



Teaching Philosophy

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Teaching Critical Thinking Virtues and Vices: The Case for *Twelve Angry Men*

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Abstract: In the film and play *Twelve Angry Men*, Juror 8 confronts the prejudices and poor reasoning of his fellow jurors, exhibiting an unwavering capacity not just to formulate and challenge arguments, but to be open-minded, stay calm, tolerate uncertainty, and negotiate in the face of considerable group pressures. In a perceptive and detailed portrayal of a group deliberation a 'wheel of virtue' is presented by the characters of *Twelve Angry Men* that allows for critical thinking virtues and vices to be analysed in context. This article makes the case for (1) the film being an exceptional teaching resource, and (2), drawing primarily on the ideas of Martha Nussbaum concerning contextualised detail, emotional engagement, and aesthetic distance, its educational value being intimately related to its being a work of fiction.

I. Introduction

From a philosophy teacher's perspective, the film and play *Twelve Angry Men* is unusual. While it is of course common to use scenes, storylines or characters from works of fiction to exemplify philosophical ideas (especially ideas from ethics, see Nussbaum 1990; Carroll 2002), rarely does a complete work of fiction provide the basis for an analysis of a sub-discipline of philosophy. In the field of critical thinking *Twelve Angry Men* has this potential. The aim of this article is to explain and justify this claim, and then to make a broader argument for the importance of fictional narratives for the teaching of critical thinking.

Twelve Angry Men was originally written as a TV play by Reginald Rose in 1954, and Sydney Lumet's film version was released in 1957. It was critically acclaimed at the time, continues to be so, and there have been numerous stage adaptations (including variations with female cast members: *Twelve Angry Women*, *Twelve Angry Men & Women*). Almost the entire ninety minutes of the film is set in a jury room in a

Are University Students Who Are Taking Philosophy Courses Familiar with the Basic Tools for Argument?

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Abstract: Philosophy courses help students develop logical reasoning and argument skills or so it is widely assumed. To test if this is actually the case, we examined university students' familiarity with the basic tools for argument. Based on our findings students who have prior experience with philosophy are more familiar with the basic tools for argument compared to philosophically inexperienced students. Moreover, students get more familiar with the basic tools for argument as their level of engagement with philosophy increases, and they get significantly better at evaluating arguments when they reach the graduate level. However, our findings also suggest that the majority of students in philosophy classrooms haven't developed fluency in (at least some) basic argument-related concepts and skills. To remedy this, we argue that philosophy instructors need to rethink (a) the place that the teaching of argument has in philosophy courses, and (b) the way they teach students about argument.

1. Introduction

University students are often told that by taking philosophy courses, and even more so by studying *philosophy*, they will develop logical reasoning and argument skills. However, do philosophy courses (and the philosophy professors who teach them) actually deliver on that promise?

One way to address this question would be from the philosopher's armchair. For example, it could be argued that since philosophy professors are experts on logical reasoning and argumentation and have practiced these skills throughout their careers, by taking philosophy courses (and learning from the best) university students will eventually develop these skills themselves. However, even if we assume that all philosophy professors are indeed experts on logical reasoning and

Classification of Strategies for Dealing with Student Relativism and the Epistemic Conceptual Change Strategy

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Abstract: Student relativism is a widespread phenomenon in introductory philosophy courses. It is a pressing issue for teachers because it seems to undermine the very purpose of philosophy. Since the 1980s there is a debate about how to understand and how to deal with student relativism. However, there is as yet no comprehensive presentation of the debate. The first aim of the article is to offer a classification of the strategies for dealing with student relativism and a presentation and short assessment of the main strategies from the debate. The second aim is to present a new strategy based on the theory of conceptual change and drawing on the results from empirical research in developmental psychology on epistemic cognition. I call it the epistemic conceptual change strategy.

As teachers of philosophy we are often confronted in introductory classes with statements from students like the following: “This is my opinion, and everyone may have his or her opinion,” “This is true for you, but it does not have to be true for me,” “There is no true or false,” “We cannot know what is true” and “Who’s to say?” This is called “student relativism” (SR).¹ The name appears in the literature possibly for the first time in Michael Goldman (1981: 11). As the students’ statements suggest, SR seems to encompass quite different kinds of relativism, subjectivism, and skepticism about truth, knowledge, meaning or morality. SR is perceived as a pressing issue by teachers because it seems to undermine the very purpose of philosophy. If there is no truth there is no point in trying to attain it through reasoning and rational discussion.

