

2 Oct 2013

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Members of the Board:

On behalf of the editorial board of *Questions: Philosophy for Young People*, I am writing to thank the APA for its past support of *Questions* and update you as to the work that we have done. *Questions* was first published thirteen years ago following a project request from the APA's Committee on Pre-College Instruction in Philosophy. The initial two issues were completely funded by the APA; subsequent issues have been subsidized by annual grants of \$500, with the exception of the 2010 issue.

Over the course of the thirteen years we have sought to expand the use, and usefulness, of philosophy for pre-college audiences by providing an outlet for the work of those pre-college philosophers, those who teach philosophy at the pre-college levels, reflections on the usefulness of philosophy broadly, as well as book reviews of materials which are believed to be of interest to the pre-college philosophy audience.

In the last few years we have been making concerted and steady progress toward a new look for the journal. While such a reinvention is really never done, the Vol. 13 issue funded most recently by the APA stands as in many ways a full encapsulation of the goals and visions of the journal. (An electronic copy of the recent issue is also being forwarded with this letter.) In addition, we have continued to explore the ways in which social media like Twitter and Facebook can be used to both further the reach of *Questions* and serve as a "between issues" outlet for some material. Perhaps more than any other area of our redesign, we are still working on finding the right mechanisms and manner to do this.

However, we have had great success in launching our own web presence for the journal. Previously, our only internet presence was through our publisher, Philosophy Documentation Center. We continue to be happy with the ways in which QuestionsJournal.com is able to serve as a home base for the journal; our social media outreach since the launch of the website always serves to send readers back to our website.

Perhaps the most significant change that happened in the year since we were awarded the APA grant is that *Questions* now has been established as the official journal of PLATO (the Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization). This stable base of both subscribers and financial support has brought us to the position where we do not feel that we need to come back to the APA for continued funding at this time.

As in recent years, the APA's funding of *Questions* was matched by the PDC. Other sources of income included support funding from the Northwest Center of Philosophy for Children (now the University of Washington Center for Philosophy for Children), home to the founding editor of *Questions*, and York College of Pennsylvania, my own institution. Those

funds, plus subscriptions, were used to cover the cost of layout, design, publication, and distribution of *Questions*. No members of the editorial board, including myself, were paid stipends for our work on the journal.

Again, thank you for your past support for the mission of *Questions*. It is clearly the case that was it not for the APA the journal would not exist and would not have been able to continue as we have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rory E. Kraft, Jr.', written in a cursive style.

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Attach: vol 13 of *Questions*

# QUESTIONS

philosophy for young people

Vol. 13, No. 1: Summer 2013

Official Journal of PLATO



TOBAGO TREE ■ JONATHAN HODGSON

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To subscribe to *Questions*, please see the back cover.

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## Editor's Note

### Looking for More

In a bit of a Zen Koan the poet Robert Zimmerman wrote that "he not busy being born is busy dying."

With this issue I'm glad to bring you some more of how *Questions* has been busy being born. While you cannot put your hands on it, by the time this issue is in your mailbox we will have launched **QuestionsJournal.com** and revamped our use of Facebook and Twitter. I encourage you to follow along and participate along side of us on all three media.

If you look to the side of this note, you will see another way in which we have been (re)born. We welcome five new members to our editorial board while we wish four others good luck in their future endeavors. We think that this new board is a nice mix in terms of geography, interests, and grade levels with which we specialize.

The final change is perhaps the most dramatic part of the birth of this issue. I am pleased to announce that *Questions* is now the official journal of PLATO (the Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization). The president of PLATO is our own board member (and founding editor of *Questions*) Jana Mohr Lone. By bringing together the resources of PLATO and the mission of *Questions* we hope to offer great resources for pre-college philosophers and those who engage with them.

Going forward we plan on continuing to display the best of the work in philosophy by young people, provide ideas for how teachers and parents can engage philosophically with children, and be an outlet for updates on what professional philosophers are doing in connection to pre-college philosophy.

If you have not seen *Questions* before, welcome. If you have, welcome back. I hope you find, as I do, that we are constantly improving and becoming more and more the resource that you both want and need.

If you will excuse me, I have to get busy assisting with the birth of the next great chapter of *Questions*.

Rory

## CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

*Questions* publishes philosophical work by and for young people, including stories, essays, poems, photographs and drawings, etc. In addition, articles related to doing philosophy with young people, reviews of books and materials useful for doing the same, lesson plans (include description or transcripts of student responses), classic thought experiments redefined/modified for modern audience interests and demographics, transcripts of philosophy discussions, photographs of classroom discussions, and more are sought.

Images, whether photographs, drawings, paintings, et al. should be sent as uncompressed TIFF files (with at least 300 dpi resolution.) Written submissions should be sent in Word, WordPerfect, or Rich Text File formats (as .doc, .wpd, or .rtf). Scholarly articles should conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style* for textual and citation manners; please use endnotes rather than footnotes.

Be sure to include contact information with your submissions. A copyright release is needed for publication. All submissions should go to [QuestionsJournal@gmail.com](mailto:QuestionsJournal@gmail.com)

Submissions for the next issue should be received by **March 31, 2014**. After initial review and editing, they will be blindly reviewed and selected by the larger editorial board.

# Should You Ever Tell a Lie?

Angela Bleeker

An important philosophical question in life is “Should you ever tell a lie?”<sup>1</sup> To me, the answer is yes. A lot of people would think “no” because telling a lie is immoral. Yet everyone has told a lie, and sometimes they don’t even know that they’re lying. Yet if they don’t know they’re lying is it really a lie? Whether or not you should tell a lie is determined by this question. If we shouldn’t tell lies, would it count if we didn’t know we were lying? This would mean that everyone would have to know the absolute truth all the time. Let’s say you heard a statement from a friend, and you believe this statement to be true. If the statement was in fact false, you aren’t lying by re-

peating it because you thought you knew the truth. If there was a math problem that you turned in for homework and you thought it was one thing but you were wrong, does that mean you were lying to your teacher? Would your teacher say, “Wrong, you liar!” as a comment on your homework? No, your teacher wouldn’t say that, because you’re not lying. You didn’t know that you weren’t telling the truth. If you’re not telling the truth that doesn’t specifically mean you’re lying.

Imagine this, your friend’s mother dies and only you know about it. If you tell your friend, then she will commit suicide, but if you don’t, your friend will believe you and live on without finding out. You have the choice to tell your friend that her mother is dead, or you could lie to keep your friend alive. Keep in mind that you can’t just “bend the truth” because you know the truth, so if you don’t tell the truth, you would be lying.

If telling a lie meant saving someone’s life would you tell it? Even though it would be telling a lie? I’m pretty sure that if you said no earlier, now you’re saying yes. When you think about it in different points your answer will change back and forth. Sure, maybe telling a lie is immoral to you but it might not be immoral to everyone, and wouldn’t you have more guilt to let someone die than to lie?

We’re back to the question, Should you ever tell a lie? My answer still stands as yes but the true question is would you?

## Note

1. The discussion in David White, *Philosophy For Kids: 40 Fun Questions That Help You Wonder About Everything!* (Waco, TX: Prufrock Press, 2001), 27–28, helped shape this reflection.

## The Ethics of Genetic Enhancement

Jessica Jacobs

Advances in the study of genetics have pushed technology into the realm of science fiction. As the nature of human genetics is further studied, it becomes increasingly possible that we will soon have the ability to manipulate the genes of our children, not only for the treatment of diseases but also for non-medical advantages. No longer victims of the genetic lottery, tomorrow’s children might be designed to possess desirable qualities such as keener intelligence or more retentive memory. The question then becomes the appropriate place for this new biotechnology in our society. Genetic enhancement will present challenges to our perception of what is “natural” or “normal,” to our view of man’s place in light of our evolutionary history and reli-

gious belief in a higher power, to our assessment of both parental responsibility toward children and civic responsibility toward a just society. But ultimately the value and promise of the technology far outweigh the perceived threats to our society.

Many object to technological advances such as genetic enhancement because of bias toward the status quo. According to the “reversal test” proposed by philosophers Nick Bostrom and Toby Ord, new technology can be viewed without bias by “consider[ing] a change to the same parameter in the opposite direction. If this is also thought to have bad overall consequences, then the onus is on those who reach these conclusions to explain why our position cannot be improved through changes to this parameter.”<sup>1</sup> Under the reversal test, those opposed to the expansion of technology must also acknowledge that previous technological advances were not desirous. If they are incapable of arguing against past advances,





## GENETIC ENHANCEMENT (CONTINUED)

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then they are guilty of what philosopher Ronald Green calls “status quo bias.” In his book, *Babies by Design: The Ethics of Genetic Choice*, Green poses the question of age for consideration under the reversal test. He offers the possibility of prolonging life by 31 percent through technology, and also asks whether one would be willing to shorten life by the same amount. Those who reject the new technology to lengthen life, while also rejecting the idea of shortening their life are guilty of bias for the status quo.<sup>2</sup> The results of the reversal test show the logical inconsistency of rejecting technological advancements, while still desiring the benefits of previous technology. When the reversal test is applied to the advancement of medical technology, like genetic enhancement, the same logical inconsistency appears. Status quo bias hinders technological advances by sanctifying our irrational fear of change, which ultimately prevents growth in society.

