A Course in Metaphilosophy for Undergraduates

*Abstract:* This paper describes an undergraduate course in metaphilosophy for philosophy majors and argues that there are four potential benefits to students; namely that doing metaphilosophy (1) allows students to draw their own conclusions about what philosophy is, (2) develops students’ metacognitive skills to promote learning, (3) establishes students as members of the philosophical community, and (4) disposes students to live lives that reflect their philosophical education. It describes issues of transparency of course design and the particulars of the course, including course content, and provides excerpts of student work to demonstrate student learning outcomes. Finally, it will suggest that even if it is not possible to offer a stand-alone course in metaphilosophy, instructors should provide opportunities to reflect on metaphilosophical issues in their other philosophy courses.

Nothing puts philosophy students on the spot more than being asked by family and friends, “What’s your major?” and the likely follow-up questions, “What is that?” or “Why would you study that?” Even professional philosophers have reported avoid these topics in casual conversation with laypersons. [[1]](#endnote-1) It is hard to say exactly what philosophy is and what its value might be. Moreover, most philosophy students have not been given the opportunity to reflect on what philosophy is or why one might chose it as a major. Perhaps students’ discomfort answering these questions comes from the belief that they are not in a position to say anything authoritative about philosophy. To do so would require adopting a *metaphilosophical* position with respect to philosophy, and since most philosophy students do not deliberately engage in the philosophy of philosophy; it is no wonder they come up short when called upon to do so. With these considerations in mind, I developed a course in metaphilosophy, or the philosophy of philosophy, for the undergraduate philosophy majors at the mid-sized, public university where I teach. Rather than looking at particular philosophical periods, problems, or philosophers, in this course we were concerned with what philosophy is, how it is done, and what its value is. These issues are rarely addressed in more than a cursory way in philosophy classes. In fact, metaphilosophy appears to be an entirely overlooked topic in most philosophy programs in the U.S. even though it has the potential to help philosophy students take ownership of their chosen field by gaining a deeper understanding of the nature and value of philosophy.

In this paper, I will describe a course in philosophical writing that focused on metaphilosophy. I will begin by explaining, in general, what metaphilosophy is and why I chose to develop a course in it. I will describe the course objectives and four potential benefits for students that align with evidence-based research on student-learning. After briefly addressing concerns about the transparency of course design, I will explain in some detail the main topics covered in the course, including the readings and assignments, and provide excerpts from students’ work to illustrate student learning outcomes. Finally, I will recommend that philosophy faculty provide opportunities for doing metaphilosophy with their students if they do not offer a specific course in metaphilosophy.

Why Metaphilosophy?

*Philosophical Writing* is a sophomore-level course whose only prerequisites are any course in philosophy and an introductory English composition course. It is required for philosophy majors[[2]](#endnote-2), and it also fulfills a core (general education) requirement; thus, not everyone who takes the course is a philosophy major. The catalog description of the course states:

A first course in philosophical methods, the aim of this course is to introduce students to the skills necessary to communicate in philosophy. The course will focus on techniques of active reading; summarizing arguments both in writing and orally; preparing abstracts, summaries, and responses to readings; writing argumentative and critical essays; presenting philosophical arguments, positions, problems and papers; thinking critically and creatively about philosophical problems, formulating original philosophical responses to problems, and using appropriate reference materials and methods. Classroom time will be organized around small and large group discussion, peer review sessions, and minimal lecture. The content employed to convey these essentials of philosophical discourse will vary by instructor.

In choosing a topic for this course, my goal was to select one that would be both interesting and accessible to students at various stages of their undergraduate careers. In order to allow the time to focus on the assignments related specifically to reading and writing instruction, the topical readings needed to exemplify certain elements of philosophical writing, not merely repeat what the students had learned or would learn in other classes. Given the freedom to choose any philosophical topic for the course, and wanting to maximize the benefits to the students in their philosophical training, my central challenge was to answer these questions: *What is one the one central course or topic students majoring in philosophy are missing? What is the one thing we never get to focus on in the courses we teach? What could really benefit students in their other philosophy courses? What could have a lasting effect on students in their lives?*

While there are many interesting topics in philosophy students may not get to in their undergraduate careers, the one topic that seems to be both overlooked and essential to a philosophy major is that of *philosophy* itself. To take the time to reflect on the very nature of philosophy, rather than on some particular period, problem, or figure in philosophy, that is, to do *metaphilosophy*, would seem to be an important, yet overlooked, aspect of a philosophical education.

Granted, the very topics we cover and the methods we use in all of the philosophy courses we teach, as well as the very existence of philosophy programs and presence of philosophy requirements in other programs of study, assume a particular metaphilosophical position. For example, most philosophers think that the history of philosophy is an essential part of philosophy, and so we include courses in the history of philosophy in our major requirements. The same could be said of the other major courses we teach, for example, ethics, logic, and epistemology: we chose the philosophers we read and the problems we discuss because we have a certain view of what philosophy is. Moreover, how we address these topics also reflects certain metaphilosophical commitments to how we think philosophy should be done: we read and discuss articles, write papers, define terms, draw distinctions, construct and evaluate arguments, etc. Finally, what we take to be the value of philosophy may be implied by the very fact that this is what we choose to do, that we institutionalize certain requirements for majors, or that other disciplines include philosophy requirements in their majors.

On the same grounds, there are certain courses we do *not* teach and topics we do *not* cover in philosophy programs, e.g., poetry or programming, because we do not recognize these topics as properly part of philosophy. Likewise, there are certain methods we do not use, e.g., painting and data collection, because we do not accepts these as *bona fide* philosophical methods.

However, even if other philosophy courses implicitly provide students with answers to metaphilosophical questions, there is value in explicitly addressing these questions. By attending to these questions themselves and with their classmates, by making them the focus rather than the unintended byproduct of a course in philosophy, there are potentially four distinct benefits for students. Each of these benefits aligns with empirical research concerning successful learning.

**1. Active Learning: Students come to their own conclusions about what philosophy is.**

Boonin (2008: 1-2) claims that what philosophy is good for is taking ownership of your beliefs by means of philosophically engaging with them. Much of what we believe has been passively and uncritically “socially inherited”; that is, we tend to believe what our parents, neighbors, and teachers believe without taking the time to question these beliefs. Once we subject these beliefs to sustained, rational, critical examination, however, our beliefs become our own. Our students’ naïve or unreflective views about what philosophy is, how it ought to be done, and what its value is can be taken ownership of by actively engaging in the philosophical examination of philosophy themselves.

