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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

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We welcome readers to the spring 2023 edition of the (newly named) APA Studies on Teaching Philosophy. In this issue, we are pleased to offer two articles and a review of a newly published book on Plato.

Our first article is entitled “Building Autonomy and Trust in the Introductory Classroom: Team Discussion and Analysis Assignments.” It is authored by Becky Vartabedian and Karen Adkins, both of Regis University. In this article, the authors offer an argument for introducing into the philosophy classroom an exercise that they term “team-based discussion,” a form of discussion that, they write, was first introduced into one of their classes in the fall of 2018 but now figures as an essential component of their introductory philosophy classroom every semester. (They also note that this feature has been used in both online and in-person classes.) Termed by the authors “Team Discussion and Analysis Assignment” (TDAA), the discussion that they describe in their article is of a form that is meant to accomplish the following: incentivize students’ engagement with, and building trust, with one another so as to help them develop both intellectual interest in the ideas of others and critical engagement with those ideas. This will, the authors claim, enhance student participation in philosophical discussion and, ultimately, help students to become independent of their teachers in coming to their own philosophical conclusions. The ultimate goal is, thus, the promotion of students as autonomous learners, and the fostering in each individual student of a sense of intellectual community with his/her fellow classmates. (The authors, helpfully, note one of the difficulties inherent in using the form of discussion that they advocate in their paper, and they note a strategy that might work as a remedy for this difficulty.) Readers attracted to the project described by Vartabedian and Adkins are encouraged to report on their own attempts to institute the project within their classrooms and report back on their success (or otherwise) with it.

Our second article, entitled “Using Truth Table Rules as Tools: A Rule-Based Approach to Teaching Truth Tables in Introductory Logic Classes,” is authored by Andrew Piker of Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi. In his paper, Professor Piker sets out clearly defined rules that he gives his students for the construction of logical truth tables such that, following the rules, the students will be able easily to set up a truth table that represent not only simple statements (both positive and negative), but also compound statements, i.e., conjunctions, disjunctions, conditionals and biconditionals. Having done this, students are then given the rules for determining the validity of arguments, and will be able to assess whether, by looking at the truth values of both the premises and conclusion, the argument they have before them is valid or invalid. Professor Piker writes that, once introduced to the rules for constructing truth tables, his students show marked improvement both on the assigned exercises using sets of truth tables as well as on subsequent examinations of the material. We encourage readers who teach introductory logic to try using the rules that Professor Piker sets forth in this article to see if this helps their own students more easily assess the validity of arguments.

As before and, as always, we encourage readers of our publication to write of their experiences as teachers—regarding the preparation of their classes, the construction of examinations that they think best assess what their students have learned in their classes, the materials they have chosen for use in particular classes or, indeed, anything else that they think has worked to the advantage of their students and that might help other instructors of philosophy.

Additionally, we welcome and are happy to consider articles that respond to, comment on, or take issue with any of the material that appears within our pages. We also encourage our readers to suggest themselves as reviewers of books and other materials (including technological innovations) that they think may be especially good for classroom use.

Though we usually list books and other materials that we have received from publishers for possible review in our BOOKS RECEIVED section, this particular section is absent from the present issue, but we hope to rein it in a forthcoming issue.

As always, readers are welcome to suggest material for review that they themselves have used and found useful in their own teaching. Since our publication is devoted to pedagogy and not to theoretical discussions of philosophical issues, this should be borne in mind when writing reviews and/or articles for our publication and also when reviewing material for it.
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ARTICLES

Building Autonomy and Trust in the Introductory Classroom: Team Discussion and Analysis Assignments
Becky Vartabedian and Karen Adkins
REGIS UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION

One of the reasons we were drawn to philosophy as undergraduates was the appeal of discussing complicated ideas with our classmates. As budget cuts to the liberal arts have made philosophy classes larger and often virtual, running effective discussion-based classes, particularly at the introductory level, has become commensurately more difficult. Recent models of how to incorporate discussion into courses include discussion-intensive pedagogy and “philosophical think-tanks.” In this article, we offer a different model for incorporating discussion more formally and purposefully into courses. This model—the Team Discussion and Analysis Assignment, or TDAA—is distinctive on account of its amplification of student autonomy in discussions and community-building activities in the introductory classroom.

Team-Based Discussion and Analysis (hereafter TDAA) began in 2018 in Vartabedian’s “Philosophical Explorations” course, our institution’s version of Introduction to Philosophy, and has been a feature of every subsequent semester through the present. Adkins adopted TDAA assignments in fall 2021. We have used this model successfully at the introductory level, in both in-person and online formats, and believe it could scale to upper-division courses in either format.

Vartabedian developed TDAA as a philosophical spin on team-based learning work implemented at our university, primarily by our colleagues in the School of Pharmacy. The TDAA framework affirms the paired emphasis team-based learning practices place on content acquisition and application. While content coverage is important in our—and most, we suspect—introductory philosophy courses, it is equally important for us that students appreciate and adopt what we see as core to the philosophical method: sustained and collegial engagement with diverse views. Oral discussion is well suited to this kind of engagement, but effective discussion and oral discussion are not necessarily concomitant. The general way in which discussion happens in open classes, which can range from twenty to two hundred students and can be in person or online, tends to result in just a few voices participating consistently, and very little back-and-forth exchange. We think effective discussion depends on parameters of trust; participants must spend enough time with just a few colleagues so that they have some knowledge of one another and confidence in being heard.