Philosophers debate whether the tools provided by breakthroughs in genetics should be limited to the prevention and treatment of genetically linked diseases. As philosopher Michael Sandel points out, the true question is not whether it is morally permissible to treat diseases but whether it is desirable to use genetic knowledge and technology to enhance our genetic traits, even when no genetic deficiency is present.<sup>3</sup> Sandel maintains that if the medical procedure is safe, genetic treatment is beneficial and morally right while rejecting the use of genetic technology to “lift themselves [oneself] above the norm.”<sup>4</sup> He believes in treating people whose diseases have put them at a disadvantage, therefore qualifying them as below the norm for health and well-being. Someone who suffers from muscular dystrophy is below the norm and disadvantaged because of the rarity of the disease. Yet it also could be said that the athlete who does not use performance enhancing drugs is at a disadvantage in our society where steroids are widely used in professional sports. Under Sandel’s criterion, one must accept that the athlete should be entitled to the gene therapy because it is no longer genetic enhancement, but treatment that will cause him to rise to the norm established in his level of play. Sandel’s wants to draw a distinct line between genetic treatment and genetic enhancement, but the line blurs because the “norm” will always change over time. The “norm” centuries ago consisted of a shorter life expectancy and higher risks for diseases. If the new technology of vaccines was dismissed because it would defy the norm of contracting diseases and early death, as Sandel suggests with the use of genetic enhancement, then progress would have halted because of the sanctity of the status quo.

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Sandel forgets that the enhancement of yesterday soon becomes the treatment of today.

Before the technology of genetic enhancement becomes available as the treatment for the new norm, its use must first be deemed desirable. Sandel argues that many are drawn to the possibility of genetic enhancement because, “they [genetic enhancement technology] represent a kind of hyper agency—a Promethean aspiration to remake nature, including human nature, to serve our purposes and satisfy our desires.” He refers to “the drive to mastery” that satisfies our desire to improve as the hubris of man.<sup>5</sup> Critics, both religious and nonreligious, are wary of using genetic enhancement technology for the fear of tampering with something that we do not fully understand. One religious objection to enhancement is that something as fundamental as our genome should not be altered because it was designed that way by

god. Yet it also could be argued that refusing to use technology fails to honor the powers over creation given to man by the creator, but instead honors the creation—in this case the human genome itself. As Ronald Green observes, “One of the rabbis points out that God created wheat but not bread; milk but not cheese.”<sup>6</sup>

The rabbi suggests an independence of man, given by god, to create and evolve from the original creations. Instead of honoring god’s creation,

the secular argument against genetic enhancement honors the product of evolution. Green investigates the value placed on the human genome resulting from evolution. Unlike those who reject genetic enhancement in favor of evolution, Green argues that certain parts of the human genome no longer serve a purpose and therefore should no longer be honored because of our evolutionary history. He believes that, “many features of the human genome may be accidents of biology that cannot be explained in terms of how they contributed to human evolutionary survival or function,” and therefore they have little value to humans now.<sup>7</sup> Green provides the example of the human eye, whose design causes a blind spot in our vision, showing that traits developed through evolution are not necessarily helpful now and some may be harmful. A harmful trait embedded in the human genome is the storing of fat, regardless of the circumstance. Though this trait would have helped when famines were a strong threat to society, now it presents the problem of increasing obesity in today’s society where food is readily available.<sup>8</sup> Genetic enhancement becomes desirable as a tool for rectifying the genes and biological accidents no longer needed in today’s society.



## GENETIC ENHANCEMENT (CONTINUED)

Though genetic enhancement is desirable to fix and improve one's genome, it does not mean that that fulfillment of the desire will be attainable for all. As a new technology, genetic enhancement will be expensive and therefore available to only the rich few. Sandel believes that with genetic engineering and enhancement, we will soon have "the danger of creating two classes of human beings: those with access to enhancement technologies, and those who must make do with their natural capacities."<sup>9</sup> This argument can also be applied to the introduction of health care into our society. Before health care became readily available, procedures such as vaccines were expensive and provided only to those who could afford it. Society consisted of those who could afford

vaccines and therefore provide children with a longer lifespan, and those who could not. As is the case for all technology, vaccines spread to the lower classes and are now available to many people. The length of time to achieve fair distribution does not discount the value of that technology. The same can be said for genetic enhancement, which will only be available to the rich for a time but eventually, as the cost of the technology is lowered, will become widely available. A related objection questions the diversion

of resources and money for genetic enhancement from current medical care. But the increase in the use of genetic enhancement will lower the overall cost of health care because diseases originating from the genome will no longer need to be treated, but will instead be eliminated from the genome. According to Green, "Like some other advanced technologies, germ line gene modifications may actually *lower* health care costs for everyone by replacing costly half-way medical technologies with dramatic new solutions to health care needs."<sup>10</sup> Germ line gene modification not only has the ability to cure an individual of genetic diseases, but the ability to eliminate the disease from the resulting generations.

As the current genetic enhancement becomes more widely desirable, parents will feel the responsibility to prepare their children for the world where success is dependent on certain genetic qualities. The President's Council on Bioethics cautioned against "the problem of conformity" where societal pressures define the notion of excellence.<sup>11</sup> Though it is worrisome to see a society where individual choices are heavily influenced by pop culture and peer pressure, it is more disconcerting that progress will stop because new tech-

nological and medical advances are being blamed for unfortunate social influences and pressures. The council makes the assumption under the problem of conformity that gene therapy is dangerous to society because it will be subject to societal pressures. But the Council fails to recognize that the problem of conformity already exists in our society. Parents now go to extraordinary lengths to push their children to succeed in school because all the other children are succeeding. This trend will not change because of the use of genetic enhancement. If anything, a child genetically inclined to have better attention and focus will be subject to less parental and societal pressures because she will have already met the current expectations of society. It is true that these ex-

pectations will continue to rise with the better performance, but that is not necessarily a problem. At the turn of the century, the expectation was to finish grade school, but now it is considered necessary by most of society to finish undergraduate school and progress to graduate programs. This raised expectation of education was caused by conforming to the changing view of education in society. The dismissing of genetic enhancement as dangerous because it would raise the expectations of society would

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*. . . This trend will not change because of the use of genetic enhancement. If anything, a child genetically inclined to have better attention and focus will be subject to less parental and societal pressures because she will have already met the current expectations of society.*

halt progress altogether.

According to the President's Council on Bioethics, the problem of conformity occurs when parents are obligated to genetically enhance their child for success because society's expectations demand it. The philosopher Julian Savulscu argues that under his Principle of Procreative Beneficence, "couples (or single reproducers) should select the child, of the possible children they could have, who is expected to have the best life, or at least as good as a life as the others, based on the relevant, available information" regardless of society's climate.<sup>12</sup> Savulscu argues that the natural impulse of parents to provide the best for their children should be obeyed even before conception through the technology of preimplantation genetic diagnosis and in vitro fertilization. These procedures would allow a parent to test embryos that have not been implanted in the uterine wall for possible disease like cancer or asthma. Savulscu believes that the embryo with no predisposition to diseases, Embryo A, should be selected and implanted instead of the embryo susceptible to cancer, Embryo B, "on the pain of irrationality."<sup>13</sup> It would be irrational to choose Embryo B over Embryo A because though



## GENETIC ENHANCEMENT (CONTINUED)

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both have nothing specific in their favor; Embryo B has something against it which would possibly affect the happiness of the child that would result had the embryo been further developed. An objection to choosing Embryo A is the possibility of discarding the genius or successful athlete that Embryo B could have been. But the same could be said if Embryo B was chosen over Embryo A who could have been a genius without the affliction of cancer. Savulscu furthers his argument by supposing that technology was advanced enough to allow us to test for non-disease genes such as intelligence. The Procreative Beneficence principle would still apply to parents who chose an embryo with a higher intelligence level because the desire to provide the best for the child would still be the same, under the assumption that a higher intelligence level is desirous. Supplying one's child with the best genetic traits and qualities possible through genetic enhancement, especially if they correspond with society's expectations, will provide the child with the best possible life prospects within the parents' control.

