

# APA Newsletters

NEWSLETTER ON TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

Volume 11, Number 1

Fall 2011

**LETTER FROM THE EDITORS, TZIPORAH KASACHKOFF & EUGENE KELLY**

## ARTICLES

DAVID E. SCHRADER

“A Course in Social and Political Philosophy”

FELICIA NIMUE ACKERMAN

“Better Late than Hasty”

FELICIA NIMUE ACKERMAN

“What We Will Not Discuss in My Class”

MARK ZELCER

“Teaching Ethics in Tikrit: A Fieldnote”

MOTI MIZRAHI

“A Pedagogical Challenge in Teaching Arguments for the Existence of God”

## BOOK REVIEWS

John Mizzoni: *Ethics: The Basics*

REVIEWED BY MELISSA BERGERON

Hans Johann Glock: *What Is Analytic Philosophy?*

REVIEWED BY R. GREGORY TAYLOR

## BOOK RECEIVED

## ADDRESSES OF THE CONTRIBUTORS





---

---

## LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

---

---

Tziporah Kasachkoff, The Graduate Center, CUNY  
([tkasachkoff@yahoo.com](mailto:tkasachkoff@yahoo.com))

Eugene Kelly, New York Institute of Technology  
([ekelly@nyit.edu](mailto:ekelly@nyit.edu))

We welcome readers to the Fall 2011 edition of the *APA Newsletter on Teaching Philosophy*. Our present edition consists of one article, two short essays on pedagogical concerns, an account by a philosophy instructor of an unusual teaching experience while on reserve duty with the U.S. military, an article on teaching (a version of) the design argument for God's existence, and two book reviews.

Our first article, authored by David E. Schrader, is entitled "A Course in Social and Political Philosophy," and looks at the wide variety in which lower-level courses in social and political philosophy are taught in different institutions and by different instructors, and notes their differing aims, contents, and readings. Professor Schrader then details the course that he himself teaches, a course governed by two assumptions—warranted for the institution in which he himself teaches: that most of his students are not philosophy majors and will take few other philosophy courses, and that most are U.S. citizens. Given these assumptions, the aim of Professor Schrader's course is to help students understand themselves as U.S. citizens, an understanding that, he argues, involves knowing the social and political history of the U.S., and understanding how the immense size and diversity of our country's population has affected and continues to affect political/social discourse and events.

Professor Schrader sets out the rationale for devoting the first half of his course to the political writings of both John Locke (primarily Locke's *Second Treatise of Government*) and John Stuart Mill (primarily Mill's *On Liberty* but also his *Principles of Political Economy* and some parts of his *Utilitarianism*) along with an exploration of the key differences between the political ideas of Locke and Mill as these are found in the assigned readings. Professor Schrader also draws attention to the contents of the Declaration of Independence and focuses on what we can learn from a careful reading of that document. We believe that readers will find the assignment that Professor Schrader gives his students regarding the Declaration not only interesting but suggestive for their own classroom use.

The focus on Locke's *Second Treatise* naturally gives rise to the key issues of natural rights, the right to private property, and the proper function of government—all matters on which Mill's views differed quite radically from Locke's. From the course's early focus on the historical sources of our political

and social ideas, Professor Schrader's course then proceeds to examine the contemporary manifestations of these ideas and how the latter are to a large extent determined both by how populous and by how diverse our nation is. Here he introduces discussion of (what Mill called) the "tyranny of the majority" and the manipulation of political structures so as to serve the interests of particular groups—a discussion that informs the second half of his course and which uses Iris Young's *Inclusion and Democracy* as its primary reading.

This part of the course will encourage students to reflect both on the meaning of democratic government and on what, under such a government, responsible citizenship amounts to. Of especial interest here is Schrader's use of several states' congressional maps to bring home to students how political structures might be manipulated to serve particular interest groups' political agendas. Few courses on political and social philosophy combine, as Professor Schrader's does, a critical look at historical sources, an examination of contemporary political and social structures, and the need for students to draw normative and practical conclusions so as to come to terms with the political and social challenges that they themselves will inevitably encounter as United States citizens.

The next two items are two short essays, both authored by Felicia Nimue Ackerman, and entitled, respectively, "Better Late than Hasty" (first published in *The Providence Journal*, June 30, 2009) and "What We Will Not Discuss in My Class" (first published in *The Providence Journal*, September 29, 2009). In the first essay Professor Ackerman defends her policy to allow students (just for the asking) extra time to do their papers, without any request on her part for an explanation for the asked-for extension. While admitting that this policy is not always workable in practice, Professor Ackerman takes up what many will consider as typical problems with such a practice, and attempts to respond to them. In the second essay, Professor Ackerman gives her reasons for announcing to her students that whatever the topic of the course she is teaching, she and her students will never discuss their personal lives in class. She then rebuts various reasons that might be given against the policy she advocates. We suspect that many readers will have different views, and we invite discussion of Professor Ackerman's proposals (as of all the pedagogical suggestions that appear in our *Newsletter*).

Our next contribution is an account by Mark Zelcer of a course he taught while he was on reserve duty with the U.S. military in Iraq. Professor Zelcer describes the topics he taught, the readings he assigned, the papers he required, and the examinations he gave. He tells us of student reactions to some of the issues raised in class discussion and of his own sense of the "weirdness" of teaching philosophy in the unusual context in which he taught. Professor Zelcer shares with us what the students—all of them enlisted men and women in the U.S. military based in Iraq—found surprising in the way that the course was conducted, as well as what surprised him himself.

---

Our final contribution is by Moti Mizrahi and is entitled “A Pedagogical Challenge in Teaching Arguments for the Existence of God.” Responding to what he perceives as the difficulty of getting undergraduate students to be interested in studying and evaluating arguments for God’s existence, Professor Mizrahi describes what he himself does to engage their interest, which includes the showing of a Comedy Central show video clip in which an argument for God’s existence (made by Bill O’Reilly) is presented. Students are asked first to reconstruct the argument making clear its premises and conclusion, and then to evaluate it. These steps are done by students and then shared with the rest of the class. Factual premises of the argument are examined with an eye towards establishing them as true or false, reasonably believed or not.

Though the argument that is the focus of the exercise will be seen by students (perhaps even initially) to be neither sound nor valid, the author argues for the advantages of using even poor arguments as instruments to teach students the different ways in which an argument can fail to establish its conclusion. More generally, he lists what he takes to be the advantages of introducing students to arguments for God’s existence in the way described in the paper.

In the **Book Review** section we present reviews of two books, John Mizzoni’s *Ethics: the Basics*, which is reviewed by Melissa Bergeron, and Hans-Johann Glock’s *What Is Analytic Philosophy?* reviewed here by R. Gregory Taylor.

As always, we encourage our readers to write for our publication. We welcome papers that respond to, comment on, or take issue with any of the material that appears within our pages. (Guidelines for submission follow below.)

Additionally, we encourage readers to suggest themselves as reviewers of books and other materials that they have found especially good for classroom use. When writing a review of material for our *Newsletter*, please remember that our publication is devoted to matters of pedagogy and not to theoretical discussions of philosophical issues. (We will send specific review guidelines to all who suggest themselves as reviewers of material for our *Newsletter*.)

We have received the following from one of our readers and herewith put out a call for submissions to the our *Newsletter* whose focus is indicated by the author of the following:

The other day, I lectured my evening class on the problem of freedom and determinism; I took about 40 minutes for the topic and discussion. After we took a break, I asked the students to spend seven minutes explaining on paper the concept they had just learned. The results, as I found out the next day, were uniformly awful. Most of them did not understand the nature and the implications of the problem. Perhaps you could ask *Newsletter* readers (1) to identify some similar fundamental philosophical concept that they have experienced difficulty in conveying to students and (2) to develop a “sure-fire” technique for presenting it to beginning students in philosophy.

The following guidelines for submissions should be followed:

- The author’s name, the title of the paper, and full mailing address should appear on a *separate* sheet of paper. Nothing that identifies the author or his or her institution should appear within the body or within the footnotes/endnotes of the paper. The title of the paper should appear on the top of the paper itself.
- Both electronic and paper copies of papers are acceptable. In the case of paper copies, we would appreciate receiving four copies for our review purposes.

- Authors should adhere to the production guidelines that are available from the APA and that are available from the APA’s website.
- In the case of electronic copies, in writing your paper to disk, please do not use your word processor’s footnote or endnote function; all notes should be added manually at the end of the paper.

Contributions should be sent to:

Tziporah Kasachkoff, PhD Program in Philosophy, The City University Graduate School and University Center, 365 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10016

Or:

Eugene Kelly, Department of Social Science, New York Institute of Technology, Old Westbury, NY 11568

All articles submitted to the *Newsletter* are blind-reviewed by the members of the editorial committee. They are:

Tziporah Kasachkoff, The Graduate Center, The City University of New York  
([tkasachkoff@yahoo.com](mailto:tkasachkoff@yahoo.com)), co-editor

Eugene Kelly, New York Institute of Technology  
([ekelly@nyit.edu](mailto:ekelly@nyit.edu)), co-editor

David Martens University of the Witwatersrand  
([david.martens@gmail.com](mailto:david.martens@gmail.com))

Andrew Wengraf, Brooklyn College (ret.)  
([andrew.wengraf@gmail.com](mailto:andrew.wengraf@gmail.com))

Robert Basil Talisse, Vanderbilt University  
([robert.talisse@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:robert.talisse@vanderbilt.edu))

---

---

## ARTICLES

---

---

### ***A Course in Social and Political Philosophy***

**David E. Schrader**

*The American Philosophical Association*

Many colleges and universities offer a lower level course on Social and Political Philosophy. The specific content of these courses varies considerably from institution to institution, or more accurately, from professor to professor. The variation is anything but surprising, given the broad descriptions that are typical of courses in Social and Political Philosophy. As illustrations, I give the course descriptions from three quite different institutions, a large state university, a small private liberal arts college, and a large community college system:

University of Delaware, Philosophy 201, Social and Political Philosophy – “Classical and contemporary views on such problems as the proper scope and functions of government, on what a just distribution of wealth is, and on the extent of an individual’s rights, liberties and obligation to obey the law.”

Washington and Jefferson College, Philosophy 135, Social and Political Philosophy – “Classical and contemporary conceptions of the nature and aim of social and political communities with discussions of current social issues.”

Harris County [TX] Community College, Philosophy 2307, Introduction to Social and Political Philosophy – “This course is a critical analysis of political theories and social issues. Consideration will be given to historically significant and contemporary systems, problems, and thinkers.”

In this paper I will present one version of a course in Social and Political Philosophy, a version that I think is valuable for my students, most of whom are citizens of the United States.

