



NEWSLETTER

on Teaching Philosophy

F A L L 1 9 8 6 I S S U E

COMMITTEE ON THE TEACHING OF PHILOSOPHY

The Committee is charged with assessing and needs in the teaching of philosophy and making recommendations for action by the Board. It sponsors sessions on the teaching of philosophy at Divisional meetings, responds to requests from members and others regarding teaching, and undertakes programs for the improvement of teaching. At the direction of the Board, it prepares statements for Board approval regarding instruction in philosophy (for the most recent of which was published in Proceedings and Addresses, Volume 50, Number 4 (March, 1977), pp. 301-313. The Chair of the Committee on Pre-College Instruction in Philosophy, the editor of the APA Teaching Newsletter, and the presiding officer of the Western Conference on the Teaching of Philosophy are members ex officio of the Com

CHAIR:

Steven Cahn
The Graduate School and University Center,
CUNY

In response to some of the difficulties experienced previously in putting the Newsletter out, most of which have had to do with insufficient publishable material being submitted to the Newsletter, I am instituting some changes in the Newsletter.

Eugene Kelly (New York Institute of Technology, Central Islip Campus 66325, 211 Carleton Avenue, Central Islip, NY 11722), Philip Pecorino, Queensborough Community College, Social Science Department, Bayside, NY 11364 and Neil Rossman (LaGuardia Community College, Philosophy Department, 31-10 Thomson Avenue, Long Island City, NY 11101) will be serving as an editorial committee for the Newsletter. They are helping both to solicit and review material for the Newsletter and to make editorial suggestions. If readers wish, they may correspond directly with any of them concerning the Newsletter.

The Newsletter will be published three times yearly, with two of the three issues devoted to particular topics (announced in advance along with deadlines for submissions of articles for those issues) and one of the three being an "open" issue.

tor may delight in spending fifteen weeks studying Descartes' Meditations, but for the uninitiated the experience may become excruciating.

A third format offers a systematic study of the history of philosophy. Such a course emphasizes historical perspective, and students are apt to be excited by the array of great books and ideas. But beginners may not appreciate that philosophy is an on-going enterprise and that its practitioners do not primarily pore over ancient texts but read contemporary journals and analyze contemporary issues. Philosophy, after all, is not just the history of philosophy.

A fourth format uses a single-authored textbook written with a student audience in mind. The obvious difficulty, however, is that, unlike physics or chemistry, philosophy does not consist of a body of accepted truths, and one author can hardly do justice to all competing viewpoints. Why should students be reading a textbook when they could be reading original materials? Granted, philosophy may be difficult to understand, and a textbook can ease the strain, but philosophical disagreement is best grasped by confronting various authors with diverse styles and opinions, not by reading homogenized textbooks. And one designed to avoid giving the impression of uniformity is apt to confuse students, leading them to wonder why the author appears indecisive.

In the face of these difficulties inherent in any introductory course, how should a teacher proceed? The key is to be aware of the pitfalls inherent in whichever approach is chosen.

If instructors prefer a problem-oriented format, they should recognize the need to supply historical perspective and links between articles. Students can be reminded that the great philosophers wrote books

Whichever format is chosen, a teacher should explain the available options and indicate the reasons behind a curricular decision. Students will then be less likely to identify philosophy with one particular approach. And this insight itself will provide increased understanding of the complex subject to which they are being introduced.

PRE-COLLEGE INSTRUCTION IN PHILOSOPHY

William J. Rapaport

State University of New York at Buffalo

In 1984, the APA Committee on Pre-College Instruction in Philosophy published the first issue of its Newsletter (dated Spring/Summer 1984), which was sent to some 500 teachers of philosophy in elementary and secondary schools across the country. (A limited number of back issues of that Newsletter are available from me at the address below.) Most of the articles were also reprinted in the Proceedings and Addresses of the APA (Vol. 57, Number 5, May 1984). The Committee has decided to merge its Newsletter with the Newsletter on Teaching Philosophy. One of the main reasons for this is that we felt that the articles that would ordinarily have appeared in separate newsletters would be of interest to teachers of philosophy at all levels.

Articles on the teaching of philosophy in elementary and secondary schools to be considered for publication in this section of the Newsletter on Teaching Philosophy should be sent to William Rapaport, Department of Computer Science, SUNY/Buffalo, Buffalo, NY 14260, with a copy to Tziporah Kasachkoff, Editor. Articles should be typed, double-spaced, with wide margins and in duplicate.

Critical Thinking

The Board of Officers of the APA recently

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In the face of these difficulties inherent in any introductory course, how should a teacher proceed? The key is to be aware of the pitfalls inherent in whichever approach is chosen.

If instructors prefer a problem-oriented format, they should recognize the need to supply historical perspective and links between articles. Students can be reminded that the great philosophers wrote books, not five-page excerpts, and can also be told something about the books from which the selections are chosen.

If instructors prefer a classics format, they should recognize the need to make clear that philosophical inquiry did not cease centuries ago, that philosophers continue to work on issues that concerned Leibniz or Hume, that we read these authors not to venerate them but to help ourselves think more clearly about issues facing us today. Students also need to be reminded that the authors chosen lived at different historical times and were influenced by them.

