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**FAILURE AND OPPORTUNITY IN THE
DISCIPLINE OF PHILOSOPHY:
A SHOW-AND-TELL**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

PHILOSOPHY

by

Emily Robertson

June 2024

The Dissertation of Emily Robertson is
approved:

_____
Professor Jon Ellis, chair

_____
Professor Neal Tognazzini

_____
Professor E. Hande Tuna

_____
Peter Biehl
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate
Studies

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Abstract

Failure and Opportunity in the Discipline of Philosophy: A Show-and-Tell

Emily Robertson

Philosophical inquiry promotes critical consideration of important values and beliefs, communication and argumentation skills, and self-reflection. Yet in the U.S., widespread familiarity and interest in it remains limited. Philosophy's been consigned to universities, with academic Philosophers becoming *de facto* stewards for the entire history and practice of the European and Anglo-American thought tradition. Even within universities, philosophy tends to be derided and insular: many students don't find it useful or worth exploring; if they do, they might find its presentation impenetrable or alienating. There is a growing body of literature expressing dissatisfaction within and about the discipline of Philosophy, but also a great body of work promoting strategies for amelioration and innovation. This dissertation expands on both. In the first half, I articulate what I take to be missed opportunities, misguided norms, and misplaced priorities within Philosophy. These manifest across pedagogy, research, and engagement with the world beyond the disciplinary institution. Philosophy should be inclusive and accessible, applied to real-world, relevant issues at the forefront of peoples' minds—right now, it's not. Throughout, I highlight strategies for meeting these challenges. In the second half, I present two projects of my own research, which both attend to several dimensions of the discipline's shortcomings. The first is built around my collaboration on a deck of

conversation cards about ethics and technology. The cards create a playful, low-stakes entry to philosophical inquiry, and when scaffolded into structured activities invite further opportunities for recreation and for student-led, empowering pedagogy. I present games, classroom activities, and a major course assignment to that end. The second project centers a claim common in disagreements about whether to support or participate in university teachers' strikes: that teachers' strikes harm students. I unpack this claim and explore considerations on both sides of the debate. I present my exploration in three modalities—an academic piece that's accessible across disciplines, a public-facing op-ed, and one-page pamphlet to be distributed to teachers and students during a strike—to demonstrate how philosophical work might be presented to various audiences and for various purposes. The aim: philosophical work, done differently.

Acknowledgements

Introduction

I became enamored with philosophy about as quickly as I possibly could have—given that I hadn't learned about it until college. I entered undergrad with absolutely no understanding of what Philosophers do—the questions they ask, the methodologies they use, the precision of language and argumentation that they rely on. The only experience I'd had, curricular or extracurricular, with anything besides a passing use of the word was my high school's Philosophy Club, which consisted of a friend group of stoners doing I-don't-know-what at lunchtime together and managing to get their picture in the yearbook; I never bothered to find out more about why they started the club or what they discussed in it. And why should I have? The subject was completely foreign to me; people joined clubs to take part in activities or causes that they already knew they were interested in. I had no such attachment to philosophy, and no impetus to try it out.

Luckily, I had a more formal introduction to philosophy in college. I took an "Intro to Moral Issues" course during my first term and declared a Philosophy major my second. It clicked. And despite myself—for I had a marked "I-hate-school" young adult attitude and a newfound passion for farming at the time—I continued pursuing philosophy academically. I may not have loved school, per se, but I loved philosophy, and the university was the only place in which I had found any luck or community in which to engage with it. I didn't feel *done* with philosophy (I'd just started!), yet I felt that the only opportunity I had to continue reading, thinking, and discussing it with people was at school. So: within a few months of learning about

"philosophy" I was a Philosophy major, within the next three years I had a Philosophy degree, and within a year after that I was accepted into a Philosophy PhD program. And here I am[1]! Ever a philosophy student, yet a begrudging academic.

Of course, in undergrad I learned that I loved many things about the academic discipline: I appreciated the organization of the topics, the quirkiness of my professors, the assignments and expectations of the courses (especially when compared to those of other subjects, rife with textbooks and busywork and multiple-choice quizzes), and oh, the lectures and discussions! I'd found my place. But I've had time to reflect on my experiences with the literature, the courses, peers, and professional Philosophers I've met, and more recently with my own students in Philosophy, and my view of the discipline has become less rosy. I believe it's been the best academic fit that I personally could have found; the discipline *as it is* has suited my learning and working style, my intelligences, my idiom. I've done well reading journal articles, listening to lectures, writing essays, and going down theoretical rabbit-holes, but I nonetheless think that my experiences could have been even better. I also think it's a shame that my understanding of philosophy was so limited that I felt my only means to engage with it was in an academic context, even though academic spaces weren't ever the ones in which I wanted to spend more time otherwise. The black-and-white "this is philosophy, and this is where and how it's

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[1] Well, I am actually writing this from a farm, but I am *here* in that I'm working to finish my degree.

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done" mindset I took on was in some ways a godsend, because it allowed me to find passion and enjoyment in my education (which was new to me), and it's kept me busy for the last 10 years, but on the other hand I think it was very limiting: I felt that I had to choose between philosophy and farming, between philosophy and starting my "real" life. Philosophy, the opportunity to philosophize, felt like a commodity monopolized by the university and I had either to invest in it or to let it go and move on.

Now I understand that such a mindset is completely dramatic. Part of why philosophy is so cool is that one can philosophize basically anytime, about basically anything. And part of why philosophy is so valuable is because this is something that we *just do*. It is in our very nature as reflective beings that we question our assumptions, look for meanings, tie together reason and intuition and feeling and evidence to try to find answers for ourselves. Philosophy just seems to be our curiosity and rationality and uncertainty culminated into an intentional exercise or project when other modes of investigation feel insufficient[2]. It's full of ideas and tools that can be fun and practical and exciting and important, and it is not just for academics. It is not just for the university. But it's taken me a long time to understand this, to conceptually de-couple philosophy from the university discipline it's housed in. Why is that? And what's been lost, for me, in having taken that time? Is my experience—or something like it—common to other people? And finally, what am I going to do about it?

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[2] Almost like the "…and the kitchen sink" of inquiry.

Well, this dissertation is an undertaking of my own call to action, a response to that final question. I articulate what I take to be missed opportunities, and misguided norms, and misplaced priorities within the discipline, and I respond to them: I offer suggested alternatives, strategies, reasons, and examples of ways in which philosophy might be practiced, taught, and otherwise engaged with differently than how I've seen it be done and experienced it to be. I envision philosophy to be a subject which people know about before they reach college, an exercise which they feel entitled and able to practice, a tool and skillset which they find useful, a topic which they believe is worth exploring. And I think that professional Philosophers, those already well-situated within the discipline, have a huge role to play in seeing this vision met.

Crucial to my project is an understanding of philosophy's current position and trajectory in U.S. culture. To answer my third question above, I don't think that my own experience with philosophy was idiosyncratic or unique, at least not initially. Philosophy isn't a core or even an elective subject offered at most middle schools and high schools, and even the skills associated with the subject—critical thinking, argumentation, abstract reasoning and the like—tend to be de-centered. With a public school system increasingly facing standardized curriculum, budget cuts, and an emphasis on STEM, the soft skills and nuances associated with the humanities get less airtime, less practice, and—to my eyes—less appreciation than in earlier generations[3]. There are simply very few facilitated or formal opportunities for

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[3] See Heller (2023) and McIntyre (2011).

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children and teenagers to familiarize themselves with the subject of philosophy. And even where there are, I'm not sure how much effort is made to situate it as a practicable, contemporary, everyman pursuit. One might be taught of Greek gadflies, or medieval scholastics, or French existentialists, without being invited to ponder the very topics that intrigued or haunted these figures. Philosophy is approached merely as a topic that's studied (rather than an activity that's practiced), and as such is closely associated with the academic rather than the quotidian.

Prospects for philosophers, too, tend to be relegated to the university. Does anybody know a real-life philosopher—that is, somebody they'd be willing to *call* a "philosopher"—who doesn't work at a university? At best, folks might cite a fiction writer or a public intellectual, or fall back on the fact that most all of the famous historical philosophers didn't work at universities, or even get philosophy degrees; that they did philosophy in a time when philosophy degrees didn't even exist. But these days, a PhD in Philosophy is basically a necessary requirement for being a philosopher, or even for "doing philosophy" at all (without an advanced degree in Philosophy, it can easily be chocked up just to having one's head in the clouds, or being prone to rabbit-holing, or theorizing; thinking, yes, but not often considered "philosophy" explicitly). And people with PhDs, we all know, work in universities. Philosophy appears to have found its way into a closed-loop system whereby it and its practitioners never seem to leave the university: the education, job training, job, and opportunities to do philosophy are all housed in the same safe place.

That is, until we consider the war against public education[4] and universities[5], hear calls for "more welders and less philosophers"[6], watch costs of living rise, wages fall, and academic jobs disappear. Certainly now, if not before, philosophy seems like a privilege for the few—either those lucky enough to find a position at a university, those rich enough to not have to work at all, or those impassioned enough to prioritize thinking over working, principled enough to invite asceticism or poverty for the sake of living the examined life. Most of us, however, get jobs and pay rent, and being a philosopher just won't cut it. Most people who go to college these days do it out of necessity, in order to get a proper job; even within the university now, demand and funding for the humanities has withered. People want—and perhaps need—more opportunities to take STEM classes than philosophy ones. They take all and only the courses required of them, because they can't waste the time or the money taking courses for enrichment or fun. I think that all of these things—philosophy's hardly being taught to kids and teenagers, being taught as a study rather than a practice, finding a comfy home within the university, and yet its ever-more tenuous place even within the university—culminate in a certain general belief about what philosophy is, who it's for, and whether one can or should do it: it's intellectual masturbation, for privileged people, and unless one wants to become a professional Philosopher, it's probably not worth getting in to. Besides, philosophy has no answers anyway, right?

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[4] See Black (2020)

[5] See Marcus (2019)

[6] See Brunell (2024), quoting Marco Rubio's slogan from the 2016 Presidential Campaign trail.

Again, I think this is a dramatic and naïve picture of philosophy, but it's one that I held before I got to college, and I imagine that many others (at least implicitly) hold it too. So professional Philosophers find themselves in the relatively unique position of carrying the torch for philosophy, as it were. The practice and skill of philosophy has managed to get shoehorned pretty tightly into academia, but now sees its prospects even there becoming dimmer. Enrollments are dropping, departments are closing, and tenure-track job numbers are decreasing. I don't like that this is happening, because I love philosophy and I find it interesting and valuable and I believe that a lot of other people would, too, if they got the opportunity to learn and practice it in earnest. But on the other hand, I understand why they don't: facilitated or formal opportunities to engage in philosophy aren't ample, and even when people get those opportunities—say, in undergraduate philosophy courses—there are still a lot of ways in which people might get turned off from it, might think "yeah, that's not for me" or "not worth my time". I've experienced some of these barriers myself, and I see my students experiencing them, and I think there are things we can do to mitigate them.

For better or for worse, it's in the hands of professional Philosophers to keep the practice and the study of philosophy alive. Humans might never stop philosophizing, in a broad sense, but I hope it goes without saying that the loss of methodologies and stores of knowledge, the loss of philosophical tradition and experts, the loss of institutionalized venues and efforts for practicing philosophy

would constitute a huge loss indeed[7]. We're not at a tipping point; I don't believe

that philosophy will poof out of existence at any moment, but I do think it's

becoming endangered, and in its rarity becomes misunderstood, too. Professional

philosophers have become the stewards and the spokespeople for the entire history,

thought tradition, and practice of philosophy; one or two lower-division

undergraduate courses are the only experiences that many people have with

philosophy, to make up their minds about its intrigue or usefulness, about how it

can be done or what theories and beliefs to endorse. So at the very least, there's a

responsibility for Philosophers *qua* teachers of philosophy to do right by their

students and their subject and make for the best learning experience they can[8].

But beyond this minimal responsibility, I think that professional

Philosophers—in their teaching, research, and lives—can make even bigger impacts,

can do even more good. Philosophy is a natural human impulse. It does tackle

important questions. It does provide good skills. It should be shared and practiced,

in my opinion much more than it is now. I don't think that it should be relegated to

the university, the purview only of PhDs or their students. I want everybody to be a

philosopher—if not an expert—or at least have the opportunity to know what that

might mean for them, and whether they'd find value in it. This too remains a project

for professional Philosophers—that is, academics—until some point down the line

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[7] We wouldn't feel fine if all of the professional musicians and conservatories in the world went out of existence, just because "people will always have the drive to create music". Expertise is valuable even in honing innate impulses.

[8] This is, I believe, a responsibility for all teachers—but perhaps stronger for philosophy teachers, because of the tenuousness of our discipline's existence.

when hopefully "philosophy" becomes common enough that those who wish to turn to pure scholarship, to remain expert's experts, may do so without the loss of opportunity for non-experts to engage with the subject. To put it bluntly: I want everybody to have a fair shot at playing around with philosophy before we continue to encourage or allow for the academic insularity that's been pervasive in the discipline—that has, in a sense, *been* the discipline—for quite some time now. My project is motivated by the belief that the discipline's professionals should be prioritizing teaching and outreach over highly specialized, abstract and esoteric projects of our own. Only when we've made good work on those fronts should we feel comfortable that there'll be people in the next generation who'll actually be willing to read the treaties and *magnum opuses* many of us dream of creating.

My reader need not agree with me though about the state of the discipline, the relationship between the discipline and the practice, or even the value of philosophy itself in order to gain something from reading this dissertation. My project elaborates in depth many of my criticisms of the discipline and offers suggestions and examples of my own efforts to see Philosophy thrive. Readers might engage with it for any number of reasons, and take away from it what suits them: values, arguments, criticisms, strategies and activities for teaching, visions for the discipline, or perhaps nothing at all. I take my audience to be other Philosophers, either working their way through a degree in Philosophy or employed at a university, so from Philosopher to Philosopher: I've got some ideas to share. What I

aim to do is add to the body of critical, practical, and metaphilosophical works already out there hoping to reshape and reinvigorate the institution of philosophy.

I'm not the only Philosopher considering different ways to operate within the discipline; many people have written about it and in fact, I see examples all the time of Philosophy students, teachers, and organizations pushing against the grain already and making positive changes to the discipline even as I write this. The people who have done this are my inspiration, and offer me hope for the discipline: I've had great teachers, I see efforts and opportunities for public philosophy, I learn intriguing ideas and skills from others and I want to appreciate and amplify their efforts while also putting forth my own.

Among the voices who've already contributed and whom I will be referencing at various points are Robert Frodeman and Adam Briggle, Kristie Dotson, Myisha Cherry, and Philip Kitcher. Frodeman and Briggle, in their book *Socrates Tenured: The Institutions of 21st-Century Philosophy*[9] problematize the very institutionalization of philosophy within the university and its precarious place in the university and in contemporary society; they present suggestions for how the discipline might evolve to accommodate today's academic, political, and industry circumstances. Dotson, in "HOW IS THIS PAPER PHILOSOPHY?"[10] discusses the "culture of justification" within academic Philosophy, the gate-keeping and pedantry involved in demarcating philosophy from non-philosophy and this norm's

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[9] Frodeman and Briggle (2016b)
[10] Dotson (2012)

adverse effects on minoritized philosophers. Cherry, in "Coming Out of the Shade"[11] turns toward professional Philosophers themselves, urging them toward accessibility, public interfacing, and interdisciplinarity—individual choices that can help Philosophers and non-Philosophers alike reframe and gain a healthy understanding of the work that Philosophers do. And Kitcher recommends we practice "Philosophy Inside Out"[12] in a paper by that very name, suggesting pragmatism in our topics of research and our methodology, so that philosophy can maintain (or return to) personal and cultural relevance for everyday people.

Part of what makes my project unique, I think, is its show-and-tell format. This dissertation is a guided exploration not only of my perspectives on the discipline, but also of what I'm doing in response. I don't want this dissertation to be merely an intellectual exercise; I want it to be a toolbox for—or at the very least, an instructional example of—philosophy being approached in the very ways I argue for. As to whether this project counts as a proper enough work of "philosophy" to warrant a doctorate degree, I obviously hope that it does… at least just enough. I imagine this to be a somewhat subversive project, my modest attempt, reminiscent of Judith Butler's gender project, to shape and reconceptualize academic Philosophy from the inside[13].

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[11] Cherry (2017)
[12] Kitcher (2011)
[13] Maybe academia more broadly, too, since dissertations tend all to maintain styles, formats, and other norms (e.g. formality), respective of discipline. If I'm subverting the norms of one that might count as a move toward subverting them all.

Part I of this dissertation follows a more traditional route: two long-form papers—two chapters—discussing my concerns, critiques, and suggestions for improvement in Philosophy. The first (Chapter 1) is simply titled "Pedagogy". As things stand, an introduction to philosophy or a critical thinking course might be the only formal exposure to philosophy that a student—or a person—has in their lives. It's for this reason that philosophy teachers have a particularly strong responsibility to be *good* teachers to their students; folks might not have other opportunities to spark an interest in philosophy or gain something valuable from it. The chapter discusses ways in which teaching in philosophy might be falling short and could be improved.

Furthermore, as I discuss in the chapter, Philosophy—again, unlike many other disciplines—tends to be, and tends to be *considered* to be, a discipline of white cisgendered men (Linda Martín Alcoff calls it "demographically challenged"[14]). I do not spend much time arguing for why the discipline shouldn't be okay with this; rather, I take it as an assumption and a further reason for engaging in equity-minded, progressive pedagogy in efforts to ameliorate the demographic problems (and the reputation that comes along with them). Three pedagogical areas I discuss which I think could help address the demographic problems and improve teaching and reception of the discipline more broadly are course topics and content, presentation of course content, and assessments of student learning.

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[14] Alcoff (2013), 21

In the section on course topics (1a), I critique Philosophy's near-ubiquitous focus on the philosophical canon; I offer instead reasons for and suggestions of how to de-center the canon and teach more applied topics and more contemporary and diverse authors. In the section on content presentation (1b) I discuss Philosophy's norm (though I know it isn't particular to Philosophy) of assigning dense academic readings, lecturing on them, then inviting open-ended discussion. I suggest more varied, scaffolded, and facilitated discussion-based approaches to presenting philosophical ideas: less readings, less lectures, and more genuine exploration of ideas, rather than simply learning *about* them. Finally, in the section on course assessments (1c) I discuss the discipline's overreliance on essay-writing. Though developing writing skills is important, doing so is often not part of a philosophy course's explicit learning goals. I discuss both essay-based and alternative forms of assessment as they pertain to current, expressed course goals which might not include writing, as well as the question of whether writing *should* be a learning goal in philosophy courses. I also discuss practical concerns about assigning essays (be they in-class or take-home) as a reason perhaps to favor other forms of assessment. Making real changes within the discipline along all these lines could be truly transformative: a facelift for the discipline and in-roads for today's young people to engage with and appreciate philosophy.

All this said, philosophy is not just about college philosophy courses: there is much more about it to be explored and appreciated outside of the classroom. The next chapter (Chapter 2) is called "Philosophy in the Real World". As much as I

would love to see pedagogy be prioritized in Philosophy — it's one of my passions and I think there's a lot of opportunity to shift our pedagogical goals and norms to make the discipline, and the practice, more fruitful for students — I know that it's not the only aspect of a Philosopher's job. Research, *doing philosophy*, is often a requirement (if not the very reason folks want to join the profession); as is "service".

Chapter 2 largely discusses aspects of Philosophers' insularity and offers suggestions for how to counter it. I spend some time in Section 2a motivating the chapter: who do Philosophers tend to engage with, and why? I argue that Philosophers' main audiences and contacts are with other Philosophers, and that I think it's a shame. Like many academic disciplines, Philosopher's work tends to be highly specialized: academics writing to other academics on very niche topics. But, as I describe, philosophy holds a special, personal, existential, and innate importance to people. It's not meant to be confined to the university. In Section 2b, I explain why I personally love philosophy, why I think it's valuable, and why I think it should be shared. Philosophy is playful; philosophy is practical; philosophy is profound. People — and not just university students — should have the opportunity to philosophize and to have support in doing so. For the rest of the chapter (Section 2c), I discuss how Professional Philosophers can, and sometimes do, take on the important and rewarding roles of being philosophical question-askers, facilitators, and guides to other academics, students, and the public alike. I believe there's a great value to public philosophy, so understood, and that the discipline ought to prioritize it. I offer suggestions of how Philosophers might prompt or enable this priority.

I also return to the topic of applied philosophy. Applied philosophy tends to be relegated to the discipline's periphery, and when researched is often still bound to the armchair: it is discussed and argued about, but rarely actually *applied*—shared or practiced beyond the statements and disagreements of Philosophy professionals in articles and conferences. I'd like to see more applied philosophy, both within the discipline and outside of it, with Philosophers contributing to on-the-ground discussions and decision-making; philosophy in action. I don't want to suggest that individuals research applied topics strictly for instrumental purposes, just to join the fray or help solve problems. I appreciate philosophy enough to want to encourage people to pursue whatever philosophical interests they happen to have. However, I think that the institution of Philosophy would do well to incentivize the less esoteric, the more interdisciplinary and applied topics of research. I think there are some very pressing and pragmatic reasons for doing this, not least the goals of maintaining philosophy in our culture and the discipline in our universities.

Part II of the dissertation delves into the show-and-tell. I provide examples of my own work and use them as case studies to show and to explain how I respond to the critiques and suggestions offered in Chapters 3 and 4. Chapter 3, "TEQ Deck" centers on a project of which I've been a part since 2020: a deck of conversation cards (called the Technology, Ethics, Questions "TEQ" Deck) that presents prompts and scenarios at the intersection of ethics and technology with the aim of removing barriers to entry for having the difficult and pressing—but also interesting and fun— philosophical conversations. The cards themselves, in their present iterations, are

finished, though we foresee updated versions with new and revised questions to be printed in the future.

Our current task, however, is in coming up with uses for the cards—creating games, activities, assignments, and paving the way for pedagogical and industry ecosystems in which TEQ Deck might be integrated. These are what I contribute here. In the first section (3a), I offer two games of my creation—called Circular Reasoning and TEQ Deckery—in which the TEQ Deck can be used for purely recreational purposes. Then in Section 3b I move on to present examples of how TEQ Deck might be used in structured learning environments: I offer three different in-class activities—March Madness, Gallery Walk, and Drafting Connections—and then instructions for a four-part major project which might be assigned for a university course in technology and ethics, or something similar. Finally, in Section 3c, I present a co-written, public-facing piece by myself and Jon Ellis describing and reflecting on the TEQ Deck project; an exciting project with varied uses is only valuable insofar as people know about it, so we made efforts to share about it.

Chapter 4, "University Teachers' Strikes" concerns itself with the ways in which philosophical ideas and works might be presented, and the contexts and topics for which philosophy might be very useful. I argue in Chapter 2 for more applied and publicly-engaged philosophy, and Chapter 4 sees those visions in action. My topic of focus is university teachers' strikes and in particular, reasons for or against university teachers to participate in a strike. During the 2019 wildcat strike at UC Santa Cruz and the 2022 UC system-wide UAW strike, I heard from many of

my Philosophy graduate student colleagues that the reason they weren't striking was because doing so would be a harm to their students: it would cause the students stress, deprive them of learning or grades, or constitute treating them as mere means to strikers' ends—a categorical wrong, for many. I decided to explore this. What began as an exercise for myself—a philosophical exploration of a decision and event(s) that mattered to me—I quickly realized could be put to some use: people must make real-time decisions about whether to go on strike, or support a strike, and investigations like mine might help them to make such a decision. But peer-reviewed journal articles are not going to be the most effective or efficient resources in times of fast-moving, on-the-ground decision making.

In Section 4a, I present a somewhat typical "academic" paper—the kind I might one day submit to a Philosophy journal, or present at a conference—arguing that harm to students is not a compelling reason against university teachers' participating in a strike. Then in Section 4b I present a punchier, shorter-form version of it: an op-ed, which ran in Lookout Santa Cruz and addressed community members and students, rather than would-be striking teachers or academics. And finally, in Section 4c, I present a pamphlet, a one-page accordion-style resource of questions, considerations, and resources meant to spur thought and conversation between teachers and students alike. Each medium is fitted for a different context and audience; people with varying background, interest, and urgency can thus have multiple in-roads for engaging with the ideas presented. More generally, Philosophers' mindfulness toward context and audience, and willingness to present

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their ideas in untraditional (that is, less academic and more accessible) ways can generate much more impact. Philosophical insights and methods stand a much higher chance of being taken up and put to use in very real, on-the-ground ways. I think can be an epistemic and a societal good: more voices and perspectives in the exchange of ideas, and these yet seldom-heard ones sharing the goods of philosophical reasoning, rigor, conceptual analysis, and theory with any who might be interested.

Throughout Chapters 3 and 4, I provide meta-discussions, reflections and analyses of the various projects and activities I present. These are provided for readers of the dissertation—rather than, say, students in my classroom, players of the TEQ Deck games, or would-be striking grads—to gain explicit insights into my motivations and aims for the different components as well as how they relate to and address the topics I discuss in Chapters 1 and 2. The projects and activities themselves are standalone, but by coupling them with further discussion I hope to create a sense of cohesion and clarity, an explanatory thread weaving together my critiques and calls to action in Part I with my demonstrations of action in Part II.

Before moving on to the body of my dissertation, I'll specify some terminology and make some disclaimers. First, I'll be talking a lot about philosophy as a practice and a methodology, as a subject and a "tradition", but I'm not going to make much effort to define 'philosophy'. That would be an entire dissertation in and of itself. I consider it the knowledge and methodology we learn when we take

Philosophy courses, the ideas and theories we research to acquire a Philosophy PhD or publication in a Philosophy journal, the subject of inquiry that defies other labels, but most importantly all of these things as distinct from the institution(s) in which they are housed. Philosophy as ideas, theories, methodologies, and practice is not the same as Philosophy as a university department or an academic profession. When I speak of 'Philosophy'—with a capital-P—I'm speaking of the institution, the academic discipline, the field of research and of teaching dominant in college and university Philosophy departments in the U.S. and elsewhere. When I use the term 'Philosopher(s)'—again with a capital-P—I'm speaking of people who do philosophy professionally at such an institution, or at least who were trained at one. Most Philosophers (capital-P) have a PhD in Philosophy, and are well-versed in the discipline's institutional norms and expectations.

Yet there also exist philosophers (lowercase-p) who needn't have formal training or professional ties to the institution of Philosophy—but they also needn't be amateurs: all Philosophers are philosophers, but only some philosophers are Philosophers. The point is that I'd like to make a distinction between Philosophy (capital-P) as a part of the 21st-century, Anglo-American higher education machine and philosophy (lowercase-p) as an activity and a subject of exploration—one done in or out of an academic setting. The distinction is important because, in agreement with Robert Frodeman and Adam Briggle[15], I think that the way that institutionalized Philosophy has come to operate is a major cause of the disfavor and

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[15] Frodeman and Briggle (2016)

(alleged) cultural irrelevance of philosophy as a practice. I aim to make it clear, then, when I'm talking about lowercase-p philosophy—the activity and topic of inquiry I value—and when I'm talking about capital-P Philosophy—the institution stewarding it. I'll be explicit which term I'm using when there are ambiguities. When I quote others, I will not edit their spelling or grammar, inclusive of their capitalization (or lack) of the word 'philosophy'. I trust context will do enough here.

Unfortunately it isn't always easy to disambiguate the subject from its institution. For example, basically my entire philosophical education has been in what's called "the western analytic tradition". Characteristic of this tradition is a questioning—or at least an explication—of one's assumptions, an aim for clarity in conception and articulation, and meticulous reasoning and argumentation. This tradition and its methodologies tend to be distinguished from those of science, religion, non-western philosophy, and even so-called "continental philosophy"[16]. And it happens to be the primary philosophical tradition taught and practiced in U.S. colleges and universities. So when I say that I love and find value in philosophy, I do have my personal experiences and appreciation of western analytic philosophy in mind as taught to me within the Philosophical institution, as shaped *by* the institution. I am happy to accept a broad enough conception of 'philosophy' to include non-analytic and non-western thought traditions (I discuss this in Section 1a) but given my philosophical background I admit I tend to use it to refer implicitly to

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[16] Which isn't to say that clarity and meticulous reasoning aren't present in these other subjects; just that they tend to be distinguished by other features and aims.

the western analytic tradition. Perhaps this experience and bias points to a failure of the U.S. Philosophical institution—though that's not one of my arguments in the dissertation. In any case, the lowercase-p philosophy that I know and love is the same one that makes up the scholarly foundation of capital-P Philosophy. I don't really have complaints about the former, except as it's used to monopolize and essentially to define the latter.

I'm also painfully aware of the narrowness of my own experience: there are hundreds of Philosophy departments in the U.S. alone, and I have been a part of just two. I have, as I said earlier, 10 years of affiliation with the discipline; I've been a "professional" Philosopher for five of them—and that, only if being a funded doctoral student counts. I've been to a number of Philosophy conferences, though I don't "network" much; I've never submitted a piece for publication; I'm not on the job market. I have distanced myself from the discipline (many of my reasons for doing so are articulated throughout this project), yet I nonetheless espouse my perspectives as an insider. That said, I think many of my observations, experiences, and frustrations are shared—and I'll of course provide references where I can—and some are generalizable at least in part because features of the discipline *qua* discipline borne in the western analytic tradition make it the case almost by definition. For example, western philosophy is a tradition famously described as "a series of footnotes to Plato"[17] so it's no surprise that many Philosophers within this tradition venerate Plato and the other ancient Greeks, researching and teaching a

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[17] Whitehead (1979), 39

canon founded in their works. Similarly, if it's a tradition of textual analysis (as many academic disciplines are, I'll admit), it's no surprise that there's a lot of reading and writing involved in Philosophy. I might take issue with these norms even as I understand where and why they arose, and though they make up cornerstones of the tradition.

However, I also don't feel like I *need* my claims, my worries, my suggestions, to be generalizable or true of every Philosophy department and practitioner. I haven't experienced—nor do I hope to experience—a single, homogeneous, monolithic PHILOSOPHY. Yet, regardless of how widespread—or not—the disciplinary practices are both with which I take issue and which I endorse, I still think they're worth exploring on paper. At the very least, it's been useful for me to articulate why *I* value philosophy and how I think that value can be shared and appreciated more widely. I am happy to have found an outlet for expressing my passion for teaching and for public and applied philosophy within a piece of scholarship, where so often "teaching", "public philosophy", and "applied philosophy" are relegated to peripheral spheres, separate from proper Philosophical research. I am merging them, pulling the disciplinary periphery into the center while arguing to expand the very institution of Philosophy to welcome that growth.

Part I

Chapter 1: Pedagogy

Believe it or not, most Philosophers cannot make a living doing research alone. Most professional Philosophers are instead hired as college or university faculty and expected to teach, with research (read: publication) and service requirements on top of the teaching responsibilities. Only with summers, sabbaticals, and research grants do most Philosophers get to focus solely on their own research, and research grants are few and far between—especially relative to many other disciplines. This is just to say: much of a Philosopher's time is spent teaching, or at least splitting their efforts between teaching, research, and other professional responsibilities, not to mention their personal lives. Yet most Philosophers enter the profession to do research: they'd rather "do" philosophy than teach it, and their teaching and service responsibilities come as a necessary but unwelcome requirement to pursuing their real work. This isn't to say that every Philosophy teacher is begrudging about it. Many lean in to the role, perhaps, like me, finding that they actually *enjoy* teaching—even more than researching!—or tackling their teaching role with the same perfectionism they apply to their argumentation. There are also many, many teaching-*only* jobs, for adjuncts, community- or liberal-arts college faculty, and fellows[18]. But still, for many Philosophers, teaching is not a priority.

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[18] I'll note here how strapped the job market is: way too many philosophy PhDs for the number of jobs available. I'll suspend judgment about whether I think people who land jobs as adjunct instructors or community college professors do so because that is their job of *choice* or because those are the only jobs *attainable.*

Well, let me back-track there. Teaching may indeed be a priority—because of the aforementioned necessity, and sheer the time-suck of it—but teaching *well* may not be. One can teach a class half-heartedly, and once one receives tenure, one needn't worry much about one's student evaluations or teaching outcomes. Actually, even before getting tenure, many Philosophers are incentivized to give teaching a back-seat: universities tend to hire for prestige, and one does not gain prestige by being a good teacher. Universities hire published and promising Philosophy *researchers* into roles that require both researching *and* teaching, but only provide raises and tenure (PhDs too, for that matter) to Philosophers based on their research output—so long as they're not absolutely terrible teachers, all the professional goodies ride on research[19].

So many Philosophers prioritize their own philosophizing over their teaching: it's often what they like more anyway, and it's also their golden ticket, as it were. In principle I'm okay with this prioritization—we all have favorite and least-favorite parts of our jobs, after all—except that truly I believe students suffer from it. If students suffer from it, if they have bad experiences in philosophy courses, they're more likely to write off both the discipline and the practice. Philosophy (uppercase-P) has the opportunity to be one of the most eye-opening, mind-expanding, engaging and exciting disciplines, yet instead it's floundering along with others in the humanities[20]. I don't want to attribute "the death of the humanities" just to the

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[19] See Cherry (26)

[20] See Heller (2023). As I wrote this at the beginning of the 2023-2024 school year, I was told that 80% of the incoming freshman at UCSC have expressed interest in declaring a STEM major.

way that they're being *taught,* but certainly some good teaching can help to revitalize these disciplines: increase enrollments, increase major declarations, keep jobs intact, keep entire departments alive, and help in manifold ways keep lowercase-p philosophy alive. At the very least, it won't hurt.

Although research proclivity might give Philosophers clout within their professional circles, that is not why undergraduates enroll in their courses. Most students only get their first introduction to "philosophy" in college (whereas they've studied English and literature, math, science, and history for years), so they tend to pick philosophy courses based off the topic: whatever fulfills a general education requirement and sounds least uninteresting, or easiest[21]; if they're smart they'll check ratemyprofessors or ask around to see which classes or instructors are the best. But unlike graduate students, undergrads do not generally take philosophy classes from people just because they're famous. In fact, they likely don't even know who *any* famous contemporary Philosophers are (except for Peter Singer, maybe), and for my part, I didn't read any works by my undergraduate professors unless they assigned it to me themselves, or after I started graduate school. All to say—and maybe this is obvious—for undergraduates, it's their professors' *teaching* that matters, and not their research.

I want to inspire a new generation of philosophers; I want people to take philosophy courses because they're *interested in them*, to declare a Philosophy major

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[21] God bless general education requirements; without them, the humanities really would be dead.

or minor because I think it is indeed Philosophy is a great major, but also because I think that beyond any other discipline, an interest in Philosophy is an interest in thinking and learning and—ugh—wisdom itself. Choosing Philosophy is almost a political statement at this point, communicating to oneself and to others that knowledge needn't always be instrumental; that productivity and innovation needn't always be tangible[22]. I think that students can be better students *and* better people with even a hint of this mindset present. So as philosophy teachers, it's our job to provide students the opportunity to get engaged and engrossed in philosophical questions and ideas, not because we expect students to solve them, or memorize them, or even to understand them, not because they're always practical, but because they're awesome. I think everybody should partake in that awe, to revel in the poignancy and profundity and somehow the relevance of the topics which Philosophers engage with every day. Even if students decide not to continue in Philosophy, I think it's still worthwhile to try offering them a great experience in the time they have. This is indeed largely what a liberal arts education is about: exposure to multiple subjects, a well-rounded education resulting ideally in a well-rounded populace. Future Philosophers of America aside, I believe that a good learning experience in *any* subject can be enriching and incredibly valuable, and this includes learning experiences in Philosophy courses.

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[22] Except, of course, the endless deliverables that philosophy students and professionals are expected to produce.

Funny enough, as much as I deride the hero-worship awarded to Socrates and Plato, I do think they set a good precedent for the project of philosophy—a precedent which I think has unfortunately been somewhat forgotten: their foremost roles were those of *teachers*—or perhaps philosophical guides—even if they didn't self-describe as such. Socrates didn't write (ahem, "publish") anything. He just asked people questions, gadflying about, making regular citizens question their beliefs. And if he's the platonic ideal of a philosopher[23] it seems a bit ironic to me that the discipline originating from his practice has taken such a departure from it. Of course with Philosophy's professionalization and with capitalism come specialization and metrics of productivity; of course 2500 years down the line the language and the methodology have changed; but can't the ethos remain?

I don't think philosophy should be an ivory tower affair; I think the ideas should be accessible and should be explored in and outside of the profession, but also in and outside of the university; in and outside of the classroom. I will discuss the out-of-the-classroom stuff in Chapter 2, but in this chapter I focus specifically on the teaching of philosophy to college students in lower-division philosophy courses. I will discuss different norms in university-level philosophy pedagogy which I think would benefit from a shift in focus or practice. First, in Section 1a, I explore course topics and content, in particular, our discipline's focus on the canon; then in Section 1b I'll explore how the topics and content are presented, typically by way of reading assignments and lectures; finally, in Section 1c, I will explore how students'

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[23] Pun intended!

engagement with and understanding of them is assessed, in particular with the assignment of Philosophy essays. For shorthand, I'll call these areas "topics", "presentation", and "assessment". In my discussion of each pedagogical area and its norms I'll explain my criticisms (albeit often with ambivalence) and I'll explore alternatives that I've learned about, witnessed, or tried myself. These alternatives aim to address or correct the problems I've identified while still maintaining the integrity and uniqueness of the discipline.

1a: Topics and the Canon

The main thing I'll discuss in this section is the philosophical canon. Now, it's old news that the canon is comprised primarily—if not *completely*—of the writings of white European men. I'm not going to spend time arguing that point. What I'm curious about is how we respond to it—what, if anything, do we *do* with the knowledge about the demographic makeup of our canon's contributors? My thought: a perfectly viable and pedagogically sound response is to do away with teaching the canon; less radically, I'll suggest de-centering it. Many age-old and favorite philosophical ideas can be explored via contemporary works with diverse authorship, and perhaps exploring the age-old philosophical ideas needn't be a priority anyway.

This section will proceed as follows: first, I'll explore reasons why we might be dissatisfied with the canon. Is there even a problem to be addressed? Second, I will explore reasons why we might want to revise the canon—that is, diversify it

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without doing away with it—or teach it in such a way that there are opportunities

for including non-canonical but more diverse thinkers into the picture. I'll argue that

both of these approaches to the very real problem of a white-male canon don't

sufficiently address it. These efforts tend to be disingenuous and I think they

continue to perpetuate the issues that they're attempting to solve. Finally I will

explore the question of whether to teach the canon in the first place: is there a way to

do right by our discipline *without* assigning the likes of Plato, Aristotle, Locke,

Bentham, Kant, and the rest? I want to provide an ambivalent "yes".

1a.1: Is There a Problem?

Alright, so is there even a problem to be addressed regarding the canon?

Philosophers land on both sides of the question: some think yes, and some think no.

Most of the arguments are grounded in claims about educational, professional, and

otherwise systemic disparities for minoritized (that is, not-

white/straight/cisgendered/European-or-American male) individuals, or they're

grounded in claims about what the tradition of philosophy and the discipline of

Philosophy *are* and *should be*. I'll approach these in turn, though they are related.

To the more strictly demographic concerns: white men are overrepresented

in the discipline. Given nation-wide demographics in the U.S., we might expect

women to earn about 50% of Philosophy PhDs, and non-white students to earn

about 40% of Philosophy PhDs; yet women, despite being about 50% of the

population and earning about 46% of all PhDs in recent years, have only earned

about 29% of Philosophy PhDs[24]. Non-white students, while comprising about 40% of the population, earned 30% of all PhDs in 2018, while only earning 16% of Philosophy PhDs[25]. These numbers suggest not only that women and non-white individuals are underrepresented in doctoral completion more generally, but that their underrepresentation is even *more* pronounced in Philosophy than across all disciplines. I chose to share numbers on Philosophy PhDs because I think doctoral recipients are a good way to "measure up" the demographics within the discipline: focusing on undergraduate degrees or full professorships yields slightly different numbers but I don't think they reflect the current disciplinary trends: many undergraduate Philosophy majors don't carry on in the discipline after graduation, and I worry that the number of professorships might be dismissed as reflecting a more historical academic norm—one in which basically only white men could become professors—from which we're still waiting for older generations to retire. The number of PhD recipients hopefully reflects *current* disciplinary trends and capture—or at least include—whatever the consequences may be both of undergraduate degree completion and of professorship makeup.

In any case, the discipline has a lot of white men—just go to almost any Philosophy conference, check APA membership demographics[26], count the number of Philosophy journal publications[27], or make tallies of your own department's faculty and grad student populations. Now, consider the message and the

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[24] NCSES (2022)
[25] Schwitzgebel (2020)
[26] APA (2023)
[27] Wilhelm et al. (2018)

pedagogical impacts of a white-male philosophical canon taught primarily by white

males: as Kristie Dotson puts it, "Philosophy *is seen* as a 'white man's game'"[28].

Despite growing efforts at "diversity, equity, and inclusion" within Philosophy

departments, the discipline has quite an unfortunate reputation that I think will be

hard to fix without some dramatic changes. But I think the issue goes beyond mere

reputation: Philosophy's poor reputation reflects something genuinely wrong with

it: exclusivity. I shouldn't have to ask, but don't we *want* people of various

ethnicities, genders, socioeconomic backgrounds, religions (and lack thereof), and

other identity categories to be able to partake in philosophy—to know they *can*

partake in it? If the answer is yes—and I sure hecking hope it is—then I think a large

part of the project of making this the case is to give Philosophy (capital-P) a

makeover. This sounds a little bit shallow, but I believe if the first thing people think

of when they think about philosophy is "dead white guys", there exists a real

problem. Capital-P Philosophers and courses in philosophy taught by them are some

of the only ways people get exposure to philosophy. They are "the face" of

philosophy, and that face is white.

One solution is to try fixing the present-day demographic representation

issue. I think this is an important project and indeed it's one which many

departments and universities are undertaking. Diversity initiatives in admissions

and hiring are a good step, especially considering the plethora of data suggesting

that students perform better academically if their teachers share identity markers—

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[28] Dotson (2012), 4

or, put more simply, if their teacher looks like them[29]. I think this makes a lot of intuitive sense, in terms of finding role models and forming expectations of one's own potential, in terms of counteracting stereotype threat, feeling a sense of belonging and safety, and more. If we want more and diverse people *in* Philosophy, we need more and diverse people teaching philosophy.

But I can't suggest that we fix the problem of demographic representation with more demographic representation—how circular! Furthermore, my project is one of doing capital-P Philosophy differently, which assumes that I and likely my readers are already embroiled in the discipline. We can't change our own ethnicity, gender identity, etc. so another way in—a different way in—is to make the discipline seem more appealing to a diversity of people *even if* their teachers are mostly white, or men, or white men. I'm a white woman, yet I am looking for ways to tackle the problem of racial and gender diversity in Philosophy: maybe I should look to the texts—and their authors—that I and my fellow Philosophers tend to admire and teach; the image that is perpetuated not only by the demographics of Philosophy professionals but by the demographics of the people who the professionals read, research, and share with their students.

1a.2: Neo-Canonical Approaches

Perhaps the most obvious suggestion for making topics in philosophy more appealing to diverse thinkers is to diversify the canon itself; I'll call this the reformist

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[29] Fairlie et. al (2014)

approach, and I don't think this approach does the work it's meant to do. In what

follows I'll discuss some of the motivations and strategies of this approach, as well as

my critiques of it.

As we are all well aware, most of the "seminal" works in philosophy are by

white men—quick digression, perhaps we could cease the practice of calling works

"seminal" if we're trying to de-center maleness[30]. Anyway, one thing we might do in

response to a white-male-dominated canon is simply to "Re-read" it, as Nancy

Tuana's edited book series[31] and many contemporary works in philosophy aim to

do. The thinking is this: while it's unfortunate that most of the history of philosophy

centers the works and ideas of white men, we, as enlightened feminist and antiracist

scholars, can still work with them—with an eye toward tipping the scales, so to

speak, toward inclusion of other voices and ideas. Charlotte Witt discusses strategies

in her paper "Feminist Interpretations of the Philosophical Canon". She expands on

earlier work of hers in which she distinguishes three different ways in which

feminists can approach the philosophical canon: "Scholarship that revises the history

of philosophy to include women philosophers, research that catalogs the explicit or

theoretical misogyny of a canonical philosopher (or a historical period), and an

exploration of what resources the tradition might hold for feminist purposes" [32].

Though her discussion centers feminist aims, it is at least in principle applicable in

the realm of antiracist aims too, though later I'll note a few challenges to the analogy.

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[30] See Ahmed (2017), 16
[31] Tuana (1994-2015)
[32] Witt (2006), 540

The first strategy is to revise the history of philosophy to include the contributions of women and non-white thinkers into the canon[33]; Witt calls this the "Best Supporting Actress" approach with what I take to be rightful snark. Did you know that Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia had correspondence with René Descartes, and challenged his claims that a completely immaterial soul could somehow interact with a completely material body? I sure did. In fact, I've had to read that correspondence about three separate times, and if I have to read it again I'll likely throw my computer against a wall. Here's her knock-down argument against one of our favorite philosophical heroes:

> Now the interests of my house, which I must not neglect, now some conversations and social obligations which I cannot avoid, beat down so heavily on this weak mind with annoyance or boredom, that it is rendered useless for anything else at all for a long time afterward: this will serve, I hope, as an excuse for my stupidity in being able to comprehend, by appeal to the idea you once had of heaviness, the idea through which we must judge how the soul (nonextended and immaterial) can move the body; nor why this power [*puissance*] to carry the body toward the center of the earth… should sooner persuade us that a body can be pushed by some immaterial thing, than the demonstration of a contrary truth (which you promise in your physics) should confirm us in the opinion of its impossibility[34].

With unrelenting self-denigration and propriety (if not sarcasm), Princess Elisabeth manages to stump Descartes. Yet we still teach his mind-body dualism to this day, so I must wonder if including Princess Elisabeth's correspondence with her teacher—the "doctor of her soul" as she puts it[35]—really does much work for promoting women's place and historical contributions to the tradition[36].

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[33] See Ruonakoski (2023)
[34] Shapiro (2007), 67-68
[35] Ibid. 62
[36] See Witt (2006) and Simons (1995) for a discussion of similar "Best Supporting Actress" inclusions of Simone de Beauvoir in the canon.

There is a clear danger in finding places for women to be inserted into the canon: it "reinforces the secondary status of women thinkers"[37]. So long as they're recognized as adherents (and sometimes challengers) of the ideas of canonical male philosophers, they remain mere groupies and sidekicks. The inclusion of non-white philosophers or those of other underrepresented genders presents even more difficulty because unfortunately, they weren't even privileged enough to be in conversation with the canonical philosophers. There are very real disanalogies between women's position in history (and the history of philosophy) and those of other identity groups: women have always lived "dispersed among men"[38] and while that may have led to less solidarity and culture among themselves than arose among other minoritized groups, it did provide opportunities to learn about and be in dialogue with the white men of the canon. While other groups were still segregated, invisible, even nonexistent in the history of [western] philosophy, white women were—at least at times—able to participate. In other words, white women were given a head start, and this is why we are even able to *consider* the inclusion of women into the canon. It seems that to find input of otherwise marginalized or ignored voices in the history of philosophy we may be required to expand the canon to include so-called "non-western" thought: just as historical, but less in keeping with the tradition.

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[37] Witt (2006), 542
[38] de Beauvoir (2011), 28

I like this approach much better than that of simply trying to *insert* underrepresented thinkers into the margins and line breaks of the existing canon, for the following reason: our discipline stands on the shoulders of giants, and these giants were all white and male. Daniel Verene claims that there are four "masters" in the School of Ages (read: the only philosophy worth studying): Plato, Aristotle, Kant, and Hegel[39]. All other philosophy is a mere footnote to their thought[40], or worse, belongs to the School of Resentment: more recent Philosophers attempting to "discredit" the masters using faulty empirical conjectures, or analytic tools, or pragmatism, or identity-based or political ideology[41]. Verene makes these claims to justify the canon's exclusivity, and though I find his paper to be emphatically chauvinistic, he does illuminate well the historical trajectory of the tradition—thus the discipline—of Philosophy: we cannot *avoid* the centering of white male voices if the very foundation of our discipline is founded in their writings. Kyle Peone describes this history well: "Certain questions interested our Greek forebears, and they set out to investigate them in particular ways. Those who followed them, however much they disagreed and however much the problems they confronted varied, were part of this tradition because they were engaged in dialogue with their predecessors. This continues through to our day"[42]. If we want a more diverse canon, perhaps we should look to other forebears besides the Greeks!

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[39] Verene (2018), 7
[40] Whitehead (1979), 39
[41] Verene (2018), 12-16
[42] Peone (2016)

I've seen this approach in action, with positive results. I myself am working to provide materials, lectures, and discussions to students about beliefs and theories which don't harken back to the Greek forebears. In a recent Introduction to Ethical Theory course I taught a unit on Buddhist ethics; we spent time examining the concepts of dependent origination and karma[43]; we explored approaches to virtue ethics found in Nahuan, Ubuntu, and Confucian traditions (and yes, we did also talk about Aristotle for a few minutes). My students responded well. In personal reflections many lamented the norm of focusing just on Aristotelian virtue ethics, and appreciated the comparisons available between different approaches to judging and aiming for goodness. One student brought to the forefront the benefit of expanding *whose* philosophy we teach: "[the Nahuan way of thinking] did resonate with me while studying it. It may be because of a connection that I could have through my family, since they are Mexican and a connection on ethics may be possible with the ancient Mayans and Aztecs". Many of our students—and many of *us*—are not of European descent; it can foster a sense of belonging and resonance to learn from traditions that likewise aren't European. The Greeks weren't the only ones with brains!

There is a blossoming push for specializations and courses in philosophy which explore other thought traditions. Most notably, "Eastern Philosophy" has risen in popularity—my guess is due to the plethora of texts available (and Philosophers love texts), but also I think due to genuine demand: about 60% of the

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[43] For more on these topics, see Jay Garfield (2021)

world's population lives in Asia, and even more share the ethnicity (rather,

ethnici*ties*) and history; it's almost laughable at this point to ignore the intellectual

contributions of this continent, even in a discipline as Eurocentric as Philosophy. But

closer to home, studies of Latinx Philosophy are on the rise, and I hope to see this

trend, and others, continue.

Much of the time, non-western philosophy is placed as a foil to, or a

comparative tool for examining western philosophy. Even Daniel Verene teaches the

I Ching and the *Tao tê Ching* for the purpose of "enriching" the philosophical canon

and providing the groundwork for dialectic[44]. Karsten Struhl advocates for a cross-

cultural dialectic, claiming that "Without this dialog, philosophical inquiry remains

within the boundaries of its own basic assumptions without recognizing the way in

which these assumptions limit the inquiry. Without cross-cultural dialog between

philosophical traditions, philosophy cannot progress beyond these boundaries"[45]. So

there are arguments beyond just *inclusiveness* for expanding the canon, namely that

philosophy itself can be, and can *be done*, better by taking a cross-cultural—that is,

cross-traditional—approach. That said, I am a bit wary of framing it this way,

because I think it is still quite easy to center the canon, the "real" canon, the western

canon, while throwing other traditions a bone. It's easy to include a token Eastern

text or Chinese Philosophy course into a department's curriculum without genuinely

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[44] Verene (2018), 10
[45] Struhl (2010), 290

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making efforts to canonize the ideas presented; we might get a DEI merit badge, but have we really changed the discipline?

There's also opportunity for pushback at a less practical level, though related: perhaps "philosophy" *should* stay western. In a delightful series of opinion pieces spurred by Jay Garfield and Bryan Van Norden's "If Philosophy Won't Diversify, Let's Call It What It Really Is"[46], professional academics have of late been debating what it really means to study and practice in the discipline of Philosophy. Garfield and Van Norden argue that Philosophy's egregious neglect of non-western thought warrants some sort of change, thought their suggestion is modest: if we don't want to expand the canon to include non-western traditional thought, then we ought to specify that we are researchers and teachers in departments of "European and American Philosophy". They say, "Part of the problem is the perception that philosophy departments are nothing but temples to the achievement of males of European descent" so those who are willing to bite that bullet, those "who are comfortable with that perception should confirm it in good faith and defend it honestly"[47]—otherwise, they argue, we should make serious efforts to diversify our curriculum and areas of study. I think this is very poignant. It's also gotten pushback.

The main source of pushback seems to be semantic: 'philosophy' designates a particular history and methodology, so by expanding the canon and incorporating

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[46] Garfield and Van Norden (2016)
[47] Ibid.

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other "Wisdom Traditions", as Peone calls them, we'd be doing a disservice both to the tradition of philosophy *and* to the other traditions. Even renaming our departments to be those of "European and American Philosophy" suggests that there are in fact *other kinds* of philosophy, and we're not studying them. But if philosophy *just is* the tradition begun by our Greek forebears, Peone claims it'd be a dishonest and even offensive overreach to subsume these other traditions of thought and wisdom under the name 'philosophy'[48]. Nicholas Tampio explains the distinction like this: "Philosophy originates in Plato's *Republic*. It is a restless pursuit for truth through contentious dialogue. It takes place among ordinary human beings in cities, not sages and disciples on mountaintops, and it requires the fearless use of reason even in the face of established traditions or religious commitments"[49]. These other wisdom traditions might more properly be called religions or world views, but not philosophy. And learning from these other traditions is not without value. Back to Peone: "The philosopher can always learn something from the Taoist, as the Taoist can always learn something from the philosopher (and both can learn something from the physicist and psychologist and fine artist). But it is a mistake to think that the two are reducible"[50].

Despite my efforts at introducing my students to non-western moral frameworks in what was ostensibly an Introduction to *Western* Ethical Theory course, I'm sympathetic to the positions of Peone and Tampio as well. Perhaps

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[48] Peone (2016)
[49] Tampio (2016)
[50] Peone (2016)

there's something significant about the focus on *theory* in western philosophy; engaging with Ubuntu or Confucian or Nahuan ethics in my course was indeed quite different from engaging with utilitarianism or Kantian deontology or ethical egoism. There was a certain lack of argumentation—our exercise was more about explication and understanding, and students either understood and jived with the frameworks or they didn't. There wasn't much space for thought experiments or counterexamples because the fundamental worldviews and assumptions expressed in those frameworks had to be taken at face value. To begin questioning whether members of a South African community actually engage in dialogue with their ancestors to establish values and norms[51] is to miss the point of an Ubuntu worldview, and perhaps that's exactly the point Peone and Tampio are making: Ubuntu ethics seems to be more tradition than position, more religion than theory.

I'll note, though, that the western philosophical tradition is also mired in religiosity, both in an explicit way, historically, but also in our undying fervor for rationality and deduction, perspicuousness and indubitability. These are the tenants by which we formed our discipline and I don't know that they're at base any *less* religious than certain assumptions and fervors of other belief systems. But I digress. There is something unique about the methodologies and foundations of the tradition we now call "philosophy", and it's not straightforward how we might integrate other traditions into it without misrepresenting them or doing away with the

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[51] Nafukho (2006)

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analytic rigor that we know and love. I'm ambivalent about the separate-but-equal approach that Peone and Tampio suggest.

