

APA Newsletters

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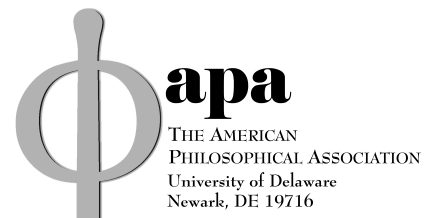
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FROM THE EDITORS

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Welcome to the fall 2009 edition of the *APA Newsletter on Teaching Philosophy*. We are pleased to present three papers of interest to teachers of philosophy.

The first paper, "Teaching the Dog's Breakfast: Some Dangers and How to Deal with Them," by Ralph H. Johnson and J. Anthony Blair, both of the University of Windsor, begins with a complaint about textbooks used in teaching informal logic and critical thinking: they do not examine fully the foundations of the field and distinguish the kinds of learning processes that may be appropriately classified under these terms. The paper then presents such an analysis, distinguishing between kinds of analytical skills that college students should master, and noting how problematic some of them in fact are. The authors distinguish the studies of logic, critical thinking, informal logic, problem-solving, decision-making, argument and argumentation, inference, and implication. The paper offers suggestions for developing a first-year course that keeps these distinctions in mind as it focuses upon those skills thought by the instructor to be most important. Since course development requires the developer to be familiar with the relevant literature, a list of sources is included in the paper, along with an extensive bibliography of specific works in the field.

Our second paper, "Teaching Plato with Emoticons," is by J. Aaron Simmons of Hendrix College and Scott F. Aikin of Western Kentucky University and Vanderbilt University. The authors maintain that students' reading skills are shaped by such technologies as the use of emoticons in communication. It may therefore be useful to include their skills as self-expression via emoticons in exercises designed to increase their critical skill in philosophy. The paper describes one of the exercises the authors have designed: a reading of Plato's *Euthyphro*, in which students are required to add emoticons to "decode" the drama of the text, and thereby demonstrate their understanding of some of Plato's technique of presenting arguments, and their ability to interpret Plato's thought. The article describes some of the pedagogical results they have obtained by this exercise, and suggests some other texts to which this technique can be usefully applied.

The third paper, "Using *Euthyphro* 9e-11b to Teach Some Basic Logic and to Teach How to Read a Platonic Dialog," is by Russell W. Dumke of Our Lady of the Lake University. Professor Dumke tells us that he received the inspiration for this exercise

from the layout of a textbook he was assigned for a course in philosophy. The text contains a chapter on logic that is followed by a chapter that discusses Plato's and Aristotle's notions of form, and includes, as a reading selection, Plato's *Euthyphro* 9d-11b. Here Socrates and Euthyphro discuss the latter's definition of piety as what the gods all love. The passage may be seen as an illustration of basic concepts in logic. Dumke's paper offers an excellent analysis of this passage, using truth-functional operators to show the structure of Socrates' analysis, and a diamond-shaped diagram for exhibiting plastically the two men's dispute about the definition. The author brings out via his analysis examples of possible circular reasoning and an informal fallacy. Students are shown where the chief difficulty in Euthyphro's definition is located, and why his definition fails to give Socrates the knowledge about piety that Euthyphro had promised to give him. Students also learn to appreciate the distinction between an *attribute* and the *nature* of a concept.

We are also pleased to present a brief contribution by Felicia Nimue Ackerman of Brown University entitled "Wa(i)ving Rights Away." It concerns the option offered to students of obtaining access to letters of recommendation written on their behalf, or of waiving their right to such access. This article originally appeared in *The Providence Journal*, which has given us the permission to reprint it here.

We have one review, *Philosophical Myths of the Fall*, by Stephen Mulhall, reviewed by Daniel Gallagher.

We always encourage our readers to suggest themselves as reviewers of books and other material that they think may be especially good for classroom use. The names of the other books and materials we have for review are listed at the end of the *Newsletter*. Please remember again that our publication is devoted to pedagogy and not to theoretical discussions of philosophical issues, and that aim should be borne in mind when reviewing material for our publication.

As always, we encourage our readers to write for our publication. We welcome papers 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:

- The author's name, the title of the paper, and full mailing address should appear on a separate sheet of paper. 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.
 - Both electronic and paper copies of papers are acceptable. In the case of paper copies, we would appreciate receiving four copies for our review purposes.
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- Authors should adhere to the production guidelines that are available from the APA and that are available from the APA's website.
- In the case of electronic copies, in writing your paper to disk, please do not use your word processor's footnote or endnote function; all notes should be added manually at the end of the paper.
- All articles submitted to the *Newsletter* are blind-reviewed by the members of the editorial committee. They are:

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ARTICLES

Teaching the Dog's Breakfast¹: Some Dangers and How to Deal with Them²

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1. Introduction

We have each had almost forty years of experience teaching logic, formal and informal, argumentation, and critical thinking at the university level. Like everyone who teaches introductory logic, critical thinking or critical reasoning, or informal logic—call it what you will—we have been looking at the spate of textbooks that publishers send us (there are well over 100 on the market). What we find there is a mish-mash of conceptual confluences, confusions, sloppiness, and blurriness—bad critical thinking about the very subject matter we're teaching. The point is not that each text takes a different and incompatible theoretical position; there could be no objection to that. The problem, rather, is that in too many cases the theory seems not to have been thought through carefully, or a controversial theoretical position is taught without alerting the student to its problematic status. To take a couple of examples: there seems to be a widespread assumption that teaching argument analysis is equivalent to teaching critical thinking; and many authors teach that "deductive" and "inductive" (a) name argument

types, and (b) exhaust the argument types. These are at best dubious claims, and all are contested in the literature. (This is not the place to defend this claim in detail. For a start, the reader may consult Blair 2006.)

Our objective in this paper is to suggest some clarifications, and to spell out their implications for how such a course should be conceived and structured. By the way, the textbook authors may not be the principal culprits. The publishing companies want these texts to be all things to all people so as to maximize sales, and they pressure authors to include a wide range of material, as we know from personal experience and anecdotal reports from colleagues.

2. Some essential distinctions

One of the most hopeful developments in the 1970s was the emergence of what some have called the "thinking skills movement," which had as its aim to install the teaching of thinking skills into their rightful place in education at all levels. This movement led to the development of a number of initiatives, some of which targeted critical thinking (e.g., Richard Paul's Sonoma State University annual conferences, begun in 1981); others, problem-solving (Rubenstein 1975); others, decision-making; others still, lateral thinking (DeBono 1967). This plurality of initiatives prompted educational psychologist Lauren Resnick to ask: "How should we make sense of these many labels? Do critical thinking, metacognition, cognitive strategies and study skills refer to the same kind of capabilities? And how are they related to problem-solving abilities that mathematicians, scientists and engineers try to teach their students?" (1989, 1).

Following Resnick's example, we go over some of the main categories that are frequently involved in the "call it what you will" course, making comments on each of them in the hopes of encouraging greater clarity about what one proposes to do in teaching them. Such introductory courses (and the texts that are created for them) often conflate "things" that need to be distinguished—like critical thinking and informal logic. Furthermore, the objectives in these introductory courses involve positions on difficult concepts requiring theoretical treatment that they do not receive there. So we comment on the following concepts: reasoning, logic, informal logic, critical thinking, problem solving, decision-making, argument(ation), inference, and implication. Our glosses on these concepts and their distinctions are no doubt themselves controversial and, of course, they fall short of thorough, carefully supported analyses. Each could use book-length treatment, and some have received it. But that's our point: *these fundamental concepts should not be taught as if they are simple, settled, and unproblematic.*

REASONING. (1) A cognitive activity. Solving logic puzzles (Sudokus, for example), solving problems (from crossword puzzles to how to save the planet), arguing, coming to a decision about what to do or what attitude to take, working out an explanation, these and many more activities all employ reasoning, but *the process and the norms for good execution* might be different from one to the other. (2) A report or transcript (the verbal expression) of such cognitive activity. *One* of many different uses of "argument" is to denote a report of *one* of many kinds of reasoning, but an explanation (for just one other example) can equally be a report of reasoning.