Courses in Social and Political Philosophy often use writings from Aristotle, Plato, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Marx, Mill, and a variety of other figures from the history of philosophy. The list of writers from the past half century whose works often appear in such courses is even longer, most notably including John Rawls, Robert Nozick, Michael Sandel, and a host of others. Instructors’ choices of readings will be governed by their broad aims for the course in Social and Political Philosophy. Numerous aims are consonant with the course descriptions given above:

Presenting a historical survey of major authors’ views on social and political philosophy;

Presenting the cases for significantly different understandings of social and political relations;

Examining the major philosophical issues that arise in social and political philosophy;

Presenting significant critiques of contemporary American social and political arrangements;

Presenting the views of authors whom the instructor finds particularly interesting, either in the instructor’s agreement or disagreement with them.

My own aims in teaching Social and Political philosophy are, I think, both modest and practical. I assume that a comfortable majority of my students are not Philosophy majors, and that most of them will take few philosophy courses. I also make the assumption, reasonable in those institutions in which I have taught, that a comfortable majority of my students are citizens of the United States. In settings in which these assumptions were not warranted I would not teach this particular version of Social and Political Philosophy. My principal aim in teaching Social and Political Philosophy is to help my students come to a clearer understanding of their context as American citizens. This involves two aspects in particular. First, social and political discourse in the United States appeals to historical roots. It is, therefore, a part of my aim to present writings that set out important historical understandings of the nature and function of political society that have significant impact on contemporary visions of American citizenship. Second, social and political discourse in the United States occurs in a nation having a unique set of features. In particular, the United States is a very large nation. Size counts. Social and political discourse in a nation the size of the United States (over 300 million) is in important ways different from social and political discourse in a nation the size of, say, Norway (under five million). Another unique feature of the United States is that its population is highly heterogeneous. Again, unlike the population of Norway, American citizens share little by way of common religion, common linguistic roots, or common cultural history. The United States is a civil society founded not upon common ethnicity (even in 1776), but upon common commitment to a set of social-philosophical beliefs. I do not, of course, claim that the United States is the only nation with these features. I do, however, note that the United States, unlike most nations in the world, does possess these features and that these features are important in framing civic life in the United States. The two aspects of my aim of helping my students come to a clearer understanding of their American citizenship,

then, guide my selection of materials and assignments for my course in Social and Political Philosophy.

### Historical Roots of American Political Thinking

My experience in talking about politics with Americans, both students and non-students, has led me to think that most Americans appeal to an odd and often inconsistent combination of the views of John Locke and John Stuart Mill. Popular American political thought is deeply imbued with the idea that human beings possess certain natural rights and also with the idea that social decision making should be based on considerations of aggregate utility. This is anything but surprising given the echoes of Locke that we find in the “Declaration of Independence” and the deep-seated utilitarianism in most contemporary economic thinking. Accordingly, I devote the first half of the semester to looking at Locke and Mill, and particularly pushing the students to attend to some of the fundamental points of difference between their views.

My primary Locke text, of course, is his *Second Treatise of Government*, which I ask the students to read along with the “Declaration of Independence.” Both the “Declaration of Independence” and Locke’s *Second Treatise* require rather careful introduction. The “Declaration” is a document that students have heard so much about since their childhood that they think they know it. What is perhaps most important in leading students into the “Declaration” is making them aware that it is not simply a “declaration” of independence, but a justification for independence. Most American students, to the extent that they think about the “Declaration of Independence,” think of its adoption as simply a bold assertion that the thirteen colonies would free themselves from British rule. The first sentence of the “Declaration” makes it clear that this is not an accurate understanding. “When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature’s God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.” The end of that sentence makes it clear that the framers thought that the assertion of independence would only warrant serious consideration if it were given careful justification. In short, the “Declaration of Independence” starts out with an affirmation of the rationality of political discourse.

Locke’s *Second Treatise* requires more introduction. Students have frequently heard of it in a High School Social Studies class. The comfortable majority do not, however, have any familiarity with it. Moreover, when they first look at the *Second Treatise* they find themselves puzzled. If there is a *Second Treatise*, then there must also be a *First Treatise*. Why is the second one, but not the first one, important to us? Also, the *Second Treatise* starts out with talk about God and Adam. In particular, what does all the talk about Adam have to do with social and political philosophy? I have found that the students will have a far clearer sense of the point of Locke’s *Second Treatise* if I give them a brief guided tour of seventeenth-century English history. Given that an important part of the religious discord and political intrigue that beset England during the seventeenth century started with the first three wives of Henry VIII, it is fairly easy to make the guided tour entertaining. It also provides a context in which to trace the rise of parliamentary power in England during the seventeenth century in ways that make the differences between the social contract views of Hobbes and Locke much more understandable, at least to those students who have heard a bit about Hobbes. In particular, students need to understand that the *First Treatise* and the talk about Adam in Chapter I of the *Second Treatise* focus on refuting

the view that kings rule by divine right, a view that we may not take seriously, but that the defenders of the Stuart kings, Charles II and James II, in Locke's time took very seriously.

One small assignment that I give early in the course requires the students to submit a copy of the "Declaration of Independence" with the footnotes to Locke's *Second Treatise* that would be needed if Thomas Jefferson were held to present-day standards of notation. Students tend to find the assignment interesting, and it pushes the students to familiarize themselves with Locke's and the framers' particular views on abuse of governmental power. The three issues, however, that I emphasize most strongly in the *Second Treatise* are Locke's views on natural rights, the right to private property, and the proper function of government. These, of course, are all points on which Locke's views differ profoundly from Mill's views.

John Stuart Mill was not even born until almost thirty years after the adoption of the "Declaration of Independence." However, as noted above, his impact on the social and political thought of most Americans is profound. The primary text that I use from Mill is *On Liberty*. I do, however, supplement *On Liberty* with bits from *Utilitarianism* and more substantial material from *Principles of Political Economy*, a book that I think receives far less attention than it deserves. While Mill's case for liberty, a case that is regularly unsettling to both political liberals and political conservatives alike, provides the overarching backdrop to our reading of Mill, the three issues noted in the previous paragraph receive particular emphasis.

Locke's political philosophy is clearly premised on a notion of natural rights. This, of course, is echoed in the claim in the "Declaration of Independence" "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." While Mill is not as dismissive of rights-talk as Jeremy Bentham, Mill clearly does not think that we possess God-given natural rights. On Mill's view, talk about rights must in the end always be analyzable into talk of utility: "To have a right, then, is, I conceive, to have something which society ought to defend me in the possession of. If the objector goes on to ask why it ought, I can give him no other reason than general utility" (*Utilitarianism*, 54). This difference between Locke and Mill foreshadows a great divide in American social and political thought in two respects. First, the two views lead to importantly different views on the proper scope of governmental activity. Second, and more narrowly, the two views lead to profoundly different views on the justification of property rights.

On Locke's view, our possession of natural rights provides the reason for civil government. The only reason that people are "willing to join in society with others, who are already united, or have a mind to unite, [is] for the mutual *preservation* of their lives, liberties and estates, which I call by the general name, *property* [emphases in original]" (66). This, it is generally thought, leads to a very limited view of the proper function of government. It is clearly a view that appeals to political conservatives, at least of a libertarian variety. Governmental activity can be justified only to the extent that it can be shown to be required for the defense of natural rights which, because they arise in nature, are logically prior to any governmental decision. It is also a view that cannot be maintained without something like Locke's understanding of natural rights, and hence a view that Mill cannot share. There certainly have been utilitarian defenses of a very limited role for government, but those defenses should not be confused with defenses based on our possession of natural rights.

Mill perhaps sums up his understanding of government most clearly in the closing sentence of his *Principles of Political Economy*. "It is the proper end of government to...[take] such

measures as shall cause the energies now spent by mankind in injuring one another, or in protecting themselves against injury, to be turned to the legitimate employment of the human faculties, that of compelling the powers of nature to be more and more subservient to physical and moral good" (Vol. II, 603). The proper function of government, in short, according to Mill, is to advance human utility. Mill's view of the proper range of governmental activity leads to a much more experimental view of political society. In a broadly democratic society, we might expect government to engage in certain activities because a majority of the populace thinks it plausible that such activities might advance human utility. At the same time, Mill's view requires that social decision makers honestly evaluate the results of such governmental experiments, and continue the activities only to the extent that the evidence warrants.

The final and narrower point of contrast between Locke and Mill lies in the justification of property rights. Locke's justification of a natural right to private property (Chapter V) is a justly famous philosophical "whipping boy." The labor theory of value on which it rests is roundly rejected by non-Marxist economists since the time of Mill. Its "as much and as good" (21) proviso seems radically inapplicable to the real world. Moreover, Locke's understanding of property revolves around items of physical property, and seems very difficult to apply to contemporary issues in intellectual property, particularly intellectual property created in cooperative settings. Beating philosophical dead horses can be satisfying, but it can also be counter-productive. All of us who teach philosophy are aware of the common penchant among philosophically inexperienced students for mistaking criticism of an argument for rejection of its conclusion. All too often students who are simply presented with the standard criticism of Locke's justification of private property will take that criticism as tantamount to a rejection of private property. Faced with what they may see as a choice between Locke's unsatisfactory argument and property-less communism, they are as likely as not to choose Locke. Here again, the counter-pose of Mill is extremely valuable. It is important that students understand that Locke's is not the only justification of property rights.

Mill provides an alternative justification. He devotes two chapters of *Principles of Political Economy* (Vol. I, 257-300) to the subject of property. Mill is very explicit. "Private property, as an institution, did not owe its origin to any of those considerations of utility, which plead for the maintenance of it when established" (259). Property rights, on Mill's view, are legal rights, granted by government, and should be granted in such a manner as to promote the general utility. Given this kind of view, Mill does not regard property rights as either something that we have virtually without restriction or something that we fail to have. Rather, on Mill's understanding property rights end up as something like bundles of more particular claims that we have to the extent that they promote human utility. Again, the extent to which any particular set of property rights serves to promote human utility is an empirical question.

My chief point here is that the student is not torn between Locke's argument and communism. Rather, the two significant strands of social and political thought that have shaped popular American political ideas both provide defenses of some level of property rights, but they provide profoundly different defenses of property rights, and hence profoundly different philosophical frameworks for understanding a broad range of issues surrounding property rights.