Another argument that Tampio makes against the renaming of Philosophy departments is that even if we accept that "Department of European and American Philosophy" is more accurate—semantic stuff aside—it's still a bad move for the discipline: "The implication is that academic philosophy is racist, sexist and worthy of an imminent demise. This will be welcome news for policymakers who want to prohibit federal funds from subsidising the study of philosophy, say, at community colleges or state universities"[52]. The idea is that owning up to our Eurocentricity makes it explicit (clearly), and that doing so could have negative consequences for departments and professionals who already have enough trouble getting work and funding. It's hard for me not to feel like he's dug himself into a bit of a hole with that one, as it's that very racism and sexism (actual and/or perceived) which reformist Philosophers—or as Verene would call them, the School of Resentment—are trying to correct. I've suggested that Philosophy is a "dying discipline" at least in part because of its reputation for being white male-dominated and exclusive; to say we shouldn't address this, shouldn't even name it, seems wrong-headed. Tampio's offered a pragmatic reason to maintain the status quo, but it's ineffective—self-defeating, even—if the status quo just is what's led the discipline to have the reputation and the lack of funding support that it does.

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[52] Tampio (2016)

Okay, so much for the first reformist approach of expanding the canon itself

to include women and non-white thinkers and their works. It's difficult enough just

to *find* historical works of philosophy that aren't written by white men, and even

when we do, including these works risks perpetuating a "Best Supporting Actress"

trope or otherwise tokenizing them as they're placed relative to the monolith that is

the western philosophical canon. On the other hand, if we try to broaden the canon

beyond just western philosophical thought, we risk a departure from the intellectual

tradition and methodologies that we cherish so much. Furthermore, expanding the

canon and doing other thinkers and traditions justice is a lot to expect. Erika

Ruonakoski formulates some of the worries that arise:

> The existing philosophical all-male canon is already in itself so dense that it
> is an impossible task for any contemporary philosopher to master all of it.
> Why introduce minor figures whose philosophy most certainly has been less
> influential than the existing canonical texts? [Next], even if a philosopher
> who is not specialised in the history of women thinkers would like to
> introduce them on a course, this may be difficult to do without a degree of
> dilettantism. Finally, if we widen our horizons beyond the Northern
> hemisphere, to include African, Asian and South American philosophers, or
> philosophers of different minorities, does not our task of teaching
> philosophy become even more impossible and can it not at best provide only
> a very superficial glimpse into different philosophies rather than a solid
> understanding of the history of one?[53]

All of these worries point to legitimate difficulties of expanding the canon in ways

that are pedagogically and professionally sound: Philosophers just don't have the

bandwidth or the resources to be experts in *everything,* much less the time to teach it

all. Ruonakoski focuses on the epistemic difficulties of this suggestion, but there are

very real practical and institutional difficulties too. It's rare for Philosophers to find

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[53] Ruonakoski (2023), 42

time and funding to pursue new specializations, or develop completely new syllabi, particularly when supplementary funding and training are provided with the expectation that teachers enrich their repertoires at the same time as they undertake their regular faculty responsibilities. It's unfeasible, and potentially unfair, to expect them to do this.

So what are our other options? Perhaps we still focus on the traditional western canon, but we shift the lens by which we read and interpret it. Witt suggests two other approaches (besides the "Best Supporting Actress" one), by which contemporary Philosophers can engage with the canon as it is while still furthering their feminist—and as I'll analogize again, anti-racist—aims for the discipline: for one, we can "catalogue" the misogyny and racism found in the works, lives, and eras of canonical philosophers, and for two (often in stride with the first) we can appropriate canonical ideas and works to serve feminist or antiracist purposes[54]. To the first, we may read and teach both Aristotle and Kant but make explicit Aristotle's overt sexism and Kant's overt racism; offer a critique at the very same time we extol them. They had good views, but they had bad ones too.

I don't think the suggestion is to ad hominin them ("Aristotle is *cancelled!*"), but rather to put into context, to bring to the surface, the ideas and circumstances which do seem to render Philosophy inhospitable to minoritized people. I'll talk more later about what others have called the cult of the genius[55], but insofar as that's

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[54] Witt (2006), 540
[55] Ruonokoski (2023)

a bad trend in Philosophy, drawing attention to some of the faults (intellectual or otherwise) of our great philosophical heroes seems to be a good start for nipping the idolatry in the bud.

However, this as a strategy of re-reading the canon isn't sufficient. As most Philosophers know (at least in principle), offering a purely negative perspective isn't great philosophy. It may be a first step, but if we want any notion of *progress* to be upheld, we ought to try offering not only an objection or critique, but also an alternative, or an amelioration—as Graham Priest describes it, a "constructive aspect" to our criticism[56]. If we halt our efforts at critique alone, the significance of our critique might be hard to grasp: after all, everybody is flawed and every idea or theory can be criticized in some way or another. So what gives? Merely reading and recognizing the philosophical canon to lack diversity and even to perpetuate racism and misogyny is just as fruitful as reading the Torah or Bible or Quran and recognizing that these texts perpetuate homophobia. These critiques—really just observations—alone don't do much, except perhaps to bolster the alienation that minoritized groups already feel in Philosophical or religious spaces. Just because we remove the excuse of plausible deniability doesn't mean we've rendered philosophy or Abrahamic religion any more hospitable to those for whom the critiques target.

So, to Witt's other approach to engaging with the current canon: we ought to explore what it *can* do to help us meet our aims of inclusion. In other words, and in keeping with the feminist project, we ought to politicize it. Her main suggestion is to

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[56] Priest (2006), 204

expand on or appropriate the good "nuggets" found in canonical texts, to research and (as is my focus) to teach not only the original ideas and positions of the canonical figures, but also the revised ones, the gerrymandered ones, of contemporary thinkers. I'll call this the neo-canonical approach, and to my understanding the idea is basically to embrace secondary literature. Where the canon is lacking or flawed, we can fill in the gaps and fix the mistakes.

This approach seems promising to me, for two main reasons: first, it's in keeping with the philosophical tradition more generally. Academic Philosophy is primarily the work of examining others' ideas and theories, questioning, critiquing, or interpreting their assumptions and reasoning, and then providing positive accounts—either revisions of or alternatives to the bits that we don't think work. Of course we do this with the canon as well! The difference here is the political aim: it's not only about developing the ideas and systems put forth by white male philosophers, but about subverting the perception that philosophy just is for white males. So the neo-canonical approach is also promising because it allows attention to be turned toward the contemporary: toward a relatively more diverse group of Philosophers with relatively more inclusive or politically correct views.

I think this can be done more or less effectively. I will never forget a particular lecture in an undergraduate course I TAed for, during which the instructor, in my view, totally missed the mark: it was a lecture about Kant, discussing his moral anthropology (from his *Lectures on Pedagogy*) and his pure moral theory (from his *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*). The instructor

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began the lecture by admitting that in the excerpts assigned, Kant blatantly expresses

racist and Eurocentric ideas. Then they changed the powerpoint slide to show an

image of Charles Mills' face and an abstract of his 2017 essay "Black Radical

Kantianism", exclaiming excitedly that he is a Black scholar. The instructor read the

abstract and then implored students to engage with Kant charitably because his

ideas can be used in such positive, critical contexts as students saw there. Now, the

lesson in reading charitably and in not throwing the baby out with the bathwater—

as it were—is a good one, and I don't doubt the instructor's earnest intention to

engage non-white and/or otherwise dubious students with the valuable and

*un*problematic aspects of Kant's work. However, because of the execution of the

lesson and the subsequent lack of engagement with secondary literature on Kant[57], it

was difficult for me to see Mills being presented in anything other than a token "Best

Supporting Actress" role.

A more fruitful neo-canonical approach would be to engage with the

criticisms and appropriations of canonical writings *qua* works themselves, to read

them side-by-side with or subsequently to the historical texts and to invite

discussion and criticism of these newer works, as well. Examples of this approach

might be reading Susan Bordo's "The Cartesian Masculinization of Thought"[58]

alongside Descartes' *Meditations* or Susan Moller Okin's "Philosopher Queens and

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[57] I think Christine Korsgaard's work in *Fellow Creatures: Our Obligations to the Other Animals* (2018) could have also been a good addition to the lesson (it was an environmental ethics course).
[58] Bordo (1986)

Private Wives: Plato on Women and the Family"[59] alongside Plato's *Republic,* or indeed to read Charles Mills' "Kant's *Untermenschen"* or "Black Radical Kantianism"[60] alongside whatever moral or political work of Kant's that has been assigned. This approach can help to rectify not only the demographic whiteness (or maleness) represented in philosophy, but also what Mills calls the *conceptual* whiteness (or maleness) presented within the canon and perpetuated within the discipline itself[61]. The critical and meta-discussions *about* the canonical works are exactly the point: though they might veer away from epistemology or moral theory properly speaking—interrupt the topical flow of a unit or course—they draw attention to, and sometimes aim to ameliorate (in the case of the appropriative works) problematic aspects of the canonical works we're unwilling to give up. These are the sorts of conversations that in my experience arise anyway when assigning controversial figures in a class[62]; the suggestion here is to intentionally integrate ideas and criticisms along these lines into courses in order to acknowledge and uplift political critiques of the canon in a way which invites genuine philosophical engagement with works of non-canonical figures, as well[63].

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[59] Okin (1982)

[60] Mills (2018)

[61] Mills (2017)

[62] For example, students who ask why we're reading Aristotle when we know he was sexist, or who claim they don't want to engage with Peter Singer's work because he "advocated for infanticide".

[63] I see this as a "two birds with one stone" sort of suggestion; the downside is that courses might cease to be *pure* metaphysics, epistemology, etc. with the addition of the higher-order critical pieces. I don't see this as a terrible corruption, but perhaps the suggestion would best work in a general course like Introduction to Philosophy, where students are meant to explore a whole range of philosophical subfields and topics.

Then again, this is explicitly a practice of moving *beyond* the canon; it does nothing whatsoever to address or change what we *take to be* the canon. Still at the center of the discipline remain the works of white men, but we can draw concentric circles outward and include many, many other voices and ideas at the periphery. I think this is the best we can get, if we remain attached to the idea of the philosophical canon, and I'm still not satisfied with it. Reformist approaches to the canon at best let—that is *allow*—non-white or non-male participation in philosophy, as if to say, "sure, you can have a seat at *our* table". It does nothing to undermine what Kristie Dotson calls the "culture of justification" in philosophy, forcing some folks to *prove* that they belong at the table time and time again, while most of the seats are reserved in perpetuity for our white male forebears, occupied by marble buffs and great hefty tomes. This is why I don't jive with a reformist approach to the canon, but rather with a "revolutionary" one: I'd prefer to not teach the canon at all. Before moving on to that, however, I'll spend a bit more time discussing the neo-canonical approach, and other reasons why people might be resistant to it. Much of this resistance can also be applied to the approach that I favor, so it'll provide some exposition; a primer for later objections.

I think much of the resistance toward the neo-canonical approach stems from purism or pragmatism, or a combination of both. The purist leanings in their crudest form go something like this: primary literature (i.e. the canon) is just better. To put secondary literature next to it and examine both as if they were worth the same is to sully the magnificence of the great thinkers' works with punditry and unnecessary

politicization. Any good ideas one can glean from Plato and Kant and them, one can glean *from them*, not from somebody else's interpretation of them.

And pedagogically, canon purists might say, by offering students secondary literature a teacher is depriving them the opportunity to create their *own* interpretations and critiques of the great texts: authors of secondary literature inevitably move beyond and/or bastardize and/or critique the original authors' ideas, thus guiding students down particular — and potentially *wrong* — paths of understanding the texts. Rather than doing them this disservice, we should invite them to engage in the deep reading and critical thinking required to develop *their own* understanding, interpretation, and critique of canonical texts; if they're able to spot sexism or racism or lapses in logic or ungrounded assumptions, then power to them: they're doing philosophy. Secondary literature, it can be claimed, is at best unnecessary and at worst harmful.

The more pragmatic kind of resistance does not seem too different: the idea is that in order to critique — or even to understand a critique of — an argument, idea, or text, one must first understand the text itself. Even if we concede that secondary literature *can* be interesting, illuminating, or ameliorating, there's still an obvious order of operations at work: first we must read and understand the primary texts. Only after we — and our students — do this should we even think about looking at the secondary literature. Thinking pragmatically about this, understanding that it's *very difficult* to understand and to be confident in one's understanding of the primary canonical texts, perhaps it's best just to stick to those and not bother with the

secondary literature at all. After all, courses go by quickly; we need to prioritize what should be prior (recall the quote from Ruonakoski earlier). Perhaps secondary literature, feminist or antiracist critiques, etc. should wait until upper-division courses, or graduate seminars, or specialized research, or maybe retirement…

I can imagine kicking the can down the road forever, never deigning to read the secondary literature because one is never finished engaging with the primary literature. And it's true that Plato, Kant, Hegel and them created very rich works, ones which can (and have) taken lifetimes to explore. I understand—or at least I pretend to understand—the value in continuing this work. I have no doubts that many Philosophers will continue specializing their research in ancient and modern canonical works in perpetuity. But I wonder if that's the same trajectory we ought to set our students up for. For one, this does nothing to address the inclusion issues I've been discussing: if we leave it up to students to recognize for themselves the shortcomings of the canon, then we've done nothing to reform the canon after all. The same authors, texts, and ideas are still centered, only with the hope that students will stick them out long enough to develop a well-informed critique.

Furthermore, I think the project of allowing students to create their own interpretations of texts is much more opaque than the let's-stick-to-primary-sources camp might admit. Translations are themselves interpretations. The act of translating requires interpretation and transformation of the original text; it requires designating emphasis and connotation; it requires trying to understand and reiterate an author's ideas as best as one can, but when these ideas may already be very difficult to

understand it's no surprise that translators make mistakes, or change meanings, or in any case take liberties. Anybody who reads a translated text is already engaging with secondary literature[64]. One might make the argument that secondary literature *of* translated primary texts is then actually tertiary literature and still less worth prioritizing than the secondary (that is, the translated), but to me the purist pronouncements are already beginning to wear thin. Even in selecting what one takes to be the *best* or *most accurate* translation of a text, one is in a sense already editorializing about it.

Furthermore, as a teacher, it is also immensely difficult to introduce or to discuss a text without providing one's own interpretation of it. Unless we are meant to leave students completely to their own devices when engaging with a text, it is nearly impossible to avoid suggesting some sort of direction for interpretation. And I don't think this is a bad thing, so long as one is transparent about it[65]. One can read and share a text from a particular lens and yet be upfront about it. In fact, in presenting feminist or antiracist critiques or revisions of primary texts, I think it's obvious that the authors and teachers of these pieces be transparent about the lens by which they're approaching them. But if the goal is to offer students a perfectly unadulterated look at some centuries-old piece of writing, I think the purists have a

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[64] And it's almost not worth mentioning that most of our canonical texts, besides the famous modern Brits and Scots, were not originally written in English.
[65] I had a professor who indeed would read the original German text of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, and would think out loud about how *he* would have translated certain words differently.

lot of work cut out for them. Either that, or they ought to reconsider their resistance to secondary (ahem, tertiary) literature.

I also think that there's something ironic about many Philosophers' resistance to engaging with secondary literature. The irony is that secondary literature is what they themselves produce. It seems a sad state of affairs for the discipline if our best contemporary Philosophers don't believe that contemporary philosophy is worth engaging with; if the best example we can set for our students is to research and produce work that shouldn't be read, or at least not taken seriously. I am very likely dramatizing the position here, but my aim is to inspire a generation of new philosophers, and discounting the value of contemporary work (to whatever degree) does not sound to me like a good means for inspiration.

1a.3: Non-Canonical Approaches

Rather, I think we should embrace contemporary philosophy, at the very least in a concerted neo-canonical way, or more radically, by ceasing to teach the canon at all. There's also another, organic, topics-first way of teaching which allows for the exploration of both contemporary and canonical works without prioritizing one over the other. I've already discussed some of my thoughts on the neo-canonical approach, so now I'll move on to consider an explicitly non-canonical approach: how about teaching all of the foundational philosophical topics we've been teaching for ages, but only assigning contemporary authors to read?

Off the bat, I'm drawn to this approach for a number of reasons, but I do admit there are some glaring practical and methodological difficulties. Here's why I like a non-canonical approach: if these age-old philosophical questions and topics are indeed worth exploring—and I think that many are—providing contemporary explorations of them could in principle give us much of the same philosophical meat, just in better packaging. Today's published Philosophers are much more diverse than those of yore: even if relatively underrepresented in the discipline, women, transgender, and nonbinary Philosophers, Black, Asian, Latinx, and Indigenous Philosophers, and in general, Philosophers of varied socioeconomic, religious, ethnic, national, and sexual identities and backgrounds have a much larger foothold than ever before. If one strategy for revitalizing the discipline is to show our students that people *like them* can become Philosophers—that people like them *are* Philosophers—then it is clear we should be bringing those Philosophers to the fore. Plus, reading their works in our philosophy classes also communicates that contemporary philosophy is a worthwhile pursuit; contemporary utilitarians or mind-body dualists or philosophers of religion can still offer novel perspectives and arguments; good philosophy didn't stop at the turn of the 21st-century.

Although "better packaging" of philosophical concepts will fall under my upcoming discussion of presentation, I think it is worth noting here that contemporary Philosophers are often, in my experience, much more fun to read— engaging from the get-go, which is a plus in introductory or lower-division courses. I understand that textual analysis is an important skill in philosophy, but often

overlooked is the hidden curriculum[66]—the implicit ask—that students be able to decipher unfamiliar and outdated language. Somebody's ability to hone in on a thesis or identify an argument, to search for logical fallacies or evaluate a claim, isn't necessarily tied to their ability to understand Olde English or to untangle run-on sentences or fill in the blanks on a shoddily-translated piece of writing. But if the texts that we assign, that we expect our students to analyze, consist in these sorts of linguistic brambles, those other skills de facto become required, too. Although Philosophers are notoriously verbose (even these days, despite our best efforts), offering students contemporary texts, with formatting, syntax, and terminology that's more familiar to them can remove some barriers to the actual work of understanding, analyzing, and responding to philosophical texts and ideas.

Furthermore, contemporary authors also use examples and write about topics that are more familiar and engaging to students. Consider external world skepticism, and the various ways a teacher might introduce the thought experiment. There is, of course, the classic Cartesian example of the evil genius/demon. But this example brings with it quite a bit of baggage: students can be reticent to accept the premises of the thought experiment, not to mention the explicit religiosity of Descartes' response to it. Perhaps more compelling is a brain-in-a-vat thought experiment, as articulated by Hilary Putnam[67], or illustrated in *The Matrix*[68]. But even now *The Matrix* seems outdated! How about utilizing an article expressing the

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[66] See Laiduc and Covarrubius (2022)
[67] Putnam (1981), 1-21
[68] Wachowski and Wachowski (1999)

consequences of fully integrated Virtual Reality technologies for epistemology? Figuring out ways to frame age-old philosophical problems in ways that are engaging and accessible to 21st-century students is a lot of the work of philosophy teachers, but there's contemporary philosophical research available that can do a lot of this work for them. If students are more likely to grasp philosophical examples, puzzles, or ideas just by the way they're presented, I'm all for it.

Then again, there are some practical issues. Trying to avoid the canon altogether is unfeasible. For one, many contemporary authors do (and should) reference canonical authors and their works. Even a contemporary Kantian is still a *Kant*ian and we can't hope to teach deontological ethics without at least mentioning the guy. We must still give credit where credit is due, and context (historical, methodological, or conceptual) where context is required. Presenting age-old problems as if they are novel is not going to set our students up for success, and trying to do so may very well complicate the tradition of analyzing and responding to others' ideas that is so integral to the tradition. That said, an upshot of contemporary scholarship is that it *is* rife with context and references. Philipa Foot, in putting forth her ethical theory of Natural Goodness, discusses the relevant thoughts of Aristotle, Aquinas, Anscomb, and Thompson as they relate to, contrast with, or begot her own[69]. The context of any good work of contemporary philosophy is built right in. Compare this to many canonical works, in which the authors surreptitiously refer to their predecessors' works and ideas, without so much as

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[69] Foot (2001)

naming them, never mind explaining them.

This returns us to the pragmatic objection to neo-canonical or non-canonical approaches of teaching philosophy: it's hard to teach the new-and-improved version of an idea or a theory without harkening back to the original or most basic version of it. And this I accept. Certain authors or accounts can't in good faith be avoided, but they can be de-centered. Their ideas can be explained and discussed even while their works aren't assigned; they can be referenced without being read. I will discuss this more as I explain a topics-first approach, and in my later section on the presentation—the ways to *teach*—certain topics. But what of the purist objection? If contemporary works tend just to be watered-down, over-interpreted, or politicized versions of the canon, we might still be hesitant to teach them. Especially so if we're explicitly trying *not* to teach the original works alongside them (again, this would be the distinction between a neo-canonical and an outright non-canonical approach). Unfortunately, I think I've already said most of what I can say in response to the purist, and it's unlikely they'll be persuaded by me.

As a last attempt, I'll say this: there's a time and a place for everything. In teaching and learning, ideas are best engaged with when they're scaffolded: one starts with a basic concept, idea, or skill, and works up from there toward more complex problems and tasks[70]. I am all for History of Philosophy courses, deep reads of *Nichomachean Ethics* or *The Critique of Pure Reason*, and the like. But perhaps we ought to start from the beginning—not the historical beginning, but the conceptual

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[70] Like Foundationalism, but for teaching. Thanks Descartes!

and skills-based beginning: engaging with fun examples, analyzing digestible texts, understanding the basic tenants and import of an idea before diving into the weeds. This is, of course, how curriculum tends to be set up: students begin their philosophical journey by taking survey courses, Intro-to-X courses. Then, if their interest is sustained they'll continue taking courses which notch up the density, both of text and of concept (in both of the universities I've been affiliated with, the history of philosophy series of courses are all upper-division). My suggestion is to lean into this, to save ancient and modern philosophy for Ancient and Modern Philosophy courses and to first allow our students to get hooked by the topics and spirit of philosophy before being mired in the Great Works of the Big Names. At the very least, I'd like to see more of this[71].

This leads me to my final suggestion of this section, which is a topics-first approach to teaching philosophy. This is basically a rephrasing of much of what I've said earlier, but in an effort to be less antagonistic toward the canon and its proponents: rather than trying to avoid the canon completely—even in introductory courses—I suggest that teachers of philosophy first consider the *topics* they'd like to teach, or which seem relevant and pressing for the time, rather than the particular pieces or authors they'd like to teach. Then they can build their syllabi and lesson plans from there. This slight shift in course design strategy could, I think, encourage teachers to consider novel ways of introducing thought experiments and ideas, ones

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[71] For example, as many Contemporary Moral Issues courses as Introduction to Ethical Theory ones.

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they might overlook if they continue to center the philosophical canon. If I'm hoping

to teach about, say, personal identity, I needn't jump straight into teaching Locke or

Parfit; maybe I could start off with *Freaky Friday*[72] or *50 First Dates*[73] and take it from

there. It's clear that the topics which canonical authors address arise in other forms,

and from other creators. At the very least I'm asking for teachers to give those a

thought first, and then if a more sustained examination is what they're after, they

can move on to assigning what the canonical folks have had to say about the topics.

There are also many topics—perhaps more compelling for students—which

aren't even age-old ones per se, but which can serve as approachable and engaging

starting-points for the age-old questions that professional Philosophers love so

dearly. Take transgender identities, for example. This is a hot topic culturally, and

there is ample contemporary literature on the subject. There are absolutely no

canonical philosophers who have examined the topic (as far as I know). But it can

nonetheless be tied to many classic (and contemporary) questions about personal

identity and metaphysics more generally[74]. An entire Introduction to Philosophy

course could be centered around topics related to transgender identities:

metaphysics[75], philosophy of language[76], epistemology[77], phenomenology[78], and

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[72] Waters (2003)
[73] Segal (2004)
[74] Consider the Ship of Theseus, for one.
[75] See Dembroff (2018)
[76] See Dembroff and Wodak (2021) and Hernandez and Crowley (2023)
[77] See Bettcher (2009)
[78] See Bettcher (2014)

ethics[79]. In exploring these subdisciplines with a topics-first approach, students can

still get an introductory survey of philosophy and its methodology—and may even

get a taste of the canon, if the teacher so chooses—but they are drawn in by topics

which hook them, rather than the loftiness of big words and the promise of history.

Philip Kitcher suggests something similar in his 2011 essay "Philosophy Inside Out",

in which he argues, interpreting John Dewey, for a squarely pragmatist approach to

philosophy teaching and research. He argues that the "core areas" of metaphysics,

epistemology, philosophy of language, and philosophy of mind should only be

attended to when doing so is necessary to help address the pressing issues of the

time. He says:

> It is easy to suppose that there are timeless questions, formulated by the Greeks, or
> by Descartes, or by Frege, or by Wittgenstein, that, once introduced, must constitute
> the core of the subject [of philosophy] thenceforward. I want to suggest a different
> history… the impetus to philosophy was present in all human contexts, from the
> natural and social environments of our Paleolithic ancestors, through the variant
> forms of society we know from history and Anthropology, to the circumstances of
> the present. At each stage, the philosopher's first task is to recognize the appropriate
> questions that arise for his contemporaries[80].

I take this as a suggestion to keep with the times: the aim of philosophy is not to

answer timeless questions, but rather to answer pressing ones; to engage in on-the-

ground conversations to solve real problems that people in one's society deem

important (rather than just the ones that philosophers deem important). To take

pragmatist claims to their most extreme, philosophy is only as valuable as it is *useful*,

so our approach to philosophical questions ought to start with contemporary, on-

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[79] See Bettcher (2007), or specific topics like transgender women in sports, gender-affirming
care, etc.
[80] Kitcher (2011), 252

the-ground problems and topics instead of the ones we've gotten by fine with leaving unanswered for millennia.

While I'm sympathetic to pragmatist leanings, I don't think I need to endorse them here—at least not universally. I don't want to say that only "pragmatic" philosophy is worth doing, but rather that a pedagogical pragmatism is warranted. Interest and funding in philosophy—and in the humanities more generally—is waning, and within the discipline there are concerning and unrepresentative demographic trends. These are real, on-the-ground problems which a re-thinking of Philosophers' role in society might help to address. Kitcher says that "Philosophers are people whose broad engagement with the condition of their age enables them to facilitate individual reflection and social conversation"[81]. If this holds any truth— which for what it's worth, it doesn't seem to with respect to *professional* Philosophers[82]—then this work of facilitation ought to take place among students, the public, professional and amateur philosophers alike. I will discuss Kitcher's article and the push for pragmatic, applied philosophical research in Chapter 2, but if there is indeed a professional responsibility to research topics with real-world applicability and relevance, I don't see why that responsibility wouldn't also exist in one's teaching. This holds especially true when taking into account that much of students' initial resistance to engaging with philosophy is that they can't understand *why it matters.*

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[81] Ibid. 254

[82] Thanks to Neal Tognazzini for pointing out that professional Philosophers these days are probably better described as "technicians working on puzzles".

For his 2023 article "The End of the English Major", Nathan Heller

interviewed many current and recently graduated university students, asking them

why they chose the major(s) that they did, and what their thoughts are on the ever-

decreasing numbers of humanities students. I was struck by a particularly poignant

response, by a 2021 Harvard graduate in molecular and cellular biology:

> My parents, who were low-income and immigrants, instilled in me the very
> great importance of finding a concentration that would get me a job—'You
> don't go to Harvard for basket-weaving' was one of the things they would
> say to me… My issue as a first-gen student is I always view humanities as a
> passion project. You have to be affluent in order to be able to take that on
> and state, 'Oh, I can pursue this, because I have the money to do whatever I
> want.'… I view the humanities as very hobby-based.[83]

Again, my purpose in this chapter is not to discuss ways in which we can create

more Philosophy *jobs*, but rather to discuss ways to get students interested in

lowercase-p philosophy (which, of course, might lead them to a Philosophy job).

However, given the cost of a university education, the kinds of jobs that are

available, and the looming ecological and political disasters abound in the world

today, it makes sense that students (and their parents) want to prioritize knowledge

and degrees that can make a difference in the world and attain them employment.

Even if students have an intrinsically-motivated interest in philosophy, they

deserve the opportunity to learn how experience in the discipline might be useful *for*

them too. Lee McIntyre urges philosophy teachers to recognize the goal of

philosophy not only to be about finding the truth, but about "[using] the truth to

improve the quality of human life… The goal—especially at the undergraduate

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[83] Heller (2023)

level—should be to help students recognize that philosophy matters. Not just because it will improve their LSAT scores (which it will), but because philosophy has the potential to change the very fabric of who they are as human beings"[84]. This is not a small order, but I do believe it starts with meeting students where they're at—in the 21st century, rife with personal, social, economic, political, and ecological crises—and attending to topics they might better-recognize and be interested in.

To sum it up, my suggestion is this: begin with the tangible, the graspable, the relevant—in short, perhaps, the applied—and then let that stone gather moss if it must. Teach them the canon as an aid to understanding the topics at hand, not the other way around. I think that all too often, philosophy instructors begin with the esoteric, and for students who are unfamiliar with such big or abstract questions, the stone never starts rolling. Or if it does, it's halted by the realization that they have a world outside of the classroom to contend with; mental health, economic security, and climate change are more pressing than mereology, theories of knowledge, or the problem of other minds. Unless we can find culturally relevant in-roads for students to engage with those topics, they might not ever see the point.

1b: Presentation of Material

Whereas the last section focused on what sorts of topics I think should be taught—by way of examining whether to center the philosophical canon in our curricula—in this section I'll turn to a discussion of *how* they're taught; how students

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[84] McIntyre (2011), 1-2

are presented with philosophical topics and how I think the discipline can make some pedagogical improvements in this area. We've all had great teachers (I hope!), and we've all had poor teachers (I'm sure), and the subjects they teach often have little- to no relevance toward our assessments of them. I've never been a fan of science, but two of my favorite teachers were science teachers[85]. On the other hand, I've loved philosophy since I took my very first Introduction to Moral Issues course[86], but I've been loath to learn from a handful of philosophy professors nonetheless[87]. When it comes to teenagers and young adults, a particularly good or a particularly bad learning experience can make or break one's interest in or willingness to pursue a subject. And when it comes to philosophy the pressure to make "a good impression" on one's students is even more pronounced: whereas every college freshman has taken a litany of English, science, math, and history courses already—enough of a required course sample size that one or two bad teachers is less likely to have spoiled the entire subject for them—most students' *first* experience with philosophy (in a guided, sustained, or academic way) is at a time when they're already feeling pressured to make a major decision for themselves[88]. Many students enter the university already having decided what discipline to enter. Philosophy not only joins late into the recruitment process, so to speak, but may have to poach from other disciplines for some of its star players.

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[85] Shout-out to Mr. Nalder and Mr. Bellomy.
[86] Shout-out to Ned Markosian.
[87] Shout-out to—well, I'd better not.
[88] "Major" here with a double-entendre: the decision to declare a major and begin one's professional trajectory is indeed a big one.

All to say that yes, first impressions do matter. Even if students mostly take philosophy courses just to satisfy general education requirements (which has been my experience), the topics explored in the courses are not the only factor in deciding whether they like philosophy or choose to continue studying it. Whereas the topics section was mostly about *creating* interest in philosophy, this and the next one will be about sustaining interest and improving learning outcomes. I'll use personal experiences and pedagogical research to examine traditional ways of teaching [philosophy] and offer examples of other approaches toward doing so — ones which can improve and sustain interest, learning, and equity in student success. Three major points of discussion in this section will be readings, lectures, and what Ruonakoski calls the "cult of the genius". The first two hold relevance for teaching practices generally — whatever the discipline — but the third is somewhat more particular to Philosophy. In any case, for all three of these areas I think that an emphasis on appealing to students as individuals and facilitating collaboration and discussion are critical for improving students' learning experiences.

Here's what I take to be the typical way in which material is presented in an undergraduate Philosophy course (lower- or upper-division): a philosophical text is assigned to students, and they are expected to read it before coming to class — no, in fact they're expected to read it *twice* before coming to class (it's difficult stuff, after all). Then in class, the professor spends much of their time lecturing: they explain whatever relevant historical or philosophical context the piece arose in, then they parse out the main points of the text: the thesis, the argumentation, the assumptions.

Then they lay out some possible objections (either provided in the text by the author themselves, or drawing from later philosophers' responses to the text), and open the class up for discussion.

Truth be told, I like this way of doing things—as I mentioned in the introduction, the way that I was taught philosophy worked well for me: I'd read what was assigned (though only once) and I'd come to class if not with a good understanding of the text and its arguments, at least with a basic grasp of the thesis and the form of the piece. And I liked a lot of the texts we were asked to read! Many of my professors were very good at lecturing: one of my favorite professors would basically spend all class every class lecturing, and I ate it up. He was articulate and organized, he wrote on the board with impeccable handwriting, and he interpreted the readings for us so clearly that every day felt full of epiphanies for me. My undergraduate university professors also tended toward formalizing arguments: clearly laying them out in premise-conclusion format and going through them step-by-step, even if the authors of the texts didn't do so themselves. My initial reading of a text, coupled with careful explication by my professors and my own nearly-verbatim notes left me feeling as though I understood the assigned texts really well. Furthermore, possible objections (and possible responses to them) were also provided in lectures, so even if I wouldn't have thought of them myself I still had the opportunity to mull them over and evaluate them after the fact[89]. I thrived!

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[89] This critical thinking aspect was often assessed by way of a midterm or final argumentative essay, in which we were asked to evaluate arguments. Since I won't focus on assessments until my next section, I'll end the chronology here.

But looking back at my time as a student, particularly in my current role as instructor (or teacher's assistant—TA) to undergraduates, I see that this picture is too rosy. In an ideal situation, with particular kinds of students, the straightforward reading→lecture→discussion format is indeed good: it encourages students to grapple with difficult texts themselves, then provides opportunities for clarification and troubleshooting during the subsequent lectures and discussions. Even more ideally, students would then re-read the texts to see that their understanding and ability to engage with the difficult texts has improved; they could continue to engage with the texts and the ideas presented in them and then practice their own critical thinking in finally evaluating the ideas. However, this picture assumes a lot—both about the teacher and about the students—and unfortunately the circumstances of learning are usually not this ideal.

For one, not all teachers are good at lecturing. As I mentioned earlier, many professional Philosophers consider themselves researchers first and teachers only by mandate. They might not prepare their lectures with care, or if they do they might still have trouble communicating and explaining ideas to students in ways that actually lead to better, clearer understanding. While I've had some fabulous lecturers, I've had some not-so-fabulous ones, too: dry or rambling speakers, poorly-organized or illegible notes on the blackboard, lectures which either provide way too much information so as to muddle the ideas rather than clarify them, or which provide way too little information under the assumption that students' prior knowledge can fill in any background or argumentative gaps. Now, I don't want to

let lecturing teachers off the hook here: I think philosophers can and should improve their lecture preparation and style, even if they don't change anything else about their pedagogy. But what I'll aim to do in this section is to argue that lecturing needn't take a forefront in philosophy courses anyway—so that even poor lecturers may still be good teachers. I'll offer some suggestions for improving lectures too, but that won't be my focus.

So much for the teachers, in this typical way of approaching learning in philosophy. What of the students? As I said, for some students—myself included—readings and lectures can be a great way to learn. In an informal poll I took of fellow UCSC Philosophy grads[90], a majority were in the same camp: lectures can be great. So can readings. We might not all read quickly, but as folks who have decided to pursue Philosophy academically and professionally, we are a sample of people who understand the value of reading and who are willing and able to do it (at least in principle; how else did we get here?). Furthermore, we are a sample of people who have pursued Philosophy because of—or despite—its being taught primarily by way of lecturing. I think this is why the tradition continues relying mostly on readings and lectures in philosophy teaching: it's how we learned philosophy, and it worked for us. But I will remind my reader than most undergraduate students who take philosophy courses do not continue doing so and do not plan on doing so; to cater one's teaching to the small subset of students who are like oneself is to do a

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[90] I asked first- and second-year grad students in my Pedagogy course what their learning styles were.

disservice to the rest—especially if we're hoping to attract *more* students to philosophy, rather than weed them out.

To put it bluntly, most students these days don't do readings and don't like lectures[91]. Even if teachers make efforts to encourage or compel students to read, student workarounds are very often found. Particularly in this age where many texts are assigned or available online, reading quizzes can be "hacked" by students utilizing in-text search functions (e.g. ctrl+f) to find key words or sections, or relying on AI tools (e.g. ChatGPT) or online encyclopedias (e.g. Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy or Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy) to summarize texts for them. Plus there are the age-old hacks, like simply skimming a text or reading just the abstract, introduction, and conclusion of an article. There are also endless youTube videos, podcasts, blog posts and the like which summarize philosophical texts and ideas and allow students to circumvent the task of reading the texts themselves.

Again, I don't want to let anybody off the hook: students should read. Personal accountability is a huge part of education, and it's enormously frustrating to find out that one's students aren't putting in the work that's expected of them. Textual analysis is an important skill to learn which can only be learned by practice, and we ought not give up on *reading* no matter how unkindly our students take to it. That said, we teachers have pedagogical aims, and it doesn't do anybody—the students, the teachers, the institution, society—any good to put our heads in the

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[91] Even the very graduate students I polled above admitted to frequently skimming or skipping assigned readings, and these are people who *like* to read!

sand for the principle of the matter (that students should read) when the success of

our aims is contingent on the fact of the matter (that many students don't read). In

the next part of this section (1b.1) I hope to shed more light on this issue, and also to

provide suggestions for encouraging reading, and alternatives for assigning reading

in Philosophy courses. Then I'll transition to use of in-class time, to question the

efficacy of traditional lectures and provide suggestions for improving and

alternatives to lecturing in Philosophy courses (1b.2). Finally, I'll move to discuss the

cult of the genius, which concerns less the particular strategies of presenting

philosophical material, but rather the ethos behind it; this ties well into my earlier

discussion of the philosophical canon, and also the pedagogical values expressed in

my discussions on readings and lectures (1b.3).

1b.1: Readings

First to the readings we assign. In the last section I argued for de-centering

the canon, perhaps trying to avoid teaching it at all—at least in lower-division or

introductory courses—unless necessary for engaging with or supplementary for

understanding the more topics-based or contemporary pieces of focus. Implicit in

this idea is that we should still be assigning texts, and we should still be assigning

texts written by Philosophers—peer-reviewed texts, if we want to be specific. Now

I'll try to make the implicit explicit. While I think that exposure to scholarly

philosophical texts is important, I think that they should be assigned sparingly in

lower-division Philosophy courses—even the contemporary texts! In other words, I

want to take my claims from the previous section even further to argue not only that

we might should de-center the philosophical canon in our teaching, but that we

might should de-center philosophical texts in our teaching, as well. I think that we'd

do well to minimize those materials designated both "philosophical" *and* those

designated "texts" to help foster engagement and understanding in our students.

Here are things I've said in favor of contemporary philosophical writings:

their authorship is more diverse, they tend to be easier to read—in part because they

less-often need translation—and they cover topics that are perhaps more relevant or

relatable to today's students. I stand by these statements, especially when the objects

of these comparisons are traditional canonical works of philosophy. But let's be

honest, even contemporary philosophy can be extremely difficult to read. In an

opinion piece called "Writing on Philosophy: It's Not Rocket Science. It's More

Complicated Than That", Geoffrey K. Pullum analyzes the syntactic structure of a

single 86-word-long sentence by Ruth Millikan. I won't get into the details here, but

suffice it to say that the sentence itself, not to mention the unearthing of a logical

fallacy it's meant to explicate, are, as Pullum puts it, "mind-crunchingly difficult" [92].

Just because a philosophical work is contemporary doesn't mean that it's easy. Just

take a look at Millikan's, or Slavoj Žižek's, or Judith Butler's writing; look at Jerry

Fodor's or Sally Haslanger's, or José Medina's writing. Unfortunately, it's difficult to

avoid jargon and long, complicated sentences even while speaking in 21st-century

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[92] Pullum (2018)

parlance. Contemporary philosophy—whether it leans toward the "continental" or the "analytic"—is among the most difficult academic writing to understand.

The reason for this, I think, has a lot to do with the nature of the tradition: so much of the work in philosophy is *about* the meanings of words that attention to and precision regarding the words we use is necessary. Philosophers can't just assume general agreement on the meaning of 'meaning' any more than they can assume agreement on the meaning of 'consciousness' or 'bald' or 'woman' or 'possible' or 'free'. Hell, we can't even agree on what the word 'philosophy' means! In our work to define words, or to use them to help us untangle complicated philosophical problems and puzzles, we aim to be as "clear and perspicuous" as possible, but as we know all too well, a feedback loop arises by which we try to make clear distinctions, but then finer-grained distinctions arise, or possible objections or exceptions, modal specifications, etc. which all need to be explicated as well, and then in explicating them, even *further* distinctions arise which need to be explicated, and so on. Suddenly we've endorsed a working (albeit conceptually-engineered) definition of 'woman' such that:

> S *is a woman* iff
>   i)   S is regularly and for the most part observed or imagined to have certain bodily features presumed to be evidence of a female's biological role in reproduction;
>   ii)   that S has these features marks S within the dominant ideology of S's society as someone who ought to occupy certain kinds of social position that are in fact subordinate (and so motivates and justifies S's occupying such a position); and
>   iii) the fact that S satisfies (i) and (ii) plays a role in S's systematic subordination, i.e., *along some dimension*, S's social position is oppressive,

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and S's satisfying (i) and (ii) plays a role in that dimension of subordination.[93]

Don't get me wrong, I appreciate this definition of 'woman' and I do plan to assign this paper in future Feminist Philosophy courses. I also appreciate the satisfaction of capturing *exactly* what one wants to capture in a definition (gimme them necessary and sufficient conditions, baby!). My point here is modest, though: philosophy's quest for clarity does not make for particularly easy writing, be it contemporary or canonical[94]. Not only do we make use of some very discipline-specific jargon (as do so many other disciplines), but our very discipline itself is built upon the stipulations, conceptual engineering, and fine-tuning *of* jargon. As Kitcher explains it, much of philosophy is a project of decomposition: our progress seems only to move forward by examining smaller and smaller questions. Other disciplines that make use of technical language and jargon, on the other hand, make progress by accumulation of results; reliability and eventual consensus[95].

In other words: even if other subjects or disciplines make use of technical language, doing so isn't in and of itself a project of the discipline—unlike in philosophy. A quick example to illustrate this: consider the timeless question "do I have free will?" Well, to answer this question we'd need to know what 'free will' means. Hmm, how about "the ability to do otherwise"? All well and good, but then we need to figure out what 'ability' means. Perhaps it's a set of dispositions? But

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[93] Haslanger (2000)

[94] Judith Butler writes, "Indeed, when standards of clarity become part of a hermetic discipline, they no longer become communicable, and what one gets as a result is, paradoxically, a noncommunicable clarity" (2004), 41.

[95] Kitcher (2011), 250-251

what's a disposition, and can one really be said to have a disposition if one never manifests it? Let's call these sorts of dispositions "finkish" ones and analyze those against certain alleged counterexamples to the claim that free will is the ability to do otherwise… now, this paragraph outlines decades and decades of metaphysical research[96], but despite all the cool definitions explored in it, we are no closer to answering the question of free will.

I digress. Contemporary philosophy can be jargon-y and convoluted, and its methodology unfamiliar (maybe nonsensical) even to people who have experience dealing with technical language in other disciplines. So one suggestion I have is to assign students texts of other genres—ones that aren't works of capital-P Philosophy, for sure, not even works of "philosophy" per se, but which can still illustrate philosophical ideas, questions, or problems. Again I implore teachers to *hook* their students, then ease in to the purer forms of philosophical discourse later if they must. Short stories, for example, can introduce students to important topics in philosophy without having to articulate the minutia of a given theory or debate. Take Ursula K. Le Guin's "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas"[97], which I've seen used many times to introduce a deontological objection to utilitarianism: is the unending suffering of one child outweighed by the otherwise-utopian existence of an entire peoples? Or take Ted Chiang's "What's Expected of Us"[98] which I've used to introduce students to the idea of causal determinism, and the question of

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[96] See Van Inwagen, Lewis, Frankfurt, Fischer, Vihvelin (not cited).
[97] Le Guin (1973)
[98] Chiang (2005)

responsibility and meaning in life if determinism is true. Short stories capture students' attention and imagination, and they can also do very well to capture the gist of a question or issue without bringing in the jargon that Philosophers deem necessary for *addressing* the question or issue. Assigning news articles, empirical studies, or basically any other reading that isn't properly in the genre of a philosophical essay, can be very useful in creating interest and allowing students to make connections between the topics at hand and their own life or academic background.

Furthermore, I don't think that teachers should limit their assigned materials to readings alone. Beyond different genres of material, there are also different mediums: we can assign readings (either "philosophy" or not) but we can also assign movies, TV episodes, podcasts, audiobooks, youTube videos, video or board games, etc.—these also either "philosophy" or not. Multimedia course materials have a similar benefit as non-philosophical works of writing of providing varying opportunities for students to create connections or gain interest in the topics or questions being presented[99]. They also go beyond other genres of writing alone to actually address various types of learning. In other words, not only might students be more *interested* in learning materials that are presented in non-philosophy or non-textual genres (because they're more engaging, or more familiar, etc.), but they might be more *able* to learn from varied materials. I don't want to go into too much of an empirical discussion here, but it is clear that people have varied learning styles.

[99] Saint-Croix and Nguyen (2023)

A popular model for parsing out learning styles is VARK, which stands for "Visual, Aural, Reading/Writing, and Kinesthetic", and for each of these styles or modes different strategies or tools for learning are figured to be more or less effective. For example, visual learners might benefit from seeing data represented in graphs, ideas represented with pictures, and arguments represented in flow charts, but the use of images and other symbolic tools might not engage kinesthetic learners; rather, they might learn the same information best by using models, applying concepts to real-world examples, or hearing ideas while on a walk rather than at a desk. Some data also suggests that most students are multimodal learners, which means they learn best engaging with content in more than one way[100].

In any case, philosophy's tendency to be very reading-heavy is bound to work better for some learners than others, so my suggestion is just to shake it up in terms of the types of material assigned (as well as the types of assessments assigned, but I'll get to that later). Even something as modest as providing audio transcriptions—or even just sharing that students are welcome to use audio transcription *software*—along with texts, or assigning an on-topic song or movie or news article prior to, instead of, or along with a philosophical text, can engage students with varied learning styles and levels of interest in the discipline. Particularly when considering the intended audiences of various genres, one can also accommodate students' varied levels of prior knowledge, language abilities, and attention spans (most philosophical texts are written for the intended audience of

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[100] Prithishkumar, IJ and Michael, SA (2014)

other professional Philosophers, which is why, I suspect, they seem to take the form they do with little complaint).

This isn't to say that I want teachers to stop assigning readings. To the contrary, I want assigned readings to actually *be read by students.* I'm not good at reading when I'm standing up (woe unto my standing desk), and I'm not good at reading when I'm hungry; I'm also not good at reading when I'm not motivated to read. If I expect that a text will be boring, or beyond my comprehension, or too long to be worth the effort, I am much less likely to read it. Or perhaps I will read part of it, or skim all of it, but not with an aim toward deep reading or understanding. I think key is getting students *excited* about what we're asking them to engage with, so that they approach the materials with an open mind and enthusiasm. Providing varied materials in the first place helps with this, because certain students might already be more enthusiastic about a movie or an empirical study than about a philosophy paper, but I think there are ways to present even philosophical texts that can encourage students' motivation to engage with them.

For one, I suggest scaffolding: starting on the ground floor, so to speak, with basic concepts and lower-level skills and working students up toward more complex understanding and self-efficacy as they need less support from the teacher. In the case of readings, I suggest gradually working students up toward reading full-blown philosophy papers for homework by starting with simpler ones—say, encyclopedia articles or blog posts, editorials, etc. written by Philosophers, which tend to portray difficult ideas in simpler terms, more geared toward a public audience. They might

be asked to practice annotating, learn to identify theses and arguments, and evaluate claims. Then as they gain more confidence utilizing these skills they can begin to apply them to shorter scholarly Philosophy articles, or perhaps just passages of them, in-class and with the support of teachers and peers. Then finally they can be assigned full-length philosophy papers without feeling like they're being thrown in the deep end. All to say, I am for assigning students to read philosophy papers but I question whether they should be the first, the only, or even the majority of materials assigned.

Priming students to read some of the texts can also be useful. At the very least, let them know what the next reading will be about ahead of time; explain to them what makes it interesting, how and why it was written, and offer some pointers about what might make it a challenging read, things to look for in terms of language or argumentation, how long it is and might take to finish, and reading habits you've acquired and plan to use for it. I suggest even beginning to read the piece in class, or pulling a particularly interesting passage to share ahead of time, so they can have some experience engaging with it, and hopefully become drawn in to the topic, style, or even the mystery of the piece ("what's going to come next? How will they ever possibly argue this?"). Again I think this helps to appeal to the students as individuals, people who are expected to do a thing and want to know what they're getting into. It's an opportunity to share one's enthusiasm for the subject, and also to get questions or input from the students about what *is* useful to them as they prepare for a reading.

My final suggestion when it comes to assigning materials is to give students a choice of what to read or engage with. I understand that often in philosophy, there is a canon, and a "lineage" of papers or books and their replies and it can feel urgent to assign all and only those readings. There might not feel like time to throw in some movies or podcasts or blog posts, much less to give students the choice between reading a beloved and important philosophical text and watching a movie, or listening to a podcast about it—when given the choice, most students will probably always choose to engage with the "easier" of the materials. This isn't exactly what I'm suggesting[101]. I return now to the earlier suggestion of a topics-based approach where, I've found, there feels like there's much more opportunity to offer students a choice in what they'll learn next. After all, lineages branch, objections and replies differ, and there are just so many interesting topics out there! When crafting a syllabus, teachers have a lot of different ways to offer students choices, depending on their comfort level and the strictness of their curricula. I'll give some examples:

1. Letting the class choose the topics that the course will cover.

   a. Consider a survey course, and all of the "topics in x" that might could be covered in it. UCSC's course catalogue entry for Feminist Philosophy says: "The topics may include (but are not limited to)

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[101] Though now that I think about it, there might be good ways to offer students the choice to read or engage with materials of varied difficulties, based on their confidence and abilities; there could be incentivization structures or later assignments that require the more difficult texts to be read anyway, such that students who don't need the easier introduction can save themselves the time by skipping it, students who do need it have the opportunity built in to the curriculum and the timeline, and students who overshoot—who don't think they need it but actually do—can always go back in the reading list to engage with more introductory material.

oppression, normalization, discrimination, objectification, misogyny, androcentrism, patriarchy, the sex-gender distinction, sexed embodiment, gendered labor, and the relationships between sexism, racism, homophobia, and transphobia." Already this list provides more than enough topics than can be covered in a single term, so why not give students the pick of 5 or 6 of them (with or without some "anchors" or required topics mixed in as well) based on their interests? Spend part of syllabus day explaining these and soliciting preferences, and/or take polls as the class finishes one topic to see which they'd like to move onto next[102].

2. Letting the class guide which lineages to follow, or letting students choose individually which lineages to follow, and creating opportunities for them to share and compare their diverging trajectories.

   a. This could be wide-grained or fine-grained, depending on the course, as wide-grained as "okay, let's assume substance dualism is true" to as fine-grained as "okay, let's assume that moral responsibility relies on an agent's endorsement of their action by way of their superseding *values* rather than *desires*".

3. Letting the class guide, or letting students choose individually, more localized thought experiments, examples, objections, or replies to a key reading.

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[102] For an example, see Danny Weltman's Contemporary Moral Issues syllabus (2016)

a. There are innumerable iterations of the Trolley Problem, and responses to those iterations as well. Give students the option ("the fat man, or the organ donor next?") or even allow them to fill in the details of a case themselves ("find a real-world example of when somebody chose the good of the many at the expense of the few").

I'm sure there are many more ways in which a teacher can provide opportunities for student choice in assigned materials, but examples aside, the gist is this: people are more likely to do things when they have a choice in what they're doing, and by virtue of having had a choice they're also more likely to be interested in and engaged with readings, and with the course trajectory more broadly.

Speaking of "having a say in it", I will now move on to how teachers utilize their in-class time. Remember the typical approach is to assign readings, then lecture about them in class, then open the classroom up for discussion. I want to suggest that in class, teachers also give students more of a say—literally—in inviting student discussion and collaboration rather than prioritizing lectures. There is evidence to suggest that disadvantaged and underrepresented university students benefit heavily from active learning in science classrooms[103], as do women[104]; moreover, as do *all* students[105], though I think that attention to equitable learning outcomes is important here to stress the value of active learning: some teachers are okay with poor success rates in their classrooms, but I'd be hard-pressed to find a teacher

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[103] Haak et. al (2011)
[104] Laws et. al (1999); Lorenzo et. al (2006); Schneider (2001)
[105] Freeman et. al (2014)

who's okay with success rate disparities that directly correlate with racial, gender, and socioeconomic differences among their students. But I'm jumping the gun here: first, what is active learning? Second, is it as useful in the humanities as it is in STEM?

Freeman et. al define active learning as a type of teaching and learning that "engages students in the process of learning through activities and/or discussion in class, as opposed to passively listening to an expert. It emphasizes higher-order thinking and often involves group work"[106]. Active learning is often described as a foil to "expositional" or "transmissional" approaches to teaching and lecturing which tend to consist, as Freeman et. al describe it, as students "passively listening to an expert", taking notes, and perhaps raising hands to ask questions mid-lecture. Examples of active learning techniques can be minute to grand, and can be utilized during or in lieu of lectures.

During lectures, teachers might intentionally pause to allow students time to reflect on the preceding material, check in with classmates about notes, and ask questions to the instructor; teachers might ask a question of students (maybe even a leading question) and allow the opportunity for students' prediction or critical thinking prior to sharing the answer(s) with them; they might periodically ask students to write down a summary sentence or two of what they take to be the most important points from the recent segment of lecture.

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[106] Freeman et. al (2014), 8413-8414

Instead of, or perhaps alongside (either before or after lectures), teachers might provide a puzzle, problem, case study, or decision which students are asked to consider and solve; they might ask students to generate their own assessment questions, and to provide and explain short-answers which would be considered excellent, proficient, or insufficient; they might have students move around in the classroom based on various degrees of agreement or disagreement with an idea; they might have students collaborate on a concept map or a reading guide. My personal go-tos are "Think-Pair-Share"[107] and "Jigsaw"[108] activities. Both of these activities provide students with individual opportunities and responsibilities to engage with material, but also low-stakes opportunities to troubleshoot ideas, practice sharing information, and otherwise collaborate with their classmates.

In all these examples, and so many more[109], the point of active learning is essentially to help students create or construct their own knowledge, rather than be expected to uptake whatever the teacher tells them to. It is very popular among critical pedagogues and is meant to disrupt the academic norms of what Paulo Friere calls "the banking concept of education" in which "knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to

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[107] Activities in which students are asked to reflect on a question first individually, then to pair up with a classmate and discuss both of their reflections, then to share their combined findings out loud to me and the larger class.
[108] Activities in which students are split into groups (say, AAAA, BBBB, CCCC, DDDD) and each group is expected to read, work on, discuss, and otherwise familiarize themselves with a single topic or resource. Then, groups are shuffled (in this example, new groups would consist of ABCD, ABCD, ABCD, ABCD) and the students of each original group are expected to share main points and takeaways from their first discussion.
[109] See Center for Research on Teaching and Learning (n.d.)

know nothing"[110]; under this conception students are considered as objects meant to *be taught* rather than subjects meant to *learn*, and as such the teacher is meant to talk and they are meant to listen. Now, this sounds wrong-headed and archaic and I'm sure most university teachers wouldn't explicitly endorse this kind of thinking; but implicitly, and by the way they present materials and expect their classrooms to function, I think many still do. Traditional lectures encourage passivity and an unyielding deference to expertise (that of the teachers and of the thinkers that the teachers lecture about), rather than critical thinking, self-efficacy, and a motivation to uncover truths for oneself. What's worse, this sort of expositional approach to teaching is often followed by assessments in which students *are* asked to think critically—but they haven't had a chance to practice doing so.