It follows that there is not one kind of cognitive activity that is good reasoning. That in turn implies that if you promise to teach students how to improve their reasoning skills, you need to qualify your promise and limit your ambition.

LOGIC. This word has many equally legitimate senses. Even the "logic" textbooks characterize logic in different ways (see Blair 2003). So, great caution and a definite humility are in order

when undertaking to say what logic “is.” If logic is defined, as Copi and Cohen confidently declare in the opening sentence of their classic text, as “the study of the methods and principles used to distinguish correct reasoning from incorrect reasoning” (*Introduction to Logic*, any edition, opening line of Chapter 1), then it includes far more than propositional or quantificational logic. For there is also presumptive reasoning, and reasoning to the best explanation, and plausible reasoning, and problem-solving reasoning, and decision-making reasoning, and so on. Reasoning certainly can’t be restricted to formal deductive logic, if only because that excludes non-formal material deductive logic, non-monotonic logic, and more. Other textbook definitions of “logic” fall similarly short of inclusiveness, and really ought to be treated as stipulations for use by that author in that textbook.

The claim of some textbooks that learning formal deductive logic improves one’s reasoning skills is an empirical claim that, to our knowledge, has never been proven. Even if it helps, which is not clear, it’s unlikely, given the variety of different kinds of reasoning tasks that don’t involve deductive (necessary) relations between propositions, that it would be enough.

CRITICAL THINKING. Here’s another term with many definitions. We believe it is unhelpful and confusing to identify critical thinking with just any kind of good thinking. Unhelpful, because it provides no guidance about what to try to teach in a critical thinking course; confusing, because it conflates many distinct kinds of thinking. We already have concepts like problem-solving, decision-making, arguing, and reasoning, which, by the way, are not all the same. Those who think critical thinking is a useful concept and that critical thinking skills are valuable have in mind a kind of second-order or meta-level thinking—thinking about thinking. And they have in mind, more specifically, the evaluation of thinking and of intellectual products in general. Since one must first interpret correctly in order to evaluate properly, skill in interpretation has to be included, too. So critical thinking is plausibly thought of as skilled interpretation and evaluation of such intellectual products as observation reports and other kinds of information, explanations, arguments, and so on (see Scriven & Fisher 1997). Teaching critical thinking, accordingly, seems to involve teaching various kinds of reflective questioning, interpretation, and evaluation strategies.

If teaching how to interpret and evaluate arguments, explanations, observation reports, and other kinds of information (perhaps among much else) is what seems to be involved in critical thinking, then teaching just one of these is by no means teaching all there is to learn about thinking critically. Teaching logic is not equivalent to teaching critical thinking, nor is teaching skills in one or another kind of reasoning, or teaching how to analyze arguments. Also, if interpretive skills are important, it will be important to teach some *content-specific information*. To give just one example, we believe that learning how to think critically about TV news reports requires learning how TV news reports are created and what constraints they face. These skills are not learned in a formal logic course or a course on argument criticism.

INFORMAL LOGIC. Here is the definition we gave in 1987, in an article in *Informal Logic*:

Informal logic is best understood as the normative study of argument. It is the area of logic, which seeks to develop non-formal standards, criteria and procedures for the interpretation, evaluation and construction of arguments and argumentation used in natural language. (p. 148)

For this definition to be clear, we need to add several comments.

First, since that time we have made one modification: we have broadened our description of the range of argument to include the sort of argument that occurs, not just in everyday discourse, but also disciplined inquiry—what Weinstein calls “stylized arguments...within the various special disciplines” (1990, 121).

Second, an obvious point is that “informal” takes its meaning in contrast to its counterpart—“formal.” Yet this point was not made for some time; hence, the nature of informal logic remained opaque, even to those involved in it. Informal logic is non-formal in this sense: it rejects the notion of logical form as the key to understanding the structure of arguments and it likewise abandons (or downplays) validity as constitutive for the purposes of the evaluation of argument(ation). But “procedures which are somehow regulated or regimented, which take place according to some set of rules” (Barth and Krabbe 1982, 19) are clearly formal in another sense. In this other sense of “form,” informal logic can be, and indeed is, formal. For there is nothing in the informal logic enterprise that stands opposed to the idea that argumentative discourse should be subject to norms, i.e., subject to rules, criteria, standards, or procedures. What is rejected is that the criteria for evaluating all arguments are to be obtained solely by reflection on the logical form or on the deductive validity of the argument.

How, then, does informal logic differ from formal logic? Informal logic differs from formal logic not only in its *methodology* but also by its *focal point*. That is, the social, communicative practice of argumentation can and should be distinguished from both deductive inference and deductive implication, which are the proper subjects of formal deductive logic. Informal logic is concerned with the logic of arguments used in argumentation: namely, the nature of the cogency of the support that reasons provide for the conclusions they are supposed to back up.

Finally, it should be noted that the “in” of “informal” was originally conceived as indicating a kind of opposition to formal (deductive) logic. But it became clear that the issue was not which logic was better. Which is “better” depends on the situation. If you are interested in whether a sentence or proposition follows necessarily from another or others (i.e., in entailment relationships) then deductive logic is what you need. If you are interested in what inference to draw from the empirical data you have, then inductive logic is what you need. If you are interested in whether the premises of an argument provide good support for the conclusion, informal logic provides a more insightful account, or such was the belief that motivated our initiative.

Teaching informal logic is NOT teaching reasoning and it is not teaching critical thinking and it is not teaching deductive logic without its formal or symbolic apparatus. It is teaching about one kind of reasoning, the reasoning expressed in arguments, and it provides tools for critical thinking about one kind of intellectual product: arguments.

PROBLEM-SOLVING. There is a literature, mostly coming out of engineering and medical education, about strategies for solving problems (see Rubenstein 1975). “Problems” are understood as desired goal states for which the means, or the best means, of reaching them are not initially known. Thus, problem-solving is one kind of reasoning. Formulating a proof in deductive logic is one instance of problem-solving, but so is figuring out the best location and design for a bridge. Proposed solutions to problems can be good or poor, so assessing such solutions is one of the tasks to which critical thinking can turn. But critical thinking is not the same as problem solving.

The point is that teaching critical thinking, logic, informal logic, or general reasoning skills is not the same as teaching problem-solving, and vice-versa.

DECISION-MAKING. If decision-making is to be distinguished from problem-solving, it might be defined as the process of determining what actions should be taken or what policies should be implemented, given a situation requiring a choice. Unlike with problem-solving, the desired end state is not a given. Decision-making involves means-ends reasoning, but it can also entail working out the practical implications of principles, rules, or laws. It is thus one kind of (or type of exercise of) reasoning. It is not the same as arguing (though arguing requires making decisions) and it is not the same as logic. Like other intellectual processes and products, it can be evaluated, and thus subjected to critical thinking. The “practical reason” of Aristotle and of Kant is reasoning in decision-making.

There is no equivalence between teaching good decision-making strategies, good problem-solving strategies, critical thinking, argumentation, or logic.

ARGUMENT, ARGUMENTATION. Here are two more terms with many, many definitions and no proprietary rights. Keep the product/process distinction (and potential ambiguity) in mind for both terms. Arguments are one way we try to justify claims we make, to convince others of their reasonableness, or to get others to do things. In some uses of the term, arguments are simply concatenations of statements or propositions; in others, they are vehicles of communication for various purposes. For some they are sets of sentences, for others they are complex speech acts or speech events. The simple dichotomy between argument as a reason for a claim and argument as a quarrel, found in too many logic texts, is an embarrassing, even culpable, oversimplification. There is so much more that needs to be said and philosophers really ought to know better. Moreover, the study of logic, formal or informal, does not exhaust what needs to be known to be adept at making and assessing arguments. The fields of rhetoric and speech communication have large and illuminating literatures pertaining to arguments and argumentation.