### **Democratic Citizenship in the Contemporary United States**

For all their differences, both Locke and Mill are broadly

democratic in their social and political philosophies. Locke, of course, wrote nearly a hundred years before the founding of the United States. Mill wrote almost as long after the founding of the United States, and makes numerous references to the United States in *On Liberty*. He speaks approvingly of democracy constrained by a constitution (2). In speaking about the United States, Mill claims that “elective and responsible government became subject to the observations and criticisms which wait upon a great existing fact” (3). Later in the same paragraph, Mill raises an issue that is profoundly important in thinking about societies that would view themselves as democratic: “The will of the people, moreover, practically means the will of the most numerous or the most active *part* of the people” (4). Mill’s basic concern here is with the “tyranny of the majority.” Moreover, Mill rightly notices that such “tyranny” can be exercised not only by an actual numerical majority, but also by groups that, by virtue of their active manipulation of political structures, are able to exercise majoritarian control of government.

Two facts about the contemporary United States make Mill’s concern particularly apt. First, the United States is very large. Political communication, even in countries much smaller than the United States, is mediated by a multitude of structures to which many citizens lack easy access. The influence of money in politics is a factor that no observer of our politics would deny. The second factor is the diversity of the American population. Because of that diversity, American history is rife with episodes in which various groups have not been accorded the rights that the American founders declared to be universal. We have seen race slavery and later racial segregation. We have seen the internment of Japanese-Americans during the Second World War. We continue to see racial hostility in various segments of the American population aimed against Hispanics, people of Middle-Eastern descent, and various others. One of the chief challenges of contemporary American social and political thought is how fully to include all Americans as citizens with full access to those political structures that define the United States as a “government of the people.”

I take that problem as the focal point for the second half of *Social and Political Philosophy*. Iris Marion Young’s *Inclusion and Democracy* serves as the primary text. As its title suggests, Young’s book raises these issues in ways that are instructive, provocative, and conducive to careful classroom thinking. As Young notes in her introduction, the book addresses three central questions:

1. What are the norms and conditions of inclusive democratic communication under circumstances of structural inequality and cultural difference?
2. How should inclusive democratic communication and decision-making be theorized for societies with millions of people?
3. What is the proper scope of the democratic polity and how are exclusions enacted by restricting that scope? (6)

Note that the first two of Young’s central questions focus precisely on the two issues that I identified at the beginning of this paper as central to understanding democratic citizenship in the United States at the outset of the twenty-first century: what are the unique challenges of democratic citizenship in a country that embodies substantial cultural differences; and what are the unique challenges of democratic citizenship in a country of very large population. In addressing the first of those questions, Young starts by making a case for deliberative democracy. Contrary to the political operatives of both major political parties in the United States, democratic citizens should not be seen as bundles of stable and unchanging interests whose political role is to be aggregated by political campaigns to the point where one campaign amasses more

than fifty percent of the vote. Rather, “democracy is a form of practical reason” (22). Democratic discourse is central to democratic citizenship: “Participants arrive at a decision not by determining what preferences have the greatest numerical support, but by determining which proposals the collective agrees are supported by the best reasons” (23). This, I take it, is the model of democracy that both Locke and Mill supported in their writings. It is certainly central to Mill’s discussion of “liberty of thought and discussion” (15-52). It likewise seems implicit in Locke’s regular insistence that political power be impartial and non-arbitrary.

Young continues her quest to answer the first question by examining the conditions that are necessary to engage citizens in ways that will lead them to take seriously their inclusion as citizens in a democratic community, avoiding cynicism, apathy, and resentment. She also examines “Social Difference as a Political Resource” (Chapter 3, 81-120). In that chapter she notes, in ways that are highly consonant with Mill’s discussion “Of Individuality as One of the Elements of Well-Being” (*On Liberty*, 53-72), that attending to social difference leads to recognition of differences in perspective that can promote important social advancement. In particular, Young argues that individual identity, while clearly influenced by group social differences, is not reducible to such differences: “Social groups do indeed position individuals, but a person’s identity is her own, formed in active relation to social positions, among other things, rather than constituted by them” (99).

Young’s attempt to address the second of her three questions, the one dealing with the size of American democracy, focuses on two issues, representation and what she speaks of as “civil society.” The difficulties with representation in democratic societies have been apparent at least since the time of Elbridge Gerry and his eponymous monster, the gerrymander. It is useful here to show the students congressional maps of several states. On the one hand, the congressional map of Iowa reflects a minimally partisan process that creates coherent-looking districts and some reasonable presumption of representativeness. On the other hand, the congressional map of Pennsylvania (and we could take many other examples) reflects the attempt of one political party to give it advantage in the state congressional delegation disproportionate to its percentage of the total vote. Pennsylvania’s Twelfth Congressional District (under the 2001 redistricting), for example, makes the original gerrymander look like a coherent shape. Confronted with such maps, few students will hold on to the view that political representation is an uncomplicated notion. Young raises a variety of issues surrounding representation, what exactly the relationship of representation involves, special group representation, etc. These issues are fundamental to the idea of democratic government and fruitful for engaging classroom conversation.

Young’s discussion of “civil society” is one of the high points of her book. She looks at the variety of ways in which humans organize within society: churches, civic organizations, organizations devoted to particular causes, organizations focused around particular institutions such as schools, etc. Young argues persuasively for “the claim that a free, active and diverse civil society is crucial for democracy. Associational activity promotes communicative interaction both in small groups and across large publics” (188f). Young’s point is that such activity creates opportunities for citizen involvement in varieties of projects through groups that lack the daunting size and remoteness of state and national government. Young’s discussion of the variety of associations through which people act is accessible to students, most of whom have some experience with student organizations ranging from fraternities and sororities to a broad range of campus clubs.

The third of Young's three questions goes beyond the issues that are so obviously implicit in American citizenship. Young starts with issues of residential segregation, local participation, and regional government. Much of this ground can be made familiar to students through examination of the relationships between city centers and suburbs as they relate to such issues as public transportation, school district boundaries, and regional development. What is much more difficult, and surely much more speculative, is Young's foray into the hugely complicated issue of global democracy. The questions and answers that arise in the final chapter of Young's book raise fundamental issues about global justice and the difficulties of global governance.

### Conclusion

As I noted at the outset of this paper, Social and Political Philosophy can be taught in many different ways with many different aims. The course I have described in this paper aims primarily to help American students reflect on the concrete context of their own citizenship. The course surely also provides an examination of important issues in social and political philosophy. It provides analysis of two seminal historical thinkers in social and political philosophy. It provides an introduction to an analysis of property rights. Most importantly, however, it gives students a familiarity with important historical strains of thought that continue to shape a great deal of social and political discussion in the United States. Of equal if not greater importance, it encourages students to reflect on the political significance of the two most peculiar features of United States social and political reality at the outset of the twenty-first century, the size of the United States and its cultural diversity. We often forget that the American founders were confronted with their own challenges surrounding cultural and other forms of diversity, how to bring into a common political union the various communities that populated the thirteen colonies, communities that embodied a good deal of diversity for that time. Even within the colony of Pennsylvania, there was a challenge in bringing into a common political society the English Quakers, the Scots Presbyterians, and the German immigrants who had by the time of the American Revolution become a substantial population within the commonwealth. We in the United States continue to face the same kind of challenge in the twenty-first century, but now on a much larger scale. My hope is that philosophy, through such courses as the one that I've outlined above, can play a salutary role in helping our students to face that challenge.

### Works Cited

- Locke, John. *Second Treatise of Government*. Edited by C. B. Macpherson. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980.
- Mill, John Stuart. *On Liberty*. Edited by Elizabeth Rapaport. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Principles of Political Economy*, Vols. I & II. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1894.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Utilitarianism*, Second Edition. Edited by George Sher. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001.
- Young, Iris Marion. *Inclusion and Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

## ***Better Late than Hasty***

**Felicia Nimue Ackerman**

*Brown University*

*Originally published in The Providence Journal, June 30, 2009, and reprinted with permission.*

When I was in college, I made a discovery that changed my life. I discovered that I could turn in assignments late.

Late assignments were hardly an issue in my elementary school, which was too "progressive" to give much homework. Teachers seemed to fear that homework would stifle our creativity, although they never explained how we were supposed to be creative when we had little to be creative about. Late assignments were hardly an option in my high school, which was too regimented to grant extensions for anything short of an emergency appendectomy coming right after a grandparent's funeral.

In college, however, extra time was available for the asking—and the telling. Professors expected you to tell them why you needed an extension. I grew adept at saying plaintively, "I've been having problems lately," without adding that these problems mainly involved making myself get down to work. At that point, I made a resolution: When I became a teacher, I would never ask students why they needed extra time.

Unlike most of my youthful resolutions, this is one that I have managed to keep. My policy is to suggest dates for turning in papers, but to make the dates optional.

Students may turn in work anytime during the term, except that those who want to avoid getting Incompletes in a course obviously must turn in everything in time for it to be graded before course grades are due. Students who want Incompletes get them for the asking, with no telling required.

This policy shimmers with advantages. It spares me (and my grading assistants) piles of hastily written papers. It keeps students from having to write such papers. It also eliminates the need for intrusive judgments about students' personal lives. No teacher can disallow all extensions. What if a student breaks an arm? But if a broken arm merits an extension, what about a broken wrist—or a broken heart? My policy safeguards students' privacy by not requiring them to barter personal details about arms, wrists or hearts in return for extra time.

Most of my students tell me they have never had another teacher with this policy. Why not? Here are some arguments I have encountered against it.

"The policy is not always feasible." That is absolutely right. For example, I make minor modifications when a course involves classroom discussion of students' papers. Furthermore, many teachers have large classes and no grading assistance. Such teachers may need papers turned in on a strict schedule in order to get them graded at all. These are no reasons not to adopt the policy insofar as it is feasible.

"Deadlines are necessary for students to develop good work habits." This may hold true in pre-college education, when students are developing basic skills for a wide range of classes. Good work in philosophy, however, is a matter of rigorous thinking, not of meeting deadlines. Moreover, the liberal arts do not aim at vocational training. There is no more reason for me to impose deadlines because many workplaces impose them than there would be for me to require students to show up at my office at 9 a.m. because that is when many employees must show up for work.

“Some students need the discipline of a deadline to get them to complete an assignment.” I can hardly give deadlines to some but not all students in a class. Most of my students thrive under my lenient policy. Why sacrifice them to the minority who need external constraints?

“Students who turn in all their papers at the end of the term miss out on the opportunity to improve later papers by taking into account the comments on earlier ones.” I warn my students of this danger. But I do not require them to act as if the comments will be so valuable. I let each student judge this for himself.

“Some students who request extra time are just procrastinators.” I know. I was one. Is that so terrible? Some procrastinators write good papers once they get around to it. Some do not. Why grade either sort on anything but the quality of their work?