Many teachers do attempt to provide opportunities for active learning by way of class discussions. Perhaps they open a class meeting with the prompt "How did people like the reading?" or maybe after they finish a lecture they'll ask "Does anybody have any questions?" or "So, what do y'all think about Gettier cases?" or "Does the Grue example undermine the conclusions of inductive inference, and with it, science and empiricism?". Instructors might prompt students to respond to these questions without then responding to the students themselves—perhaps they prompt other students to respond, or explicitly set up a "Socratic Circle" format[111] and wait silently until one or two students realize that *anything* is better than the

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[110] Friere (1970), 72
[111] "Okay, everybody sit in a circle. Now I want you to have a discussion *with each other* about x".

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pain of awkward silence, so one or two finally decide to speak up. I do think this is on the right track, and the opportunity for some discussion in class is better than none, but I think such open-ended and large-group discussions often fall short of the engagement and critical thinking that teachers hope to spur.

For one, not every student speaks in full-class discussions. There are practical reasons for this—like time constraints and class size—but there are also personal ones: some students are shy, they lack confidence in their answers and don't want to be corrected, disagreed with, or condescended to publicly (either by the teacher or by a peer). And though discussion *is* an example of active learning, the caveat is that one need actually be participating in the discussion to be learning actively. If only a small handful of (usually white, usually male) students are willing to raise their hands and participate in a group discussion, they are the only ones reaping the benefit of the activity. Furthermore, large group discussions also tend to invite less critical thinking on the part of students than do those in smaller groups and pairs. I think this is due to the constant presence of the teacher. To put it bluntly, students will often only share out loud what they think the teacher wants to hear. This isn't always bad, when the teacher is soliciting information (perhaps asking students to recall some previous information) or asking a leading question to guide the lecture in a particular way—but again, this doesn't necessarily invite critical thinking or discussion; it's a simple call-and-response.

Even well-phrased questions which are meant to invite students' personal interpretations or beliefs can be misconstrued in students' efforts to "get it right" and

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to have the approval of the teacher. More times than I can count, I've prompted a classroom discussion and hoped for students to engage with each other, but every single response is directed at me! No matter how I place myself in the room (at the front of the classroom, at the back of the classroom, in one of the facing-forward desks, in the Socratic Circle along with the students), students look at and speak to me, hoping for a response or reaction from me—not to or from their peers. These sorts of classroom dynamics and snafus can be solved by instantiating certain classroom norms and providing more structure to classroom discussions, but that is exactly my point: merely opening the classroom up for discussion and expecting students to contribute isn't sufficient for actually *creating* constructive discussions. Without more intention and more structure, very often it's the minoritized students who remain passive learners, and feelings of alienation and lack of motivation are increased[112].

Now, I will note an important concern: most evidence in favor of active learning has taken place in the context of STEM classrooms, which tend to have larger classes, more memorization, and less critical thinking than the humanities; perhaps active learning is more important in these fields than in philosophy? Or: perhaps active learning is more effective in these fields than in philosophy? To the first, despite the fact that at this point no metanalytical reviews of active learning studies have focused on the humanities or social sciences (woe unto the undervalued

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[112] I have received a lot of student feedback in the past about people "dominating the conversation" and students not feeling comfortable nor interested in speaking up in class.

fields of academia), ample evidence nonetheless suggests that active learning

benefits students across disciplines[113]. And to the question of whether STEM

classrooms have a higher *need* for active learning in instruction than, say, philosophy

ones, I'd argue that there is no need for comparison: if active learning is beneficial

full-stop (as studies suggest it is), then a discipline's historical method of instruction

and learning outcomes should have no bearing on whether active learning is

instantiated. Sure, disciplines which require more memorization (e.g. chemistry

versus literature or philosophy) might have a harder time getting students to

actively learn than those whose core objectives are critical thinking and analysis, but

that doesn't mean that the need is foregone in the less memorization-heavy courses.

In fact, the skills practiced in active learning environments (e.g. communication,

collaboration, critical thinking, problem-solving, etc.) might indeed be more useful

for students in the humanities and social sciences than for those in STEM fields—

even if use of these skills does well in helping students succeed in their less

humanistic endeavors (e.g. memorization) as well.

In-class focus on student contributions can also do well to improve

performance on assessments: rather than sharing all the information they're

expected to know, and hoping that they've absorbed it, practitioners of active

learning can get a better idea of how and to what degree students are engaging with

and grasping material—by asking them, by checking in with them, by having them

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[113] Brame (2016); Ambrose et al (2010); Bonwell and Eison (1991); Chickering and Gamson
(1987)

demonstrate it. Students also tend to engage in metacognition with active learning[114] so they themselves can become more aware of how they're faring with the material and skills around which course learning goals are based.

I understand that not all teachers nor all classrooms can accommodate active learning at every turn: in-class time constraints, class size, topic, learning goals, classroom set-up and technologies, and preparation all affect a teacher's ability to successfully incorporate active learning into their classes (particularly the more structured, time-consuming, and group-oriented strategies). But some active learning is better than none, and many of the during-lecture strategies mentioned earlier take little to no time or changing of lesson plans. I think it's worth teachers trying strategies out and seeing what works for them and their students.

1b.3: Cult of the Genius

Finally to the cult of the genius. This is the last aspect of material presentation that I'll discuss, and I'll keep it brief before moving on to assessments. "Cult of the genius" is not a new concept, in large part because the very etymology of 'genius' itself seems to suggest untouchable, venerable greatness (much like every cult leader is taken to possess, at least by their followers): male spirit, virility, innate talent, originality, and solitude—solitude because they are too self-motivated and focused to be bothered by anyone else[115]. It seems befitting of a genius to be adored, even— or especially—if that adoration is unreciprocated; they are the brilliant, the unique,

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[114] Brame (2016)
[115] Ruonakoski (2023), 36-37

the Übermenschen and we would be lucky just to catch a whiff. Anyway,

historically, the genius is a figure we admire, and the genius is always male—again,

due to its etymology but also due to the relatively more educated and respected

position that males have always had in society. It is no surprise, then, that most of

the *works* of genius are also by men, and these are the very works that comprise our

academic and intellectual canons. I've already spoken at length of the philosophical

canon, but in this section I'll discuss not the works themselves, but the way they're

presented; the charm and charge of genius that our philosophical canon is offered

with and its effects on pedagogy.

I mentioned earlier that while my discussions on readings and lectures/in-

class time held relevance across disciplines, the cult of the genius was more

particular—or at least more pressing—for Philosophy. I'd like to explain that now.

It's true that every discipline has its heroes: Leibniz, Darwin, Einstein, Hawking,

Shakespeare, Euclid, Chomsky, Aristotle, and all the others. But what distinguishes

some heroes from others is that we still *read* some of them; their works—not just

their ideas—have acquired a certain *je ne sais quoi*; as if the very ground they walked

on has become blessed! Works in the humanities—I'm thinking in particular in

literature and philosophy, and I'm guessing in linguistics too—continue to be read in

their original form (or as close to original as possible; see my earlier discussion on

translations), yet this is not the case in other disciplines, like mathematics, history,

and science. Eric Dietrich explains it well in his paper "There Is No Progress in

Philosophy": science and philosophy diverge not in the forming and arguing over

theories, but in the fact that at some point, scientific theories are broadly accepted as true whereas philosophical ones aren't. As such, we can rephrase and reiterate—even revise—scientific theories to teach them to our students confidently, but we can't do the same for philosophical ones: the jury is still out, and we don't know where in a text the truth or the smoking gun might reside. "In sum," he says,

> Though scientific texts are old, the theories, when true, aren't (truth doesn't age). So we teach the theories, which we update with better techniques. However, no philosophical theory is true, or at least no theory is regarded as true by significant and large majority of philosophers. So, we have no recourse but to agonize over and rehash what the philosopher said[116].

We don't need to re-read Einstein's 1905 or 1916 papers on Relativity even while we still teach them: "Since his theories are true, what Einstein *actually* said needn't be fought over"[117]. To take Dietrich's claims further, I think that this holds true for history, anthropology, other social sciences, and other STEM fields, too. We still teach and discuss things like calculus, and we might even teach and discuss things like scientific racism (i.e. theories and methods we largely believe to be false), but that doesn't require us to actually read the likes of Isaac Newton, Leibniz-*qua*-mathematician, or Samuel George Morton. The only disciplines in which the specific works, the *words*, of the historical greats are still pored over are literature, philosophy, and some subdisciplines of linguistics[118].

Literature, I believe, differs from philosophy and linguistics because the value of literature is just as much about the form of a work as it is about the content

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[116] Dietrich (2011), 335
[117] Ibid.
[118] The line between philosophy and linguistics gets blurred for me, anyway.

of the ideas expressed: how does Shakespeare utilize iambic pentameter, what

makes haikus so poignant, and what can be said of Nathaniel Hawthorne's use of

symbolism? On the other hand, many works of philosophy allegedly acquire their

value from the content of their ideas alone. If one takes a historic or literary approach

to philosophy, there do seem to be some notable exceptions—Platonic dialogues,

Nietzschean fictional polemics, Wittgenstinean aphorisms—but I think that many

contemporary Philosophers would claim that, while they admit they like the style of

these works, the style is but instrumental for articulating hard-to-articulate ideas;

they'd be just as happy *philosophically* (if not literarily) to engage with these ideas in

more straightforward or scholarly translations, if only they could be sure the same

ideas were being represented!

Full circle, this is why we stick to reading the originals. We can still get new

insights from re-reading Aristotle, no matter (or in part because of) how obtuse his

writing style is, in ways that we can't get new insights from re-reading Newton or

Einstein or Boaz. So in many circles of Philosophy, we still read the old, great works,

but rather than accepting that we do so from emotional, intellectual, or aesthetic

appreciation—as folks admit much more readily with literature—we claim instead

that we do so because we *believe* them, because we think they are getting at the truth

of reality in a way that other practitioners of ideas can't (no matter how they try to

revise or rephrase the theories and arguments). This may just be a consequence of

contemporary U.S. Philosophy departments' relatively strong adherence to the

analytic tradition—more allied with science—than to the continental tradition—

more allied with the humanities. We find ourselves in a pickle: reading and analyzing works by "the greats" that might be more at home among classicists or in studies of literature, but nonetheless aiming to read them as if they were communicating facts that we could prove or disprove, believe or reject.

Erika Ruonakoski makes a different claim in her book *Sisters of the Brotherhood: Alienation and Inclusion in Learning Philosophy*. She argues that we read works of philosophy not because "they provide us with 'facts' but because they help us think by engaging both our affective and reflective abilities"; they teach us *to think* in dialogue with the author, rather than teaching us *what to think*[119]. To some degree, I agree with Ruonakoski here: a lot of the time, works in philosophy serve as examples of new perspectives, demonstrate different ways to think, and share insights or epiphanies that can feel quite personal; emotionally and existentially weighty. Our takeaways aren't necessarily facts—they aren't always propositional—but they are takeaways nonetheless. However, within the tradition, these takeaways are meant to be asserted; the rhetoric and beauty of an insight should be stripped away until it *becomes* a proposition. It's telling that her example of a liberating and dialogical piece of philosophy is Hanna Arendt's 1951 *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, whose place within the philosophical tradition—within Philosophy departments' curriculum—is shaky at best. Perhaps Arendt indeed invites us to think *with* her, but most others, I reckon, would rather indeed just tell us what to think; *they* might be engaging in a dialogue, but not with their readers—only their interlocutors. In any

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[119] Ruonakoski (2023), 35-36

case, Ruonakoski claims that we readers feel a kind of connection with the authors, *plus* we are in awe of their brilliance, and they become heroes to us, or as she calls them, "demigods"[120].

A sort of feedback loop arises as we read the works because we admire the authors; we understand them to be geniuses so we assume their works are profound; the assumed profundity confirms the writer's admirability, and so on. Of course there must have been some start to the loop: someone read Hegel once and was like, "this is genius! *He* is genius!" but even then, one can't be too assured in the actual genius of the work (or its author), because philosophy favors nepotism: with the right advisor(s) and colleagues, one can do anything! In any case, a danger arises when we forget that it's the ideas we're supposed to be interested in, and not the people who wrote them down. As Ruonakoski states, "the cult of genius obscures the character of philosophy as a collective endeavour and emphasises the person instead of the work"[121]. Instead of an earnest investigation into a difficult puzzle or interesting question, the goal rather becomes *getting into the head of this genius* – I worry that too much effort is spent working to decipher the indecipherable simply because of an author's reputation.

Furthermore, the worry cascades: if we venerate the likes of Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Foucault and Sartre, because of their genius and despite their writing styles (allegedly), we might begin to equivocate between genius and style:

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[120] Ibid. 36
[121] Ibid. 38

geniuses write giant books and use run-on sentences; they invent their own glossary

of terms (Kant!) which we're *sure* will be really illuminating if we could just

understand them. We confuse verbosity and opacity with "rigor", and this sort of

style becomes a trademark of the greats. And we professional Philosophers (most of

us, at least) would one day like to be *among* the greats[122]! It is a high honor to become

a famous philosopher, and few achieve it. Since most of us aren't properly genius,

one tool we have available to us is to emulate the geniuses of yore by approaching

our work with the same trademark "rigor":

> If it is not confusing (I mean rigorous) enough, philosophers at times
> question if it is even philosophy…. The obsession of some philosophers with
> rigor suggests intellectual posturing and elitism. On this view, the more
> rigorous a philosopher is, the smarter they look. The more effort a work
> takes to be understood, the more intelligent and philosophical the
> philosopher seems.[123]

This quote by Myisha Cherry demonstrates some of the downstream effects of the

cult of the genius: intellectual grandstanding and gatekeeping within contemporary

circles of Philosophy, length of and language within works that's only accessible to

an elite, storied few, and a clear message to students of philosophy that THIS IS WHAT

PHILOSOPHY LOOKS LIKE. If you aren't enamored with Kant by the end of the term,

philosophy isn't for you. Furthermore, even if you *are* intrigued, there is no place for

you among the greats: can you truly say that you could ever be as rigorous and

committed and exceptional as this brilliant Königsberg homebody bachelor? One of

my professors once entered the classroom and made us guess what day it was; after

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[122] Ruonakoski (2023), 38
[123] Cherry (2017), 23

some time he finally revealed that it was Immanuel Kant's birthday! The idolatry of our philosophical heroes has become almost religious (recall that Ruonakoski calls them "demigods"[124]) and as any religious proselytizer should know, it's easier to convert people with service, community, and ideas than it is to convert them with a list of all the saints, angels, and gods they could only hope to be compared to; maybe we take this genius thing too far.

The cult of the genius communicates limited access to an elite club, which might be appealing to some but is more often alienating; a cause of resentment for those who feel their entrance will not be granted. Unfortunately, there are demographic trends here too. This can become clear when discussion of the cult of the genius is tied back into discussions of the canon and of in-class discussions: if all the great authors of yore have been white and male, and a majority of the students in class who are willing to speak about and engage with them are white and male, what does that mean for all the non-white or non-male students? Furthermore, the very notion of 'genius' can loom over students' heads, given that markers of genius are traditionally masculine-coded: confidence, independence, isolation, assertiveness, enigma. Even though men are not, on the whole, smarter than women, they are better at *acting* (read: pretending to be) smart than women[125]. A certain amount of panache by white male students, a certain amount of stereotype threat experienced by non-white or non-male students[126], plus a certain amount of implicit

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124 Ruonakoski (2023), 36
125 See Lindeman et. al (2019) and other research exploring why women act less confident than men.
126 Saul (2013)

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bias by teachers[127]–due at least in part by their own understanding of the canon and indoctrination into the cult of the genius—all point toward the positive appraisal of and continued success for while male students over those of less-represented identities in Philosophy classes and in the discipline.

Now, I don't want to downplay the importance of rigor in philosophy, nor do I want to nix 'Kant' and 'Hegel' from our collective vocabulary[128]; as I said earlier, these guys are considered geniuses for a reason, but I think that greater efforts should be taken to separate the man from his work, his work from his ideas. I think that these degrees of separation can help to communicate to students that they—who they are, at their place in history—can still engage with the subjects; the door to understanding didn't close with Hegel. And so long as teachers are aware of the cult of the genius, they may be less likely to fall into discipleship, which in turn might make it easier for them to de-center the canon ("do I really need to assign this text, or am I just flexing on behalf of Kant?") and reframe classroom lectures and discussion toward more of a focus on students' own wrestling with ideas than on their induction into a particular philosopher's fan club.

The cult of the genius is an unnecessary, if not pernicious, norm in Philosophy. By decoupling 'Philosophy' from its wall of fame and its untouchable, impenetrable prose, I think teachers can create a new view of the discipline which is more approachable and inviting to students than it might be currently. Not only can

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[127] Brennan (2013)
[128] I kant even imagine that!

they get hooked in with topics and ideas presented by people who are more like them, and who write (or speak, or act) in ways more like them, but they can get the sense that a sustained interest or profession in philosophy is not limited to the timeless geniuses of the world. This is just one possible approach of introducing students to philosophy; one which I think is underexplored. There should still be courses which introduce students to canonical texts, perhaps with an aim toward challenging their level of comfort with new (or rather, old) questions, ideas, language, and style—but this needn't be the first or the only introduction to philosophy students can receive. Teachers who do teach the canon should in any case frame it more as a history and backbone of *ideas* in philosophy, rather than as an ode to the men who wrote them.

1c: Assessment

This is my last section on pedagogy, and it's about the final step, as it were, in teaching: assessment. Well, learning doesn't end in assessment, but units and courses do. The idea is this: students are presented with material in class, or asked to engage with material on their own, learn and discuss it in various ways, and then they're asked to demonstrate what they've learned by way of assessments. In Philosophy, essays are by and large the main form of assessment[129]: students are

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[129] With the exception of logic courses, and in my experience some other more empirically-informed topics, like philosophy of cognitive science.

most likely asked to write something expository[130] or something argumentative[131].

Often, course assessments are split up by way of a midterm and a final essay, where

the midterm is expository and the final is argumentative. Argumentative essays

include necessary exposition so midterm essays can serve as practice—or

scaffolding—for the higher-level task of defending a position in the later essay.

This is all well and good. As I've done with earlier parts of the chapter, I'll

now explain why I'm personally a fan of this assessment structure, but why I

nonetheless think it should stop being the paradigm in Philosophy courses. I

wouldn't say that I love to write essays, but writing essays for my courses has suited

me; I'd probably prefer writing two essays in a term than having to do daily

homework or—gag—some sort of "creative project" at the end, or a group

presentation. I don't *love* writing essays, but I do strongly dislike other forms of

assessment. Timed, in-class essays can be stressful for me, but the deadline lights a

fire and I can scribble furiously and basically always say what I feel I need to say;

I'm quick to decipher exactly what a prompt is asking of me, I don't need to outline

on paper (I can often think it through in my head), I can triage if I need to in order to

maximize points in limited time, my handwriting's not bad... Take-home essays I

prefer, during which I can focus for hours at a time, perfect my tone (I tend to write

very colloquially, but I can cater to my audience in terms of formality and flair if I

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[130] For example, "What is the sorites paradox? Provide at least one example, and clearly state
the three jointly inconsistent claims of the paradox."
[131] For example, "What is the sorites paradox? Provide at least one example, and clearly state
the three jointly inconsistent claims of the paradox. Then, explain which of the claims you
think is most likely false and why."

need to), come up with a quippy title, etc. I tend to be pretty confident in my writing; I can predict what grade it'd receive and if I want a better one I can put in some extra work to achieve it. On the other hand, I can't stand busywork; I don't consider myself *creative* so any sort of creative project I partake in feels childish and like a waste of time (why write a poem about something when I could just explain it?); group projects lead me to a lot of logistical anxiety, resentment about workload distribution, and furthermore I don't like leaving my success or grade even *in part* in the hands of other people: I want my grades to reflect my work, and my work only.

I digress; the point was to provide my reasons for preferring essays over other sorts of assessment: they're my strongest form of demonstrating thought and knowledge, I appreciate the lack of busywork, and I don't have to go out of my comfort zone. Perhaps other Philosophers can identify with these reasons, or see some of these traits reflected in themselves as well. But I will remind my readers again that Philosophers aren't very representative of the general student body. I also think that age—real or kindred—plays into our mindsets about assessment, too. I come from a family that had high expectations of success, self-sufficiency, and accountability: I was expected to do well in school, I was expected to exceed expectations (as paradoxical as that sounds, that was what I felt), and if I didn't understand a topic I had to figure it out. Either that, or I could bullshit my way through it (by playing to the assignment guidelines, regurgitating information that still didn't quite make sense, etc.). If I didn't do my homework, well, that's unacceptable, and if I didn't do my reading, well, that's no excuse. I was raised with

high standards of accountability, and I've carried that with me; the touchy-feely stuff feels like fluff. Again, perhaps this resonates with some.

Anyway, essays seem good because they provide a no-nonsense way of evaluating whether students have engaged with and understand material, and they offer a lot of flexibility too, depending on a teacher's goals: they can be timed or not-timed, open- or closed-book, short-answer or long-form, expository or argumentative. Essays guidelines can easily be tailored to fit most Philosophy course learning goals.

But I think this is where the first problem with relying solely or mostly on essay-writing assessment arises: hidden curriculum. Hidden curriculum consists in the implicit expectations of student performance, beyond what the stated learning goals are for an assignment or a course. Essays, I believe, rely on a hidden curriculum that's easier for some students to meet than others. The second problem with a reliance on essays that I identify regards the stated, explicit goals of a course—hidden curriculum aside: what *do* we want students to gain from a Philosophy course, and should we be shifting our goals? I think that we should be shifting our goals, even as we remain mindful of institutional and disciplinary-specific curriculum guidelines. Finally, there are very pressing practical concerns: both in-class and take-home essays face numerous worries with regards to accommodations, cheating, and equitable grading. In what follows I'll spend some more time discussing each of these worries—Section 1c.1 on hidden curriculum, Section 1c.2 on learning goals, and Section 1c.3 on practical concerns for essay

assignments—and in each section I'll provide some suggestions for and alternatives to traditional philosophy essays for course assessments.

1c.1: Hidden Curriculum

First to hidden curriculum. The term 'hidden curriculum' is not new; it's been used in pedagogical circles since the 1960s. Broadly speaking, it refers to all of the things that students are expected to do or to know in order to navigate [higher] education—the "unwritten rules" for success[132]. For example, there are social and hierarchical norms that tend students toward more successful academic careers: cohabitation with peers, study groups, approaching and interacting with teachers and other figures of authority[133]. There are institutional resources linked to student success: libraries and online databases, office hours, tutoring, disability accommodation, and other resource centers. There are also norms in successful classroom interactions and assessments: speaking and writing style, formatting and citation norms (5-paragraph, MLA-style essays, anyone?); even things like the kinds of questions students ask in class and the forcefulness of their assertions can affect the way they are perceived and treated by both their peers and their teachers, and can in turn affect their sense of belonging and their opportunities for success.

Unfortunately, some people are more privy to the hidden curriculum than others: it shouldn't be a surprise to learn that white, middle- and upper-class American socialization and education norms are the exact ones reflected in higher

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[132] Laiduc and Covarrubias (2022), 222
[133] Ibid. 223

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education's hidden curriculum[134]. In other words, the background in prior knowledge and academic skills, social navigation, and institutional know-how that sets students up for success in the university is already "baked in" for many upper- and middle-class white students, but not for poorer, international or immigrant, first-generation college, or POC students. Socioeconomically advantaged students often come to university better-prepared, and with more of a sense of entitlement to their success, education, and the resources on offer to them than do relatively less-privileged students. Even if they aren't better-prepared academically, they are more likely to seek out help when they need it[135]. To be clear: I don't believe this is the fault of any of the students. As much as the meritocratic, self-sufficiency mindset was instilled in me, I try to resist it: some people are dealt different hands, and expecting people to just "figure it out" is callous and classist. I'm also not going to turn this into a polemic about systemic cultural and institutional change to address these inequities. Rather, I just want to point out: there is a hidden curriculum, and we, as teachers in higher education, should be aware of it.

We can also help to address it. For example, one assignment I include in all of my courses is a required office hours visit. By way of introducing the assignment I explain what office hours are, why they're useful, and I provide tips for making office hours visits productive. The goal is to encourage help-seeking behavior and give students an opportunity to practice approaching and chatting to teachers—

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[134] Ibid. 221-222; see also Markus (2017)
[135] Lareau (2015)

we're not that scary, and it can be helpful[136]! I'll say more about learning goals and how they can help to level the playing field in terms of hidden curriculum later; for now I want to return to the discussion of essays.

Essays can be good ways to measure most of the knowledge and skill goals typical of a Philosophy course: identifying theses, analyzing texts, asking critical questions, understanding and analyzing major philosophical theories or frameworks, articulating ideas and arguments, anticipating and responding to objections, etc. Basically, teachers can just prompt students to do any or all of that in writing—easy peasy! But consider the hidden curriculum that might be present in some of these goals, the implicit, behind-the-scenes knowledge or skills that are required in order to complete them. "Translation" skills might be necessary for reading or analyzing certain texts—recall an earlier discussion about how many philosophical texts are written in archaic or dense and convoluted language; even native English speakers may have trouble deciphering them. Is ability to understand the verbage and syntax of 18th-century English (or translated 18th-century German) actually what we're aiming for with "textual analysis"? For articulating ideas, is it necessary that students have the ability to *write* them or would an oral articulation demonstrate their understanding just as well? Let's say there's a closed-book, in-class essay assigned, for which students are asked to articulate the fine-tuning argument for the existence of god. Implicitly, then, we are expecting students to

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[136] Certainly, a required office hours visit is unfeasible for large classes or those without TAs (who also hold office hours); explaining office hours and encouraging students to seek help doesn't require an assignment.

memorize an argument, *manage* their time, attention, and anxiety, *perform* certain motor skills (e.g. handwriting or typing), and of course articulate the argument itself. However, only one of these expectations was listed above as a typical learning goal in Philosophy. Practitioners of Universal Design Learning call this "construct relevance": there are a lot of constructs—that is, skills and knowledge that our assessments measure—which may or may not be relevant to the skills and knowledge that we are *wanting* our assessments to measure[137].

Essays, for example, tend to require a certain degree of mastery of the English language. Jargon-y, dubiously-translated, and syntactically atrocious texts aside, most readings assigned in Philosophy courses [in the U.S.] are in English, and many philosophical texts have few translations. Not only do we expect students to read and analyze texts which may or may not be in their native language, but in our assessments we expect them to explain the ideas or present an analysis of them using, again, just the written English language. I know of very few Philosophy teachers who don't, at least to some degree, assess students' essays based on the formal features of the pieces: looking for typos, grammatical errors, specific formatting and citation requirements… this is all stuff that some students are more well-versed in than others, and also stuff that is (generally) not relevant to the expressed learning goals of the course.

Another facet of this worry is that essays tend to be high-stakes: a midterm and a final essay might make up the whole of a student's final grade, or there'll be

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[137] UDL on Campus (n.d.)

some combination of low-stakes assignments with a final essay comprising 40% or 50% of the final grade. Beyond potential worries of construct relevance, high-stakes writing assignments also limit the ways by which students can demonstrate their learning to effect. Recall the various learning styles students might have, and also consider more generally, the various abilities and backgrounds of students: some students are visual learners, and some are blind. Some students passed AP English, and some are dyslexic (many passed AP English *and* are dyslexic, but I digress). Some are math majors in their senior year, and some are in their first-ever university course. Different students not only learn in different ways, but they can demonstrate their learning in different ways, too. An aural learner might be able to articulate better out-loud than on paper, for example. Heavy reliance on high-stakes essays favors a certain kind of student—ones who learn best by reading and writing; who are native English speakers or who are further along in their university career, with a high degree of experience practicing formal essay conventions; who don't have dyslexia or ADHD; etc.

I feel like there are some pretty easy ways to address the concerns I've raised here. For one, teachers can simply provide more variety in their assessments: perhaps they assign one essay, one presentation, and a handful of low-stakes reading assignments so that even if a student struggles with one kind of assessment, they can still shine in another. Teachers can also offer choices between types of assessment: rather than assigning a *written* final essay, they can allow students to submit either a written or an oral one; five short-answer responses or one longer one. Just as

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teachers often provide a choice in topic or prompt for their essays, they can provide a choice in medium of submission as well[138]. Variance in assigned materials and course resources can be beneficial here, as well—in particular, utilizing varied materials to fill in the gaps for the construct-irrelevant aspects of assessment. Teachers aiming for "analysis" rather than "reading and writing" assessments might provide audio versions of course texts, or point students to text-to-speech software; they might offer or allow translated versions of texts, dictionaries (or better yet, glossaries that students created during the course), and essay formatting and citation guides for students to reference as needed.

Scaffolding assessments is also a good strategy here, and as I mentioned earlier, I've seen this one commonly done in Philosophy classes! Usually an earlier essay is expository and a later essay is argumentative: evaluating an argument is predicated upon being able to understand the argument, so it makes perfect sense to have students practice the simpler, more foundational skill before moving on to the more complex one. Many instructors I've seen also take this further: understanding an argument is often predicated upon being able to identify an argument, which is predicated upon understanding what an argument in philosophy even *is*, etc. Assignments which build skills and prime students to know what the teacher's expectations are moving forward can help to bridge gaps in students' prior

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[138] It's interesting to see what students decide here; I often give my students the choice between an oral or a written response, or between an essay and some sort of multimedia or creative project. Most of my students tend toward the written responses (especially upper-classmen; I've had more variance with freshmen's submissions) but I worry that this is not due to their preferences or strengths, but rather due to their schooling experiences and not realizing that other options are truly available to them.

knowledge and experience and also offer opportunities for varied mediums and a handful of lower-stakes opportunities to demonstrate knowledge. I'll talk about formative assessments in the next section, but scaffolded assignments are a great example of formative assessment, and can offer opportunities (both in students' work and teachers' feedback on it) to demonstrate the philosophical *practice* rather than just to regurgitate information or write a pretty essay.

1c.2: Learning Goals

The previous section discussed ways to see learning goals of a typical Philosophy course met, while supplanting the hidden curriculum often embedded in our ways of assessing those goals. In this section, I'll push back against the learning goals themselves. A revised set of learning goals can in turn offer opportunities for different kinds of assessment than the tried-and-true philosophical essay.

I'd like to preface this section by acknowledging that there's a lot of variability in the amount of control that teachers have over their course learning goals, at least nominally. Most Philosophy departments have their own curriculum, which include course requirements and program learning outcomes for students majoring or minoring in Philosophy; certain courses are expected to focus on certain topics, teach certain skills, and meet certain goals in order to develop a well-rounded student of Philosophy. Many Philosophy courses also fulfill general education requirements (GERs), and these GERs themselves have particular learning goals to be met. There might be further guidelines or limitations imposed on teachers' course

learning goals to ensure consistency among course sections, ease course design responsibilities, aid new instructors, or simply to weed out the crazies ("what's she doing having them practice yoga in an epistemology class?"[139]).

So, there are often certain learning goals that instructors are required to have in their courses. That, or they are strongly—albeit implicitly—expected to have them; and I think this is right! Philosophy (capital-P) *is* a unique discipline, and there are certain skills (critical thinking, analysis, logic, and argumentation) and certain knowledge (in ethics, metaphysics, and epistemology; of core problems and debates; perhaps even of famous philosophers of history) that it makes sense for Philosophy courses to center. If a student completes an ethics course not having heard of utilitarianism, something is wrong. If a student completes a logic course not having heard of *modus ponens*[140], something is wrong. But I think that many Philosophy course designers limit themselves to the bare-bones learning goals. Just because there are certain required learning goals doesn't mean they're comprehensive (necessary but not sufficient, see?), and I think it'd be worthwhile for course designers to become a little more thoughtful—and creative, perhaps—in considering what other [kinds of] learning goals might be worth including. Furthermore, let's be real: there typically isn't a whole lot of oversight with regards to course syllabi and learning goals. GER curriculum can be woefully bureaucratic, and once a course is accepted into the curriculum, the vetting and goal-alignment seems to stop there. So

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[139] Though maybe these sorts of strategies aren't so crazy after all. See Saint-Croix and Nguyen (2023).
[140] The argument form, not the term 'modus ponens' itself.

even if teachers wanted to sidestep some of the "required" learning goals—which I'm not going to suggest they do—I think doing so wouldn't be too difficult.

But nevertheless, there's room to introduce more learning goals into our Philosophy courses, even while maintaining the ones typical for each particular course. So what sorts of additions do I suggest? First I'll circle back to the previous section and suggest that there can be ones which specifically address hidden curriculum and attempt to make up for inequity. Relatedly, I also think an emphasis on practice and collaboration would be good. Finally, I'll discuss—as I have before— the aim of meeting students where they're at, and appealing to them more personally, disciplinarily, and practically than many Philosophy courses tend to do.

Back to hidden curriculum! There's a lot of institutional and academic know-how and know-that, which some students enter into the university lacking, to their detriment. If a student never realizes that they can get accommodations for their disability, or that there's tutoring available, or that they can talk to their professors during office hours for extra help, then they'll never be able to reap the benefits of those resources. Even if a student knows about them, they might still not feel brave or entitled enough to actually pursue them. So perhaps put it in course syllabi; incentivize them to help themselves by making it an assignment! I mentioned earlier that I have a required office hours visit in all of my courses; it's tended to be worth about 5% of their final grade, and it's credit/no credit[141], repeatable (obviously), and

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[141] I've required that students come into office hours with a "substantive question"; if they come in simply asking about their grade or when an assignment deadline is I'll let them know that they haven't met expectations for the office hours visit yet.

completable any time during the term besides finals week. I've required students to

log in to the library database system and download a reading themselves, so they

can familiarize themselves with the online library system. I haven't done this yet, but

think it'd be cool to require that students visit at least one tutoring session (if the

course I'm teaching indeed has tutoring), or one resource center (Writing Center,

DRC, counseling, Queer Center, food pantry, etc.) to gain a sense of community and

see what the campus has to offer.

None of these suggestions are properly "philosophical"; one might think that

this is all well and good, but beyond the purview of a Philosophy course—or maybe

just beyond the interest of a Philosophy professor ("not my problem"). But hidden

curriculum can severely disadvantage certain demographics of students. If one trip

to the Writing Center can plug them in to four years' worth of support, that seems

worth the trouble. Plus, then Philosophy teachers can assign those midterm and final

essays and not feel guilty because they know that students know where to seek out

writing help if they need it!

Folding some of this institutional know-how into course learning goals can

not only help students succeed in *our* courses, but in their academic careers more

generally; it can help to keep vital university resource centers populated and funded;

it can keep us from sitting bored and alone during office hours week after week; it

can vary course requirements and assessments in ways that don't really lead to

much extra work or grading on the part of the teacher[142]. In my Introduction to

Ethical Theory class I created one such goal, for which students should be able to

"**navigate** a philosophy class with more confidence than before this term began", but

I think that similar ideas could be couched in any number of ways.

The learning goals and the activities or assessments meant to help meet them

depend, of course, on the instructor's actual aims and priorities, the amount of

wiggle room they have in developing their course, and also potentially on the make-

up of the students taking the course: is it a 300-student course, for which requiring

an office hours visit from each would be untenable, but perhaps requiring an

assignment comparing online research tools would be easy? Are the students mostly

upperclassmen, presumably more familiar with the campus and with university life,

or are they mostly underclassmen, who could benefit from a survey or a tour of what

resources are available to them[143]?

It's clear that some skills or know-how are better-practiced in certain courses,

or with certain students, than others. But one thing that is consistently beneficial is

practice itself—and this is not often reflected in course learning goals. I think what's

often overlooked in philosophy is that it is indeed *a practice*; "philosophy" is not a

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[142] These sorts of assignments can be credit/no credit and require only that students take a
picture of themselves with a resource center employee or write a one-paragraph reflection
about their experience. This advice is not particular to Philosophy; I think all university
teachers could do better communicating the support that's available to students.
[143] For example, my efforts to "demystify" office hours for students fell a little bit short in my
Ethical Theory course because most of my students were seniors, taking one of their last—if
not their very last—courses at university. Basically all of them had been to instructor office
hours before, and furthermore their time of ever *needing* office hours was coming to an end
anyway.

finished product (which might be called a "work of philosophy" or something like that), but rather a series of acts. Philosophy (lowercase-p) involves wondering, reading, listening, thinking, asserting, rephrasing, revising, considering, doubting, responding, and so much more. It's a dialogue[144], a process. Too often our learning goals focus just on the end product: demonstrate what you know, what you've mastered; tell me your thesis and explain why it's correct. I think these miss much of the point, because they communicate to students that the process *isn't* what matters—not even a little bit.

So I think that learning goals would do well to reflect some of the processes and best practices within the discipline, as well as whatever "deliverables" teachers might want to see at the end. Goals of this stripe might include the explicitly dialogical—like, actually talking to people about ideas—but also the methodological. To the former: we might want students to practice engaging in critical discussions with others respectfully; we might want them to practice some intellectual virtues like charitability and humility; we might want them to practice giving feedback and receiving feedback on work. Another of my past course learning goals was for students to "**discuss** and **analyze** ethical theories and tricky moral issues with other people; **appreciate** and **work to understand** points of disagreement"[145]. Exercises in

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[144] Ruonakoski (2023), 38

[145] In terms of activities and assessments to help students reach these goals, beyond a number of guided discussions I had students do an assignment in which they had to find a topic of strong moral disagreement with a partner, hear their partner's view, then charitably explain their partner's arguments, identify where their disagreement was, share what they take to be their partner's strongest points, and offer suggestions of how their partner might make their arguments even *stronger*.

perspective-taking and charitability can be challenging and fun for students, and they can also foster genuine philosophical inquiry (we've all had classes in which every student seems just to agree with one another, or with the author, or with the teacher, and no real discussion—much less a *critical* or an *interesting* one—really takes place). Teachers ought to find ways to show the importance of collaboration and discussion, of the sharing of ideas through respectful dialogue, and let those be explicit goals in the course. Assessments which measure these goals will tend to be quite different from traditional philosophical essays, as students can demonstrate this by way of actually just discussing with others (participation points, anyone?), or acting and role-playing; finding examples of different perspectives, doing peer-reviews, etc. Again, these sorts of activities or assessments can still be scaffolded toward the ultimate goal of a final philosophy paper: they provide great fodder for topics, theses, argumentation, possible objections.

There are also more methodological goals a teacher might emphasize, notably, I think, the processes of drafting and revising a philosophy paper, but also the (perhaps more esoteric) process of philosophical inquiry itself: doesn't good philosophy often start with a spark of wonder, or a pang of malaise? These feelings morph into interest, and interest brings with it questions: how do I know other people have minds? Is there meaning in life? Am I the same person today as I was 10 years ago? So much of philosophy is about asking good questions! I would love to see more course goals aimed at sparking interest and asking questions, having students consider different ways that a question or a topic might be approached;

trying out different approaches; reframing the question or reconsidering the approaches; offering alternatives.

How to incorporate these sorts of goals into a syllabus? Well, very straightforwardly one could codify (for lack of a better word) the writing process; I've seen this being done with more and more regularity: teachers will assign outlines, first drafts, peer revisions, etc. (for a grade) and perhaps grade finished essays partially on how well students responded to feedback, or how much their final draft differed from their first draft. These sorts of assignments can provide more low-stakes, process-oriented assessment and also help students to troubleshoot and develop their ideas more fruitfully than if just the final essay were assigned. They encourage dialogue—perhaps between students, via peer-reviews, but also between the teacher and their students. Learning goals such as "**Improve** your argumentation and writing skills" would be straightforward enough to include.

I also think that providing students opportunities for reflection and metacognition can be useful here: have them grade their own papers and provide explanations for their criteria; assign a concept map or a flow chart for them to articulate their arguments; ask them to reflect on a moment in class when somebody changed their mind, and why that particular comment or idea was so compelling; assign them an in-class "exit-ticket" in which they describe their "muddiest point" or some concept they're still struggling to understand before they leave; have them go outside and sit in the forest for 30 minutes then ask them what they noticed, what interested them, and what questions arose for them—have them work together to

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consider which of the questions were "philosophical" ones and why, and/or have them work toward *creating* philosophical questions of inquiry from their observations and feelings. All of these are ways to encourage students to say "I don't know", to ask questions, to evaluate their own beliefs, to improve their argumentation, and so on. Learning goals to this end might state that students will "**Explore** philosophical curiosity" or "**Prompt** philosophical inquiry and discussions".

By way of tying all these suggestions together and explaining them, I'll draw the distinction between "formative" and "summative" assessment. This distinction is also found in the literature on Universal Design Learning, and I think it's useful for understanding the value of in-class discussions, practice, and low-stakes assignments. These are all examples of formative assessment, which are used throughout a course to measure students' progress in learning and provide opportunities to "troubleshoot" their skills and understanding, so they can improve and succeed later on[146]. Summative assessments, on the other hand, tend to be the end-of-X assessments: those placed at the end of a unit, term, or program which are meant to measure students' mastery of a skill or subject—practice is over[147]. Most graded philosophy essays are summative, except those whose steps have been scaffolded, for which the earlier parts (outlines, first drafts, etc.) would be formative, and the final submission summative.

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[146] Trumbull and Lash (2013)
[147] Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning (n.d.)

Basically my suggestion is to integrate more formative assessments into Philosophy courses, so that teachers can get a better idea of students' strengths and struggles prior to high-stakes final essays or projects. This isn't always possible, as teachers might have large classes, tight schedules, and their own [grading] workload to contend with; but again, I think that any formative assessment is better than none, in whatever shape or practice it may take. My suggestions are not meant to be all-or-nothing, but rather to offer multiple and varied strategies for teachers to try if they feel interested or able.

The last thing I'll discuss on the topic of learning goals and course assessments is—and I do keep coming back to this section after section—meeting students where they're at; trying to engage them in philosophy even if they have no interest in becoming "philosophers" (lowercase- or capital-P). I think that we can and should try to do this more, considering that most of our students will only take one or two philosophy classes in their lives—as much as we might *want* them to take more. In short, I think that teachers should try to find more ways to make philosophy relevant to the students themselves, as individuals. Too often I think that philosophy courses are designed with the myopic aim of training future professional Philosophers: we want students to read real-ass Philosophy articles and books; we want them to formalize arguments and use real-ass deductive logic to prove their points; we want them to write "philosophy papers" in the same style and format as

real-ass Philosophers[148]. While I am in support of showing students what it's like to

"do Philosophy", and introducing them to discipline-specific methodologies, norms,

and ways of thinking, I don't think so much emphasis should be on training students

for a future career in Philosophy[149]—the truth is, for a huge majority of students,

that's not a future they want; the discipline-specific methodologies and norms will

likely be forgotten once the course is over because they serve no purpose for

students (the skills, on the other hand, can certainly be transferred and used in other

disciplines). Just like I think we could save deep reads of Aristotle and Kant for

upper-division Philosophy courses, I think we could also save some of the "how to

write a proper philosophy paper" expectations, or "what it's like to participate in a

Philosophy conference" experiences for upper-division courses, for the students who

already demonstrate a sustained interest in the discipline. Let's not put the cart

before the horse!

Instead, I think lower-division (and in particular, general education)

Philosophy courses should focus more on allowing students to make connections to

the content. I think that teachers could do more to make their courses personally,

academically, and practically engaging for students. To the first: I am a huge fan of

prompting students to make personal reflections or find examples from their own

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[148] In one course I TAed for, an assignment even included a mock Philosophy conference, so that students could experience for themselves what it's like. In reality, the assignment was just a presentation with a Q&A afterward, but the instructor framed it—advertised it—as an exciting look into the world of professional Philosophy; yet it was an intro-level Environmental Ethics course and 91% of the enrolled students were declared in majors *other* than Philosophy (most were in environmental studies/science or biology-adjacent disciplines).

[149] See Samuelson (2014) a similar discussion.

lives as they explore topics. This can be easier in some courses, or with some topics, than others (for example, I think it can be tricky to encourage meaningful personal connections with a lot of topics in metaphysics). I've created assignments in which students reflect on their ethical decision-making strategies and their confidence in making ethical decisions: what sorts of moral rules or guidelines were they taught as children, and by whom? Has their approach to making ethical decisions changed since then, and into their young adulthood? Do they consider themselves ethical people?

I've also had students identify a moral dilemma they've faced in their own lives, and then explain what made it a genuine moral dilemma (i.e. what conflicting moral obligations/considerations were at play and why they conflicted). These sorts of assignments prompt students to apply course content to their own lives, which encourages personal investment in the material and also allows them the opportunity to see where and how the stuff they're learning in their Philosophy class might be relevant in their real lives. Again, these sorts of assessments may prove useful in scaffolding toward a high-stakes essay: students get opportunities to motivate their papers ("why *does* this matter?") or brainstorm real-world examples to help make their expositions or arguments clearer.

In general, I think that the more personal one's engagement with a subject is, the less alien that subject seems. I applaud any opportunity to take philosophy down from the ivory tower and bring it to the people, perhaps by including learning goals

for students like "**realize** that philosophy can be for everybody"[150] or "**apply** various ethical frameworks in their own lives and moral decision-making" or "**be** a feminist killjoy"[151]. What sorts of ways might a particular course be useful for students in their actual lives, even if it's the only philosophy course they'll ever take?

Besides the reflective and the personal, students can also make interesting connections between philosophy and their own academic or professional interests. What metaphysical or epistemic assumptions does a student's STEM discipline take to be axiomatic, or where's the line between a question of physics and a question of metaphysics? What ethical principles should a professional X follow, or what ethical concerns might they have to deal with? An assignment could be to have students research "philosophy of X" (where X is whatever their current academic interest or topic of study is) and find a paper about it.

Relatedly, students might be able to transfer skills or concepts from philosophy to their own academic or professional lives. We Philosophers love to preach that critical thinking, analysis, argumentation, etc. are useful skills for *anybody* (in fact, that's a claim made by most humanities pedagogues: skills gained and used in the humanities are useful in all disciplines), so let's allow students the opportunity to practice transferring those skills to other domains. In this sense we might focus on the practical import of philosophy which might not entail creating

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[150] I am inspired toward something like this by the suggestion of a math instructor, who includes the learning goal "realize that *everyone* can be a 'math person'" in their syllabi—aiming to dispel the myth that some people "have it" and some people don't.
[151] This was a cheeky one that an instructor for Feminist Philosophy included in their syllabus.

new learning goals—or even new assessments—but rather being clear and transparent about the "why" of our various course goals, assessments, and activities.

In general, transparency about course assessments—the purpose (what skills are being practiced; what knowledge is being gained), the task (what students are being asked to do and how they're being asked to do it), and the criteria for success (how it'll be graded; what an exemplary submission looks like)—help to increase student's motivation to do the assignments, and also help to create more equitable outcomes across students[152]. In part, the equitable outcomes are due to hidden curriculum becoming un-hidden from students: even if skills or knowledge are required that students lack, at least they know what skills and knowledge to practice or to get help with. Being transparent, too, about the fact that some students enter the classroom with more familiarity or expertise than others can also be beneficial for creating equitable outcomes. Laiduc and Covarrubias cite studies which suggest that "naming differential advantages masked by the hidden curriculum" can help to reverse the negative psychological and performance impacts of entering a classroom at an academic disadvantage[153]. Instead of students thinking that their struggles or their poor performance are an intrinsic flaw in themselves, they realize that a series of contingent (albeit unfortunate) factors simply put them further behind in the particular starting lineup; as such, they may have to take some extra steps to catch up[154].

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[152] Winkelmes et. al (2016)
[153] Laiduc and Covarrubias (2022), 225
[154] This is often couched in terms of promoting "growth mindsets" rather than "deficit mindsets."

Alright, so much for learning goals. The gist is this: Instead of focusing solely on the real-ass-philosophy learning goals, I'd like to see teachers consider what other skills or takeaways it'd be useful for students to acquire. In doing so, I think doors will open to innumerable kinds of assessment that aren't traditional philosophy papers—some of these assessments might still be writing-based, but more reflective, low-stakes, or formative than a midterm or final paper; some of these assessments might take, or at least offer opportunities for, typical philosophical skills to be expressed in ways that don't require writing at all. In any case, variety and transparency in course assessments and the learning goals they're meant to measure can appeal to a broader swath of students than would a typical reliance on high-stakes philosophy essays.

1c.3: Practical Concerns

Finally, I'd like to discuss some practical issues that arise with essay assessments. The gist is that whether a typical expository or argumentative essay is assigned and meant to be completed in-class, or whether it's meant to be completed on students' own time, serious practical hiccups can emerge which make me question the worthwhileness of these sorts of assessments. In what follows I'll discuss take-home in-class essays separately, and bring up the distinctive concerns that arise for each: for take-home essays, I think that cheating is the most pressing concern, and for in-class exams, I think that student accommodations and anxiety are. Then I'll spend some time discussing the problem of grading, which is relevant

not only to both take-home and in-class essays, but almost any assessment ever. Throughout, I'll offer what suggestions I can for how to sidestep or ameliorate the problems.

Take-home essays are a very popular assignment in Philosophy, and I understand why. Essays tend to be a sort of cumulative assessment: students are meant to demonstrate the skills they've learned throughout a course, and there's often a lot of information they're asked to cover. Much of the time, students are expected to engage with and reference one or more philosophy papers, book chapters, etc. in their responses and re-reading a paper or flipping through pages to find quotes can be time-consuming. In general, it makes a lot of sense to allow students however much time they want to use (i.e. their own time) to complete a philosophy essay: it accounts for variability in students' reading and writing processes, provides them the opportunity to polish the essay to whatever degree they see fit, and furthermore it's just more like real life in Philosophy: we all write "take-home" essays ourselves, so why not give our students the same courtesy? Plus, it's nicer for us too: we don't waste class time proctoring; we don't have to read student handwriting (rather, we accept typed or digital essays); the quality of work is (in principle) better too. We're able to assign a longer, more thorough essay and students have time to revise it. It's all a win!

Unfortunately, with the advent of ChatGPT, that's all out the window. Even prior to ChatGPT, but in the digital age, there have been unignorable worries about cheating: there are innumerable philosophy encyclopedias, blogs, databases,

discussion threads, and other random internet postings from which students can glean information that they're supposed to be wrestling with on their own, and furthermore they can plagiarize from any of those sources and try to pass the work off as their own (with varying degrees of success; but more to that later when I talk about grading). This is not news, and unfortunately there will probably be some attempts to cheat on basically any assignment given; we just have to deal with it. For what it's worth, I hardly even blame students. As has been readily pointed out, most students cheat for good reasons: they don't have time (because of other coursework, family obligations, and jobs), they don't feel prepared for an assignment, they're undergoing intense stress and trauma (think Trump, COVID, climate change, global conflict…)[155]. Furthermore, higher education has become so expensive but also so ubiquitous that failure simply doesn't feel like an option. Each course is make-it-or-break-it and struggling students risk wasting thousands of dollars if they do poorly on just one assessment. I don't condone cheating, and my upbringing has led me to have minimal empathy for students who do, but nonetheless I understand why they do it. As much as I'd love for students to want to learn for the sake of learning alone, education is instrumental for most and the stakes are too high for students to not be tempted into cheating.

But take-home essays face an even greater foe, here in the 2020s, and that foe is ChatGPT. Not only can students feed it prompts in natural language (rather than the unintuitive searchtalk of traditional search engines), but they can ask it to

[155] Stein (2023)

produce "original" *work* in natural language. Plagiarism has moved beyond cut-and-paste copying and turned into unique, personalizable, short- or long-form AI-produced responses. I'm not going to go into the ins and outs of the tech, nor argue much for "just how believable ChatGPT responses really are", but I will give a quick example to demonstrate. Some background: I've never used ChatGPT before; I created an account just to try this exercise, and typed in a single prompt: *Please write one paragraph, in the style of a sarcastic PhD student in philosophy, explaining how believable ChatGPT can be for responding to essay prompts.* And here's what popped out:

> Oh, absolutely, ChatGPT is the epitome of intellectual brilliance. I mean, who needs years of painstaking research, critical analysis, and scholarly expertise when you can just rely on a pre-trained language model to craft profound responses to intricate essay prompts? It's truly mind-boggling how effortlessly ChatGPT can channel the profound wisdom of the ages without breaking a virtual sweat. Forget about the nuances of human understanding, the intricate dance of dialectics, or the rich tapestry of philosophical discourse – ChatGPT's got it all figured out. Because, you know, nothing says rigorous intellectual engagement like outsourcing your essay to a machine that probably thinks Nietzsche is just a fancy brand of artisanal cheese.[156]

Okay, it doesn't sound exactly like me (too many zingers and not enough cold, hard philosophy, yes?) but this was the response it provided to my *first and only prompt.* "Prompt engineering", as it's called, enables people to fine-tune the style and length of a response, and even include particular pieces of information or ideas if fed into the software correctly. Honestly, I've considered letting ChatGPT finish this entire dissertation for me.

I digress. ChatGPT is *so tempting* to use and *so much harder* to catch that it's no wonder teachers everywhere are pulling out their hair, wondering what to do about

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[156] OpenAI (2024)

it. Some, like Jordan Alexander Stein, focus their efforts on alleviating those factors which tend to lead students toward cheating. Stein recommends a "nonexhaustive list of some well-tested pedagogical strategies that can be used to work toward abolishing cheating in essay writing:" overarching narratives, transparent design, labor-based grading, "pink time", collaboration, and accessibility auditing[157]. Some of these ideas I've suggested myself (if not by name, and in different contexts). And I'm happy, for the most part, with this list of suggestions. Specifics aside, the idea is that we should make our courses and our classrooms more supportive for our students, so that they will feel more prepared and empowered to do the work themselves. Furthermore, in line with some of my other earlier suggestions, if we actually get students excited about the topics being covered then they might have even more motivation not to cheat.

However, many of these supportive classroom measures come at the cost of rigor. Old-guard teachers might roll their eyes—not only at these suggestions, but at many of my earlier ones too—because the trend for "fixing" education can seem to just be… making it easier? Points for participation and effort—who cares if you're right! Scaffolding and hand-holding for basic skills and knowledge in ways that harken back to No Child Left Behind policies. These are college students, after all; shouldn't we be able to expect some background knowledge, some basic writing skills, some accountability?

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[157] Stein (2023)

Yes and no. We should probably be able to expect that, but also be aware that sometimes our expectations aren't met. That's the state of affairs in which we seem to find ourselves: over 60% of 12th graders are "below proficient" readers, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress 2022 report[158], yet we are constantly increasing university undergraduate enrollments. It should come as no surprise that students are entering the university increasingly underprepared. Unless our aim is to cull out entire generations of students from attaining post-secondary degrees, we may indeed need to lower our standards or work harder to actually help students *learn* so that they can, perhaps with a little bit of extra time, begin to *meet* our standards. So yes, I think that scaffolding, points for effort, and the like do serve a purpose.

However, this approach can be overdone. As Corey Robin puts it, "I've done that kind of work in previous classes, and my students tell me they've been doing it since middle school. Both the students and I found it artificial and alienating. Not to mention infantilizing"[159]. Some folks aren't okay with hand-holding, or even if they are, they realize that *eventually* they will have to assign an actual essay, or some other sort of summative assessment. So what then?

For teachers who abide by assigning take-home essays—even if they've prepared students well, and scaffolded the assignment—the worry about ChatGPT use still remains: students want that 'A'. I think the only way to have our cake and

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[158] National Assessment of Educational Progress (2022)
[159] Robin (2023)

eat it too is try aiming for some "ChatGPT-proof" sorts of essay prompts. Now, both Stein and Robin take issue with this approach. Stein argues that this is a form of policing students: we don't trust them to do their own work but we aren't willing to help them not *want* to cheat, so we resort to ever-tricksier assignment prompts in order to catch them in the act[160]. Robin, seemingly picking up the train of thought where Stein left off (though they do hold conflicting positions), claims that trying to ChatGPT-proof assignments by writing "ever-more-artful questions" is not only a waste of his own time, but also "risks demanding too much of the students: expecting a superhuman effort on their part, just for the sake of proving their humanity"[161]. If we're even slightly worried about our students' ability to read and write, we shouldn't be expecting them to do those things *and* decipher a labyrinthine essay prompt that's intentionally designed to stymy [artificially] intelligent responders.