In what follows, we describe the framework in more detail, including structural considerations and group formation. We offer example TDAAs, explaining their construction, objectives, and real outcomes from student reports. We evaluate the TDAA’s success in circumventing a key challenge facing all small-group work: the “free-rider” problem, where individuals who under-contribute can do so without suffering a penalty. Finally, we describe the benefit of affirming student autonomy in discussion—that is, a key feature of TDAs is their operation away from the formal environment of the classroom, in a location the students choose and apart from the expectant gaze of the instructor—autonomy that has demonstrated substantive transformations in student comprehension of course material and the development of an overall course community.

TDAA STRUCTURES AND FORMATION

The TDAA assignment is an adaptation of Team-Based Learning (TBL) strategies, which are widespread in our
university (a private, master’s-level university) and used primarily in our pharmacy school. For our colleagues in pharmacy, Team-Based Learning assignments function as a ‘flipped’ model, “freeing up class time for application activities in which students work in teams to solve the kinds of problems they will face in the future.” These application activities depend on the implementation of regular readiness assessments, which include short quizzes that serve as pre-test benchmarks over content that will be deployed in the team activity application; content acquisition is evaluated with both post-tests that follow the application activities, and peer evaluations that incentivize the fair distribution of effort. Our TDAA framework depends on the standard commitments of team-based learning: namely, small groups that stay together during the entire semester; the use of peer evaluations as a way of combating the free-rider problem (see below); and expressly devoting class sessions to team activities.

TDAAAs depend on permanent small groups that are themselves no larger than 20 percent of the overall class size. At our institution, these groups typically include between four and five students each. In our model, groups are self-selected (i.e., students choose their group members) and form in week three or four of the semester, following the close of our institution’s add/drop period. This timing allows both the course roster to settle and students to begin developing a sense of each other’s classroom presence. Before TDAA groups form, students in Vartabedian’s classes will have participated in one or more preliminary group discussion assignments in which discussion partners are not self-selected, providing some diversity in encounters with others. While the hope is, of course, that students select groups based on these encounters with others, we notice that groups tend to form around proximity (i.e., where students are sitting relative to whomever ends up in their team) or pre-established friendships in the class.

Indeed, though there are many ways to form groups inside a classroom, we have taken seriously the anecdotal and persistent concerns students bring to small group work and small group projects from other classes (and from our own experiences). Students frequently comment on the seemingly arbitrary composition of groups, the potential for workload to be poorly distributed among group members, and the resulting frustration around grade distribution. Self-selection may not avoid these worries entirely, but it can at least relieve the burden of arbitrariness that might undermine the project before it gets off the ground.

In these groups, students develop responses to discussion questions over a reading under study and are completed in one seventy-five-minute class session. On days when TDAAAs are scheduled, teams meet in a non-classroom location they’ve determined in advance—available coffee shops or cafeterias on campus, on the quad, or in a common area in the residence hall or library. The prompts for Vartabedian’s TDAAAs are available on our institution’s learning management system (WorldClass) beginning fifteen minutes before the start of class; student groups produce a single set of responses and submit that to a designated drop-box on the LMS by the end of the class session. (An example of Vartabedian’s prompts appears in the section below titled “TDAA Procedure.”) Adkins posts TDAA prompts two days before and asks students to show up for the TDAA with the reading or viewing completed but has a similarly tight timeline on submitting responses. Except for the fifteen-minute buffer prior to the start of class, teams do not have access to the prompts in advance. Teams are also encouraged to work through as much material as they can in the course session with an emphasis on quality over quantity—strong responses engage the text(s) under study in appropriate ways (contextualization, discussion, and citation are required) and demonstrate collaborative thinking or depth of understanding that may not have been available from individual focus or full-class discussion. Our courses have accommodated anywhere between four and six TDAAAs each semester.

John Capps cites discussion as “ideally suited to encouraging our students to think critically, to consider a variety of points of view, and to give reasons in support of their positions.” Capps further insists—rightly, we think—that class discussion is an opportunity to “model how philosophy is itself an ongoing discussion between different figures and positions.” Alexander Englert recommends small group discussions as “a means of learning to philosophize,” and as opportunities for students to practice autonomy and self-direction. We think models like Englert’s “think tank” and our own TDAA assignments provide useful alternatives for maximizing depth in small-group discussion. Most basically, both of us value TDAAAs for their ability to emphasize and generate student autonomy in discussions; the TDAA itself is a semester-long assignment that is both iterative and generative. As such, we think it supports a broader view of what it means to philosophize beyond the Socratic example: to think synthetically or creatively about the problems philosophy presents, and to think critically and with appropriate skepticism about what the world presents to us.

Secondarily, the TDAA model is adaptive to significantly different course objectives and organization styles. Vartabedian uses TDAAAs as a way of cultivating close reading and textual engagement in classes. Because so many students are encountering philosophical writing for the first time, providing a dedicated and consistent place for the text ensures that the students are reading the assigned text; encountering elements of scholarly texts like introductions, footnotes, and references; and learning the relevance of these elements for understanding the main text. The prompts provided in a close-reading-focused TDAA alert students to significant ideas in the text under study. The TDAA assignments point to portions of the texts that students will typically end up writing about in short papers. They’ve discussed these texts with peers, submitted responses, and received feedback on their responses to these identified signposts in the text. Each of these experiences supports the longer-term work of philosophical writing in the introductory course.

