

# Philosophy in Two-Year Colleges



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APA NEWSLETTER ON

# Philosophy in Two-Year Colleges

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THOMAS URBAN, EDITOR

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## FROM THE EDITOR

Thomas Urban

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During the question-and-answer portion of the 2010 APA Central Division John Dewey Lecture, titled "On Not Knowing Where You Are Going," speaker Alasdair MacIntyre remarked that in the future "Philosophy in the United States will be found in community colleges and other strange places." While this comment caught many by surprise, it points to an evolving presence for philosophy in two-year and community colleges. The aim of this newsletter is to foster a rich discussion concerning the nature and issues that characterize that evolution, as well as to highlight the great differences one finds from institution to institution, and the great diversity of faculty and students who populate their campuses.

Accordingly, this first issue (and perhaps those that will follow) does not adhere to a single theme or topic. Instead, it reflects the very broad call for papers adopted by our committee, a breadth that we believe best gathers and presents the reality that is the twenty-first century two-year and community college. It is not the *normal school* of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, or the *vocational-technical school* of sixty years ago. And, while workforce programs do make up a sizeable portion of the two-year and community college curriculum, it is not unreasonable to point out that the same is true of many programs found at four-year and graduate institutions. What is unreasonable is to pretend that the two-year and community college mission is somehow inferior to that of those other *higher* institutions, or its faculty less sophisticated in their thinking than those at four-year colleges and universities. While there is certainly a greater emphasis on teaching in the former and on research in the latter, this does not entail that excellence in either is necessarily distributed accordingly. One reason there is a need for a newsletter specifically devoted to two-year and community colleges is that the challenges of teaching at two-year and community colleges, broadly conceived, not only include pedagogical issues, but professional and workload issues that differ significantly from those at senior colleges and universities.

This is clearly a work in progress by any measure, but work that we believe is important to the health and well-being of both the profession and philosophy. We welcome your comments, and, more importantly, we welcome your articles for publication in future issues.

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## ARTICLES

### *Thoughts on the Consolidation of a Two-Year College and a Research University*

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GEORGIA PERIMETER COLLEGE

George Rainbolt

GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

While mergers of colleges and universities have occurred as long as there have been colleges and universities, it seems likely that current political and economic factors will lead to an increase in such mergers in the years to come. In particular, falling state appropriations combined with resistance to increasing tuition puts institutions under the kind of financial pressure that makes merger an attractive option. What follows is a description of an in-progress consolidation of a two-year college and a research university. While there are risks, we believe that this consolidation will be beneficial to students and faculty at both institutions.

In January of 2015, the University System of Georgia (the System) announced the consolidation of Georgia State University (GSU) and Georgia Perimeter College (GPC). The two institutions legally became one this past January, and the first combined registration will be for the fall semester of 2016. This consolidation is part of a larger System-wide plan. A total of twelve institutions have been or are being consolidated into six. This will take the System from thirty-five institutions to twenty-nine. GSU is Carnegie-classified as a research university (very high research activity) with 32,000 students (25,000 undergraduates and 7,000 graduate students) on a main campus in downtown Atlanta. GPC was Carnegie-classified as an associate's institution with 20,000 students on five campuses mostly in the northeastern suburbs of Atlanta and a significant online presence.

### THE SHAPE OF THE CONSOLIDATED INSTITUTION

In some mergers, both academic departments and non-academic units are merged. For example, in the consolidation of Kennesaw State University and Southern Polytechnic State University (two other institutions in the System), the standard practice was for academic departments in the same field to combine. The English

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faculty of each institution were combined into one English department. Similarly, the combined institution has one Registrar's Office.

The GSU-GPC consolidation is taking a different shape. GPC has become a distinct college (named "Perimeter College") within Georgia State, just as the College of Arts and Sciences and the College of Law are distinct colleges within GSU. Incorporating Perimeter College as a distinct college allows the students and faculty to be kept largely distinct from the faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences and the other colleges in the same way that the students and faculty of the College of Law are by and large kept distinct and separate from the College of Arts and Sciences.

There are distinct admissions criteria, with the Perimeter College retaining the admissions criteria of an associate's institution. Similarly, tuition rates remain lower for students registered in associate's degree programs at Perimeter College. The courses offered at the freshman and sophomore levels are identical. The "common core" of basic distribution requirements for the associate's and bachelor's degrees has been unified. However, students enrolled in associate's programs and students enrolled in bachelor's programs are not going to be in the same classrooms. Moreover, the faculty members that have been teaching in the same discipline (for example, philosophy) at different colleges have not been merged into single academic departments, but rather have been organized into distinct departments within their respective colleges. Normally, students will move from Perimeter College to the other GSU colleges when they receive their associate's degree. There are distinct degrees. Perimeter College offers only the associate's degree, and the other colleges do offer associate's degrees. They continue to offer bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees. There are distinct faculties with distinct promotion and tenure requirements.

On the other hand, non-academic units have been merged. The combined GSU has one Registrar's Office and one Office of Safety and Security (a.k.a. campus police). This organizational model is employed by a number of other institutions. For example, Emory University's Oxford College is a distinct college within Emory University that offers the first two years of the Emory curriculum.

## **BENEFITS OF THE PLANNED ORGANIZATIONAL MODEL**

Why retain Perimeter College as a distinct college within Georgia State University? First, GSU and GPC had distinct admission requirements. In particular, GPC enrolled a large group of students in its remedial education ("learning support") program. Diversity within the classroom is certainly a good thing. However, when it comes to students' level of academic preparedness, *too much* diversity within one classroom can create practical challenges and obstacles for effective teaching and student success. To the extent that this is a legitimate worry, avoiding the integration of the associate and bachelor students has some benefit. Second, this system allows distinct promotion and tenure criteria. GPC did not have a research mission, so its faculty were not hired with research in mind. Moving GPC faculty into

departments with a research mission would cause problems for the GPC faculty and for preexisting GSU faculty. Third, with Perimeter as a distinct college, it is easier to do apples-to-apples comparisons (e.g., about student performance) pre- and post-consolidation. Fourth, it is administratively simpler to retain Perimeter College as a distinct college. Fifth, this option offers a number of financial benefits and helps to mitigate a number of financial risks that mergers sometimes encounter.

Importantly, keeping Perimeter College a separate college enables the possibility to keep its tuition rates lower, a significant financial benefit to students. This is important if enrollment numbers at Perimeter College are to be maintained. An organizational plan which fully integrated the GPC faculty and students into the preexisting GSU colleges would be under a great deal of pressure to raise the tuition levels from the lower level that is the norm for associate institutions to the higher level that is the norm at the state's research universities. Obviously, raising tuition could have a serious negative impact on enrollments.

Similarly, keeping Perimeter College a separate college makes it possible to keep payroll costs for faculty (one of the largest portions of any university's operating budget) from increasing as a result of the consolidation. The pre-consolidation GSU faculty had higher salaries than the faculty at GPC. An organizational plan which fully integrated the GPC faculty into departments within GSU's colleges would be under a great deal of pressure to take steps toward equalizing faculty pay. Such a plan would increase the payroll costs of the resulting institution, which would make tuition increases unavoidable. However, again, increasing tuition rates would jeopardize enrollment.<sup>1</sup>

## **ADDITIONAL RISKS**

Some at Georgia State worry that having "Georgia State University" on two-year college degrees will hurt Georgia State's reputation. It is hard to estimate the seriousness of this risk because there have been so few cases of this sort of consolidation. We tend to hold the view that a well-managed consolidation can minimize this risk. Emory University's Oxford College shows that it is possible to have a two-year program inside a research institution with no negative impact on academic reputation. Additionally, as the Emory University example shows, there is a potential benefit for associate's degree programs. For better or worse, there is, in the minds of some students, a stigma associated with attending a two-year college. Insofar as there is this stigma, it may have dissuaded potential students from enrolling at GPC. It may be that the "Georgia State University" name will help to minimize this concern. Potentially, this may make enrolling in an associate's degree program more attractive to students who would otherwise have looked elsewhere for their education or not have gone to college at all. Accordingly, there is a potential benefit to students that may result simply from the rebranding.

Another worry is that GSU is taking on GPC's financial problems. From 2009 to 2015, Georgia State's enrollment grew from about 30,000 students to about 32,000 students, while GPC's enrollment fell from about 25,000 to about 21,000. Possible explanations for this drop include the

reviving economy and a change in the System's remedial education rules. (Most colleges and universities in the System have had enrollments fall during this period—GSU's success during this period is something of an outlier.) Although there will be cost savings from combining non-academic units, it will be vital to return Perimeter College to a path of growing enrollments.

Any time two organizations merge, there is a risk of culture-clash. We need to be honest. This is not a consolidation of equals. The combined institution retains the Georgia State University name and the Georgia State University president. None of the senior administration at Georgia State lost their jobs because of this consolidation. Some members of the senior administration at Georgia Perimeter College have lost their jobs, and others have had reduced job titles. In the consolidation of policies and procedures, the decision was made that the default policy would be Georgia State's. GPC faculty and staff will have to adapt to a new culture that largely represents the existing culture at GSU.

One worry on the part of Perimeter College faculty is connected with this. Many worry that the consolidation will have a harmful impact on student learning. The culture at GSU is the culture of a research university—a culture in which large numbers of undergraduates at the freshmen and sophomore level are taught by graduate students with little classroom experience. The undergraduate bodies of GPC and GSU were similar in many ways. They were similar in their ethnic diversity and in their diversity along socio-economic lines. Indeed, a substantial portion of GSU's upperclassmen were originally GPC students who transferred after completing some coursework or an associate's degree at GPC. However, the GPC students who successfully transfer to GSU represented only a portion of GPC's student body. GPC's student body included a significant number of students that are weaker in terms of their academic preparedness. Thus the student body at GPC contained a significant portion of students who were much weaker than the students GSU faculty would typically encounter. Perimeter faculty thus worry that a general policy of adopting the ways of GSU whenever the cultures and practices of the two institutions differ will result in a consolidated institution that is no longer well suited to the needs of its most at-risk students.

While this last worry is felt acutely by some faculty at Perimeter College, neither of the present authors see the need to be particularly pessimistic on this issue. The effort at consolidation is being made with some care to retain what is successful and necessary for student success when the practices of the two institutions are in conflict. Much of what went on in the classroom at GPC will not change. Additionally, GSU's current administration has shown itself to be attentive to the concrete results of the changes it makes, and we have reasonable confidence that if changes necessitated by the consolidation have a negative impact on learning-support students, corrective action can be taken once the institution has achieved a more stabilized (post-consolidation) state. Finally, because of the way state financing of higher education is structured, the consolidated institution has a large financial incentive to make sure that students at the associate level are successful.

Another worry is triggered by the fact that Georgia Perimeter College recently went through a sudden leadership change and at least two rounds of budget cuts that resulted in layoffs. The consolidation has led to reductions in levels of non-academic staff. There is a risk that Perimeter faculty and staff will become demoralized. On the other hand, GSU's leadership is stable, and because it has bucked the state-wide trend of declining enrollments, GSU has largely succeeded in avoiding budget cuts. It may be that the consolidation will bring more stability and minimize the risk of further enrollment declines and the budget cuts that they often cause.

Finally, there are operational risks. The process of consolidation is extremely complex. There is, for example, a risk that the financial aid or accounts payable system will crash. We are in no position to evaluate this risk, but we are encouraged that this consolidation is not the System's first and that the previous consolidations have largely avoided operational breakdowns.

#### **ADDITIONAL BENEFITS**

At a basic level, the combining of back-office and upper-level administrative functions (deans, administrators, etc.) is likely to lower costs per student. This is one central reason that the System is pursuing consolidation.

Students who go to two-year colleges and want to transfer to earn their bachelor's degree often perceive the move from the two-year college to the four-year college as a barrier. The consolidation of GSU and GPC should make it easier for students to make this transition. The consolidated institution will have clear financial incentives to remove bureaucratic barriers between the two-year and the four-year degree. In the ideal case, it will be as easy for a student who earns the associate's degree to move to a bachelor's program as it is for a student who earns a B in Calculus I to take Calculus II.

