate regulatory body. I don't mean a moral right based on the patient's consent or on the likely benefits which will accrue to the patient. To understand the concept of a right in this context is to remind oneself of the extraordinariness of medicine.

Consider the hospital: in no other single building in human society is there such an overwhelming concentration of suffering, despair and death.[5] Our normal encounters with suffering and death are piecemeal: an elderly relative gets cancer, a cousin dies in a car crash, our young child has a fever. There is time to deal with it, time to distance oneself from it, time to move on more or less successfully. And yet the hospital staff have to deal with one illness after another in the knowledge that there will *always* be more to come. Certainly there is cause for joy after a successful treatment; but this cannot dispel the sheer mind-numbing mass of suffering that they are unable to treat.

This is not supposed to be a banal paean to the heroics of the medical profession. My aim, rather, is to remind the reader of that first awe and horror that he felt as an unprejudiced child upon realising what medicine was all about, and before accepting the story that it was a job just like any other. That awe and horror are the natural responses to the socially extraordinary nature of medicine.

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[5] A prison contains plenty of suffering, but it is a different kind of suffering in virtue of its putative link with guilt and desert. The overwhelming concentration of suffering in the hospital is similar, however, to that of the battlefield and the slum. And much of what I have to say can equally be said of those contexts. However, I am assuming a reader of Western middle-class background, with little experience of battlefields and slums.

Now here's the controversial step in my argument. It is medicine's extraordinary nature that exceeds the poor powers of common or garden ethics. The ethical education that most people receive in childhood equips them well enough for the classroom, the shop, the office, the nightclub, the oil platform, almost everywhere. But the hospital—if one really opens one's eyes to what is going on there—will overwhelm every newcomer, no matter what his age or background. Importantly, it will overwhelm the philosopher too.

I stress that this overwhelming is ethical, and not just psychological. After all, it is tempting to reconceive the experience as one requiring 'mere' psychological fortitude and objectivity, the sort of thing required by bungee jumpers—I put 'mere' in scare quotes because I do not want to imply that it is an easy process to grit one's teeth to the stench and the groans and the gore (just as it is not easy to jump off bridges), but in a way it *is* easier than having to deal with being ethically overwhelmed. The problem becomes stubbornly ethical when one is suddenly aware that there is *no good reason* why this child is desperately ill while you are healthy. The problem becomes massively ethical when this child is multiplied over and over in the wards across the country.[6] A 'good reason' for an illness, in this context, will obviously not be the causal explanation or diagnosis that some clinicians might consider helpful. But the philosopher is certainly in no better a position to offer reasons.

The ethical, however, should not be seen as comprising only situations of great suffering or great risk of death. Moral philosophers are perversely keen on such extreme situations in their examples, as if the problem can only achieve sufficient clarity in this way. But the ethical mostly comprises the mundane and small-scale, both inside the hospital and out: every expression of gratitude or apology, for example, is ethical. Similarly, the overwhelming nature of the ethical experience in a hospital is revealed not only by the child's reasonless suffering, but also by things like the mundane trade-off between efficiency and kindness. However well-meaning, staff will always be too few. Decisions have to be made at each bedside over how long to stay beyond what is clinically necessary, and over how to extricate oneself politely. These are ethical questions since they have a direct

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[6] Again, the same sort of sudden awareness of the striking contingency of the other's death on the battlefield, or the other's extreme poverty, is not the sort of thing that can be subdued by reasons.

impact on patients who are frightened, vulnerable and lonely. And again, there is no good reason not to spend another five minutes comforting this patient, here and now, whatever the obvious reasons for not spending five minutes more with every patient.

The limits of legislative discussion

So the medical student and the doctor have to learn to cope in order to be effective, and this can be done in familiar, more or less admirable ways, and I do not need to discuss those here. What is more interesting for me are the possible effects of the hospital experience, and of the efforts to cope with it, on the student's ethical understanding of the medical world and of his developing role in that world.

So can the philosopher help? Again, I accept that the philosopher may have a role—although not a privileged role—in teaching some bits of the philosophy of science and mind, as well as critical thinking. But when it comes to ethics I am much less confident. Let me develop what I have called the legislative aspects of ethics, which is what philosophers are good at. A typical medical-ethics seminar will turn on 'isms' (such as utilitarianism) or 'issues' (such as euthanasia). The sessions might well be popular and generate enthusiastic discussion. They might lead to extensive research and excellent essays. But assuming I am right about the student's being ethically overwhelmed, can these legislative discussions help the student make sense of his experience? I suggest not. The intellectual activity of arguing for a specific euthanasia policy is radically different from the intellectual perplexity of facing a particular patient asking for your help to die. Even when classroom discussions focus on a particular case, such as that of Diane Pretty,[7] the individual is still described in general terms, as part of a search for a consistent approach to *types* of patient (i.e. the Diane Prettys of the future).

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[7] Diane Pretty suffered from motor neurone disease, and she reached a stage where she was physically unable to commit suicide except by refusing to eat and drink. In 2002 she formally requested that her husband be granted immunity from prosecution for murder if he helped her to commit suicide. All levels of the judiciary, culminating in the European Court of Justice, rejected her request.

However subtle and articulate a knowledge the students may develop of the euthanasia debate, this knowledge will be compartmentalised away from their hospital experience of particular patients, in a similar way that some doctors keep their devout religious faith away from their consultations. So until the student encounters a dying patient, until he really listens to the dying patient, all discussions of euthanasia are little more than shrill posturing stirred up by facile journalistic accounts. Whatever conclusions the student may reach in the debating club will have little effect on what he feels and does during this crucial first encounter, let alone during subsequent encounters. That is why the philosophers' drastic thought experiments, e.g. of whether to shoot one Indian to save nineteen,[8] are at best pointless because one has *no idea* what one would do when actually faced with such an obscene choice; at worst they coarsen and dull our ethical sensitivities by misleading us into thinking there must be a right answer in every situation.

Can the legislative discussion of euthanasia not be of use *after* the student's first encounter with the dying patient? Again I would say not, because the encounter itself did not take place in the impersonal orientation and theoretical idiom that characterise the legislative efforts, and so a round peg ends up having to be squeezed into a square hole. The more appropriate high-level language by which individuals may discover the meaning of the encounters is literary or theological (both taken in the wider sense), rather than philosophical. The student has to accept the possibility that the most appropriate response to a patient's plight might simply be pity.

The two most important aspects of the encounter are its *particularity* and its *proximity*. Particularity means that all the details of the case are in principle available here, and we can go back as often as we need to. 'Going back' here involves not only a search for further relevant information about the patient's unique situation and wishes, but also the opportunity to talk over the situation with the patient, and help him to discover what his wishes are in the first place: it is too easy to hide behind the key legislative concept of autonomy by vouchsafing the patient what he wants (from among viable treatment options) without deeper discussion. Proximity means that the patient is 'in your face' rather than summarised in a textbook or on a

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[8] This example is from Bernard Williams 'Part II: Against' in: JJC Smart and B Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against*, OUP 1973.

PowerPoint slide. There is no avoiding their pain and their anger. Crucially, their proximity means that you will learn something of their point of view. Learning about another's point of view is not a matter of *accepting* that the patient has another point of view—of course he does; rather it is being *struck* by the other's point of view, being forced, if necessary, to confront it in a situation where the student is not entirely in control and is slightly vulnerable to surprise.

Philosophical discussions of '-isms' and issues teach the student to talk the talk without any guarantee that he will properly *adopt* the words. Certainly he will *absorb* expressions like 'autonomy' and 'best interests' and 'quality of life' without really understanding what they mean; they become shibboleths to ward off ethical criticism. But ethical maturation involves adopting the words: 'quality of life' only means something when it is used in the context of a discussion with a real patient making terrible decisions that will affect his quality of life. Does he want to start the chemo now or does he want to wait a little longer so he can finish a project? The particularity and proximity of such a patient making such a decision is what adds flesh to the words, and brings them to life.

The philosopher's lack of authority

In rejecting the legislative model, I am also rejecting the philosopher's particular claim to expert authority as a teacher of medical ethics. His authority is further undermined by his lack of clinical experience. The obvious response to such a controversial claim is to say that the philosopher is better able to preserve the requisite objectivity by remaining distant from the forum where clinical decisions are made, and is less likely to be distracted by the politics and the technology of the hospital. In addition, surely the principles of ethics are universal: hospital clinicians should be judged by the same standards as the rest of us.

However, imagine the following situation. A hospital wishes to organise a debate on the question of whether a patient can be covertly tested for HIV infection before surgery. Now any invasive surgical procedure carries a risk of needlestick injury and consequent infection

from patient to surgeon. Due to the special stigma attached to HIV, however, any testing normally requires the patient's explicit consent.

The hospital asks a philosopher to argue against the covert testing, and let us say that he presents strong and clear arguments in support of the position. Most philosophers would say that the particular identity of the author of the arguments is irrelevant to the arguments' strength and clarity: if they are good arguments, then they ought to win the debate on their own, as it were; if they are poor arguments they ought to fail. Through persistence and open minds, the ethical truth of the matter (of what, impersonally, ought to be done) will eventually be discovered.

But now consider that the philosopher has never himself been in a situation where he has to face a life-threatening risk of infection through needlestick injury. As such, his ethical opinion on the matter comes too 'cheap': he has never been forced to test it under adversity. Would he really refuse the covert testing as he says ought (impersonally) to be done? He might, but again I suggest that there is no way he can know for sure until he finds himself in that situation. And this ignorance, not of facts, but of himself, undermines any authority which he might claim in virtue of the strength and clarity of the arguments alone, or in virtue of his characteristic philosophical training. There is a very real sense in which he does not know what he is talking about.

I am not going so far as to claim that doctors are entirely immune to ethical criticism from non-doctors.[9] Rather, I am saying that philosophers are wrong to conceive of ethical discussion and disagreement as no more than the clash of ideas and reasons. Instead, in certain cases, the opinion's author may well have relevant experiences that allow him to 'stand behind his words'; that add authority to the opinion without adding any expressible discursive detail. And even when a philosopher does not stand by a specific ethical opinion and instead merely facilitates a legislative debate on an ethical issue, his clinical inexperience will undermine his responses to the opinions expressed. For example, the philosopher will be less likely to accept 'expediency' as an explanation for ethically *prima facie* dubious behaviour if he has not worked in an understaffed hospital and has not experienced that distinctive compassion fatigue that so often follows the ethically overwhelming experience.

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[9] There are similar debates about ethical criticism of soldiers by civilians.

Some positive suggestions

What I am advocating is an education in medical ethics focused more on the dramatic aspect. This would recognise that the cultivation of ethical dispositions and sensitivities has not come to an end for adults, and that the ethics sessions should primarily facilitate the student's own exploration of his ethical beliefs, in his own words, as arising from his ongoing encounters in his clinical placements. Now of course the philosopher *may* be perfectly able to facilitate in this sense, but only by sharply restraining his legislative urges. Ideally the facilitators will have clinical experience, of course, but there may not be enough available, and notoriously, some who do volunteer may have strong didactic impulses. But the best facilitators might well be those with theatrical experience. There is much that could be learned from lecturers in communication skills about how they recruit and train appropriate facilitators.

So I want to finish with a brief outline of the sort of activities I have in mind. I'm not sure any of them are particularly original, but they would assume a new importance within the context of my central argument.

Working with actors

This would be explicitly modelled on, and could be combined with, the teaching of communication skills. A professional actor would play the patient, students would rotate playing the doctor, and the other students would observe and take notes, and then feed back. The ensuing discussion would cover not only communication skills but also ethics. The actor would be provided with a detailed biography, and would be expected to improvise consistently and plausibly as required. The facilitator would be firm in keeping the discussion away from general matters of policy as much as possible: *given* that the law is thus and so, what should the GP do?[10]

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[10] One well-known textbook to advocate the combination of ethics and communication skills in such a way is Hope, Fulford, Yates, *The Oxford Practice Skills Course*, OUP 1996.

Confidential 'baggage' forum

This would be a compulsory session, once a semester, where students could bring 'baggage' to unload in confidence among a small group of their peers, in the presence of two clinicians. The clinicians would not be there to teach at all, merely to help the students articulate their concerns and possibly to fill in some relevant details about hospital policy or medical life that the student may not know about.[11]

The use of film and literature

The problem with case scenarios and vignettes is the lack of detail, and this threatens the particularity and proximity that is so important to deepened ethical understanding. On the other hand, it may not be possible to spend enough time with real patients for any number of obvious reasons. The use of literature and film to present a compelling and detailed portrait of the patient's experience can be an adequate substitute, and can generate much useful discussion.

A central place for theology

On the one hand it is easy to understand the rigid secularisation of the modern medical school and hospital, given the huge success of scientific medicine. On the other hand, by far the most sophisticated accounts of the *meaning* of suffering and death have been offered by the major world religions. At the very least, medical students should know something of these accounts in order to understand something of their patients' religious beliefs, rather than relying on the hospital chaplain to 'translate' for them. However, I would suggest that students who are themselves already religious believers could be encouraged to develop their theological understanding of medicine *alongside* the development of their clinical understanding.

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[11] This idea was originally suggested by Deborah Bowman of the St. George's Hospital medical school.

Visits to a hospice

It might seem that a hospice is insufficiently different from a hospital, in terms of what a student could learn from a special visit. However, the hospital patient might not know or accept his fate, he might die too quickly, and all the ongoing treatment will be distracting. In a hospice, the residents are more likely to have prepared themselves for death, and to be ready to discuss it.

Assessment

This has always been a problem. Multiple-choice and short-answer questions in ethics are utterly pointless, however efficiently they might test other subjects. At most, some ethical aspects of the law can be indirectly tested in this format. Essays are very inefficient for the huge medical cohorts; at best they encourage legislative thinking, at worst little more than regurgitation. Assessing ethics by practical demonstration (eg as an Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) station) might be feasible, but there are obvious problems with objectivity and consistency, and with the inability to prevent a 'check-list' approach.[12] I would suggest that the student's ethical conduct and character should be assessed more rigorously by the Fitness-to-Practice Board using the standard reports from tutors through the years. It might be possible to add explicit ethical categories to the report forms such as 'ethical sensitivity' and 'ethical maturity'.

Admissions

Applicants are normally selected for medical school on the basis of their academic ability and scientific knowledge, and this is clearly important. However, this should be supplemented by:

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[12] See: **http://wings.buffalo.edu/faculty/research/bioethics/osce.html**

(i)   an explicit prerequisite of at least a year working or volunteering in a health care facility, or at least in a charity that helps vulnerable people. The director of such a facility or charity would then be asked to provide a reference, which would include details of the applicant's character.

(ii)   In addition, there should be a minimum age of 23, although the applicant need not already be a graduate. It is enough that he has already seen a little more of the world, and has a character that has settled a little more, than the 18-year-olds who make up the bulk of British first-year medical students.

Future Discourse 2005:

Papers

In July 2005, the Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies hosted an international conference at the University of Leeds, *Future Discourse: learning and teaching in philosophy* for discussion of the current state of philosophy learning and teaching across a range of diverse fields. The conference was a great success and very much appreciated by all those who attended. There will be a second conference in 2007 and a call for papers will be issued in 2006.

The following papers represent a selection of the topics and range of interests covered by the conference participants.

Kant on Teaching Philosophy

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1. Introduction

I n 1765, Kant issued an *Advertisement* for the four lecture courses he would be delivering in the winter semester of 1765/66, on Metaphysics, Logic, Ethics, and Physical Geography (Kant 1905). Instead of merely outlining the course syllabuses, Kant prefaced the document with what would nowadays be called a 'statement of teaching philosophy'.[1] As far as I am aware, this is the only place

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[1] As a teacher of philosophy, I find this expression profoundly irritating, because of the ambiguity between 'teaching *philosophy*', and '*teaching* philosophy'. It also makes it almost impossible to use a search engine to find anything about teaching *philosophy*, since most of the hits are statements of *teaching* philosophy.

where he explains his approach to teaching,[2] and it is an approach which (apart from the first point below) is remarkably consistent with what professional educationalists consider to be best practice in the 21st century.

In view of the radical nature of Kant's ideas, it is surprising how little attention has been paid to them. John Ladd (1982) summarises the *Advertisement* in a general account of Kant as a teacher, derived largely from Vorländer's biography. His main purpose is to show that Kant's approach to the teaching of philosophy presupposes that philosophy is very different from other disciplines, in that it fosters the independence of thought which is central both to the concept of enlightenment and to the concept of the autonomy of the will in ethics. Eugene Kelly (1989) provides a complete translation of the *Advertisement* into English, and prefaces it with a few brief remarks. Interestingly, Kelly is almost entirely negative about the *Advertisement*. He says that if Kant had submitted it for publication in the *APA Newsletter on Teaching Philosophy* (of which Kelly was editor at the time), he would have rejected it, on the grounds that it was too long-winded, it contained too much technical terminology and it said too little about the *content* of his lectures. Its only saving grace, according to Kelly, was that Kant showed a genuine *concern* for his students.

The articles by Ladd and Kelly are the only two writings I have been able to find which discuss Kant's *Advertisement* in any detail. In what follows, I shall give a much more sympathetic account of Kant's approach to teaching philosophy, and relate what he says to current theories of good practice in university education.

2. Students too Young for Philosophy

Kant starts off on the wrong foot by telling his prospective students that they are too young to study philosophy, since their understanding

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[2] Kant's late work *Pädagogik,* edited by F.T. Rink, might be expected to contain something about teaching philosophy; but in fact it is about the upbringing of children, and not 'pedagogy' in the modern sense.

and reason are not yet mature enough for it. Being taught philosophy too young is the cause of:

> the precocious garrulousness of young thinkers, which is blinder than any other form of self-conceit, and less curable than ignorance.

It is unclear from the rest of the document how far Kant believed the problem could be overcome. If he seriously believed, with Plato for example,[3] that there is a minimum age below which philosophy cannot be taught without doing more harm than good, then he should not have been teaching philosophy to undergraduates at all. And it needs to be remembered that students entered university even younger than is the norm today—Kant himself matriculated at the age of 16 (Kuehn 2001, 62). If he merely believed that there was a problem which could be addressed by more enlightened teaching methods, then he could have been less patronising, and given his students more positive encouragement. He should have addressed them directly rather than in the third person, as did his contemporary John Stewart at Aberdeen, in his *Some Advantages of the Study of Mathematics, with Directions for Prosecuting the Same* of 1748 (Wood 1993, 10–11). Again, he should have told them, for example, that they were embarking on a peculiarly difficult but rewarding course of study, which he would help them through.

Nevertheless, Kant did believe that it was possible to teach philosophy to young people, provided the teaching followed the natural order in which the human understanding develops. The problem was not so much that undergraduates were too young, but that certain preliminary stages had to be gone through before students were introduced to philosophy itself. As Kant says:

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[3] Plato set the minimum age as high as 50 (*Republic*, 540a), though Socrates was perfectly happy to discuss philosophy with youngsters such as Theaetetus. In the late 1980s there was a public debate as to whether philosophy should be taught at A-level, with some professional philosophers arguing that, although students were mature enough at 18, they were not at 16. In my view, children are more open to philosophical discussion before they are subjected to the rigidities of GCSE and A-level curricula. Some of the most exciting philosophical discussions I have witnessed have involved primary schoolchildren using the methods of Matthew Lipman (Lipman 1988). Kant (1912a, 146 fn.), seems to backtrack somewhat when he says 'Thus it is quite easy to ground enlightenment [i.e. thinking for oneself] in *individual subjects* through their education; one must only begin early to accustom young minds to this reflection.'

