

# Teaching Philosophy



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APA NEWSLETTER ON

# Teaching Philosophy

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TZIPORAH KASACHKOFF AND EUGENE KELLY, CO-EDITORS

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## FROM THE EDITORS

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We welcome our readers to the fall 2018 edition of the *APA Newsletter on Teaching Philosophy*. In this edition, we offer you four articles.

Our first contribution to this edition of the newsletter is a review-essay by Nickolas Pappas, professor at City College and the Graduate School, both of the City University of New York. Professor Pappas reviews a new translation of Aristotle's *Physics* by C. D. C. Reeve. Professor Pappas begins by recalling a word offered to him by one of his undergraduate teachers as he first encountered Aristotle: one only *rereads* Aristotle, because individual works can be properly understood only if one has worked one's way through the larger context of Aristotle's thought. Professor Pappas finds in this little insight the key to the great value of Reeve's new edition. For Reeve takes the trouble to provide the reader with references and links to other works in Aristotle whose presuppositions, arguments, and conceptual analysis provide the larger context needed to understand the present work. In some cases, Reeve cites for the reader in his notes the relevant text from other works of Aristotle. Pappas finds Reeve's introduction complex yet excellent as a piece of philosophical analysis, but suggests that the beginner read it only after having read at least half of the *Physics*. Reeve wisely does not include references to contemporary debates on the *Physics*, for before long they may become obsolete or irrelevant to future discussions. Pappas's reflections on some of Reeve's choices of the English terms he uses to translate Aristotle's Greek show us how very difficult is the work of any translator who wishes to give an English reader a translation and not an interpretation of an ancient work such as this.

Our second paper, "A Teaching-Based Research Assistantship: Why, How, and Results," by Susan Mills of MacEwan University and her research assistant, Kirsty Keys, is guided by the problem of whether it is reasonable to offer teaching assistantships to undergraduate students, and, if so, how might they be funded and conducted. Assuming a positive answer to the first question, Professor Mills sought financial assistance and obtained it from her own department, after having successfully made the case before it for the validity of the project. She then chose an

eager and able senior, Ms. Keys, to do research intended to terminate in an extensive syllabus for a freshman course on knowledge and reality. Eventually, they produced a syllabus for a senior-level course on personal identity. The bulk of the paper is a description of the research strategies they developed together for finding published works on these themes that are diverse but sufficiently coherent in their content to structure student engagement with the material, and are appropriate for the students for whom the course was being designed. These strategies involved indexing, building bridges between works in different but related topics, and the annotations by Ms. Keys of essays from which Professor Mills then made selections for inclusion in the syllabus. The paper concludes with the reading list for the 400-level course—and Professor Mills invites readers of the newsletter to give her feedback that could assist her in future revisions of the syllabus—and a statement by Ms. Keys about the skills she learned and applied while working as Professor Mills's research assistant.

The third contribution, by Christian B. Miller of Wake Forest University, is entitled "Teaching a Summer Seminar: Reflections from Two Weeks on the Philosophy and Psychology of Character in the Summer of 2018." This seminar, for which Professor Miller provides a detailed syllabus, was concerned obliquely with a perennial problem of philosophy: whether virtue or character can be taught. It pursued this ancient question empirically in part by studying persons thought to be morally exemplary by representatives of philosophy, theology, and psychology. The hope was to gain insight into the sources of their moral exemplarity. The broader purpose of the paper, however, is to reflect on the ways of best setting up and conducting a summer seminar. Professor Miller lists some of the challenges to be overcome and the opportunities to be sought after and utilized for maximum effect. He hopes that his reflections will be useful to others who might be contemplating developing a summer seminar at their home colleges. The paper concludes with an appendix containing one of the several handouts he gave to participants in the seminar to guide their researches into the nature and the means of achieving human excellence.

Our fourth paper, "Building Logic Papers from the Ground Up: Helping Introductory Logic Students Write Argument-Based Papers," is by Andy Piker of Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi. Professor Piker provides in his paper a model for students assigned a project in logical analysis. Here students indeed build papers "from the ground up" by passing through the phases of the model: 1) The choice of a topic is left to the students. Some choose a philosophical claim, others a moral or social controversy. 2) Students write

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an argument supporting some conclusion regarding the topic. 3) A counter-argument is constructed. 4) The structure of the arguments is diagrammed, with arrows leading from premises to the conclusions. 5) Students get and give feedback to their arguments from their fellow students. 6) All students receive feedback from the professor. 7) The final paper is written based upon the model.

We always encourage our readers to suggest themselves as reviewers of books and other material (including technological innovations) that they think may be especially good for classroom use. Though the names of books and other materials that we have recently received from publishers for possible review are listed in our **Books Received** section in each edition of the newsletter, reviewers are welcome to suggest material for review that they have used in the classroom and found useful. However, please remember that our publication is devoted to pedagogy and not to theoretical discussions of philosophical issues. This should be borne in mind not only when writing articles for our publication but also when reviewing material for our publication.

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## SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

As always, we warmly encourage our readers to write of their experience as teachers for our publication. We also welcome articles that respond, comment on, or take issue with any of the material that appears within our pages.

The following guidelines for submissions should be followed:

All papers should be sent to the editors electronically. The author's name, the title of the paper and full mailing address should appear on a separate page. *Nothing that identifies the author or his or her institution should appear within the body or within the footnotes/endnotes of the paper.* The title of the paper should appear on the top of the paper itself.

Authors should adhere to the production guidelines that are available from the APA. For example, in writing your paper to disk, *please do not use your word processor's footnote or endnote function; all notes must be added manually at the end of the paper.* This rule is extremely important, for it makes formatting the papers for publication much easier.

All articles submitted to the newsletter are blind-reviewed by the members of the editorial committee as follows:

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## BOOK REVIEW

### *Aristotle, Physics*

Translated with introduction and notes by C. D. C. Reeve. Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Co., 2018.

Reviewed by Nickolas Pappas

CITY COLLEGE AND THE GRADUATE CENTER, CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

"Well, they say you don't read Aristotle, you re-read him," were William McCulloh's encouraging words to me in 1980, walking across campus.

Professor McCulloh taught classics at Kenyon College, and I was an undergraduate making no headway with the Aristotle I'd been assigned in another course. One day when we crossed paths on campus I spelled out how frustrating the texts were. Aristotle's assertions sounded true enough one by one (I said) but without point or purpose. Why sudden qualifying phrases about motion that only interrupted his line of thinking? Wherefrom a premise about how many "principles" there are, this premise seemingly supplied by Aristotle only to justify his next conclusion?

That Professor McCulloh presented his response to me as an old saw already gave it a calming effect. And the implied recommendation that I read through everything in Aristotle and then settle down to read it all again at least explained how I could understand the corpus, even if that amount of reading went beyond anything I intended to do. In fact, I later grasped how practical and not only reassuring the advice was. Aristotle had thought out his philosophy to enlighten, not to obscure, and the more you keep a sense of its totality in mind the more it will enlighten you.

Aristotle's works on nature in particular draw on one another, both in their methodologies and in their substantive claims. The *Physics* contains his most general account of nature and motion and of what can be contained in theories of nature, but its repeated appeals to observed phenomena coexist with cross-references to other Aristotelian positions. A principle of definition from the logic constrains what is said about the world's elements, as when the differences among categories spelled out in the *Topics* problematizes the Eleatic claim that all things are one. One *what*: substance, quantity, or quality?<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Aristotle's discussions of individual sciences illustrate conclusions

drawn in the *Physics* about causation and motion in the study of nature as such. The *Metaphysics* finds a place for all natural science within the broader treatment of being and substance.

Just as you get the point of someone's arm-swinging in the street when you look more broadly to see the car they're directing into its parking space, so too the announcements and premises that can sound arbitrary in Aristotle turn out to have excellent reasons behind them, which ignorance of the larger context may have prevented you from grasping.

Aristotle's readers face other interpretive obstacles besides the difficulty of keeping the whole philosophy in mind. There is the antiquity of the Greek language, whose syntax and lexicon map only approximately onto modern English, not to mention the peculiarity of Aristotle's own tight, unadorned prose, often ambiguous despite his efforts to be clear and specific.

Then too there are the nature-theorists who preceded Aristotle and whose quandaries and cosmologies he exerts himself to reply to. Throughout the corpus Aristotle considers it his responsibility to solve the difficulties that his predecessors created about nature, and where possible to find the grain of truth that even their benighted theories contain.

The very process of engaging with earlier theories tends not to take place in what we recognize as science today. On Kuhn's story of scientific achievement, the transformation that establishes a new paradigm leads to a consensus whose practitioners dispense with the conceptual quibbles that hampered pre-modern science. I suspect that Aristotle would have found the normalcy of "normal science" unsatisfying for those students of nature who had studied earlier proposals about space, time, matter, and motion, and wanted the past disputes settled as much as they wanted a framework for future inquiry. In this respect the *Physics* reminds us what students of nature had to give up with the change from ancient to modern science. Aristotle hopes to end the difficulties he inherited with a logical and factual framework that permits resolutions to those standing puzzles and that preceding theorists would have understood (and that, if they worked in good faith, they would have accepted). Aristotle is not muzzling his predecessors, in other words, nor rendering their work meaningless as a new scientific paradigm does, but rather giving them something true to say in place of their own misguided conclusions.

Even without turning into a cheerleader for the present, one has to admit that not all the knots that Aristotle sets himself to disentangle are equally compelling. Zeno's paradoxes regarding motion seem contrived but they still get under people's skin. Empedocles raised the possibility of a haphazard nature to be accounted for without teleology; add some assumptions to the view presented under his name and you get natural selection. Needless to say the observable data themselves—about plants and animals, air and water, projectile motion and sun and stars—cover the same natural world that we occupy.<sup>2</sup> In all these cases we are primed to enter Aristotle's discussion.

On the other hand, when reading the *Physics* we are invited to assess the debate over whether "the unlimited" is a substance,<sup>3</sup> and neither answer to that question promises to illuminate our present experience of nature, any more than we can make ourselves care whether Plato or the Hippocratic author is more correct about the cause of epilepsy (more bile than phlegm in the brain, or more phlegm than bile?). Moreover the predecessors Aristotle is replying to are in many cases unknown today, most of their works having disappeared over the centuries. Aristotle's writings on nature sometimes feel more accessible than his ethical and political works but sometimes less so, often depending on whether he is answering questions that modern readers no longer ask or even understand.

The problem of historical context and lost predecessors arises for every historical figure. And every ancient Greek philosopher saddles us with the burdens of reading ancient Greek or its translations. In these respects Aristotle's translator is in the same position as Parmenides', Plato's, or Epictetus's.