There are cases in which the two institutions can profit from each other's expertise. Over the past fifteen years, GSU has increased graduation rates dramatically (by approximately 20 percentage points) and eliminated the gap between the graduation rates of white students and students from underrepresented minorities. Many of the lessons Georgia State has learned will help Perimeter College students graduate. GPC had (in our view) the best online program in Georgia. GSU faculty can learn a lot about online teaching from the Perimeter faculty.

Georgia Perimeter College did not have a strong system of shared governance while Georgia State does. Perimeter College's faculty and staff now have proportionate representation in GSU's university senate structure. Indeed, Perimeter College's faculty are one of the largest voting blocs. This gives Perimeter College faculty the opportunity to advance proposals through the normal process to redress or correct any perceived missteps made during the consolidation. Being empowered to work toward possible correction of any perceived mistakes should help mitigate any demoralizing effect on faculty. Although the consolidated Senate has only been in operation since January, we believe that Perimeter students and faculty

are already seeing the benefits of being a part of GSU's stronger shared governance system.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS: CONSOLIDATION AND THE NEED FOR ACCESS TO QUALITY HIGHER EDUCATION

A healthy democracy depends on having an educated citizenry that can participate in decision-making. It depends on having a citizenry of critical thinkers who can focus on the common good, and who can resist the siren's call of demagogues. When it comes to their access to quality higher education, the citizens need all the help they can get. They face many difficulties. The state of Georgia (like many other states) projects a great increase in the need for a college-educated workforce. While there seems to be the political will to mandate an increase in graduates, there does not seem to be the political will to increase state revenues so that colleges and universities receive adequate support. Instead, the state provides much less funding per student than it did in decades past. Costs are passed on to the students and their families in the form of increased tuition rates. This trend (the gradual privatization of the public education system) has been repeated across the country. The result of this trend has been a great increase in student debt—a troubling phenomenon that is currently receiving a good deal of attention in the media as we approach a national presidential election.

The consolidation we have been considering (like the consolidation strategy generally) is obviously not a magic bullet that will solve these problems. However, in such times, every little thing that can be done to help should be done. We believe that this consolidation has the potential to increase the availability of quality education to the people of Georgia.

Serving a total enrollment of roughly 52,000 students, the new institution created by this consolidation is the largest university in Georgia, and one of the largest in the country. It is only natural that a consolidation of this magnitude should face its fair share of obstacles and challenges. However, it seems to us that, all things considered, there is reason to be optimistic about the prospects for increased access, improved student outcomes, and overall cost-reduction. There is good reason to think that this consolidation will help more Georgians get a better education.

### ENDNOTES

1. A recent planned consolidation in the state of Massachusetts had to be scuttled because of just such considerations. See Kellie Woodhouse, "Anatomy of a Failed Merger," *Inside Higher Ed*, August 5, 2015, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/08/05/college-merger-negotiations-are-long-and-complicated>

## *The Ethics of Freedom: A Unified Framework for Teaching Ethics in the Community College*

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Time was when the good were the virtuous, then the stoic, the godly, the self-interested, the happy, the dutiful, and, more recently, the ones who show they care.<sup>1</sup> Each ethical tradition asserts its own value-equation, (i.e., good = 'x'), purported universal, and to ground its respective principle. However, where honesty outranks bias, ethics teachers understand that no single theory settles all dilemmas. This limitation leads to creative strategies that either stretch a principle beyond its scope, invoke whichever theory seems most apt to the dilemma, or suggest some, typically labored, patchwork of principles.<sup>2</sup> The result for ethics students, and attendees of community colleges in particular, may be aversion more than moral erudition. Teachers need a way of framing the discipline such that contemporary students feel the personal importance of its question.

Socrates understood his mission to help *the people* to find virtue. Ethics was not to be the exclusive property of philosophers. Yet, one need only to consider the current state of our communities to realize, either, that Ethics has become too diversified or esoteric to be popularly viable, or we teachers have failed to convey the real value of the good. Certainly, some will suggest that the simplest explanation is rampant and depraved *akrasia*. This last account suggests that people do what they want in place of what they know to be the good. This essay proposes a strategy for teaching ethics in a way that shows the good to be exactly what one wants. The two-year college setting, more than others, is a unique, but fleeting, opportunity to touch the minds of many. As a preponderance of our students move directly to the workforce, the ethics course may be one's only formal academic exposure to the realm of character development. Where the college builds a workforce yet neglects to form the person, it has failed both community and student. Likewise, where philosophy is but debate among professional academics and no longer strives to awaken the people, it has failed its original vocation.

The discipline of ethics seeks the meaning of a good life, but "goodness" can mean various things. To most students, "a good life" and "the good life" denote two very different notions. Socrates rejected this distinction. Properly understood, for him, a good life is its own reward. If Socrates is correct (and this writer thinks he is), no one who knows better would do wrong.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, if we reject the convenient excuse that humanity is morally weak, it becomes incumbent on the teacher to demonstrate that goodness constitutes the best of all possible lives. Teaching ethics students in two-year colleges can only be effective if they are convinced that the good is in their interest.

What has been said suggests a dual pedagogical challenge, both practical and theoretical. The Socratic Paradox proposes

that epidemic turpitude cannot be explained by moral weakness. All people want the best lives for themselves. The difficulty is more properly intellectual, a failure to understand that the good do benefit. The latter challenge is the need, more urgent now than ever, for a unified and simple moral theory. Addressing the latter might make progress toward the former, and enkindle new concern for being good.

What follows is an attempt at a unified framework, not a compilation of extant traditions, but one that delivers a single, *appealing* principle, to capture what is said by all the rest. Thus we suggest from the start that students should understand every ethical tradition to identify something of real value to human beings. Each represents an aspect of the good. But the ethics course should not be presented as the search for a "correct" ethical theory. Rather, the learning outcome for the student of ethics must be genuine concern for how one ought to live.

In the attempt of the traditions to assert the universality of their principles, each identifies a single moral standard, the parameters of which define a narrowness of scope. Whether this standard is the virtue of the mean, the fundamental goods of natural law, the satiation of self-interest via contract, happiness, the good will, the Overman, or Care, the ground of every value is the same. That which makes all valuation possible is the freedom of autonomous beings. Throughout the current essay, "autonomy" means *potential* self-direction, while "freedom" means the power to enact it. Thus all free beings are autonomous; however, not all the autonomous are free. We seek to demonstrate that the fundamental value of each aforementioned standard is freedom as an end-in-itself. The end of human freedom is the freedom of the human. Because beginning college students are especially enamored with the excitement of a sudden liberty, the idea that moral goodness is in the interest of their freedom cannot fail to be of appeal.

On our theory, freedom is not only the condition of all value, but itself is understood as *summum bonum*. Wherever individuals find meaning in their lives, maturity understands that one is individually responsible for what ultimately becomes of oneself. To be free is to assume this obligation. We thus propose "the principle of freedom": *One ought always to seek the preservation of freedom, both in thought and action, in others, and also in oneself.* This principle is grounded in the assertion that the essence of human existence is autonomy; becoming free is the improvement of the soul. Action that tends toward the destruction of freedom is prohibited; action that tends toward its preservation is promoted.

Freedom, however, does *not* mean immunity from just incarceration.<sup>4</sup> Citizenship implies agreement to live according to the law. One who willfully violates such law breaches it freely. To impose the statutory punishment for a freely chosen act is not the denial of one's freedom; contrarily, justice is, in fact, its affirmation.<sup>5</sup> Should law be enacted without a moral ground, this may justify civil disobedience and the will to suffer freely for one's cause.

Nor does freedom mean doing whatever one may wish. To seek the freedom of autonomous beings implies

avoidance of such action as would result in its destruction. For example, should one wish regularly to abuse habit-forming drugs, the consequence whereof is addiction, deprivation of one's freedom will ensue. Active addiction is a loss of self-control and any chance of not succumbing to obsession. Thus drug abuse is a violation of the principle of freedom.

Each of the following sections will begin with a brief synopsis of a particular ethical tradition as might be taught in an introductory course. These are meant only to capture the basic teaching in each case and presumably remain uncontroversial. As opposed to developing an extended interpretation of any ethic, each is treated only so far as is necessary to demonstrate that it can be understood as seeking the end of human freedom. When the tradition is framed in this way, the respective moral theories seem less purely academic, and become strategies for enhancing students' lives.

### **FREEDOM AND VIRTUE**

For Aristotle, human beings are rational and social animals. Each component of this conception reveals an aspect of his thought. Because happiness, understood as well-being and flourishing, is conceived an intrinsic good, Aristotle deems it a rational end. Our sociability serves to instruct our imitation, while the necessity of virtue arises from animality. People are afflicted by the vicious extremes of deficient and excessive emotional response. Thus virtue is a mean that lies between these two extremes. For example, all animals experience fear. Yet, in humanity, the remedy is courage. The excessive are the reckless, the deficient, cowardly.

The sole point of this synopsis is to suggest that the value of the virtues lies in preserving our freedom. The extremes result in one's captivity. Want of real courage is enslavement to one's fear, either through cowardice or temerity. When seized by base emotion, virtue frees us from its conquest and the onus of self-deprecating thought. Virtue as a mean, *itself*, is an extreme for one must freely choose to face off with one's vice. Recklessness exposes one to injury or death, while cowardice is a prison of its own. Well-being is the freedom from diverse forms of oppression; flourishing is freedom from decline. For the contemporary student, "virtue" sounds anachronistic, but freedom is a timeless incentive.

### **FREEDOM AND STOICISM**

Central to the counsel of Epictetus stand two profoundly wise directives. The first instructs that one ought always to distinguish between that which is within one's control (is one's own) from that which is not (belongs to others). The second instructs one, in every situation, to remember the general nature of things.

The first principle makes our point explicit. Things within one's control are free, unrestrained, and unhindered; things not in one's control are weak, slavish, and restrained. The aim is freedom from disturbance of various sorts, e.g., blame, accusation, fear, coercion, harm, loss, and the pangs of guilty conscience.

To mistake that which lies beyond one's control for that which lies within is to enslave oneself to a life of winless battles and a false sense of incompetence. Perhaps the gravest error of this sort is attachment to the past. Of course, most people do not actually believe they can alter the bygone. Still, regretting and bemoaning what is done or left neglected is a failure to heed this basic truth. Ensnarement in the past comes at the cost of a free present. Alternatively, learning from the past can obviate the foolishness of committing all the same mistakes again.

The second principle instructs us to remember the general nature of things, i.e., to understand their essence. Yet Epictetus' illustration seems not to do justice to the true depth of his very own advice. He writes,

With regard to whatever objects give you delight, are useful, or are deeply loved, remember to tell yourself of what general nature they are, beginning from the most insignificant things. If, for example, you are fond of a specific ceramic cup, remind yourself that it is only ceramic cups in general of which you are fond. Then, if it breaks, you will not be disturbed.<sup>6</sup>

Epictetus' justification here for remembering the general nature of the ceramic cup seems to be essentially Platonic. The absolute cup (the Form) has not been lost, but only a reflection thereof. In any event, there are other ceramic cups. However, the deeper meaning of his teaching seems closer to the notion of being "already broken" articulated by Master Achaan Chaa. Understanding from the start that the nature of things is impermanence frees one from idolatry to objects. The cup is, in a sense, "already broken." Not only does this ease excessive grieving at their loss as well as suffering the fear thereof, but knowing that possession is finite and contingent grants one greater appreciation for things not guaranteed at all. Moreover, infinitely greater is this insight when approaching love for persons. Belonging to the essence of persons is mortality. Genuinely understanding this can move the bereaved from the depths of great despair to celebration of having shared another's life. All people value freedom from disturbance.

### FREEDOM AND NATURAL LAW

One great advantage, especially today, of Natural Law over other faith-based ethics is that one need not have faith to affirm its teleological analysis. Aquinas asserts that all things in nature exist to serve a purpose, e.g., the eye is inclined toward vision, as the wings of a dove are inclined toward flight. His key move is to establish a parallelism between the inclinations of natural things and those of human beings. According to Aquinas, all persons have four basic inclinations, each of which indicates a fundamental good. Our desire to understand things exists for the sake of *knowledge*; our social nature exists for *sociability*; our inclination to preserve our lives exists for *life itself*; our sexual inclination exists to *procreate*. Thus one ought to promote the fundamental goods indicated by the human inclinations. To divert the inclinations from their fundamental goods is a violation of their natural purpose. Yet if, as we assert, the strength of Natural Law is teleological, wherein lies the final value of its goods?<sup>7</sup>

Natural Law asserts the fundamental goods of knowledge, sociability, life, and procreation. We contend, however, that their value is not fundamental, but in the service of promoting human freedom.