The natural progress of human knowledge consists in the understanding:

- first training itself to arrive at clear judgments on the basis of experience;

- then attaining concepts through these judgments;

- then knowing these concepts through reason, in relation to their foundations and consequences;

- and finally knowing them as a coherent whole by means of science [in the German sense of *Wissenschaft*, meaning the systematic knowledge of any discipline].

Teaching must follow exactly the same route.

In other words, students should not be presented with highly abstract concepts until they have matured enough to understand them. This means starting by making judgments about particular cases, and only later bringing them together into a theoretical structure. This is good advice for any discipline, and it anticipates modern educational techniques, such as problem-based learning, and the use of case studies. To give just one example, it is notoriously difficult to teach statistics to students of psychology or economics, if it is presented as an abstract system which has to be mastered before it is applied. It is much better to start by introducing individual statistical techniques as and when they are needed for solving particular problems, and only later to put them into a theoretical context. Much the same might be said of formal logic, which often mystifies students if it is not first applied to concrete and relevant examples of reasoning.

3. Philosophy and Employability

Kant's implicit message is that, to be a genuine philosopher, you must have attained the last of the above stages. However, this stage is *not* relevant to employability, because Kant agreed with Socrates (Xenophon 1923, 1.6.13) that philosophy should not be a paid profession (despite the fact that Kant himself received a salary as a philosopher):

> you will clearly see that it is very unnatural for philosophy to be a paid profession, since it contradicts its essential nature if it accommodates itself to the craziness of market forces or the rule of fashion.

Instead:

> by its very nature, it should essentially be reckoned only as an adornment of life, and, so to speak, one of its dispensable embellishments.

According to Kant, one of the evils of modern society was that people considered it necessary to be a sophisticated intellectual in order to advance in life. There was therefore pressure on the universities to give students a semblance of philosophical wisdom, without going through the stages necessary for their intellectual development. The consequences were dire:

> the students pick up a sort of reason before their understanding is fully developed. They wear borrowed scientific knowledge, which is, so to speak, draped over them rather than having grown within them. Consequently, their mental capacity is as undeveloped as it was before, but at the same time it has been seriously corrupted by the delusion of wisdom. This is the reason why you often come across intellectuals (especially academics) who show little understanding, and why universities send more dull wits out into the world than any other state institution.

This is strong language indeed, and one wonders what Kant's colleagues would have thought of his addressing his students in such terms. Kant was equally rude about (at least some) academics in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In B172–3, he argues that judgment, or the ability to apply rules to particular cases, is an innate ability, which cannot be taught. It cannot be taught, because teaching consists in supplying 'rules drawn from the insights of others', and if the person concerned cannot apply rules, they cannot apply any higher-order rules as to the exercise of judgment. In a footnote he adds:

> Lack of judgment is essentially what is called 'stupidity', and it is the sort of handicap which cannot be remedied. If people are obtuse or mentally limited simply because they lack the appropriate level of understanding, or concepts of understanding, they can certainly be improved through education, even to the point of becoming scholarly. But since

> lack of understanding is usually accompanied by lack of judgment, it is not unusual to come across very learned people who, in the application of their learning, often betray that lack of judgment which can never be rectified.

These 'scholarly' and 'very learned' people presumably include fellow academics.

So far, Kant has stressed the irrelevance of philosophy to employability. The other side of the coin is that all the stages of intellectual development necessary to become a philosopher are highly relevant to employability, except for the final stage:

> It is expected that a teacher will educate students first to use their *understanding*, then to use their *reason*, and finally to become *academics*. Most students do not become academics. So the advantage of such a method is that, even if students never reach the final stage, their education has made them better trained and more intellectually accomplished for a non-university career.

Indeed, university teachers are neglecting their duty if they do not inculcate general intellectual skills:

> The trust of the state is being abused if teachers fail to increase the intellectual abilities of the young people in their charge, and educate them to *their own* more mature insight in future, but instead deceive them with a supposedly already complete philosophy, which was thought up for their benefit by other people.

In other words, teachers should remember that only a small proportion of their students are going to become academics. Students should be taught in such a way that they all develop their understanding so as to benefit them in any later career. This is also essential for those few students who are destined to become academics, since they will become bad academics if their heads are filled with abstractions before they are ready for them—postgraduate training can be left till later.

Again this is good advice. Some academics think of university as a training school exclusively for future academics. For example, Dennis Hayes (Hayes 2003) writes:

> . . . [the] sole purpose [of the university], as a creator of knowledge, is research, and such 'teaching' that goes on is subject to the requirements of the research process. . . . The

only test of the success of university 'teaching' is whether it produces a new generation of creative and critical academics.[4]

Related to this is the widespread feeling among academics (and students) that anyone who fails to obtain a reasonable 2.1 is really a failure, because they are not qualified to proceed to postgraduate research.[5] Such an attitude has always been unsustainable, and it is even less sustainable in an age of state-supported mass higher education. As Kant was aware, philosophy is the ideal subject for developing the understanding, or, as we might put it today, for training students in 'transferable' or 'key' intellectual skills and attributes. The corollary is that these skills should be made explicit; that teaching methods should focus on developing them through the subject content of the discipline; and that students should be assessed positively on the extent to which they have acquired such skills (as well as knowledge), and not negatively on the extent to which they have failed to make the grade as potential academics.

Kant's biographer, Manfred Kuehn (Kuehn 2001, 358–9), citing Rudolf Malter (Malter 1990, 398), tells the following little story, which throws further light on Kant's attitude towards the majority of his students in the middle:

> One of Kant's students reported that he often introduced his lectures by saying that he lectured neither for the very bright (*Genies*), because they would find their own way, nor for the stupid, because they were not worth the effort, but only for the middle, who were seeking to be educated for a future profession.

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[4] See also my reply (MacDonald Ross 2003).

[5] This became very evident during a nationwide consultation carried out in the mid 1990s by the then Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC). It attempted to formulate a definition of 'graduateness' which would apply to *all* graduates, whatever their subject and whatever their degree class. The project failed, partly because of the difficulty academics had over specifying any positive skills or attributes distinguishing graduates with a low class of degree from non-graduates. The HEQC's successor, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), took the bit between its teeth, and produced 'qualifications frameworks', defining minimum standards of attainment for all graduates (QAA 2001). Interestingly, these include just the sorts of critical and argumentative skills Kant considered to be exclusive to *philosophy* graduates. For further discussion of the qualifications frameworks, see MacDonald Ross 2002, 106–111.

One might quibble about Kant's neglect of the extremes—the best students can be stimulated to an even higher level of performance, and the weak can often be raised to an acceptable level. But his point remains that the focus should be on the large majority of students in the middle, who are unlikely to become academics.

4. Philosophy as *sui generis*

Kant makes a sharp distinction between the teaching of philosophy and that of other disciplines, on the grounds that other disciplines have a body of knowledge which can be taught, whereas philosophy does not. There is no textbook of philosophy, because there are no established philosophical facts. As he puts it:

> Many of those who have learned history, jurisprudence, mathematics, and so on, nevertheless decide on their own accord that they have not yet learned enough to teach it to others. On the other hand, why are there so many people who can seriously imagine themselves, in addition to their other business, being perfectly able to pontificate about logic, morality, and the like, should they wish to get involved in such trivialities? The reason is because in the former sciences there is a common standard, whereas in the latter everyone has their own.

The mistaken belief that there is a body of philosophical knowledge which can be transmitted to students is:

> the origin of an illusory science, which passes for genuine currency only among particular people in a particular place, but is rejected everywhere else.

If Kant had been writing after he had developed his critical philosophy, he would have had to modify this claim. Although he retained the view that *metaphysics* as a body of transcendent knowledge cannot possibly be a science, he came to believe that the synthetic a priori knowledge contained in the Transcendental Analytic could be taught as a systematic doctrine like any other science. This would have been what he confusingly calls his *System of Metaphysics*, which he promised in the Preface to the second edition of the *Critique*

of Pure Reason (Kant 1904, Bxxxvi), but which he never wrote. It is confusing because he normally uses the word 'metaphysics' in the pejorative sense of the illusory science of transcendent reality—God, immortality, freedom, and cosmology. So his mature position would have to be that there *are* some philosophical facts in relation to the world of experience, but that there is no body of *metaphysical* knowledge about the reality which transcends experience.

Many philosophers will no doubt disagree with Kant's claim that there is no metaphysical knowledge, and may even see it as reinforcing the student relativism they strive to overcome. However, this is not a reason for rejecting Kant's approach to the teaching of philosophy, because everyone must at least agree that all claims to metaphysical knowledge are *contested*. This means that students cannot become philosophers unless they learn to think and reason for themselves, rather than absorb a body of established knowledge, like lawyers or medics.

Elsewhere Kant makes it clear that philosophy is *sui generis*, not merely in the negative sense that it lacks of body of knowledge, but in the positive way it develops the habits and skills of rational criticism. In *What is Enlightenment?*, Kant (1912) begins with the following clarion call:

> Enlightenment is man's release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. Self-incurred is this tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. *Sapere aude*! 'Have courage to use your own reason!'—that is the motto of enlightenment.

Kant accepts that there are many circumstances when people must toe the party line: civil servants and soldiers must do what they are told, and pastors must preach the teaching of the church, even when they disagree. But in an age of enlightenment, everyone has the separate right to function as a 'scholar' (*Gelehrter*), as Kant puts it— that is, to publish writings which subject established policies to rational criticism.[6] And as we shall see, it is this 'scholarly' disposition which is developed only through the teaching of philosophy.

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[6] Kant says more about this in 1912a, 144–146.

In the *Conflict of the Faculties*, Kant (1907) argues explicitly that the Faculty of Philosophy is superior to the higher faculties of Divinity, Law, and Medicine, which are 'higher' only in the sense that these subjects are studied after a degree in philosophy. Its superiority consists in the fact that, whereas the higher faculties merely provide a professional training, philosophy uses reason to criticise the very foundations and methods of the other disciplines. It is interesting to note that, in modern times, research has shown that graduates in philosophy are better prepared for postgraduate programmes in subjects such as business studies and law than graduates in explicitly vocational disciplines (Adelman 1984).

Kant's triumphalism about the special nature of philosophy is unlikely to endear him to the teachers of other subjects. At least in recent times and in the West, it has been the mission of universities to produce graduates of *all* disciplines who are distinguished from mere trainees by being autonomous, critical thinkers about their specialism. Kant may well have been correct about how students in other faculties were taught in the eighteenth century, but the very idea of a university has moved on since then. However, the real question is whether actual educational practice conforms to the rhetoric. When I said at the beginning that Kant's prescriptions for the teaching of philosophy were remarkably close to modern educational theories, I was referring to theories about university education in general, covering all disciplines. But unlike other social scientists, educationalists are as *pre*scriptive as they are *de*scriptive. They are not primarily concerned to describe how university teachers actually teach, but how they *ought* to teach if they are to achieve the objectives of a university education. The general view is that the traditional format of lecture, seminar, and sat examination are not conducive to autonomous critical thinking, and that teachers in all disciplines (including philosophy) need to change their ways quite radically—and in precisely the way Kant recommends. Kant's claim about the special nature of philosophy would have seemed much less outrageous if he had said that philosophy is unique in that it *cannot* be taught by traditional didactic methods without turning it into a pseudo-science, and that other disciplines would be taught *better* if they used the methods which are necessary for philosophy.

5. Starting from the Students' Level

If we now move to Kant's more specific recommendations as to how philosophy should be taught, he says that teachers should take into account the level of understanding which students have actually attained, and not assume that they have the same level of understanding as the teacher:

> But all this must be proportionate to the level of understanding which the preceding exercise must necessarily have brought about in the students, and not to the level of understanding which the teacher observes (or thinks he observes) in himself, and which he even falsely assumes to be present in his students.

This may seem obvious, but it is a common failing of teachers in all disciplines to assume that students are, or ought to be, capable of understanding anything which the teachers themselves can understand. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that, in the post-Humboldtian university, teaching is supposed to be conducted in the context of the latest research, which encourages teachers to talk above the heads of their students. However, this ideal can be realised without assuming that students are capable of understanding the latest articles in journals intended for an audience of professional academics (MacDonald Ross, forthcoming). If we are to give students a hand-up towards our own level of understanding, we must reach down to where their hands currently are.

It is also worth noting another of Kant's digs against his fellow academics—that they themselves sometimes understand less than they think they do.

6. Philosophy as an Activity

Kant's next recommendation comes in the form of a sound-bite:

> students should not learn *thoughts*—they should learn *to think*.

This expresses the essence of Kant's educational philosophy, and it is in complete accordance with the modern stress on active learning.

Students should not be the passive recipients of the thoughts of others, but they should acquire the ability to think for themselves. Graduates who have acquired this ability will continue as life-long learners, whereas those who have merely learned what they have been taught are unlikely to develop further.

7. The Teacher as Guide

There then follows another sound-bite:

> the teacher should not *carry* [students], but *lead* them, if he wants them to be destined to *make progress* by themselves in future.

In other words, students will not make any progress after they leave university if they passively follow what they have been told. The teacher must lead them, in the sense that they are guided to make their own progress. This is essentially the same as the modern dictum (*horribile dictu*) that the good teacher should be 'a guide on the side, not a sage on the stage'.

8. The Transition from School

Kant then recommends that university teaching has to undo the damage done to students by the way they have been taught at school:

> Students come fresh from school, where the method of teaching accustomed them to *learning*. Now they think they will *learn philosophy*; but this is impossible, since they must actually *learn to philosophise*.[7]

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[7] Kant makes a similar point in the Preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason* (Kant 1904, Bxiii), when he says 'However, reason should not learn from nature like a schoolchild, who merely regurgitates whatever the teacher wants, but like an authoritative judge, who compels the witnesses to answer the questions *he asks them*.'

I am sure that most of today's philosophers will sympathise with Kant's complaint. Pupils at school are trained to give the best possible answers in examinations, at the expense of thinking actively for themselves. There are exceptions to this generalisation, but the pressure of league tables makes it increasingly risky for schoolteachers to encourage originality. When school leavers arrive at university, especially in subjects such as philosophy, they are confronted with a totally different philosophy of education, in which they are expected to involve themselves actively in their own learning, and manage their own time. They find it difficult to accommodate themselves to an academic culture in which philosophy is something you *do*, rather than something you are *taught*. Many of them assume that the curriculum will be delivered to them through their ears in lectures, and they flounder when they are expected to read difficult texts critically, and to think for themselves in discussion and when writing essays. Unfortunately, Kant doesn't provide any specific recommendations for bridging the interface between school and university.

9. Philosophy as an Inquiry

Kant's next recommendation is that:

> The distinctive method of teaching philosophy is *zetetic*, as some of the ancient philosophers called it (from the Greek *zetein*), meaning 'enquiring'; and it only becomes *dogmatic*, or 'definitive' in various of its branches when people's reason has already been more practised.

The term zetetic comes from Sextus Empiricus (Sextus Empiricus 1933, I.3), who described the sceptical school as:

> the *zetetic* school, because of its activity in enquiring and thinking.

Here Kant is flagging his indebtedness to Sextus, whose scepticism he was familiar with long before he was awoken from his dogmatic slumbers by Hume (Kuehn 2001, 48). He agreed with Sextus that we

are compelled to believe in the reality of phenomena, but that we can never satisfy our desire to know noumena; and the Kantian terminology of phenomena and noumena is already there in Sextus (Sextus Empiricus 1933, IV.9). Kant's method of thesis and antithesis in the Transcendental Dialectic is exactly the sceptics' method of balancing the arguments in favour of a dogmatic claim with equal and opposite arguments against it. In short, Kant's whole critical philosophy can be seen as an attempt to objectivise the world of experience against a background of scepticism about our knowledge of transcendent reality.

Kant doesn't specify which branches of philosophy become legitimately dogmatic, but he clearly thinks that students should learn in a *zetetic* way until their reason is fully developed. The implication is that, even if philosophy teachers have sufficient grounds for supposing that they themselves have access to the objective truth, they should not teach it dogmatically, but they should lead their students towards it zetetically. This is wholly in accordance with modern methods of learning by inquiry, whereby students are led to use the research methods of their teachers to construct their own understanding of the content of their discipline.

10. No Authorities in Philosophy

Kant's final recommendation is that any course text should be used, not as an authority, but as a piece of writing which should be thought through and argued with:

> the philosophical author used as a primary text for teaching should not be treated as the archetype of judgment, but only as an occasion for making one's own judgment about him, or even against him. The method of thinking through the text and drawing conclusions from it oneself is essentially what students want to be proficient at. Not only can it be useful to them, but any definite insights acquired at the same time must be treated as incidental consequences, and they only have to plant their fertile roots within themselves in order to enjoy an abundant harvest.

I am not convinced that all students *want* to be proficient at thinking through the text and drawing their own conclusions from it. Many would prefer to be told what to think. Nevertheless, Kant makes the fundamental educational point that university students, especially in a subject like philosophy, *ought* to apply their own thinking to texts, and not merely accept them as delivering a curriculum to be absorbed passively.

Kant is even more radical when he says that any insights acquired are incidental. His thesis is that education is primarily about developing intellectual competence, and that subject knowledge is relatively unimportant. This again is fully in accordance with current thinking.

Kant comes back to this point at the end of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (Kant 1904, B865), in the Architectonic of Pure Reason. Here he distinguishes between 'historical' knowledge[8], when people know only what they have been taught, and 'rational' knowledge, when their understanding has arisen from the use of their own reason. For Kant, it is only the latter sort of knowledge that has any value. As he says:

> So suppose someone has, in the strict sense, *learned* a system of philosophy—for example, that of Wolff. They would have in their head all the axioms, explanations, and proofs, together with the structure of the whole system, and they would be able to count everything off on their fingers. However, all they would have would be a complete *historical* knowledge of Wolff's philosophy. They know and judge only as much as has been given to them. If you criticise one of his definitions, they won't know how to come up with an alternative one. They have taught themselves on the basis of someone else's reason—but the capacity to imitate is not the capacity to be creative. In other words, the knowledge did not arise in them *from* reason. Although, objectively, the knowledge is certainly an instance of

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[8] In English and Latin as well as in German, the term 'historical' had long been used to contrast the empirical with the rational—for example, the Natural History Museum in London contains empirically discovered exhibits, and Hobbes contrasted the historical, or empirical, with genuine, deductive science in the Epistle Dedicatory to *De Corpore* (Hobbes 1839, ii). However, here Kant seems to mean second-hand knowledge (literally, 'learned by being told a story'), as contrasted with knowledge acquired either by direct experience or by independent reasoning. This is made clear in his 'What Does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking' (Kant 1912a, 141), where he contrasts 'historical' belief based on mere testimony with knowledge based on empirical evidence.

> rational knowledge, in the learner as subject it is merely historical. They have understood and remembered, that is, they have learned well; but they are no more than a plaster cast of a living human being. Knowledge that is objectively rational can only *originally* have sprung from the reason peculiar to humans. So knowledge in the subject can also be called rational only if it is drawn from the universal sources of reason. And the same sources, namely principles, give rise to criticism and even rejection of what has been learned.