By contrast, the difficulty my undergraduate professor had known to address—namely, the challenge of needing to know the entirety of a philosopher's thought—has an acuteness in Aristotle's case that it possesses for few other philosophers. And despite the other virtues of C. D. C. Reeve's new translation of and commentary on the *Physics*, in my opinion its greatest value and a sufficient reason for instructors to assign it is its ability to keep the *Physics* in constant conversation with the rest of the Aristotelian corpus. Serious undergraduates will be spared the disorientation that I experienced during my collegiate look into Aristotle; graduate students in philosophy, whether first coming to Aristotle or already familiar with his thought, will find much to stimulate and feed their understanding as they contextualize the *Physics* among the other works of Aristotle's. In a sense this presentation of the *Physics* lets one read Aristotle even before re-reading him.

Reeve's book is organized as every such translation ought to be, and as many are, with numerous notes that explicate a point, identify linguistic or conceptual difficulties, or refer the reader to something else Aristotle has said. I've been familiar with Reeve's Aristotle for years, since reading his translation of the *Politics* in 1999, and this book demonstrates yet again his facility at relaxing a clenched Aristotelian sentence into natural yet accurate English. What this translation additionally does that I have not seen enough of with Aristotle's works on nature is to reproduce the relevant other passages cited in the notes to the text. Using this book one does not have to track down the part of the *Nicomachean Ethics* or *Metaphysics* that one wants, but finds the words standing by within the pages of this volume.

What Reeve's version of the *Physics* does *not* include is a survey of the secondary literature from scholars today who dispute the sense or logic of individual passages. I think he was right to exclude contemporary debates, and not because of any weakness or unworthiness in them. First of all, this book would have swelled to double its size or more, losing the focus on Aristotle's writings that it now

has. More significantly, some of today's debates will fade away before the need for this book does. Readers coming to the translation in order to know Aristotle's theory of nature would then be sent to obsolete readings and issues. Dated debates would date this book, which in its present form promises to be valuable for some time to come.

Along with the notes of commentary, an introduction of around thirty pages brings students into Aristotle's thought. With emphasis on the *Metaphysics* and the logical treatises from the *Organon*, the introduction seeks to explain the structure of Aristotelian scientific theories and the criteria for different kinds of knowledge. My impression of it is that the introduction works well as philosophy and as scholarship but less well as pedagogy. It might make an off-putting beginning to one's study, except for those already quite knowledgeable about Aristotle. Serious students would be advised to read the introduction after having begun to study the *Physics*, say about halfway through that work, when the context that this section provides can begin to connect with the arguments and specific points that the reader has already worked to understand.

In any case, if one really wants an introduction when beginning the *Physics*, this book already contains such a thing in the form of the notes, especially the notes to the first few chapters. The notes numbered 1–34 tend to be long ones, collectively filling twenty-two pages of this volume in the process of covering Chapters 1–2 of *Physics* Book I, a mere three pages of Aristotle's translated text. These notes reprise some of the topics and discussions that come up in Reeve's introduction but with more direct connection to the sentences in those opening chapters that stop and vex the new reader. Readers should get to know all of Reeve's notes, but these first ones especially.

**Notes.** Some of the notes did leave me wanting more. Quite a lot left me delighted with their depth of explanation and with the range of Aristotelian texts they included in their cross-references. Before giving examples of each, I have to register my only complaint with the form of this book's organization. Although the notes are numbered, corresponding to superscripted numbers in the text of the *Physics*, the notes themselves do not refer to other notes by their numbers. Instead, when the notes refer to other notes, they do so by means of the text to which those other notes are appended; thus "1 2 185a23n." instead of "Note 19," that telltale lower-case "n" telling the reader of the informative note elsewhere.

The rationale for such references is clear enough. When composing a set of notes, identifying them within the notes by number means that any new note interpolated later among the old ones would throw off all the enumeration. The process of compiling such a commentary is rarely linear, involving hundreds of returns to previous passages to take a note out or add a new one. The translator would then have to go back and change all the cross-references to reflect the new enumeration. That is surely an insuperable problem during the composition of a book.

Even so, it might be possible to go back through the notes after the book is complete, taking out each reference to a

note in terms of its chapter and line and replacing that with the note number. Then readers already flipping between the text of the *Physics* and an explanatory note, and finding a reference to another note, can turn to that directly rather than having to make a first stop within the text of the *Physics* and back to the notes. A future printing of this book might try a more direct way of connecting the notes.

As far as the notes' content is concerned, I occasionally wanted to see the translator challenge Aristotle's assumptions more than he did, or to point out where those assumptions fail. For instance, the *Physics* asserts that everything in motion "moves either in a circle, in a straight line, or in a mixture of the two."<sup>4</sup> Does Aristotle need that claim as much as he seems to think he does? Where does it lead him astray, and what motivates his adherence to it?

More consequentially for the history of science, I am struck every time I read the *Physics* by its preliminary sketch of natural selection, perhaps informed (as I said) by Empedocles, which Aristotle puts forward as a rival to his teleological account. (Darwin included this passage, in some editions of *Origin of Species*, as part of his survey of the articulations of natural selection that preceded his.<sup>5</sup>) Aristotle parries the challenge by keeping what happens by coincidence separate from what happens "always or for the most part." Because mutations take place only occasionally, he says they cannot be typical of nature, which proceeds always or for the most part and therefore for a purpose. Darwin would unite chance with regularity by letting the variations that appear in a species then become part of its genetic nature, hence regularities. Then what comes to be by coincidence remains as regularity; at that point, Aristotle's argument would lose an essential premise and random natural changes would undo the defense of teleology (as he saw that they might). Uncharacteristically, Reeve does not guide his reader to see this vulnerability in Aristotle's *Physics* or the point at which Darwin will, as it were, insert his rebuttal.

Students of the figure of the "first mover" in Aristotle might wish for other additional commentaries in connection with VIII 6 and VIII 10, the chapters that try to explain what most fundamentally grounds or causes motion in the universe, which is to say a mover that does not move. The unmoved mover in Book XII of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* inspires all other motion in the universe as objects of love or striving do, thus as that for the sake of which other motion takes place, as a final cause. Maybe some efficient causation enters into the account given in the *Metaphysics*, although it is hard to say exactly how. Things are different in Book VIII of the *Physics*, where the arguments concerning the unmoved mover seem to require that being to provide the first "cause of the change or rest," i.e., to be an efficient cause. The notes do not have to answer the question, given the volume of discussion that this difference between the two texts has already inspired, but they might do more to illustrate the problem for the reader.<sup>6</sup>

I have another kind of wish for more at other points, when the notes give readers all the cross-references within Aristotle they could want, but not references to his predecessors. One obvious example arises at 194a36-b2:

Aristotle distinguishes the craft or *technê* concerned with the use of an object and the *technê* concerned with its production. The blacksmith makes a cobbler's hammer; the cobbler uses it. Reeve's Note 167 connects this distinction to fascinating discussions in *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Metaphysics*, and other Aristotelian writings, but it does not mention the same distinction in Book 10 of Plato's *Republic*, to which this passage can be read as an instructive gloss.<sup>7</sup> Sometimes perhaps the admirable desire to embed the *Physics* in Aristotle's corpus, as this book does, crowds out the project of describing its relationship to earlier thinkers.

I hasten to add what any fair-minded reader will already be thinking—that one can always find topics in a book of this kind that one wishes had received more coverage. Assuming a book of finite length, and even more if we assume a book of limited length—as a translation with notes must be—adding more on any subject means saying less about another one. Finding places where you can wish for more takes scarcely any talent or effort, and nowhere near the talent and effort it takes to make a book such as this one.

The limitation of the “wishing for more” comment is especially clear when there are so many notes in this book that give readers more than they could have thought to ask for. Any short list I come up with will be arbitrary, but I feel compelled to mention: Note 113 explaining the notorious *tode ti* “this-something”; 129 quoting from the *Generation of Animals* to help unsnarl a reference to dogs' coming from horses and the like counterfactual violations of nature; 188 translating and explaining the words for “chance” and “luck” lucidly enough to prevent their being used interchangeably; 364 itemizing the ways in which one thing is said to be “in” another thing according to Aristotle; 458 expanding and explaining a sophisticated argument about “Coriscus” that Aristotle alludes to; 586 explicating the technical term *antistrophein* “conversion,” for which Reeve lays out six uses in Aristotelian logic and cites the relevant passages from Aristotle's *Topics* and *Prior Analytics*. There are nuggets like these throughout the collected notes, all of them contributing to a rounded and detailed sense of Aristotle's writings and methods.

The notes even let you think about why it is that some discussions in the *Physics* strike the philosophical reader of today as lacking in motivation. Now and then Aristotle speaks of a *logikos* difficulty, a “logico-linguistic confusion” as Reeve perfectly translates that phrase, which he discusses in Note 258. Less accurately we might think of the *logikos* difficulty as a conceptual confusion. In any case what Aristotle means is that the incomplete study of nature permits some quandaries that are merely logical or verbal feel more significant than they are. As Note 258 describes such confusions, it reminds us (without speaking of such things overtly) that the *Physics* often addresses questions and puzzles that arose, in antiquity, not from observations but from theories. We might be amused by the answer to a puzzle about why a projectile continues to fly through the air, but at least that answer addresses a worry about projectile motion that observations inspire. When the puzzle being addressed is about whether “the unlimited” can be divided up without ceasing to be unlimited, very

little about the natural world being observed is at stake, for all that someone has dreamt up (and then no doubt been plagued by) the problem.

**Terminology.** Every reviewer discussing a translation of Greek philosophy has to say something about the words chosen to render terms appearing in the original. For students who do not know Greek, who are after all the primary concern of a translation (and the readers most dependent on the translator's choices), these word choices determine the value of the work. Aristotle's terminology should be translated as accurately as possible, so that the English-speaking reader is not led astray or kept at the mercy of an idiosyncratic or tendentious translator. As much as possible a given Greek term should always have a single English equivalent, so that one knows when Aristotle is covering the same topic again. Otherwise it remains for the translator to decide that here the subject remains the same but there it's something else; and then the translation passes an interpretation along even while pretending not to. And (again, as much as possible) where the Greek word covers a range of meanings, its English partner ought to cover the same range, and yet not introduce new senses absent from the original.

Reeve is a seasoned translator whose decisions tend to be both correct in themselves and pedagogically helpful. For *hupokeimenon* he writes “underlying subject,” and the etymological sense in that phrase of something's existing *beneath* a change captures the force of the Greek prefix *hupo-* “under” and also communicates the sense of what persists through change, as Aristotle would have it, as if changes took place on top of a subject. The English is as idiomatic as the Greek.

As needed—again the sign of a practiced translator—the commentary often explains the choice of words, to minimize misleading effects that a choice might have. Note 583 observes that a word rendered “jumps” could just as well be “starts” or “jerks” or “impulses.” For the adjective *kurios*, whose central sense is “dominant, chief,” Reeve uses “strict, control.” This choice taken in a vacuum might lead to confusion, although it is the right sense of the term for the *Physics* passages the word appears in, and Note 262 explains things.