The phenomenon appears in the USA at least since the 1950s.² Charles L. Reid (1970) reports of fifteen years of experience with “popular subjectivism and relativism” in college teaching. The phenom-

Philosophy in Prisons: Intellectual Virtue and the Community of Inquiry

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Abstract: This paper describes a pilot study devoted to developing the teaching of philosophy within prison education in Scotland. The study paired the CoPI (community of philosophical inquiry) approach to learning and teaching with a set of educational resources created around a high-profile MOOC (massive open online course) that introduced students to core topics in philosophy. The primary goal of the study was to determine the extent to which the teaching of philosophy in prisons in this specific manner could enhance the intellectual virtues, and thereby the intellectual character, of the students. The results that were collected suggested that the project generated significant success on this front. In addition, the study had a further consequence, which had not been anticipated, in that it also helped the students to develop important personal and interpersonal skills, and thereby also enhanced their character more generally.

1. Background and Motivation for the Project

In 2013, the Eidyn research centre at the University of Edinburgh launched its first massive open online course—or ‘MOOC’—on the Coursera platform.¹ The course was entitled ‘Introduction to Philosophy’, and offered an accessible overview of a range of philosophical topics, taking in most of the core areas of philosophy, including epistemology, ethics, philosophy of mind, metaphysics, and philosophy of science.² The MOOC was a huge success. In its first run it had over 100,000 enrolments worldwide, and it has since comfortably attracted well over one million enrolments. Moreover, the demographic profile of these students has been highly diverse, not just geographically but also in terms of gender and age, with an unusually high participation rate for a MOOC (there have been thus far been well over a million posts to the discussion boards associated with this course). The course

Teaching Moral Philosophy through Literature Circles

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Abstract: How do you effectively teach moral philosophy to classes of twenty to thirty-five students who come from diverse national, ethnic, religious, linguistic, and educational backgrounds, and most of whom have little or no interest in philosophy? In seeking ways to create a course that is relevant, practical, and engaging, I hit upon the idea of adapting literature circles to the study of moral philosophies. In this paper, I contextualize the need for an approach that promotes individual student responsibility within a teamwork context, introduce the appropriateness and adaptability of the literature circles concept in a philosophy classroom, and uncover the theoretical structure underneath the strategy in order to make it more adaptable to other classrooms and courses.

1. Introduction

Philosophy teachers are well aware that university students often come into required philosophy courses with fear and trembling. Complaints about irrelevance and difficulty are common, and a substantial proportion of undergraduates appear to lack what their professors consider fundamental skills in reading, writing, and reasoning. These are basic challenges that nearly every undergraduate philosophy teacher faces. When students come from diverse backgrounds, and especially when they speak English as a second (or third or fourth) language, these challenges are multiplied.

I teach a required moral philosophy course and various philosophy electives at a small liberal arts university in Lithuania that draws students from more than forty different countries, mostly in the post-Soviet regions of Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The students come from educational backgrounds that generally promote rote memorization (and even cheating) rather than comprehension or application; this means that they are used to recalling information and parroting their

“The Dawn of Wonder”: An Italian Experience of Teaching Philosophy to Children

NICOLA ZIPPEL

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Abstract: “The Dawn of Wonder” is a philosophical laboratory that the author, a high school philosophy teacher, has for many years led in several elementary schools in Rome. The paper aims at presenting the main characteristics of such experience of teaching philosophy to children, which doesn’t adopt the methodology of Philosophy for Children, but develops an original approach based on a historical narration of ideas and thinkers coming from both Western and Eastern traditions. According to this perspective, teaching philosophy to children means dealing with theoretical issues by keeping them in their historical and geographical context. In this way, a child who meets philosophy can reason on the basic problems of human understanding without losing sight of their geo-historical origins.

This sense of wonder is the mark of philosopher. Philosophy indeed has no other origin.—Plato, Theaetetus 155d

1. Introduction

At the beginning of the 2000s, right after graduating with a dissertation on Edmund Husserl, I attended the presentation of a book written by Giuseppe Ferraro, a professor who taught philosophy at University of Naples (Ferraro 2000). In the book, he recounted his experience of teaching philosophy to children of elementary school. I bought the book and read it several times, searching for an idea that I could carry out in some elementary schools in Rome. I had taught basketball to children for almost ten years and wanted to repeat the experience of teaching something to children in the field of philosophy. When I say “teaching something,” I mean “something” that not only I know well, but I really love, like basketball or philosophy. I think it is impossible to transmit anything but passion.