The promulgation of knowledge makes possible the freedom of informed decision-making. A corollary of the good of knowledge is the prohibition of telling lies. The object of knowledge is the true, and lies assert the false. Thus, telling lies violates the principle of freedom as it undermines one's freedom to knowingly decide. Truth is a condition of living freely.<sup>8</sup>

While the discussion of Contract Theory is reserved for the next section, Hobbes' State-of-Nature is a powerful description of life devoid of sociability. War of every person against every other person is imprisonment in wretched solitude. Social life redeems us from the risk of isolation, total self-reliance, paranoia, lonesomeness, and insanity. Life outside society makes most every act purposive, seeking shelter, food, and all the means to live. Sociability brings leisure, the community, and friendship that liberate from strict utility.<sup>9</sup>

The good of life is not found only in its preservation. To value life includes both the promotion of one's health and the beneficial faculties of body. Thus action detrimental to any bodily function is certainly proscribed by Natural Law. Yet bodily action is the outward expression of freedom; thus to compromise the body is to restrict free exercise.

Finally, from the perspective of Natural Law, sexuality indicates that procreation is a fundamental good. But the simple propagation of the species lacks a meaning unless living-in-itself is justified. We maintain that freedom itself justifies existence and procreation births autonomy.

Beyond providing children the necessities to live, the duty of a parent is to guide them to be free. To teach the young avoidance of that which would enslave them, and to cultivate what talents they may have, creates opportunity, the richness and rewards, which come from seizing possibilities.

### FREEDOM AND THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

Contract Ethics begins with the assertion of every person's right to everything, including use of other people's bodies. Yet, as unbridled self-interest cannot flourish in the state-of-nature, people contract to lay down some of their rights. The sole incentive to abide by the terms of the contract is fear of almost certain punishment. While bound by the contract, complete satisfaction is unlikely, but all are considered better off than not. Thus, on this theory, people have the natural right to the complete exercise of freedom. However, because people tend not to recognize that imposition upon the freedom of others is, at the same time, imposition on their own, there arises need of moral artifice.

Like the Ethics of Freedom, the Contract Theory has an aspect of the Golden Rule built into its structure. The contract represents the idea that the way one treats others is likely to impact how one is treated. However, our principle also recognizes that action that imposes upon the

freedom of others, *ipso facto*, brings curtailment of one's own. To restrict another's freedom not only invites like reprisals, but even if retaliation does not, in fact, result, one is nonetheless haunted by the fear thereof. Drawing the students' attention to this fact brings immediate incentive for respecting others' freedom. Thus, preservation of freedom, both in thought and action, in others, and also in oneself, immediately prohibits such behavior as would catalyze the fear of retribution in like kind. The principle of freedom obviates the social contract. There is no need of Hobbes' Leviathan.

### FREEDOM AND UTILITY

Utilitarianism finds its root in the work of David Hume, for whom reason is descriptive; only passion can prescribe. Happiness is conceived as the greatest of all goods, which, for Bentham, means pleasure and absence of pain. Thus arises Mill's principle of utility: maximize happiness for all sentient creation.

It is beyond the scope of this essay to treat the difficulties with this or any other moral theory. The Utilitarian is well aware of the dangers of deciding moral issues by hedonic calculus.<sup>10</sup> Let us deal only with utility as freedom.

What can "absence of pain" mean but freedom from discomfort? And is pleasure not liberation from the tepid average day? Even if pleasure is conceived as an end-in-itself, freedom of variation is its condition. Assuming the attempt to predict utility is presumptuous and fraught with difficulty, happiness can only be enacted by oneself. What, then, is promoting happiness but non-interference with another person's own pursuit thereof? And scarcely can happiness prevail in a circumstance where individual freedom does not. The principle of freedom promotes the liberty of persons to seek happiness however it is deemed.

### FREEDOM AND THE GOOD WILL

Clearly, of the classical traditions, Kantianism bears the most obvious kinship to the Ethics of Freedom. For Kant, only the good will can be considered absolutely good without further qualification. The good will is that which proceeds from duty (as opposed to that which merely accords with it), where duty is the necessity of acting from respect for the moral law, i.e., the categorical imperative. If the categorical imperative is to apply with absolute universality and necessity, argues Kant, it must be grounded in the existence of that which itself possesses absolute worth: the dignity of rational beings. The inviolable worth of rational beings is grounded in the freedom of the will. Thus, the formula of the end-in-itself states: Treat all rational beings as ends-in-themselves, and never only as a means.

All valuation is made possible by freedom, which, for Kant, is the causality of will. Thus, for Kant, persons are the basis for the moral law. Reason gives the law unto itself. Before interpreting the categorical imperative in terms of the principle of freedom, a note on terminology is indicated.

For Kant, the will is always free, but can vacillate between autonomy and heteronomy. The autonomous will proceeds from its own rational principle, while the heteronomous will proceeds from inclination. In the Ethics of Freedom,

however, autonomy is *potential* self-direction. Thus the will is always autonomous, but can succeed or fail to be free, i.e., to think or act without hindrance or restraint. On our theory, the absence of freedom is equivalent to Kantian heteronomy.

Now, as the categorical imperative commands respect for the freedom of rational beings (dignity), it follows that freedom is its own end. This is precisely our contention. For Kant, the heteronomous will is commanded by alien causes (inclinations), and, as such, is practically an object. For, the behavior of objects is strictly determined from without. Likewise, on our theory, infringement upon freedom is to treat both self and other as but things.

### FREEDOM AND CARE

The Ethics of Care is a twentieth-century development,<sup>11</sup> arising from the historical neglect of the feminine perspective. It suggests that men and women think of goodness differently and articulates a more feminine voice. Whether this difference is grounded biologically, psychologically, sociologically, or otherwise, it is expressed as a shift away from universal, impartial moral principles (masculine) to particular and partial ethical commitments that arise strictly from personal relations (feminine). To be good is to respond to the perceived needs of others with whom one has entered a relationship. This principle is based on the conception of human nature as both feeling and relational. The theory admits of degrees of care proportionate to the nature of each relationship. Perhaps its most notable break with tradition is the insistence on moral partiality. Ethical commitments are bound to a network of specific beings with whom one has entered a relationship of caring. Noddings defines this relationship as existing between "one-caring" and "one cared-for." The moral obligation of the one-caring is to respond to the needs of specific other beings. That of the one cared-for is acknowledgment of this care. Like Utilitarianism, Care Ethics includes animals in the sphere of morally relevant beings.

The Ethics of Care might be regarded as a form of Virtue Ethics, focused specifically on those virtues in the interest of another, e.g., loyalty, empathy, charity, and patience. Whether or not caring for others is essentially more feminine than masculine, it is presumably the case that caring for those with whom one has relations does belong to the common-sense notion of goodness.

To care for others frees one from exclusive self-interest. Likewise, to be cared-for liberates from deprivation. For those dependent upon others for their *vital* goods, the freedom to live *at all* depends on care. The Ethics of Care recognizes that each of us will, at some time, stand in need of being cared-for by another. Furthermore, on this theory, ethics arises from feelings of love and joy. Action taken in the name of love and joy may be the purest way to exercise one's freedom. Contrarily, action motivated by purposiveness alone, rather than the springs of love and joy, is always but a means unto an end and, thus, remains a form of servitude. The value of care is grounded in the freedom of one-caring, and that of the one whom is cared-for.



## FREEDOM AND EXISTENTIALISM

Existentialism begins with the daring Kierkegaard, who professes subjectivity as inescapable. When reason encounters metaphysical uncertainty,<sup>12</sup> it is poised to make a leap of faith. Yet what matters most is not the direction of this leap, but the passion with which one makes the decision. The essence of existence is but the one we freely choose, and the choosing is more important than the chosen.

For Kierkegaard, from the objective perspective, knowledge proper is compelled. Valid argument requires that affirmation of one's premises necessitates affirmation of the conclusion. Science leaves no room for human freedom. Only from the perspective of subjective *uncertainty* is genuinely free decision possible. Infinite concern demands the passion of free choice.

As Nietzsche affirms the metaphysic of the will-to-power, his thought may lie outside of this tradition. Yet, as will-to-power commands self-overcoming as creation, the essence of his thought is existential. Master Morality is spontaneous self-affirmation and freedom from pity, hatred, and self-loathing. The Slave revolt begins in the resentment of the other, impoverishment, self-pity, and negation. The master instinctively equates goodness with the feeling of strength and power as complete freedom to actuate the will. The slaves are self-imprisoned by their rancor towards the master; their values are established through oppression.

Sartre's formulation states that existence precedes essence. One must forge a meaning for oneself. Fashioning oneself requires action, as one is only that which one has done. Further, in choosing for oneself, one is responsible to all, as humanity is formed by every action. Being utterly responsible for what becomes of us is the basis for the rendering of judgment. For Sartre, moral judgment made of others is determined by whether choice is made in truth or self-deception. Lying to oneself about one's possibilities shackles one to mediocrity. Judgment of the self is determined by whether or not one's decisions are made in the name of freedom. Existentialism generates an ethic of commitment to activity and constant self-surpassing. Thus, freedom ought not have any end beyond itself as the meaning of ongoing self-creation.

## THE ETHICS OF FREEDOM

The preceding exposition is intended to demonstrate that the extant moral theories can all be understood as seeking the value of our freedom. Freedom is both fulfillment of our essence (autonomy) and the condition of all moral valuation. The Ethics of Virtue, Stoicism, Natural Law, the Social Contract, Utility, Deontology, Care, and Existentialism each identifies its own ethical standard, depending on its view of human nature. Of course, the ethics teacher must present every theory of the good with loyalty to the tradition. Each system must be represented honestly and according to its own distinctive terms. Yet, the ability to demonstrate each theory as a corridor to freedom is certainly a boon.

Howsoever the essence of humanity is read, its necessary ground is human freedom. Autonomous being is potential self-direction, but the freedom to enact it is a choice.

Freedom is the final end of autonomous action; to preserve it is our primary duty. To subjugate our freedom to any value but itself immediately brings subservience. The end of human freedom must be freedom in itself, as goodness means fulfillment of our essence. Still, from the perspective of the two-year college student, this notion still remains too esoteric. However, in a world where freedom stands in constant jeopardy, liberty is of primary interest. Thus the principle of freedom both incentivizes goodness and guides the lives of students toward fulfillment.

## NOTES

1. These references are not intended as exhaustive, but an introductory representation of the major traditions. The literature will be reviewed more widely in the development of this essay.
2. Consider Rachels' "Multiple Strategies Utilitarianism," which prescribes living according to "one's best plan" (p. 183).
3. By "knowing better" is intended not a mere belief or even a reasoned principle pertaining to the good. To know the good entails a thorough understanding of the self-imposed physical and psychological consequences of immoral action.
4. Justice is that which is merited by free action, whether this is reward or punishment. Just legislation protects the freedom of individuals.
5. It is revealing that people seem not to be concerned when they avoid due punishment. However, deprive them of their just rewards and they immediately decry abuse of justice. Clearly, if their concern is one for justice itself, they will be equally outraged when not duly punished. In both cases, persons are treated as less than free.
6. Epictetus, ¶3.
7. From a philosophical point of view, the existence of God cannot be assumed. Thus, if the legitimacy of the Principle of Natural Law ultimately presupposes the existence of God as the Supreme moral authority, the theory requires proof of God's existence. While Aquinas does develop various versions of the cosmological argument, we follow Kant in rejecting the attempt as lying beyond the possibility of human knowledge. Nonetheless, we maintain the theory to retain its teleological merit.
8. C.f., Plato's Allegory of the Cave.
9. In the ordinary sense of task-oriented action.
10. Classical Utilitarianism would seem to permit violations of the Pauline Principle as well as our common-sense intuitions regarding justice and basic human rights. A traditional response is to distinguish "act-utilitarianism" from "rule-utilitarianism." Regardless, our discussion is not intended to address the pitfalls of this theory, but to argue that the value of utility is freedom.
11. Carol Gilligan, Nel Noddings, Virginia Held, et al.
12. Cf., Kant's "dialectics of pure reason."