Kant could hardly make it clearer that mere rote learning is not philosophy. For students to become philosophers, they must learn to *think* autonomously and critically.

11. Accommodating the Ideal to Reality

Despite Kant's bold claims about teaching methods, there is no evidence that he actually implemented them. Like everyone else, he delivered traditional lectures.

He was operating in a climate in which teaching methods were closely controlled by the state. At the beginning of the document, he says that the problem of teaching philosophy within these constraints 'cannot be completely overcome'. At the end he says that:

> Only extreme necessity, which has power even over philosophy, can force it to conform to what is generally approved.

I take this as a confession on Kant's part that managerial constraints prevented him from implementing his ideal philosophical education. A quarter of a millennium later, we must ensure that similar managerial constraints do not prevent us from fulfilling Kant's ideals in the 21st century.

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On Teaching Political Philosophy through Original Texts at a Turkish University

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In this paper I report on a project that is successfully introducing second-year university students to political philosophy through reading, discussing and writing about classic texts. Three features make this project worth discussing: first, the students involved are non-native speakers of English, studying at an English-medium university in Turkey, and so the context is challenging; second, the teaching is carried out through two paired courses (one for English and one for philosophy)—i.e. the project design is somewhat unusual; third it presents a case of text-based philosophy teaching which, as Crome and Garfield (2003: 4) note, has hardly been touched by the literature on teaching and learning philosophy.

After explaining the origins and design of the project, I will consider its implications from two perspectives: as a way to teach philosophy (or to teach students to philosophise) in a particular context; and as a way to encourage curriculum and instructor development through interdisciplinary collaboration. My overall conclusions are that this project supports arguments made elsewhere for text-based teaching of philosophy and that it shows how a trans-disciplinary curricular innovation can benefit students and instructors.

1. Origins and design of the project

The project originated when the Rector of Bilkent University asked instructors from the School of English and the Department of Political Science to design a new course in political philosophy for students in the departments of Political Science and International Relations. His two main stipulations were that the students should be exposed to unabridged classic philosophy texts in small discussion-focused classes, and that the course should lead to further development of students' academic skills, including English. At this time, the first question to be asked was whether the idea was feasible, given the context and the student profile.

1.1 An unpromising site for text-based Philosophy teaching?

For several reasons this project appears to be challenging. First, most of the students are emerging from an authoritarian education system[1]

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[1] See for example, Article 42 of the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey: 'Training and education shall be conducted along the lines of the principles and reforms of Atatürk, on the basis of contemporary science and educational methods, under the supervision and control of the state. Institutions of training and education contravening these provisions shall not be established. … No language other than Turkish shall be taught as a mother tongue to Turkish citizens at any institutions of training or education. Foreign languages to be taught in institutions of training and education and the rules to be followed by schools conducting training and education in a foreign language shall be determined by law.' See **http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/anayasa/constitution.htm.**

that tends to develop students expecting to learn 'right answers' to everything, that provides insufficient encouragement to any other forms of learning except memorisation, and that encourages a strongly hierarchical relationship between instructor and student. This state of affairs is further reinforced in higher education by the role of YÖK, the Higher Education Council[2]. This context matters—both generally, and specifically in relation to Philosophy. Regarding teaching and learning generally, the context in Turkey is one that Freire (1970) characterised as a 'banking' or transmission form of education. If however education should help an individual develop autonomy through the ability to think in critical and principled ways then a transmission mode is likely to be harmful because of the kind of instructors and teaching it creates and consequently the kind of learners and learning it creates.

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[2] See for example, the following articles from The Law of Higher Education.
Article 4: 'The aims of higher education: a) To educate students so that they: 1. will be loyal to Atatürk nationalism and to Atatürk's reforms and principles, 2. will be in accord with the national, ethical, human, spiritual and cultural values of the Turkish Nation and conscious of the privilege of being a Turk, 3. will put the common good above their own personal interests and have full devotion to family, country and nation, 4. will be fully conscious of their duties and responsibilities towards their country and will act accordingly, 5. will be objective, broad-minded, and respectful of human rights, 6. will develop in a balanced way, physically, mentally, psychologically, morally, and emotionally, 7. will prove to be good citizens contributing to the country's development and welfare and at the same time acquire the necessary knowledge and skills for their future vocations.'
Article 54: 'To those students whose behavior on the premises or otherwise is incompatible with the character and dignity of higher education students; who directly or indirectly restrict the freedom of learning and teaching; who violate the peace and order of institutions; who participate in actions such as boycotts, occupations and obstructions; who encourage and provoke such actions; who assault the person, the honor and the dignity of the personnel of higher education institutions; who behave disrespectfully; and who participate in anarchic or ideological actions or encourage and provoke such actions, penalties will be given including warning, reprimand, suspension for a period between one week and one month, or for one or two semesters or expulsion from higher education institutions, even though such conduct involves another offence.'
Amendment 3: 'Foundations are not permitted to establish educational institutions or units involved with military or security (police) matters.'
See **http://www.yok.gov.tr/english/law/content.html**.
I should note however that reforms are under way at all levels of education in terms of curriculum and instructor training.

Ramsden (1992) provides a useful framework for considering these issues. Regarding instructors and teaching (ibid, chapter 7), banking education encourages a 'theory one' view of teaching: the instructor knows the truth and can unproblematically transmit this into 'ignorant' students' minds in one standard way. This in turn encourages a 'surface approach' rather than a 'deep approach' (ibid, chapter 4) in students in which they tend to rely on unreflective, unengaged, unintegrative strategies of memorisation (Trigwell et al, 1999). Ramsden stresses that these two approaches do not reflect personality traits, but are rather responses to educational experiences. We frequently see these responses in Turkish university students, who tend to be most comfortable (and very capable) when rote learning and regurgitating straightforward information or procedures and least comfortable when asked to deal with ambiguous problems or evaluate. Students regularly report experiences of teaching and assessment that suggest that a theory one view of education is strong in Turkish higher education.

Now even if it might remain possible to defend a transmission mode of education for some topics in some subjects in some contexts, philosophy teaching and learning surely ought to be its antithesis. Various definitions of the aims of philosophy courses stress the importance of developing both higher level reading, thinking and communication skills and also a questioning and sceptical disposition or attitude (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2000; Cowley, 2001; Sellars, 2002: 126; Taylor, 2003: 47-51; Carusi, 2003: 111-117, Kezar, 2004). It appears that a philosophy course must involve doing philosophy, rather than just hearing about it. In Ramsden's terms, this calls for a deep approach to the subject from students and therefore a thoroughly constructivist[3] 'theory three' approach to teaching (see also Suddaby et al, 2002), in which

> teaching, students, and the subject content to be learned are linked together by an overarching framework or system. Teaching is comprehended as a process of working cooperatively with students to help them change their understanding. … Teaching involves finding out about students' misunderstandings, intervening to change them, and

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[3] See Carusi (2003: 96-110) for a useful brief description of constructivist principles in relation to Philosophy learning, and Dabbagh (2005) for a useful comparison of constructivist to other approaches.

creating a context of learning which encourages students
actively to engage with the subject matter. (Ramsden, 1992:
114)

Although there is already teaching and learning that follows
these approaches in my institution, to establish a new course on this
basis, given the Turkish educational context, still represents a
significant challenge for both students and instructors.

The second apparent challenge is that at English-medium
universities in Turkey, many students unsurprisingly have difficulty
studying high level content in a second language. If, further, this
content is presented through long texts in antiquated English, we can
expect particular problems with reading (Mann, 2000; Francis and
Hallam, 2000)4. The third possible challenge is getting students
whose major is not philosophy to see the interest and relevance of
intensively studying difficult philosophical texts and issues.

Two final challenges are general ones of establishing
successful curricular renewal in any higher education context. First, as
Terenzini (1999) points out, although research on student learning and
effective teaching can provide valuable suggestions about how we can
improve higher education, what actually happens in practice often
fails to take note of this advice. Second, because this project involves
inter-disciplinary collaboration there is the potential for various kinds
of misunderstandings and clashes of interest between the groups
involved. These include not just the English and philosophy
instructors, but also the students, the departments being served by
these courses and the university administration.

However, the challenges faced by this project are at the same
time urgent justifications for making it happen. First, the university
involved explicitly aims to undo some of the unfortunate effects of
students' previous educational experience and to develop more
autonomous critical thinkers who are less in thrall to authority and are

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[4] I should note however that from presentations and discussions at the *Future
Discourse* conference organised by the Subject Centre for Philosophical and
Religious Studies (July 1-2, 2005), it appears that some colleagues teaching native
speakers of English face more difficulty in getting their students to read classic
philosophy texts (see also Fishman, 1989: 362, Garfield, 2003). One possible
explanation is that a native speaker of English might be more frustrated by
antiquated English than a non-native speaker of English, who might simply see it as
just one more difficult foreign language text.

potentially more intrinsically motivated lifelong learners. Second, as explained above, the effects of the educational system not only impinge on students—they influence instructors too. The project described here seeks to challenge this situation and set an example for Turkish education. Finally, the project represents an opportunity to develop second-year students' academic skills beyond that enabled by the academic English courses provided to all first-year students at the university.

1.2 Design of the project

The project (which has been running now for over five years) has the following features. First, students read unabridged versions (or English translations) of classic works related to political philosophy. In both semesters there are two required books, and a choice of three from six others[5]. Depending on the focus of the philosophy course, students may be required to read all or parts of each book. Second, students are expected to do philosophy with these texts (rather than merely hear about them from a lecturer) through small discussion-centred classes (originally about 15 students, but now as many as 25). Third, the project challenges students' thinking, speaking and writing skills through its approach to teaching (including tutorials) and assessment (primarily extended drafted essays, presentations, participation in class discussion and open-book exams). Fourth, the project is built around two paired courses where students receive three fifty-minute lessons each of academic English and philosophy with the same students placed in each pair of classes. The academic English and philosophy instructors are then expected to closely coordinate,

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[5] Fall Semester: Plato, *Republic* and one of Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics* and *Politics*, plus any three from Plato, *Five Dialogues*, Thucydides, *On Justice, Power and Human Nature*, Cicero, *On Duties*, Aquinas, (CUP edition of) *Political Writings*, Augustine, *City of God*, and Machiavelli, (Hackett edition of) *Selected Political Writings*. Spring Semester: Hobbes, *Leviathan* and Bentham and J.S. Mill, (Hackett edition of) *The Classical Utilitarians*, plus any three from Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, Rousseau, (Norton edition of) *Political Writings*, Hume, *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of the Morals*, Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Marx, (Viking's edition of) *The Portable Karl Marx*.

with the intention that students develop relevant skills and knowledge through experiencing the texts first in their English class, before going on to work further on them with their philosophy lecturer.

For the English instructors, this design creates the opportunity to work again with students on their language and academic skills in a way that, because of the raised linguistic and cognitive challenges, has credibility (rather than seeming to be just more of the same English language teaching they experienced previously). For the philosophy instructors, it creates a more rigorous and effective scaffolding system to support students' struggles to deal with difficult ideas in difficult English, thereby leaving more time for philosophical discussion. The instructors involved have reached broad agreements on parameters such as the aims of each course, which texts must or may be used and which forms of assessment should be used (e.g. a minimum of two drafted essays with tutorial support), and have then developed their courses and collaboration between courses within these limits.[6]

2. Evaluating the experiences of the project so far

I base my comments in the following sections on information gathered from various sources: formal and informal interviews with English and philosophy instructors; informal interviews with students; quantitative course evaluation data provided routinely by students for the university; qualitative evaluation data provided by students comparing their experience of having different instructors in the two semesters; observation of philosophy classes by two instructors; course documents, web pages, teaching and assessment materials requested from instructors; and my own experiences as a instructor and coordinator of the English course. For this paper, I will focus

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[6] The following course websites currently provide further information on course objectives, and examples of teaching and assessment materials: for English, **http://www.bilkent.edu.tr/~spring;** for philosophy, **http://www.bilkent.edu.tr/~wigley**.

more on the philosophy than the English course, but this is not to imply that one has been more or less problematic or successful than the other.

2.1 Course designs, teaching and assessment practice

On both sides, instructors have varied in how they have implemented the project. On the philosophy side this variation has followed seven main dimensions: first, the extent to which a instructor-centred lecture approach has been abandoned in favour of the intended discussion-focused seminar approach; second, the extent to which class activity is structured around pre-determined forms and content versus the extent to which it emerges out of discussion in a particular lesson, or with a particular philosopher; third, whether the instructor's view tends to dominate discussion or whether students' views are given more chance to emerge and be critiqued; fourth, how much of each text and how many different texts each instructor attempts to cover; fifth, how much the instructor believes the students need to know about the historical context of the text in order to interpret it (see e.g. Thomas, 2005 on this issue); sixth, the extent to which assessment discourages a surface approach to learning (e.g. as is risked with reading or lecture comprehension quizzes) and instead encourages a deep approach through more open-ended, integrative and evaluative tasks (primarily essays); seventh, the extent to which instructors have adopted a process approach to supporting essay writing through drafting, feedback and tutorials.

On the English side this variation has followed four main dimensions: first, the extent to which the instructor has been able to gain students' trust in dealing with the philosophy texts; second, the extent to which instructors have managed to avoid providing 'warm-up' philosophy lessons through reading and discussing the texts and instead have managed to provide opportunities for students to develop knowledge and skills—both general and specific—for dealing with each philosopher's style of writing; third, whether the students' views are allowed to emerge and be critiqued rather than the instructor's reading dominating; fourth, the extent to which assessment tasks have developed higher level reading, thinking and communication skills rather than low level comprehension of texts.

One difference between the two sides is the extent to which the ideas in the texts are applied to current affairs in Turkey. In some implementations of the English course, the class activities and assessment tasks quite regularly refer to Turkish politics and social life. The philosophy instructors tend to be more suspicious of this approach as being potentially distracting from working on the texts philosophically in themselves.

2.2 Approaches to collaboration

The success of the teaching partnerships has also varied greatly. At one extreme, the partners have merely exchanged syllabi at the start of the semester, met perhaps once, and then communicated if at all by e-mail or (unfortunately) using students as messengers and couriers. At the other extreme, the partners have become team instructors with each appearing in the other's classes as often as possible, with constant communication, and with an agreement to deal with different parts of the texts in the two classes so as to maximise coverage. Between these two points are various degrees of collaboration and communication to ensure the two courses cover the necessary parts of the texts in tandem and that problems with teaching and student progress are dealt with quickly. The partnerships have varied a lot in how closely the English instructor is expected to cover the same (parts of) texts as the philosophy instructor. Several partnerships have made use of mutual observations of each other's classes. For a time, several partnerships had students write essays to receive feedback and course marks first from the English instructor and, after further revision, from the philosophy instructor. However, as an assessment practice, this created problems due to the differing interpretations of the essays by the partners, and because of the problems caused by tending to artificially separate linguistic and organisational feedback from content and argument feedback.

From informants on both sides, a repeated and unsurprising comment is that the success of the collaboration depends on both the interpersonal skills of the partners (in particular their abilities to respect, trust, listen, negotiate and compromise with each other), and their skills as instructors. If one side of the teaching is not successful it tends to harm students' attitudes towards the other side. Conversely,

successful English lessons appear able to prime students for intense text-based philosophical discussions both linguistically and, perhaps more critically, in their motivation to engage deeply.

The main point of conflict has been trying to define where (if anywhere) the boundary can be drawn between dealing with texts from an English language and academic skills perspective versus a philosophical perspective. For the philosophy instructors it is naturally problematic if the English instructor behaves as a wannabe philosophy lecturer; for the English instructors, versed in the Content Based Instruction approach (see e.g. Brinton *et al*, 1989; Brinton and Master, 1997), it is problematic to expect high level language and academic skills to develop except through serious engagement with academic content (i.e. the ideas in the philosophy texts).

2.3 Effects on students and student learning

Students generally have a positive attitude towards the courses and claim to be learning from them. To the extent that they are valid and reliable data, mean student grades suggest successful learning in both courses. Instructors themselves report that students improve in both English and philosophy courses, particularly in writing. Official student evaluation ratings are generally at least as high as for other required first and second-year courses, which is heartening considering the relative difficulty and intensity of both courses. Where a particular group of students have given low ratings, this has consistently been due to problems with an instructor that the group has found uncaring, unfriendly or aggressive. On the other hand, the data also reveal that a minority of the students do not enjoy the courses and/or do not learn from them. Our initial fear that most students might find the overall teaching and assessment approach hard to deal with has not been confirmed. Rather, many students have particularly enjoyed the chance to discuss ideas in small classes, to feel that their ideas are taken seriously by the instructor, and to receive extensive feedback, both written and oral, while working on their essays in both courses. In other words, evidence of a theory three approach to teaching seems to be reciprocated in a deep approach to learning—at least with some students. It is possible too that this project has been fortunate enough to have started in an era in Turkey's development in

which existing authoritarian social norms, including educational, are for various reasons facing rejection from a significant proportion of a young and increasingly aware student population (see e.g. Kinzer, 2001, especially chapters 6, 7 and 8).

From the perspective of the English and philosophy instructors, we can identify three main groups of students. One small group shows significant, sometimes dramatic, development both in skills and in adopting a philosophical stance. In their writing and speaking they begin to appropriate, not just mimic, the discourse of philosophy (Bartholomae, 1985). A larger group makes gains too, to the extent that these students cope successfully with the demands of the course, and hopefully (because this has not been formally measured) take away certain skills and attitudes that will help them in later courses. For both these groups, the philosophy instructors comment that it is when they retain the same students for two semesters that they see, towards the end of the year, the clearest shifts in students—most notably improvements in the philosophical quality of their writing. In terms of thinking, we see some of the changes described by Perry (1970, 1981), including a move from dogmatic certainty through relativism towards a constructivist principled approach to ideas. A final group fails to cope, sometimes for reasons unconnected with the demands of the particular courses. For some of these students, however, it is the design and teaching of the courses themselves that are the problem: we are currently unable to help them deal with the challenge (especially of reading), whether it be a skill related or a motivational issue. This might reflect a theory two approach, in Ramsden's terms. Instructors recognise the need to design activities for learning, but have not taken the next step of recognising (or being able to act on a recognition) that subject, activities and students interact in complex ways requiring varied, flexible and individualised strategies from the instructor.

Overall, however, we find that at least the first two groups of students are able to deal with the texts, the discussions and the assessment tasks. One reason for this is the level of support they receive through the two courses, in particular the process of reading and discussing texts in class in response to guiding prompts (e.g. comprehension questions, application, synthesis and evaluation questions, or tasks to identify premises and conclusions). They are able to reach coherent understandings and develop informed critical views of the ideas and arguments. Another reason is the collaborative

atmosphere, the sense of community of the classes fostered over the paired courses through group work, and the instructors' own struggles sometimes to make sense of the texts. That is, the reading process is difficult but not so face-threatening—an important factor in student motivation (Francis and Hallam, 2000: 312-313; Seifert, 2004). This is not to say that students do not adopt strategies to ease the difficulty— some turn to simplified or summarised versions on the Internet, or to Turkish translations. Interestingly, in the latter case they often realise that the problem was not language per se but the difficulty of (the expression of) the ideas, whatever the language.