---

## ***What We Will Not Discuss in My Class***

**Felicia Nimue Ackerman**  
*Brown University*

*Originally published in The Providence Journal, September 29, 2009, and reprinted with permission.*

As Brown University’s fall semester got under way, I began by telling students my usual ground rules. This presentation goes approximately as follows:

“I expect you to come to class, but you don’t have to give me explanations for any absences. I will suggest paper topics and completion dates, but you don’t have to stick to them. I have one strict rule, though. In my courses, we never, never, never, never...”

At this point, I add that I hope all these “nevers” are arousing everyone’s curiosity. Sometimes I ask students to guess. What is it that we never do?

We never discuss our personal lives.

My rule surprises some students. After all, I teach bioethics and also courses on philosophy in novels and short stories, and such material raises issues relevant to personal life. My rule disappoints some students. After all, aren’t their own personal lives the most fascinating things in the world?

Actually, no. My own personal life is the most fascinating thing in the world. Unfortunately, however, no one else seems to find my personal life as fascinating as I do. I point out to students that the same probably goes for their personal lives.

I also discuss a deeper reason. My courses use readings that deal with illness, disability, obesity, abortion, discrimination, competition, rape and other possible sources of distress in students’ lives. Intellectual discussion requires the unconstrained exchange of views. Fear of treading on tender wounds impedes such discussion. How freely will students criticize a fictional rape victim for not reporting the rape if they know that one of their classmates is agonizing over having made the same choice? How freely will a grader criticize a paper that discloses the writer’s sufferings?

Many teachers defend the use of personal material. Here are some reasons I have encountered.

Reason 1: Sharing personal experiences can enrich class discussions.

But the risk of derailing intellectual interchange outweighs any such possible benefits. Furthermore, diverse backgrounds can enrich class discussions without drawing the class into

students’ emotional lives. One of my recent bioethics seminars included a Costa Rican student. She enriched class discussions through her information about health care in Costa Rica. She did not discuss her own health or her feelings about being Costa Rican.

Reason 2: Discussion of students’ personal lives can “reinforce the validity of personal experiences.”

This claim comes from a 1994 article in an academic journal. But my teaching does not aim to reinforce the validity of students’ personal experiences; it aims to make students more rigorous thinkers about philosophical issues.

Reason 3: Teachers who share their personal experiences can be more effective role models.

I don’t want to be a role model. I want my students to think for themselves, not to model themselves on me.

Reason 4: Students can better appreciate abstract issues by relating them to personal matters.

No doubt this is sometimes true. But it does not mean that students should “share” intimate personal insights with classmates or teachers. Moreover, seeing issues in such personal terms can be limiting. People are already interested in themselves. Education should stimulate their interest in other things.

Not all roads lead to oneself.

---

## ***Teaching Ethics in Tikrit: A Fieldnote***

**Mark Zelcer**  
*Brooklyn College*

Last year my Army Reserve unit was ordered to active duty to help conduct the draw-down of U.S. forces from Iraq. We were sent over for a year to conduct the logistical task of moving U.S. materiel out of the Iraq Theater of Operations. It was an enormous job and the work left little time for anything else (especially philosophy). I spent about half a year working out of Joint Base Balad in central Iraq (unofficially known as “Mortaritaville”) and I spent the other half of the year working out of Contingency Operating Base (COB) Speicher, in Tikrit, farther north. Like most larger U.S. military bases around the world, both locations had some amenities including “education centers,” where the military facilitates various educational opportunities, including college courses, for the personnel on base. The University of Maryland University College (UMUC) supplies many of the educational services to these bases and has been in Iraq since 2008. But for safety, economic, and logistical reasons, the school does not provide its own faculty to teach courses in war zones, only an administrator for each location who sends out base-wide emails asking for qualified people who are already stationed there to teach college courses. The school vets those who reply and hires them on a per-course basis. Toward the end of the year on COB Speicher I found myself with a slightly less onerous schedule, and was able to pay attention to some of the goings-on on base. Having arrived in Iraq with a brand new philosophy Ph.D. and quite a few years of adjunct-teaching under my belt, I offered to teach a course in the semester that culminated shortly before my time “in country” was to end.

Typically the education center on base can offer classes in such topics as English writing, basic mathematics, aeronautics, and law enforcement, as the course offerings are completely dependent on the qualifications of local personnel. Given what everyone can probably guess about military bases (that they do not have many philosophers on hand), philosophy courses are

rarely offered. Here I will try to convey what it was like to teach a class under these rather odd circumstances—incongruities and all.

I shall begin with the course design: The course was called “Contemporary Moral Issues.” It met for three hours, two nights a week, for eight weeks in June and July 2010 and had about 13 students enrolled. I assigned two textbooks by James and Stuart Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (6th edition, McGraw Hill International Edition, 2010) and *The Right Thing to Do* (5th edition, McGraw Hill International Edition, 2010). Most significant in my decision to use those books was that the UMUC European office told me that those would be the easiest for them to get to us. The university issued the books directly to the students in the very beginning of the semester, though because they had expected fewer than 13 students, a few got their books late.

We began the course reading about theoretical ethics and dedicated the second part of the semester to dealing with specific moral questions. I handed out a syllabus in which I assigned the chapters in *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* on 1) cultural relativism, 2) subjectivism, 3) religion, 4) egoism, 5) utilitarianism, 6) deontology, 7) social contract theory, 8) virtue ethics, and 9) care ethics—in that order. I assigned articles from *The Right Thing to Do* on the following topics:

1. Poverty (Mylan Engel, Jr.’s “9/11 and Starvation” and Peter Singer’s “The Singer Solution to World Poverty”)
2. Race (M. L. King, Jr.’s “Letter from the Birmingham City Jail” and Peter Singer’s “Is Racial Discrimination Arbitrary?”)
3. The death penalty (Louis P. Pojman’s “A Defense of the Death Penalty” and Stephen B. Bright’s “Why the United States Will Join the Rest of the World in Abandoning Capital Punishment”)
4. War (Douglas P. Lackey’s “The Ethics of War and Peace,” John Rawls’s “Fifty Years After Hiroshima,” Thomas Nagel’s “What Is Wrong With Terrorism?” and David Luban’s “Liberalism, Torture, and the Ticking Bomb”)
5. Bioethics (James Rachels’s “The Morality of Euthanasia” and Richard Doerflinger’s “Assisted Suicide: Pro-Choice or Anti-Life?”)
6. Abortion (Don Marquis’s “Why Abortion Is Immoral” and Judith Jarvis Thomson’s “A Defense of Abortion”)
7. Sex and drugs (Michael Huemer’s “America’s Unjust Drug War.” Burton M. Leiser’s “Is Homosexuality Unnatural?” Bertrand Russell’s “Our Sexual Ethics,” and Nicholas Dixon’s “Alcohol and Rape”), and
8. Animal welfare (Peter Singer’s “All Animals Are Equal” and Tibor R. Machan’s “Do Animals have Rights?”).

I had hoped to cover some of the earlier theoretical material quicker and focus on the later material in more depth. For reasons that will be clear later on, I made some changes that altered what we covered and how much time was spent on the various readings. The students were required to write two papers, one designed to show that they understood the differences between the various ethical theories we covered and another designed to exhibit their ability to formulate arguments about specific ethical questions and relate them to ethical theories. UMUC required at least one exam, so I gave a midterm that covered the first set of readings.

Overall, my teaching experience was positive, though unusual. It was unusual first because the make-up of students was all enlisted (i.e., non-officer) Army soldiers, themselves a unique lot. Because they are not officers, they are generally

more comfortable taking orders than giving them. Certainly they get more orders than they give, regardless of how comfortable they feel. I assume that they are more likely than not to come from economically disadvantaged circumstances and are in college taking advantage of the military’s educational benefits so they can either leave the service and do better in the civilian world or because they hope to make a career out of the military and become military officers, which requires a bachelors degree. Perhaps some were in the class out of intellectual curiosity as well.

Also interesting was that in one sense the students came to the classroom already identifying with each other as peers. Not only did they share the language of late adolescence like more “traditional” college students (though some were older), but they also shared the language and assumptions of military culture. Thus, for example, I felt no need to warn students to be respectful of each others’ beliefs when discussing sensitive topics within ethics or religion, as the nature of U.S. military life generally makes such disrespect taboo and certain kinds of toleration automatic. The class dynamic thus felt different from the other classes I have taught.

As far as their academic level goes, I noticed the students were less prepared for college learning than were those I was used to teaching. As best I could tell, UMUC has no entrance requirements beyond a high school diploma or its equivalent. But, as all the members of the class had responsibilities well beyond what is typically given to college age students, the students generally exhibited a level of maturity that reflected the seriousness of their daily lives.<sup>1</sup> In some ways the added maturity compensated for the lack of academic preparation.

Not to belabor the obvious, but the circumstances in which we all found ourselves—war—made for an unusual pedagogical situation as well. Regardless of the level of a soldier’s responsibilities, life was stressful in Iraq. The stress was felt not only by the students but by me as well. I generally feel more comfortable in my civilian role as a philosophy instructor than I do in my military life as a soldier, and as an officer I had significant responsibilities that constantly distracted me from my classroom duties.

The course, chosen by UMUC, is standard fare as a first philosophy course and I was extremely curious to see how this would compare to similar courses I have taught in conventional classes in large urban universities over the past years. For most of my students this course was their introduction to higher education and none had taken a philosophy course before. As is common with introductory-level students, they had little idea of what philosophy could be about. As a matter of fact, one student, a chaplain assistant, confided in me after a few classes that he thought the class would be about contemporary issues in morale and was eager to learn new ways of helping his soldiers. Nonetheless, given his job, he was not disappointed to learn that it was morality, not morale, that we would be studying.

The students worked pretty hard under the circumstances. I got the impression that almost everyone read every text I assigned. (Hurrah for military discipline; you order them to read, and they comply!) The students were diligent about reading, writing papers, and preparing for the exam. Still, the atmosphere in the class remained relaxed despite the generally arduous conditions that we all lived under. Moreover, we were all in uniform all the time as most soldiers in Iraq go through their whole tour without wearing any other kind of clothing. That means that my rank as an officer was obvious and the protocols governing interaction with officers were understood. During the class, however, I was pleased to see that this was mostly dispensed with (e.g., no one called me “sir” in class or stood at attention when addressing me). My status as instructor

of the course was treated as it was in most any other class I've taught. (I do wonder what would have been different had I been outranked by someone in class.) The students also realized that there was a rank hierarchy among themselves, and sergeants were addressed as "Sergeant," corporals were addressed as "Corporal," etc, by each other. I believe all of my students unlike myself were Regular Army soldiers, that is, before they deployed, they were doing or preparing for their wartime mission on a U.S. military base at home or abroad. I am a reservist, so the day before and the day after I was deployed, I was a civilian. Outside training, I have not lived or worked on a military base for any extended period of time, nor do I rely on the military for my income. The Army for me is not a regular job as it is for them.