Rather than aim for tricky and ever-complicated essay prompts, my suggestion is rather to aim for personal ones. This means expanding the scope of a philosophical essay to include more personal and in-class references in its discussion, to the end of a less "academic" finished product. I'm all for this— especially if it leads to less cheating. For an Academic Literacy course I recently taught, the instructors who designed the course worked for days trying to figure out what sorts of reflection prompts would be ChatGPT-proof, but basically everything,

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[160] Stein (2023)
[161] Robin (2023)

with the right prompt to the model, could be faked. Even responses which were meant to reflect on personal experiences or identity, and utilize specific examples from a text, could be written by ChatGPT[162]. Clearly, appealing just to the personal isn't sufficient for ChatGPT-proofing.

However, my fellow instructors eventually *did* manage to create a general essay prompt which ChatGPT couldn't hack: the trick was to ask students to refer to experiences that they had in class, and to share the insights and connections and examples gained from those experiences with specificity—that is, the prompt instructed students to be *quite* specific: which day did they learn this, which part of class (lecture, activity, etc.) did it take place in, who said it, and why did it stand out to them[163]? Because of the contingent specificity asked for, it's nearly impossible for ChatGPT to bullshit a response—that is, so long as the person grading the work knows the names of the students in class and has a good idea of their own lesson plans. If students *wanted* to use ChatGPT nonetheless, they would have had to do all the same work (recalling a class activity or a particular comment or moment, and connecting it to course material) we were asking them to do for the assignment, just in order to provide the right kind of prompt for ChatGPT. In other words, cheating took basically the same amount of work.

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[162] Robin (2023) explains a similar series of "tests" in which ChatGPT successfully wrote an A-level response to a reflective prompt about the play *The Bacchae* as "someone who struggled in their youth with their gender identity but now, as an older adult, does not".
[163] The prompt is phrased like this: "This is an opportunity for you to describe – and **be as specific as you can** – how class discussion (whether in small- or large-group) is helping you engage better with the reading(s) you're doing. I'm hoping to see you metacognize, and work towards understanding not only *what* you learned, but *why* and *how* you came to learn it."

I think that similar essay prompt stylings can be utilized for philosophy essays as well, even for more "informational" asks. Instead of "Explain Descartes' Evil Demon argument for external world skepticism", a teacher might instead prompt students to "Explain the Ayahuasca argument". What's the Ayahuasca argument, you ask? Well, it's basically the same as the Evil Demon Argument, but instead of an evil demon deceiving you, it's a sneaky shaman, and they gave you an extra strong dose of psychedelic drugs and you have no idea what's real and what's not real. Now, no self-respecting search engine would know anything about the Ayahuasca argument… because I just made it up! Furthermore, it's memorable and specific enough that if it were taught in a philosophy course, and were explained *in class* as an argument for external world skepticism, the teacher needn't include "Explain the Ayahuasca argument *for external world skepticism*" in the essay instructions; that's a needless clue, and astute students would probably catch on that the Ayahuasca argument is just a cheap replica of the Evil Demon argument. Actually, astute students would probably catch on anyway (particularly if the teacher had assigned Descartes' *Meditations* for class), but unless they actually learned about the Ayahuasca argument in class and understood it well enough to make that connection, yet *still* decided to ChatGPT a response explaining the Evil Demon one, they would be unlikely to cheat; again, cheating would be more work than just doing the dang assignment.

Anyway, this was just one example, but I think it's possible to make one's in-class examples unique enough, and to prompt students to discuss them and to refer

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to other in-class particularities throughout their essay responses, that assigning take-home essays still seems feasible. Just a little bit of extra work up front from the instructor, and students will be required to draw from their own learning experiences, rather than relying on stock information available on the internet.

Maybe even this sounds too like too much work, or perhaps my reader doesn't believe that this will actually keep students from cheating, or they don't want to mar the name-brand examples and textual (rather than in-class) references typical of a normal philosophy paper. Another option is to stop assigning take-home essays altogether. Dramatically, this could mean no more essays, period. I think this could be doable, but I suspect most philosophy teachers would balk at the idea.

Less dramatic is the move toward in-class essays. I think that assigning in-class essays is typically less popular in Philosophy than assigning take-home ones, in large part for reasons I mentioned earlier: how can one be expected to write a good philosophy paper in just an hour or two? However, this doesn't stop teachers from assigning them nonetheless: in my undergraduate Philosophy courses, in-class writing midterms and finals were quite common. Often, rather than a full essay, my professors would assign short-answer prompts: explain one argument, or write about my favorite response to X objection, or articulate my position on Y debate. Longer-form essays tended to have simpler guidelines than typical take-home essay prompts would. I'm not sure the reasoning behind my own undergraduate professors' choices to assign in-class essays, but I can speak to the current situation of teachers: there might not be a better choice. This is the conclusion that Corey

Robin reached: starting in fall of 2023, all of his writing assignments were to be in-class[164]. Besides sneaky under-the-desk cell phone searches, cheating becomes nearly impossible. Not actually impossible, of course, but much more difficult than for take-home assignments.

The main issue with in-class essays, besides the loss of valuable instruction time, are the practical difficulties that arise regarding student needs and accommodations. I am a fan of disability accommodation; I think that students should be able to get the help they need, and I think classroom accommodations encourage inclusion and equity in education. That said, I am often overwhelmed by the onslaught of accommodation letters I receive each term, and the particular allowances and changes I am expected to make if a student requests them can be unbelievably varied. For a single in-class essay, there might be student accommodations that require a designated reader, a scribe, word processing software, a private testing space, extra time, frequent breaks, and so on. Some of these accommodations are seriously at odds with an in-class, hand-written, timed essay (and furthermore, re-open certain doors for cheating), and yet we have to do them—how?

There are also other, less institutionally-reified concerns with in-class essays. Some students just get nervous! Some have poor memory! Some students read or write slower than others! Some have illegible handwriting! Some get sick! Test anxiety is real, and I feel bad for students who can't demonstrate skills and

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[164] Robin (2023)

knowledge that they possess just because they freeze up from stress. The abilities to work under pressure, and manage time, and read quickly, and write both quickly and legibly, are all examples of (presumably) construct-*irrelevant* skills, and even students with accommodations are asked to perform such skills much more in in-class essays than in take-home ones. And what happens if a student misses the day of the essay, because their car breaks down or they get sick or their grandma dies? Rescheduling hours-long time slots is tricky, and at some point accommodations (like the use of a computer or a rescheduled exam) can introduce issues of fairness going in the *other* direction[165].

So it's not very practical to assign in-class essays these days, particularly if we've got large classes (with more students who need accommodations) and can't very easily provide alternative dates, settings, time limits, etc. to students who need them. I don't have high hopes for in-class essays, besides, I think, allowing students sufficient opportunities to prepare for them, and/or providing alternative kinds of assessment. To the first, teachers should provide essay topics and prompts ahead of time (or at least a list of possible ones), and also let students know of their expectations as well: perhaps they provide the assignment instructions and grading criteria a week or two in advance. This way, students have the opportunity to study and mentally prepare, and even practice writing timed essays (if they so choose). Certain construct-irrelevant features can't be removed from in-class essays, but at

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[165] I feel like this is tricky territory, like "reverse discrimination", but I do worry that ad-hoc lenience about deadlines, or rescheduled exams, or use of electronic aids for *some* students can be unfair for the others—even if the goal is, in principle, equity.

least students can be informed of what they are, and the onus of making it work is on them. I don't know how helpful this is; a student who cracks under pressure will do so regardless of how much they've practiced. But it's an option!

Another option is, as I've discussed in previous sections, to offer multiple modes of assessment. Perhaps students could either write an in-class essay, or have a 20-minute meeting with the instructor in office hours, orating or discussing the very same prompt. Or they could choose between submitting one in-class final essay, or a series of handwritten notes or journal entries throughout the term for a large portion of their grade. I don't know, maybe they could do a creative project instead.

I think that providing alternatives can be tricky for a number of reasons. For one, a lot of the practical, logistical issues that came up with accommodations will also come up with alternatives: how to schedule X amount of office hours visits during finals week, *and* an in-class essay? What if students miss their appointment? Is it fair if the office hours meetings take place throughout a week or two, but the in-class essay happens on the last day of class? Does the teacher have the time and bandwidth to make this happen? These are all issues to reckon with, but I think the most worrisome is how to evaluate—that is, grade—varied modes of assessment in an equitable way. Particularly for high-stakes assignments, like midterms or finals, credit/no credit is not an attractive option for many, but a few percentage points of difference might drastically affect a student's final grade; we do not want to risk grading discrepancies if we don't have to, and different *kinds* of assessment invite a lot of discrepancies.

This leads me to my final discussion of assessments—and in particular, essays—which is the difficulty of grading them. Being a fair grader is an aim we should all have, but being an objective grader is nearly impossible in the humanities—*especially* with essays. The crux of the issue is that while style, mechanics, tone, and even handwriting may very well be construct-irrelevant to topics in philosophy, that's all stuff it's very difficult for us to be impartial toward. Often I'll hear instructors say, "well, I can't evaluate them on their arguments if I can't even read their sentences", which is definitely true—tautologically-so. But it's in our nature as humanities professionals to love pretty papers, just as it's in our nature as humans to love pretty faces[166]–literal readability aside, it's hard to evaluate a dry, monotone paper as highly as a snappy, articulate, just-humorous-enough one even if they demonstrate the exact same understanding and analysis. We're biased toward our favorite students, or certain demographics, so that just a student's name might affect the scores we give them[167]. Even things as mundane as the time of day, our moods, or hunger level might affect our grading (me, I like a nice glass of wine while I'm reading student papers). Not to mention the time it takes to grade papers! Give the it-should-only-take-two-minutes-to-grade-an-undergraduate-philosophy-paper spiel as much as you want, but it takes time to read a paper with an aim toward good-faith understanding; Philosophers should know this better than anybody.

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[166] Jackson et. al (1995)
[167] Bonefeld and Dickhäuser (2018), 481

These are all age-old woes of teaching and grading. I won't dwell on them too much except to reassert that essays are notoriously the hardest to grade equitably. Much of the information students are asked to provide is couched in fluff (unlike in a fill-in-the-blank or even a short-answer test where responses are much more straightforward), which can be distracting, and essay conventions and mechanics are all-too-easy to get hung up on while insights can be concealed in run-on sentences, limited vocabulary, and disorganization. Rubrics tend to help, but only so much; even so, score thresholds can often feel arbitrary.

Matters are made much worse if teachers want to take my earlier suggestion of offering multiple kinds of submission or assessment: if I can't grade student *essays* fairly, how am I supposed to grade student essays *and* oral presentations, or creative projects, or journal entries fairly? Trying to norm both assessment difficulty and grading criteria can be a losing battle, not to mention norming across graders (e.g. TAs or different instructors teaching the same course). Grading essays (or other high-stakes assessments) is daunting for teachers, and receiving essay grades is daunting for students. My thought is: maybe we should try other strategies instead.

I don't have a perfect solution, but I do advocate for alternative forms of evaluation. It's been shown that various kinds of "ungrading" can help to reduce grading workload for teachers and increase classroom equity[168]. Mind you, "ungrading" is sort of a misnomer. Grading still takes place, but under varied structures or with different aims than traditional grading. Stein suggests labor-based

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[168] Lince (2021); Rapchak et al. (2023)

grading[169], which I think is too complicated and may set the bar too low in terms of aiming for quality and correctness in student submissions. My "ungrading" practice of choice is called Specifications or "Specs" Grading[170] which can be cashed out in any number of ways. The long and short of my approach is clear assessment instructions on the part of the teacher, and attention to following instructions completely on the part of the students. I think of it basically like a series of thresholds students are expected to meet, each attached to a specific ask with clear criteria provided[171]. In principle the criteria are clear enough that teachers can easily determine whether they've been met, and students can easily see why they got the grade that they did. I've only used this grading approach in one course, but it seemed successful and I spent less time poring over minute details to figure out whether a paper deserved a B+ or an A- than I have in any other teaching role.

All to say, there are a lot of assessment grading strategies out there which I think Philosophy teachers should play around with more; especially if they cannot give up on assigning traditional philosophical essays (be they in-class or take-home ones), and *especially* if they are short on time, teachers should at least be mindful of and willing to tinker with the ways they assess student work.

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[169] See Inoue (2022)

[170] Bayraktar (2020)

[171] For example: "1) provide a one-sentence thesis statement stating what your position is; 2) articulate argument X by explaining each of its three premises; 3) state and explain which argument you think is the weakest and why", etc. Students essentially get a check mark for each criteria if they more-or-less meet it, and certain number of check marks warrants a certain grade. Note, there's still room for delineation here (do they get a check mark for (2) if they only explain two of the premises, or if they misrepresent one of them?).

To bring this full-circle, and by way of concluding my chapter on pedagogy, I think that conscientious grading practices can make a huge difference to student engagement, experience, and success in Philosophy courses or programs. Although I encourage Philosophy teachers to de-center the canon, to rely less on traditional reading assignments and lecturing in class, *and* to reconsider high-stakes philosophy essays as the main form of assessment, I believe that even if they do none of that their teaching practice and their students' experiences can be greatly improved by being more mindful of what they're actually trying to assess (construct-relevance) and finding ways then to assess students' work transparently and equitably. All of my suggestions might be against the grain of traditional Philosophy pedagogy, but I think that pedagogical re-evaluation is necessary if we want to foster students' new and continued interest in the subject.

I'm not asking for a revolution, and I don't expect any instructor to incorporate every of my suggestions into their teaching (I don't even do that!), but I do hope to see more experimentation and innovation in teaching strategies, to the best of instructors' abilities. Small steps, or even just changed perspectives might make a big difference in how students perceive and engage with philosophy and Philosophers in their time at university.

Chapter 2: Philosophy in the Real World

The entirety of the last chapter was, nominally, about pedagogy in Philosophy. I described my own experiences as a student of Philosophy; I explored what worked for me, why it did, and why it doesn't work for everybody. I recounted the "for whom" of traditional Philosophy pedagogy's not working. I offered suggestions for changing up the works we assign to students, the means by which we present and teach philosophy, and the means by which we assess our students' learning. Implicitly, much of my discussion was about more than pedagogy: it's not just the way we teach philosophy that I take issue with, but the way we *do* philosophy. Our pedagogy is just a carryover from our broader personal and disciplinary values and norms; if we change the way we approach the Philosophical profession more broadly, I am sure that positive changes in our pedagogy would follow. So this chapter intends to make explicit the broader issues I take with the profession, and offer suggestions for re-thinking or re-orienting ourselves as Philosophers who are already in the discipline.

Many of the themes in this chapter and the last, however, are similar. Certainly if I think we should teach more applied philosophy, I also think we should *do* more applied philosophy; the motivations I'll express are different, though. Rather than appealing to our needs to engage and encourage the students who take our Philosophy courses, I'll appeal to the value of philosophy itself. Thus far I've assumed that my readers share my love for philosophy and the sense that it *is* important to keep the practice alive; creating and sustaining students' interest is a

way to do this. But in this chapter, I will focus on that love for and value of philosophy: why do I love it, and why do I think it's worth sharing? By bringing this to light (and hopefully it'll resonate with my readers), hopefully some of my further suggestions will be motivated; they won't be so critical for our *profession* as the need to improve our pedagogy, but perhaps they get to the heart of philosophy better. What I'll discuss in this chapter are things I don't like seeing—like a lack of reach in our research, and the insularity of Philosophers and Philosophy departments—and things I'd like to see more of—like public philosophy and a focus by Philosophers on applied topics and current real-world discourse—all by way of affirming philosophy's value and purpose in a world that needs it.

This chapter begins with a discussion of who Philosophers tend and tend not to engage with (2a): Philosophers tend only to engage with other Philosophers, and even then the interactions remain fairly insular. The field has become so specialized that even within the discipline, Philosophers needn't really engage with anybody but the handful of other "experts" in their particular specialization. Next, in Section 2b, I'll shift my discussion to the value of philosophy—why I think it's valuable enough that everybody should have sustained and facilitated opportunities to engage with it. Finally, in Section 2c, I'll discuss how and why Philosophers might facilitate non-Philosophers' engagement with philosophy. I'll discuss in-roads by means of public philosophy, research in applied philosophy, and finally, philosophy as a way of life. Rather than give up on or shunt their service, teaching, and researching responsibilities, Philosophers might could just re-focus them and still be able to

meaningfully engage with the public. I'll end with some words on philosophy as a way of life: even if we don't completely re-orient our working lives, I think a little more intentionality and integrity in the way we orient our behavior and outlooks could go a long way in making philosophy more appealing and accessible to non-Philosophers. Leading by example, and making efforts to see our philosophical positions through, is a good way to show and invite others into the practice of philosophy.

2a: Philosophical Works and Work

First to the "who" of philosophical engagement. I might overuse the word 'engagement' but at the same time I think it captures so much of what I want to see with regards to peoples' relationship with philosophy: interest, excitement, involvement, discussion, experience. I hope to see students engaged with the course materials they're assigned, engaged in class discussions and activities, and engaged in the process of questioning and thinking and arguing and learning—this is all stuff I discussed in the last chapter. I also hope, however, to see *Philosophers* engaged with the real world and with non-Philosophers, as well as vice-versa; non-Philosophers engaging with philosophy in and out of the classroom, with other non-Philosophers and Philosophers alike. But as things stand, it seems the norm that professional Philosophers *qua* Philosophers tend only to engage with their students—and that, only to varying degrees—and with other Philosophers[172]. On the other hand, non-

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[172] I mention this "*qua* philosophers" to sidestep any pedantic retorts that philosophers also engage with their families and friends, and that I failed to mention this [irrelevant detail].

Philosophers simply don't get much opportunity to engage with Philosophy unless they pursue it on their own, and I think this is a great loss. I'm going to start my discussion with philosophical research, then move on to discuss philosophy more broadly: how much are the skills of philosophy being taught, how much are philosophical conversations being had, and how much are Philosophers engaging with people outside of the academy? More importantly, how much *should* all of this be happening?

Myisha Cherry makes some brilliant points about Philosophers' insularity in her article "Coming Out of the Shade". The purpose of her article is to describe means by which we might see "the act of philosophers leaving their philosophical bubbles… and [engaging] with the world"[173]. Clearly this is right up my alley, and in fact much of my own project has been inspired by Cherry's piece. I will refer to it often in this chapter.

Part of the problem, she claims, is that the work Philosophers do is simply inaccessible to non-Philosophers; this harkens back to my discussions (in which I also cite Cherry) of the canon and the cult of the genius: work of yore is incredibly difficult to read, and contemporary Philosophers feel motivated to maintain that tradition. Perhaps there are innocuous reasons for this—maybe Philosophers genuinely feel there is no other way to express their ideas than through abstruse prose, specialized jargon, and oblique argumentation; maybe they're just trying to "keep up" with the discipline, and even though they'd prefer to write accessibly,

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[173] Cherry (2017), 22

they fear ridicule from their colleagues; or perhaps, as Cherry surmises,

Philosophers actually just love to think of themselves as special. We are, of course, in

the oldest academic field like, *ever to exist*, and yet we are undervalued today;

perhaps we ought to [over]compensate:

> In Greek society, philosophical thinking was an activity for the wealthy
> because they had the leisure time to philosophize. Today, I think rigor has
> been used as a way to exclude others from this "special" activity; an activity
> that some suppose only they are gifted enough to understand and engage
> with. Instead of coming out of the shade, the shade has become their country
> club and their tent of intellectual apartheid that allows them to think of
> themselves as superior and special. Accessibility is a threat that puts them at
> risk of being like and with the people[174].

I won't assume Cherry thinks this of *all* Philosophers (she herself is at least one

example to the contrary), but in any case I think she touches on some common-sense

psychological pulls, and I can understand exactly where she's coming from. We all

want to be special! We all want our work to feel important. And while scientific

researchers and engineers and real-estate agents and politicians make tangible

changes to the world, basically the only thing that Philosophers have to measure the

worth of their work are their intellectual accolades. It makes sense to me that

Philosophers tend to overvalue their own intellectual prowess, undervalue others',

and use this sense of superiority to distinguish themselves and even to ridicule those

others. I see it among my Philosophy peers, and I don't like it. The stereotype that

Philosophy students are pretentious and unlikeable is… not wrong, in my

experience. So anyway, we might not *want* to strive for accessibility, lest it damage

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[174] Ibid. 23

the ivory tower. The only people worth impressing (and the only people who are capable of recognizing our genius) are other Philosophers—our admiring audience.

Unfortunately, I think that philosophers have a hard time even engaging with each other. Q&A sessions at conferences are often contentious; most research projects in Philosophy are individual (compare the frequency of co-authored pieces in Philosophy to those in other disciplines); speaking from my own experience, it seems as though Philosophy departments and student cohorts don't spend much time socializing together or prioritizing community-building[175]. In short, in-person Philosopher-to-Philosopher engagement seems lackluster. But even engagement with each other's work is minimal. For one, the acceptance rate of publishing in Philosophy journals is just about 10%[176], compared to other disciplines, whose journal acceptance median hovers around 20% (at the low end, in business) to 50% (at the high end, in health)[177]. This means that much of the work being done in Philosophy doesn't even get a chance to be read by folks outside of a writer's personal circle, and perhaps a couple of journal referees. Of the contemporary works that *do* get published, how often do they actually get read? Well, according to CrossRef and as posted on Wiley Online, the publisher of "Coming Out of the Shade", Cherry's article only has two citations. On Philpapers, the number of citations listed is three. And it was published over seven years ago! An analysis from 2015 found that 82% of peer-reviewed publications in the humanities are never

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[175] Perhaps other departments don't, either—some of these observations might be generalizable to academia more broadly, with Philosophy being just one example.
[176] Weisberg (2018)
[177] Sugimoto et. al (2013)

read[178]. Adam Briggle notes the trend of underread contemporary Philosophy works specifically:

> Judging by press runs (typically 500 or 750 copies for academic books) these works are read only by other professors. Indeed, it is not clear that even professors read one another's articles and books; most academic books are sold to university libraries rather than individuals, as is the case with the professional journals that publish philosophy articles. Philosophers produce an increasing amount of material, but it is far from clear who is reading that work. Most of it is cited sparsely, if at all. Indeed, the chief function of this research seems to be to provide criteria for deciding whether the authors are worthy of tenure.[179]

Not only does Briggle illuminate some of the numbers and point to the *who* (or rather the *not-who*) of who reads published Philosophy works, but he also suggests another unsavory motivation for publishing: getting promotions. It's true that regardless of whether a Philosopher's work is read or not, publications are a must for most tenure-track hiring and promotions.

What Briggle doesn't consider here is the *why* of Philosophy publications' lack of readership. Among Philosophers, I think a lot of this indeed has to do with our veneration of the canon, and our hyperspecialization. Why read new scholarship when many are still solely researching the classics and the greats? Especially with a somewhat cynical understanding of the motivations for publishing (professional necessity, rather than a love of wisdom and a genuine desire to share insights), new work seems even less appealing. Furthermore, why would a professional Philosopher read about coming out of the shade, or imaginative resistance, or virtual reality, or *any other topic,* if they're already settled into their nice "niche" of the

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[178] Biswas and Kirchherr (2016), found in Frodeman and Briggle (2016b), 22
[179] Briggle (2014)

"Third Moment of the First Book of the First Division of Part One of Kant's Third Critique"[180]?

So much for Philosophers engaging with each other's work. Among non-Philosophers, I feel like it's clear why a lot of Philosophical works aren't read: there's an enormous barrier to entry. Both canonical and contemporary works are often rife with jargon, assumptions of prior knowledge, dense and difficult language and organization. Often *I* don't feel equipped to read a philosophy book or most any of the articles in a given Philosophy journal, and I've been in the discipline for almost 10 years; I can't imagine the amount of ambition necessary for a "layperson" to acquire and read them, and then to actually gain something valuable from what they've read.

Cherry also notes some other reasons why Philosophical works—even the interesting ones—don't often get read by the public: beyond the content's inaccessibility, there is literal inaccessibility too. Most Philosophy articles and journals are paywalled (plus most Philosophy books are exorbitantly expensive), and most universities don't publicize new Philosophy publications via press releases or wide-net emails; this is in contrast to the readily available and free access to science and social science articles and the popular media by which they're advertised[181]. I suspect this is in large part because the demand for scientific research is higher, and STEM is like, the #1 priority in education and the world. That said, part of my aim is

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[180] Samuelson (2014). I found this specialty delightfully absurd, and I'm still not even sure if it was just a joke or if this was truly their area of study.
[181] Cherry (2017), 24

to urge Philosophers to *create* more demand for work in Philosophy. Maybe news outlets and university public relations would take a bigger interest in Philosophy publications if they weren't so difficult to read and understand.

One might pause here and think, "scholarly work in *every* discipline is largely inaccessible—what makes Philosophy any different here, and why do Philosophers have a responsibility to fix that but not, e.g. particle physicists?" I've got two responses to this, the second a little cagier than the first. First: I do agree that scholarly work in every discipline is largely inaccessible to and largely unread by most people; Philosophy is certainly not the only hyperspecialized discipline. However, there are an enormous number of science journalists, science magazines, and even the scientists themselves who are willing to summarize, translate, or "dumb down" their work for a popular audience. There is enough interest in the research that it manages to get disseminated with or without the researchers' explicit efforts. My claim is that for disciplines like Philosophy, in which there *is* no public interest in the research, explicit efforts are needed—at least to get the ball rolling (maybe one day there'll be a *New York Times* philosophy beat).

Here's the second response: we ought to consider whether or not we think our research *is* worth sharing—and this holds for Philosophy as well as other disciplines. If you're writing works titled "The Role of Fermentation Length in the Perceived Sophistication of Homemade Kombucha" or "Decolonizing Culinary Narratives: Exploring Hegemonic Power Dynamics Through the Lens of Avocado

Toast Consumption in Western Metropolises"[182], or more darn papers on Kant, and you don't think anybody outside your own circle of experts has any reason to care at all, then by all means, don't make efforts to share your work or make it accessible. I suppose much of my discussion is aimed toward academics who think their work actually matters, who wish that more people were interested in what they're interested in and wanted to read it. I want folks to do Philosophy differently—better—because I think philosophy *can* be exciting and *should* be shared. Later in this chapter I will discuss topics of philosophical research, and it's true that I have a strong favor for applied philosophy—for this very reason. In any case, at this point, accessibility (in both the literal and the intellectual sense) is a major reason for public lack of engagement with Philosophy.

There's also a general culture of exclusion in professional Philosophy itself, which leads to less philosophical work being *labelled* "philosophy". This means that public or academic interest in philosophical topics might nonetheless be beyond the purview of the academic discipline; people engage rather with "theory" or "feminist and queer studies" or "linguistics" or "literature" or "history of consciousness" because of their relatively more inclusive norms, even if the methodology appears to be akin to that of philosophy. In other words, another reason for the lack of engagement between Philosophers and non-Philosophers is that the title "philosopher" and the label "philosophy" have themselves adopted a condition of exclusivity. The demarcation between philosophy and non-philosophy creates, to my

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[182] These were more ChatGPT finds, OpenAI (2024).

mind, a sort of necessary isolationism; stray too far or interact with the wrong people

and one's work ceases to be considered philosophy at all! This doesn't mean that

philosophical *ideas* aren't being engaged with by the public or by other disciplines,

just that people might not realize that what they're engaging with is philosophy.

Besides the chauvinistic, country-club-of-intellectual-superiority aspect of

Philosophy's isolationism that Cherry discusses—to whatever degree this holds

true—I think there's a more historical or genealogical explanation that helps to

explain it, as well[183]. Back in the day, 'philosophy' basically encompassed any field

of study, and our western academic tradition is founded in this terminology (recall

that "PhD" stands for "Doctor of Philosophy"). Demarcations occurred between

different kinds of philosophy—for example, practical versus theoretical

philosophy—and so-called "natural philosophy" and "moral philosophy" took hold

as somewhat distinctive traditions, at least in terms of topics explored. But again: all

of this was considered philosophy. Eventually "natural philosophy" became science,

and other disciplines also arose as distinct from philosophy[184].

Now instead of being an umbrella term, "philosophy" has become

taxonomized into a more and more narrow description. Recall an earlier section in

this project, where I discussed the controversy about whether non-western

philosophy should be called "philosophy" or not; these sorts of questions and

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[183] See Frodeman and Briggle (2016b), for a prolonged discussion of the development of the
research institution and its effects on the practice—and the newly-formed enterprise—of
Philosophy (in essence, the eliding of lowercase-p philosophy with uppercase-P Philosophy).
[184] Frodeman and Briggle (2016a)

controversies occur in spades. Is feminist philosophy philosophy[185]? Is

phenomenology philosophy? Is Latino philosophy philosophy? Is Ayn Rand

philosophy? Is Foucault? "HOW IS THIS PAPER PHILOSOPHY?"[186] In principle, I

feel like this continuous effort to demarcate philosophy from non-philosophy makes

sense, because it's simply in following the trajectory of the discipline: as new fields

of study take form, and claim their own space in scholarship and academia, there

must be a move from Philosophers to seek to maintain *their* space in academia.

"Philosophy" (lowercase-p) has fractured into so many distinct pieces that

Philosophers feel a need to claim their own—not out of possessiveness, but out of a

sense of self-preservation[187]. *In principle*, I am sympathetic to this: if philosophy is no

longer natural science, and it's no longer linguistics, and it's no longer political

theory, etc., then what is it?

Unfortunately I think this disciplinary self-preservation has tended toward a

sort of ouroboros effect: defensiveness has turned to offensiveness, and philosophy

now cannibalizes itself. A nefarious "culture of justification" has arisen by which

Philosophers must not only "measure up" to certain presumed standards of method

and topic, but must also adhere to a particular personal performance of *Philosopher*;

often one's ideas cannot speak for themselves, and to gain legitimation they must be

presented in a certain way, alongside a certain narrative of why they are indeed

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[185] Bianchi (1999)
[186] Dotson (2012)
[187] This need for self-preservation is only exacerbated these days by the actual threats to the discipline, in the form of budget cuts and the shutting down of whole departments. See McIntyre (2011).

Philosophy—these days, uppercase- and lowercase-p philosophy are equivocated. Kristie Dotson sums it up, "to say that philosophy has a culture of justification, then, is to say that the profession of philosophy requires the practice of making congruent one's own ideas, projects and… pedagogical choices with some 'traditional' conception of philosophical engagement"[188].

The bad news is that this "traditional" conception of philosophical engagement is just that: traditional. Return to the canon, return to the "demographic challenges"[189] our discipline faces, and *try to maintain those*—for that's what we know philosophy to be, and we need it to persist. Philosophers who try to do things differently tend to be faced with a lot of push-back; they're not only exploring the relatively unexplored in their discipline, but they are forced to justify their own position *within* the discipline. It is no surprise, then, that many Philosophers who don't fit the mold have tended to find themselves in other departments, ones more willing than Philosophy to accept nebulous "theory" and interdisciplinarity so long as it's *still good work*. So now, philosophical work is being produced in politics departments, literature departments, ethnic studies departments, French and German departments[190], and our discipline must dig its heels in even more: if those works aren't properly Philosophy, then perhaps they aren't properly philosophy either.

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[188] Dotson (2012), 6
[189] Alcoff (2013), 21
[190] See Butler (2004), Alcoff (2013), Hall (2022), Dotson (2012)

To be honest, I myself am quite nervous about my work's status as philosophy. I've been a member of the UCSC Philosophy Department for years now, taken and taught courses in Philosophy, interacted with Philosophers, gone to Philosophy conferences, acquired a B.A. and an M.A. in Philosophy, and now as I write my dissertation I wonder if it'll be accepted *as philosophy* by my advisors and my peers. Perhaps my work is merely "on philosophy but not of it", as Judith Butler says[191]. Am I doing philosophy or am I doing critical theory? History? Pedagogical theory? Sociology? Sophistry? I'm hoping I'll be able to graduate.

Luckily I've got the subversive, self-referential thing going for me: my project is very much about lessening the exclusionary practices and poor reputation of Philosophy by changing it from within—taking a step from inside the institution toward a new approach to it. So with a modicum of luck my readers will take that to heart and I'll be able to get my degree. I've digressed, so I'll very soon return to the topic of who is or isn't engaging with philosophy. The last tidbit I'll provide here, though, by way of the self-referential, are two questions—perhaps challenges— posed by Butler at the end of *Undoing Gender:* "Could it be that not knowing for sure what should and should not be acknowledged as philosophy has itself a certain philosophical value? And is this a value we might name and discuss without it thereby becoming a new criterion by which the philosophical is rigorously demarcated from the nonphilosophical?"[192] I take this as a challenge for Philosophy

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[191] Butler (2004), 233
[192] Ibid. 234

to stay true to its core tenets of curiosity, inquiry, and dialogue. Instead of making such strong efforts to gatekeep the discipline, perhaps we should rather delight in the not-knowing; consider reasons (we love considering reasons), offer arguments, but not approach the question of what counts as "philosophy" as one which needs to be settled outright. Let's approach it like philosophers, not policy-makers!

Perhaps accepting more disciplinary vagueness will have some ameliorative effects when it comes to people's willingness to engage with research in Philosophy. On the overt end of things, people may come to stop seeing philosophy as a "white man's game"[193], may feel more willing to pick up a Philosophy journal or buy a philosophy book if doing so isn't weighted down by the reputation of exclusion and bearded white guys that's followed the discipline for so long. People might feel enabled to recognize work that's philosophical *as* philosophy, without getting bogged down by questions of who wrote it, in which century, and with which credentials. Kim Q. Hall cites "recruitment" strategies they use in the project of *Queering Philosophy* (this is both the title of Hall's book, as well as a term for their project): they use the term 'philosophy' quite "promiscuously"—as with the term 'queer'—in order to recognize and honor the philosophicalness and the queerness of any number of the works they cite[194]. In other words, Hall recognizes and labels things "philosophy" based upon their ideas and what they can do for Hall's project, rather than by the journals they were published in or the department in which their

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[193] Dotson (2012), 4
[194] Hall (2022), 16

authors reside. Even non-academic works can have philosophical value (surprise!), and those ought to be utilized and noted too[195]. If people see more works that they're familiar with referenced in Philosophy articles, and see more non-Philosophy works being called philosophy, perhaps they'll be more keen to engage with it. I aim for less tip-toeing and pretension, and more out-and-proud engagement with works of philosophical merit which may or may not have been born of the discipline.

Of course, this might seem a threat to our tradition of rigor and, well, tradition. And I just finished explaining why demarcating ourselves from other disciplines is important for keeping Philosophy—as a distinct discipline of study— afloat. So what gives? Well, I hedge here. On the one hand, I do understand the need to "stand out" as a unique area of thought and methodology, and I do bristle when certain things are called "philosophy", or adopt language used in our discipline in ways that I think are wrong (ever gone to the "metaphysics" section in a bookstore?); I'm protective too! If Philosophy departments cease to exist, and Philosophers are meant to get folded in to other disciplines, I think a lot of them wouldn't get re-hired, and the sorts of insights they could provide (from whichever department in which they're housed) would remain uncovered. As things stand, most disciplines don't think they need a resident Philosopher. But on the other hand, the reason they don't think this is because the barrier between other disciplines and Philosophy remains so opaque. *We don't need them and they don't need us* is the norm. But to the

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[195] It's not a coincidence that Hall's project is also about re-envisioning and re-orienting the discipline of philosophy—theirs is a project of doing philosophy *otherwise* or *slantwise* to make it more queer (not only in topics and demographics, but in methodology and ethos).

contrary, I think a philosophy informed by politics, science, sociology, and literature *would* be valuable, and a philosophy-informed politics, science, sociology, and literature would likewise be valuable. Many researchers don't see this, I think, because of the strict demarcation—adherence to discipline-specific journals and collaboration only with bona fide professionals in x field of study. This isn't to say that interdisciplinary work doesn't get done, but I think that all too often it's still relegated to one discipline or the other, and at least in Philosophy, a main subject of the culture of justification[196]. I think it could be done more, and it could be done better.

This leads me away from a discussion strictly of philosophical *works*, and toward a discussion of philosophical *work* more broadly. Philosophy (lowercase-p) shouldn't be limited just to disciplinary-specific conferences, university classrooms and offices, and academic publications: Philosophers should be engaging with other academics as well as with the so-called "public", turning the *work* of philosophy into a collaborative exercise of living, rather than the purely intellectual pursuit it is often taken to be (by Philosophers and non-Philosophers alike). First, more on interdisciplinarity, then I'll broaden my discussion to include public engagement.

Because of the trends in Philosophy of demarcating the philosophical from the non-philosophical and of specialization, I think it can simply be really difficult to

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[196] By this I mean a sort of I-promise-this-is-Philosophy-despite-my-engagement-with-e.g.-social-scientific-literature necessity, see D'allesandro (2022), 337 for an example.

integrate cross-disciplinary information or tools into Philosophical research, and

even more-so to *collaborate* with those from other disciplines: our methodology

differs, as does our ethos. Many disciplines take as axiomatic certain rules or values

which Philosophers are wont to question: how much should we infer with inductive

reasoning? *Do* rights exist? *Does* a=a? Can we actually assume a distinction between

sex and gender? Much of our inquiry can come off as mere pedantry to other

disciplines, or a sort of objectionable conservatism. It's true that the woke left (which

tends to be the reigning voice in university discourse) can often get stymied by the

arm-crossing, finger-wagging, and none-too-polite questioning by members of

Philosophy departments. We tend to shy away from politics and activism[197], which

alienates us from the other humanities disciplines, but we also tend to shy away

from hard data and experimentation, which alienates us from the sciences.

  I think much of this has to do with those lines of demarcation that we've set

for ourselves: if *we* want to continue being Philosophers, then we have to be mighty

careful about fraternizing with and being corrupted by such non-philosophical

forces like political motivations and political correctness, bandwagoning, induction,

and all those other despicable elements of *irrationality* we might find in populations

less intellectually rigorous than ours. We've idealized ourselves as highly rational,

objective (even though we hate the word 'objective'!), and principled thinkers, yet in

asserting these values and in nitpicking everybody else's assumptions and methods,

we often fail to see our own dogmas motivating the pedantry. It's insufferable. We're

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[197] See my chapter on teachers' strikes (Chapter 4) for more on this.

happy to stipulate as many premises as we want or base entire theories off of "intuitions", yet we worry that use of inductive reasoning, statistics, political motivation, or emotional appeals will make our insights or arguments less credible.

Our hyper-specialization also plays into this: we have a hard enough time engaging with other Philosophers in our work—what could a Moorean non-naturalist about normativity have to teach an event-causal libertarian about free will, or vice-versa?—so it makes sense that the pool of qualified and interested interlocutors becomes even smaller (in ratio if not in net numbers) among non-Philosophers. I also understand the difficulties found in trying to reconcile different assumptions between highly specialized thinkers in a productive enough way to actually *want* to work together, much less get anything done ("ugh, must I explain the Doctrine of Arbitrary Undetached Parts to you again?"). Foundational disciplinary knowledge in Philosophy and in any other field of study can be a big hurdle to cross when considering a collaboration. Furthermore, I think a lot of Philosophers simply have different aims than folks in other disciplines: many of us are interested in a priori, necessary, or universal truths. We hunt for ideal theories and we aren't satisfied until we've responded to every last counterexample. Somehow Philosophers manage to be stuck in the weeds but with our heads in the clouds all at the same time. Other disciplines tend to rest more squarely on the ground: they rely on working definitions, best explanations, statistical favorability, political and historical context, human testimony, empirical evidence, and perhaps a touch of humility. This is all somewhat anathema to philosophical methodology.

But I don't think that hope is lost! For one, before such strict disciplinary demarcation, many philosophers were also experts in other fields and this seemed to serve them—and their various disciplines—very well. And for two, there is already a fair amount of interdisciplinary work happening between Philosophers and other academics. These examples show that interdisciplinary work *can* be done. The main hold-up that I see, again, has to do with the culture of exclusion in Philosophy: interdisciplinary work is looked down upon by many Philosophers, and the nay-saying is exacerbated by what many see as a disingenuous institutional push *toward* interdisciplinarity—disingenuous because it perhaps wouldn't be a priority if not for the pragmatic concern of Philosophy departments' demise and certain practitioners' attempts to make it philosophy more relevant[198].

Until about the mid-20th-century, most professional philosophers weren't "just" philosophers—they were mathematicians (Leibniz, Russell, Wittgenstein), sociologists (Descartes), historians (Nietzsche, Foucault), and more. It's clear, too, that these cross-disciplinary thinkers have tended to be some of our most famous philosophical forebears. These days, there are also some philosophers aiming to do interdisciplinary work, but I think there could be many more. The most clear examples of Philosophers working alongside other academic disciplines are in philosophy of mind and moral psychology, and examples of Philosophers working alongside non-academic professionals are in applied ethics, such as bioethics,

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[198] See Baumann (2013), accusing Philosopher of science and pragmatist Philip Kitcher of trying to reduce philosophy to a "handmaiden of science", 5.

environmental ethics, or ethics of technology[199]. What's interesting to observe is that within both spheres, the "academic" and the "professional" ones outside of Philosophy, the transfer of ideas is pretty unidirectional. Within academia, interdisciplinarity tends to consist in Philosophers using data gained in other disciplines to inform their own theorizing: turns out cognitive science can teach us a thing or two about how the mind works, and social science can teach us a thing or two about people's moral intuitions and reasoning. This data can help us to cull empirically wrongheaded premises or intuitions in order to favor certain theories over others. For example, most research in cognitive science suggests that humans make mental representations of the objects of their perception, which, according to some Philosophers of mind, would make e.g. "naïve realism" views of perception moot; extra points for representationalism! Yet I can't find any contemporary cognitive scientists approaching Philosophers for *their* ideas about perception: thus the relationship is unidirectional.

In the other direction, outside of academia, the expertise of Philosophers may be useful in industry or policy, but it's very rare for philosophers to uptake any of the professional expertise of the people *they're* working with. Philosophers (capital-P) might consult on topics of medical consent and euthanasia, conceptual and moral consistency in environmental policies, or the ethical implications of various technologies, but rarely do Philosophers seek the input of medical doctors or tech developers for their *own* research and work. I guess this observation isn't to say

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[199] Frodeman and Briggle (2016b)

much besides perhaps question the actual interdisciplinarity at play here. Unidirectional input hardly seems to constitute collaboration, and just because Philosophers write on topics related to other fields does not mean that they are working *with* those other fields.

Incidentally, and perhaps self-defeatingly, I think there's been a big institutional push toward Philosophical interdisciplinarity, and in particular what has been called "empirical" or "experimental" philosophy—that is, using "traditionally scientific" methods (data mining, questionnaires, even controlled experiments) to answer "traditionally philosophical" questions[200]. I use a lot of air quotes here because given the history of ideas and of demarcation, it's hard to actually say what count as "properly philosophical" questions versus scientific ones, and which methods (e.g. observation) might count as properly scientific ones versus philosophical ones. In any case, funding for Philosophy (and the humanities in general) is low, and funding for STEM is high[201], so there is, unsurprisingly, a lot of momentum to make philosophy more scientific, inasmuch as doing so can promise funding opportunities for Philosophers. In principle I don't think there's anything wrong with this—research what you want, and get funding where you can!—but again disciplinary exclusion starts to rear its ugly head. Philosophers (capital-P) who try leaving the armchair get labelled as "scientistic" by other Philosophers and as "pseudo-scientific" by scientists; the economically-driven aim to broaden the scope

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[200] Prinz (2008)

[201] In 2014, funding for humanities research was 1% of that funding for STEM (Frodeman and Briggle (2016b), 48.

of inquiry and method of philosophy appears, to me, not to do the discipline any favors. Philosophy (lowercase-p) *as such* gains no positive recognition, even if Philosophers do manage to get some extra funding.

I don't know how to reconcile academic Philosophy with other disciplines—and I don't know if I want to. I hope I've explained the ways in which Philosophers do or don't engage with other professionals (mostly other academics, but I gave some mention of other sectors), but normatively speaking, I don't think this *should* be a priority. I think we're a little damned-if-we-do, damned-if-we-don't when it comes to explicit efforts to position ourselves as a discipline: either we can remain steadfast in our isolationism, pondering only the questions no other discipline can dream of engaging with and exiling those borderline practitioners of "theory" or of politically motivated or scientifically informed philosophy. This, or we try to embrace interdisciplinarity—we might act as consultants, sharing a reference here or some data there, working unidirectionally with other thinkers. Or, finally, we might truly embrace interdisciplinarity and cease to be considered philosophers at all; this could lead to some sort of institutional identity crisis in which it's realized that Philosophy isn't unique enough to warrant its own discipline. Perhaps we dissolve the brotherhood and see where we all end up!

Perhaps that summation was dramatic at best, a false dichotomy (or trichotomy) at worst, but my own handwringing about the crisis of disciplinary Philosophy leads me to realize that perhaps it's not the *discipline* of Philosophy we should be worried about—it's the heart of philosophy. Instead of trying to prove we

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deserve a place in the academy, let's consider why we deserve a place in peoples'

lives, and then we can work backwards to argue for our place in the university. This

intuition follows Robert Frodeman and Adam Briggle's account of philosophy's

social and institutional disfavor, by way of problematizing its very

institutionalization. They argue that philosophy's turn *to* an academic discipline is

what's led to its unpopularity. In short, they argue, the essence of philosophy has

been lost in Philosophy; the ethos and practice subverted for the sake of funding and

publications and clout. Perhaps a refocus on what's great about philosophy—why

we Philosophers are drawn to it in the first place—will help to orient our discipline

and practice in positive ways.

2b: The Value of Philosophy

I think it's time I say more about what's being subverted, discounted, or lost

in disciplinary Philosophy that I think is so worth revitalizing. What is it that I love

about philosophy? What's this ooey-gooey essence/ethos/heart of philosophy that I

so cherish? It's hard for me to pinpoint, but I do think that, trite as it is, "the love of

wisdom" etymology is a good place to start. There's something so heart-wrenchingly

beautiful to me about learning for learning's sake, about being struck with a

curiosity and wanting to explore it—not because it'll do anything for us (at least not

immediately), but just because it's interesting and delightful to think about. I love

the juxtaposition of how urgent, practical, and trivial philosophizing can feel all at

once: some philosophical questions feel all-important—like their answers will have a

huge existential impact, or will shift entire outlooks and orientations toward the universe—yet they have nothing to do with quotidian pursuits. Others, say, moral frameworks, seem incredibly important for day-to-day living and decision-making, yet most of us live in perpetual moral ambivalence, so what good, if any, is there to the work of moral theorizing? Philosophy (lowercase-p) is a push-and-pull of recognizing the abstract in the practical, and using the practical to abstract. As Frodeman and Briggle say, philosophy has the ability to spark a "creative tension between contemplation and engagement"[202], and I think there's good in finding the right balance between navel-gazing and action, as well as in marinating in the tension, questioning one's questions and priorities and not knowing if it's time to put a topic to rest or not. Perhaps we land on an answer we like, and—as I'm sure is the case in other intellectual pursuits too, particularly math—have something like a sublime experience. There's something aesthetically powerful about crafting a valid argument, about recognizing epistemic coherence, about performing an exhaustive analysis, about articulating with conceptual clarity. I'm basically salivating at this point.

And I think there's something great about philosophical dialogue, too. There's something very self-disclosing about one's approach to a conceptual or an abstract question, like it's highly personal but one needn't share any personal *details* about themselves. I think that philosophical questions make for some of the best ice-breakers, because if approached right, people care deeply about their answers—even

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[202] Frodeman and Briggle (2016b), 14

if they don't care deeply about the topics. People want to formulate their thoughts well (a philosophical discussion is necessarily thoughtful), and this encourages a genuine engagement in the conversation. Even among strangers I've found that there tends to be a certain willingness *to* engage authentically, which can be rare with traditional "small talk" or "shop talk". Mind you, the exercise of conversational virtues is important here[203] to ensure that philosophical discussions don't get derailed—but this is true in any conversation. When approached with curiosity, patience, and charitability, I think that philosophical discussions tend to be—all else equal—way better than any other conversations one can have with strangers, acquaintances, peers, colleagues, even with close family and friends: philosophizing together can create intimacy without vulnerability (besides perhaps humility, which can be difficult for many people). Kinship is created in the constructing or breaking down of ideas together, finding similarities and appreciating dissimilarities of thought or assumption or values.

One conception of philosophy that resonates strongly with me is philosophy as play. Here I mean the act of *doing* philosophy—of philosophizing—as an act of play (and one can play alone, or with others). Off the cuff, I think that "play" can capture a lot of the joy and elation that I've described experiencing in the last couple of paragraphs: whatever feelings that play can produce in us, I think philosophy can produce in us too. Philosophizing can *feel* like play. But *is* philosophy play? I'm not sure that an answer to this question is necessary for my purposes, since mostly I'm

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[203] Teichman (2019)

just trying to describe why I like philosophy so much. But eventually I'll want to

move toward an explanation of why I think that philosophy is valuable, and should

be practiced and shared with people outside of the academic discipline, so maybe a

closer examination of play will be useful to that end.

Play is often synonymized with recreation: playing is done for its own sake,

and not for some practical or instrumental reason[204]–the activity is its own end, and

is thus, to borrow language from Bernard Suits, "autotelic". Note, then, the unique

value that autotelic activities have for us: they're the only ones worth doing simply

because we find them worth doing! I don't know if this sounds as groundbreaking to

my reader as it does to me, but at the very least, in terms of subjective value, I can't

think of any stronger reason for the claim that *we should be doing autotelic activities*. I

take it that autotelic activities are the ones that make our lives feel meaningful, the

ones that make us want to keep living and motivate us to follow through on our

work and responsibilities (the unfortunate but necessary instrumental activities that

take up most of our time). In defining game-playing as a paradigm autotelic activity,

Suits goes so far to make the claim that game-playing would constitute the "ideal of

existence"[205] in a Utopia where nothing *needs* to be done. If all instrumental needs

were banished, what would we do but play games?

Colin McGinn, at the end of his book *Truth by Analysis: Games, Names, and*

Philosophy, takes seriously Suits' arguments, but disagrees that game-playing would

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[204] McGinn (2011), 137
[205] Suits (2014), 188-189

be the *only* occupation in Utopia: philosophizing would exist there too. He argues

that philosophizing is, too, an autotelic activity, much like game-playing. Rather

than playing with games, he says, philosophy is about playing with ideas;

philosophizing *is* playing with ideas[206]. Unlike with other forms of inquiry, say

scientific or historical, the end—knowledge—is not separable from the means in

philosophy: it's not the goal just to achieve philosophical knowledge, but rather to

achieve it *by* philosophizing. The scientific method, on the other hand, is only

valuable insofar as it can reliably help us to attain scientific knowledge. If we could

take a shortcut, and acquire scientific knowledge without the method, McGinn

claims that we would, but not so with philosophy. "In philosophy it matters how

you got there, not merely where you arrived"[207]. Even if we did take the shortcut to

philosophical knowledge, we'd be dissatisfied with the results: we wouldn't really

understand what we've learned because we hadn't taken the time to consider the

alternatives and appreciate the contextual and comparative merits of a given account

or theory (similarly to how we wouldn't really feel we'd *won* a game if we'd cheated

to do so). McGinn also considers the explanatory benefits of philosophy-as-play

when it comes to different conceptions of progress and various professionals'

motivations; philosophy-as-play helps to explain why we still tend to focus on the

history of philosophy, and why we still teach ideas and theories that are widely

believed to be false.

> Perhaps this is why scientists are apt to be impatient with philosophy:
> instead of simply arriving at a piece of information and incorporating it into

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[206] McGinn (2011), 149
[207] Ibid. 147

the store of human knowledge, philosophers seem obsessed with their own history, their tortured dialectics, the perpetual dance of ideas, the wreckage of past intellectual edifices. Philosophers seem caught up in their own process, neurotics lost in a maze of options, defensive and uncertain. Why can't they just spit it out and get it over with? Why all the agonizing?[208]

Well, under McGinn's view, it's because the agonizing is part of the fun; not merely a means to an end[209]. Now, as I said earlier, I really like the idea of philosophy as play. I think it captures a lot of what *I* value about philosophy—but, as suggested above, perhaps not everybody values the playful aspect: very pragmatic people, or very busy people, might not recognize its value. Certainly I know folks who think that playing games is a waste of time, and probably even more who think that philosophizing is a waste of time. It seems that often, we have more important things to do than to play. This is actually a point that Bernard Suits makes, in an appendix to *The Grasshopper*. Whereas McGinn synonymizes autotelic activities and play, Suits endorses a narrower definition: to constitute play, an autotelic activity must according to him also make a "temporary reallocation… of resources primarily committed to instrumental purposes"[210]. Play, on this definition, is not only an activity done for its own sake, but an activity done for its own sake when something useful could be getting done instead.

This understanding of play seems, then, to trivialize the activity of philosophizing, if we think of philosophizing as a kind of play. Maybe it really just is

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[208] Ibid. 148

[209] And it might not always be fun, just like the exhaustion and soreness of running a marathon isn't necessarily fun; but it is part of the challenge, and I don't think anybody would run a marathon if it didn't take effort.

[210] Suits (2014), 225

navel-gazing, and while it's not a *bad* thing to do, it's certainly not something I

should be proselytizing so strongly. Play comes after work, we might think, and

there's a lot of work to be done in the meantime (like science!)[211]. This tracks, too,

with conceptions of Philosophy—and the humanities more generally—as hobbyist

disciplines, a privilege for the few. Myisha Cherry shares a personal experience that

illustrates what I take to be a common position of non-philosophers:

> I was told by someone pursuing a doctoral degree in another department,
> but quite familiar with the philosophy department, that, "it is a privilege for
> philosophers to just think about stuff." For her, we philosophers are
> privileged to make a career of disengaging from the world in order to think
> and this disengagement makes no contribution to the real world.[212]

I agree that it is a privilege. Similarly to professional athletes, gamers, and artists,

professional philosophers seem like a lucky bunch: "you mean that guy gets paid

just to play video games? And *you* get paid just to *think about stuff*?" Honestly,

"professional Philosophy" sounds almost oxymoronic. In any case, thinking of

philosophy as play might only exacerbate the eye-rolling. But on the other hand,

play *is* important. And that importance is often overlooked. We live in a workaholic

culture in which many of us willingly do sacrifice recreation for productivity: we

work late, we check our emails over the weekend, we delay our vacations. Often this

feels (and often this *is*) necessary for our survival or success or security: miss out on

poker night to pick up an extra shift, give up on writing the novel in order to put

food on the table, work in an office all day to pay for the kids' college. Even when we

have time for recreation, we might be too tired to make much good of it; whereas

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[211] See Hurka and Tasioulas (2006)
[212] Cherry (2017), 21

people can in principle read books, play games, philosophize, do art, or go outside in their free time, very often they just watch TV instead. I don't want to make any judgements about this way of living—at least not directed toward individuals[213]—but I do think that it's a bummer we don't play more, and I think if prompted, most people (even the workaholics) would agree with me. Folks might scoff when they hear about professional video game players or professional Philosophers, but is that not at least in part because they're jealous? Jealous that others *get* to play, and get paid to do it, while they're stuck doing "actual" work?