The logical norms of good arguments might for some kinds be formally expressible, for others informally expressible. But if we are teaching how to evaluate arguments, we need to teach dialectical responsibilities and rhetorical sensitivity (that is, sensitivity to occasion, context, and audience). Teaching some deductive logic tools is not teaching someone how to argue well when it counts. Good arguments are responsive to objections, and sensitive to audience and occasion, as well as being embodiments of cogent reasoning. Moreover, plenty of good arguments are deductively invalid. So teaching logic, especially elementary formal logic, is very far indeed from all there is to teaching about arguments. But, also, as we’ve said, teaching how to interpret and assess arguments does not exhaust the teaching of critical thinking skills.

INFERENCE. “Inference” is potentially ambiguous between the process of inferring and the product that results from such a process. The term is also used variously to mean “implication,” “argument,” or “reasoning.” Those provisos having been noted, inference (as a process) may be described as the process of drawing a conclusion from some proposition (or propositions)—as, for example, when I reason: “There are reports of rain for this afternoon, so I had best take my umbrella.”

So, if you are going to say you are teaching about inferences, you have to stipulate for your students the sense in which you are using the term, and it would be responsible to let them know that there are other senses of the term in wide use.

IMPLICATION. “Implication” has the same potential for process-product ambiguity as “inference.” Some use those

two terms interchangeably; others don’t. In one sense, an implication is a logical relation that can hold between sentences or propositions, on a par with consistency, contrariety, and contradiction. But there is also implication in the sense of leading someone to believe, like that involved in innuendo (e.g., the implication of the observation, “Tony was sober today”). As a product, an implication is what may be inferred from a statement or set of statements. When using the term “implication” in teaching logic, full disclosure requires noting these complexities and stipulating how you relate implication to inference in your teaching terminology.

With those distinctions in mind, we turn our attention to the task that instructors of these first-year courses face: How best to teach that course you’ve been assigned?

3. The Question of Focus: What are you going to be teaching?

In our view, there are two dimensions to planning your course:

(1) Content Coverage Objectives: What is to be your fundamental content? Is it: Basic deductive logic, Informal logic, Reasoning skills, Critical thinking, Argument analysis and evaluation, Fallacy analysis, Problem solving, Decision-making? Other? As we hope you have now seen, these are arguably quite different topics, even though related—any one of which by itself would reasonably be the content of a one-semester course. In fact, any one of them could form the contents of several courses, at the introductory, intermediate, and advanced levels.

Given the above distinctions, a good deal of thought must go into the planning of the course. It’s quite possible the calendar description of the course at your institution embodies conflation of the concepts we’ve discussed above. Also, your department might expect the course to be teaching several of these things (at once), whether or not it recognizes the differences among them. So you could well face the “political” challenge of navigating among existing practices and expectations. On the other hand, it might be possible to organize the course so that you cover more than one of these topics, albeit in a pretty sketchy fashion, if you must do so in a one-semester course.

In our view, the important first step is to be absolutely clear in your own mind about precisely what you are trying to teach (and what you aren’t) and then be clear with your students about it, too. If your course is to be an omnibus course, you might consider giving it an appropriate title, like “Thinking Skills” instead of some other title that suggests a narrower focus, such as “Introductory Logic” or “Critical Thinking.” If the course is narrowly focused, then it’s important not to think of it, or sell it to students, as something it is not. If you are teaching elementary deductive logic, fine; but then don’t claim to be teaching your students how to interpret and evaluate the arguments typical of public discourse, and don’t claim to be teaching them how to think critically, make decisions, or solve problems.

(2) The Scholarly Literature: You also need to become familiar with the scholarly literature on these topics. What you learned in graduate school probably did not prepare you to teach about arguments and argumentation, for instance, which is a huge subject not touched on at all in the sort of logic courses you took to pass your Ph.D. prelims. For example, even something as apparently uncontroversial as the informal fallacies is a theoretical minefield. There are several competing theories about what an informal fallacy is, or indeed if any exist. Moreover, there is dispute about whether the teaching for informal fallacies, even if it is done up to the standards of one of the current theories, is an effective way to teach students how to interpret and evaluate arguments. So if you are going

to teach any of this material responsibly, you need to hightail it to the theoretical literature. Would you teach introductory epistemology or introductory ethics without knowing the theoretical literature? We suspect not. To be sure, formal deductive logic is not like ethics and epistemology—it is more like a science. There are no different theories about validity—though there are various pedagogical strategies for determining it. If someone thinks that teaching some elementary formal deductive logic suffices to teach reasoning skills, argument analysis, or critical thinking, this assumption would explain their indifference to the literature on those topics. Our view is that, at best, this is a highly controversial assumption.

In our experience, philosophers can be incautious about empirical claims. (As journal editors, we get articles submitted that make claims like, “The textbook approach to fallacies is...,” without any accompanying citations or other evidence that this empirical claim is indeed true.) We urge you to be cautious about how you specify the outcomes that you promise from your course. These are, after all, empirical claims. Even if your course is carefully designed, conceptually, it is unlikely that you effect a dramatic improvement in the skills you are trying to teach in fourteen weeks (or, *a fortiori*, in ten); but in any case, unless you’ve done carefully designed pre- and post-course assessments, you don’t really know.

4. The literature

We have urged readers to turn to “the literature.” Here are some sources. This is a far from systematic collection, and leaves out entirely the problem-solving and decision-making literature.

The principal journals focusing on argument and argumentation are *Informal Logic*, *Argumentation*, and *Argumentation and Advocacy*. The only critical thinking journal we know of is *Inquiry*, *Critical Thinking Across the Disciplines*. *Informal Logic* also covers informal logic, and, more generally, reasoning and argumentation in theory and practice (now available free online, www.informallogic.ca, and its back issues will soon be available there, too). *Philosophy and Rhetoric* is another good resource.

Conference proceedings are a rich source of literature. The *International Society for the Study of Argumentation* (ISSA) has published six massive volumes of proceedings, one for each of its quadrennial conferences held since 1986. The *Ontario Society for the Study of Argumentation* (OSSA) has held seven conferences, and its proceedings are available on CDs.

Monographs on critical thinking include: Robert J. Swartz and David N. Perkins, *Teaching Thinking: Issues and Approaches* (1989), Alex Fisher and Michael Scriven, *Critical Thinking: Its Definition and Assessment* (1997). See also Richard Paul’s collection of essays, *Critical Thinking* (1990).

Those interested in the literature on this topic of the effectiveness of instruction in formal logic might consult Richard E. Nisbett’s *Rules for Reasoning* (1992). On the value of using fallacies in teaching such courses, there is a pair of papers on opposing sides in Hans V. Hansen and Robert C. Pinto (1995): David Hitchcock’s “Do the Fallacies Have a Place in the Teaching of Reasoning Skills or Critical Thinking?” and J. Anthony Blair’s “The Place of Teaching Informal Fallacies in the Teaching of Reasoning Skills or Critical Thinking.”

On fallacies and fallacy theory, we recommend for starters a look at Hans V. Hansen and Robert C. Pinto (Eds.), *Fallacies: Classical and Contemporary Readings* (1995), which has an excellent bibliography. Also see any of the many monographs on fallacy theory or on individual fallacies by Douglas Walton. For the former, see, for example, *A Pragmatic Theory of Fallacy* (1997). For the latter, for example, see *Ad Hominem Arguments*

(1998) or *Appeal to Popular Opinion* (1999). For a more complete listing, see his website: www.dougwalton.ca.

On creative thinking, see David N. Perkins, *The Mind’s Best Work* (1981) or Sharon Bailin, *Achieving Extraordinary Ends: An Essay on Creativity* (1988).

On informal reasoning: James F. Voss, David N. Perkins, and Judith W. Segal (Eds.), *Informal Reasoning and Education* (1991).

A few theoretical works on argumentation from an informal logic perspective are: Trudy Govier, *Problems in Argument Analysis and Evaluation* (1987) and *The Philosophy of Argument* (1996); Ralph H. Johnson, *Manifest Rationality: A Pragmatic Theory of Argument* (2000); and Robert C. Pinto, *Argument, Inference and Dialectic* (2001).