## *Making Connections: Philosophy as Self-transformation and Critical Thinking*

Heather Wilburn

MOBERLY AREA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

A few years ago I came across a letter that a university professor wrote to his students at the beginning of the school year. It was a thoughtful and inspiring letter that outlined a range of details about the university experience, including tips for academic success and reminders about the need for students to enjoy their time during their

academic careers. Many of us that are teaching now remember our leisurely years of study. When I think back to my undergraduate years I recall relishing days at coffee shops poring over books and notes, and engaging in hours of conversations about art, literature, politics, and philosophy. I recognize now the freedom that I had to pursue whimsical adventures, to try out various hobbies, and to get to know not only others, many of whom have become lifelong friends, but also to get to know myself. Yet while I was reading this professor's letter, it occurred to me that a great number of my students are juggling jobs and families with their own academic careers, and most of my students' experiences during their academic years are far from leisurely. This reality has caused me to pause and to think about ways in which I can help students understand the benefits of studying philosophy. As philosophers, I realize that we could spend many hours (or pages) counting, categorizing, and prioritizing these benefits. Here I want to suggest that there are two types of benefits that non-philosophy major students should be aware of.

The first benefit of studying philosophy is that it is transformative. Philosophical activity can change the way you experience and think about the world. It fosters deep thinking that is substantial, allowing us to understand the world and ourselves in ways that go beyond the surface and the *status quo*. In fact, it compels us to question the *status quo* and to be critical of the way things appear to us by digging to sometimes veiled levels of understanding and truth. This is, in fact, what most philosophers mean by "thinking." Yet at times it seems that we take it for granted that our students know that they should value philosophy—that this type of thinking is self-evidently valuable. However, if we recall our own early days with philosophy courses, most of us should see that thinking in a philosophical sense is a skill that we developed over time. Students should be made aware of the fact that philosophy involves a type of thinking that is likely new to them. This will help give them the confidence they will need to learn how to think critically and reflectively and, hopefully, to come to value philosophy. The benefit of this type of thinking is that it drives us to seek truth and understanding, and it can give us access to profound angles in our lives. For example, philosophical thinking, which is critical and reflective, can aid in our interpersonal relationships with others, can help us wrap our minds around difficult topics such as death and religion, and can improve our ability to think and communicate clearly about issues that are important to us. This is what I think of as the sort of fundamental values of philosophy—the benefits of philosophy that we as teachers want our students to reap.

The second benefit of studying philosophy is perhaps a more practical, or instrumental, benefit. In this sense, philosophy enables us to think critically and reflectively, to solve complex problems, to work collaboratively and to understand a wide range of perspectives, to analyze and synthesize, and to communicate in clear and assertive ways. I think of these benefits as practical because for students entering the job market for the first time or for those looking ahead for a career change, they will find that these are the very skills needed to land the jobs they seek. Additionally, these skills are crucial for students who are

planning to move to four-year institutions and/or graduate school later in their academic careers. Both types of benefits are important and are worthwhile to our students. Again, however, I am afraid that sometimes we simply assume that the value of philosophy is self-evident. The problem is that most of our students have never taken a philosophy course, and many have no idea what our field is about. It is up to us to make these points clear and to connect with our students so they are inspired to study philosophy.

Making connections with students is increasingly important today as many colleges are facing budget cuts and are trying to find the most effective ways to retain students. It is true that in the past retention efforts have been handled predominately by administrators—hired professionals that focus solely on student life, student services, and ensuring that our students return to classes each semester. However, if we only look at retention solutions from the administrative angle, we, as faculty members, are overlooking the role that we play in retaining students. One way to help retain students is to connect with them during the first meetings of our classes by sharing our philosophical journeys with them and explaining, in general terms, what philosophical activity entails and how precisely it will benefit them in various facets of their lives.

When I enter the classroom this coming fall, my goal is to make explicitly clear the value of studying philosophy and developing critical thinking skills that will help students in the classroom and with their professional and personal lives. In the past few years I have developed a list of articles that I share with students that point out what students can do with a philosophy degree and pinpoint critical thinking skills that are valuable both inside and outside of the classroom.<sup>1</sup> While these are great articles for students to access, it seems that I should make these points more explicit. Inspired by the professor's letter to his university students, I will offer a letter to my philosophy students as a way to begin making these connections. I plan to deliver this letter to my students on the first day of class and then leave some time for my students to ask questions during our next meeting. I think it is worth the effort to connect with students from day one, and spending some time explaining exactly what our field is and why it should interest them is one way to accomplish this goal. I offer this draft only as an example of one way we might convey the importance of critical and reflective thinking and to demonstrate a sample of the benefits that our philosophy students might appreciate. I encourage you to fill in your own details, examples, and anecdotes as well as to use your own methods to foster students' curiosity and invite them to engage in philosophical activities and courses. A draft of my letter follows:

Dear philosophy students:

When I think back to my first college classes, I remember my excitement for new beginnings and my curiosity for the various fields of knowledge and study that I did not even know existed before stepping foot on a college campus. In fact, it was this same curiosity that compelled me to return to philosophy classes semester after semester.

At the time, philosophy was mind-blowing to me; I had no idea that people had been asking such profound questions in a systematic way for the past 2,500 years. My philosophy courses opened up an entirely new world for me and I never looked back. This, of course, is not to say that the questions that philosophers asked were all that different from some of the questions that I had asked myself at various points in my life.

What does it mean to be a human being?

Should morality dictate or influence societal laws?

How do I know that my blue is the same blue as yours?

What does justice mean?

How should I treat others?

How can I live the best possible version of myself?

Are my actions freely chosen or is everything predetermined for me?

Should Neo take the red pill or the blue pill?

My philosophy classes not only asked the most intriguing and significant questions, but also revealed the way many important thinkers had answered such questions over the course of human history. I found that the answers developed by various thinkers often conflicted with one another. This was perplexing to me because I, like most students, was accustomed to having specific facts to memorize and to providing examples of various concepts to demonstrate the depth of my understanding regarding the subject matter of a given course. Philosophy, as Socrates demonstrates, is not about memorizing facts or classifying examples under various groups or concepts, but, rather, it is about reflective thinking and thorough examination of ideas and beliefs. In my philosophy classes I was developing ways in which to think deeply and clearly, to communicate, and to justify ideas and beliefs pertaining to knowledge, God, ethics, justice, and art.

It was only years later that I realized that while the questions philosophers asked were certainly intriguing and important, it was really the philosophical method or the way that philosophical thinking unfolded that had the most significant impact on me. Philosophy is about the big questions and concepts that help us understand ourselves, the world we are immersed in, and our relationships to others. Learning how to think about and communicate such complex ideas is ultimately the foundation of every college mission statement that highlights critical thinking skills.

In fact, education in the Western world, just like philosophy, has its roots in Ancient Greece. It was Plato who began the first higher education institution in the West when he opened the doors of the Academy, which is where many Greeks, including Aristotle, studied philosophy, politics, mathematics, medicine, and the sciences.

Regardless of which field you are going into, your philosophy classes will be beneficial to you in the following ways: First, philosophical thinking is transformative and can alter the way one thinks, communicates, and acts. In this sense it can nourish our minds, shape our behaviors, and sometimes even effect change in the world. Second, philosophical thinking by its very nature is critical and reflective. Philosophical activity involves thinking about and communicating complex ideas, analyzing and synthesizing information, and being able to view problems from a wide range of perspectives. In this sense, philosophical activity can help you develop skills that your future professors and employers are looking for. I will expand on both of these types of benefits below, beginning with the transformative side of philosophy.

In your philosophy classes your ideas and beliefs will very likely be challenged. This does not mean that you will be asked to abandon your beliefs, but it does mean that you might be asked to defend them. Additionally, your mind will probably be twisted and turned about, which can be an uncomfortable experience. Yet, if at all possible, you should cherish these experiences and allow them to help you grow as a thinker. To be challenged and perplexed is difficult; however, it is worthwhile because it compels deeper thinking and more significant levels of understanding. In turn, thinking itself can transform us not only in thought, but in our beliefs and our actions. Hannah Arendt, a social and political philosopher who came to the United States in exile during WWII, relates the transformative elements of philosophical thinking to Socrates. She writes:

Socrates . . . who is commonly said to have believed in the teachability of virtue, seems to have held that talking and thinking about piety, justice, courage, and the rest were liable to make men more pious, more just, more courageous, even though they were not given definitions or "values" to direct their further conduct.

Thinking and communication are transformative insofar as these activities have the potential to alter our perspectives and, thus, change our behavior. In fact, Arendt connects the ability to think critically and reflectively to morality. As she notes above, morality does not have to give a predetermined set of rules to affect our behavior. Instead, morality can also be related to the open

and sometimes perplexing conversations we have with others (and ourselves) about moral issues and moral character traits. Theodor W. Adorno, another philosopher who came to the United States in exile during WWII, argues that autonomous thinking (i.e., thinking for oneself) is crucial if we want to prevent the occurrence of another event like Auschwitz, a concentration camp where over one million individuals died during the Holocaust. To think autonomously entails reflective and critical thinking—a type of thinking rooted in philosophical activity and a type of thinking that questions and challenges social norms and the *status quo*. In this sense thinking is critical of what is, allowing us to think beyond what is and to think about what ought to be, or what ought not be. This is one of the transformative elements of philosophical activity and one that is useful in promoting justice and ethical living.

The second type of benefit philosophy can offer may be a more immediate need for you as you prepare to enter the job market or to transfer to another school in order to continue your education. This type of benefit involves the development of certain skill sets that are deemed marketable and, thus, crucial for your future well-being. To be marketable in today's job market, candidates need to stand out and to demonstrate that they bring something to the table that is needed by the employer that other candidates might not have. If you look at job advertisements, you will notice jobs from all fields require individuals who can work both independently and collaboratively, can discuss and solve complex problems, and have strong verbal and written communication skills. These skills are all related to what colleges refer to as critical thinking skills, and these are the type of skills that you will gain during your college career, particularly in your philosophy courses.

For instance, in our philosophy course we will read, analyze, question, and discuss complex ideas and concepts. Because it is important to connect new ideas to experiences you have, we will apply these new ideas and concepts to events going on in the world. Often times you will make these kinds of connections to film and other art forms that you are familiar with. This is an excellent way to demonstrate the depth of your understanding and to make these ideas communicable to others. We will read, we will write, and we will discuss ideas and concepts that have driven generation after generation for the past 2,500 years. The point here will not be to find absolute answers, but to train ourselves to think deeply and with detail and focus, which is similar to the level of thinking that employers seek in new candidates. Sometimes we will need to examine and set aside our own assumptions and beliefs about the world in order to understand an issue or to solve a problem. Sometimes we will need to be able to look at an issue from a variety of different perspectives in

order to see its nuances and complexities. This process—the philosophical life—will lead you to understand your own views and the views of others at a much deeper level. You will eventually be able to articulate and defend the views that you have or those that you develop and be able to talk about perspectives that you yourself may not agree with.

With respect to the meaning of education, the German philosopher Hegel uses the term *bildung*, which means education or upbringing, to indicate the differences between the traditional type of education that focuses on facts and memorization, and education as transformative. Allen Wood explains how Hegel uses the term *bildung*: it is “a process of self-transformation and an acquisition of the power to grasp and articulate the reasons for what one believes or knows.” If we think back through all of our years of schooling, particularly those subject matters that involve the teacher passing on information that is to be memorized and repeated, most of us would be hard pressed to recall anything substantial. However, if the focus of education is on how to think and the development of skills include analyzing, synthesizing, and communicating ideas and problems, most of us will use those skills whether we are in the field of philosophy, politics, business, nursing, computer programming, or education. In this sense, philosophy can help you develop a strong foundational skill set that will be marketable for your individual paths. While philosophy is not the only subject that will foster these skills, its method is one that heavily focuses on the types of activities that will help you develop such skills.

Overall, philosophical thinking will arm you with the skills needed to take the next steps toward your academic degree or your career. It is also this type of thinking that will enrich your souls, moving you to make the world a better place, driving your curiosity to tangle with new ideas and problems, and preparing you for meaningful relationships with others. I look forward to working with you and hope that your college experience is rewarding and enjoyable.