Meyers and Jones (1993) note that, “The process of education is self-development and learning is truly meaningful only when learners construct their own knowledge” (20). And yet, “we often do not know what we think until we try to say it”; therefore, purposefully attending to and articulating our beliefs is a first step in making them our own (*op. cit.,* 22). Moreover, doing metaphilosophy provides the quintessential model of *active learning*, i.e., purposefully engaging in a set of behaviors to promote learning via constructing or discovering knowledge. By addressing the central metaphilosophical questions—*What is philosophy? How should philosophy be done? What is the value of philosophy?—*directly through reflection, discussion, and in their writing, students are actively engaged *doing* philosophy. They generate questions, posit answers, consider objections, and draw distinctions. Activities such as these, namely higher-order thinking tasks, are a hallmark of active learning and essential to effective learning (Bonwell and Eison, 1991).

This mode of learning has what Bergsteiner and Avery (2014: 258-259) describe as a high degree of *potency*. Students are reflecting on their own beliefs, so the learning is concrete rather than abstract; they are actively engaging with those beliefs philosophically, so the learning is active rather than passive; and they are gaining first-hand experience engaging in philosophical activity rather than learning second-hand about these beliefs (258-257). Moreover, by generating preliminary answers to the core metaphilosophical questions and critically evaluating them, students benefit from what’s been called the *generation effect* (Brown, Roediger, and McDaniel 2014: 87-88). In short, by positing their naïve metaphilosophical views and then recognizing room for improvement, their “mature” metaphilosophical beliefs will be more substantial.

**2. Metacognition: Students will develop transferrable metacognitive strategies for learning.**

Metacognition[[3]](#endnote-3) is a hallmark of cognitive constructivism (not to be confused with social constructivism), which is a theory that describes learning as taking new ideas and fitting them into a complex system that includes the learner’s entire prior learning (Hartle, Baviskar, and Smith, 2012). Bruer (1994) describes metacognition as a type of inner dialogue one has in which one attends to one’s own understanding of the material, the questions one has, whether one agrees with what one has read, etc.

A substantial body of literature supports the role of metacognition in learning. Ambrose et al. (2010) describes metacognition as an essential component in becoming an effective self-directed learner (p. 191). Metacognitive practices have been shown to be correlated with higher academic achievement (Schellenberg *et al*., 2011). Learners adept at metacognitive awareness are more likely to adapt to new learning situations and are more facile at moving to higher-level academic behaviors (Girash 2014). Citing Bruer (1994), Concepción (2004) reports that students with more highly developed metacognitive skills are more effective learners, and he argues that professors of philosophy ought to provide not only background knowledge, but opportunities for students to hone their metacognitive skills in order to move them towards a deeper understanding of philosophy and to help them become better learners overall.

Metaphilosophy is a classic exemplar of metacognition. Doing metaphilosophy gives students the opportunity to attend to and reflect on what they have or have not learned about what philosophy is, how it is done, what its value is, etc. It helps them to become aware of their assumptions about what philosophy is; and it directs them to attend to their own philosophical thinking as they employ it in their academic work. The central questions in metaphilosophy call for metacognition: *What do I think philosophy is? Why do I think that? Why are these topics philosophical while others are not? What am I doing when I do philosophy? Are these effective methods? Why am I doing philosophy? How do I think philosophy will affect me in the long run?*

Moreover, students adept at raising metaphilosophical questions or self-prompting with metaphilosophical questions (e.g., *What assumptions are being made? Why does this matter? Why does this argument face a certain objection?*) will spend less time on less productive means of approaching philosophical works and get to the more demanding philosophical tasks. These skills can facilitate learning in their other philosophy courses.

**3. Expertise: Students develop expertise essential to community membership.**

“Explicit, flexible metacognitive functioning appears to be a strong component of expert thinking” (Garish 154). Concepción (2004) describes the novice reader of philosophy as one who lacks not only the background and conceptual knowledge essential for a deep understanding of philosophy, but the requisite metacognitive skills to attend to new and complex philosophical problems. On the other hand, the expert in philosophy, having not only an arsenal of background and conceptual knowledge and experience doing philosophy, but more finely-honed metacognitive skills, has a richer understanding of philosophy and the ability to transfer these skills and this knowledge to novel situations. He argues that we ought to create opportunities for students to hone their metacognitive skills to help them to become better learners, and providing students with the opportunity to explore metaphilosophy does just this.

Moreover, experts distinguish themselves from novices with respect to being cognizant of the limits and extent of their existing knowledge (Garish 2014:154). When Socrates announces his own ignorance, this is an indicator of his expertise, not his inexperience.

For my part, as I went away, I reasoned with regard to myself: “I am wiser than this human being. For probably neither of us knows 5 anything noble and good, but he supposes he knows something when he does not know, while I, just as I do not know, do not even suppose that I do. I am likely to be a little bit wiser than he in this very thing: that whatever I do not know, I do not even suppose I know.” (*Apology*, 21d)

Similarly, having engaged in metaphilosophical reflection, students understand better their own grasp of philosophy as well as the aspects of philosophy they have yet to sort out. This is an important step in what Rudisill (2011) describes as a transition from studying philosophy to doing philosophy.

When we invite students to critically evaluate philosophy itself, we recognize them as members of the philosophical community, which promotes inclusiveness given the diversity of students themselves. No view in philosophy is immune to critical evaluation. Students don’t have to take their instructors’ word for it that philosophy seeks knowledge, employs reason, or requires a certain attitude: they can question and evaluate these claims themselves. In doing so, they join a community of philosophers *as philosophers*. Thus, doing metaphilosophy promotes students’ philosophical expertise and invites community membership.

**4. Deep Learning: Students will carry with them a deeper understanding of what philosophy is when they leave the university.**

When students leave the university with a philosophy degree, if they also leave with a well-developed view of what philosophy is and what its value is, they should understand that their achievement is not one of simply having fulfilled certain requirements. Instead, they have purposefully engaged in constructing knowledge and finding meaning through the philosophical enterprise. It will become part of who they are and how they live their lives.

Additionally, the process of actively engaging in metaphilosophy aligns with strategies Gibbs (1993, cited in Fink 2003: 51) suggests for promoting deep learning. In addition to engaging in active learning, promoting metacognition, and promoting inclusiveness, letting students develop underlying concepts pertaining to philosophy, allowing them to explore and question philosophy, and encouraging them to generate knowledge “changes their orientation towards learning” in the future (*Loc. cit*.).