5. Conclusion

We have written this paper out of concern for the academic integrity of the introductory course offered by most, if not all, philosophy departments in the United States and Canada that focuses on some mix of reasoning, argument analysis, introductory formal logic, informal logic, inductive reasoning, critical thinking, problem-solving, and/or decision-making. This “dog’s breakfast” of topics and objectives to be found in a good many of such courses is evidenced by the overly ambitious agendas offered in many of the textbooks, a state of affairs that we surmise is both the effect and the cause of confusions about the nature of these topics and the relations among them. We are also concerned that philosophy departments expect especially junior faculty to be prepared to teach these courses by virtue of their graduate training in formal logic, with complete disregard for the voluminous and sophisticated scholarly literature in each of these topic areas. Based on our own experience and knowledge of several of these fields, we think that a great many of these courses would benefit from being rethought and redesigned with a clear conception of the subject matter being taught and of the outcomes being claimed.

Endnotes

1. The first-year course in critical reasoning, informal logic, critical thinking, elementary logic, etc.
2. This paper is a rewritten version of a workshop developed by the authors for presentation at the AAPT Conference on August 15, 2008. We thank Tziporah Kasachkoff for encouraging us to submit a rewritten version to *APA Newsletter on Teaching Philosophy*, and we thank four referees for their constructively critical comments, which we have tried to address in revising the paper for publication.

Teaching Plato with Emoticons

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The Rationale:

We live in an age of communicative speed. Often with such speed has come a loss of personal expression. As a consequence, in the attempt to make email and text messages more “personal,” there has emerged a prominence (and sophistication) of *emoticons*. An emoticon is a combination of typographic symbols used to convey emotional content in written messages. For example, if someone were to want to have her reader take something she wrote as a joke or

facetiously, she may have a sideways “winking smiley” follow the sentence, as such: ;-). These icon markers allow for a virtual personality to come through in the texts of our informal written communication. Though some teachers may not be familiar with such expressional supplements, their students are.

Students in introductory classes regularly need some bridge between their everyday reading skills, which are increasingly shaped by technologically influenced practices such as the use of emoticons, and those skills necessary for reading philosophy. Often, the Platonic dialogues are the first extended exposure students have had to philosophical writing. By tapping into the communicative norms understood and deployed by our students in their everyday lives, we may be better able to engage them with Plato’s philosophy—particularly its dramatic style. Here, we present a supplementary tool for teaching Plato that emphasizes the dramatic elements in his writing in a way that helps students view the dialogues in familiar terms. The emoticon exercises we will outline make the dialogues relatable because there is an overlap between the decoding skills necessary for interpreting the dialogues’ drama and those for placing emoticons. That said, it should be clear that our pedagogical suggestions are not meant to advocate a *specific interpretation* of Plato’s dialogues. Rather, this approach is amenable to *any* interpretation. This is simply a way of getting the students to read the texts as relevant to where and how they live and, hence, open them to the work of interpretation. As such, this is a pedagogical supplement and not a stand-alone strategy. This method does not replace the need for careful and detailed analysis of the claims and arguments offered by Socrates. But, we have found this method to be a helpful way of getting the students motivated to engage in such analytical work.

In what follows we will outline the pedagogical method involved in teaching Plato with emoticons by focusing on the *Euthyphro*, then give some results from our own experiences of using this method, and conclude by suggesting some further areas of instruction opened up by this method.

The Method:

Our emphasis at the outset is on the dramatic dimension of the dialogues, which helps to open students to the philosophical substance that drives the drama. Before giving out the assignment (which we detail below), we begin by asking a few questions to the students about their own use of emoticons in text messages or emails. For example, why do we use emoticons at all? How do emoticons aid us in understanding each other when we “talk” in this certain media? Do we think that emotional expression is needed in communicative contexts? This is a conversation that need not take much class time, but it does get students interested in the class if for no other reason than they find it intriguing that the practice of text messaging and other issues about typography are within the purview of philosophical inquiry. The connection that should then be made is that the philosophical engagements presented by Plato all begin in conversation.

After our introductory discussion, we break the students into groups of three or four. We then distribute a list of emoticons to each group—these are easily found by typing “emoticon” into a Google search. However, the list that we have used with great success is one created by Tracy Marks found at <http://www.windweaver.com/emoticon.htm> (accessed January 22, 2009). This particular website has a good selection of emoticons and a wide range of different types. They are categorized here as “happy, smiling, laughing,” “teasing, mischievous,” “affirming, supporting,” “hugs and kisses,” “miscellaneous,” “unhappy, sad,” “angry, sarcastic,” “trying to communicate,” “feeling stupid or tired,” and “surprised, incredulous, skeptical.” Whatever list

you use or website you draw from, what is important is that the various emoticons are easy to reproduce (i.e., can be achieved with just a few strokes of the keyboard or easily drawn by hand). Some websites have emoticons that are animated and available for download. These are not as productive for the method that we are suggesting. Students need to be able to reproduce the emoticons on their own paper without any trouble and the more technically sophisticated the examples are the more difficult this task becomes. So, characters such as /, (,), :, ;, {, }, etc. are going to be your best bet.

Once you distribute the list of emoticons to each group, you should then distribute a copy of selections from whatever dialogue you are reading (our example below will be selections from the *Euthyphro*). An alternative is to distribute the material electronically as a word processing file into which the students may type the emoticons themselves. We often use the opening pages of the dialogue as our selection for the exercise, since there is often sufficient drama for interpretation and the philosophical exchanges have not yet become too difficult to track. The tools for the exercise are appropriate for use throughout the dialogues, but as an introduction to reading the dialogues, it is best to apply the method under limits.

At the opening of the assignment, there should be one list of emoticons and one copy of the dialogue for each group. Then the assignment runs as follows:

- Each group is responsible for reading the selections together before the next class meeting.
- They are to work collaboratively to place emoticons wherever they think appropriate on the paper copy of the dialogue selections or insert them in the electronic copy.
- They are also to prepare collaboratively a justification for each emoticon they insert. For example, why does \-o (indifferent) work at a particular place and ;-> (devilish wink) work at a different place?
- Finally, they are to write up a short paragraph explaining what they learned about the main characters in the dialogue from this exercise. So, in the *Euthyphro*, they would need briefly to discuss Socrates and Euthyphro as illustrated by the emoticons applied throughout the selection.

Encourage the students to use their imagination in this assignment and try to relate to the characters and the conversation as persons that they might “converse” with on a listserv or blog’s discussion thread. The next class session should be devoted to hearing from the various groups about where they decided to insert emoticons and having them all present their short remarks on the main characters. Of particular importance is to try to get the students to approve or challenge the choices made by other groups. Our experience has been that the conversations that occur as a result of one group’s contesting that a particular comment was :-> (bitingly sarcastic) and suggesting instead that it was ;-) (winking, just kidding) are a great aid in facilitating serious philosophical reflection. Pursuing the question of what is at stake between interpreting Socrates as bitingly sarcastic or just kidding will require students to bring to bear progressively sophisticated philosophical judgments. The question: “Why would Socrates make biting remarks to Euthyphro, instead of merely joking with him or being perfectly sincere when he says that he must become his pupil at 5a?” asks us to examine Socrates’ motives and views in order to make an appropriate interpretation. The interpretive task of placing an emoticon drives us into philosophical territory.

The Results:

Below are some brief examples of what our students at Hendrix College and Western Kentucky University have come up with in the *Euthyphro* assignment:

2a – Euthyphro: “What’s new, Socrates” :-> (hey hey)

2a – Euthyphro: “...Surely you are not prosecuting anyone before the king-archon as I am?” 8-I (eyes wide with surprise)

2a – Socrates: “The Athenians do not call this a prosecution but an indictment, Euthyphro.” :-| (grim)

2b – Euthyphro: “Who is he?” >:-< (angry)

2c – Socrates: “...He is likely to be wise...” :-> (devilish wink)

3c – Euthyphro: “Whenever I speak of divine matters in the assembly and foretell the future, they laugh me down as if I were crazy; and yet I have foretold nothing that did not happen.” :-((frowning)

3c – Socrates: “...to be laughed at does not matter perhaps, for the Athenians do not mind anyone they think clever, so long as he does not teach his own wisdom, but if they think he makes other to be like himself, they get angry.” :-Y (a quiet aside)

4a – Socrates: “My dear sir! Your own father?” 8-O (Omgod!!)