#### NOTES

1. Here are a few articles that I make available to my students:

[https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/ethics-everyone/201605/is-philosophy-degree-useful?utm\\_content=bufferdc6a8&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=facebook.com&utm\\_campaign=buffer](https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/ethics-everyone/201605/is-philosophy-degree-useful?utm_content=bufferdc6a8&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_campaign=buffer)

[http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/education/2004-02-11-college-all-starts-cover\\_x.htm](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/education/2004-02-11-college-all-starts-cover_x.htm)

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=93192093>

[http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/06/education/06philosophy.html?\\_r=3&](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/06/education/06philosophy.html?_r=3&)

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/work-in-progress/2012/03/27/how-to-develop-5-critical-thinking-types/#727075378380>

## Preferred Qualifications: Community College Teaching Experience

David Sackris  
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

Given the extremely tight job market for professional philosophers, more Ph.D.s are beginning to consider jobs at the community college level.<sup>1</sup> There are good reasons for considering this avenue: if you enjoy teaching, the job focus is on teaching, and your evaluation and tenure depend primarily on your performance in the classroom; if the prospect of working with a very diverse student body, both in terms of background and skill set, appeals to you; if the location in which you live is a large part of job satisfaction, there is a far greater ability to get a job in an urban area via the community college track. However, to get a job at a community college, one thing is prized above all: teaching experience. Yet this is where the newly minted graduate student may well be at a disadvantage in the community college hiring process. In this article I seek to address the issue of how to become a strong candidate for a community college position right out of graduate school.

### THE DILEMMA

The teaching requirements of graduate students in Ph.D. programs vary greatly: some graduate students are thrust into the breach from practically the get-go and are assigned as the instructor of record to a class; at other institutions, students never move beyond running precepts or grading.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, the majority of faculty advisors would advise their students *not* to seek out additional teaching responsibilities—the smart thing to do, he or she would say, is to focus on course work or focus on completing one’s dissertation. A great majority of faculty advisors would probably tell a graduate student to be positively grateful if he or she is able to somehow avoid teaching responsibilities altogether. However, if one wishes to pursue a teaching-focused position, this may well be poor advice.

The reason this may well be poor advice is that as advanced graduate students begin to examine community college job listings out of actual interest or sheer desperation, they will notice something rather disconcerting: they are not qualified for most full-time positions at community colleges. The reason these individuals are likely to be unqualified, despite their pending defense date and their forthcoming publication in *Philosophical Quarterly*, is that they don’t have sufficient teaching experience to be a serious contender for most positions. Although it is certainly true that community colleges now want their new hires to have Ph.D.s, what they really want is community college teaching experience.

A brief perusal of jobs currently listed on a variety of job boards reveals the following: almost all community colleges require substantial teaching experience; almost all community colleges *prefer* community college teaching experience; almost all community colleges prefer candidates to have experience working with diverse student

bodies; almost all community colleges prefer candidates who have experience teaching online; some community colleges *require* community college teaching experience; some community colleges *require at least two or three years* of full-time community college teaching experience for consideration.<sup>3</sup> The harsh reality is this: unless you’ve taught at a community college for several years, you’re not going to be teaching full time at a community college.<sup>4</sup>

### TO BE, ONE MUST DO

The fact is, teaching one course a semester, or serving as a mere teaching assistant for one course a semester, is not going to get you the experience needed to be competitive for a community college position. Even if you have taught multiple courses as the instructor of record at your graduate institution, this is not exactly the teaching experience that a community college hiring committee is looking for. At this point you may well think, “Teaching experience is teaching experience; what difference does it make if I have actually taught at a community college?” Answering this question is closely related to answering the question as to whether you should seriously consider pursuing a career at the community college level to begin with.

In some sense, I agree with you: teaching at the college level is teaching at the college level—some of the skills will transfer to any institutional setting. But that’s just it: *some* of the skills. The community college is a unique learning environment, and your student population will differ greatly from the student population one experiences while teaching at their Ph.D.-granting program. Most Ph.D.-granting programs in philosophy, whatever their perceived merit may be, are housed at flagship state universities or at premier private universities. As a result, experience teaching at your Ph.D.-granting institution only gives limited exposure to the college teaching environment: at any U of X the student population is predominantly of college age, and, since they are at a flagship state institution or private university, they are likely pretty good students who received a halfway decent high school education. It is true that there are a good number of students at the community college level who could have gone to a good state university right out of high school. But, ultimately, this is only a portion of the student population that exists at the community college level.

According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), the average age of community college students is 28.<sup>5</sup> Undoubtedly, you will have students who are older than you. Additionally, student diversity at the community college level is astounding, both in terms of racial and ethnic diversity, and in terms of diversity of skill sets.<sup>6</sup> These facts provide unique challenges in the classroom (e.g., how do I engage a room full of students with a diverse range of abilities?). Your students will also have a range of responsibilities that radically differ from the typical student at a four-year institution. Given that the median age is 28, many students at the community college level have families that they need to provide for and full-time jobs. Almost every single student has a job of some form. That doesn’t necessarily mean that a community college instructor assigns less work or expects less from his students; it does mean that part of being a successful

community college instructor is having a good idea of what your answer is going to be when a student asks to make up an exam because he or she could not find adequate child care for that day. The only way to gain reasonable experience with such a diverse student body is by working with such a diverse student body. Also, the only way to determine if that kind of experience is worthwhile for you personally is by having that kind of experience.

The following is a common saying at the community college level: there is no typical community college student. I agree with that to some extent, but, hopefully, as the above makes clear, if there is a feature that typifies community college students, it is that they have a lot of competing obligations—school cannot necessarily, nor perhaps should it be, their number one priority as we might expect of a traditional college student. As a result, community college interviewers are going to ask different kinds of questions. Here is a sample of community college interview questions:

Part of a liberal arts education includes making sure that students are well-versed in an understanding of the many social, cultural, and economic influences that shape who they are. What does philosophy add to that understanding that isn't already covered by the social sciences?

Our students come to us with a wide range of academic preparedness and backgrounds. What strategies have you employed in your past teaching experience to encourage student success with a similar student body?

A student comes to your office hours and tells you that she has been living out of her car. What do you do?<sup>7</sup>

If you have not worked in a community college-like setting, it is going to be very hard to answer these kinds of questions.<sup>8</sup> You may think that the third question is far-fetched, but, in fact, I had a student come to my office to tell me that she had been evicted from her apartment in my first semester as a full-time community college instructor. Gaining experience at the community college level will prepare you to answer questions like these. If you cannot answer questions like these, you will not be able to secure a full-time position at a community college.

You might further be tempted think, "Okay, I don't have community college-specific teaching experience, but I do have some significant teaching experience—I held a visiting assistant professor position! So I will probably be a strong applicant even if I don't meet all the *preferred* qualifications that you mentioned above. I mean, I have a Ph.D.! You said that only *some* colleges *require* community college teaching experience. I have looked at a few job postings. For a good number of positions, the required qualifications merely state 'master's degree in philosophy and one year equivalent full-time college teaching experience.' So I don't need to do anything special—I can apply to community colleges as a back-up plan while I apply to four-year schools as well."

You shouldn't be surprised to learn that it is pretty competitive out there for community college jobs. If you are not able to meet a majority (preferably all) of the preferred qualifications, you don't have much of a chance. At many community colleges the applications are first culled through by individuals in the human resources department, or via an initial screening committee. The human resources department/screening committee will likely only give 10 or 12 dossiers to the actual faculty search committee. And you can probably guess how they determine which files to pass along. Just in case you can't, I'll tell you: by checking off each of the required and preferred qualifications that you fulfill—the more you are able to fulfill, the better your chances.<sup>9</sup> Further, when a college asks for the equivalent of one, two, or three years of full-time teaching experience, they mean full-time teaching at a single institution. Adjuncting at three different institutions so that you end up with a course load of five classes a semester will still only count as part-time work in the eyes of most human resources offices because of the way that faculty contracts are drawn up. Typically, each year of adjunct work counts as half a year of full-time work, regardless of how many classes you taught "part-time" during that year. So if you don't have the preferred number of years of teaching experience at the right kind of institution, your application may not even be looked at by any faculty members on the hiring committee.

This is good news and bad news. It is bad news if you have finished your degree, since to become competitive for a full time position at a community college you will need to adjunct for at least two years at the community college level. It is good news for those of you still in graduate school: teaching one community college class each semester gets you half a year of full-time teaching experience. If you do that for two years, you have the equivalent of one year of full-time teaching experience at the community college level!

The upshot of this article should by now be clear: I am telling you that if you are at all interested in applying for full-time positions at the community college level as a newly minted Ph.D., you should be working part time at the community college level while you work to complete your degree. This advice may sound completely radical, but it is, in fact, completely practical.<sup>10</sup> There are lots of reasons to avoid working outside your Ph.D.-granting institution even if you think you might be interested in teaching at the community college level: no time, your committee won't want you to, it's inconvenient, you're a genius, you're don't want to contribute to the adjunctification of the American university system, you don't like undergraduates, etc. I will address some of these concerns.

## CONCERNS ABOUT ADJUNCTING WHILE A GRADUATE STUDENT

**I just can't find the time:** Teaching a new class for the first time is a time consuming affair, especially if you are concerned with doing a good job (which you should be). But (fortunately or unfortunately) teaching is the kind of thing you learn by doing. Almost all graduate students serve as TAs. If you don't know where to start, just start

with one of your professors' syllabi. It may (very well) be that the person you TA'ed for is not a great teacher. But you need to start somewhere. Most likely any faculty mentor will gladly provide you with syllabi, lecture notes, and even tests and assignments. Just as we can become virtuous by imitating others who know, we can become halfway decent teachers by imitating other teachers. After you use your mentor's syllabus, you'll figure out what works for you and what doesn't, and modify it accordingly for the community college setting. Once you teach a class for the first time and work out the kinks, a 3-credit hour class should not take up any more than 10 hours of your time each week (once you really have things down, only 6-7; remember that community college professors have 5/5 loads plus committee responsibilities—if that sounds horrific, you should probably just stop reading now). Those 10 hours *include* time devoted to grading. So if you're teaching one class at the local community college, you could conceivably have a situation in which you teach one 3-hour session a week, and then devote a few hours of your Saturday to grading and prep work. Part of being an academic is juggling multiple responsibilities, so this will constitute good practice. Bottom-line: if you are interesting in teaching full time at a community college, you should find the time to start adjuncting at one as a graduate student.

**My committee won't want me to:** Your committee also won't want you to procrastinate or drink so much. But your committee doesn't know about everything that you do, nor, if they did, would they approve of it. At the end of the day, it's your life. If you might be interested in teaching at the community college level, it makes sense to figure out if you enjoy doing so as soon as is feasible in order to get the kind of experience you will need to be a competitive candidate on the job market (remember: two years of teaching experience at the community college level is required for some positions, which equals four years of adjuncting). My committee may have been less than thrilled that I included community colleges as part of my job search; however, I was confident in my decision to do so because I knew what I was getting myself into, thanks to my adjuncting experience. It's also important to remember that your committee is likely not going to pay for you to have health insurance when you run out of department funding and don't have a full-time job.

**It's inconvenient to teach somewhere besides my home institution:** If there aren't many community colleges around you, it may well be rather inconvenient to teach at one while pursuing your degree. Adjuncting, if not in a major city, pretty much requires a car. And adjunct pay isn't very good, if you haven't heard. For some people, teaching only one section at the nearest community college may well be a break-even enterprise once one factors in car maintenance, insurance, and gas prices. Even if this is the case, the experience is invaluable. You will figure out if this is something that you want to pursue. You will gain valuable teaching experience no matter what path you ultimately pursue, and with today's low gas prices, you will probably at least have some extra spending money to supplement your graduate stipend. If you are interested in pursuing a job at a two-year college, it is better to adjunct now while

working to degree than have to support yourself entirely on adjunct wages after degree. If you are doing the latter, you will have no time for research, which you will need to be engaging in if you want to keep your career options open.<sup>11</sup> Teaching one class at your graduate institution and one class at an outside institution amounts to a 2/2 load with no committee responsibilities. If you cannot find time to work on your dissertation with that kind of responsibility, then you are not going to find time to write as a professional academic.