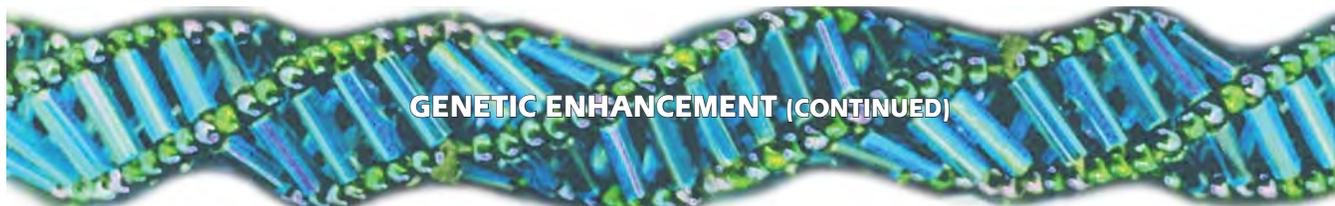
Parents who abide by Savulscu's principle of Procreative Beneficence are subject to the criticism of hyper parenting and, even worse, not loving the child they would have had without genetic enhancement. Sandel argues that due to the competitiveness of society, even without help from genetic enhancement, parents mold their children and provide what they believe is best for them. He agrees that genetic enhancement is comparable to expensive schooling and private tutors, but he argues that genetic enhancement is more dangerous because it encourages hyper parenting even before the child is born and increases the pressure placed on children from their parents after having been born.<sup>14</sup> Philosopher Frances Kamm acknowledges Sandel's concern for increased parental involvement, but argues that a child who is genetically enhanced to have traits like self-control would need less parental control than a child who does not have self-control.<sup>15</sup> If a child already possessed the qualities that controlling parents want to instill through tutoring and expensive schooling, then the parents would no longer feel the need to pressure the child. Sandel argues that even if a parent cannot be accused of hyper parenting, it is possible that the parent lacks accepting love towards their genetically enhanced child. He draws a distinction between the love of the child for what they are, accepting love, and the love a parent has to promote the well-being of the child, transforming love. According to Sandel, the accepting love a parent has for a child is lost when the child is genetically enhanced because it im-

plies that the child would not be accepted without the genetic qualities chosen by the parent.<sup>16</sup> Sandel's argument would be valid if the child already existed with a certain set of qualities and was then rejected by the parents, but as Kamm points out, "Before the existence of a person, there is no person yet with certain characteristics that we have to accept if we love him. . . . Hence, not accepting whatever characteristics nature will bring but altering them *ex ante* does not show lack of love."<sup>17</sup> Accepting love does not exist before the child is born because the parent does not know the child's characteristics and therefore could not love him. Though it is true that if a genetically enhanced child is not exactly what the parents desired, they may not give the accepting love the child de-

serves, but the same could be said for parents who did not have a genetically enhanced child, and in both cases those individuals should not have been parents to begin with. Those who have a child, genetically enhanced or not, possess accepting love for the child and his qualities, as shown by parents who love their children with disabilities.

Parental choice of the child's qualities through genetic enhancement raises the question of the legitimacy of the child's claim to those skills. The President's Council on Bioethics believes that with the use of genetic enhancement, "we cannot really own the transformations nor can we experience them as genuinely ours."<sup>18</sup> The Council makes the assumption that because a concert pianist received a gene that predisposes him to music through genetic enhancement, his achievement as a musician is of little value. But the same could be said for the concert pianist who is naturally gifted in music. Both musicians possess the genes that proved useful in playing piano, one as a result of genetic enhancement and the other through simple luck in the genetic lottery. The Council seems to imply that the "natural" concert pianist, the one with the luck to receive the necessary genes in the genetic lottery, is a more valuable musician even though both the genetically enhanced and the "natural" concert pianists were subject to luck. The first did not ask to be genetically enhanced before she existed, just as the second did not ask to receive those genes from the genetic lottery. Therefore, if a "natural" skill is of high value, a genetically enhanced skill is of the same value because both "natural" and "unnatural" require development and both are subject to gifts of fortune. Sandel argues, "To acknowledge the giftedness of life is to recognize that our talents and powers are not wholly our own doing, despite the effort we expend to develop and to exercise," and therefore genetic enhancement lowers our

*The ability to fundamentally change our genomes . . . causes us to question the meaning and value of our skills, to question the responsibility of parents, and ultimately to examine our understanding of the common good*



appreciation for talents and qualities because our parents chose them.<sup>19</sup> But since the genetically enhanced pianist did not ask for the genes to play piano and happened to be lucky enough to have parents who desired that ability for their child, his ability is a gift just like the skill of the natural pianist. Genetic enhancement does not prevent the concert pianist from acknowledging the giftedness of his own skill, but helps him recognize the good fortune he must have had to possess parents who were capable of giving him these skills just as the “natural” pianist sees his skill as a gift from the genetic lottery.

The advancement of our society depends upon the acceptance of technology, even though it poses risks to the “norm” and status quo. Genetic enhancement offers us a unique opportunity not only to raise the bar of excellence in our society but to continue to change and grow as human beings. The ability to fundamentally change our genomes is something we have never encountered before. It causes us to question the meaning and value of our skills, to question the responsibility of parents, and ultimately to examine our understanding of the common good. When genetic enhancement is used wisely, it gives us the ability to provide more for our children, to repair errors in our genome, and to cherish specific gifts that must be cultivated. Genetic enhancement is a testament to our human aspiration to advance ourselves with technology founded upon ingenuity and creativity. It does not have the power to diminish our humanity because it lacks the autonomy to act outside of our judgment and control. Instead, it is an expression of our human nature to better ourselves. This technology does not stand apart from our nature, but is subject to the will of the creative and ingenious beings that created it. Genetic enhancement offers the promise of progress that we can scarcely imagine, but we

must not let fear stop us from making the conscious decision to accept the gifts the technology offers.

### Notes

1. Green, 104.
2. *Ibid.*, 105.
3. Sandel, 1.
4. *Ibid.*, 2.
5. *Ibid.*, 6.
6. Green, 177.
7. *Ibid.*, 182.
8. *Ibid.*, 183.
9. Sandel, 3.
10. Green, 137
11. Kass, 5.
12. Savulescu, 415.
13. *Ibid.*, 416.
14. Sandel, 8.
15. Kamm, 12.
16. Sandel, 14.
17. Kamm, 10.
18. Kass, 9.
19. Sandel, 6.

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# The Good Student

Margot Rashba

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What is education? This question has been long deliberated throughout different social eras. From medieval times to the modern era, the values and goals of education have been changed and modified. Presently, the goal of education seems to be based upon building a prestigious social status and gaining material wealth. In order to reach this goal, hard work and intense competition is glorified in public and private schools alike. However, is the good student one that fulfills this seeming aim of society or does the good student require something other than the will to compete? The purpose of education ought to revolve around acquiring intellectual and moral virtue so that students grow as individuals with knowledge, for our *telos*, or our purpose of existing, according to Aristotle, is to become a fully flourishing member of our group.<sup>1</sup> The good student must conform to the purpose of education—to strive to be virtuous while in pursuit of knowledge—and to well-intentioned motives, for if the motives of a student, however successful, are base and vicious, the individual is not truly a good student.

In our society, the words “the good student” are often used and interpreted differently. A high-achieving student, such as a straight-A student, is separated from the idea of the good student, or the virtuous student. A high-achieving student may very well be a virtuous and good person; however, it is equally possible for a high-achieving student to lack moral development and virtue. The high-achieving student does not have the prerequisite of virtue, which makes it possible for a straight-A student to possess vices. The truly good student must possess virtue, without which he/she is not a good student. The purpose of education should revolve around this definition of the good student as the virtuous student, not only the high-achieving student ideal that is common in the modern day.

However, before analyzing the purpose of education, we should first define virtue. Aristotle states in *Nicomachean Ethics* that a virtue is a state of character, acquired by habit and lying between the extremes of excess and deficiency. Virtue is a state of character, for once you gain a virtue it is something you do involuntarily without rational calculation: it becomes part of you. Once an individual has acquired a virtue, it is further cultivated by the habit of exercising that virtue. A virtue in itself must be the mean between the extremes. For an example, consider the virtue of bravery. On the extreme end, bravery produces rashness and recklessness. On the other hand, lack of bravery produces cowardice. Thus the virtue of bravery is the mean between the two extremes of excess and defect.<sup>2</sup> Why must the individual cultivate these virtues? According to Aristotle, the virtues cause humans to fulfill their *telos*, or purpose of existing, which is to become a fully flourishing member of the human race. The virtues and the quest for virtue cause individuals to have a purpose for existing. From the idea of basic virtue, moral

DETAIL OF THE DESKS ■ EDOARD E. EXINE, MARCH 2, 1936



and intellectual virtues are each differentiated. The purpose of education stems from these intellectual and moral virtues that Aristotle outlines in Book VI of *Nicomachean Ethics*.

The purpose of education should be to cultivate one's capacity to acquire intellectual and moral virtue. Aristotle states that there are five intellectual virtues: practical wisdom, theoretical wisdom, scientific wisdom, intuitive wisdom, and philosophical wisdom. Scientific and theoretical wisdom both involve the necessity to observe and realize universal truths. Practical wisdom is the ability to discern the good life and involves both experience and the capacity to act, both of which are acquired with age. Intuitive wisdom is essentially the faculty that is “left-over” for it is innate wisdom that is not characterized by the other four. Philosophical wisdom is a result of both scientific and intuitive wisdom, but without all of the other virtues, philosophical wisdom is not attainable.<sup>3</sup> The pursuit of knowledge should be based on endeavoring to perfect and attain all of these intellectual capabilities. Each of these intellectual virtues allows a student to progress upon the path to knowledge. Thus, this model of virtue should set the guidelines for the pursuit of knowledge and education itself. However, one cannot be a good student without the motivation to strive for both knowledge and promotion of the virtues within oneself. This statement can be described in the following logical sequence: If one is a good student then one pursues the purpose of education. The purpose of education is to strive for knowledge while cultivating the virtues. If one is not striving for knowledge then one is not pursuing the purpose of education. A student who fails to strive for knowledge and acquire virtue fails to move toward the *telos* of a good student. Therefore, if one is not pursuing the purpose of education, then one is a bad student.