Lugenbehl (2003) describes deep learning as that which goes beyond both surface learning, and concept learning. Students can memorize facts to pass a test, or they can sufficiently master certain philosophical concepts to write a paper; however, deep learning allows students to recognize and incorporate what they have learned into their lives (353). Deep learning reflects not just the possession of some body of knowledge, but it alters one’s character, behavior, and sense of self. Giving students the opportunity to do metaphilosophy, therefore, may have lasting effects on their lives.

Transparency in Course Design

Questions about the nature of philosophy are themselves philosophical questions; therefore, one’s own beliefs about philosophy are subject to scrutiny. In this course, I tried to be transparent about my own metaphilosophical views. I explained to students that without ever having taken a course in metaphilosophy myself, I have developed certain attitudes and beliefs as the products of my own philosophical education and my own experiences doing scholarship and teaching in philosophy. I made no secret of the fact that I was “raised” in the analytic tradition—I had a particular view of what topics were more central to philosophy, what methods ought to be used in philosophy, how philosophy related to other disciplines, etc. Since our department is an analytic department, and the other courses the students would take would be in a similar style and be based on certain assumptions about what philosophy is and how it is done, it was important to make this transparent to students. This was not a survey of schools of philosophy (or a comparative philosophy course), but a reflection on what philosophy is from a contemporary analytic point of view. Still, given these parameters, there are more metaphilosophical issues than could be addressed in a single course.

That said, I am unapologetic for wanting students to encounter philosophy as I understand it, even if they ultimately decide for themselves to draw their own conclusions. In fact, that is precisely the goal. I do not pretend to be presenting them with all of the options, for to do so would be impossible. Nevertheless, there are features of academic philosophy I find completely compelling, enlightening, and inspiring. Philosophy can be mind-altering and life-changing, and this is what I want to reveal to my students. Still, I don’t pretend this is the only way to understand philosophy or to undertake a course in metaphilosophy.

Of course, other philosophers would and should teach a course like this one differently—emphasizing those aspects of philosophy and metaphilosophy they find particularly provocative. As is the case with most philosophy courses, the instructor’s philosophical proclivities strongly influenced the choice of readings, the discussions, and topics in the course. I did my best to be as forthcoming as I could about my choices, background, limitations, and philosophical leanings with my students in this respect.

The Particulars of the Course

Learning Objectives

Because this was a course in both philosophical writing and metaphilosophy, there were two sets of learning objectives that often overlapped. Satisfying the *course* goal of being competent in reading and writing philosophy papers would mean that students would be able to:

* Read philosophical texts actively, carefully, and critically;
* Recognize, evaluate, and respond to arguments;
* Identify and summarize arguments and objections;
* Recognize philosophical methods and technical terms;
* Clearly state philosophical problems and issues;
* Formulate arguments and objections;
* Write well-reasoned, well-organized, clear, concise critical and/or argumentative essays; and
* Use and reference discipline-specific indexes, journals and reference material.

At the same time, this course was investigation into the central questions and positions in metaphilosophy—what is philosophy? How is philosophy done? And, what is the value of philosophy? We were concerned with how we can think about what philosophy is today and why doing it is a worthwhile endeavor. Thus, satisfying the *topic-related* goal of having a deeper understanding of what philosophy is, how it is done, and what its value is would mean that students would be able to:

* Clearly state a thoughtful conception of what philosophy is;
* Identify metaphilosophical commitments/assumptions in the readings;
* Distinguish philosophy from other disciplines;
* Explain the goals of philosophy;
* Explain how philosophy is done;
* Explain the value of philosophy; and
* Answer with confidence the questions, “What is your major?” and “Why would you major in that?”

Instructional Methods

I used a scaffolded approach to writing instruction, focusing on developing reading and writing skills incrementally and culminating in writing an argumentative essay. Early assignments encouraged focused reading, careful notetaking, and accurate summarizing, and then developed into recognizing, formulating, and responding to arguments. Assignments aimed to develop certain skills over the course of the semester, included in-class writing components, and went through stages of peer-review and revision. An assigned text (Graff and Berkenstein 2015) introduced the “They Say/I Say” model of academic writing, emphasizing defending a thesis in response to what others have said about a particular topic as well as considering and replying to objections. This framework can easily be adapted to a philosophy course (Earl 2015).

I introduced metaphilosophy by encouraging students to identify and assess not only their own beliefs about what philosophy is and ought to be, but also those assumed by the authors of the assigned readings in this course[[4]](#endnote-4) and in other philosophy courses. The readings were primarily short articles that were accessible to undergraduates and that clearly articulated particular responses to the core questions in the course. A list of suggested readings organized by topic are provided in Appendix A. Class discussion focused on the assigned reading that addressed several of the central topics in metaphilosophy, which will be discussed below.

Assignments

In addition to short at-home and in class activities, such as reading questions, identifying philosophical elements in the readings, short summaries and outlines, etc., the major assignments in the courses were these:

* A pretest and posttest questionnaire asking students about their view of what philosophy is, how it is done, and its value.
* Four short papers, one corresponding to each section of the course, reflecting increasing writing skills and content knowledge.
* A final portfolio assignment in which student provided a narrative self-evaluation of their performance along with specific course work as supporting evidence to demonstrate the degree to which they met the course learning objectives.

Course Content

The course was divided into five parts, each introducing both a main question related to metaphilosophy and certain skills related to philosophical writing. The first section provided an introduction to thinking about philosophy in the context of the purpose of higher-education, and the remaining four focused on some of the central questions in metaphilosophy—what is philosophy? How is philosophy done? What are other metaphilosophical questions? How does philosophy relate to science? And, what is the value of philosophy? Course content concerning philosophical writing started with developing reading and note-taking skills, recognizing the “they say/I say” structure of papers, summarizing arguments, developing and defending a position of one’s own, and considering objections. Here I will describe the course content primarily concerning metaphilosophy and less so the writing-related content.

Part 1: Philosophy in the Context of a Liberal Arts Education

The introductory portion of this course asked students to reflect on their own reasons for being in college, what they thought they would learn, why they chose to study philosophy in particular, what makes philosophy different from other classes, and how they thought this would influence their lives. While these would be topics we returned to over the course of the semester, emphasizing them at the outset provided a context for thinking about philosophy and for purposefully developing a richer philosophical perspective.