**I don't want to contribute to the adjunctification of the American university:** Yes, I agree that what is happening to higher education is completely deplorable. This article is essentially advice for operating within the corrupt system. I don't have an answer to the adjunct crisis. As someone who adjuncted for many years, I firmly believe that the pay offered to the vast majority of adjuncts devalues their labor and their educational attainment. I am also not advocating adjuncting as a means to earning a full-time living. That is why I am advocating that one adjunct while a full-time graduate student with university support, i.e., when one is in a situation where one does not need to support themselves through only adjunct labor. The reason for adjuncting while a graduate student is to get the experience you need to compete for full-time, teaching-focused jobs as soon as the degree is in hand. At the end of the day, especially at the community college level, some use of adjuncts is necessary. Enrollments fluctuate, tenured professors go on sabbatical, schools are inadequately funded, voters are indifferent, etc.

**But "I'm the next Kant":** Then there is no reason for you to test the community college waters. Wait patiently for research universities to call you.

### **THIS ARTICLE IS NOT MEANT TO IMPLY THAT COMMUNITY COLLEGE TEACHING IS FOR EVERYONE**

Community college teaching is not for everyone, and it is not something that every person should necessarily consider. If your main concern is with time for research, then you should not consider the community college track. If you consider teaching a toilsome side task, then you should not consider the community college track. If you can't imagine teaching five classes a semester for the majority of your career, you should not pursue the community college track. If you don't want to work with students who are under-prepared for college level work, then you should not pursue the community college track.<sup>12</sup>

Much of the advice given by Rob Jenkins at the *Chronicle of Higher Education* is sound, and the following is particularly so: You cannot think of applying to community colleges as a "back up plan" in the sense that it is merely something you are willing to do, and not actually interested in nor willing to put in the work to become a credible candidate.<sup>13</sup> If you don't genuinely enjoy teaching and genuinely enjoy working with community college students, you won't get the job and you probably won't even get an interview. Further, knowing what you are getting yourself into before embarking on a career path is a significant part of job

satisfaction.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, if you are interested in applying for community college positions upon completing your degree as part of a larger search strategy focused on teaching institutions, the best way to write a meaningful cover letter that speaks to the concerns of the faculty search committee and truly expresses your interest in the position is by having actually worked with community college students. This is why I am advocating for getting the experience as a graduate student, *if it is something you are willing to seriously consider*. If you are someone who is genuinely *really* interested in teaching, teaching at the community college level could be extremely rewarding.<sup>15</sup>

**NOTES**

1. Jenkins anecdotally reports that more and more graduate students are expressing interest in community college teaching and that more and more community colleges are requiring the Ph.D. for employment. See Jenkins, "What Graduate Students Want to Know about Community Colleges, Part I," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, last modified April 22, 2012, <http://chronicle.com/article/What-Graduate-Students-Want-to/131600/>.
2. At my graduate program I was assigned my own class in my third semester, at Princeton, for example, graduate students are not typically assigned their own course within the philosophy department in the entire degree program. See <https://philosophy.princeton.edu/graduate/standard-program>.
3. See current job postings at Ivy Tech Community College, College of Southern Nevada, CUNY Queensborough Community College, Community College of Philadelphia, and Santa Monica Community College. This is just a small sampling. See also Rob Jenkins, "Straight Talk about 'Adjunctification'," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 15, 2014, <http://chronicle.com/article/Straight-Talk-About/150881>
4. The old Aristotelian paradox—how can we perform the courageous action if we are not courageous already? "For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them. . . ." *NE* (1103a32). So, too, we become full-time community college professors by acting as indentured servants in an unjust system.
5. See American Association of Community Colleges, "2015 Fact Sheet," <http://www.aacc.nche.edu/AboutCC/Documents/FactSheet2015.pdf>
6. See the 2015 Fact Sheet (ibid.) for the demographic break down of community college students.
7. These samples have been collected by the author. To see a list of common (non-discipline specific) community college questions, see "Guidelines for Hiring Full Time Faculty Members at Austin Community College," accessed November 5, 2015, <http://www.austinctcc.edu/hr/hireguide/ffaculty/sampleqs.html>
8. What do I mean by "community college-like" setting? There are institutions that serve student populations similar to the community college population: schools that make it their mission to serve first generation students, minority students, and students from poor and working-class backgrounds. However, these institutions are far less likely to have adult learners or the certificate programs that are typically offered at community colleges. Nonetheless, skills gained at these kinds of institutions can be used to bolster the case that one is a good fit for a community college.
9. I am writing this based on my firsthand experience, but it is also supported by Tom Hurley. See Tom Hurley, "Hiring at Two-year Colleges," *Inside Higher Ed*, 2010, <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2010/01/15/hurley>
10. See also "Hiring at Two-year Colleges."
11. Research is possible in a full-time community college position if that is a goal. Many community college instructors make time for their own personal projects in part because they are far better off than adjuncts: 1) they are not driving to three different universities; 2) many teach some online sections, which frees up some time that would be spent in the classroom; 3) they get a paid summer vacation.

12. Rob Jenkins makes these same points. See his "Community Colleges Might Not Be For You," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2015, <http://chronicle.com/article/Community-Colleges-Might-Not/233914>. In fact, this section is in part inspired by his article.
13. See *ibid.*
14. See John P. Murray and Sean Cunningham, "New Rural Community College Faculty Members and Job Satisfaction," *Community College Review* 32, no. 2 (2004): 19–38.
15. See "Community Colleges Might Not Be For You" for what it means to be "really" interested in teaching.

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## Community College Teachers and American Philosophical Association Meetings

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Should community college teachers attend the APA meetings? Even though, according to the American Academy of Community Colleges, over seven million people enroll each fall in two-year colleges, should the philosophy teachers of those students skip the annual national meetings? Should the APA want such participants, and is it doing enough to attract this part of the professorate? This paper will explore these questions and answer them in the affirmative. Community College teachers do have good reason to attend APA meetings, and the APA has good reason to focus on them. The paper will begin by exploring possible reasons community college instructors do not go to the divisional meetings. It will then set out several reasons community college instructors have for going to APA meetings. The final section will look at several actions the APA should take to attract such instructors to the divisional meetings.

There are many reasons that community college instructors do not attend APA meetings, and many of these also apply to teachers from other smaller colleges. One reason often given by friends and colleagues is that they do not go to



APA meetings because the meetings are for researchers, not teachers. They are to promote research. The sessions are for faculty and graduate students to present their latest research and to mingle with other researchers. Many people who teach at two-year schools do so because they do not want to do research. The annual meetings simply are not for them.

After all, community college teachers are just that: teachers. Their colleges do not evaluate them by the research that they do, and so few do it. Most have high teaching loads of five or six classes per semester without any teaching assistants to lessen the chore of grading. The result is often 150-plus students and hundreds of papers to grade each semester. When committee assignments are added, there is just very little time for research. And when two-year teachers go to APA meetings, they often say that it seems like graduate school again. They are back at a research institution where all the prestige and discussion is around the latest book written and the newest scholarly article published. The conference seems alien to their current situation and needs. It's uncomfortable.

A second reason colleagues have mentioned for not attending is money. There is very little money for professional development at community colleges. APA conferences are held at expensive hotels and in expensive cities. So, financially, it is difficult for many to attend. They may get some funding if they are on the program. But, again, it is intimidating to be on the program even as a program chair if you are not a researcher. There are sessions on teaching and community college instruction, but they are few. Community colleges often will pay only if the faculty member can show how attending the conference will improve their teaching, and since APA conferences don't focus on teaching, this claim can be difficult to support.

Some community college teachers do enjoy writing and research. Some teachers might have wanted research jobs at large research institutions, but due to a tight job market, family commitments, or other reasons, have ended up at a community college. Nonetheless, they often don't go to APA meetings to present their papers. Coming from a less prestigious college can be intimidating. APA conferences are places where the best in the field might be responding to your paper, and audiences as a whole are known to be ruthless at times in tearing down underdeveloped arguments. This approach is in many ways inherent in the nature of philosophy. Philosophers point out poor arguments. Yet, other philosophy conferences do better nurturing new research ideas and interests.

Finally, community college colleagues say that they don't go to the APA meetings because they don't think that the topics apply to them. There is a session on two-year colleges or teaching that is usually late at night on a Friday, but the other sessions just are not applicable to their circumstances. A session on Kant's 4th antinomy or on game theoretical approaches to meaning is just not likely to provide material for discussion in a 101 or basic logic class. So, such sessions might be fun, but don't quite seem to be relevant to professional development.

These reasons, and likely others, for not going to the APA meetings seem to convince most community college teachers not to attend APA conferences. Yet, are there countervailing reasons to go? There seem to be a few, so let's take a look at them. One reason community college teachers should attend APA divisional meetings is that many such teachers are isolated. The full-time teachers are often the only full-time philosophers in their institutions. They don't have other philosophers with whom to discuss philosophy on a daily basis. There are usually a handful or more of adjuncts teaching, but they tend to teach their classes and then leave to work another job. Conferences like the APA annual meetings allow faculty to talk about the subject they love at a deeper level than that of the freshman and sophomore classroom. As we tell our students, more learning often happens outside of the classroom. We should understand that the same is true for teachers in that they too learn from conversations with peers.

Second, community college teachers need to know the latest research findings. As mentioned, they generally don't do research for publication. They don't have their work scrutinized by peers for adequacy. Yet, they do need to make sure their knowledge and skills are up to date. The APA can help in some ways to fulfill faculty development in their discipline. The newest research on the philosophy of mind or epistemology should be available at APA meetings for faculty to know where the research is headed even if they are not participating in it. Philosophy is not a field that changes quickly like computer science. Nonetheless, progress is made and new ideas are presented, and the APA meetings are where those ideas are tested.

Some community college teachers might respond that they don't need to know the latest research to teach introductory classes to freshmen and sophomores. They are teaching the big, broad survey of perennial fundamental issues in philosophy. One reply is that advanced knowledge does improve the teaching of introductory classes. Graduate degrees are required to teach at community colleges for this reason. That said, this response is partially true. The introductory class does not require familiarity with the latest advanced research for it to be successful. But the teachers should know where the research is headed. They should be able to guide students that want to study more philosophy into areas that are currently being debated in the literature. Many professional philosophers started at two-year colleges. These classes pointed them in the direction of their research today. Also, many colleges offer honors sections that encourage deeper thought or research on current issues. So, the instructor must know what topics are hot and the current well-respected research. Undergraduate research is a way for students to dip their toes into topics that might lead to lifelong pursuits.

Lastly, community college instructors should keep their minds engaged. It is easy to just coast at a community college. Instructors have their classes worked out and don't need to change them much. Both students and instructors may like their classes just the way they are. Months and years can go by without instructors adding much to their classes or even reading any material beyond what is required for their classes. Good instructors, though, need to keep their

minds alive. They need to be constantly practicing, as they did in graduate school, to learn and master new material. Young instructors are often the best teachers because their skills are honed and their passion for the subject is clear. Good older teachers have similar traits.

So, it seems that community college instructors do have many good reasons to attend an APA divisional meetings even as they currently are formatted. Yet, are there actions that the APA can take to encourage their attendance? One action that the APA could take is to survey instructors from two-year colleges to discover why they attend or don't attend. The list above is likely not exhaustive, and a survey will allow reasons to be quantified and ranked.

This knowledge would help the APA make changes to its current meeting structure. Even without that information, there seem to be several changes that could be made. One important change to be made is to directly offer professional development education for people who teach. There should be more sessions dedicated to the specific issues faced by philosophers who teach freshman and sophomore classes.

One way to achieve this goal would be to establish APA credentialing. Classes could be set up at APA divisional meetings to help teachers to get up to date on the latest research. The research updates would be pitched to the generalist. The Eastern Ddivision might offer a class on the latest updates in the philosophy of mind. The Central could offer the latest advancements in logic. And the Pacific might offer a class on current debates in the philosophy of religion. All of these would be taught by prominent researchers in the field. Community college instructors are like general practitioners in medicine and should have to keep up with their broad-based knowledge as general practitioners do with continuing medical education. There may not need to be tests given, but certification could be given to attendees of such training sessions. This certification would help with a community college's accreditation by ensuring the discipline-specific professional development of their faculty. Accreditation bodies would know that instructors have made efforts to improve their knowledge and skills by attending such certification sessions.