For most of the semester, the classroom itself was a large garage-like shack with a poorly functioning air conditioner in the middle of a very large sandy lot, whose original purpose I never quite figured out. I am also more than slightly embarrassed to mention that I taught a few whole classes sitting cross-legged on the rickety desk because of the occasional field mouse that would scamper by, something I was unused to seeing in a classroom. My students, some of whom had deeply rural roots as opposed to my big city heritage, found this amusing and it made for an occasional bit of comic relief.

The class was held at night to best accommodate our schedules. At 18:30, some of us were just starting our work day, some were ending it. But most of us, like me, were fairly exhausted after a 12 hour shift that might have included patrols, manual labor, or seemingly endless paperwork. Nonetheless attendance was generally pretty good. Someone usually notified me when a student got stuck "on mission" or something similar happened. Despite sometimes unreliable communications, I was usually able to get word to them in advance when I got stuck on a mission and had to miss a class myself. Everyone was pretty understanding, as this is the nature of life in theatre. Generally, the soldiers had very sympathetic sergeants and officers who encouraged their education and helped work their schedules around their courses. It is a sergeant's job to look out for all aspects of the welfare of their soldiers, including their education, and the students in my class had sergeants who usually took their jobs seriously enough to get them to class and make the semester work. While schedules are rather fixed and there are no family or social obligations that would cause a student to miss a class, one's mission always took priority. So though soldiers were absent more often than I would have liked, absences were generally not excessive.

The unique set of students and circumstances contributed to the unusual course discussion as well. For one thing, it took longer than I had hoped to introduce theoretical ethics—about half the semester. In retrospect, I should not have expected it to go quickly. It took some doing to get the students to grasp the nature of each of the approaches and to convey how they differed from one another and why different thinkers would base a system of ethics on the respective theories.

It was relatively easy to motivate the idea that different societies operate under different moral assumptions, not that there were any relativists among the group. Of necessity, the culture of the military is homogeneous, but the base from which the military draws its recruits is as diverse as the U.S. itself. Perhaps the main function of Basic Training is to teach soldiers that they now live in a new culture with new norms. Also, we were all stationed overseas where polygamy is not uncommon. Out of respect for the locals, even within the confines of the coalition bases, alcohol is prohibited everywhere, as are bikinis on bases that have pools (our pool had been mortared and never repaired), and all the pork products in the dining facilities

are clearly labeled as "forbidden to you" in Arabic as a courtesy to the Muslims who eat there. The foreignness and the soldiers' acculturation, both into the Army and into theatre, probably helped them appreciate the varieties of ethical systems.

The system of ethics in the military, by the way, does mandate "ethics training" to everyone at least once a year. The soldiers are used to getting a list of "thou shall's" and "thou shalt not's" in a series of briefs on how to interact with vendors and contractors and on the law of armed conflict. They are all taught to follow all and only lawful orders from their superiors, etc. Fortunately, this approach did not seem to color their impressions or expectations of the way philosophical ethics is done.

What did come as a little surprise for the students, I think, was my asking them for input in the course content. Enlisted soldiers rarely get asked by authority figures what they want to talk about. We had a discussion about what topics from the book they wanted to cover or avoid, as there was not enough time to cover them all. I wanted them to have some ownership of a course that they would be participating in, however minimal. They looked at the table of contents in *The Right Thing to Do* and students of three different races (and two sexes) almost unanimously said "race" was a subject they wanted to avoid; the others in the class immediately concurred. I don't know why. Perhaps they feel that race is a non-issue because the military is integrated in ways many other sectors are not, or maybe the subject is too taboo and uncomfortable, so soldiers are used to avoiding them. I suggested reading M. L. King, Jr.'s famous letter from a Birmingham jail, but the students were mostly shaking their heads "no," so I dropped it from the syllabus. In the Army enlisted ranks the racial composition more or less mimics the general population of the U.S. The military may be one of the few places in the country where as a matter of course everyone expects to be taking orders from people of all races and an "Equal Opportunity Officer" is designated and trained in each unit to resolve and report issues involving racial discrimination.

I generally have no problem discussing issues that make students feel uncomfortable, but it seemed worthwhile to make some effort to follow students' wishes after asking for their input. On the other hand, I was determined (mostly to satisfy my own curiosity) to talk about ethical issues pertaining to war. I was wondering how the students would react to an issue that I hoped they all had strong feelings about and could possibly have an impact on the way they thought about the jobs they did every day. I wondered how reflective they were and if they could be challenged to be even more thoughtful. Some of the readings were undoubtedly directly relevant to the military duties of students in the room and I assigned four of the five articles on the topic. The subject indeed generated quite a bit of debate. While the students did not seem eager to talk about it at first, neither were they overly reluctant. Douglas Lackey's article stimulated much discussion. However, the class never reached a consensus about what makes up the ideal *in bello* or *ad bellum* considerations of a just war. One student argued forcefully and consistently, though not in these exact words, that when fighting an asymmetric war (e.g., of the kind that involves insurgency, guerrilla warfare, or terrorism) there are no illegitimate moves, while the bulk of the class argued, in keeping with their military ethics training, that there are good reasons not to perpetrate war crimes. The debate was lively where I expected shyness and deference. Perhaps this description is a bit over the top, but I got the impression that for the students, the classroom represented an oasis of thought for them in a (literal) desert of instruction-following.

Because I had no easy access to philosophy books I did not distribute hand-outs or assign paper topics that are

not represented in our texts, as I might do in the U.S. While discussing topics other than war, all the students participated in the class discussion and I found the views they defended to be similar to those I am accustomed to hearing from other undergraduates. Students were typically in favor of some drug legalization, saw no ethical problem in eating meat, they were not overly hostile to the death penalty, they maintained a live-and-let-live attitude toward sex ethics (including homosexuality), and were divided on the morality of abortion. A small contingent of students was initially less sympathetic to the suggestion that it was their obligation to make significant sacrifices to help the poor; they wondered why a poor person wouldn't just join the Army or take a less desirable job (as, presumably, they did).

From the perspective of my side of the desk, there was much about the course that felt weird. Despite the fact that everyone did everything in Iraq while carrying a weapon, I still found teaching while armed a bit odd. While it was not easy to get used to the idea that one had to always be armed, it felt particularly strange in a classroom. The incongruity of weapons in a classroom reminded me of a meditation session that was held when the only Buddhist military chaplain in the U.S. Army made a visit to COB Speicher. It seemed to me that in both situations one should check weapons at the door, but in both instances the circumstances made that impossible. I felt the same about uniforms, rank, and the formalities that they imply.

It was also strange teaching the course while not being part of a university. It was as if there was no "context" to the class. I take it for granted that when I leave a classroom and go to my office I can discuss issues, both administrative and philosophical, with colleagues. I take for granted that I can look things up in a library, and have enough leisure time to read articles or books relevant to what I am teaching. But that did not apply here as I had neither office nor library. Again, it was not something that ever manifested itself as a problem, but it is an important part of the teaching experience that I did not fully appreciate until I had to do without it.

As it happens, this was not the only teaching I did in Iraq. My job to a large extent routinely involved giving briefings to large numbers of soldiers and explaining complicated logistical procedures. I also had the opportunity to teach conversational English to Iraqi local and provincial council members in Tikrit—another fascinating experience.

Teaching non-traditional students or under exceptional circumstances can be very rewarding. For me it was a pleasant distraction from my workday and I was afforded an opportunity to interact with soldiers in a way I never did before. I was not giving orders, nor was I taking them. I was teaching students to be better citizens and better thinkers. Moreover, they were thinking about issues that mattered to them. It was an opportunity I am grateful to have had.

#### Acknowledgments

Thanks to the editors and to Dahlia Kozlowsky for valuable feedback on earlier drafts of this article.

#### Endnotes

1. Tziporah Kasachkoff makes a similar point about her Israeli students who have been through the military. ("Teaching Philosophy in the U.S. and Teaching Philosophy in Israel: A Comparison" in this *Newsletter*, 07, no. 2 (2008): 16.)

---

---

## *A Pedagogical Challenge in Teaching Arguments for the Existence of God*

**Moti Mizrahi**

*Fashion Institute of Technology*

In this paper, I describe the way I introduce undergraduate students in an Introduction to Philosophy course to arguments for the existence of God. This approach is designed to meet a pedagogical challenge. The challenge is to motivate undergraduate students in Introduction to Philosophy to engage with arguments for God's existence.

### 1. The challenge

In an article in the *Boston Review*, Alex Byrne (2009) says that "The funny thing about arguments for the existence of God is that, if they succeed, they were never needed in the first place." Those who teach arguments for the existence of God in Introduction to Philosophy courses at the undergraduate level probably understand what Byrne is talking about. Based on my experience, it seems that undergraduate students in Introduction to Philosophy courses often find it difficult to appreciate arguments for the existence of God. They tend to find such arguments redundant, it seems, because they tend to think that belief in God is a matter of faith rather than reason. If one already has faith, then there is no need for arguments. To be clear, I am not saying that all undergraduate students hold this view. Nor am I saying that this view is correct. But herein lies the challenge. As long as there are some undergraduate students in Introduction to Philosophy who find arguments for God's existence redundant in this sense, whether these students subscribe to one faith or another, our challenge as instructors is to make them realize that engaging with these arguments is worthwhile.

It seems that my experience is not unique. Byrne's take on arguments for the existence of God seemed to resonate with the moderators and readers of the teaching philosophy blog, *In Socrates' Wake*, as well. As Michael Cholbi (2009) writes:

This resonates with something in my own teaching experience: I'm sure most of us teach proofs of God's existence, in our introductory classes for instance. But one challenge I've had in teaching this material is that many students (many of them religiously inclined, but not all of them) already share Byrne's conclusion [that] God's existence is unprovable (especially to skeptics). Religious belief, on this view, can only be a matter of pure faith. Obviously, if that is the student's view, then the fact that so many of the arguments for God's existence seem shaky comes as no surprise to them at all. As a result, students feel little interest in engaging the proofs, since for them, it can only be an idle intellectual exercise. Fideism is thus a barrier to serious rational engagement with these arguments.