We began by examining the value and goals of a liberal arts education. We discussed the plausibility of Schartz’s (2015) view that the purpose of a college education ought to be to cultivate certain intellectual virtues. We considered Lugenbehl’s (2003) distinction between surface learning and deep learning and generated examples from our own experience. We reviewed the main areas of philosophical inquiry, and Baker’s (2005) characterization of philosophical thinking; and we identified certain attitudes and behaviors that could either promote or undermine the cultivation of the intellectual virtues and deep learning (Walters 1988). We discussed characteristics of philosophical writing they should recognize in the readings and emulate in their writing, such as, stating and defending a thesis, considering objections, defining terms, drawing distinctions, giving examples and analogies, providing counterexamples, and raising questions (Bedau 2002: 2-3).

These topics provided a frame of reference for the rest of the course. They invited students to reflect on the purpose of higher education, the discipline of philosophy, and what it means to be a philosophy student. Students were encouraged to think of these topics in light of their own experience, thereby securing a connection to existing knowledge and beliefs. In discussion, we challenged certain assumptions, raised questions, entertained objections, and speculated about possible answers to these questions—we actively engaged in doing philosophy.

Part 2: Introducing Metaphilosophy—What is Philosophy?

A philosophical look at philosophy requires asking certain questions about the nature of philosophy, about its aims and methods, its relationship to other disciplines, its successes and failures, and its value. In this section of the course, students first were briefly introduced to the topic of metaphilosophy and then they looked at several accounts of what philosophy is. They were encouraged to compare these accounts with each other and with their preconceptions about what philosophy is in terms of whether the philosophy was defined in terms of particular topics, methods, purposes, etc.

We began by introducing the topic of metaphilosophy and considering whether it should be understood as itself being part of philosophy or whether it is a separate enterprise and whether it is a worthwhile pursuit. We were guided by the first chapter of *An Introduction to Metaphilosophy* (Overgaard, Gilbert, and Burwood, 2013: 1-16), which argues that metaphilosophy is an essential aspect of philosophy since (1) the question, “What is philosophy?” is a philosophical question in that answers to this question are contentious; (2) if philosophy aims to better understand the “forms and methods of human knowledge,” then understanding philosophy itself is to better understand this form and method of human knowledge; and (3) we must gave a grasp of what philosophy is in order to do it well.

Turning to the question, “What is philosophy?”, again following Overgaard, Gilbert, and Burwood (2013: 17-44), we considered the features of philosophy that more closely resemble the sciences, such as the concern with knowledge and truth, and those that distinguish it from the science, for example, its lack of progress and its emphasis on its own history. Overgaard et al. (2013) provide a spectrum of views concerning the nature of philosophy with one extreme taking philosophy to be literally part of natural science and the other extreme denying that philosophy is even a cognitive discipline.

Another consideration was asking what the essential features, methods, topics, etc. of philosophy might be. Baum (1941) identifies four distinct components of philosophy—a kind of attitude, a particular method, a group of problems, and a group of theories. On the other hand, Priest (2006) characterizes philosophy not in terms of any particular subject area, but in terms of its having a critical and creative spirit.

Discussion of these readings shed light on elements of philosophy that students may not have ever considered, for example, whether philosophy makes progress or requires a certain attitude, and gave them a basis for formulating a more substantial understanding of what philosophy is. Moreover, it provided an opportunity for them to employ metacognition to reflect on their own assumptions about what philosophy is and how it relates to other academic disciplines.

Part 3: How is Philosophy Done?

The next section of the course invited students to reflect on the methods used in philosophy and how they relate to particular conceptions of what philosophy is. We focused primarily on the so-called “armchair methods.” We very briefly considered logic and reasoning, conceptual analysis, analogies, thought experiments, and intuitions. We focused on why these might be particularly useful in philosophy and whether they are unique to philosophy.

Most students in the class were familiar with basic logic and had used argument analysis in their other classes. We discussed the role of logic in philosophy and in other academic disciplines. Students were less familiar with classical conceptual analysis, however, and since this is often mentioned as a hallmark of analytic philosophy, we examined competing accounts of conceptual analysis discussed in Earl (2005). This provided a basis for considering Strawson’s argument that the task of philosophical analysis is to “provide a systematic account of the general conceptual structure of which our daily practice [of successfully employing concepts] shows us to have a tacit and unconscious mastery” (1992: 7).

Finally, we considered certain core philosophical principles that Rescher (2006) describes as aligning with a particular conception of the aims of philosophy, which he takes to be answering fundamental questions clearly, accurately and rationally. Being aware of certain principles that govern philosophical inquiry, such as “never explain what is obscure by something more so,” “never make things more complicated that they have to be,” and “never flog a dead horse,” (op cit.: 8, 10) provides a lens through which students can understand their own philosophical thinking. And, since the essential component of metacognition is an awareness of what one is doing, so attending to how philosophy is done helps students be mindful of what they are doing when they do philosophy.

Part 4: Other Topics in Metaphilosophy

There are any number of issues that could be addressed in a course in metaphilosophy. Because we were also focused on building reading and writing skills, we only briefly touched on a few of these—specifically, the role the history of philosophy in philosophy, the nature of analytic philosophy, and the relationship between philosophy, science, and the humanities. Other topics are suggested in the list of readings provided in Appendix A. An in-class, “family feud”-style game at the beginning of this section revealed that students’ familiarity with the major periods, figures, and movements in western philosophy was impressive, although they overwhelmingly lacked knowledge of 20th century philosophy. Thus, this section of the class revealed how trends in analytic philosophy have influenced how my colleagues and I teach the courses in our department, provided an opportunity for students to critically evaluate the major from an insider’s point of view, and established students’ authority in making certain metaphilosophical claims.

One of the main differences between philosophy and science seems to be the relevance of the history of the discipline to current discourse. Whereas scientists tend to take view the history of science to largely be comprised as mistakes to be left behind, philosophers often turn to the history of philosophy to support philosophical arguments and positions. We considered why this might be the case—what role does the history of philosophy play in doing philosophy? Cohen (1986) argues that contemporary philosophers should not appeal to philosophers of the past simply to weigh in on philosophical problems. Instead, she claims, by looking at the history of philosophy, one can come to see how the philosophical problems of today evolved from philosophical problems in the past, and this evolution establishes the significance of these problems. Since our philosophy majors are required to take two courses in the history of philosophy—ancient and modern philosophy, and other courses emphasize historical positions on philosophical issues, e.g. in ethical theory students examine the theories of Aristotle, Hume, Kant, and Mill, having considered the role of the history of philosophy helps students understand this aspect of their own philosophical education.