5a – Euthyphro: “I should be of no use, Socrates...if I did not have accurate knowledge of all things.” :-, (smirk)

5a – Socrates: “It is indeed most important, my admirable Euthyphro, that I should become your pupil...” :-> (bitingly sarcastic)

7a – Socrates: “Splendid, Euthyphro! You have now answered in the way I wanted.” : ^ D (Great! I like it!)

9a – Socrates: “Come now, my dear Euthyphro, tell me, too, that I may become wiser...” :-> (bitingly sarcastic)

10a – Socrates: “We shall soon know better whether it is.” :-> (devilish wink)

11b – Euthyphro: “...whatever proposition we put forward goes around and refuses to stay put where we establish it.” :-6 (exhausted)

14e – Euthyphro: “Trading yes, if you prefer to call it that.” \-o (bored)

15e – Euthyphro: “Some other time, Socrates, for I am in a hurry now, and it is time for me to go.” :-6 (exhausted)

15e-16a – Socrates: “What a thing to do my friend!” :-C (really bummed) “By going you have cast me down from a great hope I had, that I would learn from you the nature of the pious and the impious and so escape Meletus’ indictment by showing him that I had acquired wisdom in divine matters from Euthyphro, and my ignorance would no longer cause me to be careless and inventive about such things, and that I would be better for the rest of my life.” _/ (my glass is half empty) and :-> (bitingly sarcastic)

Admittedly, our suggestion here is “gimmicky,” as one colleague has put it. But, this exercise has convinced us that sometimes gimmicks can be put to productive pedagogical use. Again, this is not a stand-alone strategy—it must be integrated with the broader philosophical objectives of the classroom. The emoticon method is, at its very least, a means of motivating students under-prepared for college-level reading, but it has application beyond these. First, it is a rudimentary form of stage direction, and, as such, it is a means for reading the dialogues as exchanges between people. The emoticons are media for developing a broader dramatic reading of the dialogues. A further consideration that cuts in this method’s favor is that it is, again, philosophically neutral—it emphasizes the dramatic elements of the dialogues, but only as a means to further discussion of the philosophical exchanges therein. No

particular method will ever eliminate the unique challenge of teaching and reading works of philosophy as fecund as Plato’s. However, we have found that when students overcome their intimidation and begin to see the philosophy as something that they can participate in, they throw themselves into the task at hand. Teaching Plato with emoticons does not translate into a song and dance without the gravitas of the philosophy classroom. Instead, it is one way to help students see that the rigor of philosophy is something worth committing to and the philosophical conversation as something to which they can add their own voice.

Using Euthyphro 9e-11b to Teach Some Basic Logic and to Teach How to Read a Platonic Dialog

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Early in my teaching career, the text I was assigned for my intro sections was Ed. L. Miller’s *Questions That Matter*.¹ Being the usual industrious teacher, I endeavored to find the best way to take advantage of the book’s layout so that I could teach it more effectively. I tried a variety of things, but one seemed particularly noteworthy as an example that could also be ported to other courses. This example involved a short passage from Plato’s *Euthyphro*.

Miller’s text is arranged such that a chapter on logic precedes a chapter that chiefly discusses Plato’s and Aristotle’s notions of Form.² The latter chapter contains the *Euthyphro* passage (9e-11b) that I referred to above.³ As I prepared this material for class, I noticed that this passage exemplified many of the logical basics that Miller discusses: it is an excellent illustration of the Law of Non-Contradiction, and it references two informal fallacies. It is also an excellent example of the use of truth functional operators (which was a bit of logic that I added myself; Miller does not cover these). It is a fine example of a premier philosopher’s use of logic.

The passage is also a splendid introduction to Plato. As I shall show, it has a diamond-shaped structure wherein Socrates takes Euthyphro’s proffered definition of holiness, subjects it to a probing analysis, and shows that it is inherently self-contradictory. Euthyphro clearly does not know as much about holiness as he thinks he does.

I shall present the material much as I do in class, adding notes that may be helpful to instructors.

The Presentation

The passage begins with Euthyphro’s definition of holiness. Holiness, he maintains, is what the gods all love, and its opposite—what the gods all hate—is unholiness. We can write this symbolically as follows:

$$I. \quad H \supset L \quad \bullet \quad U \supset Ht^4$$

where H is holy, L is love, and Ht is hate. Socrates asks Euthyphro if we should let that definition pass, and simply accept what we, or others, say. Naturally, accepting something simply on the basis of what people say is fallacious. We might have an instance of *ad verecundiam*. Popular opinion is no guarantee of truth, and this is reason enough to examine closely what Euthyphro proposes.⁵

Euthyphro assents to the investigation, but clearly thinks his answer is correct. Socrates replies with a question: Is something holy because the gods approve it, or do they approve it because it is holy?⁶ We can symbolize this as follows:

II. $H \supset A$ \vee A
 $A \supset H$ P

where H is “holy” and A is “approve.”

Socrates makes a crucial distinction with this question (notice the truth functional operator *or*), and it is the starting point for his examination of Euthyphro’s definition. The distinction is between an *active* interpretation of Euthyphro’s definition (indicated by the A off to the right, above) and a *passive* one (indicated by the P at the right).⁷ In other words, Socrates wants to know if something is holy because the gods *make* it so by their act of loving it (this is the active interpretation), or if something is holy simply because that is its *nature*—in other words, it was holy before the gods arrived on the scene, and now the gods find it to be a thing that is worthy of their love (this is the passive interpretation). Does holiness therefore come from the side of the gods or from the side of the thing? The problem with Euthyphro’s definition is that it is ambiguous,⁸ and can be understood both ways.

We can illustrate where this is going with a diagram (see Figure 1 below). We begin with Euthyphro’s definition (I, on the left side). Then Socrates advances his two possible ways of interpreting it when he makes his crucial distinction. Because these two ways are opposites, as we shall see, they diverge (II). Socrates will discuss the two possibilities in detail, and finally bring them back together when he makes his conclusion (III). Socrates’ discussion in our passage thus has a diamond shaped structure.

Socrates’ request for clarification throws Euthyphro for a loop. To help Euthyphro out, Socrates illustrates the distinction with a number of simple examples: the carried and

the carrier, the led and the leader, and the seen and that which sees.⁹ In each of these pairs, he begins with the passive term, and then adds the active one.

Socrates clearly hopes that these examples will make things clear enough for Euthyphro to make the obvious inference that the same active/passive

distinction is at work in the loved/loves pair.¹⁰ Euthyphro seems to get this point. Socrates draws the distinction more precisely by asking questions that are designed to make clear why the carried, the led, and the seen are passive, while the carrier, the leader, and that which sees are active. The reason is that the latter are doing the work (the carrying, the leading, and the seeing).¹¹

As you can see from this section of the reading, Socrates seems to have a tendency to overdo things. He seems to be beating a dead horse. You will see a lot of this in Plato’s dialogs. There are two things to keep in mind, however. First, Socrates wants to be absolutely sure his interlocutor gets the point. He does not want to lose anyone. Second, notice that Socrates is carefully moving forward with his argument, step by step. He began by making the active/passive distinction. Next he will show that the active/passive distinction is the same as the cause/effect distinction. Using the paired terms helps Euthyphro (and us) see this progression more clearly.

Socrates points out that things must go in the proper order. For example, a thing is not a seen thing, and only *then* does something else see it. Something must do the seeing before anything can be seen. The active must precede the passive, and the active must be the *cause* of the passive. The passive will be the *effect* of the active. The effect cannot cause its cause. The proper order, then, is that the cause must come before the effect.¹²

Socrates will now apply the same analysis of cause and effect to the terms *loved* and *love*. This is important, because the word *love* plays a central role in Euthyphro’s definition of holiness. Socrates’ previous discussion has set up the proper framework for thinking about the question, and now he applies it directly to Euthyphro’s definition. So here we have it: being loved is a dynamic thing that requires something else to trigger or cause. Being loved is an effect, and it must have an antecedent cause—namely, someone or something that does the loving. Once again, things must follow the proper order. A thing is not loved, and then the lovers love it. A thing is loved *because* someone first loved it.¹³

Our understanding of what Euthyphro’s definition contains is deepening. Socrates is breaking down its meaning in a very systematic way. Now that we have a clearer understanding of what love means, we will see Socrates move on to the word holy. This word is what the whole passage (and the whole dialog) is about. We are getting to the heart of the matter.