One challenge specific to Aristotle's translators involves the strings of ordinary words that Aristotle occasionally joins in new ways to serve as technical terms. At one time all translations used Latinate terminology, as when *hou heneka*, literally “for-the-sake-of-which,” arrived in English dressed up stiffly as “final cause.” Translators now often preserve that Aristotelian phrase in its literalness; Reeve does too. For similar reasons *ti esti* becomes “what-it-is” in this translation as it is in Greek, and *tode ti* “this something.” The result may look exotic or affected, but this is how Aristotle communicates some of his key concepts.

I only wonder why the tricky *to ti ên einai* should have to have become “essence,” which has been used for years as its translation. The Greek phrase taken word for word comes into English as “the what-it-was-to-be”—a cumbersome and distracting word group to have to use in

informative sentences, but at least more connected than “essence” is with individual words that mean something.<sup>8</sup> English does have many uses for the word “essence” in ordinary contexts (something you can’t say for “final cause”), but some of those instances would lead a reader astray. Almond essence is a perfectly ordinary substance; it’s not the what-it-was-to-be of the almond.

As the history of “essence” in the context should make clear, no real harm will be done by using the word. People have been saying “the essence” for *to ti ên einai* for years without hurting themselves. And other objections I could make to Reeve’s word choices range from the minuscule to the microscopic. In one place for instance *akroton* “highest,” a word that Aristotle uses elsewhere to indicate a final or ultimate, is joined with *aition* in a phrase that this book renders “most precise cause.”<sup>9</sup> Despite Reeve’s justification in Note 187, something closer to the literal “highest” could have fit better in this context, e.g., “ultimate cause.”

I have spent some time going back and forth on *automatos* and derivative words, which tend to come out in this translation as “chance” when someone else might speak of what is “spontaneous” or of what happens “of its own accord.” (Physicians sometimes tell patients that a given condition is “idiopathic,” which sounds like a self-protective way for the physician to say “I have no idea why this hit you.” Here too we have what Aristotle would call the *automatos*.) But in all honesty I can’t imagine whose understanding of the *Physics* might have been hampered by the word “chance.” If something happens of its own accord or is idiopathic or spontaneous, that means there is no explanation to be given for the thing’s occurrence. It happens by chance.

Almost without exception, when I found one of Reeve’s English terms potentially confusing or partial, I had a hard time coming up with a better alternative (except possibly for *to ti ên einai*, where not so much the word as the style of translation is at stake). The translation that I most took issue with as I read was “starting-point” for the Greek word *archê*, and there too it’s one thing to object to the term used, a very different matter to improve upon it.

The word *archê* means, among other things, “beginning,” as it does famously in the first sentence of John’s Gospel: “In the *archê* was the *logos*.” The word also implies leadership or governance. The king marched at the front of a column of warriors, as their ruler, in both cases the *archê* being his. By classical times the word, often used in the plural form *archai*, could denote the more abstract concept of a principle or fundamental, and it is with reference to this abstract sense that Aristotle spends pages of the *Physics* asking how many *archai* there might be for the world, and what they are. The *archai* are causes in nature that do not have a cause themselves, or do not in turn have an *archê*.

Reeve’s Note 1 allows for “first principle” as an alternative to “starting-point” but in the translation it is “starting-point” that we keep seeing. The sense of motion and suggestion of abruptness that we find in the English word “start” gives “starting-point” a temporality and even mobility that feels

out of place in some of Aristotle’s sentences. The most famous Aristotelian *archê* might be the one attributed to Thales, namely, water. Did he mean (as Aristotle asks elsewhere) that everything is fed by what is wet?<sup>10</sup> If he did, the relation in question is an ongoing causal dependence, not something that happened once or once upon a time. Thales’ universe did not begin with a start.

One problem with finding the right translation for words about the most basic entities is that English tends to appeal to architectural metaphors when it speaks of dependence: the grounds for your suspicion, the cornerstone of a good breakfast, an argument’s premises or theory’s foundations. Architectural metaphors let us equate what comes temporally first with what goes structurally and spatially beneath, as the lowermost part of the building comes first during construction. The connotations acquired by *archê* equated what comes first temporally with what leads. Thus looking for the just-right counterpart to *archê* requires bridging the difference between *who goes first* and is up ahead commanding, and *what comes first* and is down below supporting.

Translators have limited options available to them when dealing with recalcitrant words of this type. The word *archê* is too important to the *Physics* not to be given a specific and informative translation. Should you use different words in different contexts, in this case a temporal term when the beginning seems to come before all other events and objects, and a spatial principle otherwise? It’s true that as native speakers of any language we may freely use a single word in many different ways during a single conversation. But when a translator makes a habit of adapting the words to the context (in service of the “spirit” of the original), the danger increases that each passage will reflect the interpretation peculiar to that translator.

Sticking to the Greek is a last resort. For one or two words in a text a translator might just transliterate the original, counting on readers to learn *ressentiment*, *aufgehoben*, or *logos*. This gambit can be overdone, though. And even where it is done moderately, those untranslated terms bobbing around in the prose add some opacity to the work, certainly diminishing the sense that Aristotle is talking to us.

An expert translator might decide to give up on the hope of communicating the overtones of meaning in the original term and find the English equivalent that best fits all the contexts in a given work. As always an explanatory note for the curious can settle any perplexity. I mentioned Reeve’s treatment of *kurios* in the *Physics*—a less challenging example, no doubt, given that the word does not dominate Aristotle’s text. Where *archê* is concerned one might give up on the sense of first-ness in the word and stick to what the *Physics* is looking for: the fundamentals; priority as grounding. Then we ask what the fundamentals or fundamental principles of the universe are. And yet I can’t be enthusiastic about this approach, which is why I am describing the translator’s challenge more than I am objecting to how Reeve has met that challenge. Switching to “fundamental principles” leaves us a long way from the good literal meaning in *archê*, and because it does it

invites the translator to smuggle an interpretation into the translation. “Fundamental principle” has the washed-out beige hue of very abstract terminology, like “final cause” and “entelechy.” They are not so much invitations to think the wrong thing as they are invitations to think nothing. At least “starting-point” reminds new readers that Aristotle’s question about nature might not correspond exactly to a question the readers themselves might have asked, thus that readers might do well to set aside their own assumptions about nature and work to understand what might be driving Aristotle, embarking on their review and re-reading even while reading him for the first time.

#### NOTES

1. See Aristotle, *Topics* I, 8-9 103b7-25, and its use at *Physics* I, 2 185a21-26; and see Reeve’s Note 18.
2. Aristotle’s biological works have a special freshness in this respect. He describes a cuttlefish he had seen while living on Lesbos, and we can go to Lesbos now and find the same animal, as Armand Marie Leroi has done in *The Lagoon: How Aristotle Invented Science* (New York: Viking Press, 2014).
3. Aristotle, *Physics* III, 4-5.
4. Aristotle, *Physics* VIII, 8 261b28-29.
5. The passage occurs at *Physics* II, 8 198b16-32. The prefatory reference to Aristotle does not appear in Darwin’s first edition, nor in the “new edition” of 1861 prepared for publication in the US. The sixth edition (1873), however, does include a prefatory “sketch of the progress of opinion” on the subject of evolution.
6. Reeve does acknowledge the issue in his Introduction, p. xxxi, but does not propose the path to a solution. I am grateful to Gregory Scott for discussing this interpretive issue with me.
7. See Plato, *Republic*, 10.601c-e.
8. Other renditions of the phrase in English include “the what-it-was-being,” “the what-is-being,” and so on. The finite form of the verb “to be” in this phrase, *ên*, is literally the imperfect past tense, which can be translated either with emphasis on the pastness (hence “was”) or stressing the imperfectness (hence “is”).
9. Aristotle, *Physics* II, 3 195b23.
10. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I, 3 983b18-27.

## ARTICLES

### *A Teaching-Based Research Assistantship: Why, How, and Results*

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As teachers of philosophy, how can we provide research assistant opportunities to our undergraduate students?

This is a question worth answering and—what’s more—acting upon. There are many benefits to student involvement in research, and I cover some of them below. I also consider certain obstacles to involving undergraduate students in academic research.

Following that, I reflect on my own experience working with an undergraduate student research assistant. Different than a typical academic research assistantship, it was a *teaching-based* research assistantship in which the student assisted me with a course design project. The starting point was my use of John Perry’s *Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality* in an introduction to philosophy course that I teach, and the end product was a reading list for a senior-level course on personal identity. Tasked with finding, annotating, and mapping reading materials, the research assistant worked independently and collaboratively with me to develop the reading list that, together, we present in the final section of this paper. She also assisted me with the composition of this paper and contributed her reflections—which appear at the end of the paper—on her experience as a research assistant for a teaching-based research project.

#### WHY

The benefits of student involvement in any field of academic research and scholarly activity are numerous, with the most obvious one being that research-assistant work helps students prepare for a direct path into graduate studies and, from there, into academic careers. Yet, as we know, most of our undergraduate students don’t take that path, and some graduate students don’t either. Would they nonetheless benefit from assisting in research? Absolutely.

In the discipline of philosophy, there are a number of generally beneficial skills that we tend to emphasize when we are called on to answer the question, “What can I do with a degree in X?” Surely all of us who teach philosophy have put analysis, argumentation, and composition on the list of philosophy’s practical values at least once or twice and, indeed, the study of philosophy does have those—and many other—transferrable gains.<sup>1</sup> But as off-putting as it might be to be called on to “sell” our discipline, we should not be cynical about the benefits of studying philosophy. All the same, we should not leave it to our students to figure out how to tap into and realize those benefits in practice, and research assistantships are an opportunity to do just that. By providing students with outlets where they can put their philosophy skills to work outside of the classroom, we can reinforce our answers to that perennial question of philosophy’s practical value with hard products and actionable results as well as an appreciation of the work that it takes to get to those ends. Of course, in addition to all of the benefits to the students, we also stand to benefit from the fact that research assistantships give us access to bright and talented students that can help us with our own research projects.

And yet, there are a number of obstacles to involving students in academic research and scholarly activity. Two in particular are project suitability and funding, and I hope that my recommendation regarding the former helps others make successful cases for the latter.

To begin, I will venture to say that not all research projects are suited to student involvement, especially in philosophy. Rather, it takes the right kind of project to require research assistance, and those projects are not generally found within philosophy, where the nature and scope of research leans

strongly towards single-authored argumentative papers on theoretical topics. True, there are nonetheless opportunities for students to participate in philosophical research by way of data searching, inputting, annotating, indexing, and so forth, but those opportunities can be scarce and limited for various reasons. At an undergraduate school—like the one that I teach at—those reasons include the demands of higher teaching loads and, correspondingly, lower research activity.<sup>2</sup> However, with a shift in the standard thinking about what constitutes academic research, teaching is not an obstacle but an opportunity for research assistance by undergraduate students.