Setting aside the well-known problems associated with the analytic/continental distinction, given that most of our students were unfamiliar with the expression “analytic philosophy,” and our department implicitly identifies as being analytic, we did briefly attend to the major developments, trends, features, and topics of analytic philosophy. These topics were the natural extension of previous discussions concerning the nature of philosophy.

We began by identifying certain figures (e.g., Frege, Russell, Hegel, Nietzsche, etc.) and movements (e.g., logical positivism, naturalism, phenomenology, existentialism, etc.) associated with each tradition, and briefly considered Searle’s (1999) claim that analytic philosophy is more closely aligned with the sciences and continental is more closely related to literature. While this is a somewhat superficial distinction, it is consistent with the spectrum of views covered previously described in Overgaard et al. (2013). Rescher (1990) provides excerpts from Nietzsche and Hume and invites the reader to notice difference in style in the two passages (357). Restricted by time and course objectives, we remained focused on analytic philosophy.

Hacker (2011) identifies certain trends in what he calls ‘post-analytic’ philosophy; specifically, the revival of metaphysics, the rise of naturalism, an uncritical view of science, an increase in specialization, and an interest in the history of philosophy. Additionally, he argues that there are certain features of analytic philosophy that must be preserved—a commitment to clarity of expression and argumentation, to challenging both philosophical claims and basic questions, to questioning received dicta, and to the careful use of language. On the other hand, Crane (2012) characterizes analytic philosophy not in terms of any particular set of questions or methods, but in terms of overlapping traditions of thought and a shared sense of which texts are canonical. He goes on to describe the role logic and language play in analytic philosophy, the relationship between philosophy and science, and the role of the history of philosophy in doing philosophy today. The latter, he thinks, plays a regulative role in giving us perspective on our philosophical commitments, offering us ways to both recognize and challenge our assumptions.

Searle (1999) distinguishes philosophy from science on the basis of the kinds of questions it pursues, namely, general rather than specific questions. He describes certain major movements in the history of philosophy—the shift away from skepticism, the rise of logic and language, the centrality of conceptual analysis, and the influence of logical reductionism. He goes on to list what he takes to be the six central areas of concern for contemporary philosophers[[5]](#endnote-5). We were able to tie this into a discussion of how topics in philosophy develop as science progresses.

Because these were issues we had been discussing heretofore in the course, students had begun to develop their own ideas about the essential features, methods, and purpose of philosophy. It was my impression that, because of this, they felt more confident both challenging and defending the views put forth by these contemporary analytic philosophers. At this point, the students had acquired enough background knowledge and self-awareness to defend metaphilosophical positions and to take ownership of a certain position about the nature of philosophy. This was reflected not only in the theses defended in their papers, which will be described in a subsequent section of this paper, but in a provocative discussion about the requirements for a philosophy major.

Part 5: The Value of Philosophy

Be began the course addressing these questions: what is the value of a liberal arts education? How should we do philosophy? How does philosophy affect one’s life, and what is the value of philosophy? Wrapping up the course, we returned to these questions with a richer understanding of what philosophy is, how it is done, and how it relates to other disciplines. It was now time to envision how philosophy could be part of their lives beyond the university.

It is a familiar refrain that philosophy has both instrumental and intrinsic value, and we discussed the relationship between these ways of understanding the value of philosophy. After reading Russell’s familiar essay, “The Value of Philosophy,” we read a lesser known one, “Philosophy for Laymen,” and then several contemporary, less academic papers concerned with the value of philosophy, especially for undergraduates. My goal was for students to claim philosophy for themselves, for them to acknowledge the affect it would have on their lives, and for them to be confident that their decision to study philosophy would have a positive and long-lasting effect on their lives and on society.

In his familiar essay, “The Value of Philosophy,” Russell describes philosophy as a good of the mind, one that frees one from the bias and prejudice of one’s time and culture. Contemplating philosophical questions “enlarges the self” by expanding one’s understanding of what is possible. In “Philosophy for Laymen,” Russell describes philosophy as cultivating the intellectual virtues, allowing one to develop habits of exact and careful thought, and to understand the good life. Philosophy, he says, frees us from the anxieties and anguish of the present and allows us to find serenity in an uncertain world. Wolf (2010) argues that philosophy is intrinsically good and that goodness is found in it affect upon us—in the kind of people we become having engaged in and with philosophy.

To put this in more practical terms, in an interview (Miller 2002), Martha Nussbaum describes the role philosophy plays in preparing students to make life better and in motivating them to promote and live a flourishing life. Similarly, Morton (2015) argues that academic philosophy is not just for an affluent, socially comfortable audience, but it is essential to the traditional victims of economic and social injustice. Studying philosophy not only teaches practical skills like writing and reasoning, but it allows people to see the world how it really is and to envision possibilities for how it can be better. In doing so, it improves the life of everyone affected by it, but those in positions of political and economic oppression stand to gain the most. Locating the philosophical enterprise in the realm of the humanities, Samuelson (2014) reminds us that education in general, and the liberal arts in particular, are the cornerstone of a society of free people.

This final section of the course allowed students to reflect on why they chose to major in philosophy and how they saw it changing their lives and the lives of others. They began to connect philosophy as an academic pursuit to its being a way of life. Their philosophical development, I believe, is reflected in the work the students did in the class—in the paper topics and theses they developed and defended and in their self-assessment of their own learning. It is to these outcomes that I will now turn.

Student Outcomes

In a previous section of this paper, I described four distinct yet overarching benefits for students of a course in metaphilosophy. They were: (1) allowing students draw their own conclusions about what philosophy is, (2) helping them to develop metacognitive skills, (3) allowing them to develop expertise and become members of the philosophical community, and (4) promoting a deeper understanding of philosophy in order affect their lives for the better. Additionally, I identify certain topic-related student-learning outcomes central to the course, such as being able to state a thoughtful conception of the nature of philosophy, including its goals and methods, its relation to other disciplines, and its value. More than anything, my goal was for them to see philosophy as more than just a major, arbitrarily chosen, having no potential lasting impact on their lives. By way of demonstrating that students were successful in this course, I will share with you excerpts from several of their assignments.

First, the following theses from students’ papers demonstrate the sorts of issues that appealed to them as well as the fact that attention being given to philosophy itself rather than particular problems, periods, or figures in philosophy.[[6]](#endnote-6) Several students were keen to critically evaluate claims about the nature of philosophy. For example,

* The characteristics of philosophy that Bahm identifies leave out an essential aspect of philosophy, namely, *why* we do philosophy. [edited]
* What Bahm describes as the philosophical attitude is the most important feature of philosophy and that which most clearly captures the nature of philosophy.