2.4 Effects on instructors and teaching

Whilst part of the variance in student response to the courses can be attributed to differences that students bring with them to the course, another part can be attributed to the extent to which different instructors successfully adopt, in practice, the theory three educational philosophy encouraged by the project. My impression is that this has challenged some of the philosophy instructors due to their relative lack of pedagogical training compared to the English instructors. The project rejects the view that the instructor can enter the classroom, present a prepared lecture or implement a prepared activity, and then leave with the assumption that students should have learned. Once classes are organised around collaborative reading, interpretation and evaluation of texts then it becomes almost impossible for the instructor not to realise that each class is a unique educational experiment of the instructor's design, and that learning is a complex constructive rather than additive process. Certainty disappears, and we are forced in class into 'thinking on our feet', with a responsibility to reflect before, during and after action (Schön, 1983).

      However, this carries significant potential costs to the instructor. Martin and Luekenhausen (2005) for example discuss the anxiety that comes when a instructor radically deepens his conception of teaching and the subject matter he teaches. As Argyris and Schön (1974) have argued, we tend to behave in ways that maintain certain 'governing variables' (e.g. anxiety, self-esteem, workload) within some acceptable range. In a process of 'single-loop learning' we adopt 'action strategies' that maintain our internal balance. For an instructor

to move from a theory one to a theory three view of education requires 'double-loop learning' in which certain governing variables are allowed to change—which can be costly, particularly in a context where the philosophy instructors are required both to teach excellently and carry out publishable research.

One factor that appears to have triggered this kind of learning in this project is its inter-disciplinary nature. Specifically, the philosophy instructors have collaborated over a sustained period with English instructors who have significantly greater formal pedagogical training. The organisational culture of the English group includes norms of more regularly reflecting on, and publicly discussing, aims and objectives, course design, teaching and learning activities, assessment tasks and criteria in great detail. Of these, it appears that assessment criteria in particular have acted on some philosophy instructors as a 'threshold concept'; that is, a concept that has transformative, integrative, probably irreversible effects on a learner, whilst at the same time being 'troublesome' (Meyer and Land, 2005). When an instructor first comes across the notion of explicit assessment criteria (or more simply explicit pedagogical reflection generally) and then tries to set down what he requires from students, in an essay for example, it opens (for a theory one instructor at least) a Pandora's box of issues. It tends to mean the instructor has to reflect on the objectives, course design and teaching and learning activities that supposedly justify demanding a certain level of performance specified in the assessment criteria. It implies a need to problematise all aspects of teaching, to develop an 'explicit professionalism' (Harvey and Knight, 1996: 72), and to recognise a responsibility for student learning—hence it may well be troublesome[7].

This is certainly not to imply however that the philosophy instructors in this project have been heroically rescued by English instructors from some pedagogical cave of ignorance. Rather, I have presented my interpretation of how instructors have developed in somewhat crude terms for the sake of clarity and brevity. In their

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[7] I am using the idea of a threshold concept to discuss instructor learning, but it has more usually been used to consider student learning (see for example Davies (2003) on identifying threshold concepts in Economics). As far as I know, no research has yet been done for philosophy. One instructor I asked suggested it might involve recognising a commitment to truth-seeking, epistemic norms.

attitudes, almost none of the instructors fit Ramsden's theory one description—my interpretation is that the inter-disciplinary nature of the project has provided a mechanism to link those attitudes to developing practice. This seems to confirm well Cranton's suggestion (1994: 742) that we think of the professional development of higher education instructors as a case of self-directed and transformative adult learning: 'a process of faculty becoming aware of their assumptions about teaching and revising these assumptions based on critical self-reflection'. And the English instructors too have undergone analogous experiences. In their case it has been experiencing the rigour of reasoning that philosophical education can provide. In particular, this group of instructors has developed a much greater awareness of argument in essay writing compared to other English instructors in the institution. In particular, their approach to teaching, giving feedback on and evaluating student essay writing has moved away from a focus on rhetorical templates (e.g. the 'compare-contrast essay') towards what, for example, Martinich (1996), Erion (2000) and Cowley (2001: 47-48) suggest. The collaboration then has been useful in both directions.

2.5 Organisational effects

While the preceding sections have focused on effects on individual instructors, they already hint at the cultural effect on instructors at a group level, in particular the fostering of norms of greater communication, collaboration and judicious pedagogical standardisation within and between the two groups. In rejecting managerialism, Harvey and Knight (1996: 70-72) distinguish two forms of collegiate culture in higher education: 'cloisterism' and 'new collegialism'. The former they criticise as secretive, isolationist, individual, defensive, traditional and wary of change, producer oriented, clinging to power, elitist, using implicit quality criteria, and seeing the instructor as an information provider. The latter they praise as open, networking, team working, responsive, innovative, oriented towards students and participants, empowering, welcoming change, accessible, using explicit quality criteria, with the instructor as a facilitator of active student learning. From my previous discussion, the parallels between these cultures and teaching theory one and teaching

theory three respectively are, I hope, clear. Whilst we might see these categories as too crudely drawn, through my work with instructors across my institution, I have seen many of the features of the former and, unfortunately, fewer signs of the latter[8]. The current project however has encouraged many of the instructors involved to adopt or maintain features of the second culture.

As with the effects on individual instructors, I believe this is in large part due to the project setting two rather distinct teaching cultures to work together. However, it is also the *way* that this project has developed that has allowed this tension to be productive. In particular, it has operated more as an 'academic' collaborative research project than as an instance of 'managerialist' (Harvey and Knight, 1996: 68-70; Taylor, 2003) organisational change. Creamer (2004), for example, has analysed collaborative research projects and concludes (p.569) that five factors increase the likelihood of success: first, the members should have 'comparable levels of expertise in overlapping, but distinct areas' without large status differences; second, interpersonal relations and dynamics are important for allowing constructive negotiation; third, differences of opinion should be expected, valued and openly discussed; fourth, project members are responsible for asking for and giving feedback; fifth, there needs to be both enough time and suitable settings for quality conversations and exchange of opinions.

As I hope I have already illustrated, these have largely been realised in this project. For example, I have already stressed how the two sides usefully brought different (though overlapping) knowledge and skills to the project, and how extensive communication between instructors is encouraged by the paired course design. Additionally, regarding the first factor, an early decision was made that the two sides must consider each other as equals (although institutionally and in academic requirements, the philosophy instructors have a higher status). This has proved to be an important norm in terms of valuing the opinions of both sides in discussions. Although not all collaboration has been successful, the project has achieved a climate somewhat like Harvey and Knight's new collegialism, and largely avoided the 'contrived collegiality' that Hargreaves (1994: 81) warns

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[8] Wright (2005) provides an interesting study of differing degrees of communication and shared views about teaching in various departments at a US research university.

against as being not only 'controlling and manipulative' but also 'superficial and wasteful' of instructors' energies.

My understanding from talking to other instructors is that the project has crucially avoided being seen as stemming from some alien (and alienating) academic management fad, whose fates are well documented by Birnbaum (2000)[9]. It seems to have encouraged curriculum and instructor development in a way that 'official' development initiatives tend not to be able to do (Welsh and Metcalf, 2003; Allen, 2003), partly I believe because the leadership approach on both sides has generally been congruent with what the instructors would prefer. Kekäle (1999), building on Becher's (1989) categorisation of 'academic tribes', presents evidence that certain disciplinary perspectives coincide with preferences for different styles of leadership. Although it would require further investigation, it seems reasonable to suggest that in this project there is a preference for a soft, democratic and emancipatory approach rather than a hard, efficient, result-oriented style of leadership. And this has generally been the style adopted throughout the course of the project with concomitant benefits for the organisational climate and instructors' willingness to take on professional development.

3. Support for a text-based approach to philosophy teaching?

Finally, I would like to turn to two important questions for this project: the first is whether it makes the case for a philosophy course that is solely seminar-based. I tend to agree with Cowley (2001: 45) that lectures are particularly inappropriate for a subject 'which by its nature is an intimate and interactive discipline which cannot be easily conveyed through space'. Some other possible roles (see e.g. Hawley,

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[9] For example, Briggs et al's (2003) search for cases of 'continuous planning' in higher education departments draws extensively on imported management terms like TQM (or its academic equivalent CQI), when it seems to me they could equally describe the processes involved through the language of research, familiar to academics.

2002: 90) for a lecture of helping to organise the week's study, give an overview or raise questions in students' minds seem to me to be equally achievable now through course websites or handouts. For every hour spent in a lecture, the students lose one hour in the more intense context of a discussion-based seminar. Given what the authors I cited earlier in 1.1 consider as being essential philosophical skills and attitudes, it seems we should maximise the time spent in small group classes. More generally the students I teach spend a lot of time in other courses that are predominantly lecture based, so the philosophy and English classes may be the only time in the week that students have any chance to discuss at length and in great depth. Thus, we have also this reason to promote the (hopefully transferable) skills and attitudes that can result from these kinds of classes. Finally, I would claim that although lectures can be extremely well done they are more likely than seminars to promote a transmission approach to teaching. In our context, even where the instructor attempts to make the lecture interactive there is the risk that students will be intimidated from participating in a large lecture group. I should note however that not all the philosophy instructors I spoke to agree with these views; some saw a valuable role for lectures (if done well).

Turning to the second question, we need to ask whether, to the extent that the philosophy course is benefiting students, it is doing so because it is text-based (rather than, for example, issue-based). Is there something particular about a text-based approach to Philosophy teaching that encourages a theory three approach to philosophy teaching and a deep approach to philosophical learning? This matters because if there is no advantage in making students sweat through pages of abstruse English prose then we are wasting their time. Carusi (2003: 113) argues that 'pedagogically, the most important thing a lecturer can do for her students is to get them to *do* philosophy' [italics in original]. The question is whether or not *doing* philosophy needs to be based around texts.

Among the philosophy instructors, views differ. Some think the text-based approach is critical; others think an issues or concept based approach could also work. In fact, from class observations I learned that instructors naturally slip between text-based and issue or concept-based foci, and varied quite widely in the balance between time spent on textual analysis and time spent on ideas abstracted from the text. From the students' perspective, some appear to enjoy the reading challenge—and creating challenge (coupled with appropriate

support) is an important factor in encouraging a deep approach to learning; other students simply seek to avoid what they find to be the excessive, meaningless and alienating reading demands of the courses.

Despite this somewhat mixed reality, I would still like to suggest that there are good reasons to prefer a primarily text-based approach for the students I teach, and perhaps more widely. In this I draw on some of the ideas of Ross, Garfield, Crome, Saunders and other participants from a 2003 workshop entitled 'Teaching the reading of primary texts', part of the Future Discourse Conference organised by the Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies (July 1-2, 2005). Further discussion can be found in Crome and Garfield (2003, 2004).

Common to all the descriptions of the aims of philosophical education I cited earlier are those of teaching students to analyse other people's arguments carefully and themselves argue well partly through self-reflection about the soundness of their own arguments. In order to analyse we first need to read others' arguments well (whether spoken or written). As MacDonald Ross (2003) emphasises, close philosophical reading is a difficult discipline-specific skill that the instructor needs to model in class and to support and guide as students attempt to read. In my context at least I believe it is an important educational moment when the instructor publicly becomes another (sometimes uncertain) interpreter of text. Of course verbal discussion (e.g. issues based) is also a text to be read. But I agree with Garfield (2003) that there is something particularly effective about the presence of authentic written philosophical texts in class. What students often find as they struggle together in class with a text is that philosophical writers are themselves struggling to make meanings clear. Regarding the writing process, it's another important moment as students see that even famous philosophers have to set down their ideas on paper when they are still not fully formed. As Carusi argues (2003: 106), this struggle with representation is central to philosophy and it is when students get this that they are learning 'to recognise a *philosophical* problem' [italics in original]. I believe text-based teaching is a key trigger.

The value of having some classic text as the focus of discussion is further seen as the instructor helps students to analyse and find weaknesses in the argument. The problem sometimes with a philosophical discussion based on students' arguments about an issue is getting them to take each other seriously enough or to be

sufficiently adversarial. By contrast, from classroom observations I see students can be particularly motivated as they see the arguments of some famous philosopher start to come apart at the seams. And where preserving face is important, it is useful that while students may well be disagreeing with each other and the instructor in their interpretations, at base the target is something else—the text.

Garfield (2003) offers three (not necessarily competing) theses of text-based philosophy teaching: the 'very weak thesis' is that it is part of a general aim of getting students to read primary rather than secondary texts; the 'weak thesis' is that the text is 'contingently useful' as a starting point or focus for philosophical discussion; the 'strong thesis' is that there is a 'fundamental relation' between reading primary philosophy texts and doing philosophy. In the Turkish context too, all three are good reasons for using primary texts, and it is certainly encouraging to imagine that this approach can have such multi-level effects. Indeed I would like to add two further perspectives. First, as an English instructor, long, difficult primary philosophy texts provide excellent material for building a course to advance students' linguistic and academic skills. This dovetails with Cowley's point (2001: 42-43) about using philosophy courses to develop what he terms students' 'secondary' (i.e. general academic) as well as 'primary' (i.e. philosophical) skills.

Second, as someone involved with professional development, I find that text-based teaching can encourage an intensely reflective approach to teaching and learning. From close analysis of interviews enquiring into whether and how the experience of teaching changed instructors' conceptions of both teaching and the subject they teach, Martin and Lueckenhausen (2005) develop five metaphors of teaching which they label courier, builder, navigator, expedition leader, and pioneer. The latter metaphors are associated with the greatest reflection on teaching, learning and the subject itself. Regarding our courses, the question this study raises is whether certain designs of teaching encourage particular ways of thinking about teaching. I would suggest that whilst an issues-based course can undoubtedly lead to an exploratory, flexible approach to teaching, the simple material classroom presence of the words of primary texts that have to be confronted in all their complexity appears particularly able to produce a catalytic effect towards deeper ways of thinking about philosophy (and academic English) teaching.

4. Final comments

So where does this leave us? I hope I have demonstrated that it is not only feasible, but also advantageous to apply a text-based approach to philosophy teaching to the Turkish higher education context. Admittedly this is achieved through the support of the paired English course—but I hope I have also shown that the pairing of the courses is a valuable mechanism for further raising students' general linguistic and academic skills. Finally, I hope I have shown that important benefits have accrued to the instructors involved in this project, particularly through its inter-disciplinary nature.

There are however many questions still to answer. I recognise that my case for text-based teaching is not based on particularly strong evidence—it is certainly not based on any controlled educational experiment. Given that there is some variability in the way different instructors structure their courses and individual classes, it would be useful to investigate more thoroughly possible relationships between this variability and student outcomes.

Organisationally we need to reach some greater measure of agreement on assessment criteria and standards. As I have already argued this will have the benefit of drawing out fundamental issues about philosophy and philosophy teaching. As Sellars (2002, 118) points out, 'metaphilosophical questions should always be in the background of any pedagogical research. For how can one determine how best to teach philosophy if one does not first decide what philosophy is?' This process may either lead to descriptions that are sufficiently thin for all philosophy instructors to subscribe to, or an acceptance that there have to be differing but thicker descriptions for different instructors. There is a need to establish a system of classroom observation, particularly peer observation. On the English side the unit manager routinely observes each instructor once a semester, and occasionally peers also observe each other, and this could usefully be expanded. To my knowledge, on the philosophy side there is no peer observation, which seems a missed opportunity for instructors to learn from each other.

As instructors, there are various issues to investigate. To give some examples, we need to work on making the essay drafting process

more effective for students while not overloading instructors. The suggestions in McDonough (2000) and Werne (1993) seem particularly useful in this regard. Although we know that the more enthusiastic students already choose to discuss philosophy and the texts themselves in their own time, we should also investigate other mechanisms for widening out-of-class discussion (see Hawley, 2002; Carusi, 2003). We need to look more closely at the reading process to identify more precisely what kinds of interventions and activities can best support different students, by combining the insights of both linguistic and philosophical perspectives. Finally, we make no comparisons of our student outcomes with other universities inside or outside Turkey. Given the difficulties some colleagues report getting native speakers of English to deal with primary philosophy texts and write philosophy essays, it would be valuable to compare our students' products with theirs.

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How to Assure Student Preparation and Structure Student-Student Interaction

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Introduction

In a controlled study, Uri Treisman taught his students to check each others' work as they completed out-of-class assignments in groups.[1] He found that the D to F performance of the students in

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[1] Treisman, Uri, 'Studying Students Studying Calculus: A Look At The Lives Of Minority Mathematics Students In College,' *The College Mathematics Journal*, 23/5, 1992, pp.362-372; and Fullilove, R. E. & Treisman, P. U., 'Mathematics Achievement Among African American Undergraduates of the University of California Berkeley: An Evaluation of the Mathematics Workshop Program,' *Journal of Negro Education*, 59/3, 1990, pp.463-478.

these groups fell from 60% to 4%.[2] Importantly, Treisman's course content was not altered, nor did the grading standards change. This study shows that student performance can improve remarkably when teachers structure student interactions so that students engage course material in effective ways.[3] Craig E. Nelson has grouped Treisman's

[2] Treisman's results support the broader finding that performance of discipline specific academic tasks that involve detailed 'How To' instruction inculcate transferable critical thinking skills. See Halpern, D. F., 'Teaching Critical Thinking For Transfer Across Domains: Dispositions, Skills, Structure Training, and Metacognitive Monitoring,' *American Psychologist*, 53, pp.449-455; Halpern, D. F., 'Teaching For Critical Thinking: Helping College Students Develop The Skills And Dispositions Of A Critical Thinker,' *New Directions For Teaching And Learning*, 80, pp.69-74; Williams, Robert L. & Stockdale, Susan L., 'High-Performing Students with Low Critical Thinking Skills,' *JGE: The Journal of General Education*, 52/2, 2003, pp.200-226.

[3] Although less dramatic than Treisman's results, initial data suggest that students in my sections of Introduction to Philosophy classes, where adaptations of Treisman's and Nelson's insights are used, outperform their peers with regard to grades and retention in subsequent semesters.

Fall 2003

Section (No of students)	Concepción's Phil. 100 (76)	Other Phil. 100 (518)	Difference
Academic Outcome (Mean GPA)			
Semester of the Course	2.60	2.66	-.06
1 Semester Out	2.87 (Improvement +.27)	2.67 (Improvement +.01)	+.20
2 Semesters Out	2.89	2.72	+.17
Retention			
Completed 1 Subsequent Semester	95%	89%	+6%
Completed 2 Subsequent Semesters	84%	76%	+ 8%

Without further longitudinal data and controls it is impossible to conclude that my students develop critical thinking skills faster than their peers, but the beginnings of this longitudinal data is suggestive of a trend:

Spring 2004

Section (No of students)	Concepción's Phil. 100 (103)	Other Phil. 100 (381)	Difference
Academic Outcome (Mean GPA)			
Semester of the Course	2.69	2.66	+.03
1 Semester Out	2.81 (Improvement .12)	2.70 (Improvement .04)	+.11
Retention			

insights into three related areas that demand attention from teachers: (1) assure preparation, (2) structure student-student interaction, and (3) provide 'How To' guides.[4] I have addressed 'How To' guides elsewhere and a primer for preparing such guides may be found in the appendix.[5] In this paper, I argue that assignments that structure students' interactions (with the text and each other) with detailed procedures sustain student preparation by minimising miscommunication and conferring intrinsic rewards. I present a Read-Write-Discuss cycle as one example of this type of assignment.