However, there are other virtues that are necessary besides those presented by Aristotle in order to be a good student. The core virtues of the good student should be patience,

## GOOD STUDENT (CONTINUED)

diligence, temperance, and bravery. Patience and temperance are necessary as academia is not an easy road, for it is filled with anxiety and obstacles that are not always easy to overcome. Failure is inevitable, but the good student, rather than despairing, learns from his/her mistakes and grows from them rather than striving for absolute perfection. Without diligence and hard work, knowledge is unattainable. Idleness does not further one's capacities or habits. One must also possess bravery or courage, for the quest for knowledge frequently involves delving into challenging intellectual spheres, which, however uncomfortable, leads to further development as a student.<sup>4</sup> These virtues may seem unattainable to most students, particularly high school students who more often than not do not have the motivation to follow the virtues. Moreover, this picture of the good student is an idealized representation. As a good student, one must aim for this ideal, even if not all parts of it are perfected. A good student must be attentive to the many vices and faults that students often find themselves pursuing.

The core virtues of a good student are coupled with vices that undermine these core values. These vices include, but are not limited to, perfectionism, idleness, selfishness, and envy. Perfectionist thinking can lead to an over-obsessive attitude about academics, and rather than striving for the virtues, the student instead is consumed with the need to be perfect in every area of study. This perfectionism can lead to some of the other vices such as selfishness and envy. Comparing one's academic abilities to another's can cause the student to be overly competitive and lose sight of the purpose of education. This situation is all too common in our world today among upperclassmen competing for college acceptances. These vices draw the distinction between

the successful student and the virtuous student. The notion of success, as said earlier, is drawn from material wealth, or, on the high school level, perfect grades. However, a straight-A student could possess some, if not all of the vices listed above. It is entirely possible for a seemingly successful student to have vicious motives and actions. Exceptional grades are indeed an accomplishment to be praised, but if they are acquired by means of vicious motives and actions, the individual is hastening toward moral and intellectual decline rather than advancement.

The definition of a good student has been warped in our age to mean a straight-A student who attends a prestigious college, acquires a high level job, and maintains a high annual income. These individuals, however intelligent, often do not possess the intellectual and moral virtues that are necessary to become a fully flourishing human being. Aristotle sets up a system of virtues that ought to be the goal of education, rather than base material wealth. A student is entirely capable of being supposedly successful, but lacking in his or her moral and intellectual development. By following the virtues, the path to true knowledge, and ultimately philosophical wisdom, an individual can truly achieve intellectual growth.

### Notes

- 1 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, in *Classics of Moral and Political Philosophy 2002*, ed. Steven M. Cahn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1
- 2 Aristotle, *Classics*, 192–96.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 207–208.
- 4 “Valuable Intellectual Traits,” [criticalthinking.org](http://criticalthinking.org), last modified June, 1996.

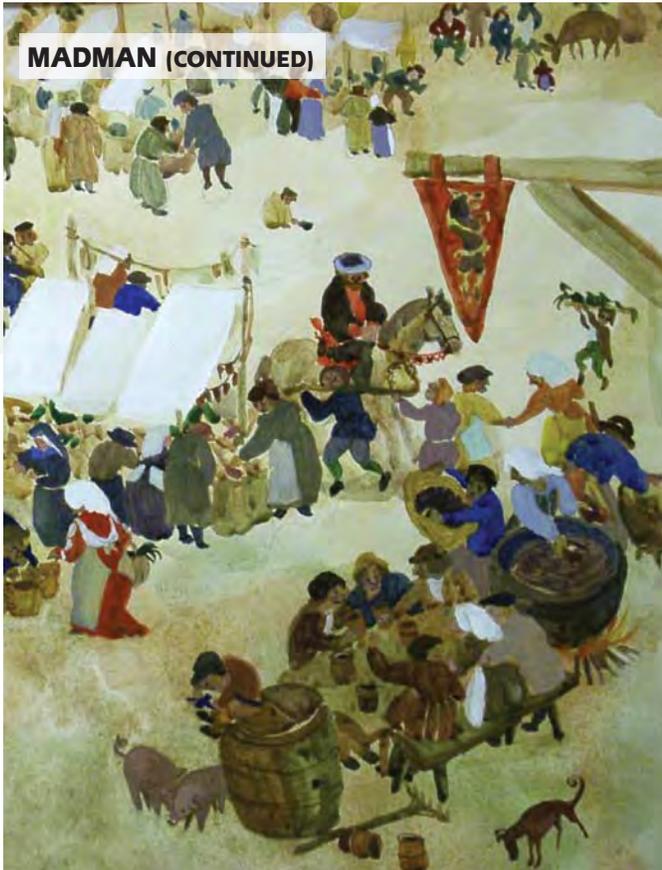


### Scott Daniel

In 1844, the year that Friedrich Nietzsche was born, European philosophy was fundamentally a discipline of logic and reason. At the time, philosophers adhered to many of the same standards that they had emphasized since the dawn of philosophical thought; leading thinkers still used the strategies of induction and deduction to reach rational conclusions about the nature of the universe and work towards a greater understanding of fundamental concepts such as “truth” and “good.” When Nietzsche entered the intellectual scene, though, he found that the trends of thought in European society were stuffy, abstract, and out of touch—so he rebelled against them. In his writing, he sought to transform Western philosophy from a sterile, academic pursuit into a dynamic, artistic, life-affirming endeavor by exploring the Dionysian-Apollonian dichotomy that pervaded every field from science to religion. Although Nietzsche's theories were sometimes vague, far-fetched, and inapplicable to

everyday life, he unified and strengthened his work not only through his eloquence and artistry but also with a spirit of iconoclasm that allowed him to tear down cherished ethical standards and call on his contemporaries to radically rethink the rules of their existence.

One of Nietzsche's first works, *The Birth of Tragedy* (written in 1872), examined the tragic theatrical traditions of ancient Greece, which Nietzsche believed had harnessed a creative life force—one that he identified with the Greek god Dionysus—to celebrate the raw, chaotic imperfection of human existence. In the work, the young Nietzsche looked back longingly to the power and vitality of the Greeks' “Dionysian” impulse, which he believed had eventually been eclipsed by another force more characteristic of the god Apollo: the highly rational, stable, “Apollonian” philosophy common in his own day. Although Nietzsche later admitted in his essay “An Attempt at Self-Criticism” that youthful romanticism



MADMAN (CONTINUED)

MEDIEVAL FAIR ■ ANIMICAT.NATA/CREATIVE COMMONS

and over-eagerness had hampered *The Birth of Tragedy*, the essential Dionysian-Apollonian dichotomy in that early work set the tone for much of his later writing.<sup>1</sup> For instance, in his 1882 work *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche reframed the tension between the Dionysian and the Apollonian as a struggle between health and sickness, as well as between “life-affirming” and “life-negating” principles. In this work, Nietzsche investigated the roots of teleological modes of thought (in an approach perhaps inspired by his earlier career as a classical philologist) and concluded that a pernicious craving for order and metaphysical truths had fueled such thinking throughout human history. As an antidote, he espoused a more cheerful, life-affirming “*amor fati*” (love of fate) that, in its highest form, could cause a person enthusiastically to will the eternal recurrence of his or her life even without the teleological consolation of an overarching meaning or significance behind his or her actions.

Once Nietzsche had established his philosophical commitment to the affirmation of life and health, he channeled his principles into an attack on traditional ethical systems. He first criticized the morality of religion on the grounds that the religious concept of something outside or beyond human existence leads to a life-negating, “man against world” attitude. Moreover, in reference to what he perceived as the growing European rejection of this unhealthy attitude, he declared that “God is dead” and went on to explain that although the prospect of a non-religious existence might seem cold and empty, the de-deification of nature was actually an

opportunity for the most advanced Europeans—characterized in *The Gay Science* as “we . . . premature births of a yet unproven future”—to work toward a new kind of fullness and health in their lives, which he called the “Great Health.”<sup>2</sup> Even later, in works such as *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) and *The Genealogy of Morals* (1887), Nietzsche advanced a broader critique of both religious and secular codified moral systems, which he denounced as examples of “slave” or “herd” moralities that had been provoked by resentment directed at the higher-ranked elite by the disadvantaged masses. He characterized these moralities, which included Mill’s utilitarianism and Kantian ethics, as championing meekness and equality while devaluing the natural human will to power and, by extension, contradicting the will to life. Finally, in defiance of all traditional moral archetypes, Nietzsche called for any “overmen” (*übermensch*) whose noble, powerful traits made them feel evil and “sick” within the constraints of herd morality to embrace and affirm their own standards of existence, move beyond conceptions of good and evil, and fulfill the ringing decree in *The Gay Science* that “you shall become who you are.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, over the course of his life, Nietzsche retained his ideas about Dionysian and Apollonian impulses and health and sickness, while also expanding the scope of his thinking from philology and dramatic theory to sweeping refutations of traditional normative ethics.