Simply put, the view that research is distinct from teaching puts an entirely unnecessary restriction on what one may think of as a research assistantship; it limits how we think of research and how we then think of involving students in research. But, in fact, teaching requires research. Among other things, it requires the review and selection of materials, the distillation of texts and the construction of arguments, as well as the development of research questions—all of which are research activities. While the audience is not one's peers and the questions are not designed for field experts, teaching cannot be done in the absence of research, which means that teaching is an opportunity for any teacher to use research assistants.

So, what can we as teachers of philosophy do to provide or increase the research-assistant opportunities to our students? My recommendation is for teaching-based research assistantships. Unlike traditional research assistantships, the research is not for the sake of peer-reviewed publication and its impact is not measured by citations, but it is produced for the purpose of dissemination (in the classroom) and it does have an impact on its audience (of students). But first we, more likely than not, have to advocate for the funds.

In my own case, the obstacle of funding was the obstacle of finding a funding source that recognized teaching-based research as research. In my search, the money for research assistantships that I found was exclusively for the purpose of research that would result in peer-reviewed dissemination. The idea of funding research that would reach its end in the classroom and not in a conference presentation or print publication seemed foreign to most whom I encountered in my search. However, I am very fortunate to have a department chair who enthusiastically supported the idea and helped me conceptualize it and search for funding for it. Moreover, when both of our searches for funding sources came up empty, my department chair was willing to allocate department funds to teaching-based research assistantships within the department. Now, after one successful trial year two years ago, the department funds this type of research assistantship annually, and I was doubly fortunate to receive some of those funds last year in order to hire a student for a teaching-based research project of my own.<sup>3</sup> In what follows, I share my experience of that project.

## HOW

I teach at a four-year undergraduate university where the emphasis is on teaching and where there is tremendous

autonomy in what we teach.<sup>4</sup> A few years ago, I felt compelled to investigate ways of improving my use of Perry's *A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality* in my first-year introduction to epistemology and metaphysics course.<sup>5</sup> As things were, I was teaching it as a primary-sources course and had opted to use Perry's *Dialogue* at the end of the course after Descartes's *Meditations*, Berkeley's *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*, and Plato's *Phaedo*. That reading list was working well, but for various reasons, I came to think that removing Berkeley's *Three Dialogues* and expanding upon Perry's *Dialogue* would be a positive change.<sup>6</sup> With that intention in mind—and with the department's teaching-based research-assistantship application process in place after its initial trial year—I took advantage of the opportunity and the availability of a student I wanted to work with, and I applied.

When I approached Kirsty to seek her interest in working as my research assistant, she was a fourth-year philosophy minor. I had taught her in four courses at the 100- to 300-level, and I knew that the quality of her academic work was impeccable and her work ethic was unimpeachable. As well, from the fact that she always excelled at making sense of my lectures and following my assignment instructions, I was confident that we would be compatible thinkers on a research project. Lucky for me, she was on-board immediately.<sup>7</sup> Her eager enthusiasm and clear understanding of the project right from the start confirmed two things for me. First, there are some undergraduate students who genuinely value and enjoy the work involved in scholarly research. Second, they can be very quick to comprehend a project—especially a teaching-based project—and what they can do to assist. In Kirsty's case, she had studied Perry's *Dialogue* in an introduction to philosophy course taught by an instructor who, like me, did not supplement it with additional readings on personal identity. However, from her subsequent studies in upper-level philosophy courses she had a sense of the breadth and depths of philosophy and, from that, she understood that there was a project to be made out of unpacking the numerous concepts in the dialogue (even if she did not know exactly what they were going into this project) and what those details could add to a student's understanding of Perry's book and of a larger picture of philosophy. She also had good research skills (learned and practiced from doing research-type assignments in her other undergraduate courses, such as literature reviews, article analyses, and research essays): she knew how to review a text for citations to other works relevant to her own project; how to search the library's databases using Boolean operators and other advanced search techniques; how to keep organized research notes; and how to write annotated bibliographies.

In early January 2017 we collaborated on the proposal for the funding application. In it, we explained that the research assistantship would be for the purpose of finding and selecting materials that would enhance the study of Perry's *Dialogue* in my "Introduction to Knowledge and Reality" course. To that end, we would look for texts that informed or illuminated the content of that dialogue. Within that very vast terrain, we had one stipulation—that we use no readers, guidebooks, or any other type of tertiary

texts. This was in keeping with my preference to teach philosophy with an emphasis on direct engagement with the texts studied, as well as with how I had built the rest of the course. As a model for what I wanted to achieve with this teaching-based research project, I had in mind what I already was doing in the course when I drew on my lessons about Descartes's *Meditations* to teach the First Night in Perry's *Dialogue*—only now I aimed to do something like that with Second and Third Nights as well. Just as Descartes is explicitly referenced in the First Night, Locke is mentioned in the Second Night, so selections from Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* were thus an obvious choice for an addition to the course that would complement the dialogue. Indeed, most of the references listed in the footnotes at the end of the dialogue were obvious candidates for enhancing my teaching of the book. However, I did not want to settle on the obvious and standard philosophical works on personal identity before exploring alternatives. Canonical texts were already represented in the course (a Platonic dialogue and Descartes's *Meditations* are required readings in all sections of this course) and the one contemporary text I had included in the course is not *that* contemporary (Perry's *Dialogue* was published in 1978). As well, it was not lost on me or Kirsty that this research project was an opportunity to include works by women philosophers or members of other groups that are traditionally underrepresented in philosophy.

Once the semester was over, Kirsty worked as my research assistant ten hours a week for four weeks. At the start, I provided her with my most recent lecture notes on Perry's *Dialogue* as well as some search tips and strategies, such as using anthologies on personal identity to identify core texts in the area; conducting internet searches to find the professional profiles of contemporary philosophers who you find have written about personal identity—those websites sometimes list publications that would not show up on standard database searches; doing topic or title keyword searches in Google with "syllabus" in them to see what texts other philosophy teachers use along with Perry's *Dialogue* or on the topic of personal identity more generally; reading research findings selectively by first skimming titles, abstracts, and introductions for relevant themes and topics before committing to reading an entire work; and making notes along the way about the relevance and content of what comes up in the search, flagging what is most interesting and excluding what does not meet the criteria.

In her first week, Kirsty reread Perry's *Dialogue*; conducted an online search of course syllabi containing that book; read portions of two classic articles on personal identity that I had recommended on the basis of their prominence in the area; selected and read two items from popular anthologies on personal identity that I lent her; searched Perry's website for his CV and skimmed the list of publications in it; started a reading list of the interesting references and articles that she had collected from these print and web sources; conducted database searches of some of those articles as well as articles responding to them; put books on hold in the university's library; and made a plan of which items she would read next. At the end of the week, she composed an email to me detailing her activities and findings, drawing

conclusions about the relevance and complexity of those findings, and making recommendations based on her assessments. For example, she deemed one article relevant because it shares an argument in common with Perry's *Dialogue* but judged that it was too complex and obscure for an introductory course. As an alternative, she found a reconstruction of that article's argument (in a response article) and suggested excerpting part of it to pair with Perry. Kirsty attached copies of what she had managed to collect in electronic form and sent them to me in an email. Given the momentum of Kirsty's research during the first week, we agreed that she should continue with her reading plan, I would read the articles she had sent me, and we would meet a few days later to draw up a plan for how to proceed.

That first series of events established the pattern of events for the project. Kirsty would source, analyze, and assess materials, noting their bibliographic information, topics and themes, connections with one another, suitability for undergraduate readers, and accessibility through the university's library. She would then compose an email to me that included a detailed account of her activities, a list of her findings (that were suitable for the project), brief notes on the topics and theses of those works, their potential interest to students, and copies—when she could obtain them electronically—of the texts she deemed most interesting for our purposes or important in the field.

Throughout the research process, Kirsty drew upon and honed the research skills that she possessed going into the project and expanded upon those skills by employing the tips and strategies that I offered, the most useful of which were, in her experience, the following: to start by reading the abstracts and introductions of potential materials in order to make efficient assessments about whether or not they were suitable for the project; to take notes on the topics and theses on any text that either was suitable or was notably not (e.g., core texts that were too difficult for undergraduate readers), thereby creating an annotated bibliography in the process; to search the internet for syllabi from relevant courses taught at other universities and, as well as, to search for the CVs of authors in the field, something that was especially useful for finding comprehensive lists of works by authors belonging to underrepresented groups. Along the way, she found that many of the research skills she was using had been learned in her philosophy classes. In particular, she had acquired the analytical skills to read, understand, summarize, and dissect philosophical arguments as well as find contentious points made by the authors of the materials she was looking at, which created openings for responses from other authors. As well, she had learned in her philosophy classes how to see connections between philosophical topics, ideas, theories, and arguments, and this enabled her to appreciate links between different arguments and topics within the broader area of personal identity, allowing her to build on the materials she had already found. Not only did this affirm the usefulness of her studies in philosophy, it showed her how to take the skills she had learned in those classes and use them outside of the classroom.

I used Kirsty's research summaries to flag texts, topics, and themes that seemed exciting or worthwhile to teach

in conjunction with Perry's *Dialogue*. I would then use the authors, topics, or bibliographies of those texts to search for more texts to add to our working list of course materials, which I would then inform her about in email or at our next meeting.

Our meetings were our opportunity to review and discuss the philosophy we were reading, the texts that we were enjoying the most, the ways in which they complemented or contrasted with each other, and how those ways could be turned into a narrative for a course. Although we would discuss questions about the particulars of what we were reading—both of us were learning a lot about the topic of personal identity as we went—we mainly discussed meta-questions aimed at reconciling what we were researching with what I would eventually be teaching. Which of the positions represented in Perry's *Dialogue* were prominent in the contemporary literature on personal identity and how were they dealt with in those works? Should we limit our searches to only standard, well-known texts, or include non-canonical, lesser-known texts and authors? Should we look only for texts that I could assign in their entirety, or would I break from the existing design of the course and assign excerpts? We always ended these meetings with ideas to pursue in the coming week, such as following up on an intriguing footnote, constructing a bridge between two arguments, or continuing on a current track.

Certain problems came to light quickly. One thing we agreed on early was that the scholarship we were reading and enjoying was not freshman-friendly in the way we were aiming for. We worried that assigning these materials in an introductory course would likely result in more confusion than clarity for a student studying Perry's *Dialogue*—let alone philosophy—for the first time. We considered ways to make the articles more digestible (fewer of them, excerpts only, etc.) but were concerned that doing so would add very little to the students' learning beyond what Perry's book and my lectures already accomplish. Kirsty's student perspective was very useful in making this assessment.