Two reasons why students do not prepare properly

Teachers have relatively little control over some causes of student under-preparedness. Many students do not have the time to study as much as we, or they, might like because they must work for wages and few teachers have the financial wherewithal to grant scholarships. However, there are some causes of student under-preparedness over which teachers have significant influence. If we can understand the causes of student under-preparedness over which we have control, then we can address them and increase the quality and quantity of

Completed 1 Subsequent Semester	86%	80%	+6%

[4] Nelson, Craig E., 'On the Persistence of Unicorns: The Tradeoff Between Content and Critical Thinking Revisited,' in Pescosolido, B. A. & Aminzade, R., *The Social Worlds of Higher Education: Handbook for Teaching in a New Century* (Pine Forge Press, 1999), pp.168-184; Nelson, Craig E., 'Tools For Tampering With Teaching's Taboos,' in Campbell, Wm. E. & Smith, Karl A., *New Paradigms for College Teaching* (Interaction Book Company, 1997), pp.51-71; Nelson, Craig E., 'Student Diversity Requires Different Approaches To College Teaching, Even in Math and Science,' *American Behavioral Scientist*, 40/2, Nov./Dec. 1996, pp.165-175; Nelson, Craig E., 'Critical Thinking and Collaborative Learning,' in Bosworth, K. & Hamilton, S. J., *Collaborative learning: Underlying Processes and Effective Techniques: New Directions for Teaching and Learning, No. 59* (Jossey-Bass, 1994), pp.45-58.
[5] Concepción, David W., 'Reading Philosophy With Background Knowledge and Metacognition,' *Teaching Philosophy*, 27/4, Dec. 2004, pp.351-368.

student preparedness. In this section, I identify two related causes of student under-preparedness worthy of the attention of teachers; student misunderstanding of what is expected and a concomitant disconnection between student effort and grade-related performance.

Nelson observes that many students come to university with years of experience that create and sustain three beliefs: teachers value a regurgitation of facts; extensive studying is for nerds or people in need of remediation; and working together is cheating.[6] The work assigned by many philosophy instructors, particularly those who see skill development as a primary goal, may frustrate students with the beliefs Nelson describes. Unlike what some students expect, we are primarily concerned with quality of oral and written analysis. We view the mastery of material as a necessary prerequisite for superior argumentation, not an end in itself to be tested with multiple-choice examinations. Even what we mean by studying texts may differ from what students anticipate. We want students to take notes while reading, summarise content in their own words, and evaluate passages toward the end of deploying their knowledge of the text in argumentation. Further, insofar as reflecting upon one's values and beliefs is assisted by dialogical communication, we are also likely to encourage students to work together and argue with each other. In sum, many philosophy professors defy student expectations by requiring students to work more collaboratively and toward more complicated end products than many students appreciate. The result of this disparity between our goals for our students and their expectations is that even some otherwise hard-working students come to class under-prepared because what they have been trained to count as preparedness is not the preparedness that we want.

Students may also misinterpret our descriptions of quality work. For example, when philosophers ask students to support their conclusion with an argument, we often want students to rebut some small number of criticisms of an initially plausible, textually informed position. But there are many ways to support a conclusion. Some students believe that they have supported a conclusion when they have provided an autobiography that traces the origins of their belief. Other students believe that they have supported a conclusion when they identify a small number of facts that establish the provisional credence

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[6] Nelson, Craig E., 'Student Diversity Requires Different Approaches To College Teaching, Even in Math and Science,' op. cit..

of the idea. Students with these understandings of 'support a conclusion' may be confused and disappointed when they receive poor marks. The problem in such cases is not that such students did not support their argument. Rather, the difficulty is that they did not support it in the manner required by their philosophy professor; a manner that requires the development and rebutting of relevant criticisms.

Similarly, many students are liable to misunderstand the modelling we do in class. Kerry Walters found that some of his students concluded from his Socratic teaching method that philosophy is a meaningless game.[7] Students misinterpreted the questioning Walters pursued as a cover up for the fact that there are no answers or data in philosophy. If there are no answers, some students conclude, then the teacher must just be playing a trivial philosophy game. Competitive students may want to learn how to win this game. But ultimately, even competitive students may mistakenly conclude that philosophy is unimportant.

A related lesson many students learn through bitter experience is that sometimes a significant increase in effort on their part may have little or no influence on the grades they receive. For students who gauge success, and often self-worth, in terms of grades, this disconnection can be especially stultifying. Most students must triage their time because they are extremely busy. Students will decide to devote their energies to tasks that are likely to garner the greatest rewards. Students give low priority to assignments when they perceive little connection between their effort and a desired grade. Such students will appear unmotivated to some teachers. However, the problem is not that these students have some sort of character flaw (e.g. laziness). Rather, the problem is that these students draw a reasonable but false conclusion based on their experience. They reason that if one instance of hard work does not get the desired result, then no instance of hard work is likely to get the desired result. Of course, the problem is not hard work, but that they were working on the wrong things or in the wrong way. The right conclusion for students to draw is that they should change how, or what, they work on. For many students, there is nothing in their experience to lead them to this conclusion.

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[7] Walters, Kerry, 'On Bullshitting and Brainstorming,' *Teaching Philosophy*, 11, Dec. 1988, pp.301-313.

Although there are others, these two contributors to student under-preparedness suggest a common intervention. If teachers inadvertently support student under-preparedness by allowing students' misunderstandings of teachers' expectations to continue, and student effort drops off when teachers fail to show students how to work on the right things or in the right way, teachers should be excruciatingly explicit regarding our expectations and show students how to work in ways that are maximally beneficial. Especially for assignments early in a term, we should provide very precise statements of expectations and step-by-step instructions that focus student energies on the right things. By helping students adapt to, and appreciate the merits of, what are new demands to them, we help maintain a tighter connection between effort and grade-related performance and thereby encourage sustained effort. In short, to support preparation we must structure student activities.

Describing, modelling and structuring

To avoid a possible misunderstanding regarding what I am advocating, it is important to distinguish between describing successful end products, modelling behaviour, and encouraging preparation by structuring students' activities. We may describe a successful paper as organised, well-argued, textually informed, etc. We model behaviour when we provide written examples or enact in class what we want students to do. We structure student activities when we provide procedures for them to follow. Telling students to support an argument is distinct from supporting an argument before them, and both are distinct from showing students how to support an argument. Not all professors who describe successful end products and model desirable behaviour structure students' activities. I am arguing for the importance of structuring student practice.

Consider an analogy from music. Students interested in learning to play the piano are unlikely to return to a teacher who spends every 'lesson' playing a piece of music for the student. It is also unlikely that a student will remain motivated if, instead of letting the would-be pianist play, the teacher lectures about the features of a Schubert sonata and the masterful playing of a long dead impresario.

A potential pianist is likely to be particularly discouraged by a teacher who, without providing any guidance, tells the student to play like a near master and then gives the student poor marks for the attempt. Alternatively, students will enthusiastically return to, and learn from, piano teachers who show the student how to find the best fingering for a particularly complex musical phrase or how to strike the keys in just the right way to evoke certain emotions. Although necessary, describing and modelling only go so far. To give students the best chance for success, we need to structure student practice and allow students to 'play' for themselves to support a motivating connection between effort and increasingly masterful performance.

'Spoon-feeding' and intrinsic rewards

In teacher development seminars I have led, colleagues have objected that too much structuring of student practice amounts to spoon-feeding, which is assumed to be a bad thing. When 'spoon-feeding' means 'give students only easy, small tasks that require little effort' or 'do much of the work for students' it surely is problematic. However, when 'spoon-feeding' means 'show students how to do new tasks that are so demanding that they are likely to be unsuccessful without guidance' it is meritorious. If structuring student practice is 'spoon-feeding' I affirm the propriety of some 'spoon-feeding.' If 'spoon-feeding' is always problematic, I deny that structuring student practice is always 'spoon-feeding.' If we want students to perform very specific skills we should show them precisely how to perform them and allow for repeated practice.

Further, we encourage continued effort when we allow our students to feel the value of their appropriately focused studying. Exhortation only goes so far. Traditional sticks and carrots such as reading quizzes and credit for short writing assignments connect outside-of-class work to in-class events. But quizzes and credit appeal primarily to the pragmatic concerns of students. When teachers connect out-of-class work to intrinsically rewarding in-class activities we contribute to a deeper motivation. When students express their ideas regarding a reading, evaluate each others ideas, and become more complex thinkers by arguing with each other, they live the

relevance of their work and they tend to find classroom experiences enjoyable and enriching. This suggests that teachers should strive to create circumstances where students will feel the relevance of, and the intrinsic rewards associated with, their out-of-class efforts. Making student out-of-class work the focus of in-class activities is one way to establish such a connection.

An example: a read-discuss-write cycle

I have argued thus far that students sustain the motivation to regularly prepare for class when (1) they are shown how to perform increasingly complex tasks, and thus do not experience a disconnection between effort and grade-related performance that is often associated with students acting on misplaced assumptions, (2) they are allowed to practice, rather than forced to listen to teachers describe the performances of others, and (3) they experience the intrinsic rewards of learning. In this section, I offer as an example a Read-Discuss-Write cycle that aims to achieve these three goals. Since the focus of this paper is preparation and the structuring of student interaction, I do not undertake a detailed discussion of the writing portion of this assignment cycle here. A primer for developing learning activities such as this Read-Discuss-Write cycle is provided in the appendix.

Early in a semester, I provide students with the following handout describing a three-step procedure for them to follow.

What to do individually before class

(1) Read the assigned text (See 'How to Read Philosophy'[8] in the course packet for helpful hints).
(2) Bring two copies (one to turn in at the beginning of class, one for you to keep) of a piece of paper containing the following:

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[8] The handout is published as the appendix to Concepción, David W., 'Reading Philosophy With Background Knowledge and Metacognition,' op. cit..

(A) A factual question (e.g. What is the author's view on topic X?) you want answered, or think that others will need answered, before a critical discussion of questions that do not have straight-forward answers can take place.
(B) A question for a critical discussion inspired by the text.
(C) A one or two sentence (no longer!) quote that is related to the question you want to discuss.

What to do in a group in class

(1) Answer each other's factual questions. Ask the instructor for assistance if you get stuck, but do so only as a last resort.
(2) Identify one (select, combine, or write a new) discussion question that seems to get at an important theme in the text.
(3) Discuss that important question, beginning with 'complete turn taking'.[9]
(In 'complete turn taking' each person in the group says what they will about the issue without interruption. Other group members may want to take notes. When that person has said what s/he wants, s/he ends with an explicit 'I'm finished.' Once everyone has taken a 'complete' turn, continue the discussion as it naturally flows.)
(4) Develop a report of your group's activities for the class (see i-v).

(Note to students: Don't rush to report writing. Let your conversation run its course. Not every group must present to the class every time.)

(i) As a group, write an accurate, brief, and complete statement of the argument from the text that was the focus of your group discussion.
(ii) Describe the author's justification for his/her central thesis regarding that argument.
(iii) Develop and evaluate criticisms of the author's argument/justification.
(iv) Precisely identify the issues upon which members of your group disagree. Prepare a question for the class to answer that will aid in resolving that disagreement. Be prepared to refer to passages in the text that are likely to be relevant during this discussion.

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[9] I borrow the idea of 'complete turn taking' from Nelson, Craig E., 'Tools For Tampering With Teaching's Taboos,' op. cit., pp.58-59.

(v) Report to the class (see a-d):

> (a) Write, in *modus ponens* form, the author's argument on the board.
>
> (b) Write, and explain orally, your reason(s) for thinking the author's argument is (un)persuasive.
>
> (c) Lead the class in a discussion of the question you think needs further reflection to fully solve the issue.
>
> (d) Every member of the group must talk during your presentation.

What to do individually after class

Write a one page, single-space, 12-point font reaction paper defending your view regarding the topic of your group discussion or presentation. (See 'How To' instructions regarding paper writing in the course packet.)

Variations

To accommodate the different abilities and backgrounds of students it is necessary to be flexible when using this cycle. In introductory classes, relatively few presentations (sometimes none at all) are actually given and even then only late in the semester. Many less experienced students struggle to answer factual questions regarding the text. Others find it difficult to generate plausible criticisms to views stated by classmates in complete turn taking. Some groups of students need a considerable amount of time to accurately reduce a central argument, or a group consensus, into *modes ponens* form. In short, with less experienced students few presentations are actually given because all of the available class time is devoted to practicing the skills needed to generate a presentation. In such cases, I solicit comments from individual students during class-wide discussion.

In some courses it is useful to have students include a potential quiz question on the sheet they turn in. Teachers can create quizzes from these submissions. To write a quiz question students must distinguish central from peripheral material. By comparing their

possible questions with others, students can obtain information regarding whether they are reading the text carefully enough to come up with a good question.

In junior-senior seminars, after one or two iterations in class, students may perform the 'in class' discussion and presentation preparation prior to class. This could be difficult in teaching and learning contexts where all students do not live within close and easy proximity to campus. However, when possible, moving this intensive preparation outside of class frees up class time so that almost every group can give a presentation every time we engage the cycle.

Conclusion

The Read-Discuss-Write assignment cycle described here structures learning activities, 'spoon-feeds' in the best sense of the term, and connects out-of-class activity to intrinsically rewarding in-class experiences to sustain student motivation. It is amenable to variation, reduces the likelihood that students will act on misplaced assumptions, and allows for repeated practice. Empirical evidence (see notes 1 through 3) suggests that this type of instructional cycle engenders transferable critical thinking skills.[10]

APPENDIX

A Primer for Developing Useful 'How To' Guides

Three questions need answering:
What have I assumed students know about how to do the discipline specific tasks I assign?
How do I perform these tasks?
How can I show students how to best approximate what I do?

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[10] I am grateful to Stephen Schulman and Melinda Messineo for helpful comments that led to improvements in this paper. The errors that remain are, of course, my responsibility alone.

Exercise

(1) Write a list of the skills necessary for students to do well in your class (be as specific as possible). Keep in mind this is a skill or activity you want them to perform, not a content you want them to master.

(2) Focusing on one skill at a time, picture yourself performing the skill.

(3) In excruciating detail, describe what you are doing in a readable fashion that is otherwise analogous to the type of instructions you might find in a model airplane kit. NOTICE: You are not describing the features of a successful end product; you are describing a procedure or the activities involved in generating a successful end product.

(5) Mind the Gap: What did you not write down or explain in your instructions because you assumed 'everybody knows that'? Be on the lookout for things that are extremely familiar to you but that in truth should not be obvious to a first semester university student. Distinguish your background knowledge from your students' background knowledge. For example, many students do not know that a rich understanding of a text often requires one to reread the material several times. List heretofore unstated activities that a person should perform to do well on your assignments.

(6) Only when we are aware that we are not performing a skill particularly well will we ask for help or slow down to achieve greater success. Show students how to effectively monitor whether they are performing the skill well. Again, picture yourself performing the skill. How do you know when you are doing it well? In excruciating detail, write instructions for determining if you are performing the skill well in a readable fashion that is otherwise analogous to the type of instructions you might find in a model airplane kit.

A Primer For Connecting Transformational Goals To Learning Activities

(1) Identify three learning objectives or student transformations that are your highest priority in a given term/course.

(Think as broadly as possible here. You have human beings in your charge, how do you want to influence them? For example, making progress along Perry's matrix of cognitive and ethical development might be your most important transformative goal.)[11]

(2) Identify three activities you encourage students to perform fairly frequently.

(Traditional examples include, reading primary texts and listening to lectures. Consider non-traditional activities.)

(3) What is the relationship between the student transformations that are your highest priority and the activities your students frequently perform? Is the relationship to your liking?

(4) Imagine a new activity that seems to encourage a transformation you value but that many of your students have not achieved with your previous pedagogy.

(5) Attempt your newly identified activity with a spirit of adventure. Often initial implementations of new pedagogy need refinement. Abandon some attempts altogether. Celebrate successes.

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[11] Perry Jr., William G., *Forms Of Intellectual and Ethical Development In The College Years: A Scheme* (Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1970), especially pp.79-80. Perry describes student development through four stages: Dualism, Multiplicity, Relativism, and Commitment.

Engaging Student Relativism

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1. Introduction

When our introductory students first encounter philosophy, they often exhibit a peculiar response known in the teaching literature as *student relativism*. Most generally, student relativism claims (or at least implies) that truth is not an objective phenomenon, but relative, either to individuals or to societies.[1] Student relativism thus has much in common with classic

[1] It might therefore help to distinguish two varieties of what is ordinarily called 'student relativism:' student *subjectivism*, which claims that truth is relative to individuals, and student *relativism*, which claims that truth is relative to societies.

philosophical relativism, but unlike its proper philosophical counterpart, student relativism is rarely questioned or supported by substantial arguments. Instead, student relativists typically express their conception of truth with such ambiguous slogans as, 'That might be true for you (or for them), but it is not true for me (or for us),' 'That is just your opinion (and every opinion is equally valuable),' or the classic student relativist's rhetorical question, 'Who is to say?'

Left unchecked, student relativism can be a serious problem for philosophy instructors. Consider, for example, the student relativists who enrol in our critical thinking courses, and who thus see logic not as a reliable tool of inquiry, but perhaps as some mysterious symbol-manipulating game. These students miss a crucial and fundamental lesson about the role that reason can play in academic investigation, and their work takes on a distressing character aimed at simply learning the rules of the game, not at using these rules to advance their own understanding. As Richard W. Momeyer notes, similar misapprehensions also plague our metaphysics courses, our epistemology courses, our aesthetics courses, and, above all, our ethics courses (301). In fact, there may be no branch of academic scholarship that is immune to student relativism, and so its potential effects may be just as serious for our colleagues in the humanities, the social sciences, and even the natural sciences.[2]

Thankfully, though, philosophy faculty have developed a number of strategies for engaging and disarming student relativism during a decades-long conversation conducted in the pedagogical journals and other publications. A comprehensive analysis and evaluation of this work would seem to be in order, and so this paper begins with a brief survey of some of the most significant contributions to the recent professional discussion of student relativism. Ultimately, I will argue that a thorough response to the student relativist must pull together insights from both sides of this long-running debate, so that it not only utilises rational argument, but also remains sensitive to the more subtle appeals of student relativism.

Both notions deny objective truth, of course, but while subjectivism maintains that *individuals* determine truth, relativism maintains that *societies* determine truth. In this paper I observe the common convention of referring to both notions as 'student relativism.'

[2] This may explain why Wilbert J. McKeachie (2002) includes a section on student relativists in the 'Problem Students' chapter of his *McKeachie's Teaching Tips*, an excellent handbook for college and university teachers in any discipline.

2. The 'Traditional' Response

For many philosophy teachers, our first encounter with the pedagogical challenge of student relativism comes as we begin to teach our first undergraduate courses in the discipline. At this point in one's professional development, it is common to adopt a strategy that seems to represent a kind of standard, traditional instructor's response to student relativism. According to this tradition, the way to handle student relativism when it comes up in class is to first *draw the claim out* into the open (i.e. either present it or elicit it from the students), then *articulate* it as precisely as possible, and then finally *attack* it with some of the classic objections made to philosophical relativism. So, for instance, when a philosophy teacher first hears a student claiming 'That might be true for you, but it is not true for me,' the traditional response calls for us to work out a precise formulation of relativism, and then point out some of its counterintuitive consequences.