Adkins uses TDAAAs as a kind of bookend to thematic units in the class, and typically chooses applied problems within the themes for students to use as TDAAAs. As Michaelsen and Sweet suggest, successful group discussion assignments
require students to make decisions, to interpret evidence, and to draw their own conclusions from the evidence they’ve collected. The value in the bookend is that students can explore the ways in which the language and approach of philosophical analysis is relevant in the kinds of dilemmas they will encounter in their lives, and student discussion over some of the cases became increasingly nuanced over the semester. In the next section, we offer two examples of TDAs that follow these different organizational approaches.

**TDAA PROCEDURE**

**THE CLOSE READING APPROACH**

The Close Reading TDAA invites students to practice strategies that offer more context to the opening paragraphs of the *Apology* of Socrates, found in West and West’s Four Texts on Socrates. Students are directed to read portions of the editors’ and translators’ introduction, pertinent information in the *Euthyphro*, and Aristophanes’ popular portrayal of Socrates in *The Clouds*. The instructions for this first TDAA are as follows:

1. Please name the students in attendance and participating in your TDAA today.
2. In West and West’s text, read note 5 on page 41. What is the value of the information in this note for our reading and understanding the *Apology*?
3. Read together *Apology* 17a-18a. Explain the language and disposition Socrates says is appropriate to the setting. Do his accusers use this language and demonstrate this disposition? Why or why not?
4. Read *Apology* 18c to learn the earlier charges against Socrates. Then, turn to p. 29 of West and West (their Introduction) and read point 2. Then pick up the action on p. 119 and read from marginal 90 to marginal 125 (on p. 120). What do you think this widely performed and well-known play has to do with the earlier charges Socrates faced?

The instructions for this TDAA are purposely didactic, intended to spotlight places in West and West’s collection that offer greater context for understanding why Socrates is in such hot water. These questions invite students to develop an understanding based on their reading and shared discussion of pertinent texts, using their best assessments of the text as the basis for response.

The first task—West and West’s footnote on page 41—distinguishes a private case like the one Euthyphro brings to the court from the public indictment Meletus has entered against Socrates. Second, by reading the opening paragraphs of the *Apology*, students come to grips with Socrates’s place relative to the law court, to his accusers, and to Athens at large, thus setting up the exchange with Meletus to come later in the text. Finally, when students see the picture of Socrates in Aristophanes’s *The Clouds*, they get a sense of the broad cultural attitudes in circulation about Socrates; pointing to this satire invites students to think about its role in Socrates’s fate and the role culture plays in shaping attitudes about notorious figures in general. Though the answers that groups provide often share a core set of similarities, what and why questions offer opportunities for divergence that spur conversation about the text in the large group.

The information above is—and has been—the subject of a lecture in which the professor (Vartabedian, in this case) highlights important passages in the texts under study and provides students with an orientation to the text in advance of their group work. The didactic instructions carry some of this forward to the small group, but students working together in small groups start to see features of academic texts and writing—including introductions, reference material, and supplements—that shed light on the primary text. The didactic TDAA prompts—examples of which are provided above—require discussion and synthesis of material into responses representative of the group’s thinking, rather than responses offered by a single individual in relation to the instructor’s question during a lecture.

**THE BOOKEND**

This is the third of four TDAs Adkins used, at the close of the unit on ethics. Students read and discuss Daniela Lamas’s op-ed titled “‘You’re Dying,’ I Told My Patient. I Wish I Hadn’t,” which appeared in the *New York Times* in 2021.

- Your first prompt is this (Lamas’s) op-ed from the *New York Times* (Lamas 2021), where a doctor regrets being truthful to her patient. (If you really want to dig into this, here are the several interesting letters this op-ed provoked, “Tell the Truth to Dying Patients?” 2021). I think it’s fair to say that at least three and maybe all four of our major ethical theorists (Aristotle, Kant, Mill, Arendt) would say that withholding the truth is clearly morally wrong, but the doctor makes an interesting case for withholding the truth in this sort of case.

- Before the TDAA, both read and think about this article (try to do it both sympathetically and critically, as far as you are able), but also think about a time where either you lied and do not regret it, or told the truth and felt like that was the wrong moral choice. Lies by omission (i.e., I stayed silent about something I knew happened or similar) count here. (You have to be comfortable enough talking to your TDAA partners about this lie, so either think of what details you are willing to share, or disguise enough details to make this shareable. I will dub this “pedagogical dishonesty” and grant you Atheist and Philosophical Absolution for it.)

- Here’s the goal for this TDAA: for you, as a group, to dig into these complicated examples of lying and truth-telling and try to come up with your own practical rules or guidance for telling the truth (in other words, our ethicists give us formulas and arguments justifying them, which are great and instructive. But we may find that these formulas
and arguments sometimes rub up against real-world complications).

- In your notes, I will want to see the kinds of examples you wrestled with, the sorts of complications for truth-telling and lying they raised, and what kinds of guidance you were able to consider as a group. (And to be clear, if you are not able to articulate a single rule or guidance that your whole group agrees on, that is A-ok. But I’d like to hear the rules or guidance you considered, and where and why you disagreed about them.)