Unfortunately for poor Euthyphro, though, things will not be so clear. Even though Socrates has patiently been leading him through a careful explanation of what his definition of holiness implies, Euthyphro will stumble at the point where the light bulb ought to go on. Socrates will have to switch gears and continue to go slowly in order to make Euthyphro understand. Apparently Euthyphro is not the brightest student in the class! But even though Socrates is trying to be clear, the next part of the passage looks quite confusing. Perhaps Plato could have done a better job with it.

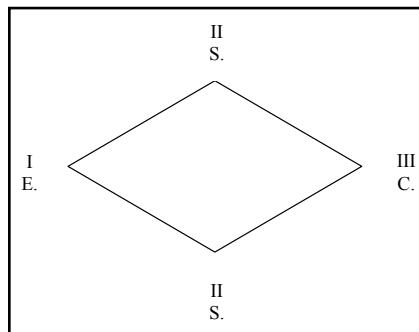
Socrates begins his examination of the word holy by quoting a bit of Euthyphro’s definition: holiness is loved by all the gods. Of course Euthyphro agrees with this formulation of holiness. He even agrees with Socrates that holiness is loved because it is holy. This is a prime example of Euthyphro’s ignorance, though. Euthyphro’s understanding is clearly not very deep. As a matter of fact, it is an example of circular reasoning: the holy is loved because it is holy. Euthyphro has committed the fallacy of begging the question (*petitio principii*).¹⁴ This is not very helpful.

Now Socrates will do something very clever to catch Euthyphro. In the guise of asking Euthyphro for clarification, he will alternate between the active and the passive interpretations of holiness. Euthyphro will blindly agree to both, and stumble into the trap.

Socrates begins with the passive understanding. It is because it is holy that it is loved (not holy because it is loved, which would be the active interpretation). Socrates is trying to draw a distinction between the two different interpretations, and it is even clearer that he has the passive one in mind once we look at his next sentence, in which he uses the word “pleasing.” This clearly is the active view: something is beloved and pleasing to the gods just because *they* love it. Obviously, the gods are doing the loving, and this act is what makes something holy. Euthyphro agrees.¹⁵

But Socrates is zeroing in on the problem that is contained in Euthyphro’s definition, and he has introduced a new word in order to make this even clearer. Socrates is now using the word “pleasing” when he talks about the active way of understanding what makes something holy. And after Euthyphro

Figure 1. E=Euthyphro; S= Socrates;
C=Conclusion



agrees, Socrates tells Euthyphro that the holy (the passive interpretation) and what is pleasing to the gods (the active interpretation) are *two different things*.¹⁶

As you can see, Socrates is trying to pin Euthyphro down. After Euthyphro asks how the two interpretations differ, Socrates repeats the two options. If something is *loved because it is holy*, we have the passive interpretation, which is distinct from the active one in which something is *holy because it is loved*. Notice that the order of *holy* and *loved* is reversed in these two formulations. The sentence that contains these formulations expresses the passive understanding. When Socrates speaks again, however, using the signal word *pleasing*, he says that something is pleasing to the gods just because *they love it*. Obviously, this is the active interpretation.¹⁷

The problem is that Euthyphro again agrees to both.¹⁸ This is going to cause him major problems, as we shall see.

This brings us to the hardest part of the reading. This is the part where Socrates will bring the two threads he spun off (at II in the diagram) together in his conclusion (III in the diagram). Let us take a look.

Socrates begins by asking Euthyphro what would happen if the active and the passive interpretations (the *pleasing* and the *holy*) were *not* separate things.¹⁹ In other words, what if *both* interpretations were contained in Euthyphro's definition of holiness (I in the diagram)? What follows may look confusing, but this is where the truth functional operators really come in handy. If you pay attention to them, you will be able to make much greater sense of what Socrates says.

What Socrates gives us is two if-then statements (conditionals) joined by an "and" (conjunction). Notice the structure: "...if holiness were loved because it was holy, *then* also what was pleasing to the gods would be loved because it pleased them. *And*, on the other hand, *if* what was pleasing to them pleased because they loved it, *then* also the holy would be holy because they loved it."²⁰ The first conditional expresses the passive understanding of Euthyphro's definition, and the second conditional expresses the active understanding (there is our signal word *pleasing* again). Again translating this into symbolic language, we get this:

III. HLH \supset LPG	•	P
PL \supset HL		A

where HLH stands for "holiness is loved because it is holy," LPG stands for "loved because it pleases them (the gods)," PL stands for "pleased because they loved it," and HL stands for "holy because they loved it."²¹ The P and the A off to the right denote the passive and the active interpretations.

Now Socrates gives us his conclusion (III in the diagram), although we need to do a bit of work to fully get his point. The conjoined pair of if-then statements is what we get if the active and the passive are not two separate things. But the opposite must be true: the active and the passive *must* be two separate things, because the two are "absolutely different from each other." The active (the sort that is pleasing to the gods because it is loved) and the passive (the holy that is of a sort to be loved) are themselves opposites—and this violates the Law of Non-Contradiction.²² In other words, what Socrates is saying is that the active interpretation and the passive interpretation of holiness contradict each other. Both cannot be true. A thing cannot be holy both because it is holy by nature (and therefore deserves to be loved) and because it is made holy by the act of the gods loving it. Euthyphro's ambiguous definition of holiness contains both interpretations, and is therefore self-contradictory.²³ This means that it is irrational, and clearly not the answer to the question of what holiness is.

This is exactly Socrates' point. Socrates wanted to know the *nature* or the *essence* of holiness, but all Euthyphro supplied was an *attribute* of it. These are two different matters. If we know the nature or essence of something, we clearly know what it *is*. But if all we have is an attribute of that thing (in this case, that the gods love it), we do *not* know what it is. Socrates has not gotten what he was looking for, and asks Euthyphro to start over. But now poor Euthyphro is thoroughly confused.²⁴

There are several things to say about this passage. The first is that it is a classic example of what Plato does in his dialogs. Time after time, you will see Socrates catch one of his interlocutors in a contradiction. This serves several purposes. The first is to move the interlocutor from ignorance to truth. In our reading, Socrates carefully showed Euthyphro that he did not know as much about holiness as he thought he did (and, remember, Euthyphro is the religious authority!).²⁵ Yet, he thought he did, and he was willing to prosecute his own father for murder on the basis of that understanding.²⁶ His ignorance would have had tragic consequences. Notice that this can also apply to us. If we are ignorant about similarly important things, and are not aware of it, it could have very serious consequences. Surely this is one of the lessons Plato wants us learn.

Euthyphro is confused at the end of the passage, but that is a good thing. The door is now open for him to walk through. It may be that Euthyphro will move to a better understanding of holiness. Perhaps he will grasp more of its nature or essence, and thus comprehend what holiness *is*.

This leads us to the second point, which has to do with Platonic dialogs in general. As I said before, you are typically not going to be able to turn to the last page and get the answer to whatever question the dialog is about. Instead, what happens is that in the course of the conversation between Socrates and his interlocutors, there is a process of elimination whereby the participants cross out things that do not work, and thus get closer to the truth.²⁷ This reading is an excellent example of that. At the end of it, Socrates still has not gotten the answer to his question of what holiness is, but at least now he and Euthyphro (and we) know what holiness is *not*: it is not Euthyphro's definition of it. This is progress.

The third point to make about this passage is the hint about what the answer to Socrates' question is. Plato did not discuss this in our reading, but elsewhere in the dialog we get a fuller account.²⁸ The answer to the question of what holiness is lies in knowing the essence of holiness, and this means the Form Holiness. For Plato, if you want to know what something *is*, the Form is the place to go.