This roughly describes the approach used, for example, by W. T. Stace and Richard Brandt in their often-anthologised treatments of relativism.[3] Since Stace and Brandt both focus on ethical versions of relativism, though, it might also be useful to consider sources that discuss a more general sort of relativism, such as Theodore Schick and Lewis Vaughn's critical thinking text, *How to Think About Weird Things*.[4] Again, Schick and Vaughn follow the traditional strategy of present, articulate, and critique, though their updated treatment of the issues here includes captivating examples drawn not only from the history of philosophy, but also from the vast literature of pseudoscience and the paranormal.

Schick and Vaughn begin by arguing that, if we simply equate truth with belief, then we could never be mistaken; whatever we believe would be, by definition, true (71-73). 'It would be nice if we were always right,' they note, 'but as we all know all too well, we aren't' (72). We make mistakes about the shape of the earth, we misdial telephone numbers, and some of us may even place losing bets

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[3] Satris (1986) suggests both Stace (1937) and Brandt (1959) as classic sources on this issue; see pages vi-x and 8-31 of Stace's book, for instance, or pages 271-294 of Brandt's book.

[4] Indeed, I have found Schick and Vaughn (1995) useful in a number of my undergraduate courses; see Irwin (1997) for a thorough review.

with our bookmakers. Thus, it seems, we cannot naïvely maintain that whatever we believe is the truth. Furthermore, Schick and Vaughn write, relativism implies its own denial, since those who reject relativism (i.e. those who believe that relativism is false) must be just as correct as the relativists are (71, 73). Schick and Vaughn also point out the well-known problems that relativism causes for moral reform and universal human rights (73-75) before arguing that, ultimately, relativism is a self-defeating doctrine:

> [T]he relativist faces a dilemma: if he interprets his theory objectively, he defeats himself by providing evidence against it [i.e. a counterexample to it]. If he interprets his theory relativistically, he defeats himself by failing to provide any evidence for it. Either way, he defeats himself (78).

Finally, Schick and Vaughn contend that our widely held concerns about tolerance and respect for others actually presuppose that relativism is false:

> The relativist may say that...we should respect the right of people to be different. But she can't consistently uphold this right—she can't say that others should respect this right...She can't even condemn those who would trample this right. She can only say that she supports it (82).

Thus, Schick and Vaughn provide many of the standard anti-relativistic arguments that make up the traditional instructor's response to student relativism. It is against the backdrop of this tradition that a number of additional strategies for dealing with student relativism have been developed over the past two decades in the literature on philosophical pedagogy. By surveying the most significant developments in this discussion we can not only gain a more accurate analysis of student relativism, but we can also develop more effective strategies for dealing with it when it comes up in our classrooms.

3. Andre's Approach to Naïve Relativism

Among the earliest contributions to the recent professional discussion of student relativism is a 1983 piece first published in *Metaphilosophy*

by Judith Andre. In her paper, Andre describes an ethics course designed to slowly undermine her students' confidence in the naïve, uncritical slogans of student relativism. By focusing on the importance of analysis and argumentation in the battle against student relativism, then, Andre's paper serves to exemplify what I am calling the traditional response. At the same time, though, Andre also introduces some non-traditional insights worth considering as we attempt to understand and respond to student relativism.

Andre begins by recommending that instructors first show their students that reason has an important role to play in ethical judgment (179-180). Virtually everyone agrees, for instance, that empirical facts are relevant to good moral decision-making, and that it is important for our moral judgments to be logically consistent with one another. After gaining these minor footholds within the wider domain of rational moral philosophy, Andre claims, the relativist slogans begin to disappear from her classroom.

Of course, given our contemporary social environment, undergraduates are still likely to encounter the slogans of student relativism outside of the classroom. To help equip her students with the skills needed to disarm these slogans, then, Andre also conducts a careful philosophical analysis of statements like 'Abortion is wrong for me, but it might be right for someone else.' Upon closer inspection, students see that such a statement is confusingly ambiguous. For instance, it might simply mean that 'We are in significantly different circumstances; [in other words,] circumstances can affect the morality of an act' (181). Alternatively, it might acknowledge a disagreement about the morality of abortion, or a reluctance to judge as blameworthy those who have abortions, or even an uncertainty about whether abortion is right or wrong (181-182). It could also be a statement of the more bewildering claim that 'Abortion is wrong in certain circumstances and (at the same time and in unaltered circumstances) also right' (182). Other 'translations' of the slogan are possible as well, of course, but the point is that only the most absurd (such as our final translation, 'Abortion is wrong in certain circumstances and [at the same time and in unaltered circumstances] also right') are incompatible with an objective

conception of morality.[5]   Once students realize this, Andre writes, they are better equipped to dismantle the slogans outside of class.

4. Satris and Student Relativism

In 1986, just three years after Andre's paper first appeared, Stephen Satris published another classic contribution to our discussion. In his piece, Satris emphasizes the distinctly non-reflective, non-critical, and indeed *non-philosophical* nature of student relativism. In his view, student relativism is not so much a philosophical position backed up with evidence as it is a psychological defence mechanism that students invoke to avoid the critical discussion, reflection, and judgment that are essential to philosophical work. Student relativism is thus a kind of 'suit of armour' designed to protect the student relativist's own beliefs from criticism (197). As Satris writes, 'S[tudent] R[elativism] is fundamentally misdiagnosed when it is viewed as a philosophical position' (199).   Instead, he argues, student relativism is best understood as a way of *avoiding* the expression of a genuine philosophical position, and thus of avoiding the challenges that one must endure to develop such a position.

     To break through this armour, Satris offers a number of suggestions, most of which echo the traditional methods for dealing with student relativism. First is a careful presentation, analysis, and critique of either student relativism or philosophical relativism. Satris admits, though, that this conventional strategy will work only with those few students whose confidence in their own knowledge has left them well prepared for relativism's 'evaporation' (199-200). Thus, he also recommends an Andre-style criticism of the students' own statements of relativism as they come up naturally during the semester (200-202). In addition, Satris cites Michael Goldman's suggestion that students be asked to discuss why relativism (especially moral relativism) is such a pervasive feature of contemporary American

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[5] Note that Mostert (1986) substitutes the term 'transformation' for Andre's 'translation,' since, as he writes, 'The gap between the original and the philosophical statement is too wide to be an example of translation' (footnote 203).

culture (202).[6] By singling out relativism as itself a culturally relative phenomenon in this way, he argues, students may be able to gain the critical distance necessary to become skeptical of their own relativistic tendencies. Finally, Satris (again following Goldman) recommends the method of advocacy, whereby instructors provide examples of philosophical positions that they believe can be proved, and then present those proofs (203).[7] As Satris writes:

> For purposes of demonstrating (i.e. actually showing) that progress can be made on difficult questions there is no substitute for actually making some progress on some difficult questions. If one pursues philosophy honestly and with effort and ability, one can hardly fail to do what S[tudent] R[elativism] says cannot be done. One will have made some good progress on some appreciably difficult but important questions. One thus demonstrates that philosophical thinking can occur and that understanding can be deepened, contrary to all expectations of S[tudent] R[elativism] (203).

Thus, Satris provides not only a rather non-traditional diagnosis of student relativism, but also several non-traditional prescriptions. As he summarises the point, 'The main strategic move that needs to be made with respect to S[tudent] R[elativism] is one away from saying and toward showing...The best way to do this is to practice the arts of philosophy and thereby provide students with a model of what can be done with such questions if they are approached

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[6] See Goldman (1981), pages 4-5; Richard W. Momeyer (1995) also writes favourably of Goldman's strategy of treating student relativism as a social phenomenon on pages 307-308.

[7] Note that the sort of advocacy that Satris has in mind here is not some sort of coercive indoctrination, but an intellectually honest modelling of rational, philosophical inquiry. As Goldman (1981) writes, against Elias Baumgarten (1980):

> There is an enormous difference between advocacy and indoctrination...To advocate a position is not to manipulate or to coerce; it is, at least as I and those I know who support the position believe, to offer the most intellectually and rationally compelling reasons one can in its favour. It is not to ignore or even to slight alternatives. It is to present these alternatives in the strongest light possible in order to show why they are, nevertheless, inadequate. Indoctrination, on the other hand, makes use of certain non-rational, covert forms of inculcation (8).

with effort, honesty and integrity, and the tools of critical inquiry'
(203-204).

5. Paden's Response

The next major contribution to our discussion comes from Roger
Paden, who argues in his 1987 *Teaching Philosophy* paper that the
recommendations of both Andre and Satris are inadequate. As Paden
writes, 'The standard methods for dealing with student relativism
often fail...because they are aimed at non-existent, and totally
opposite, entities—either philosophically sophisticated, or completely
uninformed students whose minds, it might be thought, closely
resemble Locke's *tabula rasa*' (97).[8] Instead of engaging such
caricatured student relativists, then, Paden recommends treating
introductory students as novice philosophers with strong, though
seriously flawed, metaphysical and epistemological beliefs.

According to Paden, the key to understanding student
relativism is seeing it not as an accidental notion, a philosophical
principle, or a psychological defence, but as the *conclusion* to a
general type of moral argument. Many students hold this argument,
Paden writes, though they are 'only dimly aware' of it and its
consequences when they arrive in our courses (98). So, in Paden's
view, the instructor's main task is to draw from the students their
argument for relativism, which Paden reconstructs for his readers as
follows:

> 1) Respect for persons requires that everyone has a right to
> his or her own opinion.

> 2) Therefore, it is wrong (i.e. impermissible) to try to force
> anyone to change his or her opinion.

> 3) Arguments can force someone to change his or her opinion.

> 4) Therefore, it is not morally possible (i.e. impermissible) to
> argue against someone's opinion.

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[8] Paden is not entirely critical of Andre and Satris, though; for instance, he
recommends Andre's 1983 paper as a source of 'some non-standard ways of dealing
with the problem [of student relativism]' on page 100.

>5) If it is not possible to argue against an opinion, it must be true.
>
>6) Therefore, if someone holds some belief, then due respect for that person compels us to say that belief is true for that person (even though it is not true for me) (99).[9]

In summary, then, Paden maintains that students become student relativists because, ultimately, *they are concerned about respecting others*; as he writes, 'Relativism is not held by them as a meta-ethical position, but as a first-order ethical belief. It is a consequence of their belief in, and their understanding of, ethical toleration' (99).

Having reconstructed this sort of argument through class discussion, then, Paden recommends criticising what he sees as its two weakest points (99-100). First, while it may be important to recognise respect for others as a virtue, students should also ask whether respect for others really demands that we isolate others from critical discussion. Scientists, academic colleagues, and even dear friends, it seems, can respect one another even as they engage in vigorous argumentation. Second, Paden also suggests highlighting the ambiguous notions of 'force' and 'impossibility' used in the student relativist's argument. Premise 3) above is true, of course, since arguments can cause (i.e. 'force') rational people to change their opinions, but this sort of force is very different from the sort of physical compulsion that we would be more likely to recognise as morally problematic. Likewise, while it might be in some sense 'impossible' to argue against, say, a king with the power to punish those who argue against him, it is certainly not logically impossible to do so.[10] Thus, it seems that Paden's general strategy has much in common with the traditional approach, for it treats student relativists as philosophers (albeit unsophisticated philosophers) whose arguments should be taken seriously.

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[9] This general suggestion that student relativism is a consequence of students' concerns about tolerance also appears in Ihara (1984), Mostert (1986), and Schick and Vaughn (1995).

[10] It might also help to point out here (as Schick and Vaughn [1995] do on pages 81-82) that relativism is actually *inconsistent with tolerance*, for it allows no criticism of intolerance. On the other hand, objectivists can easily recognize the virtue of being tolerant, provided they recognize that we all make mistakes.

6. Pedagogical Implications

So, despite the widespread recognition among philosophy instructors that student relativism is a problem, there remain clear disagreements about how best to understand and respond to it. What general pedagogical lessons can we draw from this debate, then? Is student relativism to be treated as a philosophical position, as Andre and Paden suggest? Or is student relativism a non-philosophical defence mechanism, as Satris contends?

Perhaps the most important analytical point to be gained here is the simple recognition that, for students, *relativism fulfils a variety of different functions.* Some student relativists are struggling, as Paden believes, to develop their own rudimentary philosophical systems. Others are looking to avoid such work, as Satris argues. Reviewing this discussion in his 1995 *Teaching Philosophy* paper, Richard W. Momeyer suggests that student relativism has at least six (and perhaps more) distinct meanings (302-306). For some students, he writes, student relativism is a primitive philosophy, while for others it may be simply a sign of personal defensiveness, or even of confusion and intellectual laziness. The work of such cognitive psychologists as William G. Perry (1981) suggests that relativism may be a temporary developmental stage for many students, especially first- and second-year students (84-85).[11] Alternatively, it might also express a protest against absolutism and authoritarianism, or perhaps a commitment to good manners and tolerance.

Thus, in any moderately sized class, we can expect to have students who are attracted to student relativism for any number of different reasons. To effectively engage such diverse groups of learners, then, instructors must first understand the work that relativism does for their students, and then implement appropriate strategies. Budding philosophers, for instance, might be ready to jump straight into the traditional techniques of articulation and criticism, while less sophisticated students may be better off starting with Satris' advocacy, or even a straightforward discussion of Perry's

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[11] See also Perry (1970) for a more thorough treatment of the 'late multiplicity' stage in his now-classic developmental scheme.

developmental stage theory, a tactic that Momeyer recommends (307-308). The point here is that no single analysis, and no single pedagogical strategy, will fit every student, or every class; instead, effective engagement of student relativism requires that the instructor be sensitive to the different purposes that student relativism serves for different students.[12]

Pieter Mostert (1986) provides another important lesson for instructors eager to understand student relativism. Reviewing Craig K. Ihara's (1984) detailed articulation of an argument for relativism from tolerance, he warns that philosophy instructors may be prone to '*overinterpret*' the pronouncements of their student relativists to the point that we literally 'transform' casual remarks into thorough, precise arguments that novice philosophers could never assemble (202-203). To achieve an accurate analysis of student relativism, then, we must take care to avoid the kind of overinterpretation that concerns Mostert. This need not preclude us from treating student relativists as genuine philosophical relativists if doing so is pedagogically useful, though; as Momeyer writes:

> I rather doubt that very much of S[tudent] R[elativism] is philosophical, even potentially, but there is great incentive for philosophers in particular to see it as such, and no doubt pedagogical value in doing so as well. By seeing S[tudent] R[elativism] as philosophical, we can do a number of things we like to do and are good at doing, such as exercise our pedagogical and intellectual skills in drawing out students to develop a philosophical position; introduce important distinctions such as that between descriptive and normative relativism or that between 'believing x is true' and 'x is true;' fit student pronouncements into a well developed literature and tradition; bring out powerful arguments to show the interesting

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[12] Momeyer (1995) makes a similar point just before listing his suggested strategies for dealing with student relativism:

> Given the varieties of meanings and uses of expressions of S[tudent] R[elativism], it is only to be expected that different teaching techniques will be effective with different students and at different times. Unsurprisingly, experienced teachers must determine which of the following techniques are appropriate at a given time, in the circumstances at hand. There is no formula to offer for determining when that might be. They are all, if you will, 'relative' (306).

problems in even a very sophisticated philosophical moral
relativism (302-303).

Thus, while potentially useful as a teaching tool, overinterpretation
can still mislead us about the true nature of student relativism.

There are other practical lessons that we can draw from our
literature review as well. For instance, there seems to be a broad
consensus among philosophy instructors that *concerns about
tolerance and respect for others* somehow lead our students to
embrace or maintain their relativism. We have already looked at
Paden's detailed treatment of this issue, and Schick and Vaughn pick
up the theme as well, but there are also similar contributions from
Ihara and Mostert in the teaching journals. Their specific tactics vary,
but all of these authors recommend that instructors initiate a careful
and explicit discussion of the supposed connection between relativism
and tolerance as a way of undercutting relativism's hold on
introductory classes. If a significant number of our students truly
believe that their relativism serves the cause of tolerance and respect,
then this would seem to be an especially sensible idea.

Finally, it may be worth considering (as Andre does) how we
could best arrange the *overall structure of our courses* to help us
engage student relativism most effectively.[13] Though student
relativism can affect undergraduate instruction in any discipline, it is
an especially acute problem in philosophy. This may be in part
because so many non-philosophers seem to think that philosophical
questions can only be answered relativistically, with a shrug and a
dutiful 'Who is to say?' As a result, students often arrive for our
introductory courses with a naïve relativistic predisposition.
Instructors who begin the semester with a careful discussion of
relativism may be in a better position to head off this sort of bias,
though; once students understand some of the classic criticisms of
philosophical relativism, for example, they may be more inclined to
consider the notion that careful, critical thought can help us to answer
the fundamental questions of philosophy in a more reflective and
substantial way.

On the other hand, the overall design of our philosophy
courses may also inadvertently *encourage* student relativism. For
instance, students who are forced to march through a series of

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[13] I am especially grateful to my audience at University of Memphis for their lively
and provocative dialogue on this issue.

radically opposed positions on fundamental philosophical issues without pausing to consider the implications of this sort of disagreement may see no hope for intellectual reconciliation *but* relativism.[14]   Of course, we would not want to shield our students from opposing viewpoints in a philosophy course, but it may also be worthwhile to supplement this sort of presentation with regular reviews of earlier lessons on student relativism throughout the semester. Likewise, a careful reconsideration of student relativism at the conclusion of the semester (perhaps culminating with an appropriate writing assignment or exam essay) could also help students to develop more thoughtful responses to the radical theoretical diversity that is part of any proper philosophy course.

7. Conclusion

So, thanks in large part to the work of philosophers and philosophy teachers, there are now a number of effective strategies for dealing with student relativism in the classroom.   This does not mean, however, that each of these strategies will be equally effective for all students. Rather, a proper analysis of student relativism is a crucial first step in engaging the position, for we can only understand how best to confront it if we first understand its attraction (rational or otherwise) for our students. Once we complete this analysis, we are in a much better position to determine which engagement strategies will be the most effective. Well-prepared, mature students may be ready to appreciate the rational arguments offered in the traditional approach, while others may benefit more from an initial advocacy approach. Thus, to develop a thorough strategy for engaging student relativism we must understand and integrate insights from both sides of this long-running pedagogical debate.

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[14] Stephen J. Sullivan made a similar point during our conversation at Memphis; see also Rachels (2003) on moral skepticism (pages 22-28) for a related discussion.