Because this TDAA occurred much later in the semester, where students seemed comfortable in small and large groups, Adkins designed this TDAA to get students talking about how to apply philosophical tools and dilemmas to their own lives. Adkins begins the introductory semester with a discussion exercise giving the students an ethical dilemma about truth and lying (with no establishing lecture or theory). While students are able on day one, in spontaneous groups, to generate diverse responses to the dilemma, and their reasonings, across the class, hit the themes of the major Western ethical theories, they are also quite emphatic in their responses; right and wrong actions are clear and not revisable. This TDAA invited students both to think about cases where there are compelling reasons for each decision, and crucially ethics as an iterative process. Rather than lived ethics being a case of reasons for each decision, and crucially ethics as an iterative process. Rather than lived ethics being a case of

Adkins always devotes part of the class session after students submit TDAAs to full-group discussion of the TDAA so that students can benefit from other groups’ ideas, and this discussion stood out for its complexity and sophistication. Students weighed the different obligations of honesty that come from isolated encounters with others as opposed to those in ongoing intimate relationships of trust. Students were particularly struck by the ways in which professional standards can constrain ethical discernment in some workplaces. Students were overwhelmingly empathetic to the doctor and discussed the kinds of institutional limitations on her ability to provide care (e.g., resource limitations in hospitals that overburden doctors with too many patients and too little time). In other words, they were fully grappling with the many and significant differences between ethics in abstraction and ethics in lived, complex, socially constrained settings. The discussion was collegial and complex.

**Evaluating TDAAs and the Free-Rider Problem**

Group work often gets a bad reputation in the academy because of free riders; group grades allow industrious students to pull the weight of the group, and free riders can under-contribute while suffering no penalty. This problem has two aspects: a technical, accounting problem (how does one account for disparate work in groups for a grade?), and a practical problem (what is the value of struggling through a group assignment in which a free rider is present?). Engler avoided this problem in part by not grading students’ output from think tanks; Capps uses detailed rubrics to assess both individual student contributions to discussion, and whole-class discussions. Providing the criteria by which students will evaluate one another at the outset of the TDAA assignment can minimize free riders, or at least make clear that free-ridership comes with a penalty. Our strategy distributes evaluation and makes it transparent. Our colleagues in the pharmacy program integrate the results of pre- and post-group readiness assessments into their evaluations. We evaluate the write-ups students put together from their TDAA submissions, with posted criteria that make it clear our interest is in the quality of discussion rather than quantity. We are interested in hearing from groups about points of clarity or difference, and not simply receiving transcriptions.

Affirming the value of TDAAs beyond independent group exercises requires the re-integration of relevant insights into subsequent class sessions. Acknowledging specific insights from group submissions in the next session’s discussion or using activities that bring representatives from different teams together to compare responses are ways of inculcating responsibility for the team’s work in its members. For instance, Adkins reserved half of the class session immediately after TDAAs were submitted for TDAA debrief and discussion, which gave the full group a chance to compare notes on what they discussed and illustrated some of the variety in student discussion when it wasn’t being managed or directed by a professor. The first TDAA in Adkins’s class focused on “cancel culture” as an easy topic for students to engage with and used two op-eds (one affirming cancel culture as a danger to free speech, another disputing it) to open discussion. When students encountered excerpts from John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty* later in the semester, several of them raised the earlier cancel culture discussion as the class thought about how to evaluate the difference between government restrictions on speech and social restrictions on speech and respond to restrictions based on this evaluation.

The close reading TDAAs are written such that these don’t penalize students for not doing the reading, but it doesn’t let those students entirely off the hook, either. They are still expected to engage with the text to some degree and also with their peers. Later in the semester, Vartabedian follows TDAA sessions with a seminar discussion in which half of the team is required to participate; following the next TDAA, the other half of the team represents the group at the table. These discussions focus on questions from the TDAA assignment that might have generated different responses among teams and bring team responses to those
prompts into larger class discussion. For example, Hannah Arendt’s claims in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* concerning the role of polite European society in perpetuating the evils of the Nazi machine—discussed in a TDA—end up being the focus of the seminar discussion. The discussion typically works from each of the groups’ initial responses, but then generates connections to passivity and politeness in our contemporary culture, and especially in relation to the uptick of public expressions of anti-Semitism in 2022.

Crucially, we employ different strategies to give students voice to evaluate themselves and their colleagues at the end of the semester, and to make workload inequities transparent. We each post criteria for evaluation of TDAA participation (preparation, contribution to discussion, respect for colleagues, fair distribution of labor), and ask students to complete brief evaluations of themselves and every member of their group individually. These evaluations are averaged to provide the individual score on the TDAA. Vartabedian also explicitly solicits feedback on the criteria that includes praise (did one member go above and beyond?) and critique (did one member not follow through?) and forwards the feedback to students with team member names removed. When students evaluate a peer’s contribution at any other quantitative level than 3/3 (for example), they are required to offer qualitative justification of that score with the expressed understanding that this feedback will be returned to their colleague; when the feedback is repackaged and returned to the free-riding colleague, it is presented to the student as a strategy for developing competence in group assignments beyond the introductory classroom. In Vartabedian’s classes, students have two weeks (between the final TDAA assignment and the last day of classes) to complete a short online form with both the quantitative and qualitative evaluations; the feedback is forwarded to students after the two-week window is concluded. In Vartabedian’s case, the anonymized qualitative feedback provided to students stands as justification for why the free rider’s quantitative grade includes deductions.

Adkins addresses the accounting problem through an adaptation developed in past team-taught courses involving group work. She reserves a small portion of the semester grade assigned to TDAs for group evaluations. Students individually submit brief evaluations of their own and their colleagues’ contributions to the TDAs (following the criteria established in a posted rubric). Students know about this requirement from the beginning of the semester, and they know its purpose. Adkins reserves the right to make small adjustments to overall TDAA grades for individual participants based on these group evaluations. In almost twenty years of including this as part of group work, most groups have reported relatively consistent and equitable labor and communication practices, but approximately one group each semester reveals the presence of a free rider. Three members of the group, for example, will describe specifically what three people did, and then say person #4 rarely showed, was late to contribute, or wasn’t prepared to engage. Person #4 typically writes an unspecific evaluation saying all work was distributed fairly. In Adkins’s approach, free-rider adjustments are not questioned or disputed, which owes to the fact that these adjustments are partial adjustments, and do not alone make the difference between passing and failing the course.