Despite the eloquence and groundbreaking content of Nietzsche’s writing, his ethical theory loses some of its luster when scrutinized for logical cogency and moral tenability. Of course, many of Nietzsche’s etiological observations about moral and intellectual thought—such as his inquiry into “the unconscious disguise of physiological needs under the mantle of the objective”—square well with the philosophical tradition of taking nothing for granted and questioning all of one’s presuppositions.<sup>4</sup> Yet the logical structure of this critique is arguably self-defeating. As part of his genealogical account of human development, Nietzsche makes the case that moral beliefs are nothing but powerful fictions shaped by a history of non-rational drives. In criticizing all human knowledge in this way, however, he undermines his efforts to justify his own contributions to philosophical thought. Additionally, Nietzsche’s blanket denunciations of his predecessors and their moral systems often stray beyond the bounds of reasoned skepticism into blind incredulity. In fact, Nietzsche often sacrificed plausibility for passion in his writing; for example, his assertion in *Twilight of the Idols* that what is good is “not contentment, but more power; not peace at any price but war” seems to suggest the rather dubious conclusion that wealthy English aristocrats produced more good in their society than Jesus Christ did in his.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, many of Nietzsche’s forceful, concrete assertions lack clear explanation or justification. For instance, Nietzsche was adamant that the overman should transcend the morality of the herd, but he never specified what constituted the concept of “overman”; nor did he provide concrete historical or sociological evidence for his repeated claims about human “herds.” Indeed, the same vagueness and lack of explanation surfaces everywhere in Nietzsche’s writing, from his praise of ancient Greek society to his criticism of modern science. It

appears, though, that this lack of specificity suits Nietzsche's particular style of philosophical discourse; if he had told his audience exactly how to live, he would have had to resort to the teleological thinking that he so strongly rejected, and if he had explicated his arguments along rigorous logical lines, he would have had to succumb to the Apollonian impulse that he constantly repudiated. In this way, just as Nietzsche sacrificed common-sense plausibility and logical consistency in return for consistent passion and power in his writing, he gave up the prospect of a well-substantiated ethical theory in return for the opportunity to advance refreshingly artistic and fanciful concepts such as the idea of the overman.

However, fanciful and far-fetched arguments quickly lose their charm if they do not have clear and profitable purchase in the real world, and some of Nietzsche's points are stubbornly resistant to such a translation. In particular, Nietzsche's firmly anti-political belief in the fallaciousness of teleological notions of equality and justice has contributed to some rather morally repugnant real-world movements, such as fascism and Nazism. Yet this type of real-world application was less a result of Nietzsche's intentions than it was a misinterpretation of his work. In reality, Nietzsche rejected the trend of fervent patriotism sweeping his country, and in his writing he expressed his distaste with "the sense in which the word 'German' is thrown around today, to advocate nationalism and racial hatred."<sup>6</sup> Besides, some parts of Nietzsche's ethical theory, like the celebration of life-affirming impulses and the banishment of nihilism through art and creativity, are far more optimistic and applicable to everyday life than his criticisms of teleology and herd morality—so much so, in fact, that Nietzsche saw fit to apply them to his own life in the form of a New Year's resolution in *The Gay Science* to "be only a Yes-sayer!"<sup>7</sup>

Notwithstanding its other various strengths and weaknesses, Nietzsche's work gains significant weight in view of the consistency of both its content and its style. Admittedly, Nietzsche occasionally contradicts himself (for example, in *The Gay Science*, he criticizes Kant for "selfishness" of philosophical judgment, which Nietzsche himself exhibits on many occasions), but the fundamental motifs and ideas of his work—the importance of life-affirming principles, the pursuit of the Dionysian instinct, the fulfillment of the will to power, the journey towards the Great Health—remain remarkably constant throughout his various writings and help to link together his various anecdotes and reflections.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, Nietzsche reinforced in his own writing style the very concepts he espoused: he embraced the chaotic nature of his own thoughts via an aphoristic format for works such as *The Gay Science*, and he rejected the rigid logical structures of his philosophical predecessors in favor of a freer, more artistic, more Dionysian approach to philosophy that can be seen in the poetic prose of aphorisms such as "In the horizon of the infinite" and "To the ships!"<sup>9</sup> Finally, Nietzsche's

iconoclasm served to unify his work; even his most implausible, impractical, or logically unsound arguments still gained value by virtue of their novelty and rebelliousness. Thus, the result of Nietzsche's tenaciousness in tearing down the moral and philosophical standards of European society was the introduction of a remarkable new creative dynamism to the world of philosophy—so in a sense, Nietzsche's lifelong desire to restore the Dionysian life force to Europe was ultimately successful.

In section 125 of *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche tells a story about a madman who enters a public marketplace and declares to a crowd of people that God is dead and that every human being is his killer.<sup>10</sup> The madman's audience is silent and perplexed, so the madman throws down his lantern and declares, "I come too early . . . I am not yet at the right time. This prodigious event is still on its way, and is traveling,—it has not yet reached men's ears." This story carries with it a distinctive ring of allegorical autobiography, for throughout his life Friedrich Nietzsche undoubtedly saw himself as a madman in the marketplace of Europe. His philosophical work exposed the death of many gods—the god of Christian religion, the god of teleology, the god of traditional good-versus-evil morality—and he zealously delivered his radical critique to the people of Europe, even when they were most unwilling to listen. Although Nietzsche may have been a madman in the eyes of the masses, the originality and expressiveness of his writing and the audacity of his attack on European philosophy and morality ensured that he would always be a madman worth hearing.

## Notes

1. Nietzsche 1999a.
2. Nietzsche 1995, 161.
3. *Ibid.*, 134.
4. *Ibid.*, 117.
5. Nietzsche 1999b, 444.
6. Nietzsche 1995, 161.
7. *Ibid.*, 135.
8. *Ibid.*, 138–39.
9. *Ibid.*, 133, 135–36.
10. *Ibid.*, 133–34.

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- . 1999a. "An Attempt at Self-Criticism." In *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, ed. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs, 3–12. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 1999b. *The Twilight of the Idols*. In *Philosophy: The Quest for Truth*, 4th ed., edited by Louis P. Pojman and Lewis Vaughn, 444. New York: Oxford University Press.

# RING OF GYGES

12

***Are people good only because they are afraid of the consequences of doing bad things? Or are people good for other reasons?***

Fourth grade students at Whittier Elementary School in Seattle discussed the thought experiment from Plato's *Republic* commonly known as the Ring of Gyges. (We reproduce in the sidebar a portion of the 2007 article in *Questions* which discussed how to use this story to engage in philosophy discussions at different age ranges.) Here are some responses from the students to the question:

## **Helen Liska**

No, I think people are good because of what's inside of them, not because of the fear of being caught. If I had something that enabled me to do dirty things, then I wouldn't use it for nasty purposes because I am a good person.

## **Raven Landwehr**

No, I think that if the inner person is good, they will not do bad stuff even if they have stuff that can enable them to do bad stuff. However, if the inner person is bad, then if they get their hands on things that let them do bad stuff, they probably will.

## **Amelia Lewis**

I think some people are only good because they are afraid, but some people are good for other reasons. This doesn't determine their personality all the time, because sometimes people who are just good will not do something they would do if there wasn't consequences. Sometimes I have the urge to talk in class, but I hold it in. I am mostly good just because I am, but everybody has those moments. All in all, I think it depends on the person, the place and the thing itself. If I were to talk out in class, it wouldn't be as bad as if I murdered someone. In conclusion, everyone is not good only because of the consequences.



### Ava Agopsowicz

I think people are not good only because of the consequences, because people like mother Teresa and Martin Luther King Jr. weren't good because of the consequences. They were good because they knew it was the right thing to do. I also think people are good for other reasons, because they were raised by good and happy families that made them want to be good and happy people.

### Yura Campbell

I think that every person, no matter good or bad, would probably do a few bad things if there were no consequences to the things they did. Also, everywhere would be a madhouse. For most people, you are not going to do bad things if you are scared of what will happen if someone catches you. Possibly everyone is controlled by fear, so they do not do things they are not allowed to do. So yes, people are only good because they are afraid of what will happen to them if they do bad things.

### Fiona Dark

I think that people do good things not because they are afraid of what will happen if they don't, but because they want to help other people. If you don't want to help out, then you don't. If you do, then you do. However, I think some not very bad things, like standing on the table, people (or at least kids) don't do because they are afraid of the consequences. Doing it or not doing it doesn't really help or hinder anyone either way. The only reason, consequently, not to stand on the table would be the consequences for doing so.

### Zara Park

I think that people aren't only good just because they are afraid of the consequences. Some people are just always nice from the inside out. However, there are some people who are just nice to get something from someone and aren't all nice to begin with, and are just pretending to be nice.

In *Republic*, Glaucon presents a classic story intended to illustrate that one is just only if one has an audience:

The story goes that [Gyges] was a shepherd in the service of the ruler of Lydia. There was a violent thunderstorm, and an earthquake broke open the ground and created a chasm at the place where he was tending his sheep. Seeing this, he was filled with amazement and went down into it. And there, in addition to many other wonders of which we're told, he saw a hollow bronze horse. There were windowlike openings in it, and, peeping in, he saw a corpse, which seemed to be of more than human size, wearing nothing but a gold ring on its finger. He took the ring and came out of the chasm. He wore the ring at the usual monthly meeting that reported to the king on the state of the flocks. And as he was sitting among the others, he happened to turn the setting of the ring towards himself to the inside of his hand. When he did this, he became invisible to those sitting near him, and they went on talking as if he had gone. He wondered at this, and fingering the ring, he turned the setting outwards again and became visible. So he experimented with the ring to test whether it indeed had this power—and it did. If he turned the setting inward, he became invisible; if he turned it outward, he became visible again. When he realized this, he at one arranged to become one of the messengers sent to report to the king. And when he arrived there, he seduced the king's wife, attacked the king with her help, killed him, and took over the kingdom.<sup>1</sup>

Glaucon then notes that if there were two such rings, "one worn by a just and the other by an unjust person," that the actions of each would "follow the same path" because one is only just when forced to be.