If instructors prefer a historical format, students should be encouraged to approach the material with a critical attitude. And they need to be alerted to contemporary discussions of traditional issues as found in recent books and journals.

If instructors choose a single-authored textbook, students ought to be reminded of the availability of perspectives other than that provided by one author. And an attempt should be made to stress the importance of historical writings in helping us think about today's problems.

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Critical Thinking

The Board of Officers of the APA recently adopted the following statement about the role of philosophers in critical thinking:

The Board of Officers of the American Philosophical Association notes that teachers and educational authorities across the country have become increasingly interested in critical thinking as an educational objective. Since philosophy provides resources essential both for the development of the techniques and for education in the disciplines and habits of mind necessary to critical thinking, it is important that professional philosophers be consulted in the development of curricula and tests in critical thinking. The American Philosophical Association urges its members to participate in such endeavors and offers to help boards of education and testing agencies identify philosophy departments, graduate programs in philosophy, and individual philosophers who can assist them in framing new tests and organizing new curricula in the area.

A directory of consultants on informal logic and critical thinking in the United States and Canada has been prepared by this Committee and was published in the APA Departmental Handbook in August 1986. Copies of this booklet are available to APA members for \$8.00 per copy; for non-members \$10.00 per copy.

Announcements and Other Periodicals of Interest to Our Readers

The National Endowment for the Humanities sponsors Summer Seminars for Secondary School Teachers. If you are interested in offering or participating in such a seminar, or wish to receive further information, please write to: Summer Seminars for Secondary School Teachers, Division of Fellowships and Seminars, NEH, 1100 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20506, or contact Steve Tigner at NEH: 202/786-0463.

Several readers of the first issue of the Newsletter on Pre-College Instruction in Philosophy have expressed an interest in the Perry scheme of intellectual and emotional development that was discussed in my article, "Critical Thinking and Cognitive Development". The "Perry Network" is formally known as the Institute for Studies in Educational Mathematics (ISEM) and was founded to explore ideas related to developmental teaching in mathematics. In contrast to organizations whose interpretation of "mathematics education" is "teaching the facts and skills of mathematics better", ISEM's emphasis is on how students' mathematical experience can enrich their development, in a psychological sense. Because the principle developmental metaphor ISEM members have used has been that of William Perry, ISEM has included as one of its activities the coordination of the "Perry Network" of researchers and practitioners in the fields of

ing critical thinking in instruction. These two elements are (1) defining critical thinking and (2) evaluating (including testing for) critical thinking ability. One of the results of their attempt to define critical thinking is an outline of suggested critical thinking goals for a school system. One result of their interest in evaluation is a list of available critical thinking tests. The lists of proposed goals and of existing tests can serve as a starting point for further investigation by a school system interested in the incorporation of critical thinking in its instructional program. For further information, contact Professor Robert H. Ennis, Illinois Critical Thinking Project, Department of Educational Policy Studies, University of Illinois, 1310 S. 6th Street, Champaign, Illinois 61820.

Other organizations and periodicals of interest are:

- (1) Philosophy for Children Newsletter and Thinking, both available from the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children, Montclair State College, Upper Montclair, New Jersey 07043.
- (2) The Journal of Pre-College Philosophy, unfortunately, is no longer published, but back issues are available from the National Council for Critical Analysis, P.O. Box 137, Port Jefferson, New York 11777.
- (3) Teaching Philosophy, a highly respected quarterly available from the Philosophy Documentation Center, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio 43403.
- (4) The American Association of Philosophy Teachers publishes a newsletter and holds conferences that are of interest to teachers of philosophy at all levels. Information on mem-

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The Moral Education Forum is a quarterly journal containing articles, interviews, book reviews, and descriptions of new research and experimental programs that have a strong value dimension. Each Spring issue features a comprehensive bibliography of new books, periodicals, and special journal issues. Each Fall issue features an annotated bibliography of new doctoral dissertations in psychology, philosophy, or education that deal with moral development theory and practice. Volume 8, No. 2 (Summer 1983) was on moral education in elementary schools. For information on subscriptions and back issues, contact Professor Lisa Kuhmerker, Moral Education Forum, 200 E. 64th St., 3C, New York, New York 10021.

For a number of years, the Illinois Critical Thinking Project has been focused on two basic elements in the process of incorporat-

State College, Upper Montclair, New Jersey 07043.

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- (4) The American Association of Philosophy Teachers publishes a newsletter and holds conferences that are of interest to teachers of philosophy at all levels. Information on membership can be obtained from Professor Frans van der Bogert, Department of Philosophy and Religion, Appalachian State University, Boone, North Carolina 28608.
- (5) Informal Logic, a new journal appearing three times a year, is the successor to the Informal Logic Newsletter. Information is available from Peter F. Wilkinson, Managing Editor, Informal Logic, Department of Philosophy, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, N9B 3P4, Canada.
- (6) The Association for Informal Logic and Critical Thinking (AILACT). For information, contact David Hitchcock, Department of Philosophy, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario L8S 4K1, Canada.

Readers who know of other sources of information should contact me, so that these sources can be included in future issues.