Both methods of evaluation allow the presence of the free rider to emerge; indeed, we think that is an important feature of the assignment. Part of how we understand the autonomy we are trying to cultivate in students is not so much independence of mind or critical thinking but self-efficacy, that is, students take responsibility for their own learning, individually and with others. This requires work at the outset (setting some expectations for group meeting and activity, which each of us includes in the syllabi and original prompts for group formation), and also trust in colleagues to follow through on commitments and engagement. In our experience, this trust is generally respected in student groups, but occasionally violated. What we think is important, in both of our approaches, is both the ability to make the social commitment of the groups transparent, and to give students the ability to recognize and mark when trust is violated. The fact that in seven semesters of using TDAs Vartabedian has never been asked to intervene in a group and that in over fifteen years of utilizing this group evaluation method Adkins has never received a single complaint about it suggests that giving students the efficacy to manage their group learning in its positive and negative varieties helps them drive their own learning in this regard. In sum, the free-rider problem is notoriously tricky, and we think that making it manifest, transparent in the classroom, and giving students strategies for mitigating it is a successful path of navigating it. 17

**AUTONOMY AND PHILOSOPHICAL COMMUNITY BEYOND THE CLASSROOM**

The intervention TDAs offer accomplishes several goals pertinent to the overall task of “learning to philosophize.” On our general teaching evaluations, students are invited to offer qualitative feedback that describes aspects of the course that contributed to student learning (Q1), solicits recommendations for improving the course overall (Q2), and indicates the ways students would describe the course to peers (Q3).

In Vartabedian’s pilot semester of the TDAA (fall 2018), seven of eighteen respondents explicitly mention the TDAA assignments or small group work in their Q1 responses:

“I really liked working with groups. I felt it was a great way to receive different ideas and perspectives. Everyone was able to express themselves and ask questions.” (FA18 Q1, response 3)

“I really liked the assignments that we had called TDAs. We were in a group almost every week discussing what we were learning in class. It made the class fun and I got some friends from it too. There is a lot of writing and reading, but I did learn a lot about life and things I don’t usually think of.” (FA18 Q1, response 1)

In the second semester that TDAs were offered (spring 2019), five of nine respondents explicitly commend TDAs
as contributing to their learning. Again, from the Q1 responses:

“The mix of personal work as well as group discussion around each reading in the class allows for complete understanding of the concepts. I also really benefited from the TDAA because they allowed us to work through the ideas in the class ourselves and teach each other.” (SP19 Q1, response 3)

“The group discussions and the TDAA helped tremendously. It really helped to clear up anything that was confusing to me and my classmates.” (SP19 Q1, response 4)

Adkins had a similar experience in her pilot offering. Nine of the fifteen students completing evaluations for her fall 2021 course explicitly praised TDAA as a valuable learning experience. (No students criticized them.) One student observed that TDAA helped them retain what was covered in class, two others praised them for helping their critical thinking skills and ability to apply philosophical debates to contemporary issues and problems, and seven students praised TDAA for helping them see multiple viewpoints on an issue.

We suggest, then, that TDAA resolve at least two additional problems Alexander Englert identifies in his discussion of philosophical think tanks: a transfer problem and a lack of Other problem. The transfer problem, or the “lack of continuity problem,” follows from Englert’s observation that small group discussions are viewed as merely arbitrary exercises designed to interrupt a class proceeding as usual. Englert argues that a group arrangement that persists through the semester supports the prospect of “an ongoing conversation” among small group cohorts, “because the conversation has to continue or be revived.”

One of the key advantages for Englert is that, by staying the same throughout the semester, the groups developed “collective presence and group memory,” and discussion could be sustained and developed. Midway through the fall 2022 semester, Vartabedian’s courses provided feedback that—in addition to offering strategies to improve the TDAA assignment—indicated the TDAA’s success in supporting understanding of reading and course concepts. In a course organized for first-year students to provide reading support, 20 percent of students reported that the TDAA accomplished a transfer of concepts from reading to small group discussion and then to the short writing assignments that form the spine of Vartabedian’s course, precisely because the students have established a level of trust with one another that lowers the stakes of sharing.

The lack of Other problem is defined by Englert as insufficient viewpoint diversity within small and spontaneously formed discussion groups. To combat it, he recommends the presence in small groups of at least one “person with whom one is not absolutely familiar and whose point of view is unexplored.” This is linked to Englert’s emphasis on the Socratic ideal underpinning small group discussions, which invokes a commitment to a “tough line of questioning” that groups composed of friends could otherwise avoid.

Though we understand the pitfalls that Englert’s efforts are intended to avoid, student feedback from TDAA groups indicates their facilitation of multiple perspectives on a particular text and understanding of key concepts that builds from discussion in the small group. We suggest that the lack of Other problem can be solved in the small groups themselves, but also solved by an instructor’s careful prompting, ensuring the presence of questions or discussion points that invite the diverse thinking that discussion of philosophical problems benefit from. Instructors design prompts that explicitly ask for students, even in groups that lack Others, to think beyond their own perspective, and full-class discussions of TDAA afterwards can bring forth the richness between group discussions. These tools invite synthetic thinking and the critical and skeptical assessments of ideas that are fundamental to philosophical inquiry.