So we changed paths: we decided to shift our focus from enhancing one portion of an introductory course on knowledge and reality to designing an entire senior-level course on personal identity. In particular, two courses on the department's list stood out as viable candidates: a 300-level "Studies in the Self" course and a 400-level "Topics in Contemporary Philosophy" seminar. We agreed that either option would be appropriate for the materials we were finding and the direction they were taking us in (and we had even mentioned in our proposal that our research could possibly supply me with content that I could teach in those courses). Our change was also timely: curriculum changes in our department were such that the "Introduction to Knowledge and Reality" course and the "Introduction to Values and Society" course were scheduled to be retired and be replaced by "Introduction to Philosophy: The Examined Life" (so I needed only to teach one more academic year with the course that I currently had).<sup>8</sup>

Our searches—largely spearheaded by Kirsty's research—now had much greater scope and depth. We agreed to still use Perry's *Dialogue* as the launching point, although now

the project wasn't about clarifying it, but, rather, probing and raising questions about points that it touches on. The works referenced explicitly and implicitly in the dialogue were still on our radar, but we were now researching the avenues of critical analysis and argument that have emerged in response to them and, more radically, despite them. This wider scope helped immensely when it came to including works by women philosophers, though we still had difficulty finding or identifying members of other underrepresented groups.<sup>9</sup> It also freed us up to allow the inclusion of more complex texts. We found that a lot of that complexity was a result of authors responding to and building on the theories, themes, thought experiments, and so forth of their predecessors and peers, and Kirsty's annotations in her research summaries—e.g., "In this paper X defends Y against Z's criticism"—were tremendously useful when it came to mapping those connections and grouping texts by topics and themes.

At the halfway point of the project, we laid out a tentative progression of readings. It started with Perry's *Dialogue* to generate interest in and questions about the topic of personal identity. Then it moved to Locke and classic responses to Locke. This provided background for the many references to Locke that occur throughout the philosophical scholarship on personal identity. It also set the stage for reading recent work defending "psychological continuity" views of personal identity. Criticisms of the latter theory led into arguments for "bodily continuity" views of personal identity, and criticisms of both theories led to readings and discussion of ethical and methodological considerations. The outline of the progression of readings was not groundbreaking, but we were excited by the arguments in the texts we had found and the connections among the arguments of the authors of these texts. As we found more materials, we would place them on the map (after consulting with one another via email or in our meetings). Sometimes placing one item on our map would result in our reorganizing others, but the general progression of ideas remained relatively the same throughout these additions and adjustments.

The number of texts was one consideration in this process—we aimed to have enough for two or three texts per week for the duration of a semester, knowing that in an actual semester, texts would have to be cut for other course activities such as tests, writing workshops, and seminar presentations. (Since I did not yet know if I would be teaching the course as a 300-level lecture course or a 400-level seminar, I preferred this flexibility.) Another consideration was how students would gain access to the texts. Perry's edited collection *Personal Identity* contains a number of the core texts referenced in his *Dialogue*, some of which we wanted to include in our course design. Since it could function as one book with multiple assigned readings in it, we decided it would be a worthwhile purchase for students and opted to adopt it for the course. However, that book did not give us anything from the current century or by a woman philosopher or on some of the topics we were intent on including. In selecting one-off articles—which is the majority of what we put into our map of readings—we gave preference to texts that are easily (and economically) accessible through the electronic resources

of our university's library website. That way, students in the course would be gaining familiarity with searching the library's website and databases—and developing a skill that is an asset for future potential research assistants.

## RESULTS

The main results of this teaching-based research project are two-fold. One is the reading list that we mapped, which I am using for a 400-level undergraduate "Topics in Contemporary Philosophy" seminar that I am teaching in fall 2018. That list is provided below. Feedback from readers of this paper is welcome and redesign is anticipated.

John Perry, *A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality*<sup>§</sup>

John Locke, Book II Chapter XXVII ("Of Identity and Diversity") in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*<sup>\*§</sup>

Joseph Butler, "Of Personal Identity"<sup>\*\*§</sup>

Derek Parfit, "Personal Identity"<sup>\*\*§</sup>

John Perry, "The Importance of Being Identical"<sup>§</sup>

Jennifer Whiting, "Friends and Future Selves"<sup>§</sup>

Mayra Schechtman, "Personal Identity and the Past"<sup>§</sup>

Sydney Shoemaker, "Personal Identity and Memory"<sup>\*\*</sup>

Anthony Quinton, "The Soul"<sup>\*</sup>

Bernard Williams, "The Self and the Future"<sup>\*\*§</sup>

Meredith W. Michaels, "Persons, Brains, and Bodies"

Andrew Naylor, "Personal Identity Un-Locke-Ed"<sup>§</sup>

Eric Olson, "Is Psychology Relevant to Personal Identity?"<sup>§</sup>

Mark Johnston, "Remnant Persons"

Marya Schechtman, "Personhood and the Practical"<sup>§</sup>

David Shoemaker, "The Stony Metaphysical Heart of Animalism"

Kathleen Wilkes, Chapter 1 ("Thought Experiments") in *Real People: Personal Identity without Thought Experiments*

Tamar Gendler, "Exceptional Persons: on the Limits of Imaginary Cases"<sup>§</sup>

\* These texts are available in *Personal Identity*, edited by John Perry and published by University of California Press (2008).

§ These texts are the ones that I have selected for the "Topics in Contemporary Philosophy" seminar.

At every stage of conducting the research that it took to design this list of readings, the help of a research assistant was tremendously valuable. I state with confidence that the process of getting to this result would not have been as stimulating or productive without that assistance, and I encourage any teacher with the will and a way to hire a student for a teaching-based research assistantship to do so.

The second main result of this teaching-based research project is the set of skills that the research assistant applied, learned, and honed.

In her own words:

I did not think I would conduct research in my undergraduate degree, let alone in philosophy. I hope that giving some insight into the personal learning aspects of my experience will encourage more philosophy professors to engage in this type of education with their students.

There were some things I had already learned during my undergraduate education that helped me get started with the assistantship (which have been mentioned above). Overall, the tasks I completed during the research assistantship, along with Dr. Mills's guidance and advice, let me learn new skills and develop existing ones, including searching for materials using databases; searching for sources with respect to a specific theory; analyzing a source based on predetermined criteria; evaluating a source from a teaching standpoint; summarizing the arguments and theories contained in a source; collaborating with another person on a research project; writing annotated bibliographies; and organizing sources into a logical progression of study. All of the skills I acquired have proven useful to me outside of the research assistantship, as well as outside the discipline of philosophy. My improved ability to locate sources helped me with finding information relevant to projects in a variety of my undergraduate courses and with the initial research to support my future master's thesis project in School and Clinical Child Psychology. As well, my improved ability to summarize sources has led me to construct clearer, more concise papers and arguments in various disciplines including, but not limited to, philosophy. Further, being able to look at sources from an educational perspective has allowed me to communicate my ideas better by teaching me to consider my audience. Being able to analyze texts in terms of their topics and positions, as well as in terms of their strengths and weaknesses, has made me better at picking out relevant sources, and at supporting, arguing against, and, in general, responding to the arguments to be found in these sources. Organizing the sources into a reading list further taught me how to make clear, logical connections between ideas, arguments, and theories, and to do so in a way that builds upon what has already been covered. I have also been

able to transfer these skills outside the scholarly realm and into the practical realm. At work, I have become better at making a case for my proposals and suggestions, as well as collaborating with and educating my colleagues on issues I find important.

I want to conclude with a final, important point. I believe I have clarified the skills-development value the research assistantship had for me and how it opened my eyes to the ways I can use the skills I have gained from studying philosophy. However, it was not simply the opportunity afforded to me that taught me all these things, but rather working as a research assistant to a mentor devoted to the project in all of its aspects.<sup>10</sup> I hope that more educators in the discipline of philosophy will take on research assistants as it will surely enrich student education in this discipline, affirm their students' choice to study philosophy, and give their students the opportunity to take the skills their studies have provided them and use them outside their courses.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We wish to thank the three anonymous reviewers of the *APA Newsletter on Teaching Philosophy* for the helpful feedback that improved this paper and for their enthusiasm for teaching-based research initiatives. We would also like to thank Cyrus Panjvani for his comments and encouragement during the writing process. Above all else, we are exceptionally grateful to Ed Lorkovic, chair of the Humanities Department at MacEwan University, for his support and contributions to the idea of teaching-based research assistantships and for his leadership in bringing the idea into actuality within the department.

#### NOTES

1. Richard Schacht, "Statement on the Major," American Philosophical Association, 1992, <http://www.apaonline.org/page/major>. Accessed 5 July 2017.
2. Linda Jonker and Martin Hicks, "Teaching Loads and Research Outputs of Ontario University Faculty Members: Implications for Productivity and Differentiation," Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO), March 11, 2014, <http://www.heqco.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/FINAL%20Teaching%20Loads%20and%20Research%20Outputs%20ENG.pdf>. Accessed June 8, 2017.
3. The administrative details of the department's teaching-related student research assistantship are straightforward. The department funds up to four forty-hour research assistantships a year on a competitive basis. Most importantly, these are not to be used for teaching assistant positions; they are solely and explicitly for assistance with the research we do pertaining to our teaching. Specifically, the projects receiving assistance must involve either significant course redesign or new course development, and the students providing the research assistance must be enrolled and declared majors or minors in at least one of the Humanities Department's disciplines, Philosophy being one of them. Proposals must include details about the project, including specific tasks and timelines for the research assistant's work as well as a defense of the student's suitability for the project. A small committee of department members vets the proposals.
4. In the case of the philosophy courses where I work, the classes are capped at forty students or fewer, and there are no teaching assistants or graders. Those of us in the professorial ranks all have tripartite (teaching/research/service) workloads with teaching comprising the largest portion, which typically means a 3/3 course load with the majority of those courses at the 200-level or higher. There is a good deal of variety and autonomy in the courses we teach as well as ample opportunity for course design and re-design development. This allows us to teach to our individual research strengths but also to stretch ourselves in the

direction of other areas. There are no prescribed syllabi and very minimal text requirements only at the introductory level.