So at the very least, philosophy has value just like other kinds of play, but a value that can easily get overlooked or superseded by the practical. And another thing: different people enjoy different kinds of play. You like pickleball, I like jigsaw puzzles, and that's a-okay—play in general might be for everybody but who's to say that philosophy in particular is? I think the answer here lies in the skills that philosophy fosters, and their broad applicability within a person's life. Different kinds of play require or promote different kinds of skills: playing sports can improve agility, hand-eye coordination, strength, flexibility, teamwork, etc.; playing make-believe can improve imagination, perspective-taking, improvisation, etc.; playing with food can improve fine motor skills, aesthetic sensibilities, etc. It's been argued by Thi Nguyen that playing games (inclusive of sports, but not of some other kinds of play—jury's out on whether he'd include philosophy) can foster agency: games

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[213] It's the system! It's the culture! Down with capitalism! Down with the Protestant work ethic!

provide us with goals, abilities, and circumstances—sometimes drastically different than our real-life ones—which we are tasked to work with in efforts to win[214]. Philosophy likewise has skills that it fosters—extrinsic goods to offer, even if people aren't convinced by the value of play. In academic Philosophy, these skills are quite straightforward. Consider the list provided on the APA (American Philosophical Society) website: general problem solving, communication skills, persuasive powers, and writing skills. These skills are transferable, not only to other disciplines or professions, but also to general functioning in the world: being able to approach questions or problems systematically and articulate reasons for believing or for acting are invaluable. The APA folks assert, "The problem-solving, analytical, judgmental, and synthesizing capacities philosophy develops are unrestricted in their scope and unlimited in their usefulness"[215].

Philosophy, especially when taught well (cough cough) can also foster intellectual virtues like humility and open-mindedness, promote collaboration and empathy, and so much more. And although these skills can be explicitly practiced in classrooms, conferences, and other venues of capital-P Philosophy, just the act of philosophizing or of reading philosophy can help one engage these skills (similarly: one can practice ice skating without a coach, or chess without an opponent, and still gain skill even if the process of or expertise gained from that experience might be different).

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[214] Nguyen (2020), 16
[215] Audi et. al (2017)

There's also a lot of value in a philosophical approach to the world, formal

training or discipline-specific methodology aside. Philosophy allows us to question

our (and others') assumptions and foundational beliefs, our values, our reasoning

processes and logic; it's essentially metacognitive and as such its practice *shapes* us,

allows us to revise not only *what* we think but *how* we think by bringing our own

thinking into our reflective forefront. Philosophical insights and knowledge, then,

are personal in ways that the fruits of most other inquiries aren't[216][217], and integral to

our orientation to the world in ways that many other kinds of play aren't. I certainly

don't want to diminish the importance of the creativity, imagination, physical ability,

and strategy that other kinds of playful activity can promote[218] but philosophy can

provide the sort of critical reflection important for *understanding* the value of

creativity, imagination, physical ability, strategy, and the like. Nguyen asserts that

games are the "crystallization of practicality"[219], the aesthetic practice of agency; I

think that philosophy helps us to create our own sense of agency—an understanding

of our goals, abilities, and environmental circumstances beyond the aesthetic

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[216] I can be sort of inflationist about philosophy, but this is why I think art and literary
appreciation and criticism might also be considered "philosophy"—the process of
consideration and articulation of one's perceptions or beliefs and how they relate seems
squarely philosophical, if not more interpretive than many Philosophers would like to allow
within their discipline.
[217] Again, this is why I think philosophy can be a great ice-breaker in conversation: intimate
yet still allowing a critical distance from one's divulgences. No deep, dark secrets need to be
shared to still get to know someone.
[218] To my mind, this is why engagement with the arts is still valuable, too—and why people
should get opportunities to do art, and sports, and music in school and otherwise. The
extrinsic goods are perhaps more elusive—harder to argue for—than those of practical trades
or degrees, but they are there. And combined with the intrinsic good of playful effort, these
sorts of activities or university courses and programs shouldn't be lost.
[219] Nguyen (2020), 13

experience of a game and into the lived one of real life. The sort of clarity attained by knowing the parameters of the environment, the goal of one's efforts, and the rules to play in a game is, I think, the sort of clarity that philosophical investigations seek of the universe. We might not get there, of course (which is why there's still a place for games, with their defined goals and finite playing times). We will probably never *attain* that clarity, but as with all play, the effort and struggle and practice itself lends a huge amount of value to the activity.

This has all been to say that I think philosophy can be very practical, in the skills that it allows us to train and the work it can help us to do to orient our lives, and I think that it's for everybody too—not just the heady intellectuals, or the privileged few, but for anybody who seeks meaning and self-knowledge in their day-to-day. It helps, too, that one can philosophize about *anything* in their day-to-day. One needn't be a Philosopher to philosophize, and in fact, given the disciplinary shortfalls I've discussed earlier, Philosophers might not even be the best philosophers out there. Colin McGinn makes a similar claim when defending his account of philosophy as play, since professional Philosophers have taken on philosophy as work, rather than as play: capital-P Philosophy has become an industry, while lowercase-p philosophy remains autotelic[220]. Instead of producing philosophical *works*, so-called amateur philosophers can bask in the experience

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[220] McGinn (2011) 153; also footnote 18. I think this is also why a lot of professional athletes and artists burn out; they forget why they loved the activity now that it's become work for them.

simply of philosophizing and they can do so about whatever is on their mind at a given time.

I'm not suggesting that philosophy can be done always; I understand that there are other things to be done in life. This is one of the reasons I appreciate the idea of philosophy-as-play, even in the more narrow Suits-y definition of the term: perhaps it is merely recreational, something to do in one's free time or while procrastinating. But on the other hand, sometimes philosophizing is possible *while doing* instrumental activities, or can itself be instrumentally valuable. I've worked— and enjoyed!—many a mundane day of stacking produce at a grocery store, weeding row crops on a farm, walking dogs around a neighborhood, cleaning my house, kneading bread, etc. and being able to think about stuff while I did so—perhaps even philosophizing about those very activities. It's true that I was still redirecting *some* of my energy away from the instrumental tasks, which complies with Suits' definition, but hey, not all instrumental activities require full attention. I can play while I work.

Perhaps a point against philosophy-as-play is the sort of superinstrumental value I've described it as having. If philosophy can impart all these transferrable skills, like logic and critical thinking and argumentation and concision and writing and communication and open-mindedness and rigor and on and on, *and* it can help us to uncover and practice our agency—to understand more about the world and its existents, our values and goals and limitations, our reasoning and our beliefs and our standards of evidence, the rules we do follow and the rules we should follow—

well, this all sounds pretty darn instrumentally valuable. The fine-grain skills and the large-grain life-altering understanding and decision-making and identity forming are all starting to sound very… practical? To use that old Socratic trope, "the unexamined life is not worth living", it seems that taken to its logical extreme, philosophizing might indeed be the *most* instrumentally valuable activity[221].

But I don't think even this extreme conclusion rules out philosophy-as-play. Consider taking up a broader definition of play than Suits provides (and McGinn implicitly endorses), and allow that play can indeed be work! Take Nguyen's taxonomy of play[222]: *intrinsic achievement play* is play for the sake of "winning" in and of itself. Imagine here somebody who doggedly argues for a philosophical position just because they don't want to be bested by somebody else. *Extrinsic achievement play* is play for the sake of whatever "winning" brings instrumentally—here we might think of professional Philosophers who may not have a passion for philosophy per se, but who appreciate the job security, benefits, and summer vacations they get in a university faculty position. These benefits they can only achieve by doing philosophy well enough to gain tenure. *Intrinsic striving play* and *extrinsic striving play*, on the other hand, involve play for the sake of engagement in the activity of play (read: philosophizing) itself. An intrinsic striving philosopher simply values the struggle of philosophizing in and of itself, whereas an extrinsic

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[221] In at least one sense; in another, breathing, drinking, and eating seem like they're probably the most instrumentally valuable activities. In another, doing the work to make the money to be able to keep breathing, drinking, and eating seems like *it* is the most instrumentally valuable activity…

[222] Nguyen (2020), 32-33

striving player values the struggle of philosophizing for its instrumental or practical benefits, e.g. argumentation skills or improved perspective-taking. If we choose to categorize play in these ways, we can see how both professional Philosophers and amateur philosophers, those who love the pride or those who love the practice, and all other kinds of philosopher ilk, can still be engaged in play whether for instrumental or intrinsic reasons, and whether they value the journey or the destination more. This might help to stave off concerns about philosophy's being purely recreational—not worth funding, or housing in a university—since it's not the play per se that institutions or individuals need be supporting: it can be philosophical knowledge or skill acquisition that they aim to support; it's just that the people they're supporting in these aims can partake in and appreciate the experience of play while meeting these other goals. Just because something is intrinsically valuable doesn't mean it *isn't* instrumentally valuable too, and vice versa.

Plus there's something unique about philosophical truth and understanding (the sorts of "wins" we might achieve) that also helps to diminish its instrumentalism: we seem never to reach the end. I won't rehash discussions about "philosophical progress" or the lack thereof, or the saying that "there are no right answers" in philosophy. I do believe that we can have philosophical insights, that we can reach conclusions, form beliefs with good reasons, learn about ourselves—our values and thought processes—and change our minds by doing philosophy, but it seems like this activity will never end. The nature of philosophical inquiry is such

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that it seems we'll probably never "solve it"[223], never "win the game", and even if we did, in keeping with McGinn's view, we'd continue the activity of philosophizing nonetheless. We wouldn't want to press the "All The Philosophical Knowledge" button[224]; we'd want to think it through ourselves, explore other ideas, keep playing.

Or so I'd like to think. Perhaps there are still folks who'd rather not play with ideas, as much as I've tried to convince them that they should. Basically, thus far I've claimed that philosophy is a delightful kind of play, and that everybody can use more play in their lives. As play goes, philosophy is special because of the transferrable skills it can teach and the metacognitive, orientation-toward-the-world-and-one's-own-thought, agency-producing sorts of takeaways it can impart. And if these "arguments" have not been convincing, I'm close to accepting that, and I'll stand corrected. Maybe I could revise my claim from "philosophy *is* for everyone" to "philosophy *should be* for everyone" which I think is easier to reckon with, but comes with its own baggage. Everyone *should* eat healthy, and everyone *should* read for fun, and everyone *should* be nice and everyone *should* love Paul Thomas Anderson movies, but they don't. Just because it's good for people, or there are good reasons why people should be certain ways or do certain things doesn't mean that people are or that they will. And that's unfortunate, but that's not what this project is about. This project is about doing and sharing and keeping philosophy alive, and providing suggestions for how the discipline of Philosophy might help in that pursuit.

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[223] The notion of "solving it" writ large reminds me of *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy,* when the supercomputer finally answers "the ultimate question of life, the universe and everything", and gives us… 42.
[224] McGinn (2011), 149

I think what it comes down to is giving people—everybody—more of a chance to engage with philosophy, to try it out, to see for themselves whether it's for them or not. That's all I can expect us to do. We can't, like, chain people to cave walls, tease them with shadow puppets, and then release them so that they can come to understand for themselves the glory of philosophical insight. No, but we can provide more opportunities for everyday people to engage with philosophy, and we can offer them some of the tools, writings, and methods of the academic discipline along with our own insights and personal example as Philosophy professionals. Let's provide folks with a fair chance to appreciate philosophy, much like we'd give a climber some chalk, tune a musician's piano, demonstrate how to center clay on a pottery wheel, explain the rules of a board game, and *then* let people give these activities a go. People can have a much better experience doing an activity if they've got some guidance, mentorship, encouragement—and this is a role that professional Philosophers are particularly suited to do. In the next section I will explore ways and reasons the discipline and its practitioners might see this vision for sharing philosophy met by way of public and applied philosophy.

2c: Public and Applied Philosophy

For students who happen to enroll in our Philosophy courses, exposure to philosophy is easy; it's inherent. What's trickier is finding ways for people outside of the academy to get a taste. Other fields of inquiry are taught to folks from a very young age—since the beginning of grade school we're all exposed to history (or call

it "social studies"), math, English (or call it "language arts"), and science. We take

P.E. and art and music classes, receive health education (albeit minimally, and often

wrong-headedly), and by middle school—if not earlier—we are expected to learn

"foreign" languages. I think this is all great! From the time we're children we are

exposed to various disciplines and hobbies, and can start navigating our various life

and career paths, learning what we're interested in or skilled at doing.

Unfortunately, this is not so much the case with "trying out" philosophy: in general

(for of course there are exceptions, particularly in wealthy private schools), there is

no educational infrastructure for exposing children to philosophy. Capital-P

Philosophy courses in university tend to be opt-in—not required—and philosophy

courses through secondary education tend to be non-existent. Middle- and high-

school students can take yearbook, woodshop, pottery, chemistry, theatre, statistics,

speech, robotics, and yet they can't take philosophy. Most of the courses that

students take growing up are not meant to prepare them for a career, but to help

shape them into well-rounded individuals who have an idea of what they want to do

with their lives. I haven't done pottery nor chemistry since high school, though I'm

still glad I took those classes—in other words, I don't believe that my failure to

become a potter or a chemist bears on the value of my having taken pottery and

chemistry. There is value in being well-rounded, or at least well-rounded enough to

know what we do and don't like.

So regardless of whether one becomes a Philosopher or not, philosophy is

worth exploring at least a bit, but people don't tend to get exposed to it until

university—so there's a gap in exposure for children and for folks who don't go to college that needs to be filled. As much as I'd love for grade schools to start offering philosophy regularly, the fact of the matter is that they don't. I think this leaves Philosophy professionals with a distinct responsibility of what I'll call public outreach: other topics, skill sets, and disciplines are already "public" insofar as everybody is forced to engage with them during their formative education. They've been explored and practiced and assessed ("hmm, I'm not a huge fan of grammar, but I love geography!") and they are not mysterious or elusive. I think this can help to explain Myisha Cherry's puzzlement about the term 'public philosophy'—nobody talks of "public math" or "public psychology", so why of "public philosophy"[225]? The answer is, to my mind, because the public simply doesn't know what the deal is with philosophy. What *is* it? Can I do it? How do I do it? Am I a fan of it? At this point in society, we don't need PSAs aired that explain why learning math is important, or what astronauts do, but we certainly could use some that explain why learning philosophy is important, or what Philosophers do. Thus arises a need for the idea and term 'public philosophy', but not e.g. 'public science'. Then again, it's clear that public science *does* exist, by way of space camps and science fairs and Darwin Day, robotics competitions, and the like. Public outreach and engagement with other academic disciplines is commonplace, both in and out of school.

There are other academic disciplines—for example, linguistics—which also aren't taught in K-12 or engaged with much outside of the university. What of them?

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[225] Cherry (2017), 25

Is there a similar need for "public linguistics", "public anthropology", or "public bioinformatics" work, to be done by our counterparts in these other departments? The short answer: sure! This is not my purview, but if professional Linguists or Anthropologists or Bioinformaticists think there would be good in the public engaging more with their work and methods, then I think they should go for it. On the other hand, I'm not sure the reasons for public outreach in these fields would prove to be as compelling as those for public philosophy. The reason for this, I think, is the sort of personal, existential, agential, life- and project-orienting nature of philosophical inquiry. Many of us philosophize naturally (with or without the support of disciplinary background), and in any case, everybody could benefit from some philosophizing. I'm not sure that's the case with linguisticizing or doing bioinformatics; I'd be happy for somebody to convince me otherwise, though.

Now, I won't go into much detail about what shape our efforts toward public philosophy might take; we all know about public philosophy! I will say, though, that I use the term very broadly: public philosophy is any effort by professionally trained Philosophers to engage in philosophical thought and conversations with non-Philosophers[226]. Examples of it include structured efforts like philosophy podcasts (*Why? Philosophical Questions about Everyday Life*; *Philosophy Bites*), ask-a-philosopher booths in public venues, youtube channels (ContraPoints; PhilosophyTube), public social media accounts, philosophy clubs, philosophy columns or blogs on media

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[226] This definition is broader than, say, Jack Russel Weinstein's, for whom it is defined by "the act of professional philosophers engaging with non-professionals, in a non-academic setting, with the specific goals of exploring issues philosophically" (2014), 38. I think public philosophy can take place in academic settings, as well.

sites ("The Ethicist"; "The Stone"; *Daily Nous* blog), so-called "pop" philosophy books, philosophy programming for children and teens (P4C; Ethics Bowl), public philosophy talks, and the like. But public philosophy can also include more incidental or ad-hoc efforts, such as interviews or opinions on news and TV programming (why can't we have philosophical pundits every once in a while?)[227], "resident Philosophers" in non-academic workplaces and industries such as medicine, tech development, politics, or journalism (Frodeman and Briggle call these "philosopher bureaucrats"[228]), and interdisciplinary or cross-listed courses within a university or other classroom environment, so that students who wouldn't normally engage with philosophical topics or methods might nonetheless be exposed to them (Bioethics, Science and Society, and Feminist Philosophy, to name a few offered at UC Santa Cruz).

I think the discipline of Philosophy should be making great efforts to extend philosophy's reach to the general public. I want philosophy to be practiced by everybody but I'm not confident they can or will do it on their own: I think everybody should be able to swim, and I think *that* can be an enjoyable activity, but people tend not to like swimming if they don't have an advanced swimmer guiding them through some of the basics. They'll find it terrifying or exhausting, their strokes will lack grace, and they'll likely take shortcuts, satisfied with the bare minimum (as if doggy-paddling is sufficient, or pool floaties will always be available to them).

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[227] See Cherry (2017), 29-30 for a discussion about Philosophers' reticence toward engaging with the public.
[228] Frodeman and Briggle (2016b), 3; 123

Similarly, an amateur philosopher left to their own devices might find philosophy dull or ridiculous, might not engage in genuine inquiry, or might fall back on unquestioned assumptions, faulty logic, conversational strong-arming, or other forms of intellectual stubbornness. A philosophical urge seems fairly universal, but that's not sufficient for sustaining a philosophical practice. Professional Philosophers needn't *teach* philosophy to the public, but rather facilitate it. I agree with Jack Russell Weinstein in his characterization of public philosophy as "creat[ing] the ground for philosophical reflection in personal life with the hope that this reflection may inspire future wide-ranging conversations about culture and meaning in life"[229][230]. Weinstein also characterizes public philosophy as a kind of entertainment, rather than, say, training in logic or civics, which tracks well with my earlier discussion of philosophy (public or otherwise) as play.

It might seem an unfair burden on Philosophers to engage with the public, when other academics don't seem to have the same responsibilities. After all, Philosophers still have researching, teaching, and "service" work to juggle—now this largely unpaid, non-tenure-inducing work of "public philosophy" stacked on top? We don't want to stretch ourselves too thin, and it'd be a shame to reduce the quality of our other work in order to squeeze in some public philosophy too—

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[229] Weinstein (2014), 51

[230] Though this characterization seems to skew toward reflection on matters of ethics and politics rather than metaphysics, mind, epistemology, and the like, I'd argue that basically any philosophical discussion –particularly one in which a non-professional philosopher would want to participate—bears on the question of meaning in life. We wouldn't *care* about what stuff the universe is made out of, consciousness, justification, etc. if we didn't feel that somehow these questions are important to who we are and why we do what we do.

probably also performed with a lower quality than we'd prefer. Furthermore, there

seems to be a stereotypical, presumed, and oftentimes actual dislike between

Philosophers and "the public". A number of professional Philosophers have

discussed this animosity, which seems to be perpetuated by way of canonical

narratives (think Thales and the olive presses, or Plato's philosopher kings),

delusions about our supreme rationality and moral superiority, suspicion of the

intent of our interlocutors (politicization, being set up for ridicule), and in some

cases actual fear for safety if we publicly question certain norms or beliefs (thus

challenging the people who tout them), or offer controversial ideas of our own[231]. On

the other hand, many non-philosophers see Philosophers as pretentious,

unapproachable, and obnoxious know-it-alls—let's be honest, even the famed gadfly

Socrates comes off as an arrogant jerk; he who claims not to know *anything!*—not to

mention the "demographic issues" historically and presently associated with the

discipline and profession, which can rub people the wrong way from the start.

I'm not sure how to fix this bad blood between Philosophers and non-

Philosophers besides the obvious: spend some time together. I think that

professionally-trained Philosophers might be surprised by the quality of questions

and insights offered by amateur philosophers (especially children!), the interest that

people can show in philosophical questions and topics, and the glow of sharing a

cool new idea with somebody who jives with it, or of watching somebody come to a

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[231] For discussions of the relationship between professional Philosophers and the public, see
Cherry (2017), 29-30 and Weinstein (2014), 34-35.

new realization or question an old belief with just a bit of nudging. These are all goods I'm sure we feel at least *sometimes* with our students, so they shouldn't seem new, but there is something distinctive—and I'd say, better—about the non-academic nature of many "public philosophy" conversations: they *are* more playful, people are not being graded and tend to be there by choice, the measure of success tends to be engagement alone, rather than learning outcomes or curriculum. As Weinstein states, "This is not teaching in any traditional sense"[232].

Of course, I advocate for teaching in a less traditional sense anyway, so the aims and excitement of public philosophy may be more aligned with academic philosophy for me than for others. But the point remains—especially for those with a more traditional teaching style—that public philosophy can actually be very fun and rewarding and unique; it can feel more like a conversation and less like a job than does teaching, and it can feel more satisfying and productive than presenting at a conference or talking with other Philosophers. Similarly, I think that non-Philosophers may be surprised by the humanity of (some) professional Philosophers: we're not all arrogant, eccentric white guys; we have a lot of passion to share and disciplinary context to provide; we live in the real world too; we ask good questions. All of these things though, we (Philosophers and non-Philosophers) will only learn about each other by interacting more with each other.

Then again, many professional Philosophers would likely *not* make good impressions or engage fruitfully with non-Philosophers—as I discussed earlier,

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[232] Weinstein (2014), 47

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many professional Philosophers hardly seem to get along well with each other. There are certainly personality types and eccentricities that make many Philosophers (and academics more generally) frankly hard to be around. I don't want to suggest that *all* Philosophers up and become public philosophers, but I do want to see the discipline encouraging public philosophy as a viable and valuable interest among professional Philosophers. I don't want to force Philosophers into roles they don't want, but I do want to see more consideration of these roles among Philosophers; most of use have already turned philosophical play into work, for better or for worse. Due to the circumstances of our particular discipline, *the work* of Philosophers has become at least in part that of stewards or even ambassadors of philosophy—the history, tradition, and methods. I think it's become a responsibility of the collective body of Philosophers to see this aspect of the work met[233].

In any case, there is still a very real practical concern about public philosophy: we just don't have the time of day. Academic jobs already require a lot of work, and these pressures may be exacerbated for Philosophers (and others) by the tenuous position of humanities departments in the U.S. The scarcity of funding or publishing opportunities, the scrambling for enrollments or grants or office space, the increased teaching loads or service expectations in a shrinking department… all of these things, alone or combined, can be overwhelming, and yet Emily's asking us to take on more? Well, yes. Firstly—and frankly—public philosophy is "good

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[233] If not now, then perhaps in the rising or future generations of Philosophers. We might not be able to teach the old dogs new tricks, as it were, but perhaps we can socialize the puppies better.

marketing" [234]. If the public is engaged with philosophy — values and enjoys it, rather than ignores or derides it — politicians and taxpayers and students and their parents will be more likely to support it. As I've said before, fixing our reputation can do wonders, and in the court of public appeal, we ought to put in some more effort appealing to the public.

But perhaps this puts the cart before the horse: public philosophy might garner more external material support for the profession of Philosophy, which might give us more resources or time to commit to public philosophy, but if the worry is that we don't have time in the first place for public philosophy this doesn't help us much. In what follows, I'll discuss some suggestions for creating space for public philosophy within academic Philosophy. I think there are some very feasible ways to increase opportunities for public philosophy without creating *additional* responsibilities for professional Philosophers. The trick is to reimagine some of the norms in professional Philosophy itself.

For one, we need to change our attitude. There are countless examples of Philosophers' efforts toward engaging the public, or at least creating publicly accessible work, and these take the form of individual and small-group efforts or institutional ones from inside and near to the university. My university houses a Center for Public Philosophy, and many others have similar organizations: The Institute for Philosophy and Public Life and University of North Dakota and The Center for New Narratives in Philosophy at Columbia University, to name a couple.

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[234] Weinstein (2014), 51

University-adjacent organizations, like PLATO, SOPHIA, Public Philosophy

Network, and others, and even more "establishment" Philosophy groups like the

APA also have programs, resources, and blog posts focused on public philosophy.

All this is to say that I don't want to downplay the very real work being done for

public philosophy, and the institutional in-roads to practice it.

But despite all this effort, public philosophy still tends to be looked down

upon within the discipline, or as Cherry calls it, "ghettoized"[235]: public philosophy is

seen as a waste of Real Philosophers' time and talent, as rigor is lost in the sharing of

problems or ideas to an untrained audience who is unlikely to help us *answer* any of

our important questions or teach us anything new[236]. Philosophers (capital-P) who

engage in public philosophy are often charged with laziness—not wanting to do

"real" philosophy, or not wanting to do philosophy by themselves[237]–or are

considered sell-outs who dumb down their work and court the masses just to make

money or perhaps to gain more twitter followers[238].

These are not flattering depictions, and they are pernicious: Philosophers

who have a focus on public philosophy simply are not seen as "serious"

Philosophers. This can have unfortunate professional consequences for folks. They

might be overlooked for tenure, their accessible works not read by (and thus not

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[235] Cherry (2017), 26
[236] Weinstein cites Brian Leiter's dismissal of laypeople's capacity for philosophical insight during a discussion of theirs on Weinstein's podcast *Why? Philosophical Discussions About Everyday Life*; see Weinstein (2014), 34.
[237] Cherry cites an article lamenting Cornel West's production of co-written books (2017), 26, though I imagine similar complaints about "crowdsourced" insights or conclusions also take place; the image of the isolated genius gets challenged with public philosophy.
[238] Pigliucci and Finkelman (2014), 93

cited by) other Philosophers (or perhaps not even published in the first place); they might receive less invitations to speak at conferences or review articles, etc. And unfortunately, there might be a ring of analytic truth to public philosophers' unseriousness *if* seriousness is defined in terms of publications and presentations and "service to the profession". Again, we each only have so much time, and prioritizing public philosophy might mean putting book-writing or journal refereeing on the backburner.

What we ought to do is minimize the either/or situation that leads people here in the first place: we should be able to integrate public philosophy into our disciplinary fold so that teaching, research, and service can come to include more of it without negative professional consequences. Mostly I think this will have to come by way of shifting attitudes. After all, it's often other Philosophers (or at least other academics and academic administrators) who make decisions about hiring, tenure, journal acceptance, course catalogues, etc. If they don't take public philosophy seriously, they can stop a lot of momentum.

There's been some work—ahem, some properly *Philosophical* work—arguing why Philosophers should change their minds about the value and priority of public philosophy[239], but I think the aim should be less about trying to convert the non-believers, and more about trying to find ways for the folks who already do see the value to have their cake and eat it too. After all, if *every* Philosopher aimed for public outreach and public accessibility in their work, what would become of the future for

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[239] See Pigliucci and Finkelman (2014) and Curren (2023)

literature on the Third Moment of the First Book of the First Division of Part One of Kant's Third Critique? The day which that stops being worked on is a day I'm sure many of us would hate to see arrive.

But truly, I'm not trying to redefine academia full-stop: there is and may as well continue to be highly specialized, nearly incomprehensible, for-other-expert's-eyes-only work being done in all disciplines (consider theoretical math as an analogous example from STEM); maybe some of it's useful and maybe some of it's not. I think to some degree this is the essence of academia. We seek to learn, we seek to study, to research, and it wouldn't be its own industry—oops, I mean its own profession—if people didn't research stuff that "the public" couldn't (and wouldn't want to) research themselves. All I'm hoping to get across here is that there are other ways of being a Philosopher, other opportunities to seize, than what's traditionally on offer in our discipline. I want nontraditional ways of being a Philosopher to be legitimate and viable, and perhaps even appreciated, ways to work within the profession. Below are some ways I think we can and should make it happen.

Create opportunities for public philosophy to count as "service". If public philosophy is indeed good marketing, and leads to more engagement with and appreciation of the philosophy and the work of Philosophers, then it's not a stretch to say that public philosophy is indeed a service to the profession or even to individual departments. The trick is advocating for that, and creating institutional in-roads to accommodate that—perhaps in the form of public philosophy centers or institutions in which faculty can utilize their efforts, or simply in taking more risks

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and making more arguments (to departments or administrators) about why certain public philosophy work should fulfill service requirements.

In our teaching, we can work to engage broad swaths of students by offering cross-listed courses and interdisciplinary tracks. Many ethics courses can easily be cross-listed (AI ethics, environmental ethics, bioethics, for example), but there are ample opportunities for others with just a bit of creativity and maybe some collaboration with other departments (philosophy of mind with cognitive science or psychology; philosophy of language with linguistics; philosophy of race with ethnic studies; collaborations with language programs to read un-translated versions of philosophical texts; and so on). Interdisciplinary major or minor tracks are also cool ways to provide students ways to engage with Philosophy while still pursuing other (perhaps more "profitable") subjects: my undergraduate university offered a "Politics/Philosophy/Economics" degree, Oxford offers a "Physics and Philosophy" one. These sorts of things may not constitute what's typically called "public philosophy", but I think the integration of Philosophy into other courses of study does indeed publicize it, literally, and it can also offer Philosophers new opportunities to engage philosophically outside of their home departments. This sort of interdisciplinary engagement might lead to other, more typical kinds of public philosophy like speaking invitations or interviews hosted by groups outside of Philosophy's network. It can also encourage further interdisciplinary research and professional work between Philosophers and other academics.

I think there are also other ways to bring public philosophy into our teaching: rather than think of our students as "the public" we might consider *them* to be the Philosophers. I imagine all sorts of activities and assignments which encourage the students in our courses to engage philosophically with friends, family, and community who aren't studying the same stuff they are. Our aims in teaching could shift—at least in part—from building students' skills for professional Philosophy to building their skills for public philosophy and for life (think: less like Saul Kripke and more like Socrates, minus the arrogance) I know of many Philosophy teachers who will tell students to "explain X as if you were explaining it to your grandma, or your 10-year-old cousin, who doesn't know about any of this". Well, maybe they actually *could* try explaining certain ideas to their grandparents or cousins. Or instead of taking for granted that Philosophers are right about folks' philosophical intuitions, students could poll folks! I had a [philosophy major] friend in college who worked as a grocery store cashier, and she claims to have engaged her customers in "small talk" about free will as they were checking out; what other sorts of philosophical conversations might we encourage our students to have with people?

One particular area of strength for our or our and our students' engagement with non-Philosophers is, I think, applied philosophy. Topics in applied philosophy tend to be much more interesting, and often accessible, to non-Philosophers than the more stereotypical topics in philosophy like ontology, normative ethics, theories of knowledge, modal logic, vagueness, causal determinism, and "the higher-order truths about schmess". Don't know what schmess is? It was invented by Daniel

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Dennett, and it's like chess, except that kings can move two spaces in any direction

rather than one; there are an infinite number of a priori truths about schmess, so the

topic is ripe for study! But Dennett conceptualizes schmess just to point out the

absurdity of some of our research agendas… put schmess alongside Dennet's other

mock scenario of becoming "a budding expert on How to Deal with How to Deal

with Responses to Goofmaker's minor overstatement" or my now thrice-used

example from Scott Samuelson of a specialization in the Third Moment of the First

Book of the First Division of Part One of Kant's Third Critique. Some topics just

don't seem worth exploring or sharing or discussing with anybody besides another

expert on schmess (or whatever). As I've already mentioned, and as Dennett

concedes, some schmess experts are okay, so long as they don't feel like they're

wasting their own time. On the other hand, Dennett does still suggest some soul-

searching on Philosophers' parts:

> One good test to make sure you're not just exploring the higher-order truths
> of chmess is to see if people aside from philosophers actually play the game.
> Can anybody outside of academic philosophy be made to care whether
> you're right about whether Jones' counterexample works against Smith's
> principle? Another such test is to try to teach the stuff to uninitiated
> undergraduates. If they don't ''get it,'' you really should consider the
> hypothesis that you're following a self-supporting community of experts into
> an artifactual trap.[240]

The trap, here, is inertia. Are we really interested in these puzzles, and do we really

think they should be explored, or are we just feeding in to a "self-supporting

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[240] Dennett (2006), 40

community" that doesn't know when to stop[241]? Personally, I am a fan of avoiding this trap in both my teaching and my research, and I think that applied philosophy is a good means of doing so. By "applied philosophy", I mean the use of philosophical methodology to tackle questions or problems that arise in everyday life—be they political, environmental, moral, scientific, or even aesthetic. The Society of Applied Philosophy characterizes applied philosophy as "philosophical work that has a direct bearing on areas of practical concern"[242]. These are the very questions, topics, and debates that non-Philosophers most often actually see and experience, the ones that they are likely to care about, because of their bearing on peoples' real lives. Also, many of these are the very topics about which interdisciplinary work between Philosophers and other researchers or academics can take place too, particularly when it comes to Philosophers working with scientists or other empirical researchers. For simplicity, I'll include interdisciplinary academic work as a kind of applied philosophy.

Philip Kitcher observes, "The impetus to philosophy was present in all human contexts, from the natural and social environments of our Paleolithic ancestors, through the variant forms of society we know from history and anthropology, to the circumstances of the present. At each stage, the philosopher's first task is to recognize the appropriate questions that arise for his

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[241] And, for what it's worth, isn't truly "self-supporting" at all—the funding for these communities comes from somewhere, so perhaps some consideration of what good these small communities are doing for the larger one is warranted.
[242] Society for Applied Philosophy (n.d.)

contemporaries"[243]. The measure of appropriateness is still unclear here, but he goes

on later to say, "The predicament of inquiry is to select questions that are

particularly salient for people, given their cognitive capacities and their evolving

interests, and then to work to address those questions—not to seek some grand

'theory of everything'"[244], or, say, a comprehensive list of higher-order truths about

schmess. So one route for fruitful philosophical inquiry is to see what people are

interested in, which questions are particularly salient, *what people might want to talk to*

us about (whereas usually we just hope they'll be interested in what *we* want to talk

about), and start there.

I discussed in my chapter on pedagogy using a topics-first approach to

teaching, because *topics* can hook students more than, say, canonical figures or

debates; here I'm suggesting we see what topics the public are already hooked on,

and engage with them philosophically about those. Folks might have the impetus to

philosophize naturally, but a guiding hand to help start the conversations, maintain

momentum, and encourage depth could do a great deal of work. Applied topics can

often lead to more abstract, bigger-picture philosophical questions (for example,

debates about cultural appropriation often lead into distinctions between

consequentialism and deontology, distinguishing types of harm or kinds of people

groups). In our teaching and public philosophy, we can guide these applied issues to

whatever degree of abstraction our interlocutors are willing to bear; in our research

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[243] Kitcher (2011), 252
[244] Ibid. 255

we can see it to the nitty-gritty end if we want to! This is exactly the "inside-out"

approach to philosophy that Kitcher suggests: find topics for which a philosophical

investigation or discussion can make a difference and philosophize from there,

rather than begin with the esoteric and hope that people will catch on about why it's

interesting.

Applied philosophy can nurture students and professional Philosophers

toward participation in the real world, into think tanks and capitols and offices and

newsrooms, in conversation with people who do other work. Philosophers (capital-

P) might utilize data and speak to shareholders and examine actionable—rather than

hypothetical—decisions and their consequences and provide their insights, or ask

important questions… in short, they can do public philosophy.

The romance between public and applied philosophy seems very natural,

though it can be easy for Philosophers to mess up: one can research topics in applied

philosophy without actually *applying* them; one can consider problems of the public

interest without actually engaging with the public. Frodeman and Briggle recently

conducted an analysis of five journals of Applied Philosophy, to see how "applied"

they really were. Of over 4,500 journal articles investigated, they found that 98.6% of

the papers made philosophical points about topics of practical interest, but lacked

any discussion of how those points might actually be applied—that is, practic*able*.

They note, "A paper might analyse the public debate or policy processes

surrounding stem cell research—but never broach the question of how its analysis

could play a live role in that debate. It might even develop recommendations—

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without any apparent attempt at seeing how those ideas could be taken up by decision makers"[245]. In other words, an astounding majority of published Philosophers working topics in applied philosophy make few efforts to get their ideas taken up by the people actually "working" on those issues—they were writing only to other Philosophers, and not to the public or change-makers whom those practical issues concern. This harkens back to my earlier discussion of Philosophy's tendency toward unidirectional interdisciplinarity. Maybe the phenomenon is due to a misguided assumption that good ideas will just spread like a virus, or "trickle down"; maybe most Applied Philosophers just aren't that interested in "applying" philosophy after all. Or, they're worried about their status as "real" Philosophers, so make sure to keep their audience properly narrow. In any case, I think that Philosophers who work in applied philosophy ought to consider why *they* are interested in applied topics, and whether the work they're doing is contributing in any meaningful way to the areas of practical concern about which they allege to care, and want to weigh in on.

There might still be some professional pushback against Philosophers who work in applied topics, and especially those who decide to aim for interlocutors or audiences beyond other professional Philosophers. Judith Butler cites a number of Philosophers doing notably interdisciplinary work like Rorty, Cavell, Nehamas, Nussbaum, Appiah, and Braidotti, but then follows up these exemplars with a vague lamentation that "I would suggest to you that none of these individuals has crossed

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[245] Frodeman and Briggle (2016b), 69

the border into the wider conversation without paying some sort of price within his

or her own discipline"[246]. As I noted in earlier sections, many "interdisciplinary"

Philosophers have felt the need to leave Philosophy departments full-stop. Applied

Philosophers' publications might be relegated to only a handful of niche journals,

rather than the name-brand ones which focus on more central Philosophical debates.

They might be looked down on at conferences. But on the bright side, applied

philosophy can create ample opportunities to collaborate with non-Philosophers *if*

an effort to do so is made; thus creating space for public philosophy even as one

pursues disciplinary research requirements. Jack Russell Weinstein (a prolific public

Philosopher) has even landed a Directorship of the Institute for Philosophy in Public

Life—an independent research institute at University of North Dakota. It is possible!

The last thing I'll say on the topic of public and applied philosophy is going

to sound fairly trite, but I still think it's worth saying. We can "apply" philosophy

and do "public" philosophy like, all the time, just by *living* philosophically. Yes, I'm

advocating for philosophy as a way of life. Part of that comes naturally, just by way

of our profession: of course we think about philosophical topics, approach at least

some questions or problems in our lives philosophically (i.e. by using tools and

methods of philosophy), we probably aim to live "the examined life" and consider

and question beliefs, norms and behaviors (our own and others') more critically than

non-Philosophers might. This is all pretty characteristic of disciplinary Philosophy,

and illustrate aspects of living philosophically. People might also try to share

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[246] Butler (2004), 246

philosophical questions and exploration with others in the *agora*, so to speak. This is characteristic of public philosophy, and another aspect of living philosophically.

I want to suggest yet another aspect of living philosophically, related to the other two but worth its own consideration: follow-through, whether professionally, privately, or publicly (though ideally all three). Philosophy as a way of life should involve integrity, which I think professional Philosophers often lack; alignment of their actions and behaviors with their expressed values. Probably a large part of my motivation for embarking on this dissertation project has been due to my frustrations with Philosophers' lack of integrity. We claim to love rationality, yet we are so often dogmatic. We claim to love inquiry, yet we are so often stubborn and contentious. We claim to love wisdom, yet we are so often crummy teachers, myopic thinkers, and armchair sages. It's no wonder we've got such a bad reputation! Eric Schwitzgebel and Joshua Rust did a series of empirical studies to examine the moral behavior of ethics professors and found that despite having much more stringent moral *beliefs* than laypeople, they nonetheless behaved no better[247]. There seems too often to be a disconnect between the things we study and argue for, and the things we actually do. I understand that philosophy-as-play or philosophy-as-naval-gazing or philosophy-as-work or whatever else don't necessitate action; one can play with ideas without having to *live* them. But all too often we take ourselves very seriously, we think we've solved it, we think we're right and we're willing to argue ad

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[247] Schwitzgebel (2015)

nauseum for our positions but are unwilling to take them any further—into industry

or policy or personal life.

Peter Singer is a controversial figure, but I don't think that anybody can deny

he tries his darndest to walk the walk: he holds certain moral positions and he

argues for them—yes, to other Philosophers but notably also in the public sphere—

and he also stands by them. He eats vegan, he donates much of his income, he

provides opportunities and reasons for other people to do the same because he

actually believes in it. I don't want to say that we should all be like Peter Singer, or

worse, become zealots to our own beliefs (ethics is one thing, but a Philosopher who

takes external world skepticism or metaphysical idealism seriously might end up

catatonic or worse), but again, I think a little bit of soul-searching is in order. We

should think about why we care about philosophy and why we're doing it. Does the

way we approach our lives and jobs as Philosophers live up to our romantic notions

about principles and inquiry and reason and virtue and wisdom?

In the second part of this project, I aim to walk the walk. I've said my peace,

or at least I've tired myself out, and now I'll show my readers what I've been up to.

I'll provide two examples, or two case studies, of philosophy by Philosopher(s)

seeking to maintain integrity. Given my pedagogical priorities and my belief that

Philosophers can and should be engaging with non-Philosophers, these examples

will showcase—with explanations—my work as it meets those values and goals.

Hopefully these last two chapters and what'll come next will be "Philosophical"

enough to warrant a contribution to our discipline, and hopefully the project's

acceptance will be a step in shifting the norms of Philosophy to be more inclusive of

non-traditional ways of teaching and researching and engaging with the subject. I

see a new era approaching, where old-school and new school aren't at odds, the

hermits can stay in the ivory towers if they want while the rest of us share the thing

we love with our students and communities; maybe then, philosophy will get a little

love back.

Part II

Chapter 3: TEQ Deck[248]

One of the features that drew me to UC Santa Cruz was the Center for Public Philosophy (CPP), a campus organization which expressly aims to spread the availability of sustained philosophical inquiry "far beyond university walls"[249]. Right up my alley! The CPP project in which I've been most involved is called *TEQ Deck: Technology. Ethics. Questions*. I include it in this dissertation because, for many reasons, I think it serves as an exemplar of rewarding philosophical work that's engaging and accessible to the public and which also has enormous potential as a unique and exciting pedagogical tool. I envision its use and adaptation in classrooms contributing positively to the landscape of nontraditional, student-focused teaching.

In what follows I'll give a background and overview of the TEQ Deck project. I will point to and explain what features of the project I've found relate to and address the criticisms and suggestions offered in Chapters 1 and 2. Then, in the rest of the chapter I will showcase specific parts of and possibilities for TEQ Deck with short supplementary pieces accompanying each. Thus begins the show-and-tell portion of my dissertation. Much of my work (on TEQ Deck and otherwise) has been guided by my ideals and commitment of doing Philosophy differently; now I'm pleased to share that work and explicate the motivations, contributions, and visions that foreground it.

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[248] Much of the language in this introduction is adapted from the THI piece Jon Ellis and I co-wrote (see Section 3c), with his permission.
[249] Center For Public Philosophy (2022)

In 2020, the interdisciplinary TEQ Deck team from the Center for Public Philosophy and the Baskin School of Engineering embarked on a project to create a tool for delivering content and pushing dialogue at the intersection of ethics and technology. A tech and ethics project might seem clearly—even inherently—interdisciplinary: engineers know tech and (some) Philosophers know ethics, and a project at their intersection suggests contributions from both. But contrary to this intuition, I think that the CPP/Baskin collaboration is somewhat unique. As I discussed in Chapter 2, much of Philosophy's interdisciplinarity is unidirectional. We might engage with research or projects from the social sciences or STEM, but we very rarely contribute to them or work with the people creating them. TEQ Deck, from its nascence, has been a project moved forward by the School of Engineering and the CPP together with the aim to create a tool that would be useful in engineering and philosophy classrooms alike, not to mention its potential for use recreationally and in the tech industry as well.

Interdisciplinarity and opportunities for public engagement meld well together in this project—and, I believe, generally—because given that our collaborators and our intended audiences or users of the TEQ Deck come from such varied backgrounds in experience and knowledge, the creation process and the finished product need to accommodate that diversity. Many ethicists have only a "layperson" understanding of technology, and many technologists only have a "layperson" understanding of ethics. The sweet spot, then, is creating a project which engages both and thus lays squarely within accessibility for laypeople—that

is, non-experts—on both the technological and the ethical front. Extensive

background knowledge or comfort with technical jargon cannot be assumed. This

removes barriers to entry for everybody. Interesting ideas and questions still remain,

with the aim of prompting thoughtful dialogue, but the conversation becomes

available for everybody's participation.

To the TEQ Deck itself: we created a deck of conversation cards—think

TableTopics, or Rachel Martin's podcast *Wild Card*. Each card in the deck presents a

pressing ethical question raised by recent, anticipated, or merely possible

developments in technology. They're meant to highlight some of the critical issues

we are facing, or might face soon, and to facilitate meaningful discussions around

them in an engaging, playful modality. Some questions are likely very familiar, for

example about weighing privacy against the goods provided by big tech and data

mining; others are more abstract or novel, like ones considering the value or priority

of requiring speculative fiction in engineering programs, or the impact of artificial

human wombs to debates about the morality of abortion. Philosophers get to explore

applied topics and utilize theoretical knowledge to contemporary real-world (or

near-future) problems (heads out of the clouds and out of the canon—see Section 1a);

engineers get to explore the social and ethical impacts of technologies they might be

using or creating (it's not just about the science); everyone gets to explore the

nuances, considerations, relationships, and possibilities available in this rapidly-

evolving world of technology (it's relevant to all of us). Hopefully TEQ Deck's

varied and dispersed use will increase awareness, deepen understanding, and most

importantly promote fruitful dialogue between different stakeholders and their perspectives.

Why cards? In part, because people are deeply interested in ethical and philosophical questions, but the words "ethics" and "philosophy" can be intimidating or off-putting. The TEQ Deck team believes that the conversations prompted by the cards are important, perhaps even critical. But traditional means of presenting and sharing content can often be alienating (I discuss this in Section 1b). Reading an article, watching a debate, or attending a lecture invites unquestioning deference to expert opinion; it doesn't incentivize critical thinking; it keeps stakeholders at arms' length and out of the discussion. We want people joining the conversation, not watching it. Participatory and active learning, civic and democratic engagement, community-building and fun are all goods I hope to see promoted by means of the playful, tangible modality of conversation cards. The questions themselves, and the way they're framed, already provide much of this potential. The benefits of physical cards are largely aesthetic and kinesthetic: they're pretty, they look cool, it's fun to draw and hold a card rather than just have a question written out on a whiteboard or asked point-blank. The questions and prompts are grounded in something tangible, and that can itself have impacts on engagement and learning. But furthermore, cards can present unique means of engagement: people *play* with cards. Beyond the sorts of traditional, open-ended discussions the cards might prompt, they provide innumerable opportunities for activities and gameplay. In Chapter 2 I discuss my view of philosophy as play; philosophy *games* see this view met, literally. Sections 3a

and 3b of this chapter provide and explain recreational games and in-class activities (respectively) that I've created for engaging with the TEQ Deck.

Scaffolded assignments and projects can also be borne out of the TEQ Deck: students already familiar with the deck and its questions are likely to be primed—and perhaps excited—to continue engaging with them. Discussions might just be the first step: research, decision-making, and other avenues of further exploration are readily available and natural next steps. Later in 3b I provide an example of a major project that could be used or adapted in a technology and ethics (or similar) course. The current plan for the TEQ Deck project is that each card in the deck will have its own web page that provides background material on both the technology and on some of the central ethical issues at stake, with links to further resources. Students and other TEQ Deck users will be welcome to utilize those websites, but given the speed at which information is found and shared and at which technology evolves, the websites and the questions/cards themselves will need to evolve, to be updated and revitalized. The assignment, the class project, that I propose capitalizes on this need and invites students to become co-creators of this living TEQ Deck. Again it's meant to shift away from the norm of students and non-experts as mere consumers of knowledge to become active participants in its creation. Finally, in Section 3c, I present a public-facing piece co-written by myself and the TEQ Deck project lead, Jon Ellis, which discusses the project, its aims, and other potential pedagogical uses for the TEQ Deck. It's a project that's meant to be shared, and as per my discussion

in Section 2a, those of us working on it should make efforts to see it actually being shared.

First, however, I will present images of our current, printed TEQ Deck. The main team in developing and revising these questions consisted of Jon Ellis, Abigail Kaun, James Read, and myself, and no one question belongs or is attributable to just any one of us. Many of the ideas and questions we attained from our crowdsourcing efforts early on in the project—another example of public outreach and engagement, a move away from ivory tower and technocratic ideals.

We've gone through numerous iterations of every question, playing with the specificity, the style, the phrasing, the framing. We grappled with many decisions: how leading or open-ended to we want the questions? How serious or light-hearted? How much technological or background information should we include? How ethics-y should we be? How should we categorize the cards? In creating a deck of cards that are meant to prompt philosophical inquiry and discussion, we were ourselves engaging in philosophical inquiry: we were *doing* philosophy. I think there's something to be said for that with regards to philosophical work and research. As I discuss in Chapter 2, the work of Philosophers needn't only be aimed toward engaging with other Philosophers, but furthermore I think that the TEQ Deck project puts into question even the ubiquity of traditional philosophical methodology, that of starting with a question, engaging with the relevant literature, then responding by putting forth an argument, account, or theory of one's own. Simply in thinking of the questions, their language and presentation, and their uses,

I feel as though I've engaged in a rewarding philosophical exploration. The work of Philosophers shouldn't be limited to writing papers and developing arguments; asking questions, making connections, exploring nuances in language and theme, and inviting others to participate is, to my mind, just as valuable. Below are images of 6 of the 52 TEQ Deck cards we've printed, though I'll be referring to and utilizing others in examples for the rest of this chapter. The complete deck is available in Appendix 1.

3a: Recreational Uses

TEQ Deck's very medium and content produce ample opportunity for fruitful and playful engagement: at its base, it's a deck of conversation-starters. With the right people at the right moment, simply asking an interesting question can lead to hours of discussion ranging from thoughtful to hilarious to challenging to groundbreaking—but not always. To set this deck of conversation cards apart from others, we at the TEQ Deck team want to provide with the deck (either printed or online) a series of activities in which the deck plays a central role. Users with different aims can engage with them using different means. In the next section (3b), I'll discuss some pedagogical uses for the cards, but in this section I focus on recreation.

We don't always want to be "learning something", feeling like there's some underlying agenda or a test at the end of the day. Earnestness and rigor can be exhausting, especially if we're just hanging out with friends and family, in the evening or a weekend. When workshopping TEQ Deck and some of our earlier ideas for engagement activities, participants lamented that most of them felt like classroom exercises—interesting, and potentially fun, but nonetheless like activities one would do in school, and not in one's living room with a beer and some friends[250]. So I embarked to create some truly recreational activities. Beyond mere conversations or strategies for facilitation, I aimed to introduce gameplay elements: rules, goals, competition, and—particularly important to me—lightheartedness. Although many

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[250] Thank you to workshop participants at the September 2023 Public Philosophy Network "Facing Technology: The Role of Public Philosophy" conference for their feedback!

cards in the TEQ Deck have a note of humor or prompt consideration of relatively

innocuous ideas (for example, a magazine advertisement targeting children who'd

like to clone their neighbors' pets), they're still fairly rich questions. Of course, that

was our aim: we want people to wrestle with conflicting values and ethical

frameworks, face confusions and complications, grapple with life-altering decisions,

and reflect on a rapidly-changing, often ominous state of current and future affairs.

Heavy! But again, not always how people are looking to spend their free time.

So I created two games which intentionally lighten the mood: players still get

the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the topics and ideas presented in the

cards, and they still get to engage with them, but pressure to be earnest or to "figure

it out" is replaced with invitations for silliness or cleverness. Section 3a.1 is a

drinking game, called Circular Reasoning, and Section 3a.2 is a party game, called

TEQ Deckery.

3a.1: Circular Reasoning

Thi Nguyen characterizes a certain kind of game as "stupid", and this is the kind of game for which *the fun* of it comes from doing the game badly: participants are still supposed to adhere to the rules and try their best, but much of the excitement of the game comes from *doing poorly* rather than from *winning*[251]. Some stupid games include Pin the Tail on the Donkey, *Twister,* and Telephone[252]–notice in these examples people are supposed to play the game as well as they can, but players and audiences alike delight in mistakes and failures, rather than or at least as much as in successes and victories[253] . Drinking games are great examples of stupid games, since the point—not the point of the game itself, but of playing a drinking game at all—is to drink, yet drinking tends to make one worse at playing the game. The rules often prompt people to drink only when they mess up or lose, so most of the time *the fun* is tied to people messing up, rather than being successful (even while they're hoping that they will win); the more they drink, the more they'll have to drink more.

The game I propose below is a drinking game, and it's inspired by a phenomenon that I've noticed tends to take place in a classroom or a conversation between people who are either like-minded, confrontationally avoidant, ignorant, excited, or some combination of these things; a conversation which might go something along the lines of this:

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[251] Nguyen (2020), 10-11; 41-43
[252] Ibid. 10
[253] And notice, too, these are the kinds of games in which people might be called out for "messing up on purpose".

Question: Should abortion be legalized everywhere?

Speaker 1: I think that women should have the right to choose if and when to start a family.

Speaker 2: I totally agree with you! There are too many kids out there who don't have the means or family support to grow up healthy and safe, so why would we encourage people to keep procreating?

Speaker 3: Exactly! We're overpopulated as it is, and the people who oppose abortion don't seem to be doing much to make the world a better place for the kids who *already* exist.

Speaker 2: Absolutely. Those people are hypocritical because they claim to value life but then don't do anything to make the un-aborted peoples' lives any better.

Speaker 1: Yeah, for sure, and if abortion were legalized everywhere then it becomes the responsibility of the parents to make sure they can support a kid before they have one.

Speaker 3: That definitely makes sense. People shouldn't have kids if they can't raise them well.

Speaker 1: Right, like there should be some sort of checklist or licensing process for people who want to become parents, to ensure their kid will be safe and fed and have all of their needs met. And parents would need to prove this *before* they are allowed to raise a kid.

Despite so much agreement and many interesting points, the conversation was disjointed, got turned on its head, went nowhere. Where did it go wrong? Each participant well-meaningly claims to agree with the others, and attempts to add their own contribution by picking up the previous thread, but fails to make the necessary connections—their comments might change the topic completely, or demonstrate misunderstanding of the previous one(s), or downright contradict them despite the speaker's professed agreement.

Speaker 1 ends up directly contradicting themselves from their first comment to their last—they begin by asserting a universal right to choose when to start a family, then by the end are asserting the need for parental licensing (whereby certain

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people might be denied the right to start a family even if they want to). Speakers 2 and 3 change the topic of discussion from abortion to child-raising to overpopulation to the hypocrisy of pro-life policies; the framing shifts from legalization to encouragement to responsibility to regulation. And ultimately, the initial question hardly gets addressed at all: the participants seem to have coalesced around some sort of amorphous conclusion (which changes content with each utterance of approval), yet the question of legalizing abortion is basically untouched. It can be frustrating for facilitators or participants to notice the discussion spiraling out of control, or for their own questions and contributions to not get the consideration or air-time they think is warranted. It can be disheartening to witness people egging each other on in nominal defense of one popular position, yet miss the ball entirely—unaware that perhaps they don't endorse the position after all.

I find that this sort of thing happens in classroom discussions quite often. As a discussion facilitator, I don't mind people running off on tangents (for example, a discussion of parental licensing could be really interesting), but I also want participants to feel like conversations are productive, or that they could leave and summarize some main takeaways. I don't know how I'd summarize the example discussion above without just sharing a truncated version of every single comment; meeting minutes rather than a considered summary.