Other students were interested in philosophy’s relation to other disciplines:

* “Philosophy and science are more closely related than one might think.”
* Philosophy shares certain features with both the sciences and the humanities.

Others were concerned with the role of the history of philosophy:

* “In order to understand the importance and relevance of current philosophical questions, one must first understand how and why these questions came to be.”
* “By understanding how philosophy has evolved we are able to have a richer understanding of philosophical issues.”

These students connected the value of philosophy to learning more broadly construed and to its value in society:

* The philosophical attitude is of particular value as it pertains to learning, and an education in philosophy can play a role in developing this type of attitude.
* Philosophy for laypersons, and not just that of specialists, is essential to the philosophy major because it helps a person understand how to confront real social problems. [edited]
* “Those students who pursue an education in philosophy learn many skills that enable them to think about the world more critically than their peers. It is important to realize how things are is not always how things *should* be, and philosophy is valuable because it teaches us to do this.”
* “Philosophy is necessary to a citizenry because it encourages inquiry and freedom of thought. Philosophy *does* have value, and its study benefits both the individual and society.”
* “A full human life is a life examined, a life with practical wisdom, and a life that seeks knowledge; therefore, philosophy should be for everyone, not just the elite.”

These theses reveal a willingness and confidence to defend certain positions about the nature and value of philosophy. They demonstrate students’ thoughtful reflection concerning metaphilosophical questions.

Second, for the portfolio assignment some of the students answered the question, “How has your understanding of philosophy improved over the course of the semester?” They were asked to cite readings, assignments, or activities that contributed to their learning. The following excerpts from their responses emphasize students’ appreciation for the complex nature of philosophy, their attention to the value of philosophy, their recognition of the role of reason and logic, and an understanding for the sort of impact philosophy may have on their lives. In this first self-assessment, the student has become aware of what he does not yet understand about philosophy—a sign of expertise:

I like to think that my understanding of philosophy has been significantly refined from the vague generalization I associated it with before taking this class. Specifically reading the paper, “What is Philosophy?” by Graham Priest opened my eyes to a more logical viewpoint on the subject. Although I don’t feel that one can have a complete understanding of such a subject, I have definitely moved in a positive direction.

In a similar vein, this student reports a new appreciation for the complexity of the discipline:

I have a much greater understanding of philosophy due to this course. I wasn’t even partially aware of just how many different aspects of philosophy there were before taking this course. … I have a better understanding of the nature of philosophy now, since I didn’t even have a developed opinion on what the nature of philosophy was before this course. I didn’t know what the philosophical method was before this, but Bahm’s “What is Philosophy” helped me learn that it is a method of reflection and using logic. …

These students gained an appreciation of the value of philosophy in society and in their own pursuits:

…The value of philosophy lies in being an intrinsic good and to an extent, but also an instrumental good. It is an intrinsic good because of the transformation one undergoes if one studies it intently. It is, to an extent, an instrumental good if one decides to pursue a teaching job or become a lawyer. Russell states, “Philosophy can give certain things that will greatly increase the student’s value as human being and as a citizen.”

My understanding of philosophy has greatly improved over the course of this semester. By reading various articles on what philosophy might be, what its value is, and what it should do, I have a better understanding of why it is important. The readings that stuck with me the most were Russell’s “The Value of Philosophy” and Morton’s “An Antidote to Injustice”. These two articles’ arguments were most convincing when considering philosophy’s real-world value. …

Coming into this course I did not know what to expect. I did not know how valuable it would be to the rest of my college career and the way I approach life in general. I am a very emotional person, so the most significant lesson I learned from this class was to objectively defend an argument and give evidence to support my claims instead of giving weak reasons that are too emotional to be taken seriously. This class and philosophy have also helped me organize my thoughts much more effectively than I was doing before. I can assign a purpose to those thoughts instead of just wondering why the heck I think so much. Philosophy needn’t just be thought of as valuable “for” something, as many of the articles we read state, but learning how to write in the discipline has better prepared me to succeed in law school. I have written multiple papers in my other courses--especially political science--and have been commended on how to-the-point and clear my writing is.

Third, on the posttest, students were asked what they think philosophy is. Their responses reflect a deeper understanding of what philosophy is, a sense of membership in the philosophical community, and an ownership of these characterizations. While their views about what philosophy is have been influenced by the philosophers we read, by me, and by class discussion, in none of their responses do they say, “So-and-so says philosophy is….” Moreover, they each mention changes to one’s character and behaviors, for example, being open-minded, coming to your own beliefs, engaging in philosophical discussion, withholding judgment, and using reason. Here are some of their unedited responses :

Philosophy is something meant to add more to a person than just a basic skill but the ability to truly learn and this can be seen in the lessons of philosophy. Philosophy is something used to build certain characteristics such as the intellectual virtues. The virtues, humility, empathy, and perseverance, help to create a deeper learning. These virtues are taught in the humanities, which teach the intangibles that employers should be looking for. The philosophical attitude is another part of what philosophy is. This is has to do with the idea of perseverance and not quitting when the goal is hard. This relates to the idea of learning as a whole because it shows when learning is difficult that that you must push through it. The intellectual virtues and philosophical attitude teach us how to learn by being humble and not thinking you know it all, and they recommend that we be open-minded to persevere. A good motto for learning that philosophy is: judge things you believe critically and things you disagree with, with an open mind. Philosophy is meant to teach deeper learning.

If I had to give a complete definition of what philosophy is, I would say that philosophy is a discipline that studies the basic and fundamental questions that concern us all. Some of the questions central to philosophy are: “What is time? “What is real?” and “What is good?” However, after taking the course this semester, one of the most important things that I have learned was that philosophy can be described as having a philosophical attitude that possesses the skills that one must have in order to succeed in the discipline of philosophy, and most importantly this is what distinguishes philosophy from the rest of the disciplines. The most important characteristic that separates philosophy from most other disciplines is using the method of reflection, which teaches a philosopher how to conduct philosophy properly. While philosophy is not limited to only one type of method, some of the many common features that a philosopher might use is methodological doubt. This sort of doubt is the process of coming up with your own beliefs or taking the side of one belief in order to question it, and not accepting that belief dogmatically. Next you must provide several arguments supporting the solution or theory that you derived. And the last process, which is the most important process, is that you must present and share your arguments with other people, and let them form their own arguments for or against the theory in which you have presented.