#### Note

1. Plato, *Republic*, trans. G. M. A. Grube, rev. C. D. C. Reeve, in *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 359d–360b.

For a discussion of how to use the thought experiment, read Rory Kraft, "Does Virtue Require an Audience?" *Questions* 7 (Summer 2007): 12.

# Dot, Dot, Dot

Ben Kronengold

It must be human nature  
Because in all it is akin  
Everyone is searching  
To define what is within

A mission meant to sum up  
The traits within our lives  
To wrap us up in boxes  
With ribbon and with stripes

To predict what we'll do next  
Based on things that we can trace  
A desperate strive to label  
Our behavior and our place

We question our existence  
And never seem to dwell  
We search for unique purpose  
And ways to escape hell

Attempts to spell out who we are  
In a double spaced essay  
Or etched on stone within the ground  
Or on a one page résumé

This goal is just a mindless game  
Of hide and seek with ghosts  
You cannot define something  
That changes and that grows

We're complex and inscrutable  
Our roads, they all diverge  
New knowledge and new people too  
Make yet new roads emerge

Changes surface day and night  
Though body still remains  
Our lives will bend, rotate, and turn  
Through our triumphs and pains

Instances, they prove this point  
For warrants argue well  
I'll write of ways that I can change  
Beneath my outside shell

I greet my mom with baggy eyes  
As I awake from dreams  
Now I'm a kid, nurtured and loved  
With excess self esteem

Next my dad, I say hello  
On a speedy drive to school  
Now I'm a son, a younger "him"  
Who tells him he's not cool

I enter doors and join the herd  
Of the future's brightest fleet  
Now I'm a student, stressed and learned  
Who'll trip on his own feet

I leave a room where desks surround  
Philosophy and laughter  
Now I have learned new truths and facts  
That I'll use in life hereafter

I read a story in the news  
About a heated debate  
Now I have a view on what's right and wrong  
A new belief on my life's growing plate

"Self" is not a single form  
It sounds offbeat and odd  
We don't turn into different people  
We wear different façades

We cannot be defined as one  
We're complex like a knot  
So when we choose what's etched in stone  
Just choose "dot, dot, dot"



## Incorporating the Activity of Philosophy into Social Studies: A Seven-Part Philosophical Inquiry Process

**Amber Makaiau**

Too often, many of the *questions* that have the potential to make high school social studies classes interesting and transformative are glossed over and traded in for boring book work. As a result, many high school students, as soon as they step into their history, psychology, civics, or even philosophy classrooms, abandon their sense of wonder at the door. They stop asking questions, they cease to make connections between the content they are learning and their own lives, and they lack meaning in their overall classroom experience. It is for these reasons that philosophy, and its capacity to give educators a pedagogy for addressing these challenges, is such an important part of a high school social studies education.

To address apathy in the social studies courses that I teach, I use a “philosopher’s pedagogy.”<sup>1</sup> I draw on the activity of philosophy to challenge my students and myself to think about thinking, particularly our own thinking as we explore course topics. One of the most successful classroom strategies for doing this is a seven-part philosophical inquiry process. This learner-centered activity starts with a philosophically rich teacher-generated focus question, and then requires students to (1) question, (2) gather information, (3) organize/analyze/construct a thesis, (4) outline, (5) write, (6) present, and (7) reflect. It is a learning activity that provides both structure, and enough flexibility, so that in the context of social studies, students and teachers can live the examined life.

One of the social studies courses that I apply the philosophical inquiry process to is ethnic studies. Ethnic studies is a semester long class that is required for graduation at our school. About half-way through the semester, I introduce the philosophical inquiry process in the class by asking my students, “What do we mean by self-concept?” And “What are some examples of our self-concepts from the perspective of ethnic studies?” This is the springboard from which we launch our inquiry, and subsequently find our way through each step of the philosophical inquiry process. My students’ work and reflections from ethnic studies help illustrate each step of the process and the tremendous impact that this class activity has had on their learning and lives.

*Questioning.* In the first step of the inquiry, my ethnic studies students use a set of previously learned vocabulary words (e.g. values, prejudice, class, bias, ethnicity, equity) to stimulate their thinking and to generate questions about themselves. As they formulate their questions they use the Good Thinker’s Tool Kit.<sup>2</sup> The Good Thinker’s Tool Kit assists students in asking questions that they genuinely wonder about. It helps them dig deep and scratch beneath the surface of their thinking. Students share their questions out

loud with their peers to foster a community of inquiry during this first step of the process. Here are some examples of their questions.

- Can I assume that if my values change, so will my self-concept? What are the reasons? (9th grader)
- What are some of the reasons I use prejudices or epithets to be funny? (9th grader)
- What does it mean to be part of the middle class? Do we have more or less authority? (12th grader)
- If it is true that I make rude remarks about other people’s biases, then does that imply that I am a hypocrite? (9th grader)
- Is it reasonable to assume that for me culture, race and ethnicity are all the same thing? (12th grader)
- What are the reasons my parents don’t treat me and my brother with equity? (9th grader)
- Is it reasonable to assume that if I look at myself as a minority that I will be treated like one? (12th grader)
- What does it mean to be Hawaiian? (12th grader)
- Is it reasonable to infer that I need to be treated with justice from the way I try to find justice for others? (9th grader)
- What does it mean to be considered a biological race? What if I am dark skinned, and mistaken for an African-American, but I consider myself to be Hawaiian. What does that make me? (12th grader)
- If it is true that I am not mad about the Japanese internment camps then what does that imply? (12th grader)
- Is it reasonable to assume that my view of men causes me to be sexist? (9th grader)
- Is it safe to assume that I have adapted to my community’s culture? If so, can I also be personally diverse? (12th grader)
- What are the reasons I don’t always feel empowered? (9th grader)

When reflecting on his experience with the inquiry process, one of my students commented on the importance of asking personally relevant and philosophically rich questions like these. He wrote, “this hard essay made me think of questions I would never have thought about. And with this it gave me a deeper understanding of who I am” (12th grader). Full of wonder, curiosity, and quite often confusion the students’ questions motivate them to gather information, which is the next phase of the philosophical inquiry process.

*Information gathering.* In the second step of the philosophical inquiry process the students gather information to help

them think through, and explore possible answers to their questions. In ethnic studies the students use three different approaches to answering their questions: introspection, interviewing, and analysis of primary documents. Many students comment about these methods in their writing. About introspection, a student wrote, “by doing this paper I have introspected and remembered many events that create my self-concept and only now I can look even deeper and understand myself better” (12th grader). Another commented on the interviewing process.

[E]xisting in this world for 14 years and having two to three weeks of discovering my self-concept was the hardest thing that I have ever done. I have learned that it is not mostly me who is answering my questions but other people who have watched my actions. I looked more into perception than I usually do. I had never really gone this deep about figuring my self-concept out. (9th grader)

In this stage of the philosophical inquiry process, students like the ninth grader above begin to think intensely about the importance of point of view and perspective taking in the construction of new knowledge. They share what they learn with their peers, and as they bring together their information, and begin to analyze their findings, they often reach new realizations about how complicated the topic of the inquiry really is.

*Organize/analyze/thesis.* In step three I teach my students the methods of constant comparison.<sup>3</sup> They sort through, organize, and analyze the information they have gathered. At this point in the philosophical inquiry new questions emerge.

What makes a person who they are? What identifies a person and makes them an individual within society? These are questions that an individual has to answer by analyzing themselves and coming to conclusions based not only on how they see themselves, but also how others see him or her. Through my own self-analysis, I found that being Japanese, with its cultural and racial

ties defines a significant part of who I am. Facing discrimination both in my past and present helped shape who I am today. I also found that having a lack of religion has also had a significant impact on how I see myself. In truth, our identities are made up of millions of factors. There are however certain elements defined within ethnic studies, that play, or have played, the most important and influential roles in our lives and our identities. Even though playing clarinet is only a hobby for me, it nonetheless plays a significant role in my identity. (12th grader)

Like this twelfth grader, they talk, discuss and think through their analysis with their peers. They develop new ideas and connections are made. Then the students take what they have learned and write a thesis statement that responds to the focus question that they were given at the beginning of the inquiry. With their thesis in hand, they get ready write.

*Outline and write.* In step four of the philosophical inquiry process the students take their thesis statements and outline their thinking. They articulate assumptions embedded in the topic, and use examples, counter-examples, and reasons to support their claims. By this stage of the inquiry many students are ready to commit their ideas to paper, but as the student below points out, they are also aware that their thinking has potential for further development.