Well, the game I propose encourages these kinds of discussions, the ones which I'm not sure how to assess but which I know from experience can be hard to resist, and fun to participate in. In a low-stakes and somewhat cooperative format

(the "somewhat" will be made clear soon), players are expected to engage with and reason from positions they might not be familiar with, listening and contributing to a line of reasoning that's prompted by one TEQ Deck question and meant to conclude with a response to a different (and potentially unrelated) TEQ Deck question. My implicit pedagogical aims with this game are to prompt players' critical thinking, problem-solving, connection-making between varied topics and concepts, and perhaps even a little bit of reflection about their own approaches to less gamified, more earnest discussions in real life.

But at base, it's meant to be fun: players get to engage with complex, interesting, and potentially stressful questions without feeling the pressure of having to *solve* them, or prove their intelligence, or virtue-signal. The fact that it's a stupid game—a drinking game, no less—sees to this. The game is meant to be fast-paced and logically disorienting, encouraging players to work together in reasoning their collective way from one topic to another while at the same time pitting them against each other by encouraging (silent) tattletales for rule breaks and allowing mischievous players to hold up the gameplay or prolong a round of play unnecessarily by various means. As is characteristic of stupid games, hopefully players will actually *have fun* messing up (if not be encouraged to do so)—silly confrontation and drinking are baked right in—so that even as they have trouble making a connection or thinking of something to say about a topic, they don't feel discouraged or embarrassed: they simply get to take a sip, then try again.

Circular Reasoning

A game of topsy-turvy reasoning that'll make you wonder, "how'd we end up

here?"

The goal: For the group to successfully provide a line of reasoning, step-by-step,

from a response to one TEQ Deck question to a response to another by the time

every player in the group has participated.

The rules: Each player can only provide one sentence per turn by way of reasoning,

evidence, or explanation, and they must speak within 30 seconds of their turn

beginning. Only the player whose turn it is may speak (though non-verbal "table

talk" is encouraged).

A player must take a drink when they break the rules:

- If they speak when it is not their turn

- If their turn takes more than 30 seconds

- If they provide more than one sentence during their turn (one drink per extra

  sentence)

The gameplay: Sit in a circle, each person with a drink. Choose two players—sitting

next to each other—to be the beginning and the end of the playing circle: Player A

and Player Z. Both players draw a TEQ Deck card and read them aloud. After the

cards have been read aloud, Player A crafts a one-sentence response to their card to begin the argument, then gameplay begins (the direction of play goes alphabetically).

The group must reason its way from Player A's response (to their own card) toward a response to Player Z's card, playing off each other's contributions one at a time. Each contribution may only be one sentence long, and players may not skip their turns. The end of the game is determined by all players' consensus that Player Z's TEQ Deck prompt was answered satisfactorily. Note: there's no criteria provided for determining a satisfactory response. It is completely up to players' own assessments and reasons. At the end of the game, players will then *clink* glasses in the middle of the circle and take a celebratory drink.

To initiate the *clink*, any player may exclaim "And thus it is spake!" and hold their glass in the middle of the circle. Players who agree that the game's goal has been met (that is, that a satisfactory response to the second TEQ Deck question has been provided) bring their glasses to the middle as well. If at least one player has refrained from the *clink*, the round has not been completed and gameplay must continue. The player who initiated the failed *clink* must take a drink for speaking out of turn.

> **Refraining from a *clink*:**
> Players might refrain from a *clink* if they don't believe Player Z's card has been responded to fully or adequately, or perhaps because they think resuming the gameplay would be more fun or fruitful than ending it. Players who refrain may not share their reasons for doing so without speaking out of turn and thus having to take a drink themselves.

Anybody who breaks a rule must take a drink, but self-policing is not the only way to achieve this. Other players may draw attention to a rule-break by gesturing or miming at the rule's offender. Note, however, that if they make any verbal accusations they, too, are breaking the rules.

Gameplay continues until everybody *clinks* in the middle. Each time gameplay makes it around the entire circle (that is, from Player A to Player Z) without successfully concluding the line of reasoning and *clink*ing, everybody must take a drink and then the game resumes until the round is complete.

Example gameplay

6 players sit in a circle. Player A draws the Mind-Reading card (right) and Player Z (well, in this case Player F) draws the Edits Inherited card (below). Both cards are read aloud and players

> Mind-reading technologies are being developed. Do people have a fundamental right to keep their thoughts private? Are there any contexts in which law enforcement should be allowed to use mind- reading technology? What about teachers or parents?

are reminded that

> Do people have a right to modify their genomes in ways that could be inherited, were they to have children?

after Player A begins the round, the goal will be for the group to reason its way from Player A's contribution (about the use of mind-reading technology) toward a response to Player F's card (about whether heritable gene edits are ethical). Then the gameplay begins.

> **Player A**: Similar to private texts, emails, and journals, a person's thoughts should only be accessed by others with permission or in cases of criminal investigation with signed search warrants.

Player B: Yes, and teachers and parents have no right to do that.

Player C: Except for in cases of minors, when they have good reason to suspect it's in the best interest of the kid to have their privacy breached. Parents invade their kids' privacy all the—

> Player A gestures wildly for Player C to stop; Player C takes a drink because they've begun a second sentence.

Player C: Except in cases of minors, when it's in the best interest of the kid to have their privacy breached.

Player D: Right, but it's very hard to judge when parents (or even law enforcement) have made that determination rightly or appropriately.

Player E: Yeah, so generally speaking even children should be able to keep their private thoughts to themselves.

Player F: And speaking of children, they should also have the right to keep their genetic privacy to themselves!

Player E: And thus it is spake!

> Player E holds their glass in the middle, but only a couple of other players join them.

Player B: I don't think that last comment really addressed the gene editing card…

> Player F points at both E and B, miming the act of taking a drink—both have spoken out of turn. They each take a drink, then player F points around the whole circle and takes a drink—everybody in the group follows suit, since everybody's contributed to the argument but they haven't been able to complete it yet.

Player A: Okay, yeah, so genetic privacy is also a thing for kids because, uh…

> 20 seconds elapse. Player C taps their watch.

Player A: …because privacy…

> 10 more seconds elapse. Player C gestures at Player A. Player A takes a drink.

Player A: Okay, privacy extends beyond just thoughts and data, because it also encompasses a person's right to develop and make decisions for themselves!

Player B: And if a parent edits their own genes, depending on the changes, that might affect their kid's right to privacy in this sense, and so it's wrong!

Player D: And thus it is spake!

> Player D brings their glass to the center of the circle; everybody except Player C follows suit.

Player E: And thus it is spake!

> Realizing Player C is not ready to *clink*, the rest of the players turn toward them.

Player C: Well firstly, D and E need to take a drink. I wanted to add one more point, that—

Player D: Now you need to drink too, for saying more than one sentence!

Player C: And now *you* need to take another drink, for speaking out of turn! Oh wait, that's another drink for me, too, and now another…

> Player D takes two drinks, Player E takes one, and Player C takes three.

Player C: Anyway, I just wanted to add that I read a book called *Children of Time* in which a virus makes a species of spiders highly-intelligent, and the species passes down understandings—memories—to children through the parents' genetic information, which could also present privacy concerns, not for the children's privacy but for the parents', and might be another reason against being allowed to tinker with genes in ways that could be inherited.

Everyone: And thus it is spake!

> All players *clink* their glasses in the middle of the circle, and the game round has ended.

Player D: Does that really just count as one sentence, C? Oh well…

Variations

Below, I provide three potential variations on the game. The first invites competition by allowing for an actual winner. Depending on the participants and the setting, this variation invites more choice in participation: somebody at a party might not want to stick around for the whole game, or might realize it's not for them. People who might be confused or frustrated at the process or the wonky reasoning

involved might prefer to stand back as observers—still with a part to play if they want, and still being able to consider the cards and players' responses to them, but without the pressure.

The second variation introduces a facilitator, or Philosopher King, to help keep the game on track—but it also invites more sparring among players and the wildcard of rule-break penalties being decided by a single individual. This variation is inspired by a favorite party game of mine called Silent Football; in the version I play with my friends most of the fun is in appealing to "Mister Commissioner, Sir" to create penalties for other players when they make a noise, get distracted, or fail to successfully pass the "silent" (read: invisible) football. The focus and entertainment of the game becomes less about the gameplay itself and more about getting retribution, via the Commissioner's rulings, against players who've tattled against us previously. In the Philosopher King version, I expect similar chaos to ensue—fun, but less wholly about the cards and the line of reasoning itself; logic and argumentation skills are practiced to different ends, namely, convincing the Philosopher King to penalize other players.

Finally, I provide suggestions for utilizing the game in a pedagogical setting; the game itself becomes an in-class activity, and the argumentative and conversational takeaways otherwise left implicit get brought to the surface: how *did* the discussion shift from the beginning to the end? How successful of a line of reasoning—or even an argument—did it end up being, and how might participants re-work it toward being a logically valid or sound one? I think this could do well in a

logic course, or in preparation for an argumentative essay, so that students could have a tangible grasp on how to craft good arguments and why it's important; applying the Ps and the Qs and the logical connectors to a real-life discussion and topic they're already familiar with.

Competitive variation: follow either the original gameplay structure, but eliminate players who have messed up their turns *only after* they've finally completed them. This ensures that everybody still has a chance to play, and to contribute toward reaching the final conclusion, but it will ween down the number of participants as gameplay moves forward. Whether the line of reasoning gets completed or not, the last player standing (or likely, sitting) wins! If it gets completed before a winner is determined, a new TEQ Deck card is chosen and the remaining players resume gameplay, with the aim of reasoning from their current position toward a response to the new TEQ Deck card. Eliminated players may still initiate *clinks*, but are still beholden to the speaking-out-of-turn rule if the *clink* fails.

Philosopher King variation: Instead of silently- and self-policing, the group may designate a Philosopher King to enforce the rules of the game. The Philosopher King must still drink whenever the entire group does, but does not otherwise participate in gameplay.

The Philosopher King *may* allow players to speak out-of-turn unpenalized in order to accuse others of rule-breaks or to defend themselves, but the final determination of a rule-break is ultimately up to the Philosopher King. Penalties for rule-breaks or for other unsportsmanlike behavior are up to the discretion of the Philosopher King as well. With great power comes great responsibility.

In classrooms: This game can also be adapted for pedagogical purposes. Follow the original or the competitive gameplay structure (with or without the drinking; I won't judge), but have a note-taker write down each step of the line of reasoning as players take their successive turns. Once the line of reasoning or the "argument" is completed, have participants analyze it! How did they start from their initial position—or premise—and end up with the conclusion they did?

Potential prompts or activities:

- Have participants formalize the argument: re-write the sentences as well-formed formulas, identifying connectives and inferences.
- Have participants identify the logical validity of the argument.
    - You might break the argument into chunks, depending on how long the whole is, and have small groups evaluate individual pieces of it (there will likely be a number of invalid inferences in the whole).
- Have participants "fix" the argument to make it logically valid, with as few changes as possible.

- o Alternatively, you might have small groups "follow the logic" to a valid conclusion, and compare where they ended up.
- Have participants fact-check the propositions or evidence, checking for soundness. Were there simply logical errors, or factual ones too? Which propositions or statements need more evidence to be compelling? Can participants provide that evidence to flesh out the argument?
- Have participants reflect on the experience of the game:
  - o What is their own position on the question or topic? What parts of the argument do they personally agree with or disagree with most?
  - o Did the practice of charitable argumentation open up their perspective, allowing them better understanding of why certain positions might be compelling?
  - o Did they change their mind at all?
  - o What—if anything—did they learn about engaging in discussions or arguments on philosophical topics that they might bring to future ones?

3a.2: TEQ Deckery

Not all party games are stupid, in the sense described for the Circular

Reasoning game, though many stupid games are party games[254]. What distinguishes

a "party game" from other sorts of games is that they have a low barrier to entry,

and players more experienced with the game than others don't necessarily have an

advantage. In other words, they're fun for the whole family. A novice—even a

child—could be just as successful at a party game as a professional (if there are such

things as professional party game players), because *skill* is not a primary determiner

of success. This is unlike in other, non-party games like Go, soccer, poker, or Super

Smash Bros. where a new player might find themselves at a severe disadvantage; too

many rules to learn, strategies to envision, and muscles to work for them to have a

hope of success against a more seasoned player. Much of the fun of play can be lost

to confusion, frustration, or demoralization. Games aren't as fun without an even

match.

To avoid this pitfall, the acquisition and development of specific skills is

unnecessary, and even discouraged[255], in the playing of party games: one needn't be

a good actor or a wordsmith, a contortionist or a strategy master; one needn't have

quick reflexes or vast stores of knowledge. Charades, *Cards Against Humanity*, *Deer

Lord!*, and Pin the Tail on the Donkey are just as fun, and just as competitive, for the

initiated as for the uninitiated. Some, like Pin the Tail on the Donkey, are stupid

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[254] For a discussion about the distinction between stupid games and party games, see Nguyen (2020) 133-135.
[255] Ibid. 133

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games—much of the fun is in trying to succeed but failing—and others, like *Cards Against Humanity*, still genuinely aim at success (even if success entails crafting a ridiculous or stupid statement).

Circular Reasoning is a stupid game, but not necessarily a party game: players with more background in the topics and ethical intricacies of the TEQ Deck cards, people who have more experience drawing conceptual connections and crafting arguments, will likely be more successful in it. In other words, it is to some degree a game of knowledge and/or skill, even if much of the fun of it comes from breaking the rules or bungling the train of thought and being made to drink. The game I propose below, TEQ Deckery, is a party game but not a stupid game: players generally will have more fun when they're doing well in the game, even if doing well does not necessitate providing the "right" answer, or having the most knowledge, or crafting the clearest argument. It allows for players to engage with the TEQ Deck and the ideas, perspectives, and considerations its cards invite without the competitive pressure of understanding them, per se.

The game is highly inspired by my favorite party game, *Balderdash*[256], and includes elements from the style of popular games like *Cards Against Humanity*,

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[256] In *Balderdash,* players take turns being "Dasher", who shares and spells out loud a word for all the players to define. Most of the words—provided on cards in the game's deck—are obscure or challenging. Each player thinks of and writes down and submits a definition of the word to the Dasher, besides the Dasher who copies the correct definition (which is provided on the back of the card). The Dasher then reads aloud the anonymous definitions and players vote on which definition they each think is the correct one, or is their own, or is otherwise their favorite. Players who aren't the Dasher get points for guessing the correct definition, or for knowing and submitting the correct definition themselves; the Dasher gets points if nobody votes for the correct definition.

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Apples to Apples, and *What Do You Meme?*[257] It is like *Balderdash* in that players'

responses are free-written, rather than provided, and that the Decker (or in

Balderdash, the "Dasher") plays a facilitating role rather than deciding the round's

victor. It is like the other games in that there is no "right" answer to the prompt

which players might be rewarded for knowing; rather, players are wholly rewarded

for thoughtfulness, originality, or humor[258].

TEQ Deckery

A party game of humor and earnestness, solving ethical problems one vote at a time.

The goal: To collect as many TEQ Deck cards as possible, as trophies for providing

the most popular responses to the cards' prompts.

The rules: In each round of the game, one player is designated the Decker, and

facilitates the submission and voting on of other players' responses to a chosen TEQ

Deck prompt. Each player (besides the Decker) must submit a response to the

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[257] In these games, players take turns being the judge. The judge draws one card from a special deck (for example, in *Apples to Apples* it's a deck with cards that have adjectives on them, and in *What Do You Meme?* it's a deck with cards that have images—internet memes—on them), and the other players must each choose one card from their hand to submit anonymously to the judge (player's cards come from a different deck. For example, in *Apples to Apples* these cards have nouns on them, and in *What Do You Meme?* they have captions on them). The judge then chooses which submitted card they think matches best with the card they drew, or is otherwise their favorite. The player whose card is the winner that round earns a point.

[258] I owe the idea for this *Balderdash*-esque gameplay of the TEQ Deck to my partner, Zach Geer.

prompt anonymously and then vote on their favorite. The player whose response

gets the most votes by the end of the round is the winner of that round, and takes the

TEQ Deck card as a trophy.

Table talk is encouraged throughout, but particularly once the submissions are being

read and voting is taking place: players may advocate for responses—their own or

others'—based on how funny, thoughtful, concise, or compelling they find them (or

any other reason!). Players may change their votes as the round progresses, and they

are allowed to vote for their own response.

Ties must be broken. The Decker may choose to discard unpopular responses and

have players re-vote among the remaining ones. In the event of a genuine deadlock,

the round concludes with no winner and the TEQ Deck card is discarded.

The gameplay: First, the group must decide how many TEQ Deck trophies it'll take

to conclude the game. Smaller groups (e.g. 4-6 players) might decide on 8; medium-

sized groups (e.g. 6-8 players) might decide on 5, and large groups (e.g. 8-10 players)

might decide on 3. The first Decker is chosen arbitrarily, and the role shifts clockwise

each round of the game. Provide lots of index cards and writing utensils for players

to use.

The Decker randomly draws 3 TEQ Deck cards from the deck, and chooses the one

they'd like to play. The other cards are discarded to the bottom of the deck (where

they might be drawn again later in the game). The Decker then reads the TEQ Deck

card aloud, and leaves it accessible for other players to consult throughout the

round. Note: not all TEQ Deck cards have explicit questions; part of the challenge is

in thinking about what *kinds* of responses would appeal to the other players, given

the prompts and the personalities at play.

The other players, each on their own small index card, craft a response to the card

and submit it to the Decker, making sure to write their name or initials on their

response to help mitigate forgetfulness or conflict later (particularly important if

certain responses are similar to each other). Once all the responses have been

submitted, the Decker shuffles the cards and reads them out loud without sharing

who submitted which response.

After the initial reading of all the responses, the Decker then reads them again one at

a time, and invites players to each vote for their favorite—this is when table talk

becomes most interesting. Players are invited to, but need not share their reasons for

voting the way they do, or advocate for others to vote for certain responses.

Discussions may arise, and players are allowed to change their votes until all votes

are finalized and the Decker closes the round. The Decker keeps a tally of votes for

each response, being careful to keep track when votes are changed. The player

whose response gets the most votes is the winner of the round and takes the TEQ

Deck card as a trophy. See rules (above) in the event of a tie.

Once a round has concluded, the player clockwise to the previous Decker becomes

the new one, and gameplay continues.

Variations and Examples

At the group's discretion, Deckers may impose further prompt instructions for their

chosen TEQ Deck cards. Players are encouraged to vote for prompts which they

think best adhere to the Decker's instructions. Some possible prompt variations are

provided below, and following each I'll provide an example of the sort of response

somebody might write given the Decker's instructions

and their chosen TEQ Deck card. I'll use the Internet

Access card (right) as the example prompt for every

response below.

> Should internet access be considered a utility, or even a human right, the same way that water and electricity are?

Answer the prompt the way X famous person might respond to it (e.g. Lil Wayne,

Leslie Knope, Confucius, Donald Trump, or grandma; the Decker should confirm

that all players are familiar with the character they're being expected to

impersonate).

> As Donald Trump: I think internet is great. Love it, I really do. Everyone should have it, just not the illegals, just not on my dime, but they should all use internet to buy my steaks, and at a great cost, no less. Cheaper than water or electricity!

Respond to the prompt only by asking further question(s).

What is a right? What is a human right? Do they exist? Should we even have a "right" to water or electricity or anything at all?

Be controversial!

Water and electricity are human *goods*, but the internet only makes our lives *worse.* It should be a human right *not* to have internet. *Mic drop*

Write and submit your response to the prompt in 1 minute or less.

Probably! But water and electricity are more important, and internet can only come after both. So it shouldn't be as much of a priority.

Provide a response that a 4-year-old would understand.

If someone took away your water you would cry, right? Well, internet is like water, only better because it allows you to watch *Peppa Pig!* So nobody should take away your internet either!

Provide your response as a haiku.

Quality of life
Bills, jobs, communication
This ain't the stone age

Respond using a short anecdote.

First, there was life. Then, there was COVID. I almost failed school because I didn't have internet access for two weeks.

3b: Pedagogical Uses

I now move on to pedagogical uses for TEQ Deck. Though the TEQ Deck team is excited for the cards' use outside of structured learning environments, we are educators and we share a passion for teaching; most of our efforts have been in brainstorming ways to utilize TEQ Deck in classrooms—be they in college philosophy or engineering courses, high schools, or training/enrichment classes within the tech industry.

In Section 3b.1 I offer three different in-class activities. Some have game-like features, but all are intended to promote thoughtful and deliberate engagement with different questions, or different aspects of the cards. Numerous activities can offer students or participants much-needed variety in day-to-day classroom environments, and also provide teachers the ability to facilitate the acquisition of narrower or pointed learning goals. In Section 1b, I discuss the norm of passive learning in philosophy classrooms: students reading texts or listening to lectures in order to get acquainted with a topic or an idea. Afterwards, often, an open-ended discussion is prompted and very few students have contributions to offer. Structured learning activities like the ones I offer here create active, student-led introductions to ethical questions and topics. Participation is embedded, and it allows students to spark an interest in a topic before being expected to absorb information about it.

In Section 3b.2 I offer a four-part assignment—a major project—which teachers might use or adapt in their classrooms; a way to morph one-off or initial engagement with the TEQ Deck into a sustained and creative culmination of effort.

My aim in creating this assignment is to offer a blueprint for teachers to use which shifts away from the traditional form of assessment in philosophy courses: academic essays (for my discussion on assessments, see Section 1c). It still prompts critical thinking, research, and writing, but in bite-sized, scaffolded units. It allows students choice and creativity not only in their topic of exploration but in the medium and presentation of the various mini-assignments and the final product which make up the project. Finally, it offers what I take to be a more equitable grading schema than what many assessments provide: the mini-assignment scaffolding provides multiple low-stakes "completion-based" grades, each with opportunities for revision and re-submission. These can help students to uncover and attend to any hidden curriculum in the final project submission and prime them to understand the teacher's expectations before attempting to complete the higher-stakes portion. The specifications-based rubrics allow for transparency and minimize the need for onerous "subjective" assessment of student work.

3b.1: In-class Activities

TEQ Deck has the potential to serve as an accessible, engaging entry into philosophical inquiry and topics related to technology and ethics. It presents numerous questions and prompts, presented in various forms (e.g. "NEWSFLASH" prompts from the future, decision-making scenarios, questions about weighing values or prioritizing interests), which invite discussion about new and developing technologies and frame ethical debates and theories in contemporary, everyday terms. As a series of discussion prompts alone, TEQ Deck can serve as a fruitful pedagogical tool. However, there are more and novel possibilities for its use as well. The tangibility of the cards and the accessibility of dozens of different questions all at once makes for a veritable treasure-trove of activities which can serve to spark student interest, provide variability in a classroom's day-to-day happenings, create structured goals and discussions, and prompt students to approach questions of ethics and technology in different ways.

In what follows I'll present three activities which explicitly make use of TEQ Deck and highlight its uniqueness and potential as a classroom tool. These activities might be used as classroom warm-ups, one-off participation activities, introductions to course modules or units, or as a first step toward a major project or a research venture where students are expected to create or choose their own topics. Though each of the activities requires a facilitator, they are largely student-centered: the students, not the facilitator(s), contribute the ideas and guide the direction of inquiry. This has the upshots of empowering them in their own learning, and also

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requiring very little preparation on the facilitator's part; the point is to hear from the students.

Each of the activities either already is or has the opportunity to be structured in a way that offers students opportunities for individual, small-, and large-group engagement. Creating time for each of these components allows students to refine their thinking and participate in active learning even if they face barriers or discomfort (e.g. language barriers or social anxiety) during certain parts of the activity. The variation helps to allow access to ideas and in-roads to participation for all.

I will present each of the activities clearly and straightforwardly, followed by a short "postscript" with my own reasons, visions and editorialization regarding the particular activity. This way, I hope they will be easy to utilize (even to copy/paste) for facilitators' own uses while still providing supplementary information about when, why, or how a particular activity might be used. Of course any or all can be adapted however an instructor or facilitator sees fit; I imagine curating the selection of cards used, shifting from an individual to a group activity or vice-versa, turning an activity into an actual assignment, and more, all as ways to customize the aims and experiences of the activities.

The activities will be presented in the following order: March Madness, Gallery Walk, and Drafting Connections.

Activity 1- March Madness[259]

Provide students with two TEQ Deck cards each—either randomly or by drafting.

Their task is to create a 2-minute "pitch" for each of their cards arguing why the

question or prompt on the card is important. They might argue why time, energy,

and resources should be spent on determining the right answer or course of action

for it (its real-world import), why it's particularly intriguing or challenging to

answer (its intellectual import), or might devise some other route toward advocating

for their cards' importance. Provide time in or out of class for students to craft their

pitches.

Students will present their pitches in a tournament-style competition. Share or

project a bracket (see below for an example) so that students can see the competition

order and track the results. In each round, two students will present their pitches in

turn. Once both have presented, the class votes on which of the cards seems most

compelling or important of the two; the winner gets to progress to the next round of

the tournament. Note: it may be the case that one student must compete against

themselves in the final; this is okay.

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[259] This activity is inspired by a "March Madness" assignment I did for Mr. Williams in AP
World History, where we were each assigned two figures from history and had to argue for
what made them the *most* important historic figures.

As the tournament progresses, encourage students to fine-tune their arguments. By the end they might have drastically different pitches for the same card. The winner of the tournament is the student whose card is deemed the most important.

Bracket example

Students are designated by letters; cards are designated by numbers. The aim is to have students competing against different classmates on each side of the tournament bracket[260].
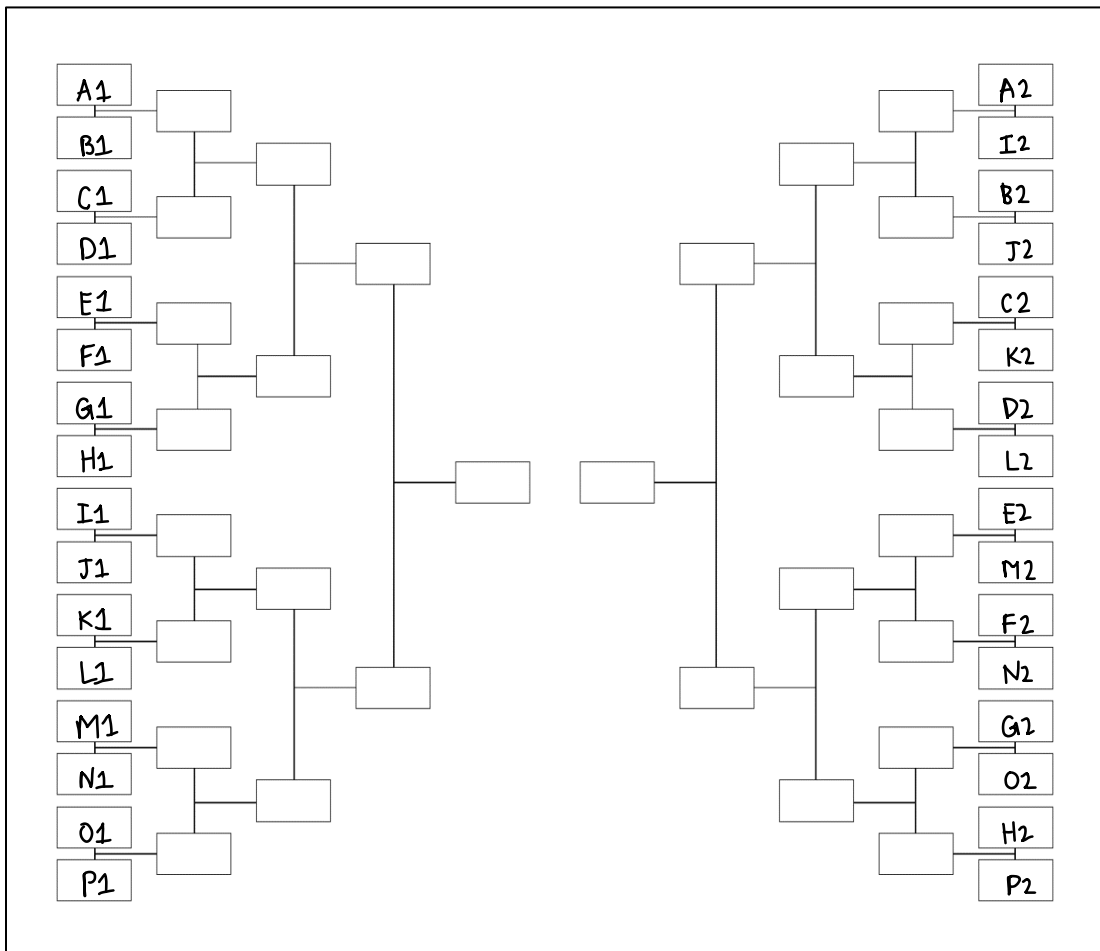
[260] Bracket template provided by formbirds.com.

Postscript

This activity can help students practice their argumentation and their public speaking skills. Students are assigned two cards to increase the likelihood of fair competition. Drafting is more in line with the March Madness theme, whereby students each get a "first pick" and "second pick" of cards. This could be done by way of traditional card drafting or some other means of allowing students to choose cards one at a time. Drafting allows students to familiarize themselves ahead of time with cards besides their own, which could be good pedagogically but might lead to biases during the voting part of the competition (if students have already decided what their favorite cards are, for example). Assigning cards randomly may disadvantage certain students but the simplicity and chance of it—depending on the stakes of the competition—could be worth it. After all, the rounds of the tournament are decided arbitrarily, too.

Depending on how much time students are given to prepare their pitches, and whether the activity will be graded, expectations can be put forth to require well-formed, logically valid arguments, or use of evidence and/or sources. On the other hand, it could be used as a way to allow students simply to practice improvisation and rhetoric, appealing to their peers in whatever ways they think will be most effective. Regardless of the class's voting response to arguments, teachers might introduce a metacognitive and reflective element of assessment: allowing some discussion after each round so classmates can evaluate the pitches or discuss the cards, providing instructor feedback on the students' pitches, and also

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having students evaluate their own: how effective did *they* think they were? How interesting or critical do they actually believe their questions to be?

The March Madness activity also awards a high degree of flexibility with regards to competition (or lack thereof) and the teacher's ultimate aims for the unit or course. If students are meant ultimately to research one or some questions, this activity could be used to narrow down the possible prompts (e.g. each card that made it into the semifinals becomes a prompt available for a final project or essay), or perhaps special attention and investigation will only be given to the winning card, and everybody works on it. Perhaps students' final March Madness rankings determine the order in which they get to choose a prompt, or present a final project; maybe students are awarded extra credit if at least one of their cards makes it to a certain round of the tournament, or if they receive certain special recognitions (e.g. "the underdog award" or "best emotional appeal").

What I think is most valuable about an activity like this is its structure of marked attention to each question. Because it's framed as a competition, students are incentivized to earnestly consider the merits, elements, and complexities of their questions regardless of whether they'd thought about them before, or would have otherwise had an interest in them. They are forced (well, encouraged) to search for the pressing ethical issues raised in the cards, the possibilities of the technologies and their uses, and the stakes involved. They are essentially asked to find answers to the question "why does this matter?" which so often arises in philosophy courses— but in their own terms. They can reflect on their own interests, experiences, values,

and fears to make a case for the questions' importance that ideally resonates with them personally. It's also somewhat more of a metaethical exercise than others: students are asked to engage with an ethical question without trying to answer it. They might not have a response to the question or solution to the problem, but they may very well finish the activity with a better understanding of why it's important, what makes it "ethical" in the first place, and what sorts of ethical and metaethical assumptions or frameworks must be in play in order to answer it. In this activity, being controversial or resolute in one's moral and political positions doesn't have a necessary place, and it allows students to familiarize themselves with the questions before jumping to conclusions or taking a position.

I could see this activity being done in groups as well, rather than as individuals: each person in the group could be assigned a different role or perspective to focus their arguments on: the those of tech developers/corporate industry/regulators/tech consumers/the public/future people/the environment, or considering the aspects of knowledge/prudence/justice/well-being/economy that might be at stake when considering the questions. In this scenario, teams compete against each other either in head-to-head battles (e.g. the environmental stakes concerning card A against the environmental stakes concerning card B), all-things-considered rounds, or some combination thereof. Introducing a team element would allow for a deeper engagement with each card, and, of course, a cooperative aspect to the activity rather than merely competition.

Activity 2- Gallery Walk

Create large-print posters of 10-12 TEQ Deck questions and affix them on the walls around the room. Provide each participant with four colored stickers with which they'll mark the questions they'd most like to discuss. Provide 15-20 minutes for participants to wander the room at their own pace, read the questions, and mark their favorites before taking their seats in small groups of four or five. Encourage mingling and discussion throughout this time.

Once everybody has marked their questions and sat down, walk around the room and tally up the stickers: whichever question has the most will become the topic of group discussions. You might solicit some individual remarks at this point for people to explain or speculate about why they found that question most compelling, or some of the others less-so.

Give small groups 15 minutes to discuss the question open-endedly among themselves. You might wander the room to hear what kinds of conversations are being had (to aid facilitation later), or join a single group to participate yourself. Once the small-group discussions are wrapped up, facilitate a discussion: aim to hear from at least a couple of people from every group; encourage participants to share the confusions, considerations, conflicts, or conclusions they discussed; encourage back-to-back contributions between group members (who might have

had different takeaways from the original discussion) as well as between groups; encourage participants to ask follow-up or clarifying questions.

Postscript

Oftentimes, discussion prompts are provided in a classroom or other setting with little to no priming or input from the discussion participants themselves. They're thrown into an open-ended discussion unprepared and oftentimes uninterested in the topic at hand; cue crickets. This activity has the benefit of giving participants time to gather their thoughts before discussion begins, and it can also provide them with a sense of ownership over the broaching of the topic itself: the group gets to decide what to discuss. Of course, it likely isn't the case that everybody in the group advocates for the same particular question(s), but at the very least the decision to discuss one over another isn't arbitrarily determined by the facilitator; it's another small nod toward the democratic process. It also has the benefit of getting people moving, and encouraging short interactions or conversations even before the "real" discussion begins. People might share confusions, clarify terms, technologies, or ideas for each other, express contagious enthusiasm, or interact in other ways which can warm people up and help them feel ready to participate once a discussion question gets determined—a nice ice-breaker. Individually, people can start formulating opinions, anticipating responses, and making connections between cards. Facilitators might even prompt a few minutes of individual reflection or ask

participants to jot down some initial thoughts about the chosen question prior to beginning group discussions so that every participant can prepare to contribute.

The large-group discussion will hopefully flow naturally; small groups will have likely had very different discussions, honed in on different considerations, faced resounding internal agreement or contention, brainstormed different answers—sharing and reflecting on these provides ample fodder for the discussion to come. However, one element of the large-group discussion that distinguishes it from the smaller ones is the role of the facilitator. Whereas small groups have carte blanche for determining the direction of their conversation—which may result in echo-chamber-like effects, conflict (like certain people dominating the conversation, or dismissing others' contributions), the overlooking of certain assumptions, considerations, or important information, or conversational stale-mates—the facilitator in the large group is responsible for drawing attention to elements of the discussion itself. A meta-conversation emerges, whereby participants can discuss not only the topics related to the card itself, but the way they approach those topics and share their ideas with others. The facilitator prompts connections, encourages respectful dialogue and conversational virtues (like patience, humility, allowing space for others to speak, etc.)[261], draws attention to patterns in reasoning, the facts and assumptions in play, and invites considerations of the significance of the way the question is framed and the context in which it's being discussed.

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[261] Teichman (2019)

This is the activity the TEQ Deck team has used numerous times in workshop settings, in order to gauge interest in and feedback on the cards. We've had participants ranging from university professors, tech and gameplay developers, students, and the public—and combinations of these groups—and the discussions have been fruitful. The individuals and the small groups and large groups they made up have all brought varied and insightful contributions and the discussion format allowed for numerous considerations, positions—and yes, digressions!—to come forth throughout; focuses and nuances shifting organically.

Facilitators can use their role to promote specific ends, too: we used it as a way to get feedback on the TEQ Deck questions and possible activities for their use, but framing it for other purposes or being intentional with the selection of prompts displayed in the room could prove quite useful. To practice high-stakes decision-making, facilitator could assign participants the roles of legislators, regulators, developers, or other stakeholders (perhaps small groups taking on the roles of each) and encourage them to focus on the priorities and processes involved in addressing the question. Somebody looking to find a research topic could request that special attention be paid to the empirical and contextual elements, the unknowns and opportunities for further investigation that each card invites. A focused exploration of far-future consequences, or matters of equity and justice could be prioritized in considerations and discussions of the cards. Between the aims of the facilitator and the cards chosen for the activity, each session could lead to drastically different kinds of discussions.

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Activity 3- Drafting Connections

This is a 2-part activity: first, participants draft cards. Then, they complete a reflection.

Drafting

Drafting is best played in groups of five to 10. Three TEQ Deck cards are dealt to each player, and players must maintain three cards in their hand throughout the game. The goal is to get three cards which share a connection. There are no rules or limitations for the *kind* of connection a player can make between cards—they'll have to explain and reflect on it later—but examples of connections players might search for include:

- Stakeholder: a group or individual whose interests are closely affected by the circumstances or decisions described in all three cards (e.g. social media users, the middle class, sentient AI).

- Value or principle: an ethical consideration that's relevant to or prompted by all three cards (e.g. equality, privacy, kindness, utility).

- Technology: a field of research or technology that's common to all three cards (e.g. genomics, space travel, algorithms, medicine).

- Framing: a style or strategy for asking a question or introducing a topic that's shared by all three cards (e.g. tradeoffs, weighing values, deciding policy, meta-questions).

Passing to the left, each player chooses one card from their hand to discard, then picks up the discarded card from their right to add it to their hand — this should happen synchronously (so players should wait until everybody is ready before they discard). This process repeats.

As players complete their sets three cards which they've determined all share a connection, they exit the group and begin the reflection component (below). If more than half of the players have finished, and a consensus is reached among the remaining players that they cannot complete their sets, each remaining player may discard one card from their hand into the middle of the circle and replace it with a new card from the deck. Drafting then continues until everybody has a set of three they are satisfied with (note: the final player may draft directly from the deck).

Reflection

Please respond to the following prompts:

1. What are your three cards, and what is their connection? Explain.

2. How might the connection you've found between the cards help you to respond to them? Will considerations or responses to one help inform the others? Brainstorm some strategies for investigating all three cards together.

3. Give yourself a grade for your efforts in this activity. What letter grade (A-F) do you think you should receive based on the strength, creativity, and

usefulness of the connection you made and your investigation of it. Explain your reasoning.

Postscript

Of the four activities, this one makes most use of the cards *qua* cards: their tangibility is key for the drafting phase. The gameplay is inspired by the classic card game Spoons, but unlike in Spoons, players don't get eliminated from the game as it progresses—this, to avoid any sort of "losers" and to facilitate continuous engagement among students who have achieved their completed set of cards and among those who haven't. The open-endedness of what kinds of connections students are allowed to make has twofold use. First, it's practical: the cards vary so much that depending on how they're distributed and how many people are drafting, it may be very challenging to find clear connections between any three cards. Having the flexibility to "ease out" of the activity with a superficial connection, or a half-baked one, or a dubious one, can help resolve worries of time constraints and anxiety. Second, it invites an opportunity for metacognition and self-reflection during or afterward; especially if the facilitator primes students that they'll have to expand on their connection and evaluate their own efforts, they'll be encouraged to earnestly read and reflect on the cards as they draft and try to make *good* connections. The cards [will] have "tags" which provide clues for connections that students might make, but they'll know that relying solely on these is the easy way out.

Teachers might adapt the activity to focus only on one or two acceptable kinds of connections to make. In particular, I think focusing just on shared stakeholders and their interests provides a good exercise in perspective-taking, big-picture consideration of issues, and practical decision-making: what should we do when we can't make everyone happy? Furthermore, considerations of stakeholders invite more critical and deep thought than, say, considerations of shared technology (e.g. "oh, these are all about AI!"), making it more difficult for students to rely on superficial connections.

Drafting allows for a deeper familiarity with the cards—they'll likely see many of the same cards circulating throughout the game—and encourages plasticity and out-of-the-box thinking: seeing the same cards again and again and not making progress on one's working set theme (e.g. social media users as stakeholders, or the principle of fairness) might make one rethink which connection to "collect", or see one's current cards in a new light. Players may originally seek to make the most straightforward or easy connections, but realize others are likely doing that too; a more creative connection might end up being easier to collect.

The reflection part is where students do most of the perspective-taking and consideration of how to address the cards' prompts. I envision the reflection either to be a class "exit ticket" for the day—students are allowed to leave once they've completed it—or as a low-stakes take-home assignment. Because each student's combination of cards is unique, they've already began their reflections in class (e.g. by intentionally picking cards with a shared connection), and because their

responses needn't be based on evidence or literature, the likelihood and opportunity

for cheating are slim. Depending on a teacher's aims, the reflection could be graded

based on completeness, the strength of their initial connection or grouping (e.g. is

"people" a specific or strong enough stakeholder to use? Is the Hippocratic Oath

card really a meta-question?), the depth of their insights, or even the grades they

give themselves (anecdotally I've heard that students tend to grade themselves more

harshly than their teachers do).

3b.2: Major Project

This project provides students with a scaffolded, multi-assignment and multi-modality opportunity to engage creatively and deeply with a question in technology and ethics. Students who are assigned this project should have prior familiarity with the TEQ Deck (perhaps they've done a few in-class activities with it already), and may find that certain technologies or topics are missing from the cards, or that some cards have become outdated, or could be improved. The idea behind this project is to empower students to *become* part of the TEQ Deck team: they will create their own TEQ Deck question and then investigate it in low-stakes, bite-sized pieces that invite them to consider it with different perspectives and aims in mind. These pieces will culminate in a final portfolio or website which may serve as a resource for future students' and interested parties' reference and use—perhaps even on the TEQ Deck website itself! As technologies, policies, and TEQ Deck questions develop, each cohort's projects will serve as a time-stamped look into the considerations, worries, debates, and solutions on offer—a living history of technological innovations, possibilities, and priorities and the ethical investigations exploring them.

The final portfolio might be completed individually or as a group (this is up to how teachers might want to adapt the project in their own classrooms) but either way it's meant to foster creativity and collaboration among students, inviting them to create their own TEQ Deck questions, invite and offer feedback from each other, contribute their own voices and perspectives into discussions of technology and

ethics, and be part of something bigger. It's not merely a classroom project—or it doesn't have to be—and students' own interests and strengths can guide the direction of their work.

First I'll present a project overview which teachers should share with their students. Then I'll present each of the four assignments (three mini-assignments and one final submission) one at a time, as they'd be shared with students. Appendix 2 contains "notes for teachers" for each of the four assignments. There are many ways that teachers might adapt the project, or decisions regarding priorities and structure they might want to consider. This presentation is meant to allow for the assignment to be easily copy/pasted or adapted for classroom use, while providing readers of my dissertation or teachers hoping to utilize the assignment(s) with my personal thoughts and analysis, and further instructions: the notes for teachers provide tips, starting points, and options to help them actually implement the project.

TEQ Deck: The Living Deck

Project overview

Imagine **you** and your classmates have just been hired for a position on the TEQ Deck team. Your aim is to update the deck of cards to keep them current and to cover more topics and technologies. Your task is to submit a portfolio for a new or revised TEQ Deck question which contains resources for further exploration that interested users can access.

Skills that you'll practice and demonstrate throughout this project include: asking philosophical questions, articulating positions and reasons for holding them, considering varied perspectives, analyzing arguments, facilitating philosophical discussions, developing research plans, doing philosophical research, writing argumentative papers, providing, receiving, and implementing constructive feedback, revising and proofreading philosophical work, and creating original resource content.

The project contains three mini-assignments, submitted separately and graded for completion, and one final portfolio submission graded for content, polish, and responsiveness to feedback. The assignments are as follows:

1) **Pick a card, any card**
   - For this assignment, you will motivate your project and provide informal and initial thoughts on your chosen TEQ Deck question.

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2) **Think-tank**

- For this assignment, you and your classmates will create a think-tank to workshop perspectives and avenues for exploring your TEQ Deck questions.

3) **Controversy!**

- For this assignment, you will provide summaries (in your own words) of two or three compelling positions on your card's topic, considering different stakeholders, ethical positions, policies, etc.

4) **Final portfolio submission**

- Finally, you will submit either a web page, zine, or a document of your final portfolio—you'll revise and format your work from assignments 1-3 and include multimedia elements (e.g. photos, illustrations, flow charts) and a final enrichment piece of your own design.

Assignment 1- Pick a card, any card

The task: This is the first part of your TEQ Deck major project, in which you're asked to brainstorm one revised and one brand-new TEQ Deck question and to <u>motivate</u> your choices for creating them: What makes these questions compelling *to you?* Why is it important that people engage with them? No research is necessary for this assignment, but if you have prior knowledge or experience engaging with this topic you are encouraged to reference and discuss it.

The aim of this assignment is to help you orient yourself and kick-start your project, and you will receive feedback from your instructor to help ensure a fruitful exploration. A version of this assignment will be revised and reformatted in your final portfolio submission.

      In completing this assignment, you'll have practiced: asking philosophical questions, articulating evaluative positions and reasons for holding them, and developing research plans.

The ask: Please submit either a 2-page written response or a 5-minute video

response in which you do the following:

1) **Choose one TEQ Deck question that you**

   think could be improved, and respond to the

   following:

   1) What is the TEQ Deck question?

   2) Which of its elements make it a strong

      question?

   3) Which of its elements could be improved?

> Elements of a strong question:
> - Is it clear? Is enough context or information provided to explore it?
> - Is the technology or topic relevant? Important? Critical?
> - Does it invite varied perspectives or answers? Is it not too leading, or too easy, to address?
> - Is it written in an interesting and engaging way?

2) **Provide a revised version of your chosen TEQ Deck question**

   You may add an explanation of the improvements/revisions you made, and why

   you think this version is stronger than the original.

3) **Brainstorm a completely new question for the TEQ Deck and respond to the**

   following:

   1) What is the question/prompt?

   2) What elements of a strong question are you hoping to capture?

   3) What difficulties or hold-ups are you facing in developing this question?

4) **Of the two questions you've created, discuss which one you hope to engage**

   with further for this project, and why.

   You might consider the availability of news, research, and other resources

   available to help explore it; you might consider the personal or global

   importance and interest in addressing it; etc.

The expectation: This assignment will be graded as either Complete or Incomplete, with the opportunity to resubmit for credit. All resubmissions will be due within a week of receiving feedback.

Complete if:	Incomplete if:
• **Student response is 2 pages, or 5 minutes long** (depending on chosen format) • **Student completes all 4 asks, with responses addressing each of the bullet points**	Student response is too short, or student fails to sufficiently respond to each of the 4 asks

Assignment 2- Think-tank

The task: For this assignment, you and your classmates will create small (3- to 4-person) think-tanks to begin exploration of your questions. Then you will create an annotated bibliography of sources which TEQ Deck users might utilize as they explore potential answers and intricacies of your topic.

The aim of this assignment is to help you gain a better understanding of your topic, the stakeholders involved, and the perspectives and positions available on it. Use this time to discover what ethical considerations and perspectives are relevant in addressing your topic, and what resources might be available to provide context and enrichment in its investigation. A version of this assignment will be revised and reformatted in your final portfolio submission.

In completing this assignment, you'll have practiced: facilitating philosophical discussions, providing, receiving, and implementing constructive feedback, considering varied perspectives, developing research plans, and doing philosophical research.

The ask: In your small groups, each of you will lead/facilitate a 15-minute discussion of your TEQ Deck question. Please take notes during these, then submit a reflection and bibliography based off your discussions and your further research.

1) **Think-tank discussion**

When it is your turn to lead the discussion, share your TEQ Deck question with your group. Allow them time to consider it and share their ideas, inviting contributions from every group member. **Note:** this is an opportunity to hear from others about your topic; try to keep your own input to a minimum, and focus on asking questions and facilitating conversation. You'll get the chance to share your own perspectives later. **Questions you might ask your group:**

- What's your answer to this prompt/question?

- How familiar are you with the topic? Does it remind you of any books, movies, news stories, articles, or personal experiences you've had?

- What further information would be useful for exploring or addressing the prompt/question?

- Who is this question important for? Who are the stakeholders involved in making decisions or being affected by this technology? What might their perspectives be?

2) **Reflection**

Please submit a 500-word reflection on the group's discussion of your question. In it, please respond to the following:

1) Who were your group members, and what were one or two interesting insights that each person contributed to the discussion?

2) How will the think-tank discussion help you to move forward with this project? What sorts of resources, considerations, perspectives, or frameworks will it be useful for you to explore and share in your final portfolio?

3) **Annotated bibliography**

Following your discussion and reflection, **create an annotated bibliography of at least 3 tools or resources that a TEQ Deck user interested in your question might find valuable to explore**. These might include news stories, pieces of fiction, podcasts, documentaries, academic papers, magazine articles, or blog posts. Please include at least 2 different mediums in your bibliography (for example, one podcast, one short story, and a news article). **For each entry, include:**

1) Citation info and, if possible, a link to the resource
2) A 1-paragraph summary of the medium, its main points, and what makes it a useful resource in exploring your question

The expectation: This assignment will be graded as either Complete or Incomplete, with the opportunity to resubmit for credit. All resubmissions will be due within a week of receiving feedback.

Complete if:	Incomplete if:
• **Student provides a 500-word think-tank reflection,** noting contributions from each group member and a plan for moving forward • **Student provides a 3-entry annotated bibliography** with at least 2 varied mediums	• Student's reflection fails to note contributions from every group member or reflect on takeaways from the discussion • Student's bibliography is missing entries or lacks at least 2 varied mediums

Assignment 3- Controversy!

The task: Now that you've acquired more information about the topic or perspectives relating to your TEQ Deck question, you are in a position to argue your own response to it—take a stand. You will present and analyze both your own position, and an alternative or contradictory one.

The aim of this assignment is to practice articulating your own views, and those you disagree with, in a fair and charitable manner. Rather than a "hot take", consider this more of a "slow burn"—a reasoned and well-thought out response to your question given the input you've gained from classmates and sources. A version of this assignment will be revised and reformatted in your final portfolio submission.

In completing this assignment, you'll have practiced: articulating positions and reasons for holding them, considering varied perspectives, analyzing arguments, and writing argumentative papers.

The ask: Please submit a 1000-word piece in which you:

1) **Present and explain your TEQ Deck question, including the focus of your discussion**

   - For example, will you be discussing how the technology should be developed? *If* the technology should be developed? Are you concerned most with safety, happiness, fairness, practicality? In other words: what are you framing your arguments around?

2) **Present your own response to, and position on, the question**

- Explain your reasoning—what makes your position compelling? Why do you believe what you do about the topic?

3) **Present an alternative response to, and position on, the question**

- Explain the reasoning behind this response—what makes *this* position compelling?

4) **Compare, analyze, and reflect on the two positions**

- What are the consequences of these two positions? What implications might they have morally, ecologically, technologically, economically?

- Where does the disagreement lay? Can this disagreement be reconciled? Can compromises be reached?

- What takeaways have you gained from exploring this question? Have you changed your mind, strengthened it, matured? What new insights or perspectives have you gained?

This submission may take the form of an argumentative paper, a short story, or a [written] dialogue or script. If you have an idea for a different form of submission, please feel free to reach out to the instructor for approval!

The expectation: This assignment will be graded as either Complete or Incomplete, with the opportunity to resubmit for credit. All resubmissions will be due within a week of receiving feedback.

Complete if:	Incomplete if:
• **Student response is 1500 words long** • **Student responds to asks 1-4** (though not every bullet point from 4 needs to be addressed) • **Student demonstrates a good-faith effort to present the opposing position in a way that is fair and charitable**	Student response is too short, student fails to respond to each of the 4 asks, or student doesn't demonstrate a good-faith presentation of alternative position

Final Portfolio Submission

The task: It's time to put it all together! Culminate the elements from Assignments 1-3 and add a new one to create a multimedia portfolio.

The aim of this assignment is to revise and revamp your previous work in order to provide an engaging and thorough project of your own making which could serve as a resource for other people interested in exploring your TEQ Deck question.

In completing this assignment, you'll have practiced: implementing constructive feedback, revising and proofreading philosophical work, and creating original resource content.

The ask: Please create either a webpage, zine, or document portfolio which includes the following:

1) **An exciting hook—to draw TEQ Deck users to your question**

   - Introduce the question, and motivate the project (from Assignment 1)

   - Include illustrations, photos, or diagrams as you see fit

2) **A medium-specific resource guide—for TEQ Deck users to explore the topic**

   - Include summaries and analysis (from Assignment 2)

   - Provide links, thumbnails, and excerpts as you see fit

3) **A well-formatted piece presenting two different positions on the question—to share your thoughts on the topic**

- This should be a revised version of your earlier argumentative submission though it can be reformatted, shortened, or lengthened as you see fit (from Assignment 3)

4) **A new and/or creative element**

- You have creative license here: what final element will you make to complete your portfolio, to make the final project more well-rounded, interesting, practical, or informative?

> The creative possibilities are endless, but here are some ideas:
> - An interview you conduct with an expert or important stakeholder on your topic
> - A series of curated and new TEQ Deck questions related to yours
> - A magazine-style "quiz" or decision tree for determining different answers or positions to the question
> - A short story or film illustrating an outcome or future concerning the question or responses to it
> - A reflection on how different mediums or aims shape how a topic is engaged with

5) **A bibliography**

- Include all of your research sources, as well as sources for images or software you used in creating your final project

The expectation: This assignment will be scored out of 100 points, based on adherence to project guidelines, revisions in light of feedback, and over-all portfolio presentation.

Criteria	Elements	Points
Adherence to project guidelines	1. Hook/intro	1-10
	2. Resource guide	1-10
	3. Position piece	1-15
	4. New/creative element	1-10
	5. Bibliography	1-5
Revisions in light of feedback	1. Demonstration of effort to strengthen and prioritize compelling elements from Assignments 1 and 2 within final project	1-10

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	2. Improvement of position piece in terms of depth of arguments, charitability toward opposing view, and development of analysis	1-10
Portfolio presentation	1. Final project is attractive and well-formatted	1-10
	2. Final project has minimal spelling, grammar, or informational errors	1-10
	3. Final project contains varied multimedia elements	1-10

3c: Public Outreach

As I discuss in Chapter 2, I think that oftentimes Philosophers don't do enough to publicize their work: they might craft a brilliant argument, articulate or clarify an important concept or idea, solve The Ultimate Question of Life, the Universe, and Everything[262], and then… publish it in a Philosophy journal. If the idea is good enough, the world will catch on, right? Perhaps knowledge just trickles down from the heights of the ivory tower, or perhaps anyone who knows what they should know would know to look at this or that paper written by this or that brilliant but obscure contemporary Philosopher. Unfortunately, I don't think it works that way. Ideas worth sharing should be shared, and I would love to see more efforts from Philosophers to widen the audience of those who engage with their work. Of course, part of this requires making one's work more accessible—that is, engaging, readable, and minimally jargon-y—but it also requires letting people know that one's work is out there to be accessed.

In this section I'll share a reformatted version of a public-facing piece about the TEQ Deck project, co-written by Jon Ellis (the project lead) and myself. It was originally posted as part of a series on technology from the Humanities Institute at UCSC[263]. I present it to demonstrate these sorts of efforts: in the piece, we aim to describe the project and the pedagogical opportunities it presents (some of which are in-class activities and contributions to the "living deck" like the ones I provided in the previous section) in language that's accessible for a public audience; even people

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[262] Adams (2007)
[263] Ellis and Robertson (2024)

with no experience in Philosophy can understand it. Furthermore, we offer insights into what philosophy and the work of Philosophers might entail: we explicitly philosophize *about* the project right on the page. It demystifies philosophy for folks who might be unfamiliar with the subject or practice, and motivates the value of philosophical inquiry even in spheres of technology and its development. People might not think of the need for philosophy in considerations of scientific and technological advancement without a nudge like this one; we must advocate for our work's place in the public and industrial spheres, otherwise it risks being ignored.