These classes could be an additional form of revenue for the APA. Community college instructors would likely have more success getting funding for conferences if there were clear benefits such as discipline-centered certification. The certification would be in addition to the normal papers that are presented at the conference, and this training might even make community college instructors more interested in attending colloquium paper presentations in areas that are being covered in generalist classes. The generalist classes, in fact, might highlight sessions that are being offered to further instructors' training.

As a part of this certification or as a part of the main session, there should also be open sessions on how to teach various courses. What are the best texts, assignments, and techniques for these courses? Such sessions take place at conferences such as the American Association of Philosophy Teachers, but they should also be a core component of APA

sessions. Even avid researchers generally have to teach an introduction to philosophy or introduction to ethics class and could benefit from such sessions. One of the more memorable times that I had at an APA meeting was when a publisher wanted to develop new introductory texts and asked a dozen of us our opinions of the books that we use and books that we would like to see developed. We all ended up enjoying the roundtable discussion of our successes and failures with various books and teaching ideas.

These sessions would then help to increase interaction between community college teachers and instructors at four-year colleges and universities. The smokers (evening receptions) allow for interaction between people and are fun events. But most of the interaction is between people who have worked together doing research and presented together. The more sessions that integrate a variety of groups, the more networking that occurs afterwards. There could even be sessions at the APA meetings that specifically try to educate community college teachers on what bachelor's institutions expect from students that transfer from community colleges. Classes transfer more easily between institutions when teachers at each school know each other.

These changes would make community college teachers more likely to attend annual APA meetings. With the APA focusing on what teachers need most, community college faculty would have multiple reasons to attend beyond those that currently obtain. The APA should not lose its focus on promoting scholarship within the profession. On the other hand, it must not neglect to facilitate the teaching of philosophical issues and analytical skills to society. For philosophy and society to flourish, good philosophers need to be developed in both Ivy League halls and local community centers.

The APA's mission is to promote the discipline and profession of philosophy at all levels. This is a wide mission that involves both skilled researchers and gifted teachers. Many of these people work at community colleges in the United States and around the world. These teachers are an integral part of the profession. They serve millions of students and promote philosophy in their communities every day. It is time that the APA recognizes their talents, importance, and needs. With a few changes and a little work, the APA could attract new members and a new audience to their annual meetings. The result would serve to expand the organization, help community college teachers, and advance advocacy of the broad importance of philosophy.

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## *Pursuing Reality: A Strawsonian Model*

Robert Boyd

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We see the puppets dancing on their miniature stage, moving up and down as the strings pull them around, following the prescribed course of their various little parts. We learn to understand the

logic of this theater and we find ourselves in its motions. We locate ourselves in society and thus recognize our own position as we hang from its subtle strings. For a moment we see ourselves as puppets indeed. But then we grasp a decisive difference between the puppet theater and our own drama. Unlike the puppets, we have the possibility of stopping in our movements, looking up and perceiving the machinery by which we have been moved. In this act lies the first step towards freedom.

– Peter Berger, *Invitation to Sociology* (New York: Penguin Books, 1966), last paragraph

Socrates provided the mandate for doing philosophy—know thyself. Fresno City College, the second oldest two-year college in the United States, offers four distinct “introductory” courses in its philosophy program. One of these courses places an emphasis on theories of knowledge and reality, and, for this course, I have found using Russell’s *The Problems of Philosophy* and Strawson’s *Analysis and Metaphysics: An Introduction to Philosophy* a great way to introduce students to the subject matter and stimulate their interest in the discipline as well as laying a foundation on which they can begin their own process of fulfilling Socrates’ mandate.<sup>1</sup> In this brief paper, I wish to present a Strawsonian model based on his *Analysis and Metaphysics* that enables reasoners to know themselves better as they try to make sense of the world around them.<sup>2</sup> From his notion that we are concept-users and that analytical philosophy should seek connections, Peter Strawson develops a powerful conceptual framework for pursuing an understanding of reality that is versatile and insightful, telling us something about both the external world and the individual attempting to understand it. Strawson’s methodology stimulates discussions on a number of relevant topics such as what is knowledge, what is reality, and how should we pursue philosophical analysis? The purpose of this paper is to clarify Strawson’s project of conceptual analysis as an approach to analytic philosophy and to show how it helps fulfill Socrates’ mandate. In the first section we begin with three conjectures that must be laid bare if we are to understand this presentation of Strawson. The second section presents Strawson’s process of “knowing” the external world, including his conceptual-connectivist model. In the final section we will consider the viability of his strategy as a means to fulfill Socrates’ mandate.

## I

Peter F. Strawson is well known for his Performative Theory of Truth.<sup>3</sup>

The Performative Theory of Truth argues that ascribing truth to a proposition is not really characterizing the proposition itself, nor is it saying something redundant. Rather, it is telling us something about the *speaker’s intentions*. The speaker—through his or her agreeing with it, endorsing it, praising it, accepting it, or perhaps conceding it—is licensing *our* adoption of (the belief in) the proposition. Instead of saying, “It is

true that snow is white,” one could substitute “I embrace the claim that snow is white.” The key idea is that saying of some proposition, P, that it is true is to say in a disguised fashion “I commend P to you,” or “I endorse P,” or something of the sort.<sup>4</sup>

That is, when an individual says, “I know X,” they are not, according to Strawson, to be understood as advocating the three distinct claims as found in the tri-part view of knowledge, e.g., 1) they have a belief about X, 2) they have reasons for believing X, and 3) X is true. For Strawson, such claims as “I know X” simply says something about the speaker. The speaker is saying that he or she agrees with X. As an ordinary language philosopher, Strawson’s position should not be surprising, for frequently, people use the “to know” verb simply as a means to show their approval to some proposition. In *Analysis and Metaphysics*, Strawson does not present his performative theory; however, this theory is consistent with the Strawsonian model presented in the next section of this paper. While this writer finds Strawson’s performative theory of truth appealing, an appraisal of it is another issue and outside the scope of this paper.<sup>5</sup>

The second conjecture that needs to be laid bare, and which may appear inconsistent with Strawson’s vision of doing philosophy, is my assumption that, frequently, we must meet our students where they are and move forward from there. In the preface of *Analysis and Metaphysics*, Strawson rightly claims, “There is no shallow end in the pool of philosophy.” Yet the purpose of this paper attempts to plunge us into a “shallower end.” This will require a simplification of Strawson’s vision. Peter Strawson does not present the diagrams that we will find in the next section, but they do illustrate his conceptual analysis. In spite of this “simplification,” we will see the complexity of the Strawsonian model.<sup>6</sup>

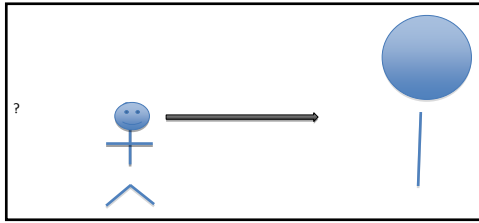
My final conjecture is the assumption that when we seek to understand ourselves and the world in which we seem to exist, we are seeking knowledge about what we perceive to be real. This understanding is seldom obtained by an instantaneous experience; rather, it involves the *process* of obtaining knowledge. Whether that process is one of decomposition or identifying conceptual mappings, an individual must determine what process works best for them. Strawson’s conceptual analysis is simply one option.

## II

For Strawson the process for obtaining knowledge and understanding begins with an individual “perceiving” an object that is external to the perceiver, and that which is perceived is found in the objective world. The perceiver asks the basic question, “What is it?” Is it simply sense data or can more be gleaned? We begin with a very basic picture of an individual engaging the external world (Figure 1).

This starting point is not immune to objections; however, it reflects Strawson’s pragmatic common sense and has been shared by many other philosophers such as G. E. Moore. Elements of this picture should be made explicit. First, the methodology for obtaining new data, new input, is not limited to the visual sensory apparatuses. Second, the perceiver

Figure 1.



is not the object of observation. Third, there is an object, external from the perceiver, being observed.

This object is not caused or brought into existence by the perceiver. It exists independently of the perceiver. This move takes us away from the traditional British idealism of Berkeley or Bradley. Strawson calls our perceiver a concept-user. "The concept-user's awareness of the world is awareness *from* a certain spatial point of view *at* any moment."<sup>7</sup> While sense perception does not guarantee true judgments, "a feature of our ordinary scheme of thought [is that] sense perception . . . yield judgements which are generally or usually true."<sup>8</sup> As a result the perceiver does not immediately reject the sense-data, but inquires whether his/her initial understanding of the *here and now* experience of perception is accurate. Russell raised this same problem when he claimed that we cannot question *whether* we have sense-data, but we must question *what* the sense-data is about given that they are private.<sup>9</sup>

The history of philosophy provides a number of models intended to help answer this basic question. For those of us who have taught these various models, we understand that each model, while offering a particular strength or positive feature, ultimately fails to be satisfactory in all cases where the question is asked. For example, the correspondence theory may be very helpful in most cases involving empirical objects, but it fails in cases involving non-empirical objects such as spirits or numbers or thoughts. Frequently, as teachers of philosophy, after teaching our students each of the basic models, we concede that any theory by itself is probably inadequate. While each is viable in its own limited way, each, ultimately, is too simplistic. Russell developed a methodology of reductionism, i.e., always moving in the direction of greater simplicity, which still holds sway over that school of philosophy we call analytical philosophy and provides a staged process of inquiry, a process of reduction, until we achieve some basic or foundational point. From the beginning of Strawson's career, his foil was Russell, and on this issue Russell continues to be the one Strawson opposes. Strawson denies a staged process.<sup>10</sup> He proposes a model that allows for greater flexibility, but in doing so becomes much more complex.

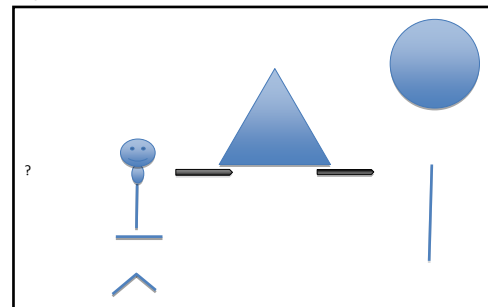
Peter Strawson proposes a model that results in his *connectivistic* approach to analytical philosophy.<sup>11</sup> He proposes that the perceiver does not perceive the object in its raw state. While the object exists whether it is perceived or not, the perceiver or concept-user does *interpret* the data, hence creating a subjective perception of the object. For Strawson this places an emphasis on conceptual ways of talking about the world. "By talking about our conceptual structure, the structure of our thought about the world, rather than, as it were, directly about the world, we keep a firmer grasp of our own philosophical procedure, a clearer understanding of what we are about."<sup>12</sup> Given this

conceptual emphasis, Strawson addresses the connection between judgment, concept, and experience. He claims that "[t]he connection is . . . that concepts of the real can mean nothing to the user of them except in so far as they relate, directly or indirectly, to possible experience of the real."<sup>13</sup> This, he claims, is the central tenet of empiricism. "[E]xperience not only bridges the gap between Subject and Object, but also gives the concepts we use all their sense of content."<sup>14</sup> However, he warns of moves that allow experience to swallow up our notions of objective reality. This raises the application of logic, which provides a form for judgment and its fundamental functions.

Our task is to connect this logical notion with two others: on the one hand with the ontological notion of the objective reality about which we judge; on the other hand with the epistemological notion of experience which alone gives sense and content to our judgements.<sup>15</sup>

The picture I have developed from reading Strawson is that of a prism that the concept-user looks through as he or she views the object. (In Figure 2, the prism, a form of Kantian rose-colored glasses, is represented by a triangle.)

Figure 2.

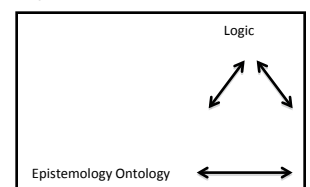


This prism is not, as Strawson puts it, a staged operation. That is, his model allows different perceivers to enter the prism from different angles or perspectives. Furthermore, each of the three components of the prism is independent, yet connected to the other two components. We might offer the following diagram (Figure 3):

As we consider this prism, which may be understood as the first layer of Strawson's conceptual apparatus in our pursuit of truth/reality, we want to remember that it is not a staged structure.