To be clear, I do not endorse fideism. I quote Cholbi simply to show that other instructors have found it difficult to get undergraduate students to engage with arguments for the existence of God. Perhaps there are readers of the *Newsletter* whose students are already motivated to engage with these arguments. If so, I envy those readers. My approach is designed to get students who lack the motivation, for whatever reason, to engage with arguments for God's existence. I have found this approach to be successful, and so I would like to share it with readers who are looking for ways to engage their students. To be clear, my approach to introducing arguments for the existence of God is not meant to address the question of whether belief

in God is a matter of faith or reason, and I will not be concerned with this issue in this paper. Rather, it is simply an approach that I have found to be successful as far as engaging students in this topic is concerned.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. The approach

For the purposes of this paper, assume an undergraduate course of Introduction to Philosophy, with roughly thirty students. The topic in question, namely, arguments for the existence of God, is introduced after basic concepts of logic and critical thinking have been covered in class, such as deductive and inductive arguments, validity and soundness, etc., and some method of assessment was used to check for the students' comprehension of these concepts. Also assume that students have already written a couple of argumentative essays.

To introduce this topic, students watch in class a video clip from the Comedy Central show, *The Colbert Report*, in which the host, Stephen Colbert, reports on an argument made by Bill O'Reilly on the Fox News show, *The O'Reilly Factor*. This clip can be found here: <http://www.colbertnation.com/the-colbert-report-videos/370183/january-06-2011/bill-o-reilly-proves-god-s-existence---neil-degrasse-tyson> (3:59). In this clip, Colbert does not use any vulgar language, but some might find his sense of humor rather tasteless. Those who find this clip inappropriate for the classroom, then, can use the original clip from *The O'Reilly Factor*, which can be found here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2BCipg71LbI> (the relevant section is from 1:50 up to 2:20).

In these video clips, O'Reilly addresses an atheist and says the following:

I'll tell you why [religion is] not a scam. In my opinion—all right? Tide goes in, tide goes out. Never a miscommunication. You can't explain that. You can't explain why the tide goes in.

After watching this clip, the students' first task is to reconstruct O'Reilly's argument. This can be done in a number of ways. One strategy, for example, is Think-Pair-Share.

Step 1—*Think*: students think about O'Reilly's argument and put it in standard form.

Step 2—*Pair*: students pair up, compare their reconstructions, and explain their reasoning to each other.

Step 3—*Share*: the instructor calls upon a few pairs to share their reconstructions with the rest of the class.

By "putting an argument in *standard form*," I simply mean identifying the premises and the conclusion of an argument and presenting them as claims, premises first and then conclusion, so that the argument is clear and easier to evaluate. As Damer (2008, p. 17) writes: "The first step in [evaluating an argument] is to reconstruct the argument into what is called a *standard form*" (original emphasis). A standard format that exhibits the logical structure of an argument looks like this:

Premise 1  
Premise 2  
Premise *n*...  
Conclusion

I shall henceforth refer to this way of writing down an argument, "putting the argument in *standard form*." Depending on the size of the class, I usually call upon two pairs to put up two arguments on the blackboard and explain why they think their reconstruction is charitable.

At the end of this exercise, we should have something like the following argument in standard form:

(1) We know of no natural explanation for the tides.

(2) Hence, explaining the tides requires a supernatural explanation.

(3) A supernatural explanation requires an appeal to a supernatural being.

(4) This supernatural being is God.

(5) Therefore, God exists.

The second task is to evaluate this non-deductive argument. In the clip from *The Colbert Report*, the astrophysicist, Neil deGrasse Tyson, explains the tides in terms of the gravitational pull of the moon. So students immediately realize that premise (1) of O'Reilly's argument is false. This exercise also serves as an example of one way in which an argument can be criticized, namely, by showing that one of its premises is false.

There is a follow up video clip in which O'Reilly clarifies premise (1). This clip can be found here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UyHzhtARf8M>. In this clip, O'Reilly argues that, even if we do have a natural explanation for the tides, we still need an explanation for the origin of the celestial bodies that figure in this natural explanation, such as the moon and the earth. An exercise similar to the one described above (i.e., Think-Pair-Share) can be done in class to evaluate O'Reilly's revised argument as well.

(R1) We know of no natural explanation for why the moon is in such a position that it exerts a gravitational pull on the earth that makes the tides go in and out.

(R2) Explaining *that* requires a supernatural explanation.

(R3) A supernatural explanation requires an appeal to a supernatural being.

(R4) This supernatural being is God.

(R5) Therefore, God exists.

Unlike premise (1), premise (R1) is not *obviously* false, and so students can evaluate this revised, non-deductive argument as well.

One might think that a more charitable interpretation of O'Reilly's argument would include the following premise instead of (R1):

(\*) We know of no natural explanation for why masses exert a force (i.e., gravitational pull) on other masses.<sup>2</sup>

However, I am reluctant to reconstruct O'Reilly's argument in this way for two reasons. First, it seems very far removed from what O'Reilly actually says. In reconstructing arguments, one should be charitable, of course, but not to the point where the meaning of the original claims is changed. One should adhere to what the author or speaker actually says as much as possible. Second, strictly speaking, (\*) is also false.<sup>3</sup> For we do know of a natural explanation for why masses exert a gravitational pull on other masses. According to General Relativity, massive objects cause space-time itself to become curved, and what we perceive as the force of gravity is actually due to the effect of this curvature on the motion of objects.

Some might think that, since premises (R) and (R1) are false, O'Reilly's argument is not worth discussing in the classroom, for it does not seem to require much critical thinking to identify its flaws.<sup>4</sup> However, as the examples presented in any logic textbook illustrate, studying examples of failed arguments is just as important as studying examples of good arguments. As Barker (1989, p. 154) puts it:

If we want to become more skillful at playing chess, or football, or any other game, it is a good idea to study not only the shrewd moves that experts make, but also the poor moves that less experienced players

make—we can learn from their mistakes. Similarly, as we try to improve our ability to reason logically, we should not confine our attention to specimens of good reasoning; we should also consider plenty of tempting examples of bad reasoning. By becoming more aware of how these bad arguments are bad, we strengthen our ability to distinguish between good and bad reasoning.

In that respect, those who find Colbert appropriate for the classroom might also wish to use his follow up report on O'Reilly reply. The clip can be found here: <http://www.colbertnation.com/the-colbert-report-videos/373357/february-03-2011/crisis-in-egypt--anderson-cooper--bill-o-reilly> (the relevant section starts from 2:30). In this clip, Colbert illustrates in an entertaining way how appealing to God for explanations of origins can be problematic, for one soon ends up with the following question: “Where does God come from?” This exercise also serves as an example of another way in which an argument can be criticized, namely, by showing that the premises fail to provide adequate support for the conclusion.

After examining this simple argument for the existence of God, presented and commented on in an entertaining way by celebrities they are familiar with, students are prepared to engage with more sophisticated arguments, such as the teleological argument.

### 3. The advantages

Judging from my experience, I think there are several advantages to using this way of introducing arguments for the existence of God to undergraduate students in Introduction to Philosophy courses.

- The fact that arguments for the existence of God, albeit not very sophisticated ones, are discussed on cable news channels, opinion shows, and comedy shows gives students the impression that this is a timely topic that they should care about. This helps them to appreciate more sophisticated arguments for the existence of God, such as the ontological, the cosmological, and the teleological arguments.
- I have found that students are more curious to learn about other arguments for the existence of God after they have watched O'Reilly and Colbert discuss this topic. One could lament the fact that, for the most part, undergraduate students care more about what O'Reilly and Colbert have to say than they care about what Descartes and Hume had to say, but this is a different matter.
- Students realize that arguments for the existence of God can be discussed in a rational, and even entertaining, way. Even if they still think that this is merely an intellectual exercise, and it is unlikely that anyone will be persuaded by such arguments, they can often see the value in discussing these arguments.
- Introducing arguments for the existence of God in the way I have described above makes the topic fun and less intimidating to undergraduate students. Presenting the topic through a comedian, such as Colbert, makes it not only humorous but also approachable. In my experience, I have often had students continue the discussion on Blackboard and post follow up clips on the discussion board.
- This exercise can serve as a firm stepping stone for discussing more sophisticated arguments for the existence of God. Moreover, this exercise helps students grasp a quite general problem with arguments

for the existence of God. Take the teleological argument, for instance. As pointed out by Philo in Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, the argument itself concludes with a claim about the existence of an intelligent being that is responsible for the design observed in nature. However, to claim that this intelligent being is God, understood as a benevolent, omnipotent, and omniscient creator of the universe, is an additional step in the reasoning. Similarly, in O'Reilly's argument, there is a similar additional step from “supernatural being that is responsible for the tides” to “God.” I have found that students are able to grasp that this is an extra, and unwarranted, step in the reasoning much more clearly when we discuss O'Reilly's argument before we discuss the teleological argument than when we discuss the teleological argument without discussing O'Reilly argument. (Note that O'Reilly's argument and the teleological argument are two distinct arguments.)

- This approach puts the emphasis on acquiring critical and analytical thinking skills (as opposed to becoming familiar with a body of literature on a particular topic) that can be put to use outside the philosophy classroom. Of course, it is important to introduce students to classical philosophical texts, such as Descartes' *Meditations*, and arguments, such as the ontological argument. And I certainly do that in my introductory courses. However, I also think that, in these tough financial times, in which the humanities must justify their worth (Cohen 2009) and philosophy departments are under attack (Leiter 2011), it might be in the interest of philosophy as a profession if philosophers would emphasize their unique capability to train students in critical thinking. As the editors of this *Newsletter* put it, “administrators are attracted” to courses that “teach what are claimed to be marketable skills” (Kasachkoff and Kelly 2010). It seems to me that, in addition to communication, collaboration, and writing skills, we can surely count critical thinking skills as one of those “marketable skills.”

In conclusion, I would like to repeat that this way of introducing arguments for the existence of God to undergraduate students in Introduction to Philosophy courses is not by any means meant to address the issue of faith versus reason. However, I have found this approach quite successful in terms of motivating undergraduate students to engage with arguments for the existence of God. Admittedly, my experience may be unique and unrepresentative of other classrooms and/or instructors. So I leave it to the discretion of the readers of the *Newsletter* to decide whether or not they wish to experiment with this approach in their classrooms.<sup>5</sup>

#### Endnotes

1. On the question of arguments and religious belief, Malcolm (1960, pp. 61-62) writes as follows: “What is the relation of Anselm's ontological argument to religious belief? This is a difficult question. I can imagine an atheist going through the argument, becoming convinced of its validity, acutely defending it against objections, yet remaining an atheist. The only effect it could have on the fool of the Psalm would be that he stopped saying in his heart “There is no God,” because he would now realize that this is something he cannot meaningfully say or think. It is hardly to be expected that a demonstrative argument should, in addition, produce in him a living faith. Surely there is a level at which one can view the argument as a piece of logic, following the deductive moves but not being touched religiously? I think so. But even

at this level the argument may not be without religious value, for it may help to remove some philosophical scruples that stand in the way of faith. At a deeper level, I suspect that the argument can be thoroughly understood only by one who has a view of that human “form of life” that gives rise to the idea of an infinitely great being, who views it from the *inside* not just from the outside and who has, therefore, at least some inclination to *partake* in that religious form of life. This inclination, in Kierkegaard’s words, is “from the emotions.” This inclination can hardly be an *effect* of Anselm’s argument, but is rather presupposed in the fullest understanding of it. It would be unreasonable to require that the recognition of Anselm’s demonstration as valid must produce a conversion” (original emphasis). Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for the reference to Malcolm’s view.

2. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this point.
3. Note that, like (R1), (\*) may be false, but not *obviously* false. This raises the question—discussion of which is beyond the scope of this paper—of whether, and the extent to which, the claim that a statement is *obviously* false is speaker relative.
4. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this point.
5. Thanks to three anonymous reviewers for helpful comments on earlier drafts.

#### Works Cited

- Barker, Stephen. *The Elements of Logic*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. McGraw-Hill, Inc., 2003.
- Byrne, Alex. “God: Philosophers Weigh In.” *Boston Review*, January/February 2009. <http://bostonreview.net/BR34.1/byrne.php>.
- Cholbi, Michael. “Should Students Expect Proofs of God?” In *In Socrates’ Wake: A Blog about Teaching Philosophy*, January 9, 2009. <http://insocrateswake.blogspot.com/2009/01/should-students-expect-proofs-of-god.html>.
- Cohen, Patricia. “In Tough Times, the Humanities Must Justify Their Worth.” *The New York Times*, February 25, 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/25/books/25human.html>.
- Damer, Edward. *Attacking Faulty Reasoning*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2008.
- Kasachkoff, Tziporah and Kelly, Eugene. Letter from the Editors. *APA Newsletter on Teaching Philosophy* 10, no. 1 (2010): 5-6.
- Leiter, Brian. “Are Philosophy Departments Being Targetted for Cuts or Elimination More than Other Programs? And, If So, Why?” In *Leiter Reports: A Philosophy Blog*, March 18, 2011. <http://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/2011/03/are-philosophy-departments-being-targetted-for-cuts-or-elimination-more-than-other-programs-and-if-s.html>.
- Malcolm, Norman. “Anselm’s Ontological Arguments.” *The Philosophical Review* 69, no. 1 (1960): 41-62.

---

---

## BOOK REVIEWS

---

---

### *Ethics: The Basics*

John Mizzoni (Oxford UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 223 pages, \$25.28.

**Reviewed by Melissa Bergeron**  
*U.S. Military Academy, West Point*

John Mizzoni, in his *Ethics: The Basics*, presents a readable unimposing gloss on ethics, but rarely fields arguments or offers much more than coarse intuitions in support of (or opposition to) a given position. Any student can pick up this book with antecedent confidence that nothing she currently believes will be challenged, apparently an objective of Mizzoni. In this regard, *Ethics* is not a particularly philosophical work, paying no attention to what makes adopting a theory reasonable, how

one is to contend with perceived shortcomings of the theory, or how generally one is to reason about ethics. There is, in other words, almost nothing normative about Mizzoni’s work.

In terms of general mechanics, there is much to recommend the text. A bonus to the care invested in writing the chapters is the closing material, which contains a list of the terms introduced and reviewed in that chapter, as well as discussion questions. This material has all the marks of a seasoned teacher, one who knows that neophytes appreciate lists and benefit from provocative questions that tempt one into further consideration of the material under discussion.

Mizzoni establishes a breezy conversational style that lends to the work’s accessibility. Ethics texts in particular tend to contain Monty Python-esque transitions, say, from a discussion of consequentialism to one of deontological ethics if only because there is a tremendous amount of information contained in the complete story moving from one approach to ethics to another. Figuring out just how much one should say to a new student to make clear the basis for shifting one’s approach is a tough thing to do. Not uncommonly, authors sacrifice accuracy (sometimes truth) at the altar of comprehensibility. Mizzoni avoids this dichotomy by casting ethical theories—“traditions,” really—as various ways one might think about moral problems rather than theories that drive decision-making, that are themselves constituted of truth-bearers, lending reason for acting on the practical conclusion. But this friendly, uncritical tone comes at a cost. The gravity of moral reasoning is never brought home to the reader, reassured, as you are from the outset, that this book “will help you identify your ethical orientation: the ethical concepts, principles, and theories you use and the ethical tradition to which you belong” rather than, the implication is, challenge your tradition (5). Mizzoni seems to take this approach on principled grounds, noting in the very next sentence that a work geared towards criticism—challenging current views, attempting rational persuasion—requires more technical apparatus than is appropriate for an intro text, a claim I think dubious, but one that goes a long way toward explaining the content of the text.

This central supposition, that students might study philosophy without arguing, criticizing, rationally persuading, and so forth, that philosophy might be separated from the practice of attempting to reason well, makes it hard to treat this as an introductory text, as a tool for teaching students to do what it does not. Something that is not essentially about evaluating the quality of reasons given for accepting P is not philosophy, at least not in any way I can see. Conceptual analysis is crucially important to philosophy, so taking the time to understand a particular theory or tradition is all to the good. Mizzoni might be taken as engaging in just this. But philosophy isn’t primarily dedicated to understanding the folkways of others (9), so it can’t simply rest easy with descriptions. Argument is the lifeblood of philosophy, inescapably normative, and not something one can do without trafficking in reasons.

Mizzoni insists that attempts to persuade are beyond the proper reach of the book. If he means that an instructor should not lobby for a particular ethical theory in the context of introducing her students, say, to contemporary moral theories, that seems to me obvious. But it doesn’t follow from this that one can’t present the arguments traditionally offered in favor of a theory. It is particularly difficult to compare the traditions when there is no talk of theoretical virtues, no epistemic standards introduced, and no canons of reason explicated. The only basis available for preferring one theory over another is intuition, and a critical eye is not even attempted here. If part of what one does in a philosophy course is model cogent reasoning, then this text will not prove an asset.

Virtually every chapter features “the theologian” as an interlocutor. On several occasions the theologian finds a curious contrast, e.g., with the evolutionist, as in passages like, “Evolutionists say these traits and the human potential Aristotle spoke of have been put into place by natural selection, while theologians will say these traits and this potential have been put into place by God” (31). The theologian is someone whose views occupy our attention throughout *Ethics*. Use of parables and stories from the Bible abound, and there are more saints mentioned in this slim volume than in a contemporary text of twice the length (cf. *Theory & Contemporary Issues*, MacKinnon, C.)

There are a few other spots that leave me scratching my head, like why the chapter covering Virtue Ethics, based on Aristotle, doesn’t mention the Function Argument, or the scientific worldview that made sense of Aristotle’s theory. The notion of a “soul” is bandied about without noting any difference between it and, say, the Christian soul. Things are more controversial still in the Natural Law Ethics chapter, in which Mizzoni announces that human sexuality naturally leads to reproduction and that one cannot say that she is inclined toward sex but not inclined toward reproduction, apparently as a conceptual matter (46).

Social Contract Ethics is essentially a review of the Hobbesian case for entering into the state, with Mizzoni representing Hobbes’ view of human nature as selfish, but with none of the nuance or realism of Hobbes, who (it seems to me) casts fear as the prime mover in the state of nature, not appetitiveness and avarice as Mizzoni has it. Utilitarianism, according to Mizzoni, is an altruistic ethic, since value is placed on others (alt, Mizzoni helpfully reminds us, just means “other”) (89). While I don’t deny that utilitarianism requires we grant the moral significance of others, altruism suggests a principled preference for the good of others, which is not utilitarian. It is also curious that Act and Rule utilitarianism aren’t distinguished and discussed. It is refreshing, though, to encounter a criticism from Mizzoni when he insists that there are “some highly controversial aspects to utilitarian ethics” (79), namely, that the ends justify the means, which runs contrary to the Pauline Principle (49). Mizzoni dedicates fifteen pages to Natural Law Ethics, only mentioning at the end that it has fallen out of favor among nontheists, suggesting that

One major reason for this is that today many moral theorists are skeptical about any kind of reasoning that proceeds from observations about human natural inclinations to moral conclusions. Individuals who share the religious worldview that undergirds natural law ethics, however, will be less skeptical about this kind of reasoning. (55)

This casting suggests that skeptics are merely biased against Christianity rather than rationally critical of the theory. The apparent special pleading on behalf of theists is acutely disappointing. In the end, each modern theory is improved by the assumption of theism. Theism rehabilitates Natural Law Ethics, blocks the Pauline Principle-violations of utilitarianism, and completes Kant’s (failed) secular ethics. It is here that Mizzoni wonders whether one shouldn’t expect a covertly theistic theory from a theorist whose name, “Immanuel,” means “God is with us” (122). Perhaps Mizzoni was just being clever. But in the wake of a slew of problematic inferences, like pressing for a curiously instrumental value for Virtue Ethics, observing, “People who interact with a virtuous person will benefit. The flipside of this is also true: the people who deal with the individual who lacks virtues and has many vices (i.e., vicious people) will be negatively affected” (29). Or insisting that incommensurability follows from cultural diversity (13);

or that social contract ethics is fundamentally egoistic, holding that something is right only if it benefits me, wrong otherwise (75); or that utilitarianism is altruistic (93); or that Kantianism incomplete without god (122). The list could go on.

Mizzoni claims in the Introduction to provide the basic philosophical tools necessary for thinking about how one ought to live, but it’s hard to see what tools he might have in mind if critical evaluation isn’t part of the enterprise. On what grounds is one to prefer a specific theory to some other on offer? It’s not even clear why one might move from one chapter onto the next if not because the former is shown lacking. But this would require considering the reasons for thinking a theory true. Various traditions are paraded before the reader but never defended, rarely motivated, and routinely left without rational grounding. If philosophy is the practice of reasoning well, or at least trying to, then Ethics fails in contributing to that practice. Instead of modeling and explaining valid forms of reasoning, Ethics leaves that task for another day and, apparently, another text; yet students having used this intro will leave the semester believing that they understand something about ethics. We might not always be able to teach our students. Minimally, we should not replace a student’s true belief not to know with a false belief that she does.

The book has a serviceable index, glossary of terms, and a bibliography. The paper edition is poorly constructed, with mine falling apart after just a few days of reading.

---

---

## ***What Is Analytic Philosophy?***

Hans-Johann Glock (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), xii + 292 pp., \$22.99 (paper).