Philosophy is a means of conceiving of a better way of life. It teaches those who study it to think critically about the world around them and to seek solutions to problems within that world. Philosophers accept that there may be more than one way to think about things, and they critique their peers’ arguments as well as their own. Philosophy can help students become more clear and concise writers. The formation of other disciplines, such as the natural sciences, is the result of philosophical question; and philosophy can be found in other subjects, such as political science and psychology. Those who study philosophy are able to better organize their thoughts and in doing so be better at critically evaluating their beliefs than most people. Philosophy is the examination of the human condition; therefore, it is imperative that everyone possess at least some philosophical education. There are many things that have been questioned throughout human history, and without philosophy, these matters’ importance would not be understood. Philosophy enables its students to gain a better understanding of anything they seek to comprehend because it teaches them to pursue a deeper kind of knowledge. Philosophy teaches us to form our own opinions about things and to question and seek the truth for ourselves rather than blindly accepting everything we are told.

Philosophy is many things. After this semester I can say that I definitely have a greater understanding of what philosophy is, but I still struggle to narrow down such an extensive subject. Philosophy is challenging ideas with logic, and responding to criticisms. A large aspect of philosophy is being critical of thoughts and ideas. It is being able to view a claim, respond to the claim, receive an objection, and then respond to the objection to prove your point. This is administered in papers, and even verbal arguments. I have come to find that almost everything is rooted in philosophy in one way or another. It is being able to summarize the arguments of others and respond with a well thought out argument of your own. It is a subject that puts a value on the contemplation of ideas rather than definitive answers. Most of all, philosophy is a way by which people can expanded their narrow view point and be exposed to a wide array of alternatives besides their own. It provides key values and skills that can’t be found through another subject. It requires those who study it to put their critical thinking skills to the test. It teaches you how to argue, write, and most importantly think.

Philosophy is a discipline with a number of descriptions, but no universal definition. It can be described as a way of thinking, a study of the world, the analysis of concepts, a method of self-improvement, a science, and a way of life. Philosophy is focused on achieving a greater understanding of a certain concept or of the world in general. Greater understanding in philosophy is achieved through the use of rational thought, logic, unbiased consideration of multiple viewpoints, and dedication.

Finally, on the posttest they also responded to the question, “Why are you studying philosophy?” This is the question that could incite dread among the unprepared philosophy major and one that prompted me to focus this course on metaphilosophy. Their responses show that they can do more than shrug off the question; they can cite the methods and goals of philosophy, and they can see both its intrinsic and instrumental value.

I was trying to discover how to be a better student, intellectually and characteristically. By intellectually, I wanted to be able read something and come up with a constructive opinion of my own instead of just repeating the opinions of others. By characteristically, I wanted to be genuine in my intellectual pursuits. I did not want to just get good grades and not really know anything about the class. I wanted to earn my knowledge for the sake of developing myself, regardless of the grade I receive. As Bertrand Russell states, “Philosophy can…increase the student’s value as a human being and as a citizen,” (Russell, 1946, p. 8). In other words, I study philosophy for its intrinsic good.

The reason behind my decision to study philosophy is that I was initially intrigued by its mysterious nature. I came to learn that the source of my curiosity came from the constant seeking of answers to new and old questions alike; however, I was never able to find a concrete answer to them using my philosophical tools, and I learned to be satisfied with that. Being a science major as well, throughout my college career it has always been imprinted in my mind that I must always seek the truth, avoid biases, limit cofounders, and always come to a final conclusion to answer the question at hand. Similarly, philosophy is a truth-seeking enterprise in which personal bias must be removed, critical thinking must be implemented and contemplation must occur. In essence, I decided to peruse philosophy to cover up the gaps that science never taught me, such as train my mind to be a critical evaluator of positions and arguments presented to me, instead of just accepting them. Philosophy has given me the tools to conduct science in a better way, to always have something to say, and to always maintain my eagerness to seek the truth.

When I first started philosophy, I was studying it to find answers, and because I enjoyed the process of attempting coming up with the answer. While I am still a part of philosophy for this very reason, I now have other reasons as to why I study philosophy. These reasons include the fact that people are open to discussing and questioning topics that I have been concerned for such as religion, I can apply my own thinking skills about a particular matter, and I can share those with other people to see what they have to say. Most important, I am studying philosophy because I would like to become even more of an objective thinker. I think that I see myself becoming more of an objective thinker by understanding how philosophy is conducted and the types of arguments that are valid, and the types of reasons that are valid behind the argument that I have presented. Lastly, I am studying philosophy because I appreciate the fact that people are similar to me, in that they don’t just pick a side of a particular argument, but they understand how important it is to always be undecided about several topics. I like that philosophy majors are encouraged by professors to learn about a particular matter not to pick sides, but to expand your thought process, and open your mind towards other possibilities that you may not have known before.

I am studying philosophy because I want to go to law school. Philosophy majors tend to do better on the LSAT and stand out as majors. Also the law requires deep thinking and logic and philosophy teaches that. What appeals to me the most about philosophy is the fact that it can help people to see a better world. With deep thinking it can be seen that changing the world and changing our circumstances is possible. The most challenging part of philosophy is being able to be open minded and see fault in your own views. This is because it involves not thinking emotionally but by using reason in order to see what theory is most accurate. Philosophy affects my life by opening my mind to a new way of thinking. This is seen as the way I learn has changed. I have begun to incorporate the intellectual virtues to in order to learn at a deeper level. One should study philosophy to learn the things at a job can’t teach such as how to think deeply and learn at a deeper level. These things will help a person in all aspects of life.

Conclusion

This course in metaphilosophy invited students to explore the nature of philosophy itself instead of specific problems, topics, or periods in philosophy; and they did so within the context of reflecting on the value of a philosophical education. We addressed questions about whether philosophy should be defined in terms of certain topics, problems, or methods; we looked at some of the methods used in philosophy and related them to those used in other disciplines; we considered whether philosophy makes (or should make) progress and the role the history of philosophy plays in doing philosophy today; and we discussed the value of philosophy and how it might affect their lives.

Even if it is not feasible for many departments to offer a course in metaphilosophy to undergraduates, it is important to recognize that our own metaphilosophical commitments influence both the courses we teach and the requirements for the philosophy major that we impose. Bringing to the forefront for students the presuppositions that underlie their philosophical educations will provide context for them to understand the nature of their own philosophical upbringing. We do not often acknowledge, to ourselves or to our students, that our own understanding of philosophy could be contentious. Recognizing this is especially important for those of us in philosophy and for those students looking to pursue a career in academic philosophy.