Finally, I want to point out just how much of the logic we learned earlier shows up in this passage. The Law of Non-Contradiction plays a central role here, as it does elsewhere in Plato's philosophy. Plato is very much a rationalist. We also saw a couple of informal fallacies pop up. Plato wants to make sure we avoid them. Last but not least, we saw Plato skillfully use many of the truth functional operators.

As you can see, the truth functional operators are an excellent way to zero in on the logic of a text. Translating from ordinary language to symbolic language can really help clarify a confusing bit of writing (or speaking). The operators helped us understand the crucial move Socrates made at II in the diagram. They also helped with the nasty part at the end of the reading. Once we made the translation, we understood how Socrates set up the contradiction that he discovered. The two if-then statements stated the two ways (active and passive) of interpreting Euthyphro's definition, and we already knew they were opposites. Joining them together with a conjunction gave us the full contents of Euthyphro's statement. Looking at the

entire symbolic translation, it was clear that the two possibilities could not coexist in the same definition.

All of this greatly helps us to understand Plato's argument. As I hope you can see now, there is a lot going on. But now that we understand *his* point of view, the next step is to evaluate critically his position to see what *we* make of it.

Conclusion

Euthyphro 9e-11b is an excellent, self-contained teaching module. It is a nice example of Socrates unpacking the implications of what an interlocutor says and subjecting these to penetrating analysis, only to catch that interlocutor in a contradiction. It is a succinct illustration of how Plato works to answer the thematic question of a Platonic dialog. It is also a wonderful example of a major philosopher referencing informal fallacies and using truth functional logic to advance his argument. This passage nicely integrates all of these elements and brings them to life in a vivid way that students can appreciate. On top of that, it discusses a question that has profound ramifications for our age (and this passage is excellent for engendering class discussion on the topic).

This passage can be taught alone. It certainly has enough pedagogical value, and it is short and easily digested. It also possesses the virtue of having a clear beginning and a clear ending. It can also be worked into a treatment of the whole dialog. This should not prove difficult. Either way, I think it is rare to find a text that combines so many elements in such a classic fashion, and yet so powerfully and eloquently lays bare the heart of philosophy. It is a wonderful text to teach.²⁹

Endnotes

1. Ed. L. Miller. *Questions That Matter*, 2nd shorter ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1998).
2. Chapters 2 and 3, respectively.
3. Miller, *Questions That Matter*, 40-42. Miller uses the Cooper translation, which can be found in the Hamilton-Cairns edition of Plato.
4. When I write this on the board, I put the statements on separate lines, with the main operator off to the side (or on an additional line between the statements), because I think this makes it easier for the students to grasp the logic. For the same reason, I depart from convention by using Ht to represent the word "hate." Note that a course in logic is not a prerequisite for the intros I have taught.
5. *Euth.* 9e.
6. *Euth.* 9e-10.
7. An obvious point, perhaps, but important nonetheless. Guthrie picks up on it as well. See W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History Of Greek Philosophy*, vol. 4, *Plato, The Man And His Dialogues: Earlier Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 105.
8. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this word.
9. *Euth.* 10.
10. *Euth.* 10.
11. *Euth.* 10b-c.
12. *Euth.* 10c. Guthrie notes this as well. See W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. 4, *Plato, The Man And His Dialogues: Earlier Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 105-106. At this point in the lecture, I often point out that Plato is arguing analogically.
13. *Euth.* 10c.
14. *Euth.* 10d. Guthrie sees possible circularity as well. See W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. 4, *Plato, The Man And His Dialogues: Earlier Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 105-106.
15. *Euth.* 10d.
16. *Euth.* 10d.
17. *Euth.* 10e.

18. *Euth.* 10e.
19. *Euth.* 10e.
20. *Euth.* 11 (emphasis added).
21. Again, I depart from convention in the interest of pedagogical clarity (see n. 4. above). Sometimes when I teach this passage I write the symbolic notations underneath the diagram at the appropriate points, so that students can more completely see the logical structure of the passage.
22. *Euth.* 11. For the Law of Non-Contradiction, see Miller, *Questions That Matter*, 26-28.
23. A note about contraries and contradictories: Socrates' conclusion may be read to say that the active and the passive interpretations are contraries, not contradictories. Certainly both cannot be true. (Copi (6e) contains a clear and useful distinction between contraries and contradictories. It is found on pages 185 and 186, and I follow it here.) This same condition applies to contradictories as well: both cannot be true. But for contraries to obtain, both the active and the passive may be false. This is certainly a logical possibility. However, this option makes no sense given the immediate context of the dialog. The *Euthyphro* explores the question of what holiness is, and the text at 11-11b makes clear that Socrates is trying to determine the essence of holiness. For contraries to obtain, the logical possibility we would have to entertain is that both the active and the passive may be false, i.e., that X is holy neither because it possesses holiness intrinsically (passive), nor because an independent agent confers holiness upon it in the act of loving it (active). Admitting these possibilities would weaken Socrates' argument, however. Why would he work against himself like this after meticulously establishing the active/passive distinction—one that will be crucial to his conclusion? The case for reading contraries here is therefore questionable. On the other hand, Socrates clearly thinks that both the active and the passive cannot be true. To say that both are, as Euthyphro implicitly does, would not answer the question of what holiness is. For these reasons, I prefer to read the active/passive distinction as contradictories. Regardless of Plato's execution, I think that is the thrust of the passage. I suspect that ultimately Plato might reject these active and passive options in favor of the Forms, but at this point in the dialog he treats them as contradictories in order to refute Euthyphro and open his eyes to the possibility of a third answer. This is why both cannot be false—at least not yet. Plato's treatment of both as absolutely different opposites that are *nonetheless not two separate things* (*Euth.* 11, emphasis added) supports this reading.
24. *Euth.* 11-11b. Often students will take Euthyphro's final comment to mean that Socrates is making a circular argument. They are not aware that this is a reference to Daedalus' statues, as the continuation of the dialog makes clear. When this occurs, I remind them that the argument is diamond shaped, not circular.
25. See the introduction to *Euthyphro* at Hamilton-Cairns 169.
26. *Euth.* 4.
27. I cover the general structure of a Platonic dialog in my introduction to Plato.
28. See *Euth.* 6d-e. Also see Miller, *Questions That Matter*, 50-52.
29. I wish to thank the editors and referees for comments that led to improvements to this paper.

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IMAGINE THIS SCENARIO. Olivia Ramirez, a college senior, visits her school's Career Development Center. She is unsure what to expect, but one discovery startles her. Application forms for large corporations routinely include this clause: "If you belong to a protected group, you have the right to equal pay. You also have the option of waiving this right. Check the box to indicate whether you wish to waive this right."

As a Latina, Olivia knows that she is doubly protected. "Why should I have to waive my right to equal pay?" she asks the career counselor.

"You do not have to. It is an option."

"And if I reject that option, will they reject me? How many people don't waive their right?"

"As far as I know, virtually everyone waives it."

Olivia wonders how this practice can go uncriticized at a college that oozes protests for everything from endangered piping plovers to the use of "girl" for any female human over 15. But she expects that it would be pointless to argue with the counselor. She thanks him for his time and walks out onto the quad where an Earth Day banner is urging, "Save the Earth before it is too late."

This tale may seem preposterous. Isn't it obvious that such a waiver system would undermine the right to equal pay? Companies don't really do this, do they?

Actually, they don't. But colleges and universities do something similar.

When I was a graduate student in the activist 1970s, a new law managed to penetrate my militantly apolitical outlook. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) gave postsecondary students the right to see their education records, which frequently include letters of recommendation. I was thrilled to think that students could finally learn what was in those letters and which ones, if any, contained inappropriate remarks about such matters as personal appearance and political persuasion.

It has not turned out that way. Colleges and universities have taken advantage of a loophole in FERPA. They use a waiver system that parallels the imaginary system Olivia encountered and gives students the option of waiving the right to see their letters. Recipients of the letters can see whether students have waived this right. Students are routinely advised to do so on the grounds that otherwise, their letters of recommendation will not be taken seriously.