This investigation into myself has started off with me saying, “I don’t know who I really am.” But now my understanding has evolved to a point where I believe that I may understand my self-concept. Well, just enough to write this essay about it. After I went through deep self-thinking and tons of interviews, I have come up with the things that make up my self-concept. (9th grader)

In step five, the students engage in the writing process. They write, read each other’s work, ask new questions, re-write, share drafts with me, I ask questions, and at the end of the process each student in ethnic studies produces a written identity narrative.

*Present.* In step six of the philosophical inquiry process, each student is invited to read their identity narrative out loud in our community of inquiry. The idea of intellectual safety<sup>4</sup> has been previously established, and the students listen with empathy. When the reader is finished, students give their support by making comments and asking meaningful questions. One of my students shares about this experience.

I was asked [by one of my classmates] if I did anything based on my home-culture and I said no. This person then asked me where my family emigrated from and I said that I have no idea. Well, this example may not have told much, but for me it seemed really weird to answer all



TOOLBOX ■ MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY/CREATIVE COMMONS

these questions without even knowing the answer and I believe that if I found out maybe I could try doing things based on my home-culture. (10th grader)

At this stage of the inquiry the students continue to engage in their learning as they listen, question, and think out loud with one another. They express deep emotions, make connections with their peers, and describe a change in the way they see the world. Their writings are memorialized as teaching texts that communicate with others the outcomes of each and everyone one of their personal inquiries.

*Reflect.* In the last step of the philosophical inquiry process the students reflect on their experience. They write about what worked well, and what they would want to change about their next philosophical inquiry experience. They also have some time to reflect on the topic, each step of the process, and their learning in general. One student wrote,

It is definitely an interesting class . . . the idea of identity and self-concept. . . . These concepts are actually proving to be meaningful in my life, because they are basically what I have been living by, without ever realizing it until now. My race/ethnicity, my values of diversity, and being a local boy in Hawaii have shaped my self-concept. In turn my self-concept has shaped my life. (12th grader)

In addition to having a meaningful learning experience in class, where, as one student put it, “we got to really think about things that I have always wondered about,” many of the students were compelled to use what they learned to make positive changes in their lives outside of school.

[T]his lesson in ethnic studies [the seven-part philosophical inquiry process] has really made me step back, look at my life and realize who I truly am and not be ashamed of that. I have learned not to be someone I’m not, and take pride in where I’m from. I also learned to be aware of other peoples’ self-concept and not be so judgmental of other people because I do not know what has happened in their life that made them the way they are today. I will use what I have learned here to maybe help my friends figure out their self concepts and maybe this would end a lot of problems we have. I will also try and go out . . . to better my community and my state to make Hawai’i a true paradise. (12th grader)

To this student, and many more, the philosophical inquiry process helped to make his ethnic studies class a transformative experience.

The seven steps of the philosophical inquiry process are in no way linear. They can be repeated, and rearranged if need be, throughout the inquiry. It is not a prescriptive practice. In-line with the philosopher’s pedagogy, teachers must use their judgment and make this learning activity fit the needs of their particular teaching contexts and students. The most important take away is that the philosophical inquiry process is a useful classroom strategy for making philosophy “a deliberately conducted practice”<sup>5</sup> in a wide range of subject areas across the social studies spectrum. It engages both students and teachers, and helps them make connections between the content they are studying and what matters to them in their lives.

### Notes

- 1 A philosopher’s pedagogy requires educators to make six interconnected commitments: (1) live an examined life, (2) see education as a shared activity between teacher and student, (3) re-conceptualize content of the discipline as the interconnection between classroom participants’ beliefs and experiences and the subject matter being taught, (4) view philosophy as the general theory of education, (5) make philosophy a living classroom practice, and (6) challenge contemporary measures for classroom assessment. Amber S. Makaiau and Chad Miller, “The Philosopher’s Pedagogy,” *Educational Perspectives* 44 (2012): 8–19.
- 2 The Good Thinker’s Tool Kit consists of seven philosophical reflection tools to help students think about thinking, particularly their own. They are: W—what do you mean by that? R—what are the reasons? A—what is being assumed? Or what can I assume? I—can I infer \_\_\_ from \_\_\_? Or where are there inferences being made? T—is what is being said true and what does it imply if it is true? E—are there any examples to prove what is being said? C—are there any counter-examples to disprove what is being said? Thomas Jackson, *The Art and Craft of Gently Socratic Inquiry* (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2001).
- 3 Barney, G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory; Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Chicago, IL: Aldine, 1967).
- 4 Jackson, *The Art and Craft of Gently Socratic Inquiry*.
- 5 John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1916), 332.

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# Discovering Ethics through Virtual Reality: SciEthics Interactive Project

Melissa Henry

## Introduction

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Virtual reality has become a pervasive part of the daily lives of today's youth; they often find themselves immersed in videogames, online worlds, and social media. Questions inevitably arise for educators and researchers, therefore, about whether virtual reality could also become a useful pedagogical tool. Educators are already using online learning software, such as Blackboard and Moodle to enhance learning activities. However, 3-D environments may be able to offer students something more—the ability to walk, talk, and create in a new community of learners. Students can immerse themselves into these learning communities at any time of day and with other students from all over the world. Virtual worlds make attractive platforms for augmenting the learning process. The goal of this article is twofold; first, to illustrate the possible benefits of virtual worlds for the education process, in particular, the ability to use a virtual environment to teach ethics. The other goal is to provide a preliminary resource for those who may have an interest in pursuing similar objectives in the future.

## Background

Virtual worlds have already been in use in K-12 and higher education to explore ecology (Hickey, Ingram-Goble, and Jameson 2009; Wrzeseien and Raya 2010), chemistry (Lang and Bradley 2009), and medical science (Beard, Kumanan, Morra, and Keelan 2009), and yet no use of virtual worlds to teach ethics in higher education has been reported (Houser et al. 2011). The SciEthics Interactive Project<sup>1</sup> is the only tool thus far that presents students with authentic ethical issues in science and engineering classes at a university level.

In the real world, students are frequently presented with opportunities to engage in dishonest academic behavior, and this temptation may only increase as they enter the workforce. Today's "millennial" students are increasingly blasé about plagiarism and this can lead to other questionable activities as they embark on research careers (McCabe 2005). The federal Office of Research Integrity includes plagiarism amongst the most egregious forms of research misconduct. What the Office of Research Integrity labels "severe misconduct" also includes falsification of data and fabrication of results (Titus 2010; Steneck 2004). The scientific community has given a significant amount of time and attention to the problem of research misconduct, but the problem continues. In fact, the reported instances of research misconduct are on the rise; thus there is a need to intercede earlier in the education process (NSF 2009).

SciEthics Interactive is an National Science Foundation (NSF)-funded project (NSF award #0932712) aimed at raising awareness of the importance of ethics in the doing of science,



and is intended to provide students with ethically ambiguous scenarios which, according to social science researchers like Helton-Fauth (2003), are most likely to elicit the most genuine responses. Genuine responses are most likely to elicit further reflection on one's choices. Opportunities for ethical reflection were created in the virtual world by building activity modules which asked students to carry out research-based assignments which culminated in ethical scenarios where no clear answer was present. This project was intended to heighten the students' moral awareness which in turn allows them to move through the four necessary components of ethical decision making: problem-seeing, formulating judgments, motivation, and ethical action. These four components have been deemed essential to developing the desire to do the right thing and fostering professional integrity, according to much social science research (Helton-Fauth 2003; Rest 1979). This research has led to several further studies, including the SciEthics Interactive Project.

The SciEthics Interactive Project has been designed to be incorporated into science and engineering courses. The goal is to enable students to both develop and model ethical behavior and further the goal of creating a future of moral scientific researchers. The SciEthics Interactive activities are aimed at advanced college-level science or engineering courses, although it is feasible to produce virtual worlds that are geared to other age and education levels. The beta-test of the project included several directives for both instructors and students that could be remodeled at a later date based on feedback and the education level of future users.

SciEthics Interactive students and their instructors are provided with detailed instruction pamphlets that inform them of login procedures, background information, a task sheet, and instructions on how to complete the assignment. In order to aid in classroom discussion, the instructor is also provided with a faculty handbook and an "ethics primer" which discusses the connections between science and ethics and gives the instructor with little exposure to the language of ethics some expertise in the subject. The SciEthics Interactive activities are designed to take students 3–5 hours to complete outside of class. The web-based design allows students

## VIRTUAL REALITY (CONTINUED)

to work solo or in groups without having to adapt the learning goals.

The first module to be developed by the SciEthics Interactive team is called TransGen Island. TransGen Island introduces students to a scenario where they must make a recommendation about whether genetically-modified salmon is safe for human consumption. When students are introduced to the TransGen Island simulation, they first find themselves in an Orientation Area where they become familiar with their avatar (their virtual-world self) and learn to navigate in the virtual world. TransGen Island assigns the students one of three different roles in the virtual world (research scientist, activist, or government regulations agent). Upon receiving their assignment, the students then move to the Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) museum where they learn the history of genetically modified fish. Next, the students begin their activity in earnest by collecting the supplies for their assigned roles; they perform data collection, explore the island, and take photographs. The student must decide on a recommendation after consideration of whether enough data has been collected and while facing pressure from a superior to eliminate some of the more errant data points. The students are provided with a path that they must take in order to complete the objectives; however, there are several optional areas for students to explore if they wish to enhance their virtual world experience.