A course in metaphilosophy allows students to critically address questions about the nature, methods, and value of philosophy directly and deliberately. It provides them with the opportunity to come to their own understanding of what philosophy is, it reinforces their learning in other courses when they have a deeper understanding of core metaphilosophical issues, it allows them to participate in the philosophical community, and it has the potential of developing then them a deeper appreciation of philosophy that will affect their lives beyond the university. Moreover, when we engage in the philosophy of philosophy, we learn to respond to the layperson’s criticism of philosophy. Students need not dread that set of familiar questions: What’s your major? What is philosophy? And, why would you major in *that*?

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*Appendix A*

The following is a list of some of the papers I found that would be accessible to undergraduates taking a course in metaphilosophy. Those marked with an asterisk (“\*”) I assigned and discussed in the course described in this paper.

Background and Introduction

\*Schwartz, Barry. 2015. “What ‘Learning How to Think’ really means,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. June 18, 2015. Retrieved June 18, 2015 from <http://chronicle.com/article/What-Learning-How-to-Think/230965/>.

\*Lugenbehl, Dale. 2003. “Learning at a Deeper Level,” *Teaching Philosophy* 26(4): 351-359. DOI: 10.5840/teachphil200326457

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\*Audi, Robert. (2008) “Philosophy: A Brief Guide for Undergraduates,” APA Online. <http://www.apaonline.org/?undergraduates>.

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What is philosophy?

\*Bahm, Archie J. 1941. “What Is Philosophy?” *The Scientific Monthly* 52 (6). 553–60. American Association for the Advancement of Science: <http://www.jstor.org.login.library.coastal.edu:2048/stable/17261>.

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How is philosophy done?

\*Gorovitz, Samuel, Merrill Hintikka, Donald Provence, and Ron G. Williams. 1979. “Reading and Writing in Philosophy.” In *Philosophical Analysis: An Introduction to its Language and Techniques,* 3rd edition, 145-157.Toronto: Random House.

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\*Earl, Dennis. 2005. “Classical Conceptual Analysis,” in *Readings on the Ultimate Questions*, edited by Nils Rauhut and Renee Smith, 42-52. New York, NY: Longman.

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Analytic philosophy

\*Strawson, Peter F. 1992. “Analytical philosophy,” in *Analysis and Metaphysics*. Oxford University Press.

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\*Rescher, Nicholas. 2006. “Philosophical Principles,” in *Philosophical Dialectics: An Essay of Metaphilosophy,* 1-15. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press.

Comparing Analytic and Continental Philosophy

\*Searle, John R. 1999. “The Future of Philosophy,” *Philosophical Transactions: Biological Sciences* 354 (1392). The Royal Society: 2069–80. <http://www.jstor.org.login.library.coastal.edu:2048/stable/3030162>.

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Philosophy and Science

\*Crane, Tim. 2012. “Philosophy, Logic, Science, History,” *Metaphilosophy* 43:1-2, 20-37. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-9973.2011.01732.x

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The Role of the History of Philosophy

\*Curley, Edwin. 1986. “Dialogues with the Dead,” *Synthese*, 67(1): 33-49.

\*Cohen, Lesley. 1986. “Doing Philosophy Is Doing Its History,” *Synthese* 67 (1): 51–55. DOI: 10.1007/BF00485509

Naturalism, Intuitions, and Experimental Philosophy

Kornblith, Hilary. 2007. “Naturalism and Intuitions,” *Graer Philosophische Studien*, 74: 27-49.

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Feminist Philosophy

Garry, Ann. 1995. “A Minimally Decent Philosophical method? Analytic Philosophy and Feminism,” *Hypatia* 10(3), 7-30.

Superson, Anita and Samantha Brennan. 2005. “Feminist Philosophy in the Analytic tradition,” *Hypatia* 20(4), 1-9.

The Value of Philosophy (Abstract)

\*Russell, Bertrand. 1912. “The Value of Philosophy,” in *The Problems of Philosophy*. Oxford University Press. Edited in hypertext by Andrew Chrucky, 1998. <http://www.ditext.com/russell/russell.html>

\*Russell, Bertrand. 1946. “Philosophy for Laymen,” *Universities Quarterly* 1: 38-49. Repr. *Unpopular Essays*, Chapter 2. George Allen & Unwin, 1951. <http://www.users.drew.edu/~jlenz/br-lay-philosophy.html#nstar>

\*Wolf, Susan. 2010. “Good-for-nothings,” *Presidential Address of the 107th Annual Meeting of the Eastern Division of The American Philosophical Association*.

The Value of Philosophy (Practical)

\*Miller, Margaret. 2002. “Philosophy in the Public Interest: An Interview with Martha C. Nussbaum,” Change 34(1):39-43. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40165782>

\*Morton, Jennifer. 2015. “An Antidote to Injustice,” *The Philosopher’s Magazine*, <http://www.philosophersmag.com/index.php/tpm-mag-articles/11-essays/52-an-antidote-to-injustice>

\*Samuelson, Scott. 2014. “Why I Teach Plato to Plumbers,” *The Atlantic*, <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/04/plato-to-plumbers/361373/>

1. I would like to thank my students in Philosophical Writing at Coastal Carolina University, who inspired and motivated me to create this course and who made this a significant learning experience for me, and the two anonymous reviewers whose comments helped improve this manuscript.

   For example, just recently Louise Antony describes just this scenario in her recent APA Presidential Address (2016: 21). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Our major requirements include the following: introductory courses in philosophy, ethics, and logic; philosophical writing, symbolic logic; ancient and modern philosophy; ethical theory; metaphysics or epistemology; and electives in philosophy. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. The concept of metacognition is usually attributed to Flavell (1979). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. While I initially assigned a monograph (Overgaard, Søren, Paul Gilbert, and Stephen Burwood, 2013, *An Introduction to Metaphilosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press) to be supplemented by a handful of articles, the workload proved too challenging for the students; so we elected to focus on the articles and not the book after reading the first two chapters. A natural starting point in this course might have been *The Apology*; however, since most of the students were concurrently enrolled in an upper-division course in ancient philosophy, we instead kept to contemporary readings. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. The six problem areas Searle (1999) thinks are particularly active in contemporary philosophy are: (i) the traditional mind-body problem, (ii) the philosophy of mind and cognitive science, (iii) the philosophy of language, (iv) the philosophy of society, (v) ethics and practical reason, and (vi) the philosophy of science. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. The passages in quotations are unedited, and the others have been slightly edited for clarity but not for content.

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