How compelling is this advice? As a professor, I have read thousands of letters of recommendation. I cannot recall a single case where an applicant failed to "choose" the waiver "option." The waiver option drives out all other options. In effect, it nullifies students' right to see their letters of recommendation.

America's colleges and universities are alternately extolled and reviled as bastions of liberalism. Why are they so illiberal about students' right to see their letters of recommendation?

A common rationale is that a recommender might not be candid if he thought that students would see what he wrote about them.

Recommenders, however, are usually teachers. Our educational system relies on the assumption that teachers will be candid when grading students. Knowing that students see their grades does not keep screening committees from taking those grades seriously. The same could be true of letters of recommendation under a system requiring teachers to be as open with students about those letters as about grades. Of course, this sort of system might prevent letters from mentioning such matters as whether a student smokes or has an egalitarian marriage, both of which I have actually seen discussed in letters of recommendation. That would be all to the good.

Rather than exploiting a loophole that undermines students' rights, colleges and universities should stop "offering" the waiver "option." In the meantime, recommenders can do what I have always done. Give all students copies of the letters that you write about them, even if they waive their right to see them.

This issue is hardly as glamorous as saving the Earth. But it involves a wrong that colleges and universities themselves have created and that they themselves can end.

BOOK REVIEW

Philosophical Myths of the Fall

Stephen Mulhall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 160 pp., \$29.95 cloth.

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College freshman generally arrive on campus with the expectation that the values and beliefs they grew up with will be challenged. Many teachers agree that an important part of their task as educators is to challenge students: to make them think about what they believe and question what they value. Before too long, students realize that some beliefs lend themselves more readily to rational scrutiny, such as the existence of God (Anselm, Aquinas, Pascal), the survival of the soul after death (Plato, Augustine, Descartes), and the belief that a historically contingent event (such as the crucifixion of Jesus) can have trans-historical consequences (Leibniz, Lessing, Hegel). Other beliefs seem less conducive to rigorous rational critique. Original sin, for example, is often relegated strictly to the realm of faith. Students not only find the story of Adam and Eve full of embarrassingly primitive imagery, but the entire creation account in Genesis seems susceptible to critique in the post-Darwinian age.

In this slim volume of 124 pages, Stephen Mulhall attempts to show that beliefs, which seem to be faith-specific, including the fall and original sin, have not escaped serious philosophical reflection. He examines how three great thinkers—Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein—took the myth of the fall seriously as an attempt to explain a constitutive fact of human existence: namely, that we are not content merely to improve or ameliorate our human condition, we also have a deeply felt need for a more radical redemption. Mulhall argues that Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein shared the intention to retain, albeit in different ways, the basic Judeo-Christian doctrine of the fallen human condition, but they also wish to transform that doctrine by detaching it from its divine source.

Mulhall's treatment of Nietzsche revolves around the famous proclamation of the death of God by "the madman" in *The Gay Science*. Drawing parallels with Shakespeare's *Macbeth*,

Mulhall illustrates the inseparable link between God's death, the murderous deed that brought it about, and the inevitable question of responsibility that arises in its wake. The appropriation of Christian language throughout Nietzsche's parable indicates that Nietzsche believed he was restating Christian orthodoxy (however shockingly) rather than utterly renouncing it. More specifically, as Mulhall attempts to show in his analysis of *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche inverts the value structure that has become such an integral part of the Christian tradition by employing concepts such as "slave morality" and the "will to power." Nietzsche's bold challenge, according to Mulhall, is a re-appropriation of the myth of the fall but not a complete replacement of it. While Nietzsche claims that this re-appropriation of the myth ultimately leads to freedom, Mulhall wonders whether Nietzsche ends up retaining the central aspects of the myth he deemed restrictive in the first place.

Mulhall forewarns the reader that due to limited space, his treatment of Heidegger must begin in midstream. He picks up the main currents that led to the German philosopher's unique conception of human fallenness. Most distinctive is the way in which Heidegger relates the human longing for redemption to death as the limiting condition of *Dasein*. Mulhall embarks on a rather lengthy discussion of the relationship between animality and *Dasein*, though the relevance of this section to the author's overarching argument is not entirely clear. He concludes this chapter by deducing some rather tenuous parallels between Heidegger's analysis and the biblical account of the fall.

The third chapter turns to Wittgenstein, focusing on his multi-layered exegesis of Augustine's autobiographical account of language acquisition. Mulhall returns to the important theme of how we too easily "interpret limits as limitations" and "experience conditions as constraints" (p. 94). He explains that the ability to articulate our experience of the world using finite words indicates that our knowledge of the world is necessarily conditioned by a categorical knowledge of the things we experience in it. He turns to the famous passage in Wittgenstein in which the author tells the story of a shopkeeper complying with a customer's request for five red apples by cross-referencing each of the elements contained in the request (opening the "apple" drawer, checking a color chart, counting to five, etc.). The irony of the passage suggests that the use of language, though based on the categorical character of knowledge, is by no means as simple as would first appear. The acquisition of language depends on an infinitely complex web of interrelationships, social backgrounds, and individual desires. The endless complexity of the phenomenon of language suggests a certain philosophical futility inherent in the human condition. Mulhall traces the development of Wittgenstein's thought in this direction as he connects Wittgenstein to René Girard's triangular conception of original sin: between two forces of violent opposition, there must be a sacrificial reference-point—the so-called "scapegoat." Violent opposition itself can be considered "original" insofar as we experience it as necessary rather than contingent, and imposed rather than chosen. From this perspective, Wittgenstein's philosophy can be taken as a reinterpretation of original sin, insofar as language constantly eludes our control no matter how hard we try to overcome its finiteness and master it.

Mulhall summarizes his presentation by noting that these three philosophers present distinct, though similar, aspects of human existence that imply a condition of fallenness: for Nietzsche, it is self-punishment; for Heidegger, it is embodiedness (i.e., mortality and animality); and for Wittgenstein, transgression.

Although Mulhall aims to make the book accessible to those with little previous exposure to the writings of these three

philosophers, I believe the text is nearly incomprehensible even to advanced undergraduates. I am not even convinced that teachers could easily glean ideas about how to help undergraduates subject the doctrines of the fall and original sin to rational scrutiny. Mulhall relies on very sophisticated argumentation and, despite his reliance on the most basic and familiar concepts of these philosophers (i.e., the Will to Power, *Dasein*, and language games), he has largely done the work of pre-digesting the material before presenting it.

Opening the book with the full biblical quotation of Adam and Eve's transgression, Mulhall sets up the expectation that frequent reference will be made to it throughout the book. Yet, in addition to being few in number, such references are awkwardly forced to parallel or interpret the philosophical positions discussed. This book is not so much about how three famous philosophers interpreted the myth of the fall, but about how each of their philosophies attempted to understand the peculiar human experience of fallenness but ultimately fell short of demonstrating how fallenness can be adequately understood apart from divine revelation.

Perhaps a deeper criticism I have is Mulhall's rather loose handling of the Christian concept of original sin. On the one hand, he admits that there are many different ways of understanding the doctrine. On the other hand, he does not hesitate to make sweeping generalizations about the common core underlying each of those diverse understandings. He identifies that core as "the conception that human nature as such is tragically flawed, perverse in its very structure or constitution" (p. 6). "For the Christian, we are, if anything, the self-originating source of sin" (p. 7). Such assertions fail to recognize that, at least according to some Christian confessions, human desires may be deeply skewed in the wake of the fall, but the "structure," "constitution," and "nature" of human beings remains essentially good. Furthermore, many Christians distinguish original sin from personal sin precisely on the basis that the former is "other-originating" and the latter "self-originating."

Despite these shortcomings, the size of the book, its straightforward use of classic philosophical positions, and its uniqueness would make it worthwhile optional reading for any course in the philosophy of religion or even the philosophy of literature. Though not an easy read, it offers deep and original reflections on how to interpret philosophies of existence and human nature since the nineteenth century. The book includes a short, decent index, but unfortunately lacks a basic bibliography. The author makes sparing use of footnotes, though his parenthetical references to primary works are clear and accurate.

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