The common themes in much of the feedback we receive concerning TDAA are trust and autonomy. Englert (speaking for most of us, we suspect) says that part of the value of small group discussion comes from students’ ability to speak freely “in a low-pressure environment where the professor—as a proverbial Big Brother—is not watching.” However, small group discussion that takes place in class does involve some moderation and professorial policing, even if only in the form of passive surveillance. Between the two of us, we have nearly fifty years of college teaching experience at six different institutions, which also includes dozens of observations of colleagues for tenure and promotion. Invariably, once ad hoc groups are formed for discussion, professors periodically roam the room to listen in to groups working. We argue that the crucial autonomy move here isn’t simply small group discussion, but the crucial leap of faith that permits students to speak on their own terms and in cultivated communities of mutual concern.

The TDAA demonstrates an undervalued but critical strategy for philosophical inquiry, and that’s inquiry done in community with others. The point of the TDAA is not necessarily doing it right, but rather doing it together.

NOTES


2. We are not using autonomy in its most general philosophical sense; rather, we are interested in autonomy as it applies to the way students take responsibility for their own learning. This is more than simply completing individual assignments in a timely fashion; TDAA require enough student commitment to organize and plan for meetings, and enough commitment and engagement with one another to generate notes from a substantive 75-minute discussion. This requires both individual student responsibility, and sustained trust and communication with peer partners, all of which go well beyond normal expectations of student responsibility in the introductory classroom.


4. Larry Michaelsen, Neil Davidson, and Claire Howell Major, “Team-Based Learning Practices and Principles in Comparison with
Using Truth Table Rules as Tools: A Rule-Based Approach to Teaching Truth Tables in Introductory Logic Classes

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I have spent a number of years teaching introductory logic to students who, in most cases, take it in order to avoid taking a math class. Many of those students find the sections of the class devoted to symbolic logic, including the material on truth tables, especially challenging. In order to help them meet that challenge, I have recently developed an approach in which rules serve as tools for teaching and learning how to construct and use truth tables.

When I introduce truth tables in my classes, I begin with an explanation of what a truth table is and provide some examples. Then I begin preparing students to construct their own tables. First, I present the following set of rules that they can use to decide which columns to include in their tables:

**RULES FOR DECIDING WHICH COLUMNS TO INCLUDE IN A TABLE**

When deciding which columns to include in a truth table, go through the rules below one by one, top to bottom—making sure to follow each rule that applies to that table.

Also, start creating columns on the far left side of the table, and then work left to right as you add each column.

**Include Columns for the Following:**

1. Each of the simple component statements (represented by capital letters) in the given statement or argument

2. Any negated simple component statements (represented by a tilde directly in front of a capital letter) in the given statement or argument
   - For example, any ~A that occurs by itself, or as part of a more compound statement such as ~A & B

3. Any compound statements that are inside parentheses or brackets in the given statement or argument
   - For example, if you were given the statement ~(G v S), you would need to include a column for G v S

4. When constructing a truth table for a single statement, include a column for the whole given statement

When constructing a truth table for a whole argument (to determine whether the argument is valid or invalid), include a column for each of the premises and a column for the conclusion

I demonstrate with examples how to use the rules. Then (after explaining how to determine the number of rows to include in a given table) I introduce a second set of rules to guide the process of filling in the columns:

**RULES FOR FILLING IN COLUMNS**

When filling in columns, start on the far left side of the table and work towards the right side of the table.
1. When the first of the simple component statements (represented by capital letters) is at the top of a column,
   – if there are only two simple component statements in the given statement or argument write T, T, F, F in the rows below;
   – if there are three simple component statements in the given statement or argument write T, T, F, F, T, T, F, F in the rows below.

2. When the second of the simple component statements is at the top of a column,
   – if there are only two simple component statements in the given statement or argument write T, F, T, F in the rows below;
   – if there are three simple component statements in the given statement or argument write T, F, T, F, T, F in the rows below.

3. If a third simple component statement is at the top of a column,

4. When a negation is at the top of a column,
   the truth value in each row should be the opposite of the truth value in that row for the statement that is being negated.
   • For example, if the negation is ~G, then the truth value in any row of the ~G column should be the opposite of the truth value in that row of the G column; so if G is true in the first row, then ~G will be false in the first row.

5. When a conjunction is at the top of a column,
   write T in a row of that column only when both components (conjuncts) are true, otherwise write F.
   • For example, in a column for the conjunction B & D, write T only in a row in which there are Ts in both the B column and the D column; write F in any other rows.

6. When a disjunction is at the top of a column,
   write F in a row of that column only when both components (disjuncts) are F, otherwise write T.
   • For example, in a column for the disjunction R v W, write F only in a row in which there are Fs in both the R column and the W column; write T in any other rows.

7. When a conditional statement is at the top of a column,
   write F in a row only when the antecedent (what is in front of the arrow) is T and the consequent (what comes after the arrow) is F; write T in any other rows.

For example, in a column for the conditional statement E → H, write F only in a row in which there is a T in the E column and an F in the H column; otherwise write T.

8. When a biconditional statement is at the top of a column,
   write T only when both components or sides of the biconditional have the same truth value; write F in any other rows.
   • For example, in a column for the biconditional statement J ↔ C, write T only in a row in which there is a T in both the J column and the C column, and a row in which there is an F in both the J column and the C column; otherwise write F.