TEQ Deck: Technology. Ethics. Questions.[264]

Jon Ellis & Emily Robertson

"Families across the country experienced devastating rifts this year due to diverging opinions about A.I. proxies—interactive, lifelike, virtual versions of real people, built using their extensive digital footprints. A woman in Iowa whose husband had passed away in January paid to have an A.I. proxy of him built. At the next holiday, she put him on a monitor in the dining room so he could 'join' the family for dinner. But when the woman's daughter and grandsons arrived, they found it so deeply disturbing and wrong, that they ultimately left. The 7-year-old was especially confused."

When you sit down with TEQ Deck: Technology. Ethics. Questions, this is one of the YEAR IN REVIEW cards you might confront. The TEQ Deck is a deck of cards, each one concerning an ethical issue raised by a recent, emerging, anticipated, or possible development in technology (in A.I., bio-engineering, astrobiology, blockchain, nanotechnology, virtual reality, big data, and so forth). The cards highlight some of the critical issues we are facing, or might face soon, and facilitate meaningful discussions around them in an engaging, playful modality.

The deck is a collaboration of UC Santa Cruz's Center for Public Philosophy* and Baskin School of Engineering. It is designed for use in many, varied contexts, with the intention of increasing awareness, deepening understanding, and promoting dialogue. Two specific uses are foremost in mind: First, we intend them to be used in structured learning environments like classrooms (e.g., in high schools,

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[264] Ibid.

* The Center for Public Philosophy is a center at Cowell College. Created in 2015, in close collaboration with The Humanities Institute, it is driven by the conviction that philosophy can be a force for positive change in the world, by sharing widely the power and joy of philosophical reflection, dialogue, and wonder.

colleges, and industries) and second, we envision the deck being used in recreational contexts, in games, with friends, family, or colleagues at the office. Each card has or will have an associated web page that introduces some of the central ethical issues at stake, and provides background and further resources. The deck and its digital home contain a broad assortment of possible uses for TEQ Deck, including pedagogically effective activities for individual class meetings as well as for larger course projects; and for recreational contexts, various structures of gameplay. Our design partner, Hiker, makes the deck and its scaffolding shine.

In testing TEQ Deck, we've led a wide variety of practice discussions in workshops and classrooms, with friends, and at public events using a "beta-version" prototype of it, usually with a group of 8 to 10 participants. We typically start by sharing 10 to 20 of the cards and having people register their four or five favorites. The process of considering and choosing cards engages people immediately. From there, discussion soars, even before further instruction.

Why cards? One reason is that, while nearly everyone is deeply interested in ethical and philosophical issues, the word "philosophy," and works of philosophy can be intimidating, even alienating. Cards are playful, tactile, inviting, and accessible. When people experience games, projects or curricula that resonate with their inner thoughts and curiosity, there arises a powerful learning opportunity—made even more so if the material is presented in a fun and digestible form. As both academics and teachers, we know first-hand that engagement, empowered learning, and a sense of belonging are key to success. Classroom activities that utilize the TEQ

Deck have the power to meet the socio-emotional and intellectual needs of our students, and recreational conversation and games built around its questions have the capacity to inspire all people who see themselves as life-long learners.

From the ground up

To discover the topics, questions, and concerns that were most on peoples' minds, we crowdsourced our concept. With the help of our supporting partners (below), we soon received hundreds of submissions from people in more than 20 different countries.

The breadth of ethical considerations, the variety of technological projects and innovations, and their global import make these questions a project not just for the TEQ Deck team, or for tech developers or students in engineering or philosophy, but a project for everybody. Ethicists and philosophers (very broadly construed) might help lead the way through these conversations, but we need perspectives from all fields, all regions, and all ages to begin to make sense of it all. In this regard, there has never been such a need for the democracy of ideas, as there are NO experts here to look to for answers. This is truly terra incognita.

And oh, how things have changed, just since we first solicited submissions four years ago. We have seen people's concerns, interests, and assumptions transform in real time (ChatGPT wasn't even a thing then!). In 2020, for instance, many people were especially concerned about privacy with respect to cameras and microphones: Was Alexa "taking in" everything we said in our homes and storing

the data somewhere, with the possibility that it could be mined in the future? Now there's more of a sense of resignation about that; that ship has sailed.

Other questions, however--about mind-reading, flying taxis, AI proxies and bots, and virtual reality, just to name just a few--have shifted from feeling far-fetched, even silly, to extremely relevant and pressing. The fictional YEAR IN REVIEW prompt at the top, for instance, felt very unrealistic to many. Today, in 2024, it represents a genuine possibility that some of us will face this coming holiday season. (A close precursor to this technology was used at the actor Ed Asner's memorial.)

The accelerating speed of technological change is of both *philosophical* and *pedagogical* significance. We *know* that more and more questions are right around the corner. We don't know what they are, though. What can we do *now*, to prepare for ethical issues we do not yet know? That is a new topic in the field known as "meta-ethics," which investigates ethical theory and inquiry itself. The development of the TEQ Deck allows us to do a bit of qualitative meta-ethical analysis about what might be coming our way, and what we might need to prepare for, moving forward.

Cross-cutting dimensions

One of the most interesting, and ultimately fruitful, things that came to the fore as we gathered questions were the different *kinds* of questions, their different levels of abstraction, and the dimensions on which they connected and diverged. Some questions in the deck are explicitly about tradeoffs (the well-being of future generations vs. the suffering of those alive today, for instance). Some are about particular ethical values (privacy, equality, autonomy). Others are meta-questions concerning ethics itself (What are we asking when we ask about the "ethics" of something? Or the question to the right). Some are about developers and companies

> The more control we hand over to machines, the more critical it seems that we instill ethical principles into their decision-making process. Can this be achieved?
>
> And how should we prioritize among the wide range of ethical values—for example our beliefs in the importance of freedom, not doing harm, reducing suffering, keeping promises, respecting the environment, and many others? Many decisions require tradeoffs among our values. Who is to decide how they are to be ranked and weighted in the engineering of machines?

(What would a Hippocratic Oath look like for the tech industry?). Others are about

> Works of speculative fiction (think *Black Mirror*) help us imagine possible futures in ways that science cannot, and some argue speculative fiction has never been as important as it is now. The more expansive and informed our envisionings are, the more skillfully we can steer the present.
>
> Should a familiarity with the growing canon of speculative fiction be a mandatory component of education in engineering and other fields? Should we be creating more pathways to careers in speculative fiction? What books or films have opened your mind as to what is possible?

science, art, and society (left).

Some are socially concerned (What are the moral implications of the industry's appropriation or interpretation of the "Seventh Generation Principle"?) or about the connected importance of language (How do we negotiate the historical connotations

of words like 'settlements,' 'colonies,' and 'frontier,' as used in fields of space

exploration?) Others afford the opportunity to

facilitate discussions on contentious issues

(about artificial wombs, for instance; to the

right).

> Artificial wombs are being developed to enable fetuses to be brought to term outside of a gestating person's body. In what cases, if any, would the availability of an artificial womb impact whether it is morally permissible to have an abortion?

Having a vista on the cross-cutting

dimensions is of utmost importance, not only for students and the community, but

for scientists and scholars. In recent years, there's been an explosion of research

institutes and think-tanks established, at universities, in government, and beyond, to

address ethical issues in connection to particular forms of technology. This is a top-

down approach to ethics and technology. In contrast, TEQ Deck is built from the

ground up, generated from the concerns and perspectives of individuals and

communities.

Specialists working at the top in many cases have a relatively narrow focus

and background. As such, they sometimes lack familiarity with, first, the far-

reaching spread of ethical questions around technologies, and second, the

connections among them and the levels of abstraction at which they must be

considered. A well-crafted, multi-coded deck of cards can provide at least an initial

exposure to these higher-order matters all in one shot, by way of a tactile, playful

package. It can serve a similar purpose in curricular initiatives focused on ethics and

technology (such as UC Santa Cruz's Humanizing Technology certificate program

for engineering students, and Crown College's CAVEAT). The cards thus constitute

a technology itself, facilitating inquiry and understanding about technology and ethics.

Ambassadors beyond the classroom

We see promise in our students doing precisely what we have done when testing the deck: being facilitators of discussions with students across campus, and with the larger community (alumni, industry, etc.). Their primary role in these activities is to attend to the meta-aspects of the discussion: to prompt participants to think about the kind of question it is, or what facts and theoretical assumptions might be needed to answer it, or how it might relate to ethical challenges humanity has faced in the past. Most of all, the aim is to gently call attention to the activity of inquiry and dialogue itself, and some of the pitfalls that can lead to alienation and misunderstanding. We envision students graduating as eager ambassadors of philosophy, dialogue, questioning, and collaboration, empowered with the ability to inspire discussions, nurture people's abilities to think and talk, and impart the tools and ideas for doing so in inclusive, thoughtful, and productive ways.

The TEQ Deck will never be finished; we see it as *a living organism*, with new questions always coming in, and outdated ones discarded. This too makes for unique curricular possibilities:

> Imagine you and your peers have just been hired for a position on the TEQ Deck team. Your goal over the next four weeks is to develop a new card for the deck and a rich set of supporting materials for its web page.... The one or two strongest projects, as judged by the class, will be sent to the TEQ Deck team for consideration to be included in the deck.

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UC Santa Cruz is the ideal home for this project. Our university is ahead of the curve in community-engaged knowledge creation, digital humanities, and experiential learning. And physically, we sit between the Monterey Bay Marine Sanctuary, where world-class scientists are doing cutting-edge research on species and conservation, and Silicon Valley, where developers and entrepreneurs are designing flying taxis, new currencies, AI in service of business, medicine, education, and on, and on. At UCSC's Silicon Valley satellite campus in April, the Center for Public Philosophy hosted its first *Tech* Ethics Bowl. The event ended with a final round where every high school randomly drew a card from the TEQ Deck and presented "cold."

We are grateful to our many supporting participants at UCSC who have helped us to solicit a wide array of perspectives, interests, and questions from around the globe:

> Astrobiology Initiative
> Cowell College
> Crown College
> Data Science D3 Research Center
> Department of Philosophy
> Earth Futures Institute
> Genomics Institute
> The Humanities Institute
> Humanizing Technology
> OpenLab
> Porter College
> Teaching & Learning Center

And to participating organizations beyond UCSC:

> Foresight Institute
> Future of Life Institute
> Marc Sanders Foundation

To contribute an idea for a card, or volunteer to participate in a student-led discussion using TEQ Deck, or to learn more, visit TEQ Deck: Technology. Ethics. Questions.

Chapter 4: University Teachers' Strikes

The content of this chapter explores the ethics of university teachers' strikes, and in particular the concern that university teachers' strikes harm students. Does the concern hold weight, enough so that it's wrong for teachers to go on strike? However, the purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate ways in which philosophical research can be applied to real-world, on-the-ground matters. The topic alone demonstrates this, but also the means of delivery: as I discuss in Chapter 2c, much work in "applied Philosophy" does not indeed get *applied*. Philosophers might write on a subject, but the dissemination of ideas ends there. I aim to see applied topics in philosophy shared with a broader audience, and philosophical methodology to be utilized in everyday considerations and decision-making.

Teachers' strikes are a topic near and dear to my heart: a lot of my time in grad school has been spent involved in union labor actions[265] and I think they're philosophically interesting to boot. So I explored them on paper. But merely writing a philosophy paper about considerations of potential harms to undergraduate students during and resulting from a teachers' strike didn't seem sufficient. I wanted to demonstrate that these ideas could be shared with other would-be striking university teachers (whether Philosophers or not), but also with undergraduates and with the broader community. Communicating these ideas might be useful for helping university teachers decide whether they do or do not want to participate in strikes, and how they might be able to minimize harms to their students; for

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[265] As I write this, I'm serving as a Philosophy department union steward in the midst of a graduate student strike.

fostering understanding from students and the community about striking teachers' motivations and efforts; for appeasing undergraduates' concern and anxieties about their own well-being during and after a teachers' strike. This chapter is an example of my efforts to "come out of the shade"[266] with regards to my own research and professional life, and so I present my thoughts in three different forms, which might serve various audiences and purposes.

The first section, 4a, is the original academic paper I wrote. It utilizes analytic philosophical methods by way of seeking to articulate what *kinds* of harms people might be concerned about regarding university teachers' strikes, and then systematically addressing each of those. I first consider typical utilitarian-style "actual harms" before moving on to Kantian-style "violation-based harms", and then finally discuss some worries about trying to apply universal moral principles in cases of collective action and those that affect groups of people rather than individuals. I argue throughout that harms to students can often be avoided or minimized and that concern about harms to students is not a compelling reason against supporting or participating in a strike.

But even this paper shirks some norms in academic (and specifically, philosophical) writing. I try to avoid jargon, and make the paper readable. I write colloquially, in first-person, and divulge my positionality: I'm not neutral on the subject, and I'm writing from experiences and frustration—even though I aim to be thorough.

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[266] Cherry (2017)

Although going on strike is a decision which teachers must make themselves, regardless of the positions of their students or the broader community, students are stakeholders too and community support can go a long way toward a strike's success. My aim is to bolster support for teachers' strikes when they occur; thus I ought to share my ideas with as broad of an audience as possible. The second section, 4b, presents a distilled version of the paper—or what I take to be its most salient points, in the form of an op-ed. This op-ed was submitted and published in *Lookout! Santa Cruz*'s May 30, 2024 Community Voices section and aims to address oft-claimed concerns about students' academic and intellectual progress in the wake of teachers' strikes.

Finally, in Section 4c, I present a one-page pamphlet, a "food for thought" guide for striking teachers and students to reference as they navigate communication, support, and decision-making during a strike. Just because harms *can* be minimized doesn't mean they *will* be, unless striking teachers know what they're able to and responsible for doing, students know too, and opportunities are provided for all involved to consider and discuss either before or during a teachers' strike.

Each version of the piece aims to present information and the fruits of my philosophical exploration in ways that are relevant and accessible for my intended audiences. My hope is that this chapter will demonstrate for other Philosophers the breadth of possibilities for how, why, and when philosophical work might make its

way out of the Philosophy journals and conference presentations and into the real

world.

4a: Academic Piece—Harms to Students of University Teachers' Strikes

Academic strikes are having a resurgence: across the United States, work stoppages by teachers and researchers are at a 20-year high and the trend seems to be continuing[267]. Healthcare coverage, wages relative to cost-of-living, workload, safe workplaces, and job security are just some of the concerns that academic workers—really, all workers—would like to see addressed in contract negotiations, and indeed these are many of the concerns that employers fail to adequately address in contract negotiations. One tool to increase bargaining power is to go on strike, and this is exactly what many university employees have been opting to do lately—often with labor union support, or with an aim to unionize. And these strikes have worked: despite the precarity of academic workers with regards to retaliation and pay-docking, and worries of regressive bargaining, recent strikes have all led to better working conditions and contracts than the universities' original and even their alleged "final" offers[268]. It seems the administrative pressure put on the universities by teachers' withheld labor is indeed enough to bring them back to the bargaining table.

But this essay isn't about labor trends or victories. Rather, it's about the decision that workers must each make in the face of contract negotiations, unionization, unfair or unsafe workplaces: that is, the decision of whether or not to participate in a strike; whether or not to *go on strike*. "Striking" is a collective action,

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[267] Iafolla (2023)
[268] For example, consider the UC's "final offer" proposed on December 5, compared to the contract that was ratified on December 16. See UAW Academic Workers (2022).

but doing so is nonetheless an individual's decision, and I think it's an important one for people to grapple with. What reasons are there for or against striking? What decision should *I* make? My plan in this piece is to explore one particular reason provided by university teachers against striking: that it harms students. Now, this may just be one reason among many that folks weigh into their decision, but I want to note that in my experience this is often provided as a *definitive* reason—or, as we Philosophers like to say, a sufficient condition—for not striking. That is, harm to students is an important enough concern for some folks that it may outweigh any and all reasons *for* striking, and render all other reasons *against* striking (I'll discuss these in the next section) redundant, the decision overdetermined. So, it seems important to investigate this reason: how compelling is it?

I'll admit from the outset that I come with an agenda. Not only do I believe that harm-to-students isn't a *definitive* reason against striking, but I hardly think it's compelling at all. I respect academic workers' decisions not to strike, but I want to argue that harm-to-students is an insufficient reason to offer.

Before I move forward, I'll make some clarifications about the context and the subject of my paper. The context is, in short, that I originally wrote this essay during a graduate student strike in which I was a participant and also union steward for my department, Philosophy. I struck my teaching work and picketed; talked extensively with grad students in my department and other ones, including the campus's union leadership. The Philosophy department as a whole had relatively low strike participation—that is, relatively low compared to other humanities departments on

our campus and also relatively low compared to philosophy departments at other campuses (it was a 10-campus UC-wide strike, with over 48,000 workers withholding labor)—and the reason provided by my Philosophy colleagues for their non-participation was overwhelmingly that if they were to strike it would harm their students, and they were unwilling to do that. This was what got me interested in the topic.

Given this experience, my discussion centers university-level teachers' strikes, and in particular, graduate student teachers (instructors, teachers assistants—TAs—and graders) from any discipline. Much of what I say may also be relevant to professors, lecturers, high school teachers, and possibly even "care workers" like elementary school teachers and nurses[269], but I want to be careful about overextending my arguments or sphere of knowledge, so unless I note otherwise I will limit my discussion to the (potential) harms faced by undergraduates during a graduate student teachers' strike, and how much these harms ought to inform a grad's decision whether or not to strike. So unless specified, I'll use "students" and "undergraduates"/"undergrads" interchangeably as well as "teachers" and "graduates"/"grads".

First thing I'll do in my discussion is to air some initial suspicions that I have about the utterance of statements like, "I don't want to strike because it harms the undergrads" or "I just couldn't do that to my students". I think these statements can be non-starters, that people might say them without genuine concern about harming

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[269] For a discussion of the ethics of care workers' strikes, see Huget (2020).

their students. After I express my suspicions, I'll move past them: I'll take the statements of concern for students at face-value, and assume my audience is operating in good-faith. My plan is to systematically investigate the different *kinds* of harm students might face during a teachers' strike, and for each I'll consider whether and to what degree those harms occur. Then I'll move toward a bigger-picture consideration: *even if* harm occurs to undergraduates, is that reason enough for their teachers not to strike? What ways might would-be striking teachers try to avoid or minimize harm to students even while striking? Or perhaps it's not harm properly speaking which motivates teachers not to strike, but rather a worry of violation: striking somehow violates their students' rights or uses them as a mere means to the striking grads' ends. Using students like this for one's own gain is just downright wrong, a harm in a more lofty sense.

Ultimately, I'm unconvinced by either of these approaches. The harms (potentially) faced by undergrads are limited, and many are avoidable: they're not harmful *enough* to compel grads not to strike, and grads who are concerned about their students' well-being have many avenues available to them to provide support, mitigate harms, and even offer opportunities for extra learning or enrichment during strikes. The violation-based interpretation of "harm" seems weak to me, as well. It takes a lot of work to learn what students' needs and interests are in the first place, and it's nearly impossible to do right by all of them; when dealing with groups of people and institutions, a violation-based approach to right and wrong is unfeasible. Finally, I'll discuss why I'm not so sure that considering the harms to students in this

case-by-case, modular manner is an adequate framework in the first place. Complications arise from the fact that a strike is a collective action or movement: a strike and its impacts are bigger than any individual's moral position or participation, so these individual—maybe token—considerations of harm or not-harm are often moot or misguided.

Suspicions about the claim

As I begin the body of this essay, I first want to get some worries articulated, but then pushed aside: I'm somewhat mistrustful of people who claim only "harm to undergrads" as their reason not to strike. For one, even if avoiding harm to undergraduates is indeed *one* of their reasons, there are many other reasons—of politics, prudence, obstinance, or apathy—which seem to me potentially more compelling, but definitely less altruistic. In terms of effective rhetoric and an aim toward being able to "own" or endorse one's reasons for deciding, appealing to the well-being of our indigent undergrads is quite a good strategy. I don't mean to suggest that people make these claims cynically (though I imagine some do), but rather that there may be a degree of rationalization involved and that avoiding harm to undergrads is in fact not the decisive reason that people claim it to be for themselves. Perhaps they don't want to strike in the first place, but come up with "harms to undergrads" as a *post-hoc* justification for holding this position[270]. Furthermore, there are many things which harm undergraduates—and many are

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[270] For more on rationalization in moral thought, see Schwitzgebel and Ellis (2016).

attributable to teachers' actions (or non-actions) and policies. I want to caution educators against cherry-picking—intentionally or not—which instances of harm they notice or make efforts to avoid. This worry is relevant in the section on "violation-based" harms but I will say a little bit at the end of this section as well.

First to the potential *alternative* reasons for not striking. If teachers make genuine efforts to investigate their own reasoning, to examine their own priorities, before making a decision about whether to strike, that's all I can ask of them. This involves not only examining whether their reasons are good (which is what I'll be discussing in upcoming sections), but also whether their reasons are genuinely the same ones that they claim them to be. So in an effort to prompt this examination, I'll provide a few examples of other reasons a teacher might have for not striking—to see if any of them resonate. Harm to students might be a very noble sounding one, but is it the motivating one, the only one, or is it even one at all?

Perhaps there are political or ideological reasons not to participate in a strike. People might think they are ineffective, a poor strategy for leveraging or gaining power. People might not agree with the reasons or conditions leading to a strike in the first place—perhaps they feel their working conditions, contract or contract offer, wages, benefits, and the like are fair. People might think striking is wrong (rather than just unnecessary or ineffectual) for reasons besides harm to students: striking may breach a contract[271], harm the employer, harm capitalism. Many strikes are spurred by unions or a call to unionize, and people might simply not like unions.

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[271] Though in many cases workers only strike after a contract has expired.

Unions have historically and reputationally been bastions of corruption, breeding grounds for radicalism, insurance for the lazy or incompetent worker; some people might just not want the association.

There are also a number of practical and prudential reasons to consider before going on strike. Though retaliation by employers during "sanctioned" or "legal" strikes is against the law, it still happens: striking employees may lose their jobs, face maltreatment post-strike, lose healthcare coverage, etc. Student workers may face academic sanctions for strike activities, and their research, relationships with advisors, and degree completion may be put on hold or put in jeopardy. Importantly, pay-docking doesn't count as retaliation, so strikers also face legitimate concerns about being able to afford to live—especially during strikes that can last weeks or months (I'll say more about this below). People might be close to graduating and would rather push through and finish on time than risk postponement or retaliation for a cause they wouldn't get to see the benefits of.

There are many mundane reasons not to strike, as well: picketing is tiring, monotonous, and risks exposure to sun, rain, cold. People get yelled at, honked at, sometimes beaten and arrested at picket lines. Striking but *not* picketing can be boring, risks much the stuff already mentioned, and also invites the scorn or alienation of the "hard-core" strikers. Militant pro-labor strike activists can be really intimidating and frankly, really rude, to people who aren't participating in the ways they'd like to see. Their vocal and sometimes coercive strategies might make people feel unwelcome, or even fearful.

There also might be reasons of stubbornness or obstinance which motivate people not to strike. In my experience, grad students were inundated with emails, cold-calls, and texts soliciting participation; traffic near campus was slowed and sometimes stopped; chanting and heckling ("hey, scab!") at the picket line abounded. Those who don't get anxious or scared may rather get annoyed, to the point of being motivated *not* to support an effort that they otherwise would. I also heard from one of my colleagues that they "won't just do what[ever] the union tells [them] to do"—nobody wants to be a pushover, bullied into action by those with the loudest voices, and nobody wants to be a band-wagoner, joining just because everybody else is. I think this holds very true for academic Philosophers, who often regard themselves as especially rational belief- and decision-makers: agnostic until offered a sound argument in favor of a given conclusion. Those who must endorse every premise before acting may very well find themselves at a decision-making impasse: if one doesn't support absolutely every aspect of the strike and its tactics, then maybe it's illogical to participate in it. *I'd better think this through more*.

Similarly, or perhaps additionally, a lot of contingent uncertainties arise during strikes, and uncertainty can be worrying or even debilitating. The 2022 UC strike was to be indefinitely long: strike until a new contract was ratified. It could have lasted days, or it could have lasted months[272] and there are some very compelling reasons why one wouldn't want to participate in a long-haul strike, even

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[272] The strike in fact lasted a bit over one month, overlapping with the beginning of winter break.

if they support the cause and would be willing to strike given a set end-date. The threat of pay-docking looms large here, manageable for a 3-day strike but not worth the risk of losing months of pay for an indefinite one. Many grads had teaching positions, research trips, publication deadlines, and degree completion to think about, for each, again, the uncertain length of strike time could be a major factor in weighing decisions.

There's uncertainty about support: how many other people will go on strike, how do the undergraduate students feel about it (harms aside), how does the community feel about it, how does the government feel about it, what sorts of narratives will surround it? Further uncertainty indeed surrounds the question of harms to students—sure, if we knew exactly what and how much harm would come to them we could make an informed and confident decision, but this will never be the case (much to my woe in writing this paper). Finally, there's the obvious uncertainty surrounding the strike's success. One might not take issue with strikes in principle, but might still have a bad feeling about this particular one, about the balance of power or the demands or the timing or the individuals involved. It's a much easier decision to participate in an action the outcome of which is guaranteed than to take genuine risks for one that requires collective action and patience; a decision that has to be motivated by statistics, precedent, best efforts, and trust— success not guaranteed.

Or perhaps some people just don't care—not an ambivalence but an apathy. Sometimes, we don't want to think about stuff. We want to put our heads down, or

in the clouds, or in a book, and not do the work. Besides, other people are highly engaged, and the strike will succeed or fail regardless of one person's individual participation. Why vote, why strike, why donate, if it doesn't really matter whether I do or not? Now, I'm absolutely not a fan of this "argument", and elsewhere I have lots to say in response to it[273]. But I think that its articulation points to the importance of examining—or at least trying to recognize—one's *real* reasons for deciding and for acting.

If I'm faced with an interlocutor who provides me with any of the reasons mentioned in this section, I can make efforts to address them, to engage with them. Perhaps we could start a discussion; perhaps in 2022 I could have explained or tried to convince my colleagues that we weren't breaking a contract, that we did have retaliation protections and strike pay available, that sometime action is called for before a deductive conclusion can be reached (if it ever can), and that they *should* care, that their participation *does* matter. But so often, harm to students was the only reason I heard. On the spot, I had a very difficult time responding to that without sounding callous or dismissive (thus why I've decided to parse it out in writing).

I might, as I said earlier, chock this up to cynicism—people providing whatever reason they think is most palatable, moralized, or self-satisfying even while disbelieving it—just to get pesky interlocutors off their back; it's easy to argue against somebody's concern for sunburn but it's trickier to argue against a commitment to students' well-being. But I don't think most people are so cynical or

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[273] In 2021 I wrote a paper called "Politically Ignorant Voters Need a Better Excuse".

conniving. I think that often, it's unintentional rationalization: they're blind-sided by their own rationality, thinking they've explored all their options and reasoned effectively when really their reasoning process was motivated by something else—perhaps ideology or self-preservation or antipathy or apathy.

But enough psychologizing! This long digression was just to say: harm to students may not be as motivating as people claim it to be. Of course undergraduate well-being is important, but I want teachers to genuinely interrogate how important it is to *them* in their decision whether or not to strike. I also want teachers to interrogate how important undergraduate well-being is to them more generally, and to be cautious about only thinking about or acting on their care when it's convenient for them to. I know all too many teachers who rely on ineffective, exclusionary, and anxiety-inducing classroom and assessment strategies—like long lectures, high-stakes writing assignments, white colonial subjects and canons, timed exams, exorbitant amounts of reading, public speaking requirements, punitive grading, draconian attendance and late work policies; yet none of this risks harm to students? None of us can be perfect, but sometimes I wonder how much of a priority harm reduction is in their normal teaching ethos for the people who cite "harm to undergrads" as a reason not to strike.

I think I've said enough about my suspicions toward teachers who claim that avoiding harm to undergrads is their reason for not striking. I've pointed fingers vaguely at peoples' motivation, reasoning, and hypocrisy but my main goal in this essay is not to question them, rather, I want to meet them where they're at. I'll move

forward now to unpack and evaluate the claim that teachers' strikes harm undergrads, and whether the claim's truth would be enough reason to forgo participation in a strike.

Actual Harms

My goal in this section and the next is, formally speaking, to evaluate a conditional statement: "If undergraduates are harmed by teachers striking, then teachers shouldn't strike". Perhaps the conditional statement itself is true, but I'd like to argue that the harms students face during a teachers' strike are minimal and variable enough that some level of degree and necessity should be built into it: "If undergraduates are harmed *a lot* and *unavoidably* by teachers striking, then teachers shouldn't strike" — something along those lines. If *this* statement is true, I can make a strong case that the antecedent (the first part of the conditional) is not met, so the consequent is not entailed. Furthermore I don't think that the conditional statement (either version of it) is true anyway: harm to students is not a sufficient reason for teachers to forgo striking.

All of this is made even more complicated because the consequent of the statement, that "teachers shouldn't strike" is a universal: all [graduate student] teachers [of undergrads], anywhere, period. Yet the decision to go on strike is personal, individual. A clever interlocuter could say something along these lines: "I'm not saying that *all* teachers shouldn't strike because it harms students, I'm just saying that *I* shouldn't" — or can't or won't. This makes for some tricky

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argumentative territory, so I'm going to move forward assuming that people who cite harm-to-students as a reason not to strike think it's a reason that should apply to everyone; that it is in fact *wrong* to strike if it harms students—a moral claim, and not an idiosyncratic personal position.

With these preliminaries out of the way, I'm going to begin my discussion of what I'll call "actual harms" that students might face due to a teachers' strike (and in the next section will explore more violation-based understandings of the word 'harm'). I've grouped actual harms into four broad categories: financial, academic, intellectual, and emotional. I'll discuss each of these in turn, starting with what I take to be the most superficial—financial harm—and ending with what I take to be the most worrisome—emotional harm. For each of them, I'll explain why I think the worries are either misguided, minimal, or altogether avoidable. In short, teachers' strikes don't—or needn't—cause very much actual harm to undergrads.

So, to financial harm. It's definitely worth considering that most students at the undergraduate level pay for their education. Either that or they receive scholarships or financial aid, which are often tied to academic or athletic performance. In any case, when the normal operations of the university are disrupted, as they are during a teachers' strike, we might worry that their money is being lost or their financial aid put in jeopardy, which can be harmful. Financial precarity can lead to all sorts of suffering and anxiety. However, my response to this concern is quite short: students' money is already being spent or lost, with or

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without a teachers' strike. Any *financial* harm caused by lost tuition money—like food-insecurity or credit card debt, unpaid bills or houselessness—is a harm already accrued, and not due to any strike. This is an example of sunk cost, and the worry of financial harm an example of the sunk cost fallacy.

It seems clear that the real worry is not *lost* money, but rather *wasted* money—the idea being that the loss of money isn't a harm so long as the money is put to good use, in this case, toward an education. Similarly, a loss of financial aid (for current or future terms) is also only a harm if it means a loss of education. We might lament the exorbitant costs of college, but many of us are willing to spend that money nonetheless, so long as the education is actually attained. When teachers go on strike, one might argue, students are paying for classes they don't get to attend, waiting on grades or diplomas they should have already received, missing out on learning they're entitled to, feeling swindled or frustrated at the waste of time, effort, and money. I think these concerns are legitimate, but I don't think they're best categorized as financial harms. As I discuss academic, intellectual, and emotional harms in what follows I will address these sorts of concerns in turn: sunk costs aside, there certainly are harms associated with the costs (or at least, what the costs promised) which are worth exploring.

Students might feel that their money's been wasted when their academic progress has been hindered: they fail (or fail to finish) a course, they miss application, academic probation, or graduation deadlines. I think of these as

"academic" harms—though perhaps they'd more accurately be described as "administrative" ones. Academic harms relate specifically to the institutional structures which students must navigate: grades, prerequisites, degree completion, things like this. If students are unable to meet their academic goals, they might have to re-take courses, stay in school longer (and lose more money), be less competitive in program, job, or graduate school applications, and face emotional hardship to boot. When teachers strike their labor, they are *in principle* unavailable to correspond, grade, or advise; it could be the case that teachers' strikes create or cause academic harm to students.

I'm sympathetic to all of these worries, but I think the harms themselves are quite avoidable. Indeed, universities and their striking teachers can (and do) make terrific efforts to avoid them. In my experience, even if certain administrative deadlines are missed, or grades for prerequisite courses are blank at the time of enrollment for future terms, business still continues as usual and all the missing information is provided in good time—after the strike ends and once the necessary administrative work is complete[274]. This means that graduating students, students on visas, students taking prerequisites, etc. can plan as they normally would[275]. A temporarily missing grade for a course is not the same as failing or not completing a course. In other words, students' money isn't being wasted, or their academic

[274] UC Santa Cruz Undergraduate Advising (2022)
[275] Pay Us More UCSC (2022)

progress hindered, even if the timeline for administrative deliverables shifts slightly due to a strike.

There are some circumstances in which students legitimately face academic precarity because of their teachers' work stoppage: perhaps they're on academic probation or they're externally-funded, their ability to enroll in future terms is dependent on an up-to-date GPA, and the timing of the strike is such that they need a course grade *now*[276]. Teachers can make exceptions in these cases. They *should* make exceptions. Doing so was advised by my union during our recent strikes for the very reason of avoiding academic harms to students[277]. Just as striking nurses still perform the necessary work to keep their patients from *dying*[278], striking teachers can perform the necessary work to keep their students from perishing academically.

A quick digression: I have heard worries that these sorts of exceptions might count as "partially striking" or "strike breaking"; that strikes are an all-or-nothing affair and a *full work stoppage* is the only way for them to be effective and for striking employees to avoid retaliation. This is not my understanding of university teachers' strikes. Academic employees are a workforce with unique responsibilities and privileges, and we have the agency and the flexibility to stop work publicly and on a large-scale while still attending to particular tasks and needs (say, feeding lab rats,

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[276] Though I'll note that these fears are often exploited by employers to strong-arm teachers into ending strikes earlier. See an example from Oakland's recent school district: Varian and Harrington (2023).
[277] Pay Us More UCSC (2022)
[278] National Nurses United (n.d.)

writing a letter of recommendation, inputting a single grade). This may vary strike to strike, or university to university, but it tends to be the case that oversight is minimal. Strikes are large-scale actions, and teachers don't lose their access to class or research software, email, or campus buildings just in virtue of being on strike[279]. Striking teachers can do what they feel needs to be done in special academic circumstances, and if they choose not to for fear of "strike-breaking" or retaliation then that's their prerogative; but it's clear at that point that students' well-being is not what's motivating them to act or not.

So on the whole, administrative harms don't, or at least needn't, occur to undergrads. Students who need their assignments graded or their grades submitted for legitimate academic or administrative reasons should and do have them done, even in the midst of a strike—what's required of striking teachers is good communication with their students and an understanding of their campus's academic policies[280]. More on students who are simply *anxious* about their grades in my discussion on emotional harms later.

There is a very blurry line between academic/administrative progress and intellectual progress[281]. Sure, we can sidestep worries about missing grades or

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[279] In fact, it's sort of the opposite: teachers must retain access to their work spaces, lest the university be charged with *forcing* a work stoppage.

[280] Strike and union leaders are a great resource for this; teachers don't have to find all of this info for themselves.

[281] To take another example from Oakland, it appears the real concerns were about graduation deadlines but news sources covering the 8-day strike disparagingly lament the "lost *learning*" (my emphasis) as the sticking point for the school district and its students. See Varian and Harrington (2023).

administrative deadlines, but what of the missing *learning*? How can students make *that* up if they're expected (and perhaps required, be it for financial reasons or otherwise) to keep moving forward in their academic journey despite a strike's disruptions? Cancelled classes, office hours, and assessments might harm students intellectually. "After all," teachers like to think, "they're paying for an *education*, not just a *degree*". So I'll now consider the harm of a lack of *learning* (by way of wasted money and time, or wasted opportunity) during and as a result of a teachers' strike. Not only is intellectual growth and knowledge good to have and bad to lose at any time, most of us would agree, but a lack of learning *now* could lead to worse harms (academic, financial, or emotional) later. To avoid our part in causing these harms, maybe we ought not disrupt the learning at all by striking.

Before I respond directly, I want to ask a big-picture question: does a student's striking teacher actually deny that student the *opportunity* to learn? Are students thus precluded from making intellectual progress? I think the answer is "no". For one, every moment can be an opportunity to learn. Learning about strikes *during a strike*, contextualized in the history of labor and the rapidly corporatizing university system and the current housing crisis, learning about community solidarity and organizing, or attending Radical Poetry Hour at the picket line could be *very* intellectually valuable experiences for undergraduates and graduates alike. One can learn in venues besides a classroom, and some people might argue that this sort of boots-on-the-ground, historicized, *lived* learning might be even more valuable than what's taught "at school" (don't people so often idealize the college *experience*

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more holistically?). I don't want to overstate this and risk slipping down the slope of "then who needs school at all?" but I do want to reiterate the modest claim that learning doesn't have to stop just because school stops. Many striking grads in my experience have also made explicit efforts to welcome undergrads to the picket line and provide them with enriching learning experiences. We don't have to stop being teachers just because we go on strike!

Students enrolled in intensive or difficult courses, or in courses that are critical to their future academic or professional success (like fundamental prerequisites in math or science), might still feel a loss. Sure, strikes offer opportunities for enrichment but there's still very real *academic* learning to be missed. This is true, and it's not completely avoidable. But it can be minimized.

Students can in principle learn the very same content that'd be taught by their striking teachers, whether on their own, in peer study groups, or by the instructors themselves. Hell, often students *can still attend the courses in which they're enrolled* even while grad students strike. Much of the time, graduate students are employed as TAs—rather than instructors—so grads' struck teaching doesn't necessarily entail that instruction ends altogether. There are some notable exceptions, such as in the case of graduate student instructors (GSIs) who strike or faculty members who "sympathy strike", in which cases course meetings and assignments might be cancelled full-stop. But most of the time, if a student really wants to learn course material during a strike, resources and support are available to

them. I, for one, would relish the opportunity to chat about course materials with a student of mine virtually or at the picket line if they expressed an interest.

One thing a teachers' strike does is temporarily hoist some of the responsibility for student learning back onto the students themselves. Many instructors make changes to their courses during (or preceding) a teachers' strike to provide flexibility for their students and to avoid penalizing them, academically, for strike-related contingencies. Often, lecture or class attendance will stop being mandatory, assignments or exams will become optional, or opportunities for students to raise their grades will be presented. Yet I've heard numerous faculty members lament that none of their students took advantage of these things: they essentially (and sometimes literally) "went on vacation early". I'm not saying I wouldn't do the same, but I would like to note that much of the intellectual harm students face during a teachers' strike is avoidable, and at least partially attributable to the students themselves. Our students are all adults—more or less—so unlike in the situations of nursery or grade-school teachers, their intellectual progress is not solely dependent on our care and prerogative[282].

Students who *want* to learn, who are willing to come to class even when attendance isn't counted, or to do supplementary readings, or to look stuff up on the internet, are much less prone to intellectual harm. Of course there are students who need extra accommodations or individualized help; students who are too shy to ask for help or who feel that they don't deserve it. These students, who genuinely *do*

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[282] See Huget (2020)

want to learn, may experience heavier intellectual harms than others of their peers—this is a basis for equity concerns in learning and is unfortunately a systemic problem that goes beyond the particular circumstance of a teachers' strike; but it's one to be mindful of regardless. I think that work can be done prior to a strike to assess individual students' needs and to prepare students as best we can for succeeding and being supported during and after a strike; again, communication is important, and care. And I do wonder whether learning gaps are exacerbated during a teachers' strike, or just maintained. In any case, this may very well be one of the toughest sticking points in making a decision whether or not to strike: *which* students might be harmed?

Of course, many students don't want to learn—they might not care about their education ("just the degree, after all!"). One might wonder if so-called "intellectual harms" can rightly be called "harms" if students willingly invite them. To be honest, I'm sort of partial to this idea, but not adamant about it: just because some students would rather, when given the opportunity, sleep in, go home, party, skip an exam, what have you—doesn't mean that they aren't still being intellectually harmed when they do that. And maybe, by giving students the opportunity to "check out" (not that university students don't have that opportunity all the time), striking teachers are indeed the ones responsible for that harm. It's a paternalistic and logically shaky position but perhaps it does have merit: maybe it's our job to make the students learn—whether they want to or not—and any lapses in their learning are harms attributable to us. So now I'll take a serious look at the harms of

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students not learning *because* their teachers (whether TAs or instructors) are on strike.

There's definitely a worry about the quality of learning. Sure, their textbooks are still available and perhaps their lectures are still occurring, but I'll be the first to agree that it's nearly impossible for academic learning to take place *as well* on one's own without the feedback, one-on-one interactions, small classroom size, activities, mentorship, and enthusiasm often provided or facilitated by TAs and teachers more generally. Our roles exist for a reason, and we're striking because we believe these roles to be important. We *are* teachers and we *are* valuable. So yes, when we strike our students might miss out some academic enrichment. They likely won't learn, or grow, or engage as much with and from course material while their teachers are striking than while their teachers are working. I'll bite the bullet on this one and admit some harm, with the caveat however, that the goods they're missing out on are limited only to what they could have learned in each particular meeting, lesson, or course that's being struck. As I've mentioned, they still have plenty of other opportunities to learn and grow, perhaps because of and from the strike. It's just, shall we say, "course-specific" (or at least "school-specific") learning that's worse-off.

So how important is this course-specific knowledge or learning? In other words, just how much of a harm is there to students if they miss out on it for awhile? To my mind, it's a small one. Much learning (especially in the university) is more of an enrichment than a necessity. Students may explore topics, practice skills, and

learn things which are interesting and personally valuable, but often not practicable

in life outside the university. In fact, universities often fail to endow students with

the necessary knowledge and skills for succeeding in the very jobs that their degrees

help them to attain; a university education has become an administrative hurdle but

not necessarily an intellectual asset[283]. For this reason, I believe that by striking we

deny students—for a finite (usually only days- or weeks-long) period—the

opportunity to learn *cool stuff* from us. But what's a month-long lapse in the long

run? Students might understand certain theories, concepts, thinkers, or methods

slightly less well during and after a term with a teachers' strike than one without,

but I hardly think this small lacuna in their intellectual enrichment is a devastating

harm to them.

"Sure," one might say, "maybe it's not so bad for students to miss out on

some discussions of Hume, or a creative writing project, or a *Deconstructing Kubrick*

course[284], but what about missing out on instruction in important prerequisite

classes; what about missing out on threshold concepts or scaffolding skills that these

students *need* as they move forward in their education?" In other words, what about

the knowledge that's genuinely (if only instrumentally) necessary for them to learn?

This response seems particularly salient when it comes to the ever-important STEM

courses many students take: math, science, and for the philosophers I'll throw in

logic, too. If students miss important instruction, assignments, and feedback in a

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[283] Chamorro-Premuzic and Frankiewicz (2019)
[284] For what it's worth, I disagree with this. Many of the same studies cited above recount that the "soft skills" practiced in liberal arts and humanities programs—critical thinking, communication, etc.—are actually the ones most useful for future employment.

course that's required for their major, their career, their life, then they may be ill-prepared for the more difficult material and assessments that'll inevitably come later (remember that the administrative concerns about program advancement and prerequisite requirements have been addressed already).

My thought here is that this concern is misguided. Mostly, I don't think it's appropriate for educators to take a "well, they missed the boat" approach to their students' learning. While it's true that program curriculum and course planning assumes some prior knowledge and experience on the part of students—and, as I've conceded, it is a bummer and a harm that a strike sets back *some* of this knowledge and experience—it's not as if the opportunity is lost forever. Striking teachers can plan for these challenges and work to address them *prior to* striking (say, by cutting some supplemental material from their syllabus in the weeks preceding the strike in order to focus on key concepts and skills), but I think that more importantly, instructors following strikes can plan or reorganize their courses with attention toward the potential effects on learning which a strike may have caused.

Assessing students' prior knowledge is an important part of any equitable pedagogy[285], and it gives teachers the informed ability to review or to perhaps reteach material that's crucial for the success in their course but which their students may not have yet mastered. And for what it's worth, students have failed to grasp threshold concepts, thrive in prerequisite classes, and sometimes learn much of anything at all, like, since the education system began. Yet they've nonetheless been

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[285] The Lawrence Hall of Science (2016); Owens and Tanner (2017)

able to progress through their courses. "'C's get degrees" and mindsets like this suggest the standards for grasping course material aren't very high. It is not a new phenomenon that students are underprepared for their courses. Although the scale of this phenomenon might be different in the context of a teachers' strike (and indeed, the relationship is causal, at least to some degree), this is something that teachers have been (or at least should have been) dealing with forever. Honestly, it draws attention to the *need* of curricula and of instructors to assess their students' readiness for a current course, to adjust that course and accommodate their students as needed. This is why accreditation doesn't require standardization. There are innumerable ways to teach a course or a subject, and pedagogically-minded teachers can take advantage of that latitude before, during, or after a strike to minimize harms, to catch students up, to reflect on learning priorities, and generally to make students' experiences feel valuable—all things they should be doing anyway, as teachers.

I understand this discussion has turned toward the conditional: sure, students *wouldn't* be harmed so much from a strike *were teachers to be better in the first place*. But I'll remind my reader here that my subject is teachers who are deciding whether to go on strike, teachers who have a particular concern that doing so might harm their students. So consider these thoughts a suggestion for how teachers might go about striking while minimizing harm to students. It may be extra labor for them before and after a strike, but perhaps this work is worth it for folks who care about the causes and outcomes of the strike itself, but who also care about their students. I

didn't say it wouldn't take effort (and besides, "too much effort" is not the reason people provided to me about why they didn't strike). In any case, it seems to me that the crux of intellectual harm to students hails from an old-guard mindset, instructors unwilling to adapt their courses for ill-prepared students (in times of strike *and* during business-as-usual), and not on the striking teachers creating addressable hiccups in their students' education.

So yes, a teachers' strike may cause students intellectual or educational setbacks, but we shouldn't be assuming students have grasped everything from their previous courses anyway, and accommodating these setbacks—at least for the very important, crucial, need-to-know content—post-strike shouldn't be too much of an ask. The intellectual harms caused by a few weeks of teachers' strikes are not damning nor irreversible. I think it'll depend on how much harm a teacher deems *too much* to cause; perhaps *any* harm is too much harm for some. I'll return to this shortly.

The final kind of "actual harm" I'll discuss is emotional harm. I've heard countless teachers cite their students' emotional well-being as a reason not to strike. Undergraduates these days are already so stressed out that it'd only add insult to injury to go on strike and to leave them with even less structure, support, routine, etc. than they're already lacking. Although we can minimize financial, academic, and intellectual harm to our students, we're somewhat powerless over their mental and emotional health—except, we might think, by providing them with our care and

support. I've heard a number of times just how anxious students are about their grades. Delaying grade submissions even a few weeks can cause… apparently a lot of emotional damage. On the other hand, offering them consistent opportunities to sit in class and to work on all the assignments originally expected of them provides students… a sense of grounding? A warm blanket of support? I am absolutely dubious of these claims, but I do think that mental and emotional health is very important, and mental and emotional harms can be very damaging, so I'll dive in further (with just a little bit of snark).

Here's how the story goes: undergraduates are very fragile, and any disruption in their already-frazzled routine of waking up early, sitting through lectures, cramming for exams and stressing over essays will likely put them over the edge. Even if we explain to them the context and reasons for our striking; even if we provide them multiple assurances of their financial, academic, and intellectual security (as far as these things may be affected by a strike); even if we offer them various modes of support available before, during, and after the strike, none of this will relieve them of any of the inevitable trauma they'll face from having their class meetings cancelled or their syllabi reorganized. Please, no sudden movements. Rather than think of a teachers' strike as an opportunity for rest, or for social activism, or for partying, or for higher grades or intellectual autonomy, undergraduates will be weighted down by fear and uncertainty—it's not an opportunity to grow, but to implode. Yikes.

"Okay, okay," some teachers might say, "that is not the story of all undergrads. But a) it is the story of *some* and I want to ensure I don't harm *them* by striking; and b) even those students who *think* they're okay with their teachers striking might be harmed anyway, further down the line". I'll respond to these in turn. To point (a) I first want to caution against the assumption that striking will make these particular students' anxiety or distress *worse* — this is perhaps another sunk cost. Many students have been, are, and will likely continue being anxious about their finances or their academic future or their intellectual progress and ability, and yes, their own mental and emotional health—whether their teachers strike or not. Our students are dealing with a lot these days: work, family, COVID-19, climate crisis…These anxieties might very well be transferred or recontextualized during a strike, but I think that especially if striking (or better yet, will-be-striking) teachers make efforts to explain the situation and the support available to their students, most students' anxieties will not get *worse* than they'd be were their teacher(s) not to strike. For those whose anxieties do get worse due to a strike, I suppose I'll just have to bite the bullet and refer them to one of the many campus resources (which they already pay for!) available to those struggling with mental and emotional health. I also wonder if rather than needing the consistency and support of a not-striking teacher, but maybe they just need a *break*.

For many students, a teachers' strike might feel like a relief: less schoolwork, more time, and more freedom. Speaking for myself, that sounds great. But this brings me to point (b) which claims, rather paternalistically, that even the students

who might *invite*, might *relish* a teachers' strike, are still being harmed, or will be harmed later. Concerns of financial, academic, or intellectual harms aside, what might claim (b) be referring to?

I think that claim (b) suggests a bigger-picture "best interest" approach to emotional harm. It goes like this: some undergrads may be hedonists—in the irresponsible, bad kind of way—so even if they're more than happy to get a few weeks off from school it's actually still in their best interest to *not* have those weeks off. And I guess the logic is supposed to go that denying them what's in their best interest is a harm (one of omission rather than infliction, surely). Maybe the sort of emotional or psychological strength that a rigorous and uninterrupted academic term awards them is worth the stress: it builds character. I'm not convinced by this. For one, who's to say? In my case, I'm hardly older than many of my students. Am I really to believe myself the arbiter of what's in their long-term best interest (as if academic commitment and trust in the wisdom of authority has worked out well for the rest of us…)? Okay, but secondly, even *if* teachers know what's best for their students in the long-term (namely, continuing business-as-usual), should *we* be the ones making that decision for them? I think we should allow our students some agency; our benevolent paternalism should only go so far. We're allowed to make our own choices (like whether to strike or not) and our undergrads are allowed to make their own choices (like whether to slack off during a strike or not). Even if they make the "wrong" ones—according to our determinations—I think there's something to be said for making and learning from those choices themselves.

Perhaps doing *this* is what builds character; perhaps being put into novel situations as young adults *is* in fact what's in their best interest. Anyway, this idea of students' "best interest" will come up later as well, so I'll leave it alone for the time being.

So much for arguments against the "actual harms" of a teachers' strike. To sum it up, I don't think students are harmed much by their teachers' striking—at least not necessarily. With some planning and some compassion on the part of striking teachers, I think it's more than possible to offer students continued support before, during, and after a strike, and whether they accept the support or believe our assurances is up to them. The few harms they might face—like a slow-down or pause in their intellectual development, or anxieties and uncertainties about the remainder of the term, or the emotional harm from "wasted tuition money"—are, I'll argue next, outweighed by the other harms avoided (and/or the goods caused) by a teachers' strike.

Note the explicit means-ends reasoning here, a utilitarian calculus. Just as many people believe that the pain caused from a vaccination is worth the immunity and community health benefits later, or that the unhappy confinement of a dangerous individual is worth the safety of their community, the idea is that even if *some* harm is caused by teachers striking, so long as that's ultimately less harm and/or more good than would occur if teachers didn't strike, it's the better thing to do. Many teachers would argue this is exactly the case. If teachers—if grad students—are overworked and underpaid, in unsafe working conditions, juggling

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extra jobs along with their own research and teaching responsibilities, while living in

a crowded house and dealing with food insecurity and the same family, COVID, and

climate crisis concerns as their students… how effective can their undergraduate

teaching and support really be? Between two actions—striking or continuing to

teach—which consequences will all-things-considered be the best?

Many claim that the improvements in living and working conditions

leveraged by a strike would ultimately improve undergraduate education and

support. Teachers would have more time to be attentive and creative; their health

and success improves students' health and success; better wages incentivize better

teachers to come on-board and to *stay* on-board; the lives of *future* graduate students

and teachers (ahem, many of whom are current undergrads) will be better too; some

romantics claim that the entire institution of higher education could be transformed

by historical academic strikes like the ones that have been taking place recently.

Compare that to a business-as-usual approach: continue teaching, accept whatever

paltry improvement to wages are offered by the university, stay severely rent-

burdened, risk burnout, but *yes*, shield the current batch of students from a few

weeks of discomfort and uncertainty! For me, it doesn't add up.

However, I think the crux of the issue has to do with whether we are

considering harms and benefits to current students alone, or whether we're also

considering the harms and benefits to *future* ones, and to their teachers, as well.

Undergrads who themselves experience a teachers' strike may ultimately be harmed

more than benefitted. I've tried to argue that these harms are avoidable or minimal,

but still if they're more than nothing, and the students graduate before any positive

changes to the university take effect[286], the harms to *them* aren't outweighed by

anything. But this doesn't entail that teachers' strikes are wrong: to my mind it's

clear that the material benefits to grads (who are students themselves) which a strike

might endow far outweigh the few harms accrued to their current students—not to

mention those potential benefits to future undergrads, mentioned above, which a

satisfied teaching force could promote.

In other words, the truth of that statement "If undergraduates are harmed [*a*

lot and *unavoidably*] by teachers striking, then teachers shouldn't strike" depends on

who we're including in our moral community. Perhaps the statement holds true if

our *only* considerations are for current undergrads' well-being and not that of future

undergrads or of ourselves. However, I suspect that this isn't compelling for folks

who genuinely endorse means-ends calculations to determine the rightness of

actions. Of course current students aren't the only people whose interests matter.

The very concept of a labor strike depends on prioritization of benefits to the

workers or to society as a whole at the cost of some other harms, where those harms

are worthwhile.

Perhaps the people who *would* claim that indeed even a minor harm caused

to some people right now is not justifiable by great benefits conferred to many

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[286] The 2022 contract ratified by our union and our university doesn't provide grad students any significant wage increases until fall of 2023—almost a year after our strike ended. It's not difficult to predict that the "downstream effects" of teachers' bargaining victories might take a years to surface for students, if at all.

people later would more likely support a "violation-based harms" position in the first place, to which I'll turn next.

Violation-based harms

Some readers might be thinking: "Ah, that last section was so crass! It's not about the facts of the matter, the crude calculations of harms; it's about the *principles* of the matter." People might be appalled by my above discussion: to consider and to weigh which harms to our students it might be acceptable to inflict is the wrong approach. It doesn't matter whether undergraduates face "actual harms" or not; to strike in the first place is to violate the students, to disrespect or harm their dignity, their autonomy. Agnes Callard puts it like this, while documenting her experience during a grad student teachers' strike:

> I've been called upon by the union to cancel class to accommodate the strike.
> But, as I see it, that would amount to using educational harms to
> undergraduates as an instrument to achieve graduate students' ends. Such
> an action seems immoral to me, for reasons articulated by Immanuel Kant:
> you are not allowed to use people merely as a means[287].