5. I appreciate Theodore Cooke's case in "Using *Blade Runner* in Your Introduction to Philosophy Course" (*APA Newsletter on Teaching Philosophy* 3, no. 2 [Spring 2004]: 6–9) for using the film *Blade Runner* to help students understand some of the philosophical concepts that are used in Perry's *Dialogue*; however, I was looking for materials that would ground and explicate those concepts more concretely than the film can provide.
6. Among my reasons for revising the course were the following:
  - my principal area of research is early modern philosophy, and so I already teach a number of other courses in which I can introduce students to Berkeley's philosophy;
  - in my study of early modern philosophy I have a particular interest in the concepts of life and death. This has led me to cultivate a research interest in the philosophy of death along with creating a 300-level course on the philosophy of death. Perry's book works as a nice complement to that interest and serves also as a stepping stone to that course;
  - Perry's book also works as a stepping stone to other courses offered by my department, including a brand new 300-level "Studies in the Self" course that was developed for the sake of increased variety and opportunity for the use of new materials;
  - many of the positions represented in Perry's book are to be found in essays, and adding an assortment of essays increases the variety of genres in course reading materials and—importantly—could also increase the diversity and representation in the authors assigned; and
  - students enjoy studying the dialogue and want to know more about the ideas and arguments contained in it.
7. I was exceptionally fortunate to have Kirsty provide me with research assistance on this project. Every success of this teaching-based research project is due in significant part to her outstanding research skills and her impressive abilities to understand, anticipate, and collaborate.
8. Indeed, after the success with this teaching-based research assistantship, I had another research assistant in Summer 2018 help me with research for this new course.
9. Unfortunately, we did not discover the UPDirectory until after concluding this research project.
10. My learning experience would not have been as successful without Dr. Mills's dedication to not only the project at hand, but also to my education. She did not simply give me tasks and ask me to report back, but rather guided me through the best way to approach these tasks by modelling techniques, giving me tips and strategies, and providing me with starting points and materials. Without Dr. Mills's dedication to and passion for education, this opportunity could have been very discouraging for me. Instead, the positive experiences I had during this research assistantship improved my scholarly and non-scholarly work and led me to a decision to pursue graduate studies, which is something I had decided against in the past. In fall 2018, I will begin a master's program in School and Clinical Child Psychology.

## Teaching a Summer Seminar: Reflections from Two Weeks on the Philosophy and Psychology of Character in the Summer of 2018

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During the summer of 2018, I had the tremendous good fortune to teach a two-week-long summer seminar at Wake Forest University to philosophers and theologians from

the US and UK. In this article, I summarize many of the key details about the seminar. But my ultimate aim is to explore some of the decisions I had to make in planning the event. My hope is that what I learned can be helpful to other philosophers who are thinking about teaching summer seminars in the future.

### 1. BACKGROUND TO THE SEMINAR

The summer seminar was held June 18–28, 2018, with participants staying at a nearby conference center and meeting on the campus of Wake Forest University. The seminar was one of the central activities of [The Beacon Project](#), which is funded by a large grant from the Templeton Religion Trust to study the morally exceptional (moral saints, heroes, and the like) from the perspectives of philosophy, theology, and psychology. I am the philosophy director of the project.

The seminar was held immediately before the Beacon Project final conference. Hence participants not only attended the seminar for almost two full weeks, but they also got to go to the two-day conference and hear presentations of new work on the morally exceptional in these three disciplines.

The theme of the seminar was “Character and the Morally Exceptional: Empirical Discoveries and Moral Improvement.” It was guided by the assumption that becoming a virtuous person is one of the central goals of the ethical life, and was organized around two central questions:

Week One: How good of a job are most people today doing in becoming virtuous?

Week Two: Are there any strategies for cultivating the virtues and becoming morally exceptional which can help us to do better?

More specifically, the goal of the first half of the seminar was to draw on empirical research in psychology to see what the makeup of most people’s moral character is today. For instance, do most people have the moral virtues (honesty, courage, temperance, and so forth), the moral vices (dishonesty, cowardice, intemperance, and so forth), or some other kind of character trait intermediate between virtue and vice (which is the view I hold)? Here is the reading list we followed during the first week:

#### MONDAY

**Topic: Conceptual Background on Character Traits**

Miller, Christian. (2014). *Character and Moral Psychology*, chapter one.

**Topic: Formulating and Discussing the Harman/Doris Argument**

Doris, John. (2002). *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*. Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press, chapters two, three, four (pg. 62–66), and six.

#### TUESDAY

**Topic: Some Responses to Harman/Doris**

Sabini, J. and M. Silver. (2005). “Lack of Character? Situationism Critiqued.” *Ethics* 115: 535–562.

Sosa, Ernest. (2009). “Situations against Virtues: The Situationist Attack on Virtue Theory,” in *Philosophy of the Social Sciences: Philosophical Theory and Scientific Practice*. Ed. C. Mantzavinos. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 274–290.

Sreenivasan, Gopal. (2002). “Errors about Errors: Virtue Theory and Trait Attribution.” *Mind* 111: 47–68.

Kamtekar, Rachana. (2004). “Situationism and Virtue Ethics on the Content of Our Character.” *Ethics* 114: 458–491.

#### WEDNESDAY

**Topic: Background on the Big Five Approach**

John, O., L. Naumann, and C. Soto. (2008). “Paradigm Shift to the Integrative Big Five Trait Taxonomy: History, Measurement, and Conceptual Issues,” in *Handbook of Personality: Theory and Research*. Third Edition. Ed. O. John., R. Robins, and L. Pervin. New York: The Guilford Press, 114–158.

McCrae, R. and P. Costa. (1987). “The Five-Factor Theory of Personality,” in *Handbook of Personality: Theory and Research*. Third Edition. Ed. O. John., R. Robins, and L. Pervin. New York: The Guilford Press, 159–181.

**Topic: Assessing the Big Five Approach and the Situationist Challenge**

Miller, Christian. *Character and Moral Psychology*, chapter six.

Doris, John. (2002). *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 67–71.

#### THURSDAY

**Topic: Background on the CAPS Approach**

Mischel, W. and Y. Shoda. (1995). “A Cognitive-Affective System Theory of Personality: Reconceptualizing Situations, Dispositions, Dynamics, and Invariance in Personality Structure.” *Psychological Review* 102: 246–268.

**Topic: Assessing the CAPS Approach and the Situationist Challenge**

Doris, John. (2002). *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 76–85.

Miller, Christian. *Character and Moral Psychology*, chapter five.

**Topic: The Density Distribution Approach**

Fleeson, W. (2001). “Toward a Structure- and Process-Integrated View of Personality: Traits as Density Distributions

of States." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 80: 1011–1027.

Fleeson, W. and E. Noffle. (2008). "The End of the Person-Situation Debate: An Emerging Synthesis in the Answer to the Consistency Question." *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 2: 1667–1684.

## FRIDAY

**Topic: The Mixed Trait Approach**

Miller, Christian. (2013). *Moral Character: An Empirical Theory*, chapters seven and eight.

**Topic: Assessing the Mixed Trait Approach**

Bates, Tom. (2015). "Mixed Traits and Dispositions: Critical Discussion of Christian Miller, 'Moral Character: An Empirical Theory' and 'Character and Moral Psychology.'" *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 18: 421–424.

Doris, John and Spino, Joseph. (2015). *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*. <https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/character-and-moral-psychology/>

**Topic: A seminar participant's paper in progress**

The second half of the seminar turned to various strategies for trying to bridge what I call the "character gap" between the character we actually have and the virtuous character we should strive to obtain. Developing and justifying such strategies is one of the most underexplored areas of ethics, although in recent years it has gained increased attention. Here we looked at brand new work by several philosophers, some of which had not yet appeared in print:

## SATURDAY

**Topic: Daniel Russell's Recent Work**

Three chapters from Russell's new manuscript, *Doing Better*.

## MONDAY

**Topic: Nancy Snow's Recent Work**

Snow, Nancy. (2009). *Virtue as Social Intelligence: An Empirically Grounded Theory*. Routledge, chapters one and two.

Snow, Nancy. (forthcoming). "From 'Ordinary' Virtue to Aristotelian Virtue," in *The Theory and Practice of Virtue Education*. Ed. T. Harrison and D. Walker. London: Routledge.

## TUESDAY

**Topic: Additional Strategies for Becoming Better**

Alfano, Mark. (2013). *Character as Moral Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, chapter four.

Webber, Jonathan. (2016). "Instilling Virtue," in *From Personality to Virtue: Essays on the Philosophy of Character*. Ed. A. Masala and J. Webber. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 134–154.

Miller, Christian. (2017). *The Character Gap: How Good Are We?* New York: Oxford University Press, chapter nine.

## WEDNESDAY

**Topic: Alan Wilson's Recent Work**

Wilson, Alan and Christian Miller. (forthcoming). "Virtue Epistemology and Developing Intellectual Virtue," in *Routledge Handbook of Virtue Epistemology*. Ed. Heather Battaly. New York: Routledge.

Wilson, Alan. (forthcoming). "Admiration and the Development on Moral Virtue," in *The Moral Psychology of Admiration*. Ed. A. Grahle and A. Archer. Rowman and Littlefield.

**Topic: Nudging and Moral Exemplars**

Engelen, Bert et al. (2018). "Exemplars and Nudges: Combining Two Strategies for Moral Education." *Journal of Moral Education*. Online First. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03057240.2017.1396966>

## THURSDAY

**Topic: Looking to the Future**

Miller, Christian. "Character and Situationism: New Directions." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*. Special Issue on New Directions in Character and Virtue. 20 (2017): 459–471.

**Topic: Two seminar participants' papers in progress**

## 2. APPLYING TO THE SEMINAR

Participation was limited to graduate students, post-docs, or faculty who had their PhD for ten years or less. Participants were required to have trained in philosophy or religion/theology, but they could be doing work in any area of these disciplines. A background in virtue ethics or the philosophy of character was definitely not required, and those who had worked extensively on the recent "situationism" debate in philosophy and related issues about the implications of psychological studies for the existence and nature of character were strongly discouraged from applying.

Applicants only had to send a CV and a cover letter with (i) their contact information and (ii) a brief discussion of their interest in and background familiarity with the topics of the seminar. The cover letter could be no longer than two pages, single spaced.

Applications were due seven months before the seminar, and decisions were made a month later. We received over one hundred applications, and I was the one who narrowed them down to the fifteen participants.

## 3. MECHANICS OF THE SEMINAR

The seminar was built into the larger Beacon Project grant proposal, and so by design we were able to cover all the expenses of the participants during the two weeks. We did not, however, pay any honoraria. Our daily meetings would begin at 9 am and go to 12 pm, with a ten-minute break in the middle. Meeting for three hours was never a problem,

as far as I could tell, and indeed some days it felt like we could have gone much longer.

My approach was to avoid lecturing as much as I could. Rather, I wanted to both cover a lot of material during our time together and generate a lot of discussion from the participants. To facilitate both aims, I had a very detailed handout ready to go for each meeting. It would usually be six to eight pages in length, and I would talk through it and invite discussion as we went. I have used this approach in my teaching for fifteen years, and have always found that it works extremely well. One of our handouts from the seminar is included in the Appendix.

After our morning session, we would head over to lunch, and then the participants would have the afternoons free to read for the next day or do other work. We would gather again for dinner, and then the nights were free too. This was the schedule we followed right through to the Beacon Project final conference.

There were two variations from this plan. One was that we took Sunday off, and I organized an optional trip to a local baseball game in the afternoon (about half the group came).