Once I have explained and demonstrated the use of the second set of rules, students practice working with both rule sets to construct truth tables for truth functional statements. Most of them get comfortable with using the rules fairly quickly (some need more time, but generally develop proficiency with a little more help or practice). Then we move on to the construction and use of truth tables to determine whether or not arguments are valid, and I add a final rule for making that determination:

**RULE FOR DETERMINING WHETHER AN ARGUMENT IS VALID OR INVALID**

If the truth table includes any rows in which the premises are T and the conclusion is F then the argument is invalid. If there is no row of that kind, then the argument is valid.

This rule-based approach might seem somewhat cumbersome, since it involves the use of quite a few rules, as well as writing out column headings for any truth-functional components of the given truth functions (rather than just writing columns of Ts and Fs under the logical operators of the given truth functions). I do let my students know that they are free to use a more streamlined process (such as writing columns of Ts and Fs under the logical operators) if they prefer to do so; and some of them do abbreviate the process. Many of my students, however, find the rule-based approach helpful—they often tell me that they do, and they do very well on their truth table exercise sets and test questions. In fact, they do significantly better than my students did before I introduced the rule-based method.

Another concern that might be raised about this method is that even though students who adopt it do learn to construct truth tables and use them to determine validity, they might do so in a mechanical or "paint by numbers" manner, merely following the rules without thoroughly understanding the process. In order to address that potential problem, I spend quite a bit of time explaining the rules, how and why they are used, and relevant concepts such as validity and the...
notion of a truth function. When students go on to apply those rules and concepts in the construction and use of truth tables, they often express their understanding of the process and the concepts involved. Many of them indicate, for example, that they understand validity better once they have used the validity determination rule and determined arguments’ validity or invalidity on the basis of the possible truth values of their premises and conclusions. Strong responses to short answer test questions (e.g., on the nature of truth functions) have provided further evidence that students are not just following the rules blindly or without understanding.

Overall, the rule-based method I have outlined above has been a very effective teaching and learning tool. It has helped guide students through the process of learning to construct and use truth tables and it has had a positive and significant impact on student performance.

** Formal deduction is another element of symbolic logic that many of my students find difficult, at least initially. One approach that they often find helpful (in addition to “thinking backwards” from the conclusion to the steps they will need to take in order to derive it from the premises) is to make two columns off to the side of their proofs: one for the rules they will follow, and another for the arguments or inferences they will make in accordance with those rules. Writing an argument or inference next to the rule it follows for each step of the proof as they “think backwards” from the conclusion seems to give students useful visual cues, and helps them keep track of the inferences they need to make.

** I have not asked my students to construct truth tables involving more than three simple component statements, but the rules could of course be revised to include instructions for filling in columns for larger numbers of simple component statements.

BOOK REVIEW

Reading Plato’s Dialogues to Enhance Learning and Inquiry. Exploring Socrates’ Use of Protreptic for Student Engagement


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Two commonplaces about Plato have inspired whole traditions of interpretive theory. 1) The Platonic dialogues arouse the characters in them, and readers who engage with them, to further philosophical inquiry. Maybe no other writings perform this arousal as well. 2) The dialogues contain turns of argument, ambiguities, and contexts that license widely divergent readings. It can be hard to say for certain what (if anything) Plato means to assert in any given dialogue.

Some Plato scholars devote themselves to these observations and to the methodological consequences they might have. Others touch on the general features of the dialogues but address them alongside other topics (justice, being) found in the Platonic conversations. Many others still have grown tired of the discussion of interpretation. How to read Plato remains a vital issue, and no one denies his facility for turning non-philosophers toward higher reflection. But the proposals for how to proceed with the dialogues mostly fall into a now-familiar range of answers, from skepticism that anything is asserted in Plato’s works (this response dating back to one stage of the post-Platonic Academy in pre-Roman Greece) to some variety of hidden or encoded meanings. The landscape seems to have been mapped out.

This new book by Mason Marshall freshens and expands the discussion. Marshall sketches an original approach to the dialogues that one can imagine putting to work in both introductory and advanced courses. This is not to say that the book is meant to be read by students in those courses. But I recommend it to their instructors.

In fact, and before I go further with this discussion, let me make my endorsement of Marshall’s book clear. All book reviews contain moments of disagreement, or points at which the reviewers distance themselves from claims in the book being reviewed. So too here. But my qualifiers should not detract from my admiration for the book or my esteem for the spirit in which it is written.

Marshall seeks a “protreptic” reading of Plato: the Platonic dialogues as occasions and inspirations for a turn away from uncritical thought to philosophizing or self-examination. He does not make this a discussion of the ancient genre known as protreptic (5), but appropriates the word for his own purposes. Marshall urges the importance of reflection to life, above all to political life, on the grounds that a successful democracy must contain thoughtful citizens. And lest one’s eyes glaze over at the prospect of pedagogical homilies (“Think for yourself,” etc.), let me say that Marshall immediately plunges into discovering the specific mechanics of the protreptic effect in Plato. In the two chapters that comprise this book’s methodological core, its first two chapters, he shows how to read the dialogues, first “top-down” and then “bottom-up,” with an eye to discovering strategies for instigating self-examination. These chapters reflect long study, broad reading, and some of the closest, sharpest observations I have seen about the dialogues.

In the top-down approach, one watches Socrates engaging with an interlocutor like Euthyphro, and asks counterfactually whether this or that change in his approach would prove more conducive to the goal of leading the interlocutor toward self-examination.