**Reviewed by R. Gregory Taylor**  
*Manhattan College*

The author intends to describe the nature of analytic philosophy “in a direct and comprehensive manner,” considering its past, its present, and its likely future. A secondary goal is to contrast analytic philosophy, at its inception and today, with philosophy in the Continental tradition. Thus the book’s scope is greater than either M. Dummett’s *Origins of Analytical Philosophy* (Harvard, 1993), which concentrates on the historical roots of the discipline, or J. Cohen’s *The Dialogue of Reason* (Oxford, 1986) with its emphasis on analytic philosophy in its maturity.

Following an introductory chapter laying out the plan of the book, Chapter 2 constitutes a forty-page historical survey. Its manageable size makes it one of the strengths of the book. In no sense, however, is the book under review intended to compete with histories of analytic philosophy like S. Soames’ two-volume *Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: 2003) or A. Newen, *Analytische Philosophie zur Einführung* (Junius: Hamburg, 2005). Rather, the author’s aim is nothing short of a characterizing definition of analytic philosophy. Each of the next five chapters considers, and ultimately rejects, some *prima facie* plausible characterization of the concept “analytic philosophy.”

Any attempt, however nuanced, to characterize analytic philosophy on the basis of geography or language, as “Anglo-Saxon” or “Anglo-American” or “Anglo-Austrian,” is bound to fail, as Chapter 3 demonstrates. Nor, according to the author, can analytic philosophy be characterized in terms of some purported relation it bears to the history of philosophy, for example, what some take to be its ahistorical character (Chapter 4). Rather than being “historiophobic” or anachronistic, as its detractors charge, analytic philosophy more often evidences “weak historicism,”

by which the author means the view that the study of the past is useful to the philosopher without being indispensable. However, even “weakly historicist” will not do as a characterization of analytic philosophy, since there is no consensus regarding the role of the history of philosophy among members of the community of analytic philosophers and there are markedly anti-historicist strains in non-analytic philosophers such as Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.

The author’s rejection, in Chapter 5, of characterizations based on some distinctive constellation of doctrines, topics, or problems will be more surprising. For example, a main current of early analytic philosophy is reasonably described as “anti-metaphysical,” a trait it inherited from logical empiricism. However, as the author reminds us, some of the principal figures in the history of analytic philosophy have focused on selected topics that are decidedly metaphysical. (Quine’s naturalized ontology and Strawson’s descriptive metaphysics are just two examples here.) In this case, once again, the author’s aim is twofold in showing that the proposed characterization of analytic philosophy is either too broad, and hence not sufficient, or too narrow, and hence not necessary. (Usually the author argues that the proposal is *both* too broad *and* too narrow.) Typically, the former aim (“too broad”) is achieved by demonstrating that certain traditionalist or Continental philosophers satisfy the characterization (Bolzano in the present case) whereas the narrowness of the definition is demonstrated by showing that genuinely analytic philosophers fail to satisfy it (here Quine and Strawson as well as Kripke).

Could distinctive methodologies or stylistic traits be the essential mark of analytic philosophy? In Chapter 6, the author, following M. Beaney’s article “Analysis” in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, considers whether analytic philosophy is philosophy pursued in accordance with “the method of analysis,” meaning something along the lines of conceptual elucidation or sentential paraphrase. The author’s conclusion is that this characterization is too broad because Husserl and even Heidegger pursued a sort of analysis. It is also too narrow, according to him, since neither H. Frankfurt nor B. Williams can be said to analyze. Nonetheless, we found Beaney’s definition, modified along lines the author himself suggests on page 159 of the text, entirely satisfying. (Given the appellation “analytic philosophy,” Beaney’s definition is hardly surprising, which may indicate that it is correct.) Finally, Chapter 7 looks at the place of moral philosophy and political theory within the analytic tradition and asks whether analytic philosophy is inherently apolitical and hence serves the established political order. This suggestion is rejected as “flabbergasting” based on facts adduced by the author. In a final section entitled “The Singer Affair,” the author describes the controversies engendered by that philosopher’s views regarding infanticide and euthanasia. He sees those controversies, in particular the success of individuals representing the disabled in disrupting Singer’s appearances before German-speaking audiences, as lending support to the claim that the analytic tradition, where present, tends to promote both liberal and democratic values. (The latter claim, in turn, is related to rationalist definitions of analytic philosophy offered by J. Cohen and D. Føllesdal, which the author rejects at the end of Chapter 6.)

Here we come to the end of a series of attempts to formulate an analytic definition of analytic philosophy itself, that is, a set of conditions that are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for an instance of philosophy to count as analytic.

Chapter 8, entitled “Contested Concepts, Family Resemblances and Tradition,” presents the author’s positive contribution to the debate. His position is that analytic philosophy is a historical or genetic concept describable as “a historical sequence of individuals and schools that influenced, and engaged in debate with, each other, without sharing any single doctrine, problem or method.” This historic account requires supplementation by a family resemblance characterization of the concept “intramural dialogue among analytic philosophers resulting in mutual positive influences” (our term). The latter characterization is needed, according to the author, so as to ensure that Gadamer and Habermas are not categorized as analytic philosophers by virtue of their having positively influenced, and been positively influenced by, Davidson and Putnam, respectively. Moreover, the family resemblances to which appeal is made will include several of the doctrinal and methodological criteria considered in Chapters 5 and 6.

The book closes with a chapter entitled “Present and Future.” Its first section, bearing the title “Imposters, Bunglers and Relativists,” considers the hoax perpetrated by physicist A. Skokal upon the editors of the fashionable postmodernist journal *Social Text*. (In 1996 they published his article “Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Mechanics” consisting of deliberately nonsensical, pseudo-scientific claims that he had derived from the writings of leading postmodernist thinkers.) The author warns analytic philosophers that it is a grave error to overlook the distinction between fraudulent postmodernists, on the one hand, and competent, but nonetheless dissident, relativists such as Feyerabend, Kuhn, and Rorty, on the other. A second section amounts to a critique of analytic philosophy—its scholasticist tendencies and drive toward hyper-specialization—written by a practitioner of it. Finally, future prospects are assayed in “Present and Future,” where the author expresses his view that “there is no overriding *intellectual* imperative for analytic philosophy to alter course solely to achieve rapprochement with other philosophical currents, assimilation to other intellectual styles, or recognition in other academic disciplines” (260).

Despite the inclusion of a historical overview of the analytic tradition (Chapter 2), the book’s arguments assume considerable knowledge of, and experience with, the analytic tradition on the part of the reader. For this reason, we think that the audience for this book would include faculty and graduate, but not undergraduate, students. It might well be a source for a graduate seminar on the history of the analytic tradition. Indeed, the author’s “family tree diagram of analytic philosophy” on page 227, containing nodes labeled “Schopenhauer,” “Polish School,” and “Kripke,” might itself serve as point of departure for one seminar session. More generally, the book should be useful as an aid, with respect to both topics and texts, to a faculty member teaching such a seminar. One of the considerable strengths of this book lies in its reminder of the diversity of views that have been held by those following the analytic banner. There are also interesting discussions of a few episodes of direct debate between analytic and Continental philosophers (Ryle and Heidegger, Carnap and Heidegger, Derrida and Searle, and so forth).

As the foregoing summary suggests, the book is very well organized. It is also well written. An exhaustive index includes both names and topics. Further, the reader should be able to begin at just about any place in the text, aided by its fully descriptive table of contents.

---

---

## BOOKS RECEIVED

---

---

### Hackett Publishing

Cohen, S. Marc, Patricia Curd, and C.D.C. Reeve (eds.). *Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy: From Thales to Aristotle*, Fourth Edition 2011.

Curd, Patricia (ed.) *A Presocratics Reader: Selected Fragments and Testimonia*, Second edition, 2011.

McKirahan, Jr., Richard D. *Philosophy before Socrates: An Introduction with Texts and Commentary*. Second Edition, 2011.

Van Norden, Bryan W. *Introduction to Classical Chinese Philosophy*, 2011.

### Harvard University Press

Bernstein, Jeremy. *Quantum Leaps*, 2011.

Foley, Elizabeth Price. *The Law of Life and Death*, 2011.

Fox, Robin. *The Tribal Imagination: Civilization and the Savage Mind*, 2011.

Grafton, Anthony. *Worlds Made by Words: Scholarship and Community in the Modern West*, 2011.

Nussbaum, Martha C. *The Human Development Approach*, 2011.

Sen, Amartya. *The Idea of Justice*, 2011.

### McGraw-Hill

Abel, Donald C. *Fifty Readings in Philosophy*. Fourth edition. 2012.

Rachels, James and Stuart Rachels. *The Truth about the World: Basic Readings in Philosophy*. Third edition, 2012.

### Prometheus Books

Joshi, S. T. *The Unbelievers: The Evolution of Modern Atheism*, 2011.

Law, Stephen. *Believing Bullshit: How Not to Get Sucked into an Intellectual Black Hole*, 2011.

Sober, Elliott. *Did Darwin Write the Origin Backwards? Philosophical Essays on Darwin's Theory*, 2011.

### Prufrock Press

Porter, Clark G., with James M. Girsch. *Make up Your Mind: A Classroom Guide to Ten Age-Old Debates*. Intended for Grades 7-10, 2011.

### Wadsworth

Bowie, G. Lee, Meredith W. Michaels and Robert C. Solomon. *Twenty Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy*. Seventh edition, 2011.

Marmysz, John. *The Path of Philosophy: Truth, Wonder, and Distress*, 2012.

Velasquez, Manuel. *Philosophy: A Text with Readings*. Eleventh edition, 2011.

### Westview Press

Boersema, David. *Philosophy of Human Rights: Theory and Practice*, 2011.

Boylan, Michael. *Morality and Global Justice: Justifications and Applications*, 2011.

Boylan, Michael. *The Morality and Global Justice Reader*, 2011.

---

---

## ADDRESSES OF THE CONTRIBUTORS

---

---

Felicia Nimue Ackerman

Philosophy Department

Brown University/Box 1918

54 College St.

Providence, RI 02912

[Felicia\\_Ackerman@brown.edu](mailto:Felicia_Ackerman@brown.edu)

Moti Mizrahi

Department of Social Sciences (B 634)

Fashion Institute of Technology

227 W. 27th St.

New York, NY 10001-5992

[mmizrahi@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:mmizrahi@gc.cuny.edu)

David E. Schrader

American Philosophical Association

31 Amstel Avenue

University of Delaware

Newark, DE 19716

[dschrade@udel.edu](mailto:dschrade@udel.edu)

Mark Zelcer

Department of Political Science

Brooklyn College, CUNY

2900 Bedford Ave.

Brooklyn, NY 11201