The other is that I invited three leading philosophers working on character to join us in week two. By then, the participants were well versed in the empirical literature on character and were able to go deeper in examining new work by the visitors, who were Daniel Russell (Arizona), Nancy Snow (Oklahoma), and Alan Wilson (Bristol). In all three cases we looked at work that either had just been published this year or was forthcoming or in draft.

For each meeting during the two weeks, participants had about one hundred pages of reading to prepare, so the workload was significant. I put together a course packet for them, and also sent them the first two days' readings a week in advance so that they could be prepared before they arrived.

#### 4. CHALLENGES AND PLEASANT SURPRISES

This was the second time I have taught a summer seminar. (The first was five years earlier.) So I knew an important lesson already: no matter how much you plan ahead of time and try to take care of every imaginable detail, there will always be multiple problems that arise which you had no way of foreseeing. And lo and behold:

- (i) One participant dropped out a month and a half beforehand, and so we had to scramble to find a replacement.
- (ii) I discovered four days beforehand that the only restaurant on campus available for lunch in the summer was going to be closed during the seminar.
- (iii) One of the participants was in a wheelchair, and for two days the elevators in the building where we were meeting were reportedly unavailable due to annual maintenance and inspection.

But at the end of the day, everything got sorted out, and logistically things worked just fine.

A trickier challenge for the seminar leader, I found, was juggling all the organizational details, while also wanting to get to know the participants and have meaningful conversations with them. These interactions can be tough to navigate when trying to also pay for their lunch, or escort the group to various places on campus, or make sure childcare is arranged for participants with kids. I don't have any advice to offer about how to do it, only the reassurance that after a few days groups tend to fall into a routine and can usually take care of themselves.

On the flip side, I had two very pleasant surprises during the seminar. The first, which struck me during the very first meeting, was that everyone was engaged by the material and was very eager to talk about it both during and outside of the seminar time. Discussion was never a problem to generate. If anything, I had to limit it at times just so we would cover everything for the day. During each meeting, all fifteen members of the group would say something, and it was never forced. I asked them to raise their hands so that the more introverted members would have a chance to participate, and this seemed to work well. Also, rather than lecture, I would ask a lot of questions and welcome comments from a variety of perspectives as we moved through that day's handout.

The other pleasant surprise was how well members of the group bonded with each other. As already noted, they consisted of a mixture of graduate students (seven), post-docs (two), and junior faculty (six), with six women and nine men. The majority were married, and of those most had children, although only two participants brought their children with them for the two weeks. By the end of this time, all the participants seemed to have become genuine friends.

What I learned is that, while covering the material and developing a competence in the subject matter are important, at the end of the day what really makes a summer seminar successful is not anything I contribute directly. Rather, it is the bond that is formed amongst the participants themselves.

#### 5. SOME KEY CHOICES TO MAKE IN DESIGNING A SUMMER SEMINAR

I could go on and on about the seminar, but my main goal is to focus on issues and questions that I confronted which may be of relevance to others who are planning future summer seminars. Of course, I recognize that my own experience is only of limited value. Others will have different budgets, different topics, and different learning goals, among other differences. Nevertheless, here are several questions which I hope will be helpful to think through together:

*How detailed should applications be?* I opted for the "less is more" approach. No writing sample. No letters of recommendation. I didn't want to burden letter writers, and I am skeptical of the value of these letters anyway.

A CV told me much of what I wanted to know, especially whether there was evidence of professional involvement and, ideally, a publication record.

*Should there be a requirement that applicants be two years or less post PhD?* I really like this approach. The hope is that many of the participants will be inspired to do work in the given area early on in their careers, which can carry with them for decades to come. Plus, I found it can help to create a rich social dynamic if everyone is roughly the same professional stage.

*Should the focus be on work-in-progress or on discussing important readings?* I have seen summer seminars structured mainly around reading work-in-progress and offering feedback. That is very different from what we did, but of course it is also a good approach to follow in its own right. It all depends on what the instructor's vision is for the seminar. My goal was to help fifteen philosophers and theologians get the training they needed in relevant areas of the psychology and philosophy of character so that they could be well equipped to *start* writing papers in the area (rather than coming to the seminar already knowing the literature well and having papers ready to go).

*Is it worthwhile to bring in outside speakers if there is funding available for them?* Frankly, it depends. Some summer seminars rotate through a series of topics and have outside speakers give a quick overview of each topic. Frequent visitors can be very helpful in that kind of context. For a work-in-progress-type seminar, on the other hand, I see less value in having such visitors.

With the approach I adopted for my seminar, I think the outside speakers were helpful (i) with providing a nice change of pace for the participants, (ii) helping participants network with leading philosophers in the area, and, most importantly, (iii) fostering engagement with the cutting-edge work that was being done at the time by top people. Just be sure to do your homework ahead of time. Is the person a good teacher and dynamic in the classroom? Will he or she be willing to hang out with the participants during the unstructured time? Does this person get defensive when his or her work is criticized, or talk down to non-experts? It is important to know the answers to these questions ahead of time.

*When during the day and for how long should meetings be held?* I find mornings tend to work best, and three hours is a good length. Anything shorter and I begin to worry about whether it is a worthwhile sacrifice on the participant's part to be there. Of course, another approach is to do two shorter, separate meetings each day (say, two hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon). The one caution I would offer is to still leave plenty of time for preparing the readings for the next day, as well as for informal conversation and engagement.

*How much reading is realistic to assign?* I probably overdid it with one hundred pages a day. I know that not everyone kept up with that much every day. On the other hand, the handouts were intended to also be useful in providing a lot of relevant detail, so that even those who did not read

a particular article could still follow along. Plus, if an article sounded interesting, there was always the chance to go back to it after the seminar was over.

*How long should the seminar be?* Obviously, this will depend on factors like the budget and the instructor's goals for the seminar. If the aim is mainly to discuss work-in-progress, then two weeks strikes me as too long in most cases. If the approach instead is one of immersion in a given subject area, then ten to fourteen days strikes me as just right. In either case, I would be nervous about going longer than two weeks.

## 6. CONCLUSION

I loved teaching this summer seminar, and judging from the evaluations that were completed on the final day, the participants seemed to find it very rewarding and enjoyable too. Of course, it took a ton of work. I averaged about five hours of sleep a night during the two weeks, not to mention the many hours of preparation in the months leading up to the seminar during which our grant administrator and I tried to sort out all the logistical details.

Looking back, though, it was definitely worth it.

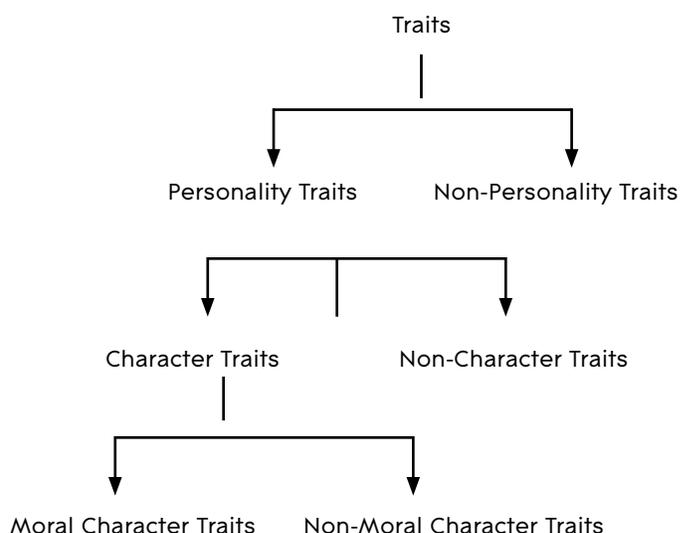
## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## Appendix

Handout from the Beacon Project Summer Seminar First Meeting – June 18, 2018

### CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND ON CHARACTER TRAITS



## PERSONALITY TRAIT

A disposition to form beliefs and/or desires of a certain sort and (in many cases) to act in a certain way, when in conditions relevant to that disposition.

## CHARACTER TRAITS

### One Proposal

A character trait is a personality trait in which the person who possesses it makes a normative judgment of the relevant kind whenever it is exercised.

### Another Proposal

A character trait is a personality trait for which a person who possesses it is (at least to some degree) normatively responsible for doing so.

### A Third Proposal

A character trait is a personality trait for which a person who has it is, in that respect, an appropriate object of normative assessment by the relevant norms.

## SOME FUNCTIONAL ROLES FOR CHARACTER TRAITS

- (a) **Understanding:** Character traits are a basis for understanding ourselves and others by classifying people in various ways which can be important to interpersonal and intrapersonal interaction. When I form an impression of Smith, for instance, my general understanding of him may be framed in terms of character traits and shaped heavily by my perceptions of his honesty, compassion, or generosity. The same could be true, not only about Smith, but about myself as well.
- (b) **Explanation:** Character traits are a basis for (partially) explaining why people act the way that they do. Smith may cheat on tests because he is dishonest (either in general or just dishonest in test-taking situations), whereas Jones may regularly give money to charity because he is compassionate, other things being equal.
- (c) **Prediction:** Character traits are a basis for predicting what a person who has them will likely do in the future. For instance, if I think that Smith is shy, then I can take myself to have a fairly good idea of how he will likely behave in a room full of people at the next work party, other things being equal.
- (d) **Evaluation:** Character traits are a basis for normatively assessing a person. So when I say that Smith is dishonest, I am evaluating him as a person in a negative way, at least in that one respect.
- (e) **Imitation:** Character traits are a basis upon which to imitate another person and cultivate positive traits

while avoiding negative ones. So I might strive to become more compassionate, and model my life after people such as Jesus, Gandhi, Socrates, and Mother Theresa, who are said to have had certain virtuous character traits to a high degree.

## SOME ADDITIONAL FEATURES OF CHARACTER TRAITS

- (1) They come in degrees.
- (2) They have what can be called a "minimal threshold" that has to be met in order to qualify as that particular kind of trait rather than some other.
- (3) They can be consistent in certain ways:

Stability

Cross-situational consistency

## THE METAPHYSICS OF CHARACTER TRAITS

### Three Rough Options:

#### *The Summary View*

Character trait ascriptions are true or false in virtue of corresponding to *actual patterns* of relevant mental thoughts and bodily action.

#### *The Conditional View*

Character trait ascriptions are true or false in virtue of corresponding to *conditional patterns* of relevant mental thoughts and bodily action.

Example:

The ascription "Jones is compassionate" is true if and only if (and because) Jones were to encounter one or more people whom he notices are in need of a moderate amount of help, he would typically attempt to help and do so from a compassionate state of mind.