As the students complete their science activities, they are directed down a path which poses a series of ethical questions, and following these questions they take an exit survey. Lastly, the students complete a final report that is returned to the course instructor written from the perspective of the role to which the student was assigned. The report contains data and evidence that the students collected on TransGen Island, and they are asked to make recommendations as to whether the fish grown at TransGen—genetically-modified salmon—should be approved for human consumption.

### Student Reactions

The initial SciEthics Interactive study took three years to complete and concluded in an initial beta-test involving 53 students from four different courses at three different institutions in the spring 2012. The students had varied reactions to the use of a virtual world in the classroom, as well as to the issues that were brought up within the simulation.

A virtual environment was new to most of the students and proved to be frustrating to some students. One student reported: “I couldn’t get the avatar to work correctly and the experience was not a good one.” Another student had similar difficulties, but still found the new environment valuable, noting: “I believe the SciEthics definitely pushed me outside of my comfort zone, which is something that I should expect when I am involved in higher education.” This statement suggests that the learning curve for

the virtual world is a wide one, and that students may benefit from having more time at the beginning of the simulation to work with the avatar and explore TransGen Island.

Students also reacted differently to the open-ended structure of the simulation. Since the activity was open-ended, the students had options within the simulation; some chose to fully explore the optional areas while others stayed on a more linear path. The survey data showed that both the linear and the optional paths were educationally worthwhile to the students. The students reported general satisfaction with the simulation and their experiences with it.

The students, while aware of both the possible benefits and disadvantages of GMOs, showed increased concern over the ethical standards employed in the virtual experiment. One typical student reported: “Whether the local media finds out the issues that are happening at Transgen or not, we need to voice our opinion to the authorities regarding the environment that those animals are living in, and the consequences of GMO foods.” The students also showed an increased understanding of the science field and the rigorous ethical standards that the science field has been working hard to employ. One student wrote: “Some may outwardly assume that science is a black and white field, however it is clear a strong moral character is essential to become an ideal scientist.”

This simulation has the added benefit of being able to be done individually or in groups without having to change the learning objectives. Students worked individually at this stage of the research, but it has been suggested by both the students and instructors that working in groups may be preferable in the future. If the instructors encourage the students to work in groups, the discussions that stem from the projects can stimulate both science and ethics conversations outside of the classroom.

Along with students, instructors also entered the virtual environment, but to varying degrees. The module and its accompanying handbooks are set up to allow instructors to choose their level of desired immersion in the virtual world. It is recognized that gaining a level of ease within the virtual



## VIRTUAL REALITY (CONTINUED)

world can be time-consuming. The instructors who beta-tested the program made themselves available to answer questions and facilitate student activity within the virtual world. The instructors confirmed that the simulation was meaningful and informative. All three instructors asserted that the students got more from the experience than self-reports may have indicated.

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### Conclusion

The SciEthics Interactive project highlights the need for particular types of ethics education within the scientific field. This project is a useful and efficient tool to meet those needs. The project provides an open-ended experimental activity where students can explore the ethics of research. The students and instructors can utilize the virtual world as an instrument to expedite a conversation about the issues raised during the simulation. This conversation allows students to draw on their own experiences and explore their future professional life. Students and faculty can benefit together through the use of the TransGen Island simulation while still receiving the level of content expected in a science classroom, and the students will continue to reap the benefits of this project in their professional fields. The project files and documents are publically accessible on the internet at [www.sciethicsinteractive.com](http://www.sciethicsinteractive.com) for those interested in a deeper understanding of the SciEthics Interactive project.

### Note

1. This research was supported by the National Science Foundation EESE Program award no. 0932712. This project was brought to fruition through the efforts of the research team: Dr. Seth Kahn, Dr. Larysa Nadolny, Dr. Matthew Pierlott, Dr. Carolyn Sealton, and Dr. Joan Woolfrey (all of whom, at the time of the study were West Chester University faculty; Dr. Nadolny is now at Iowa State and Dr. Sealton is employed at Princeton); as well as by the NSF-funded G.A. Mellissa Henry.

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## PLATO (PHILOSOPHY LEARNING AND TEACHING ORGANIZATION) 2013-2014 AWARDS TO K-12 PHILOSOPHY TEACHERS

**Deadline:** January 31, 2014

**Summary:**

PLATO is pleased to establish these three awards, which will be given annually to K–12 classroom teachers in the U.S. for excellence in teaching philosophy in elementary, middle or high school:

- (1) Matthews Award for Elementary School Teachers
- (2) Lipman-Sharp Award for Middle School Teachers
- (3) Knisely Award for High School Teachers

**Frequency:** Every year

**Background:**

PLATO invites nominations for the 2013–2014 competition. The aim of the prize is to recognize and reward three teachers for excellence in introducing students to philosophy in elementary, middle and high school.

**Award:**

Each teacher will receive an award of \$1,000, a one-year membership in PLATO, and an invitation to speak at the next PLATO Conference.

**Eligibility and Criteria:**

Eligible candidates are U.S. classroom teachers at the primary and secondary levels who regularly offer philosophy classes or philosophy sessions as part of teaching other classroom subjects.

**Nomination procedure:** The nomination procedure consists of the following:

- (1) A letter of nomination that describes the candidate for the award and the importance of his or her contribution to the instructional environment. Self-nominations will be accepted.
- (2) A statement from the candidate of his or her philosophy about teaching philosophy at the pre-college level (1 page).
- (3) A description of a philosophy session or sessions taught by the teacher, as follows:
  - (A) A written description of the session or sessions, including the techniques used; **OR**
  - (B) A sample syllabus or syllabi or lesson plan(s) (no more than 5); **OR**
  - (C) A video of a K–12 philosophy session that the teacher organized and led.
- (4) A reflection about the session or sessions described in response to (3) above (no more than 1 page).

Please submit all materials electronically to [info@plato-philosophy.org](mailto:info@plato-philosophy.org)

The Award Selection Committee may, at its discretion, solicit additional information.

Nominations, with all supporting materials, are due **January 31, 2014**

Questions may be directed to [info@plato-philosophy.org](mailto:info@plato-philosophy.org)



# PLATO

PHILOSOPHY LEARNING AND TEACHING ORGANIZATION

A national organization that advocates and supports introducing philosophy to pre-college students

## PLATO (PHILOSOPHY LEARNING AND TEACHING ORGANIZATION)

### ANNUAL HIGH SCHOOL PHILOSOPHY ESSAY CONTEST

**Deadline:** January 31, 2014

**Summary:**

The PLATO High School Essay Contest awards will be given to the best philosophical essays written by high school students, in response to the year's contest essay question. In addition to first, second and third place prizes, there will be two honorable mention awards.

**Awards:**

*First place*—\$250

*Second place*—\$150

*Third place*—\$100

Winners will be announced by April 1. The first place prize will be awarded at an annual ceremony honoring achievement in K–12 philosophy, held at the spring American Philosophical Association's Pacific Division meeting. All winning essays will be published in PLATO's journal *Questions: Philosophy for Young People*.

**2013–2014 Contest Essay Question:**

***Do human beings have free will?*** Please give the best reasons that you can in defense of your position, taking pains to explore possible objections to your view and to explain how you would reply to those objections. In your answer, make sure to explain how you define the term 'free will.' Also, if you hold that people lack free will, please explain how they can be held responsible for their actions.

Students may, but need not, consult outside readings.

**Contest Details:**

***Eligibility:*** All high school students in the U.S. are eligible to enter.

***Submission Process:*** Entries—including a one-paragraph bio and a cover sheet with your name, contact information (phone and email), grade, and school (none of this information should appear on the essay itself)—should be emailed to: [info@plato-philosophy.org](mailto:info@plato-philosophy.org).

***Essay length:*** 2,000 words maximum

***Judging:*** The papers will be read and judged by a panel of high school philosophy teachers and philosophy professors.

**Background:**

The PLATO Essay Contest is run in conjunction with the international essay contest sponsored by the *International Philosophy Olympiad* (IPO), [http://www.philosophy-olympiad.org/?page\\_id=72](http://www.philosophy-olympiad.org/?page_id=72), which requires that essays be written in a language other than the student's original language. The PLATO Essay Contest's annual question is related to the topic of the previous year's IPO competition, which in 2012–2013 was on Kierkegaard. For more information about the IPO, please email Joseph Murphy at [murphj@d-e.org](mailto:murphj@d-e.org).

For more information or questions about the PLATO High School Essay Contest, please email:  
[info@plato-philosophy.org](mailto:info@plato-philosophy.org)

## Assistance, Intent, and Offense

“A woman complains of a male colleague’s guiding her by the elbow out of the board room, or a wheelchair-bound person expresses indignation about not being addressed directly, while matters relevant to him are referred to his able-bodied companion. The response frequently heard to such complaints is, ‘Oh, he didn’t mean anything by it.’ Such a response implies that the anger and moral judgment of the woman or the wheelchair-bound person are misplaced, that they do not have the right to complain of or condemn another person’s behavior if that person intends to be courteous and respectful.”

— Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, page 150.

### Some questions to consider:

If someone unintentionally offends is she in the wrong?

How do you respond when people find your judgment “misplaced”?

Who can best tell if an action is offensive?

When is “help” not help?



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