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Seeing Both Sides of an Issue:
Teaching an Online Moral Issues Course

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A lthough there are currently obvious advantages to teaching philosophy in physical classrooms,[1] there are specific things online instructors of philosophy can do in order to make their

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[1] These advantages include synchronous and verbal discussion, the ability of the instructor as well as the students to read body language cues for indications of comprehension or lack thereof, and a natural sense of community. Although I am not convinced that online education will eventually completely trump the classroom experience, I do believe that the advantages face-to-face learning has over distance education will be diminished with the advancement of software and hardware technologies.

courses equally effective as face-to-face courses. Sometimes instructors treat their online courses as flattened, or two-dimensional, versions of their face-to-face course by translating their lecture notes into large blocks of text for students to read or PowerPoint presentations. This is a mistake, however, since this way of presenting the material is dull and lifeless, and in the case of PowerPoint, may be oversimplified and/or lacking in important logical or explanatory value. This method of presentation also does not take advantage of the various pedagogical opportunities for active learning available through online instruction. Although there is no question that philosophy courses cover objective facts and concepts (e.g. technical definitions, historical information, various interpretations of theories, etc), philosophy also has a unique educational role because the questions which it poses:

> …enlarge our conception of what is possible, enrich our intellectual imagination, and diminish the dogmatic assurance which closes the mind against speculation; but above all because, through the greatness of the universe which philosophy contemplates, the mind also is rendered great, and becomes capable of that union with the universe which constitutes its highest good.[2]

Dialogue is essential to fulfilment of philosophy and open dialogue can be one of the great advantages of online courses.

In this paper, I present several assignments which hopefully will be useful for philosophy instructors in designing and implementing their own online courses. Although I will specifically discuss ideas for a moral issues course, it is possible that some of these ideas could be adapted to other philosophy courses as well.

Background on my course:

The course I teach online is a 100-level course called 'Contemporary Moral Issues' at the University of Maryland University College—European Division. In this 16 week course, we discuss both moral

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[2] Russell, Bertrand. *The Problems of Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912. p. 94.

theory (i.e. utilitarianism, deontology, virtue theory, social contract theory, feminist ethics, and subjectivism) and moral issues (i.e. euthanasia, capital punishment, abortion, civil disobedience, racism, and homosexuality). Students are expected to log into class at least three times a week and complete one to two weekly assignments, which typically include both reading specific portions of the text and writing a response to a question or set of questions within a public discussion area of the virtual classroom. Course requirements also include a proctored midterm exam, a take-home final exam, two drafts of a ten page paper, and a short debate document. I will discuss both the paper and debate document in more detail later in this paper.

Two of the most important objectives of the course are 1) to 'distinguish argument from opinion,' and 2) 'construct arguments in support of a position, including responses to objections.' The majority of students consider these goals to be the most valuable aspects of the course; for example, even if they have forgotten the exact formulation of the categorical imperative, the development of the ability to view issues from multiple angles provides students with numerous intellectual and practical rewards. Furthermore, these objectives provide the basis for the sort of education that requires effort and engagement rather than the sort of education that emphasises dissemination and regurgitation of facts.

In my course, I make a clear and early distinction between philosophical argument and mere opinion. Because we are discussing issues such as abortion, capital punishment, euthanasia, etc, issues about which most, if not all, students already have formed their own positions, it is worth spending some time explaining the objectives of the course in order to avoid students' dogmatic declarations of the truth of their own opinion and prevent personal attacks directed toward the opinions of their classmates. In an online course, students may be more willing to assert their opinions without reservations or qualifications because there is less 'risk' of being immediately confronted by other students; they are more anonymous in a virtual classroom, and they have more time to formulate their position within asynchronous discussions. Asynchronous discussions can also get off topic rather quickly unless they are monitored constantly; for example, I had a student who wrote several personal attacks to other students who didn't agree with her position on abortion and when I entered class a day later, I had to spend some considerable time smoothing feathers and returning the discussion to the original topic.

Additionally, because almost all of the students have not taken a previous philosophy course and they recognise the controversial nature of the subject matter, they take the course in the hope of securing their pre-formed opinions and getting 'ammunition' for their everyday conversations on these matters. The resulting challenge for the instructor is to create an online environment in which students feel comfortable posting their ideas, but at the same time make clear the value of open-mindedness and the philosophical necessity of presenting logical reasons for their positions.

Making students feel comfortable posting their ideas is relatively easy. In my course, I remind students that they will not be graded on their positions, but rather on the quality of support they provide for their positions. This assures students that they will not be penalised if I do not agree with their position (for example, if they write that stem cell research should be prohibited while I think it should be promoted). I also set up a 'Philosopher's Lounge' area in the virtual classroom in which students are able to visit and discuss course related topics. Participation in the 'Philosopher's Lounge' is not required, nor graded, but in my experience this area has been a place for free discussion on topics as diverse as homosexuality in the military and the possibility of pure objectivity in relation to end-of-life issues. Obviously, feedback that incorporates humour and/or praise also increases students' willingness to present their ideas in class.

The other aspect of the challenge of teaching this course, namely encouraging open-mindedness and the presentation of logical reasons for a position, is slightly more difficult and I address this through specific assignments.

Assignments to establish the distinction between opinion and argument

In the first assignment for the course, I have students read online news articles that deal with four issues we will debate later in the term: euthanasia, capital punishment, economic equity, and civil disobedience. After reading the articles, students are asked to choose one of the issues and give reasons both for and against the positions

stated. For example, in relation to civil disobedience, students read the case of Nathaniel Heatwole who planted various prohibited objects, like box cutters, on Southwest Airlines, in order to prove various deficiencies in security screening. Students who choose to respond to this article answer the following questions: 'Why should we believe Nathaniel Heatwole's actions were justified? Why should we not?' This exercise immediately gets students to begin thinking about presenting both sides of an issue and some students admit the difficulty of making both sides appear equally reasonable. A student who chose the capital punishment article posted the following message in class:

> I discovered that my opinions can influence how I write something for this class. I wrote about the Steven Oken execution, and I kept running into difficulty trying to argue against his execution. My opinion got in the way of my seeing both sides of the argument. At first, it even got me sidetracked onto the conflict of interest that the Attorney General threw out into the public arena. For my part, it took a lot of discipline and re-reading of the objectives of the discussion to get it right.

In the second week, I post a separate topic titled 'opinion vs. argument' in which I specifically distinguish mere opinion from philosophical argument. In this posting, I emphasise that an opinion is 'an unsupported personal judgment' and an argument 'is a supported judgment that takes objections into consideration.' Because most students are familiar with the non-philosophical denotation of 'argument,' the definition of 'argument' used here is useful since it demands both good reasons in support of a position as well as the ability to consider the other side.

After completing the week one assignment on giving reasons for and against a given position and then reading the week two distinction between opinion and argument, a student posted the following message:

> I warned everyone in my introduction that I like to play Devil's Advocate, and I do, but I have never really had one of my own deep seated beliefs or opinions challenged like that, and by ME, even. It changes one's outlook on things...

Besides setting the correct tone for the rest of the term, these early assignments also help students to correct each other within their discussions; for example, when students read postings from other

students, they sometimes respond by saying something like 'although you have stated your opinion, what sorts of reasons can you provide for it?' or even help provide these reasons.

Assignments that apply the distinction between opinion and argument

The two main assignments for the course are a two to three page debate document and a ten page issue paper.

The debate document is assigned so that students can begin to exercise argumentative skills by asserting a proposition, give reasons for the proposition, list objections to the proposition and address those objections. Many students are daunted by the prospect of writing a 10-page philosophical paper on a controversial issue, so the debate documents show them how arguments can be outlined in their most basic form. Students have the option to complete the debate document individually or in assigned groups. Although I prefer that students work in groups in order to build a greater sense of classroom community and cooperation, some students (particularly the most conscientious and diligent ones) find group work requirements are unsatisfying and ultimately unfair in regard to grading.

The debate document assignment has been for the most part a great success in my courses. When I first assigned debates, I asked that they write a three page essay on their position, but frequently found that significant portions of their arguments were missing, most notably objections to their proposition and responses to those objections. Because this assignment requires a bare-boned outline requiring three main sections (proposition, substantiation, and refutations), students are able to focus their attention on the content of their argument. For this reason, the debate document is good preparation for their issue papers which require both content and essay form.

The second main assignment of the course is a ten-page issue paper. It's useful to break this assignment into two parts (a draft and final version), so that students are less likely to procrastinate, and can have an opportunity for minor changes or major revisions such as

changing their proposition after examining good reasons on the other side of the issue. In the week two assignment, which distinguishes opinion from argument, I write to the students that, 'I strongly encourage you to develop your argumentative style by creating arguments both for and against your own opinions.' Although some students are not exactly eager to present the view opposite to their own, others have experimented with this idea by choosing a paper topic with which they don't agree. For example, a student wrote the following to notify me of her paper topic:

> I am going to go against what I think and pick a topic I am not for and go for human cloning. I think it will help me to see both sides of the equation better if I look at a different point of view.

Comments like this contribute to the whole class' understanding of the aims of the course.

As with the debate document, students are to use a basic argumentative format (asserting a proposition, defending it, and responding to objections) when writing their issue paper. Because they have had practice making an outline for and against a position when preparing their debate document, most students have a good idea of how to structure their paper according to this format. By using this method of embedding learned skills within assignments of increasing complexity and difficulty, it is easy for students to see the relevance of previous assignments and for the instructor to monitor student progress. This sense of forward movement is essential to the success and momentum of an online course.

Web sources for teaching a moral issues course

Even if an instructor is teaching a face-to-face moral issues course, the construction of a companion website is recommended since students are usually extremely computer savvy and there are many course resources available online. Here is a short list of good sites that can be linked in a webliography for either face-to-face or online courses:

http://www.philosophytalk.org/

This is an excellent website for the radio programme 'Philosophy Talk.' On this website you can listen to episodes concerning topics such as animal rights, affirmative action and cloning. This site also includes lists of additional resources on the programme topics.

http://ethics.sandiego.edu/

This is a website founded and edited by Lawrence Hinman at the University of San Diego. It lists resources on ethical theories and issues; these include videos of lectures and lists of other useful websites, books, and articles.

http://www.princeton.edu/~jimpryor/general/vocab/glossary.html

This is a website by Jim Pryor at Princeton University that gives definitions for philosophical terms that apply to arguments such as 'ad hoc', 'fallacy', and 'appeals to authority'.

http://plato.stanford.edu/

This is the online Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy which has extensive entries on topics like homosexuality and philosophers such as Kant.

http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/

This is the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/philinks.htm#courses

This is the Guide to Philosophy on the Internet created by Peter Suber at Earlham College.

http://www.epistemelinks.com/index.aspx

This is EpistemeLinks.com: Philosophy Resources on the Internet.

Epictetus Teaching Philosophy

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The great philosophical tradition of ethics is a big challenge for anyone who teaches ethics. A large number of theories are waiting out there to be taught and many, many students are waiting out there to be initiated into a world of fascinating thoughts, of outstanding ideas, which, from their authors' points of view, offer many different approaches to life and living.

So, from the point of view of our students' attitudes towards our lessons, we are obliged to bear in mind that, when we teach ethics, a large number of our students are likely to be impressed, if not by us, then at least by the theories we teach. They look forward to hearing from us things that they have never heard before, ideas that they have never before considered. Of course, we know that some of our students live without such a purpose. They are not so ready to be impressed, but rather we have to provoke their interest, in order to make them motivated to listen to our lessons. I think that this is the

point we should start with, because even though we may not believe in any particular ethical theory, even though we see all ethical theories with a critical eye and even though we might not even believe in ethical theorising itself, the fact is that we have to give our students the opportunity to decide for themselves.

Thus, in this paper, I intend to explore the non-transparent dynamics of the academic teaching of ethics. What is implied in the relation between the instructor of ethics and his students? Are there any limits to academic objectivity when we teach ethics? In short, I am interested in the many dimensions in the teaching of ethics, besides the strictly academic ones. In order to explore what the possible implications are, I will examine the characteristics which were inherent in the way the teaching of ethics was conducted in ancient times. Do we have the feeling, like instructors of ethics in ancient times had, that we can change the psychological state of our students, that we can change their lives, that they profit from our teaching in a way that goes beyond simply assimilating knowledge of philosophical theories? Do our students evaluate our lessons? What exactly do they evaluate?

In an attempt to answer some of these questions, I have chosen to examine, in the form of a case study, the teaching of the stoic Epictetus. I consider Epictetus to be the most typical example of an instructor of ethics. He fulfils all the standards of academic teaching, but he simultaneously wants to change the lives of his listeners. Did he achieve such a thing? Is there a way to make ethics more interesting for those who study philosophy? What is implied in philosophical 'learning'? Can it change our students' ways of behaving and acting? What are the presuppositions for such radical change?

In Epictetus' era, philosophers claimed that they were able to cure human souls. Philosophy was considered to be a kind of medicine. Such were the times of imperial (Roman) stoicism. The stoic philosopher Epictetus is one of the characteristic representatives of the attitude in question. In his *Discourses*, he lays out his ethical principles. He discusses with his students. He formulates arguments in order to prove the truth of his philosophy. He expected that his speeches would become a cure for the passions of his students' souls. He expected that his words would contribute to the moral improvement of his listeners.

Nevertheless, throughout the whole history of philosophy, the teaching of a 'philosophy of life' has constituted a philosophical conundrum. The formulation of the notions of a philosophy of life constitutes a philosophical problem. How could we reform a life with catholic principles, which probably encapsulate only some aspects of life? Could such principles constitute some regulatory rules for life, given that there are a lot of unpredictable circumstances? Is it possible, moreover, to transmit to the students of our subject the notions of a philosophical 'behaviour', since these notions are derived from personal philosophical insights, which probably could be effectual only for the person who believes in them? Is it possible to teach such insights? I believe that these are crucial questions, which are related to the teaching of ethics itself.

What needs to be established is whether there is a chance that our academic teaching of philosophy could profit from studying the methods and ideas of our ancient predecessors. What were their specific methods and their ideas? What was their purpose? Epictetus himself points out the difficulties related to the philosophical teaching of the principles related to a way of living. Epictetus himself is a *philosopher-teacher*. He represents the ultimate example of what we seek to investigate in the present paper. As we have already said, Epictetus makes an effort to teach the philosophical principles he believes in. Nevertheless, in the sixth chapter of his fourth *Discourse*, he points out that a lot of people are not receptive to admonitions regarding the good and the bad. He says that Jupiter himself could not convince all men. What is, I wonder, the nature of this intervention? What is the difference between those who are capable of being convinced and those who are not? Does conviction depend on the dexterity of the philosopher who teaches? These questions require some answers in order for us to be able to understand the character of philosophy students, who are meant to be positively influenced by the teachings of their instructor.

Epictetus clarifies that, firstly, one ought to be sure oneself, of the principles one believes in, before one makes the attempt to teach these principles.[1] Nevertheless, I believe we have to determine the

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[1] See *Discourses* 4,6,5,3 – 7,1. Nevertheless, what is the contribution of the philosopher-teacher about? He probably clarifies the principles which anybody formulates as rules for one's life, during repeated efforts to discover the truth related to one's problems. The factors, of course, which govern our perseverance with such

causes and the nature of such insightful certainty. Moreover, according to Epictetus, when students have taken courses in philosophy and have acceded to these philosophical teachings, then they have to act according to the principles they profess.[2] That is a crucial philosophical problem. It reminds us of the distance between a theoretical ideal and its application or materialisation. According to Epictetus, the genuine adoption of philosophical theorems leads to a real reformation of morals. Thus, one has to abandon the attitude of the private individual, of the common person, and fulfil the ideal of a man in moral progress ('prokopton').[3] Nevertheless, the problem of the distance between the man in progress and the wise man, regarded as the ideal of stoic philosophy, is well-known.

Epictetus believes that in the course of a philosophical apprenticeship, theory itself precedes. Philosophical teaching itself consists of a display of philosophical principles. However, the success of philosophical initiation does not consist of merely a cerebral strengthening of philosophical principles, but, pre-eminently, demands that they be productively assimilated and that they be applied to the circumstances of one's everyday life.[4] That is what was meant to be the scope of philosophical education. Is there any possibility that nowadays we could suggest such a scope? What would that imply for the academic teaching of philosophy?[5]

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insightful certainty, need to be investigated and determined. One of these factors would be, probably, the maturation of an idea, which becomes conviction.

[2] See the fourth *Discourse* 4,6,12,1 – 12,4.

[3] See *Handbook*, 51.

[4] See the first *Discourse* 1,26,3,1 – 5,1.

[5] There would seem to be no sure answer to that question since, on the one hand, certain contemporary philosophers, like Giuseppe Boncori, in his 'Teaching Philosophy as Education and Evaluation of Thinking' (*20th World Congress of Philosophy*, **http://www.bu.edu/wcp/**), J. Aultman Moore, in his 'Shame and Learning in Plato's Apology' (*20th World Congress of Philosophy*, **http://www.bu.edu/wcp/**) and Heather L. Reid, in her 'The Educational Value of Plato's Early Socratic Dialogues' (*20th World Congress of Philosophy*, **http://www.bu.edu/wcp/**) take an optimistic view, while W. T. Schmid, in his 'Socratic Paideia: How It Works and Why It So Often Fails' (*20th World Congress of Philosophy*, **http://www.bu.edu/wcp/**), on the other, express doubt about whether the teaching of ethics can be efficacious in the formation of moral behaviour. Clearly, this is a matter in which there is room for more discussion.

In Epictetus' first *Discourse*, one can read more on the subject. One of his students claimed that philosophical behaviour could not be taught. If that is true, then nobody could condemn someone for their moral behaviour. So, the conclusion is that moral behaviour is conditioned by an inevitable necessity, which could not be reversed by philosophical teaching. If, however, on the other hand, philosophical morals could be taught, then anyone could profit from the teaching of those who claim to be philosophers. Ignorance of philosophical principles, in this respect, is the source of moral faults, the cause of moral failure.[6]

In the second *Discourse*, Epictetus, the philosopher-teacher, thinks hard about the hindrances he faces in his attempts to teach his principles. He identifies three main factors in philosophical initiation. The first factor is the teacher, the second is the student and the third factor is the objective of philosophical teaching. The failure of philosophical teaching is due, without doubt, to one of these three factors. Epictetus concludes that failure is due only to the two participants in this philosophical initiation.[7]

Regarding the students of philosophy and the hindrances which are due to them, Epictetus says that in certain cases their soul is mortified in such a way that the student does not accept the most obvious truths.[8] Consequently, it is difficult for them to be dissuaded. That was the case of the Academicians and the Sceptics, who persisted in their weakness to learn the truth about things.[9] Other students, also, full of pride, approach the philosopher out of a need to satisfy their vanity. They listen to his instruction in order to learn things that they do not know, without, however, having the necessary respect for their teacher. On the contrary, they have a disposition to judge, as though, indeed, they were already wise enough to do so, the teacher whom

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[6] See *Discourses* 1,26,5,1 – 7,2. However, what kind of moral knowledge is this, which prevents one from moral faults? What is its nature? Is it knowledge that precedes the fault and anticipates it? Or, on the other hand, is it knowledge which follows the fault and acts as a future deterrent, in order for the fault not to be repeated? Nevertheless, is there a possibility that one cannot afford to avoid moral faults, even if one has received a punishment for these faults?

[7] See *Discourses* 2,19,29,1 – 34,3.

[8] One could claim, however, that the verisimilitude concerns ideas which are recognisable only by those who, in any case, adopt these ideas.