The bottom-up approach, in the second of the two chapters, reveals the thoroughness with which Marshall has read Plato. He focuses on a number of puzzle cases in Socratic
cross-examinations, when Socrates explains a question in misleading terms, or distracts from the real issues at stake. Marshall argues that we can use those problematic moments to ask what protreptic effect they might have. Do they make it easier for an interlocutor to admit ignorance? Do they turn a reader away from the interlocutor’s self-advertisement for wisdom? Regarding a passage in the Euthyphro, for instance, Marshall writes that Socrates “is more obscure here than the content of his questions requires him to be and that his obscurity . . . is a device he uses deliberately” (41). I savored this chapter.

The purpose of Marshall’s questioning is not to determine what Plato means to do in each scene of questioning, but to reflect on what means encourage philosophical thoughtfulness. For the protreptic effect of reading Plato introduces a centrifugal force opposing interpretation as that is commonly known. In connection with the puzzling passages in some dialogues, “your goal would be not to figure out what his strategies actually are . . . but just to think of tactics that are available to him” (45). If interpretations one way or other keep returning readers’ attention in toward Plato, protreptic reading turns the attention out to almost anyone else: whoever might take to self-examination.

It is not always clear whether one is reading Plato, when following Marshall’s lead, so as to be protreptic oneself with students or qua student to be protrepticized. “Your aim would be just to discover new ideas and to refine the ideas you already had about strategies Socrates might employ” (45). More plausibly the purpose of this book is to show instructors how to set their students reading Plato with a shrewd eye for how to get them spinning off on their own tangents.

The two chapters that follow Marshall’s elucidation of his method defend the protreptic reading on a theoretical level. In chapter 3, Marshall takes on the problem of whether Plato ought to be interpreted in a particular fashion, and what we can deduce from the dialogues about how he means to be read. As in the rest of the book, Marshall draws on an astonishing quantity of recent secondary literature in treating this topic. He has looked into the alternatives for reading Plato and knows how to keep them all in their place.

For instance, Marshall embarks on a long and adept discussion of the Republic’s proposed city as if to set aside the political theory of that dialogue as a worthy subject of inquiry. In his discussion of the philosopher-royals, Marshall treats them as one more feature of the city without (to my mind) giving enough attention to the possibility that they indicate what kind of coup will actually institute the new government. But to listeners at the Republic’s conversation, and to many of its original readers, the force of mentioning philosophers in power is the expectation that philosophers will seize power. And to a contemporary audience that hears the debate over a city’s practicality as the promise of violent takeover, being aroused to philosophize threatens to mean being aroused to political subversion. Platonic self-examination is not as open-ended as Marshall believes.

In general, I fear that Marshall’s idea of interpretive options takes too little notice of the way dialogues and other texts were read in Plato’s day. “How Plato expects his works to be read” becomes a question about Plato alone. But when scholars of the present become clearer about how readers of the past consumed and assessed a work, they can say more about what an author would expect or could have expected from readers. Even when setting aside an author’s expectations, one would do well to understand what those expectations reasonably could have been in the very different literary culture of classical Athens.

Chapter 4 defends the project of the book from another side. Marshall imagines objections from scholars of Plato who want to read and teach the dialogues, but not with the purpose of enhancing self-examination. So Marshall lists all the motivations one might give for reading Plato, and pushes back against either the possibility of them or their desirability. I found this the least appealing part of the book by far. Marshall’s arguments do often hit home. He knows the subject and the scholarship. Nevertheless, the chapter creates an impression of dyspeptic dissatisfaction with scholarship. And even if these arguments carry the day, they would probably not leave the protreptic approach in place as the only game in town. The greatest danger is that the protreptic baby will be thrown out together with the scholarly bathwater.

Anyway, all Marshall really needs here for his book’s argument is the recognition that his use of Plato can thrive in the classroom alongside others. For that purpose he can do without chapter 4 entirely.

I had a different kind of lingering worry about the outcome that Marshall puts forward as the goal of such readings: self-examination, a thoughtful citizenry. No sane person could object to such aims. But it already gives a particular form to Marshall’s approach. First of all—he admits this point, even celebrates it—the thinking to be done under Plato’s influence does not have to be Platonic philosophizing, and probably will not be. As I said, Marshall does not propose an interpretation “of Plato” as one ordinarily uses such words. Any awareness of one’s own ignorance and effort to replace ignorance with knowledge will count as the activity to carry on because of the dialogues.

To advocate philosophizing that goes beyond Platonic thinking is one thing (and in my opinion a wise use of the dialogues). To equate all philosophizing with good thinking in general overlooks too much. Often, philosophy does indeed present itself as nothing but logical reasoning made self-aware. That idea of philosophizing undercuts the difference between philosophy and science; worse, it presumes that philosophy lacks all distinctive characteristics—what we may call “metaphysics,” what Wittgenstein criticized as a picture that “held us captive.” To my mind, Plato offers a superb introduction to ontological thinking of a broadly aprioristic variety. And advancing into metaphysics under his provocation probably does motivate a student to think with clarity and rigor. But clear and rigorous thinking need not be metaphysical. Some recognition of one’s own ignorance leads to scientific studies; sometimes the effect is psychoanalytical insight.
about one’s own motives. Many philosophers would not call either of those philosophical.

Scholarly, rigorously argued, richly informed, and erudite, yet also inventive, even quirky, this book ought to interest anyone who likes to teach with Plato. If they do not adopt all of the author’s prescriptions and purposes, they will still take up some of the strategies and special cases and liven up their classes with them. I intend to do at least that, thanks to Marshall’s influence and with his guidance.

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