#### *The Realist View*

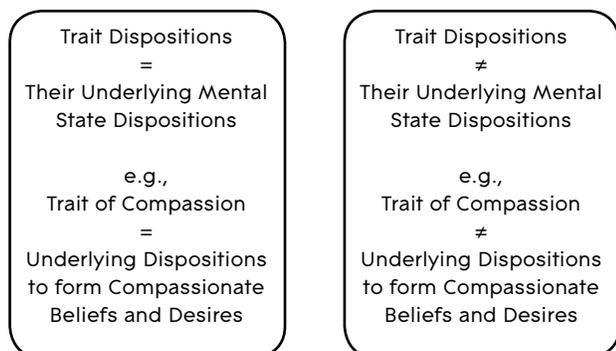
Character trait ascriptions are true or false in virtue of corresponding to actual instantiations of the trait properties.

Example: The ascription "Jones is compassionate" is true if and only if (and because) Jones has in fact instantiated the property of compassion.

Such a property mediates between stimulus events, such as seeing someone in need, and relevant manifestations, such as wanting to help and believing that I (Jones) can help by donating money.

**Question:** What grounds the trait properties?

**Answer:** A character trait disposition which is had by Jones *consists of* some cluster of Jones's relevant interrelated mental state dispositions such that necessarily, if Jones has this cluster of dispositions, then Jones instantiates that character trait as well.



## FORMULATING AND DISCUSSING THE DORIS (AND HARMAN) ARGUMENT

### The Target

A *globalist* conception of character, which is one that accepts the following two theses (I leave aside evaluative integration):

- (1) *Consistency*. Character traits are reliably manifested in trait-relevant behavior across a diversity of trait-relevant eliciting conditions that may vary widely in their conduciveness to the manifestation of the trait in question.
- (2) *Stability*. Character traits are reliably manifested in trait-relevant behaviors over iterated trials of similar trait-relevant eliciting conditions (22).

A *global character trait*, then, is a character trait which exhibits both cross-situational consistency in a wide variety of trait-relevant circumstances, as well as stability in repeated instances of the same kind of trait-relevant circumstances.

### The First Stage of the Argument

First, Doris argues that (my reconstruction):

- (i) If there is widespread possession of the traditional virtues and vices understood as global character traits, then systematic empirical observation using appropriate psychological studies will reveal many people behaving in a certain kind of way.
- (ii) However, systematic empirical observation using appropriate psychological studies fails to reveal that many people act in this kind of way.
- (iii) Therefore, there is not widespread possession of the traditional virtues and vices understood as global character traits.

What is the "certain kind of way"?

*My Interpretation:* A way that is reliably sensitive to the actual moral reasons there are in the relevant situations.

Example: Isen and Levin dime phone-booth study.

Note: This reasoning parallels some of the situationist reasoning used over forty years ago in social psychology. Subtle situational features are capable of having a significant impact on our behavior in ways that are inconsistent with the robust possession of global personality traits. As far as I can see, the key differences from this earlier discussion are twofold: (i) the Harman/Doris reasoning is used to arrive at a conclusion which is specifically focused on the extent to which people have *traditional moral character traits*, as opposed to global personality traits in general, and (ii) this conclusion is then used to assess the plausibility of Aristotelian virtue ethics, and more generally any theory in normative ethics which relies on global character traits.

What *exactly* is the conclusion of the First Stage?

- (i) On metaphysical grounds the properties of *being compassionate* or *being honest* do not exist.
- (ii) No human being has ever had any of the traditional virtues or vices such as courage or compassion, either as a matter of psychological necessity or as a matter of contingent fact.
- (iii) Given the psychological evidence, we are not justified in believing on the basis of that evidence that most people possess the traditional virtues or vices.
- (iv) Given the psychological evidence, we are justified in believing on the basis of that evidence that most people *do not* possess the traditional virtues or vices.

A quick side-note about my view and later this week...

- (v) Given the psychological evidence, we are justified in believing on the basis of that evidence that most people do not possess any global character traits.

### The Second Stage of the Argument

The conclusion in (iv) is supposed to undermine the plausibility of Aristotelian virtue ethics, along with any other theories in ethics which rely on such traits.

But how?

Harman: "this sort of virtue ethics presupposes that there are character traits of the relevant sort, that people differ in what character traits they have, and these traits help to explain differences in the way people behave" (1999: 319).

Doris in his 1998 paper: "Aristotelian virtue ethics, when construed as invoking a generally applicable descriptive

psychology . . . [is] subject to damaging empirical criticism" (520).

Doris in his 2002 book

Question: Are there any arguments connecting (i) the denial of the widespread possession of traditional character traits, to (ii) an assessment of the *truth* of Aristotelian virtue ethics as a normative theory?

## THE STUDIES

Milgram

Darley and Batson

Isen and Levin

Latané and Darley

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## *Building Logic Papers From the Ground Up: Helping Introductory Logic Students Write Argument-Based Papers*

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I teach an Introduction to Logic and Critical Thinking class in which I ask students to write argument-based papers. Writing a paper of this kind is a challenge for which many of them have not been thoroughly prepared. Before they write their papers, therefore, I ask them to complete a series of exercises that includes writing an initial version of the argument that will serve as the basis of their paper, constructing an arrow diagram<sup>1</sup> of that argument to help them organize the paper, and participating in a small group, in-class discussion of their arguments and diagrams. Then I provide them with my own comments on their work, in which I suggest some ways that they might build upon it. This preparatory approach has, I believe, yielded noticeably better results than, for example, simply requiring and commenting upon drafts (an alternative I have often used). I will describe it in more detail below.

Students begin the assignment by deciding upon a topic,<sup>2</sup> and a conclusion that they will support regarding that topic. Next, they write an argument in favor of that conclusion, and a counter-argument (which they may draw upon when asked to come up with objections to their argument in the paper itself). I specify a minimum, but not a maximum, number of premises (usually about eight);<sup>3</sup> encourage them to provide support for premises that are controversial or not obviously true; and ask them to include only premises, conclusions, and premise or conclusion indicators when writing out their arguments.

Once students have written initial versions of their arguments (and counter-arguments), they construct arrow diagrams of them. This helps them understand the structure of their arguments, which in turn helps them

structure their paper—the diagram of their argument serves as a kind of outline. Unlike a standard outline, however, the arrow diagram provides them with a detailed visual representation of argument structure: a logical map or blueprint to guide them in their writing so that their paper reflects and conveys the structure of their argument.

On the day that the arguments and arrow diagrams are due, before students turn in those assignments, I give them an in-class assignment to do in small groups. All of the students discuss their arguments and diagrams with the other members of their group and take notes on the feedback they receive. The discussions engage students in collaborative assessment of their work, and brainstorming about possible revisions and additions. I supply some prompts, in the form of questions such as these: Do any of the premises need to be supported, and if so, how might they be supported? What do you think are the strongest objections that might be raised in response to the premises or conclusions of the arguments? What other comments or suggestions do you have? At the end of the discussions, I collect the arguments, diagrams, and feedback notes—all of which I return when I have added my own feedback.

That feedback varies from student to student, of course. Often, it includes some corrections of the arrow diagrams. It generally consists primarily, though, of suggestions or recommendations for their papers concerning content development or organization. Comments of the first type may 1) focus on ways of strengthening, refining, and filling out the arguments (for instance, by adding sub-arguments as needed, providing data from studies, or drawing upon arguments from philosophical sources); or 2) suggest ways of supplementing the arguments themselves with other appropriate material (e.g., an account of the history and importance of the topic, an explanation of an important distinction, or a discussion of a relevant thought experiment). The organizational remarks may include advice about which bits of content to group together in passages, paragraphs, or sections. That advice is often accompanied by references to the arrow diagrams to explain or support the suggested groupings (I also spend some time in class demonstrating how to use arrow diagrams for guidance when organizing statements into various groupings).

When I return the students' exercises, along with their feedback, I give them their assignment sheet for the paper. The assignment sheet includes instructions concerning paper length, citation of sources, etc. It also specifies that in the introduction to their paper they must i) state the conclusion or thesis they will be supporting and defending; ii) briefly indicate—in no more than two sentences, using keywords—the main reasons they will give for that conclusion; and iii) note that they will be raising (at least two) objections to their argument, and responding to them. A brief introductory outline of this kind gives them a little more organizational guidance as they write their paper.

When students begin working on the paper itself after completing the preparatory process described above, they need not do so empty-handed. As I have indicated, they have a significant basis for their paper in the form of their argument-in-progress, as well as material for their

objections in their counter-argument, structural guidance from their arrow diagram, and developmental suggestions in their student/instructor feedback. They are already well on their way to writing their paper.

#### NOTES

1. My students generally use the argument diagramming method presented in texts such as Lewis Vaughn, *The Power of Critical Thinking: Effective Reasoning About Ordinary and Extraordinary Claims*, 5th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 86–94; and Ronald Munson and Andrew Black, *The Elements of Reasoning*, 7th ed. (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2016), 17–18. I give them the option, though, of using what I refer to as “keyword diagrams,” which are different in only one respect: premises and conclusions are represented in the diagrams by means of keywords rather than numbers. Some students prefer the keyword diagrams because the keywords represent the content of their arguments more directly, making it easier for them to keep that content in mind as they construct and use the diagrams.
2. In the assignment I do not place any restrictions upon the topics students may choose. The choices they make vary widely: they include social and political topics (such as the ever-popular marijuana legalization issue), more personal concerns (e.g., the ethical justifiability of a friend’s or employer’s behavior), philosophical problems (whether God exists, for instance), etc. Once I have read students’ initial arguments, though, I do sometimes suggest that they revise their conclusions or (in rare cases) find new topics. Suggesting a revision would be appropriate if, for instance, the original conclusion is vulnerable to certain counter-examples, but that vulnerability could be avoided by means of a minor modification (such as replacing “in all cases” with “in most cases”). I might recommend coming up with a new topic (and offer to meet to discuss possibilities) if, for example, the original one is so uncontroversial that raising reasonable objections to the student’s position might not be possible.
3. I specify a minimum number of premises for the students’ initial arguments to give them some practice in constructing and diagramming relatively long arguments, and to ensure that they generate a significant amount of material that they may draw from when they are turning their arguments into papers. I recognize, though, that strong arguments may be (and often are) short ones. So I do not specify a minimum number of premises for students to include in the paper itself. Once they have presented and diagrammed their somewhat lengthy arguments in their preparatory work, they may choose to present shorter arguments in their papers.

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## BOOKS RECEIVED

### HACKETT PUBLISHING COMPANY

Reeve, C. D. C. Translation and Introduction: Aristotle, *Physics*.

Reeve, C. D. C. Translation and Notes: Aristotle, *De Anima*.

Dasti, Matthew, and Stephen Phillips. Translation and Explanatory Notes: *The Nyaya-sutra*.

Morrow, David R. *Giving Reasons: A Short Introduction to Critical Thinking*.

Weston, Anthony. *A Rulebook for Arguments*, 5th edition.