As a result, some concept-users may enter the prism via epistemology, others through logic, and yet still others penetrate the structure by means of ontological issues. Furthermore, there is no set "second step" in the process. One might begin with epistemological issues and follow that with logical concerns or pursue ontological concerns. As to be expected, the third step, also, is not staged—resulting in an unchoreographed dance and in which circularity or redundant steps are

Figure 3.



possible. Whereas Russell’s methodology of reductionism finds circularity problematic, Strawson embraces it as an important possibility in the pursuit of truth.<sup>16</sup>

While Strawson is an empiricist, he rejects classical empiricism. For Strawson classical empiricism has the defining characteristic “that one or another of these approaches—or some composite variant of them—must be right, that they are exhaustive of the possibilities.”<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, classical empiricists incorporate a complementary error.

Internalism treats the inner subjective life of thoughts, sensations, and inner experience in general as a series of unproblematic private entities—and regards the physical world as problematic. Externalism treats the physical world of bodies moving and interacting in space as unproblematic and the subjective and inner life as problematic.<sup>18</sup>

Strawson maintains that both are necessary. We are “agents, beings capable of action . . . and we are social beings.”<sup>19</sup> It is this dual function that influences our interaction with the world around us. As a result,

over time we build up a picture of the world in which we occupy at any moment a perceptual point of view; which extends in space beyond the range of that point of view; and in which we distinguish, under concepts of such things, space-occupying individuals which have, as we have, past histories and, perhaps, a future.<sup>20</sup>

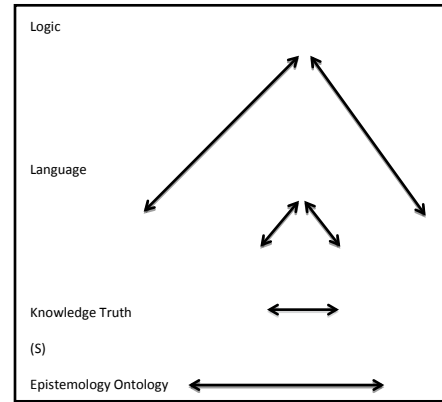
But in order to make sense of this social construct, we must consider the role language plays in our developed thinking.

Next, Strawson assembles some relevant platitudes:

- 1) The beliefs of each concept-user are partly based on *personal experience* of the reality his beliefs are about; perception and memory together contribute to building up his picture of the world. . . .
- 2) A great part—indeed the more developed a concept-user’s scheme of things, the greater that part—of a concept-user’s beliefs about objective reality are *not* based on personal experience of the objective reality the beliefs are about. . . . (Most beliefs are not first-hand.)
- 3) ... Some beliefs must be general beliefs.
- 4) ... Beliefs may conflict.
- 5) ... The need for consistency in beliefs.
- 6) It is against the general background of a body of beliefs which as a whole is not in question at any given moment that the issue of whether or not to admit a new candidate, possibly at the cost of expelling an existing member, normally comes up. [We desire coherence.]<sup>21</sup>

As he unfolds the implications of these platitudes, Strawson claims that we discover another level “within” our previous prism. He proposes a critical relationship between language, knowledge, and truth. This produces a new diagram or model (see Figure 4).

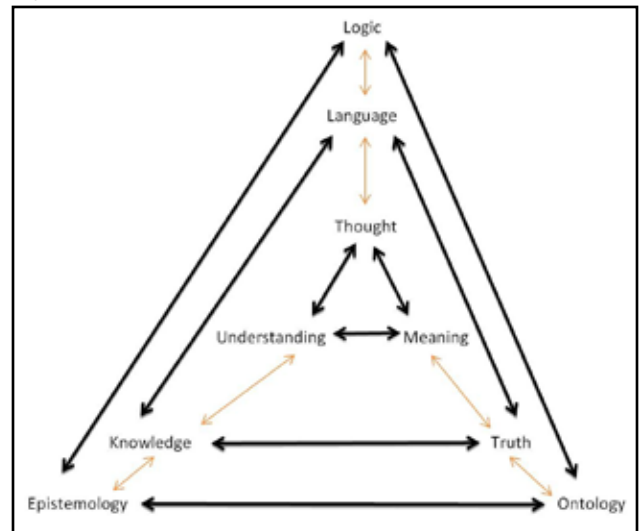
Figure 4.



The unstaged process now becomes even richer and at the same time more difficult or complex.

Finally in chapter 8, Strawson develops the connections between thought, understanding, and meaning, and they compose another layer to Strawson’s prism model. Hence, we might present Strawson’s model as seen in Figure 5:

Figure 5.



At each level the connections are not staged; hence the model allows for an infinite number of steps should they be required to achieve the desired results. Furthermore, while Strawson presents the three levels in the specified order, I do not believe his connectivism requires first penetration of the outer prism, i.e., {logic, epistemology, ontology}, then the second, i.e., {language, knowledge, truth}, and, finally, the third, i.e., {thought, understanding, meaning}. When discussing persons in this particular work, he claims that any characterization that emphasizes the “inner” person or the “outer” person is misguided as a holistic

picture. Inner and outer are simply different perspectives of the same person. The conceptual framework of Strawson allows one, as they first engage new data, to begin with questions regarding meaning or understanding or thought. Furthermore, his model highlights the connections among logic, language, and thought, among epistemology, knowledge, and understanding, and among ontology, truth, and meaning. Strawson's conceptual model is intended to be flexible to the degree that is required, making it an extremely powerful, yet practical, method for discovering truth/reality or obtaining knowledge. One investigates the inner workings of the prism to the extent required by the new data. Obviously, when driving a car and seeing another car in your lane come toward you, you would not work through the infinite steps of the prism, but rather would immediately understand the implications of the situation and make appropriate changes. However, when confronted with a more complex abstract idea such as God, then the reasoner who is pursuing truth would do well to struggle through the process.

### III

Given this description of Strawson's model for pursuing reality/truth, how are we to briefly evaluate it? First, I believe his model bodes well with empirical evidence. We are all aware that our perception of an object is always from a point of view. Russell also made this point as he discussed our perception of the table in "Appearance and Reality."<sup>22</sup> Second, when compared to alternative models, Strawson's fares well. Strawson's model assumes the objective existence of other objects; they are not products of our minds. They actually exist. However, unlike some models of objectivism, Strawson understands the complexity of perception and that the concept-user is not neutral as he/she engages external objects. This understanding is an improvement over the typical naïve correspondence theories commonly held.<sup>23</sup> Third, I believe Strawson's model for pursuing reality is quite viable. Not only is it plausible, but also, if correct, it provides direction for further investigations. It builds on Kant without embracing some of the problematic positions of Kant. However, is Strawson's position internally consistent?

Can we make sense of Strawson's subjectivity approach to reality? Is Strawson inconsistent with his emphasis on the subjective nature of a concept-user and his claim that there is a reality being observed? Panayot Butchvarov challenges Strawson's position on this point, but Strawson's reply to Butchvarov is most insightful.<sup>24</sup> Strawson does not deny the relativity of *reallys*, nor is his position open to the charge of equivocation. Those types of charges miss the point, according to Strawson.

What I have been contending is that we are not humanly capable of appreciating the force and legitimacy of both viewpoints and even—though rarely, if ever, at the same time—of occupying both. So the point, ultimately, is a point about ourselves. And there is nothing wrong with that. 'The proper study of mankind is man'. It is at least a large part, if not the whole, of the proper study of philosophy.<sup>25</sup>

Even the pursuit of reality tells us something about ourselves. It helps us fulfill the mandate of Socrates—know thyself.

### NOTES

1. Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Peter Strawson, *Analysis and Metaphysics: An Introduction to Philosophy* (New York: Oxford Press, 1992). Students often find themselves naturally attracted to either Russell's decomposition or Strawson's conceptual connectivism.
2. I wish to thank the reviewer for forcing me to refocus on the purpose of this paper and to clarify its intent. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Central Valley Philosophical Association meeting at Reedley College in November 2014.
3. Peter Strawson, "Truth," *Analysis* 9, no. 6 (1949): 83–97.
4. Bradley Dowden and Norman Swartz, "Truth," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu>
5. For an evaluation of this position, I recommend John R. Searle, "Truth: A Reconsideration of Strawson's Views," *The Philosophy of P. F. Strawson*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn (Chicago and LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1998), 385ff.
6. Within this paper I do make use of several "stick pictures," which some may find distracting, but I have found that my students find them helpful to visualize Strawson's conceptual model.
7. Strawson, *Analysis and Metaphysics*, 59. (Italics are Strawson's.)
8. *Ibid.*, 60. I recommend Arindam Chakrabarti, "Experience, Concept-Possession, and Knowledge of a Language," in *The Philosophy of P. F. Strawson*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn (Chicago and LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1998), 315ff, as a fine discussion of Strawson.
9. Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, 20.
10. Strawson, *Analysis and Metaphysics*, 62.
11. *Ibid.*, 17–28.
12. *Ibid.*, 33.
13. *Ibid.*, 52.
14. *Ibid.*, 53.
15. *Ibid.*, 54.
16. *Ibid.*, 19–20.
17. *Ibid.*, 73. Strawson identifies three principal varieties of classical empiricism: rational justification, Hume's approach, and logical construction.
18. *Ibid.*, 75.
19. *Ibid.*, 77.
20. *Ibid.*, 77–78.
21. *Ibid.*, 83–85.
22. Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, 7–16.
23. Three excellent essays should be reviewed regarding this point: Simon Blackburn, "Relativization and Truth"; David Frederick Haight, "Reference and Reality"; and Paul F. Snowdon, "Strawson on the Concept of Perception." All three are found in *The Philosophy of P. F. Strawson*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn (Chicago and LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1998).
24. Panayot Butchvarov, "The Relativity of Reallys," *The Philosophy of P. F. Strawson*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn (Chicago and LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1998), 91ff. Strawson's reply begins on page 106.
25. Strawson, "Reply to Panayot Butchvarov," *The Philosophy of P. F. Strawson*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn (Chicago and LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1998), 109.

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## CALL FOR PAPERS

The APA Committee for Philosophy in Two-Year Colleges invites papers for inclusion in the spring 2017 issue of the *APA Newsletter on Philosophy in Two-Year Colleges*.

Papers should be devoted to topics of particular interest to two-year and community college faculty, and graduate students who are considering a two-year or community college career path. These include but should not be construed as limited to the following: lower division teaching pedagogy; text and textbook selections including the use of open-access resources; cross-disciplinary initiatives; student demographics and advising; student learning evaluation; program evaluation and program growth initiatives; faculty credentialing and hiring, including concerns for women and minorities, status of adjunct faculty, workload and related issues; faculty scholarship opportunities, research, and writing; and issues dealing with program administration. Co-authored papers are welcome.

All paper submissions should adhere to the following guidelines:

- Deadline: January 6, 2017
- Papers must be in 12 pt. Times-New Roman font, double-spaced, and should be in the range of 3,000 to 5,000 words, including endnotes. Exceptional papers that fall outside this range may be considered, though this is not guaranteed. Authors are advised to read APA publishing guidelines available on the APA website.

- Pay close attention to all APA formatting restrictions. Submissions that do not conform will be returned to their author(s).
- Papers should be sent to the editor electronically and should contain nothing that identifies either the author(s) or her/his/their institution, including any such references in the endnotes. A separate page with the author's name, title, and full mailing address should also be submitted.

Submissions should be sent to the Philosophy in Two-Year Colleges Committee chair and newsletter editor, Thomas Urban, at [TwoYearEditor@gmail.com](mailto:TwoYearEditor@gmail.com), by January 6, 2017.

The editor, serving in the capacity of a disinterested coordinator, will distribute all papers to an editorial committee of current and past Two-Year College Committee members for anonymous review and evaluation. This committee will report its findings to members of the newsletter editorial board. The editorial board will make all publishing decisions based on those anonymously refereed results, and conduct any further anonymous review(s) deemed necessary. The editorial board includes Kristen L. Zbikowski, Hibbing Community College ([kristenzbikowski@hibbing.edu](mailto:kristenzbikowski@hibbing.edu)); Anthony Kreider, Miami-Dade Community College ([akreider@mdc.edu](mailto:akreider@mdc.edu)); Bill Hartmann, St. Louis Community College ([bhartmann@stlcc.edu](mailto:bhartmann@stlcc.edu)); and Rick Repetti, Kingsborough Community College–CUNY ([Rick.Repetti@kbcc.cuny.edu](mailto:Rick.Repetti@kbcc.cuny.edu)).