[9] See *Discourses* 1,5,1 – 1,5,5,1.

they, themselves, have chosen.[10] Usually, also, aspiring young philosophers do not approach their teachers in order to discover something about their lives. Rather, they seek to find teachers of arguments. These teachers impress with their oratory and their capacity to formulate arguments, and not, of course, with their moral behaviour. [11]

According to Epictetus, teaching philosophy cannot be the work of an upstart. It is not possible for just anyone to teach philosophy. It is, rather, supposed to be a 'big' undertaking, a 'secret' undertaking. The wisdom of a philosopher is simply not enough. A special capacity is needed. Epictetus believes that God himself is the one who gives the teacher of philosophy the permission to teach. Those who take the risk of teaching philosophy, without having such an authorisation to do so, defame philosophy itself.[12] Indeed, such an attitude is due to a misinterpretation about the nature of philosophy. Those who share this opinion, consider philosophy to be the aimless consumption of theories, which bear no relation to life, and that is what Epictetus castigates. This is not Epictetus' ideal of the philosopher. Epictetus' own model is Socrates. Socrates did not claim that he knew or that he was teaching anything at all. He did not adopt any theory and he did not seek to promulgate any doctrine.

From this point of view, Epictetus seems to be at odds with his own doctrine, because he seems to adopt an attitude which is inconsistent with that of Socrates. But this is not true. Epictetus wants to accentuate the model of the philosopher who lives his philosophy. He stresses that philosophy affects life. He insists that philosophy could make life less burdensome, less jeopardised by bodily and mental passions. The teacher of philosophy has to become an example of this attitude.[13]

Besides, Socrates' case is not so simple. Let's remember some things about him. In his *Apology*,[14] Socrates says that he has never

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[10] See *Discourses* 2, 21, 8, 1 – 12, 1.

[11] See *Discourses* 3, 5, 15, 1 – 19, 2.

[12] See *Discourses* 3, 23, 14, 4 – 18, 5.

[13] See *Discourses* 3, 21, 17, 1 – 23,1.

[14] See *Apology*, 33a1 – 33b3.

been anyone's teacher.[15] In *Meno*, also, he insists that he doesn't teach anything, but he always asks questions.[16] According to David Fortunoff '… the Socratic method is creative insofar as it produced cognitive gain or a changed perspective. It guides us anew each time to just and right human responses. It provides the guidance for initiatory responses demanded by each uniquely evolving occasion one faces.'[17] Fortunoff's view is representative of the point we are trying to make, meaning that Epictetus sees in Socrates' figure the model of the philosopher who connects his way of philosophising with life.

In fact, Socrates does not believe that 'kalokagathia' can be taught. He does not believe that there are either teachers or students of virtue.[18] Teaching something means that there is something to be learned, and virtue could be taught if it had the character of 'science'.[19] But virtue is not a science, for the exact reason that it cannot be taught. Men of virtue, also, cannot make others the same as themselves, because they did not become what they are through 'science'.[20]

Nevertheless, Socrates declares that he was looking around for teachers who teach about the well-being of the soul.[21] Without a doubt, he is referring to philosophy teachers, and philosophy, here, as in the case of Epictetus, is thought concerned with passions. One can teach philosophy only to those who understand that the well-being of their soul prevails, in contrast with, and even for the sake of, bodily health. Augustin Basave has an interesting idea on this subject. In his

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[15] For the two most general definitions of teaching, see Sophist, 229a3 – 230a10 and 231a6 – 231c6. See also *Cratulys*, concerning the art of teaching as onomatology: 388b7 – 389b6, 428d1 – 429a1, 435d4 – 436a6.

[16] See *Meno*, 82e4 – 82e13 and, also, 84c10 – 84d8. Concerning the dialogue in *Meno*, one can see the analysis of Robert S. Brumbaugh and Nathaniel M. Lawrence, in *Philosophers on Education*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1963, pp. 29 – 34.

[17] See David Fortunoff, 'Dialogue, Dialectic, and Maieutic: Plato's Dialogues as educational models', *20th World Congress of Philosophy*, Boston, August 10 – 15, 1998, **http://www.bu.edu/wcp/** , d.a. 14/11/2004.

[18] See *Meno*, 89d3 – 89e9 and, also, 96c.

[19] See *Meno*, 87b2 – 87c12.

[20] See *Meno*, 98d10 – 99b9.

[21] See *Laches*, 185d5 – 185e6.

paper entitled 'Integral Philosophy of Education: A New 'Paideia'' he notes that:

> personalised education does not exclude that which is essential—common and equal—in all human beings; instead, it invigorates and justifies the individual himself or his individual personality. Body and soul are susceptible to acquiring perfection and beauty, as Plato wished. This perfection assumes there is a natural, progressive and systematic development of all of man's superior abilities.

I believe that this is most obvious in Epictetus' philosophical attitude and in his ideals of philosophy and teaching philosophy.[22]

For the sake of accuracy, now, I have to recall that, according to Socrates, the therapy of the soul is due to 'good words'. Thanks to them, a human soul becomes filled with wisdom ('sophrosyne').[23] A wise soul is a good soul ('agathi psyche').[24] Besides, the most crucial problem, according to Socrates, is the weakness of those who are overcome by pleasures and not doing their best, even though they are aware of it. That is the problem which Socrates asks Protagoras to face and to teach some things about.[25]

Looked at from this point of view, what is our conclusion? As I have already said, Epictetus points to Socrates as a paradigm of his ideal of the philosopher who lives his philosophising. Epictetus himself was such a philosopher. He lived his philosophy, which was stoicism. He lived the life of 'a real philosopher'. Socrates offered himself as a paradigm to his so-called students. Epictetus did the same thing too. So, whatever the results of their efforts, whatever the effect of their lessons, the first thing we learn from them is that their life is their profession and their profession gives shape to their lives. Epictetus and Socrates are philosophy teachers or teachers of philosophising. That was their life, their aim in life, the way they lived their lives. So, both of them have a common outlook. As I said, they offer themselves as paradigms to their students.

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[22] See Augustin Basave, 'Integral Philosophy of Education: A New 'Paideia'', *20th World Congress of Philosophy*, Boston, August 10 – 15, 1998, **http://www.bu.edu/wcp/**, d.a 20/11/2004.

[23] See *Charmides*, 156e1 – 157c6.

[24] See *Gorgias*, 506d8 – 507a4.

[25] See *Protagoras*, 352e5 – 353a6.

So, what could they teach us, those two philosophers, who were two of the most eminent philosopher-teachers of ancient times? First of all, we learn that we have to live our lives as philosophers or, at least, as philosophy teachers. We have to offer ourselves as paradigms. Secondly, we have to bear in mind that philosophy represents an individual's stance towards life. So, when we teach many theories, we have to give our students the understanding that each one of those theories represents a different kind of stance of an individual—of a philosopher—towards life, or towards a problem in life. So, from this point of view, we could play the role of instructors in ethics, who make propositions regarding stances towards life, through presenting the theories we teach as paradigms of stances towards life. Epictetus himself does this very thing by presenting Socrates and his philosophy as a philosophical proposition of a stance towards life.

Finally, since we are talking about education, I would like to finish my analysis with a comment made by Jonathan Cohen, in which he accentuates the importance of the teaching aspect of philosophy or of philosophy as education:

> we are pointed to look for essential interconnections between philosophy and education … In regard to the former, we should keep in mind that philosophy, as the love of, and consequently search for, wisdom, is indeed synonymous with education in the sense of an individual's search for learning. But philosophy, as we noted above, is not only a search for wisdom but conveying of that wisdom to others as well, and thus corresponds also to education as teaching. Dewey goes so far as to define philosophy as 'the general theory of education.[26]

If John Dewey is right, then we could definitely profit from the study of the philosophers who see philosophy as a matter of education. All the rest is a matter of handling that very nature of philosophy. Each one of us is trying to find his own way, but what is for sure is that we are obliged to take up the challenge of teaching our students so that they can give shape to their own lives, as ancient philosophers did.

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[26] Jonathan Cohen, 'Philosophy is education is politics: A somewhat aggressive reading of Protagoras 334d – 338e.' *20th World Congress of Philosophy*, Boston, August 10 – 15, 1998, **http://www.bu.edu/wcp/**, d.a. 19/11/2004.

Teaching the Philosophy of Aquinas

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Teaching the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas—a thirteenth century Catholic monk whose writings are embedded in Aristotelian philosophy and ridden with strange concepts such as 'substantial form,' 'act,' 'potency,' 'agent intellect,' 'quiddity,' 'proper accident,' and 'phantasm'—is not an easy task. It's taken me many years and a lot of trial and error to find ways of effectively teaching Aquinas' philosophy.   In what follows, I outline the challenges I have encountered and the methods of addressing them that have worked with my students, making Aquinas' philosophy more accessible, more intelligible and, sometimes even, rather enjoyable to learn.

The Challenges of Teaching Aquinas' Philosophy

I have encountered five main challenges in teaching Aquinas' philosophy:

1. How to provide students with adequate knowledge of his philosophy within the time constraints of the academic term;
2. How to adequately fill my students' lack of background knowledge of ancient and medieval history and philosophy without turning my course into a history rather than a philosophy course;
3. How to motivate students to study a philosopher they perceive as archaic, boring and too theological;
4. How to facilitate the reading of medieval texts and, more generally, difficult philosophical texts; and
5. How to emphasise the philosophical relevance of such texts to current concerns.

   As you can tell from this list, most of these challenges are encountered in a wide variety of philosophy courses, not just a course on Aquinas. So, unless you have ideally prepared and ideally motivated students, and only teach contemporary philosophers who have written extremely accessible texts and whose philosophy can be easily covered in the few weeks of an academic term, the strategies I propose should, for the most part, be adaptable to your students and the courses you teach.

Challenge #1: How to provide students with adequate knowledge of Aquinas' philosophy within the time constraints of an academic term

Wright State University is on a quarter system, so I have ten weeks to teach a philosophy which, even with ideal students, would take much longer. When I first taught a course on Aquinas, I opted for a textbook. I figured this was a good way of imparting a general understanding of his philosophy while avoiding all the difficulties of actually reading primary Thomistic texts. It was a mistake. It

encouraged memorisation of arguments and historical facts rather than engagement in and understanding of Aquinas' views. It also resulted in students turning in exegetical papers closely resembling their lecture notes for the course rather than the required argumentative essays.

After experimenting with different primary texts and different sets of selections from primary texts, I settled on selections from the *Summa Theologica* that deal with the distinction between faith and reason and the proofs for the existence of God; and selections from *Questions on the Soul* for Aquinas' philosophical anthropology. These selections cover fundamental aspects of Aquinas' philosophy and deal with topics of interest to students or, at least, topics which can be made interesting to them. (Just recently Peter Kreeft has published an anthology of selections from the *Summa Theologica* entitled *A Shorter Summa* which I plan to try in the autumn. There are several nice things about this anthology: the selections provide a good overview of Aquinas's system, there's a glossary of key terms, and it's a manageably small volume.)

Challenge #2: How to adequately fill students' lack of background knowledge of ancient and medieval history & philosophy without turning the course into a history rather than a philosophy course

In order to facilitate my students' understanding of Aquinas' philosophy, I have found two preliminary steps necessary. First, as my students are generally unfamiliar with the philosophy of Aristotle and some familiarity greatly increases the accessibility of Aquinas' conceptual framework, I have found it invaluably useful to go over Aristotle's four causes, his hylomorphic theory and at least the first two books of his *De anima*. (A useful and very affordable anthology for this is *The Pocket Aristotle*.) What to cover in Aristotle will, of course, depend on what you want to contextualise in Aquinas.

Second, as even fewer of my students are familiar with the historical context of Aquinas' thought and works, I have needed to devote at least some time to filling this lacuna. However, as I already have so little time to devote to Aquinas' philosophy—having only ten

weeks in a term, two of which are spent on Aristotle—and not wanting my course to turn into a history course rather than a philosophy course, I have tried to limit this endeavour to its absolute minimum: the resurgence of Aristotelian texts in the Christian West; a short biography of Aquinas' life and works; scholasticism and the structure of scholastic texts; and, where appropriate given the issue raised by Aquinas in a particular text, summaries of the views of other thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Averröes and Avicenna.

While a pragmatic decision on my part, this strategy has consistently had a great pedagogical benefit: it stimulates student curiosity and further reading. Each time I teach this course, at least a handful of students approach me to ask about what books and/or courses I would recommend to find out more about medieval history, Plato, church history or Augustine.

Given that situation, I put together a recommended reading list for the course. Perhaps this is just my particular students, but this did not work at all and I'm quite convinced they were either thrown in the trash immediately or hardly glanced at. I think the personalised response and the enthusiasm you share about a particular book or course goes a long way towards bolstering your students' expanding interests. And if you can recommend a novel (such as Umberto Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum* or the Brother Cadfael mysteries), a website or a film (such as *The Name of the Rose*), the likelihood of the student following your recommendation seems to increase significantly and it also seems to increase the likelihood that they will follow your next, more serious recommendation.

Challenge #3: How to motivate students to study a philosopher they perceive as archaic, boring and/or too theological

Occasionally I get one or two students with a keen interest in Aquinas, but the following, paraphrased student lament is, unfortunately, much more the norm: *Aquinas died hundreds of years ago, he was a Catholic monk and he wrote in this incredibly dry, mechanical style— so why bother studying him? Can't we just memorise some stuff and do multiple-choice exams?* And it is the norm because most of the

students who take the course are there because they need an elective and this one fit their schedule well or because Aquinas was, like them, a Catholic so they should be able to get an 'A' without too much effort.

Beginning the course with the study of some Aristotelian texts has some advantages in terms of motivation. Students tend to perceive the study of Aristotle as more legitimate, even if he's also a long-dead philosopher who made some well-known mistakes and also wrote in a dry, mechanical style. However, what really works is shattering the illusions students have of Aquinas (and Aristotle, too) and emphasising the contemporary relevance of what they have to say.

Aristotle was not a crusty bookworm who merely summarised and systematised the theories and ideas of his predecessors. He developed new theories, passionately argued against differing views, and devoted himself to teaching and research in almost every branch of knowledge—he was a Renaissance man before the Renaissance. And, as for Aquinas, he was not a close-minded, religious fanatic simply reiterating Church dogma. Aquinas was, in many ways a radical. He rejected substance dualism, the most commonly espoused view in the Christian West, arguably, to this day. Unlike many then and many today, he firmly believed that faith and reason are compatible and complimentary. And if the Condemnations of 1272 and 1277 were intended against some of his teachings, then he must have been perceived as a dangerous person even during his lifetime.

Those are just some of the sorts of things that can be said about Aristotle and Aquinas that address some erroneous, preconceived notions of these thinkers. Once students have a sense that the philosophers covered in the course are interesting people who might actually have something interesting to say about an issue, topic or question of contemporary relevance, then their motivation to learn dramatically rises.

Challenge #4: How to facilitate the reading of medieval texts and, more generally, difficult philosophical texts

Explaining how and why Aquinas' texts are set up the way they are, is, of course, a necessary first step. The real difficulty is not, however,

that there are objections to his position—on the contrary, the text contains responses and replies—but, rather, the highly technical vocabulary employed throughout. Students read the text but don't understand a single sentence. If you, for example, teach Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, you know what I'm talking about. It's not just that a few terms are unfamiliar, but that most of them are.

Here again, spending some time on Aristotelian texts is useful. It introduces some of the central concepts in Thomistic philosophy: 'form,' 'matter,' 'potency,' 'actuality.' If you don't cover Aristotle first, then explaining those concepts prior to assigning any of the readings is essential.

Providing your students with a glossary of those concepts as well as other difficult or technical concepts is very effective, but only so long as you spend time explaining the concepts listed prior to when they start reading, and not just give them a handout with the expectation that they will read it, understand it and utilise it to understand the assigned reading. (So although I appreciate the fact that Kreeft has included a glossary in his *A Shorter Summa*, it will only save me paper, not time.)

A great assistance in reading difficult philosophical texts, in my experience, is being shown how to do so by example. I have a student read the first paragraph of the first assigned reading and then, step-by-step, walk them through the process of understanding that paragraph. What is the question asked or issue being addressed? What concepts are employed and what do they mean? What distinctions, if any, are made? etc. And this process is repeated for several more paragraphs, so that they 'get the hang' of it.

It's important to emphasise that difficult philosophical texts cannot be speed-read and frequently, if not always, require more than one reading. And, if this is true, it's not realistic nor pedagogically sound to assign lengthy selections of difficult texts, particularly at the beginning of the course, when students are still familiarising themselves with the conceptual framework of the philosopher in question.

I've also found study guides very useful. By 'study guide', I mean a list of questions that the student should be able to answer after reading and understanding the particular assigned reading. Depending on the level of student motivation, it may be necessary to require that those study guides be turned in to ensure that they are, in fact, used by the students.

Study guides have the added benefit of ensuring that if the material covered wasn't understood on the first reading, the student will in fact reread the selection until he/she can answer the questions in the study guide. If the study guides are graded, students are all the more motivated to answer the questions correctly and, consequently, all the more likely to read the selection more than once.

Challenge #5: How to emphasise the relevance of Aquinas' philosophy today

I have left the most difficult challenge for last: how to emphasise the relevance of Aquinas' philosophy today. My students at Wright State are quite pragmatically minded and lose interest rather quickly in what they are studying if they don't see how it is relevant to their lives in some way. Perhaps you have students similar to my own.

And you have, perhaps, been similarly educated as I have been. I can't remember ever wondering how what someone taught, argued or theorised had to do with my personal concerns. Ideas, however complex, strange, difficult to understand, or seemingly incompatible with what is held to be the case today, were interesting in terms of who and when they were expounded, in fact, were interesting in their own right.

While I still try to impart this same love of ideas in and for themselves to my students, I also realize that times have changed and so have the ways in which to foster that same curiosity, enthusiasm and passion in others. I also may have read too much contemporary philosophy on the nature of texts. I'm not sure. But I'm now convinced, and my students demand, that texts speak to them.

Surely, my choice of which texts or which selections from texts to cover in a course is guided by this concern. Aquinas' views on the relation between faith and reason are immediately relevant today, at least to American students accustomed to believing that it is perfectly fine to believe, through faith, certain tenets—for example that the universe is very young, that there was a worldwide flood within the last two millennia—even though these are utterly at odds with what science sets forth.

Aquinas' arguments for the existence of God are also quite relevant, as they are not based on intuition or 'just knowing,' and indicate that belief in the existence of a Supreme Being is not an irrational, baseless belief—nor should it be.

As most of my students have been taught that to be a Christian one necessarily had to be a substance dualist, teaching them what Aquinas—a saint of the Catholic Church, after all—actually held is particularly thought provoking and controversy stirring for my students. This is further enhanced by the implications Aquinas himself draws from his rejection of substance dualism: what it means for immortality, what it means for the final Resurrection, what it truly means to be a human person.

Beyond the selection of texts to cover and drawing connections between the issues raised in those with contemporary questions, concerns or topics, one other strategy I used to emphasise the relevance of Aquinas for today is to include, in the 'study guides' I mentioned earlier, questions such as 'Given what you read, what do you think Aquinas would say about x?' x being a contemporary issue. For example, what would Aquinas say about teaching evolution as well as creation in high school biology classes (which, by the way, is the case in Ohio)? Or, what kind of philosophy of mind best describes Aquinas' view? Physicalism? Property dualism? Substance dualism? Functionalism?

Conclusion

So, those are the five main challenges I have encountered in teaching the philosophy of Aquinas, and how I have tried to meet them to the best of my abilities. Hopefully, some of what I have learned through trial and error will be useful to you in your teaching, either of the philosophy of the Dumb Ox, or to any of those philosophers you cover that draw a sigh from students as being passé, boring, too difficult or just not worth studying.

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