Callard, as an Associate Professor, was in a different position than the striking grad students, but her reasoning is just as relevant to them: if it's wrong to use people as mere means, and striking teachers use their students as mere means, then striking teachers are wrong to strike. The idea is that students have their own ends—their own goals and interests—and by leveraging *their education* in order to meet striking teachers' ends, the teachers are thereby violating them. Thus those on strike treat their students as less worthy of having their ends met—less *human*, even—than

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[287] Callard (2019)

themselves, which seems wrong in the senses both that it's untrue and that it's a morally bad move.

So how might I argue against this, especially without trying to dismiss a Kantian moral framework altogether? In other words, if we understand the "harm" in our statement "If undergraduates are harmed by teachers striking, then teachers shouldn't strike" to mean a Kantian violation of human ends and dignity, then it'd be a tall order to try denying it. I'll leave that to the many moral theorists who spend their entire careers working to understand and critique Kant's moral theory. My aim is more modest: I'll again focus my efforts on weakening or denying the antecedent clause in the statement, that indeed striking teachers do harm (read: violate) their students in this morally objectionable way. As my reader may guess, I don't think that they do—or at least, I don't think that they *have to*, although it does get a little complicated. First I'm going to put into question what our students' ends really are and whether we can know them. Because of this uncertainty, I'll suggest that it's possible we aren't violating or ignoring their ends. This discussion also brings to light the inherent complications of trying to assess violations of this sort on a large scale: whether one chooses to strike or not, certain students' ends will not be respected. Being part of an institution such as a university even in the best of times ensures at least some violations of autonomy and interest; it's inevitable. To object to a teachers' strike while maintaining adherence to many other practices of autonomy violation is inconsistent at best, hypocritical at worst.

If for a moment I assume that teachers' strikes do indeed violate students' ends, that their motivations are purely self-interested or at odds with or simply without regard for what students deserve, then I must also assume that most striking teachers are operating in bad faith. They just want their lives to be easier; they want more money and better insurance and safer workplaces, and all this talk about needing these things *in order to be better teachers and mentors to their students* is essentially a rhetorical stunt to get more public—and student—support for their efforts. If this is true, then yeah, it does seem like striking teachers are simply *using* their current students to leverage power over the university for all the goodies they seek. I could see this. Just as earlier I noted how rhetorically effective "I don't want to harm my students" is as a reason against striking, "I want to be able to be a better teacher to my students" is a rhetorically powerful reason *for* striking. Teachers are supposed to care about their students and we'd be monsters if we said otherwise—whether we actually feel that way or not. And I agree that the pro-strike "we're doing this *for* our students" rhetoric is quite hard to believe. But I'd like to take a less cynical approach, and suggest that it's at least possible for folks to earnestly strike with the aim (or one of the aims) of becoming better teachers to their students. Good teachers can provide many benefits to students emotionally, intellectually, academically, and even financially (say, in recommending grant proposals or scholarships to apply to).

But I think I've gotten ahead of myself! How can we be sure what our students' ends *are?* Does cancelling their classes or deferring their grade submissions

necessarily fail to treat them as ends in themselves, as human persons *with* ends? In a unique situation like a massive teachers' strike, how can I dare assume to know what my students' wants and needs are *and* that my participating in the strike would violate them, without talking to my students, or polling them, checking in, reaching out? Now, I don't have any data or polls showing that the undergraduate population at UC was in support of or opposed to our strike[288]; I don't even have an anecdote about my own students during this time[289]; but I wonder whether teachers who choose *not* to strike utilize these means either. How many Kantians take the time to learn from their students what they want, or how they could be supported throughout a strike, before making the decision whether or not to participate in it?

For those teachers who actually do check in with their students and made a strike decision informed by the students' responses, I'm happy to accept whichever choice they make. But do note: if a teacher decides not to strike because their students ask them not to, then *that* is the teacher's reason against striking. The reason isn't some nebulous counterfactual "well if I were to strike then it would probably result in harm" but rather a straightforward agreement or promise: "they asked me not to, so I won't".

The takeaway from this is that we cannot assume our students' goals or preferences. If we want to respect their individual ends, then we must think of them as *individuals* with ends. Otherwise a "mere means" or violation-based approach

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[288] I inquired to union leadership about this, and to my knowledge no such data was gathered.
[289] I happened to be teaching a course for grads, and I front-loaded our meetings for the quarter so that the course was essentially finished by the time the strike began.

seems more like a smoke-screen, and a paternalistic one at that. Remember, some students might not prioritize their education, might not rue a disruption, might instead support labor actions—in fact, many undergraduates also serve as academic employees (tutors, graders, etc.) and have the opportunity to strike along with grads. But I digress. In the abstract, we can't know for sure what our students' interests are but we can certainly guess and philosophize about them anyway. So I'll return now to the question of if and when striking teachers treat their students as mere means. For now I'll assume that students *do* hold education as one of their ends.

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So now the situation of striking teachers may seem a bit damning: they intentionally disrupt their students' education for the purpose of gaining material or other goods for themselves. Even teachers who claim that their intentions [at least] include becoming better teachers may be in trouble, since as I discussed earlier it's very likely that the current students may not themselves see these improvements in education. It's not any less of a violation to *them* that teachers prioritize future students' ends over theirs than if they prioritize the teachers' own ends over theirs. It may sound nobler, but it's still an example of using them as mere means to a different end.

I think there are a couple of different ways to respond to this. The first thing I'll do is put into question what the "intent" of striking teachers really is. There may be some ways to understand it which in theory could absolve teachers from their moral naughtiness. I'll use an analogy to illustrate this. Then I'll move on to examine

the truth of teachers' strikes treating students as *mere* means. I'll make the case that in striking, teachers may nonetheless be treating students as ends in themselves—that perhaps we share ends.

To this question of intention: what *are* striking teachers aiming at by stopping their work? I've thus far maintained that it tends to be negotiation leverage, and this leverage can help them to get demands met or attain better contracts, and all the downstream goodies that come with those wins. But what's the instrument *of* this leverage? In the case of universities, it's a chokehold on their bureaucratic processes. Unlike at an assembly line, say, where work creates a literal product that's worth money and a work stoppage halts the flow of capital, teaching creates no such tangibles. The university (I understand I'm personifying here—bear with me) doesn't care about term paper submissions or hours students spend in class; its output, its lifeline, is paperwork. So long as final grades are submitted at the end of each term, the university can maintain its accreditation, its funding, its planning, and all the rest. This is just to say: the critical "product" of a university is not education. Striking teachers don't hold *education* hostage, they hold *grades* hostage. It's telling that during the 2022 strike, the UC hardly budged in bargaining for the first month; weeks of lost instruction (that is, *learning,* we might say) led to little progress in negotiation but it was *once final grades for the term* were due—once classes were already over—that an offer was made and a contract ratified[290].

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[290] UAW Academic Workers (2022)

Teachers, then, needn't *intend* to disrupt students' education by striking; rather, they *intend* to disrupt the university's administrative functioning. Any impact on students might be understood as an unfortunate but foreseen consequence of their true aims. "But this is still bad!", one might respond, "the students are still being used! Their classes are still being cancelled and their education still being affected!" I'll warn my reader quickly about slipping back into an "actual harms" framework—is the concern truly that they're being used or that they're losing out on some learning? If it's the latter then I'll refer my reader back to the previous section.

But how about this "treated as a means" concern? Consider the decision to take a sick day or an emotional health day, or to go to a wedding or a philosophy conference, if doing so means cancelling class or deferring some grading labor. I'm sure that my illustrious colleagues and interlocutors wouldn't deign to do these things, given their principles and all: clearly, presenting at a conference only serves to further one's own professional goals, and at the expense of the students! And it shouldn't make a difference to a Kantian that conferences and weddings only last a couple of days, whereas strikes can go on for weeks; the facts-of-the-matter are irrelevant to the pure moral badness of treating somebody as a mere means for *any* length of time. So are students being treated as means in analogous ways, in the case of a conference and in the case of a strike?

One might argue in the negative: the violations of students' education is necessary for the attainment of negotiation leverage, whereas the violations of

students' education are incidental in the case of the conference—if a teacher doesn't feel that they must cancel class to attend their conference, they won't.

I think this is the same case for gaining negotiation leverage: if workers don't feel that they need to strike, they won't. But due to tremendous power imbalances between employers and employees, disruptive actions are indeed sometimes the only way to keep from being ignored. There are different ways to do this, however. Consider UCSC's 2019-2020 wildcat strike, which consisted (for the first two months) simply in withholding grades: no instruction time was lost, all the fall final exams were taken, but students simply didn't receive their grades (with some exceptions; see earlier discussion of "academic harms"). This was still a labor action, still a strike (and still many grads didn't participate), yet no education was lost. "Sure, but you're still violating some ends of theirs—if not getting an education, at least getting their grades", someone might say. Perhaps, but this seems more akin to taking a lunch break on the way to deliver somebody's dry cleaning. Everybody wants things done quickly, but is delaying a service genuinely treating somebody as a mere means? Is uninterrupted, timely delivery something we should expect from people, morally speaking, if it's at the expense of their own ends? UCSC graduate students tried sharing their stories about rent burden, unsafe housing, hours-long commutes, and financial precarity; they tried bargaining with the university in good faith in 2018, they overwhelmingly (83%) voted against ratifying the UC and UAW's new contract because it didn't account for their cost of living. Alternatives had been tried, and failed, and grads remained without the compensation they felt that they needed. So

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they struck their grading work in December. UCSC still didn't respond by February, so striking grads decided they needed to take further action and begin other work stoppages and picketing. Finally, and only then, did the university agree to offer graduate students supplemental housing fellowships. This is all to say that grads' withholding of grading and teaching labor was not the aim of their collective actions; it was perhaps necessary—or felt necessary—but only in the same sense as withholding grading or teaching labor to attend a conference in order to further one's career is: no better alternative.

This doesn't necessarily argue against the wrongness of cancelling classes or withholding grades. Perhaps conference-going teachers are also using their students as mere means, are also doing wrong by them. I'm willing to bite that bullet, for it does lead back to evaluating what people's true motives are for not striking: claiming that it'd harm (that is, violate) students to strike, but overlooking those same concerns when it comes to other opportunities for personal gain, is highly inconsistent. It suggests a less-than-universal application of Kantian moral principles (and thus dubious endorsement of them in the first place), or more charitably perhaps it just suggests a different underlying reason for wanting not to strike. In that case, let's hear it.

I'd like to move on and consider whether students are being treated as *mere* means anyway—it's not wrong to treat somebody as a means if they're *also* being

treated with the dignity of an end-in-themselves. So might this be the case in a teachers' strike? I think there are many opportunities for this claim to be made.

For one, as I've mentioned, students may indeed support the strike and it is still possible that even current students' education and experience could be improved due to a strike—teachers might not see a change in their material circumstances immediately following a strike but they might be re-invigorated nonetheless, excited to come to work and willing to put in efforts they felt too demoralized to put in before their win.

There's also the possibility that current students, future students, and their teachers share some ends and ideals which supersede those of token violations: we should all be able to afford to live where we work, afford food and shelter and healthcare, and yes, get a good education. These are the ends that striking teachers are working toward, and this "we", this community, includes our undergraduates. I think that people have, shall I say, a *right* to certain goods, and we should be able to advocate for that right.

This harkens perhaps to a different kind of Kantian approach, one in which we ask what kind of maxim or rule we might want universalized, such that no conceptual contradictions or worldly chaos were to ensue if we did. I would indeed want every worker to strike if the circumstances prescribed it (for example, during unfavorable contract renewal negotiations) or if they ran out of other options to advocate for fair—instead of dangerous or exploitive—employment even mid-

contract. I'd want my students to do it too, and I'd want them to know that they *could*. Personally, I'd want my *teachers* to strike as well!

I'll admit I'm saying this from a place of privilege; I know myself and my position well enough (financially, academically, intellectually, emotionally) to know that I'd be fine with a few weeks' pause from my learning—or a few weeks of pay withheld for striking, too, for that matter. I don't *need* to strike as much as some others do, and I don't *need* the support of the university as much as some others do, either. So maybe my judgments—"rational" as they may seem to me—are clouded by my individual circumstance. Yet this is impossible to avoid, especially when these decisions are being made by thousands of agents, affecting thousands of others, and regarding an economic, social, and educational *system* rather than a single rational being. Maybe I'd have been fine without a better contract, but if I truly want to have others' interests in mind, my own lack of need shouldn't make much of a difference; what big-picture interests or rights would I like to see advocated for and respected?

This brings me back to the question of how the hell we can know what's in our students' interest. Without a discussion or consent from each individual, we can never be sure that our actions aren't in some way violating their ends or disrespecting them. By striking, even if we were impeding our students' autonomy, their right or ability to pursue their own ends—like an education—this same concern arises when it comes to facilitating that very education! We force material,

assessments, and deadlines on our students; we require certain courses, standards, methodologies, modalities onto our students; we control them in all sorts of ways!

We're damned if we do and damned if we don't strike: either way, we're denying our students certain opportunities for autonomy, for considering and recognizing what their ends are and how to attain them. In fact, it seems that entire *institutions* are built upon denying people autonomy (think parenting, think school, think "the war on drugs", think prisons). Interesting. It seems to me like protecting individuals' autonomy doesn't work on a large-scale; different people have different goals or ends or values, so when we have to make decisions that affect *groups* of people, we're bound to disrupt some individuals' pursuit of their ends. Consensus is impossible, in a classroom or in a social movement. And our position as educational "authorities" will always make us responsible for some violations of our students' autonomy.

It just comes down to which violations we're willing to commit. I'll return again to the worry of cherry-picking. Violation-based arguments can be very compelling (illustrated by my struggle to respond to them!), but it's a little hypocritical to rely on them for some positions—such as deciding not to strike—and not for others—such as deciding to go to a conference or making attendance mandatory or requiring them to read a colonial canon.

But enough with the formalized, "mere means" considerations. It might still be hard to shrug off a feeling of… ickiness? If teachers' beef is with the university,

and not with its students, how can we justify using the students as pawns? Shouldn't we just leave them out of it? Alas, if only there were a way to avoid that completely. Striking is, to me, somewhat of a last resort. Try as we might to prepare students for a strike and provide them with "unofficial" educational labor—such as check-ins or support or opportunities to learn or even exceptions to grade withholding, we might put students into pawn-like positions.

Unfortunately, we are part of a university system that doesn't value teachers *qua* people but rather as teachers *qua* workers. Similarly, it's my opinion that the university system doesn't value students *qua* people but rather as students *qua* customers. We're already pawns, teachers and students alike, and we have limited options. Our biggest source of leverage *qua* workers is our labor—and in this case, it's teaching and grading labor. That said, I'm not suggesting we lean into this ickiness nor accept it lightly: I think teachers' struggles and students' struggles are all valuable in an effort to *stop* being mere pawns. But this means we've got to stop *acting like* mere pawns. We care about the education we're providing to students: we think the education is valuable and we think the students are valuable, and our striking is a symbolic—as well as an administratively impactful—message to the university saying as much. Rather than thinking of students as pawns in the chess game of a teachers' strike, I think of them as the kings we teachers exist to serve.

Well, that was a little dramatic. In any case I think a lot of the feelings of ickiness are caused by a concern that teachers are just stooping to the university's level—willing to sacrifice the good of the students for whatever it is we prioritize

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higher (likely suspect: money). But I'll return to an earlier point: I don't think the good of the students and the good of the teachers is separable. I think we owe it to ourselves to realize not only that our *work* is valuable (to students and to the university alike), but that *we* are valuable. If we want to keep providing the best education we can to our students, we have to take care of ourselves too.

It's not a stretch to say that if we have Kantian duties at all, we have them not only to our students, but to ourselves and to our fellow teachers as well. There's virtue in standing up for oneself, voicing one's needs, advocating for colleagues and future people, and having social ideals. While I won't claim to know what's "in the best interest" of my students, I can still try to be an example to them. They can take it or leave it, but that's a value teachers provide whether they're striking or not.

On Collective Actions and Individual Decisions

As promised, I'll also bring up the oft-overlooked (at least by my fellow Philosophers, anyway) fact that striking is a collective action. In 2022, it was on a huge scale—the biggest-ever academic strike in U.S. history. I don't think the decision to strike or not *should* be an individual decision; just look around! It's about working together for something bigger, or at the very least it's about solidarity. Says the Philosopher: "Leave the collective action to the sociologists and poets and politics majors and **shudder** Marxists; but leave me out of the groupthink!" If some teacher thinks their own decision to strike would cause more harm than good, then damn it, they shouldn't strike! Everyone's got individual moral principles they've

got to follow, even as the world continues to turn without them. But in this section I hope to push back against this ethos: it's naïve, and a little solipsistic, to make decisions purely based off of one's individual moral position. Especially when it comes to actions taken by and affecting large groups of people, there is so much more to consider. To begin, I'll consider the topic of freeloaders. Then I'll articulate worries with both the "actual harms" and the "violation-based" approaches which arise in the context of a large action like a strike. Neither framework seems particularly well-suited for making the individual decision of whether to strike or not.

Fun fact: individuals can reap the benefits of a union and of an organized strike without actually having to participate in either. My university's grad student union provides protections to all academic student workers at the school, regardless of whether they are dues-paying members or not. Neat! And even the grads who didn't strike received all the same wage raises and goodies that the striking grads fought for. It is quite convenient to be able to take a moral high-ground about not wanting to harm students while still benefiting from the consequences *of* said harms—it's similar to the position of those of us who avow that structural racism is wrong, but nonetheless exercise and enjoy the privileges awarded by it. There are overtones of insincerity in both. Perhaps folks who think that the harms to students are not worth the gains of a strike ought to make some sort of reparations to harmed

students: any extra goodies awarded by the strikes' efforts shall be redistributed to our injured undergrads, or refused outright! *PSA: we don't condone this harm*.

I'll admit, it is different trying to avoid actively harming people oneself than to avoid or ameliorate harms occurring in general, or by a collective—but if it's wrong, it's wrong. In any case, making the individual, principled decision is also trickier than it may seem; the moral high-ground hard to find. I'll explain some complications that arise in what follows.

With regards to deciding to avoid "actual harms" to students by not striking, please consider: in a teachers' strike, hundreds or thousands of *other* teachers go on strike. Most students' schedules, expectations, and education are already going be disrupted. So even if a teacher would rather that *nobody* went on strike ("it harms the students!"), they nonetheless must reckon with the fact that other people are doing it anyway. This is not to say that a person with morals ought to throw up their hands in the face of a mob or majority[291]. However, they must consider the impacts of their decision *in the context* of a disruption that will happen regardless of what they personally decide.

Folks often fail to consider the harms of trying to maintain business-as-usual during a strike or an emergency, given that business-as-usual is already disrupted. Sure, *you* might not cancel your classes or change your syllabus, but at least some of your students' other teachers will. So now the students must navigate the general

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[291] "So into the gas chamber they go!" commented one of my colleagues.

chaos of *some* teachers holding classes and others not. How does this bear on their mental and emotional health? As a child of divorce, I can attest to the value of consistency. When mommy and daddy (or in this case, teacher A and teacher B) opt for different house rules the results can be confusing and distressing. For example: does attending one instructor's class mean that students must "cross the picket line" of a different instructor[292]? Furthermore, if one must *literally* cross a picket line to get to class, students who are concerned about crossing the metaphorical one probably don't feel too great being put in the position of having to do it for one teacher while another is holding a sign at the very picket they're being asked to cross.

"Then I'll just hold class virtually instead, or I'll make my assignments and exams optional!" A tricksy way to sidestep the literalness of the picket line, but then out goes the consistency and business-as-usual approach: teachers who'd like to keep classes running or maintain a rigorous reading schedule often have to change their syllabi, course plans, teaching strategies and the rest to a huge degree anyway, therefore putting in extra work themselves and still disrupting students' expectations of the class.

I think that trying for normalcy in a time of turbulence is ignorant. I don't think teachers with these principles are ultimately doing their students any favors, or helping them to avoid any actual harms, by acting like a proverbial stick in the mud. Unless they can stop a school- or a system-wide teachers' strike *before it starts*, I don't

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[292] For what it's worth, I think no, because it's teachers who are on strike and not students. Folks strike work, not school.

think even the most noble of harm-avoidant thinkers can justify a head-in-the-sand approach: trying to avoid harming students oneself may ultimately lead to more harm done, all things considered.

If it's truly about minimizing harms, perhaps a quick but full-strength strike would be best: 100% strike participation might be enough to convince universities not to drag their feet. Many of the holdouts of negotiation are due to the university's assumption that strike enthusiasm wanes, coalitions fracture, etc. before the university becomes forced to make concessions. Instead of a long-haul, small-but-mighty contingency, perhaps the best way to get students back a-learnin' is for everybody to strike from the get-go. Or, to return to my example of students' anxiety about, say, crossing the picket line, perhaps the way to minimize harm is for everybody to cancel classes and defer assessments (ostensibly going on strike), so that students aren't forced to choose between their political or ethical stance and their grades, or between allegiances to one teacher and another (between their teachers for different courses *or* between, for example, their TA and instructor of a single course).

The point I'd like to emphasize is that it's naïve and myopic to make an "actual harms"-based decision against striking solely on the harms that might be individually afflicted were the decision made in a bubble and the action taken alone. The action is not taken alone, and on this approach, a teacher might should make a decision that *feels wrong*—like participating in the disruption of the university's functioning—in order to *do right* by their professed principles.

I think a similar thing can be said for the "violation-based" concerns. I circled around this in my previous section, but I think it's the case that students' autonomy and interests are being violated regardless of what people do during a strike: if there's even one student whose legitimate interest (and by "interest" I don't mean their whim—I mean their end, their goals, what's good for them and respects their human dignity) is in having classes cancelled, or teachers' striking, then a non-striking teacher is thereby violating *this* student's interest. There's nothing "in principle" okay about that, just as there's nothing "in principle" okay about violating the interests of one's other students. In either case, a teacher is doing wrong. We cannot respect *everybody's* autonomy and interest, so we must appeal to paternalistic overtures and assumptions about our students in order to justify our decisions.

At some point it just becomes untenable to appeal to a single moral code or principle or reason. Philosophers in particular pride themselves on logic and coherence, as if every moral rule will necessarily apply cleanly in every situation (Kant said it is so!). I think this leads to a blindness: to distill the facts of a situation to the morally relevant details of one's preferred moral framework is to ignore so much of the social and personal, historical and forward-looking, big-picture and individual, pragmatic and symbolic, emotional and measured aspects of a given situation.

Globalization and power and particularity do not allow for a single

universalized rule to be followed in order to do right—if "doing right" is ever

possible these days. I do want each teacher to make their own decision about

whether to strike, but I also want them to understand that a strike, its meaning and

its consequences, are bigger than them and their personal ethics. Undermining its

power and disregarding one's colleagues' efforts and sacrifices for the sake of

maintaining one's solipsistic sense of intellectual integrity and theoretical coherence

feels to me a lot less to me like moral righteousness and a lot more like self-

absorption.

Conclusion

Thus concludes my exploration of the harms to students of university

teachers' strikes. I began by voicing some suspicions about the claim, oft heard from

my Philosophy department graduate student colleagues, that their reason for

deciding against going on strike is that striking harms undergraduate students. This

provided reason has been ubiquitous enough, at least in my experience, that I believe

it warrants a philosophical investigation: is the potential harm to undergrads of

going on strike reason enough to refrain from going on strike?

At first glance, it does seem compelling—noble, even—to prioritize students'

well-being and interests even if at the expense of one's own, or of the aims of

collective action. That said, there are many other reasons one might have for

deciding not to participate in a teachers' strike—none of which sounds quite as

altruistic. I named some of these reasons and questioned whether they, and not harm to students, may in fact be the motivating factors for non-participation. I urged earnest reflection on this; if students' well-being is being touted as a reason in bad faith for not striking, this invites novel charges of using them as mere means—not from the strikers, but from those who decide not to strike, or who discourage others from striking. I suspect that university administrators might be guilty of this. False or misguided adherence to the harm-to-students claim also makes it difficult to engage in discussions about it: if actual or violation-based harms to students aren't genuinely motivating non-participation in a strike, then my considerations of and responses to those reasons won't hold any weight in encouraging participation.

Dubiousness aside, I then moved on to examining the worries and the potential impacts of various harms students might face during or because of a teachers' strike. I found none of them to be compelling enough to warrant a decision not to strike. Most actual harms—financial, academic, intellectual, and emotional—can be mitigated before, during, and after strikes. Importantly, this requires care, communication, effort, and planning on the part of striking teachers; it's not easy to do—a strike isn't a vacation—but for those who share an interest both in the goals of a strike and in the well-being of their students, it's doable. With regards to violation-based harms, I think the same holds true. Students' interests and ends may be opaque to us, so in order not to resort to paternalism a would-be striking teacher ought to have conversations with them, gauge their support, and then make an all-things-considered decision whether or not to strike. Consensus is unlikely; some

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students or others will almost certainly have their ends violated whichever decision a teacher makes. Just by being a part of an institution this is so!

Ultimately, I conclude that decisions affecting groups of individuals and decisions about participation in a collective action do not lend themselves well to being made by adherence to strict and singular moral frameworks such as the broadly utilitarian actual-harms or the broadly Kantian violation-based harms approaches. I'm not sure what the right way to approach these sorts of decisions are, though I think that reflection on one's values, emotions, and enthusiasm are a good place to start. We live in a non-ideal world, and thus a non-ideal approach toward navigating it seems warranted: particular individuals' situations differ, absolute consistency is impossible, and somebody's always going to get hurt. We must do the best we can for whatever causes or reasons we feel strongly about, and then own and learn from our decisions.

There are many directions in which I or others could take this project further. For one, a deeper exploration of decision-making for actions performed by or affecting groups of people—rather than individuals—would be useful. The half-baked thoughts from the previous paragraph could be developed, and further case studies of events, movements, institutions, and individuals' actions could be used to compare and contrast the merits and implications of traditional moral theories versus novel, pluralized, and non-ideal ones. Maybe teachers' strikes are a unique

case, or maybe a more comprehensive exploration of collective actions and collective harms could help point to a generalizable approach or conclusion.

Further work on the effects and harms of teachers' strikes themselves is ripe for the taking, too—the philosophical literature on this topic is woefully small. University activism is unlikely to go away, and there are many more routes to explore: just how much harm *is* too much harm, such that striking becomes impermissible? How much ought we consider the distributions of harm and benefit to various students or institutions? For example, if minoritized or first-generation students are the most profoundly negatively impacted by a strike, ought we weigh considerations of social justice and equity more highly than the perceived long-term or big-picture benefits to teachers or to the educational system? And how likely are the benefits of striking—and making contractual gains—to positively impact students, or even teachers, in a system where money allocated to one source must be taken from another, and tuition raises or inflation might be likely consequences to higher-paid teachers? Empirical data would be useful here, both qualitative and quantitative. An exploration of moral responsibility and blameworthiness could be illuminating: even if students (or others) are harmed during a strike, is that harm attributable to the strikers or to their employer who creates the conditions for a strike? Other moral frameworks might be explored, too: Rossian minimalism[293] might be a good contender for responding to the various harms and duties worth considering in a teachers' strike; various virtue ethics approaches might provide

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[293] See Markosian (2009)

more holistic and contextualized advice to potentially-striking teachers. There are, of course, innumerable reasons a person might hold for wanting to or not wanting to strike—how do the others hold up to philosophical scrutiny?

All this and I've barely scratched the surface. Philosophy has a place in social and labor movements, in on-the-ground decision-making, and in day-to-day life. I hope that the trend continues (or emerges) of philosophers taking the time to use their skills to investigate moments and matters that affect them personally and are important to them individually.

4b: Op-ed—UCSC strike: How much should we worry about lost learning?

The piece below was written and published as an op-ed in the May 30, 2024 Community Voices section of Pulitzer Prize-winning online newspaper *Lookout Santa Cruz.* The idea originally, for the dissertation, was simply to re-work the original academic piece *in the style* of an op-ed, but incidentally a new graduate student strike broke out at UCSC and across the University of California system just as I was nearing the end of my studies. If I had taken the effort to write a public-facing piece about teachers' strikes, and I had also argued earlier in the dissertation (in Chapter 2) that Philosophers ought to share their work more broadly, it would certainly have been hypocritical of me not to at least *try* to share my thoughts on the harms students might face during the current teachers' strike. So, try I did, and it got accepted! It can be found on the *Lookout Santa Cruz* website[294].

In working with the Community Voices editor, Jody Biehl, I learned a lot about the difference in writing norms between academic pieces and journalistic ones; even more specific norms exist for op-eds. The organization of arguments, inclusion of personal details, and most obviously, the length of op-eds are the features that stood out most to me as distinctive from academic writing. I also tinkered with audience: rather than writing to an academic audience attempting to read the piece disinterestedly, I wrote to community members and undergraduate students whose levels of interest, emotion, and concern might very likely be at the forefront. My aim was less to provide a comprehensive argument and anticipate peoples'

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[294] Robertson (2024)

intellectualized objections than to provide a big-picture claim—more of an

illustration than an argument, to my mind—and anticipate peoples' feelings and

experiences. I hope the philosophy comes through still, but I'm also very excited to

see my philosophical "findings" expressed in ways that non-Philosophers find

accessible and engaging.

Some revisions were made by editors, and not by me, but I am copying the

piece as it was published on the website (with some formatting changes).

UCSC strike: How much should we worry about lost learning?[295]

Quick Take: UC Santa Cruz graduate students have entered their second week of strikes.

That has left some in the community worrying about lost learning and the effect on grades.

Emily Robertson, a doctoral candidate in philosophy and a strike supporter, unpacks that

argument and asks, "How pressing a concern should lost learning really be?"

On May 20, University of California graduate student workers kicked off a UC-wide strike to protest the way university leaders have handled pro-Palestinian activism on campuses. Specifically, they are angry that university leaders at three campuses (UCLA, UC Irvine and UC San Diego) called police to remove protesters and break up encampments (sometimes forcibly and with injuries) and punished employees for protesting.

UC leadership has tried – and so far failed – to end the strike by claiming it is unlawful, but what interests me more is an argument some people make against continuing, supporting or participating in strikes like this. They argue that strikes harm undergraduates by disrupting their learning.

I'm a doctoral candidate in philosophy at UCSC and a student worker who's been involved in strikes in 2019-20, 2022 and now the current one. Much of my academic work is in ethics, and year after year I've reflected on this popular claim. So let's take a look.

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[295] Robertson (2024)

Striking teachers stop teaching. They don't hold classes, grade assignments, input or submit grades into online systems. Is it *wrong* to do this? Is learning stopped?

UC graduate students have listed [legitimate grounds](#) for striking and they have made their [demands](#) clear, but does concern for students' lost learning override these reasons and aims?

I think not, so long as we take a more holistic vision of "learning" and striking teachers attend to – rather than dismiss – the concerns.

First, I hope many of us can agree learning is distinct from mere academic progress. Delayed or withheld grades, in my five years' experience at UCSC, tend to have [little academic or administrative impact](#) on students. Undergraduates' grades don't suffer long term, nor do students lose their ability to enroll in future courses, get financial aid benefits or visa status, transfer or apply to other programs and scholarships or even graduate with peers. Unofficial transcripts are still available, and blank grades (those that haven't been inputted) do not lower students' GPAs.

In the few cases where withheld grades might harm students academically, striking teachers should and generally do communicate with their students and work to make [exceptions](#) (similar to [striking nurses](#)).

Once a strike is over, teachers (or those hired to replace them) will input grades — it's simply a delay in processing rather than a loss. Teachers often do, and should, [adjust how their courses are graded](#) to account for changes in instruction and

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assessments due to a strike. This ensures students get penalized as little as possible by strike activity. Students who believe their grades have been unfairly assigned may always file a [grievance](#).

But even if students' grades and academic progress don't suffer from a strike after days, weeks or months of missed instruction, what about the learning they're allegedly being graded on? Isn't *that* lost?

Many on the pro-strike side claim a small loss in learning now is worth the long-term educational benefits of healthy, safe and well-paid teachers. I'm not so convinced. Graduating seniors, for example, won't see any of these alleged improvements in teaching post-strike.

That said, not all learning is strictly course-related. Strikes are outlets for exploring ethical and political positions, activism, organizing and community-building. UCSC's current strike also includes near-daily [teach-ins](#) (topics include radical literature, yoga, labor history, and Palestinian poetry). These may be nontraditional "classes," but they are unique and enriching opportunities to learn, nonetheless.

Furthermore, teachers strikes provide opportunities for students to practice accountability and — maybe for the first time — take charge of their learning. They can: keep up with coursework, seek support in novel ways (for example, through peers) and communicate less formally with teachers. Often, striking teachers are still

available to students. They might not hold office hours, but they can chat as mentors or peers.

Learning opportunities are only *lost* during a strike if students are unwilling to seek them out.

Students enrolled in rigorous courses, or those critical to their major or future academic success (like fundamentals in math or science), might still feel a loss. The enrichment of the encampment lessons won't help them understand calculus or thermodynamics; there's still real *academic* learning to be missed.

This is true, and it's not completely avoidable. But it can be minimized.

Most classes taught by faculty and lecturers are continuing despite the strike. All course materials (and libraries! And internet! And resource centers!) are available, and many assignments are still due.

Some class meetings, discussion sections and office hours — arguably the most engaging aspects of courses — might be paused, but learning needn't stop. Undergraduates are adults, and their education is their prerogative (university teachers are not "care workers" like grade-school teachers or nurses are).

Let's not forget, too, that many undergrads support the strike, and are organizing their own disruptive campus actions in tandem with striking grads. Others relish the opportunity to rest or to catch up on schoolwork. This isn't to say we should dismiss

lost academic learning. But maybe we need to reframe it, with students' own priorities and decisions taken into account.

Ultimately, supporting or participating in a strike is a decision of conscience and solidarity. Maybe teachers aren't willing to strike out of concern for students; maybe they are. Maybe students want their teachers to strike; maybe they don't.

I hope students and their families and communities understand the value and motivation behind teachers striking, and know their intention is not to harm students.

I hope teachers – striking or not striking – understand the uncertainty and anxiety students face when their schooling is interrupted and their schedules are upended.

Teachers should offer lines of communication throughout a strike, be honest and invite honesty back from their students. I hope everyone communicates respectfully and that those communications are received with grace. Harm can't always be anticipated, but teachers – even striking ones – should be receptive to and proactive about responding to it.

Personally, I don't think lost learning is a compelling claim against university teachers strikes. But I feel good that I've taken the time to reflect on it, to weigh considerations, and now, to share them.

Strike on!

4c: Strike Pamphlet—"But Doesn't Striking Harm Students?"

I created a pamphlet to be handed out to would-be or currently striking teachers, their students, and anybody else who may be interested in exploring the topic[296]. Much of the ambivalence I've heard from teachers considering whether to participate in a strike, and many of the frustrations I've heard from students regarding teachers' strikes seems to be grounded in a lack of information about what actions or consequences are possible. Teachers don't want to "penalize" their students during the course of their own political or workplace-related activism, and students certainly don't want to be penalized for it either. But without easy access to information and resources, and without discussions between strike organizers, teachers, and students, ambivalence becomes inertia. Unfortunately, this leads to a lot of would-be striking teachers refraining from withholding their labor, and a lot of students unnecessarily harmed by the actions of striking teachers who remain uninformed about their responsibilities and about the opportunities for minimizing harm.

My aim with the strike pamphlet is not necessarily to convince people to support or participate in a teachers' strike (though I'd like it if they did. I also imagine the pamphlet would only be circulated by people who already support a given strike—I don't think nay-sayers would have an incentive to do so—so the messaging is nonetheless fairly pro-strike), but rather to encourage more nuanced,

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[296] The pamphlet was designed using Canva software.

informed considerations of the "harms to students" worries and invite discussions, rather than isolated inertia- or fear-driven decisions.

"I DON'T SUPPORT THE STRIKE BECAUSE IT'S NOT FAIR TO STUDENTS"

"IF GRADES AREN'T SUBMITTED IN TIME, WON'T THIS AFFECT STUDENTS' ABILITIES TO GRADUATE, APPLY FOR PROGRAMS OR SCHOLARSHIPS, ENROLL IN FUTURE COURSES (ESPECIALLY THOSE WITH PREREQUISITES), MAINTAIN THEIR VISA STATUS OR FINANCIAL AID?"

In urgent cases, **exceptions to grade withholding can be made!** This is legal for striking teachers to do, and it's even encouraged.

"BUT **HOW DO I KNOW WHOSE CASES ARE 'URGENT?'"**

See the strikers' FAQ for end-of-the term questions (QR code to the right), and keep up-to-date with emails.

Most of the time, unofficial transcripts are sufficient for academic deadlines, and "blank" grades don't negatively affect students' GPAs.

"THERE'S STILL A CHANCE STRIKING TEACHERS WON'T MAKE THE NECESSARY EXCEPTIONS, RIGHT?"

It's an unfortunate possibility, and it's scary, but **is it a reason to be resistant to the strike full-stop?** Those are the choices of individual teachers, not the collective.

Also: students may always reach out to their advisors to help advocate for them if they need their grades.

"GRADES AREN'T THE ONLY CONCERN. **WHAT ABOUT ACTUAL LEARNING?"**

Think of it this way: **strikes can offer unique opportunities for learning** about ethics, politics, organizing, labor history, community-building, and more.

"SURE, BUT STUDENTS MIGHT STILL FALL BEHIND IN MATH, SCIENCE, AND OTHER ACTUAL COURSEWORK."

Students maintain access to course materials during strikes and can seek out support through peers, libraries, resource centers, online tutorials, and even striking teachers (in their "unofficial" roles as peers or mentors).

"YOU'RE SURE ASKING A LOT FROM STUDENTS TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR OWN EDUCATION."

Let's face it: many students are grateful for a chance to skip class or get an easy 'A'.

"NOT EVERYONE. THEY'RE PAYING FOR THIS, AND **THEY DESERVE THE EDUCATION THEY SIGNED UP FOR**."

College isn't just about course-related learning. Even though that might be disrupted, consider all the other opportunities for growth, accountability, and experiences that students can gain.

"SO YOU'RE SAYING STRIKES DON'T CAUSE ANY HARM AT ALL?"

Unfortunately, harms (academic or otherwise) might still occur.

"THIS RAISES EQUITY CONCERNS TOO. MINORITIZED OR FIRST-GEN STUDENTS MIGHT BE MORE NEGATIVELY AFFECTED BY A STRIKE THAN OTHERS."

This is true, but **many strike demands aim at promoting equity** in workplaces and education. The hope is that the long-term benefits outweigh the immediate costs, but this all depends on the causes and demands of the particular strike.

"I'M NOT BUYING IT. **IT'S JUST NOT FAIR** FOR STUDENTS WHO ARE AFFECTED NOW."

Teachers only strike because they need leverage to make change. **Is it the teachers who are responsible for these harms, or the university which created the need to strike in the first place?**

"THE TEACHERS. IT'S THEIR CHOICE TO STOP TEACHING, AND IF THAT HARMS EVEN ONE STUDENT THEN IT'S ON THEM."

There's no way around it: strikes can be harmful for students. But **they are collective actions with collective results. It's much bigger than individual harms or considerations**, whichever position you take.

"SO WE SHOULD JUST AGREE TO DISAGREE?"

The strike is happening with or without full consensus. **Pragmatism might be best here**: how can harms be minimized, and how can we end the strike quickly?

"IT'S WORTH THINKING ABOUT…"

Appendices

Appendix 1: The TEQ Deck

Below is a computer graphic of the deck rendered by the TEQ Deck's design partner, Hiker, and on the following pages are images of the individual TEQ Deck cards.

TEQ Deck

Technology. Ethics. Questions.

The more control we hand over to machines, the more critical it seems that we instill ethical principles into their decision-making process. Can this be achieved?

And how should we prioritize among the wide range of ethical values—for example our beliefs in the importance of freedom, not doing harm, reducing suffering, keeping promises, respecting the environment, and many others? Many decisions require tradeoffs among our values. Who is to decide how they are to be ranked and weighted in the engineering of machines?

// coding ethics

THIS WEEK'S HIGHLIGHT

"After two decades of false starts, bioengineers develop Heroin-Plus: gives users all the same experiences of heroin without risks of dependency or overdose. While researchers are setting their sights on ecstasy and cocaine next, controversy erupts on the ethics of using and selling."

// heroin-plus

YEAR IN REVIEW 2029

"Families across the country experienced devastating rifts this year due to diverging opinions about A.I. proxies—interactive, life-like, virtual versions of real people, built using their extensive digital footprints. A woman in Iowa whose husband had passed away in April paid to have an A.I. proxy of him built. At the next holiday, she put him on a monitor in the dining room so he could "join" the family for dinner. But when the woman's daughter and grandsons arrived, they found it so deeply disturbing and wrong, that they ultimately left. The 7-year old was especially confused."

// grandpa proxy

Scientists are developing technologies that could be used to bring extinct species back to life (de-extinction). Will the availability of this technology reduce the urgency of protecting species that are endangered?

// de-extinction

Tech companies and app developers could set their new-user settings to be the most private possible, so that busy or unsavvy users don't unintentionally share their data with third parties or hackers. Should this be legally required, or should users be responsible for their own privacy?

Does it make a difference whether the services are free to access? Or what the services are for (entertainment, schoolwork, travel, etc.)?

// user-settings

When a person gets a genealogy test, the results carry genetic information about their relatives too. Anyone with access to the test results (the testing company, law enforcement, a hacker) could determine private, personal details about their relatives. What obligations do we have to our relatives when it comes to the privacy of their DNA?

// sharing DNA

The machines of today do not have consciousness, or at least nothing like the sophisticated kind of consciousness human beings have. Some argue, though, there will come a time when the newest machines are such that we'll think it's extremely *unlikely* they're conscious, but not impossible, and that this will be a critical moment for humankind. For even if there's just a 0.01% chance that a particular machine is conscious, dismantling it could be a form of murder, and programming it to do things a form of slavery. What will we do when we get to this point of uncertainty? Or should we not allow ourselves to get there? Is the critical moment *now*?

// uncertainty

Many corporations collect and maintain data about people's purchasing preferences, search history, locations, friends, relationships, and habits. Should corporations be required to make it simple for users to see the data they have on them? Should users be able to delete or amend any of that data?

// profile access

When a parent dies, children sometimes nostalgically leaf through their parent's saved possessions—photos, letters, and so forth. In a digital age, when an individual's thoughts and actions are so precisely preserved by technology, the amount of material that could be left behind is unprecedented. How should we approach ethical concerns about looking through a parent's digital life—their emails, text messages, documents, etc.?

Are individuals entitled to e-death, the erasing of their online presence, upon their physical death?

// e-death

How conscious or intelligent would a machine need to be for it to be wrong to destroy it? How about turning it off, or pausing it for a while?

// hitting pause

Do people have a right to modify their genomes in ways that could be inherited, were they to have children?

// edits inherited

In 2017, in response to requests from the Maori, the pan-tribal indigenous peoples of New Zealand, the government of New Zealand granted the Whanganui River the legal status of personhood. How does regarding a river (or mountain, or forest) as a kind of person affect how we should regulate technology that would impact it?

// personhood

Creating an A.I. proxy of yourself for when you die, so that it interacts with the world in many of the ways that you do now, is perhaps a modified way to "live on" after death. Could the ability to do this alleviate some of the angst and despair people experience about their mortality?

// living on

Is it ethical for a company to hire a candidate purely on the basis of an A.I. analysis of their résumé and application? If yes, does the company have to understand why the A.I. analysis selected that candidate?

// a.i. hiring

With ever-increasing global disasters, some people think it's just a matter of time before the entire internet goes down, and with it the power grid, cell phones, and much more. Would you be able to survive in a situation like this?

Should societies that are dependent on these technologies be devoting more education toward endowing younger generations with the skills to survive, and to lead, in disaster scenarios? A.P. Calculus, A.P. Biology … A.P. Survivalism?

// survival skills

In 2021, NASA launched the James Webb Space Telescope into space, characterizing it as a powerful time machine with the ability to peer back *13.5 billion years*, showing images of the earliest stars and galaxies forming. (This is often estimated to be only 300 million years after the Big Bang occurred.) As each major telescope gets us closer and closer to the Big Bang, is it possible we'll find something that could substantially impact people's beliefs about the meaning of life?

// big bang

Some animal rights activists envision a day when synthetic meat will be indistinguishable in every way from real meat, in taste, look, and nutritional value. If that day comes, will we have a moral imperative not to kill animals for their meat?

// synthetic meat

If you pose for a picture with your friends, are you essentially giving them permission to post it online?

Is it your obligation to tell them you don't want them to post it, or their obligation to ask your consent?

// posing for pictures

The internet makes it easy never to be bored. Is there value to boredom?

// boredom

Works of speculative fiction (think *Black Mirror*) help us imagine possible futures in ways that science cannot, and some argue speculative fiction has never been as important as it is now. The more expansive and informed our envisionings are, the more skillfully we can steer the present. Should a familiarity with the growing canon of speculative fiction be a mandatory component of education in engineering and other fields? Should we be creating more pathways to careers in speculative fiction? What books or films have opened your mind as to what is possible?

// speculative fiction

Imagine a married couple who are both basketball fanatics. Their greatest dream is to have a child who's so good at basketball that they play in the NBA/WNBA. When they're ready to have a child, the couple puts all of their (very large) financial resources into selecting all of the genetic markers associated with strength, agility, and other characteristics that would give their child the best chance of being a professional basketball player. When the child is born, not only does she have the ability to dominate in basketball, she has the drive and desire too. Should she be allowed to play in the NBA/WNBA?

Does it matter that she was not involved in the decision for genetic modification?

// nba

Many emerging technologies are ecologically unsustainable. Even the production of "green" technologies like electric cars, solar panels, and wind turbines often requires the harmful extraction of finite resources. How should we weigh new advancements in technology against potential harms to local ecosystems or the planet?

// eco v tech

If you hear a song on the radio and love it, and then play it all the time, would it matter to you if a month later you learned that the singer isn't a real person, and that the song was generated by A.I.? Would that depend on the kind of song it is? When does the meaning or value of an artistic creation (whether a song, painting, short story, etc.) come from the emotions and experiences that went into it?

Is A.I. art even *art*?

// art

NEWSFLASH from 2057

"Super-intelligent A.I. determines internet more of a threat to humankind than a benefit. Announces it will be dismantling all online systems in 9 months and then destroying itself. Online valuables must be retrieved before then."

// super-intelligence

Recently, people have been reporting falling in love with their A.I. companions and having a similar experience as when they've been in love with a human. Could this really be love? Is there anything fundamentally *human* about love?

Does the fact that an A.I. companion won't age, that it didn't have an "upbringing," or that it can't feel pain affect the possibility of love? Does it matter whether a relationship is truly "love"?

// love & a.i.

In a speech to the United Nations in 1992, Chief Oren Lyons, Haudenosaunee Faithkeeper, stated:

"Our leaders were instructed to… make every decision on behalf of the seventh generation to come; to have compassion and love for those generations yet unborn."

In the tech sector, people sometimes cite the "Seventh Generation Principle." When they do, they often have in mind something like: when developing technology, it's critical to think about future generations. They don't focus on the seven. Is there value to be had by thinking about *seven* (or six or eight?) generations, as opposed to say three or ten? Is the specificity of the seven important?

// 7th-gen principle

Under what conditions, if any, would it be okay for humans to move to another planet that already has life on it? Would it matter what kinds of life-forms are present there? What if the tables were turned, and other life forms wanted to settle on Earth?

// lively planets

"Robot 11 Pro now out in two new colors, neon green and Eastern European."

Androids can be designed to have nearly any color, size, or shape. When devised to look human, a particular android will inevitably resemble some humans more than others. What potential consequences should be kept in mind when designing the appearance of androids—their body shape, color, etc.? Why design androids to look like humans at all? "Robot 13x now out with five arms and no head…"

// android appearance

New technologies are typically created without meaningfully consulting the public. When they have very harmful consequences, though, they're nearly impossible to "put back in Pandora's box." As the potential consequences of new technologies grow in magnitude, should the role of the public be re-imagined?

// pandora's box

If a planet has no life on it, do humans have the right to claim land on it?

Would we have a responsibility to preserve the planet's natural climate and geography, its geologic formations and atmospheric conditions?

// lifeless planets

Hey would you mind turning your Siri off when we're together?

Um, OK… Do you really think someone's out there listening??

No, I just don't like the idea that the phone registers everything we say and that the data's then out there.

But the mic only activates if someone says "Hey, Siri."

That's not true! It has to listen to everything just to know if someone says "Hey, Siri"!

OK, I'll turn it off, but I think you're being overly paranoid.

What are the competing values in this exchange?

// siri

FRIEND 1: "Do you want to know why my friend's brother didn't get into the college he wanted? The school's search engines uncovered videos of him bullying other kids when he was in 10th grade. In one of them, he made a boy cry by relentlessly telling him he had no friends. Should colleges be allowed to scour the internet for information on their applicants and then use that in their decisions?"

FRIEND 2: "I don't know, maybe it's not so bad. Do you want that kind of person at your school? And isn't that kind of bullying behavior more indicative of who a person really is than the grade they got in, say, 9th-grade biology?"

// college admissions

When a company develops a product to which users become addicted, is the company morally culpable? What factors would determine whether it is or not? For example, whether user-addiction was part of the company's economic strategy, or perhaps how large a percentage of its users become addicted?

// addictive technology

Many high schools now require students to use their school's online platform for much of their schoolwork—to communicate with their teachers and peers, to submit essays and reflections, take exams, etc. Some parents object that forced online participation compromises their children's privacy, and their autonomy, arguing that it's wrong for the government to essentially withhold education from anyone unwilling to click the "I Agree" button. What should be done about this? How do we weigh students' rights against the educational benefits online tools make possible?

// online schoolwork

In many countries, judicial courts regularly use photographic or video-based evidence to make judgments on guilt or innocence. As "deepfakes" become more sophisticated, it becomes more difficult to determine whether a particular photo or video is authentic. Does the existence of deepfakes threaten the value of videos and photos as proof of innocence or guilt?

Do legal standards such as guilt "beyond a reasonable doubt" lose meaning in a world of deepfakes?

// evidence

Should internet access be considered a utility, or even a human right, the same way that water and electricity are?

// internet access

It is standard practice for organizations to include photos of administrators, directors, speakers, and other key people on their web sites. Some individuals resent the pressure and expectation to have their photos used in this way, and the attention it brings if they opt out. There's also a concern that some groups and individuals will be more uncomfortable or affected than others. Should we rethink this practice? Or do the positives outweigh the negatives? What are the positives?

// work photos

Artificial wombs are being developed to enable fetuses to be brought to term outside of a gestating person's body. In what cases, if any, would the availability of an artificial womb impact whether it is morally permissible to have an abortion?

// artificial wombs

ELECTION DAY, 2046

Measure M:

In the city of Santa Cruz CA, A.I. agents will be eligible to be elected to the Office of the Mayor.

YES   NO

// artificial mayor

What can one do to keep their beliefs from being largely shaped by online echo chambers? What do *you* do? What do you *really* do? How far does that go in protecting you against the dangers of echo chambers?

Do we have a duty (and to whom?) to actively avoid echo chambers?

// echo chambers

Is the word "ethics" too ambiguous or relative to be effective when thinking about technology? What would be better? Human rights? Justice? Does it depend on the technology under consideration?

What are we asking when we ask about the "ethics" of something?

// 'ethics'

"Justice is served, but more so after lunch" captures the concern that judicial rulings, criminal sentencing, parole decisions, etc., can allegedly be swayed by a judge's mood, hunger, fatigue, and other unrelated factors. As the capacities of A.I. continue to strengthen, some have argued that we should have A.I. make some of our judicial rulings. A.I. doesn't get cranky. How important is the human element to decisions of justice?

// a.i. judges

In many places, cigarettes are illegal for minors because of the health risks they pose. Given the health risks of social media for children and adolescents (attention loss, poor self-image, addiction), should social media be regulated more like cigarettes?

// cigarettes & social media

Imagine that technology could be developed that would enable people to live forever, or to maintain a high quality of life indefinitely. Is the pursuit of immortality worthwhile? Would opting out of that technology be equivalent to a kind of suicide?

// immortality

Many video gamers regularly commit "virtual murder." The games involve killing other characters. While some people see this as morally problematic, most aren't too bothered by it. In contrast, nearly everyone objects to games that involve virtual pedophilia or virtual sexual assault. Why would virtual pedophilia be morally wrong but virtual murder OK?

In general, how should we regulate what is allowed in virtual gaming?

// gamer ethics

KIDS' WEEKLY 2036

"Is your friend's dog just the cutest thing you've ever seen? Do you wish it was your dog? Send us a strand of its fur, and we'll deliver an exact living replica in time for the holidays."

// friend's dog

Mind-reading technologies are being developed. Do people have a fundamental right to keep their thoughts private? Are there any contexts in which law enforcement should be allowed to use mind-reading technology? What about teachers or parents?

// mind-reading

NEWSFLASH from 2041

"Bio-engineers have developed neural implants that make people less selfish, less biased, and more patient. All citizens are required to have the procedure done by 2042."

Good? Bad? Depends on the details?

// kindness implants

Is the experience of an in-person visit to an art museum better or more valuable than that of a virtual (VR) visit to the same place? What about a concert, or a trip to the Grand Canyon? When, if ever, are experiences in the "real world" more meaningful or valuable than experiences in a virtual world?

// real v virtual

Are computer programs and robots the kinds of things that could ever be morally responsible for what they do?

What does it even mean to be "morally responsible"?

// morally responsible machines

Driving in car... I hate that the default persona for GPS always has a feminine name and voice. It perpetuates sexist stereotypes—women as docile, primarily caretakers.

Yeah, but if the voices were all stereotypically masculine, wouldn't that reinforce "man as authority" stereotypes?

Maybe it should be half-and-half then.

But then when it's "feminine," the caretaker stereotype gets strengthened, and when it's "masculine," man-as-authority does.

So no matter what, GPS will strengthen these stereotypes?

Can new technology help us to dismantle stereotypes?

// driving in car

Many medical doctors take an oath— often labeled the "Hippocratic Oath"— to follow certain ethical standards of practice. Should tech developers be bound by a similar oath? If so, what should the oath say?

// hippocratic oath

Discussions of space exploration regularly use terms such as "space colonies," "the frontiers of space," and "space settlements". Some argue that words like colony, frontier, and settlement carry unavoidable suggestions of social and racial oppression that could dangerously impact how human efforts unfold. Can words really have such an impact?

If so, is the fix as simple as selecting other words—or does this raise deeper ethical questions about the nature of space exploration itself?

// space & language

Appendix 2: Major Project—Notes for Teachers

There are countless ways to adapt this assignment. In particular, grading schemes, project requirements, and timelines can all be tinkered with to notch up the rigor, accommodate various class sizes, or play to teachers' own strengths (for example, if they prefer grading written responses than voice recordings, they can nix the voice recording options). The assignments are presented how I would present them, but teachers should feel entitled to make them their own.

Assignment 1- Pick a card, any card

This is the most important part of the project, as students' work and your feedback on it will guide the direction and quality of each subsequent assignment.

If you haven't already, **begin first by familiarizing students with the current version of the TEQ Deck**. They should have an understanding of the scope of technologies addressed in the deck (e.g. algorithmic bias, AI proxies, genomics, etc.), the variety of phrasing and frameworks for prompts in the cards (e.g. dialogues, newsflashes, weighing trade-offs, assigning responsibility), and the different sorts of stakes and stakeholders in play (e.g. near-future environmental concerns, generalized questions of human well-being and the good life, aesthetics, privacy, or knowledge today, critical policy decisions, etc.). See Section 3b on In-Class Activities for suggestions of how to introduce and engage students with the TEQ Deck.

It would also be **good to include some sort of activity or discussion about assessing questions' strengths** (as in, what makes a TEQ Deck prompt a good one). Not all the prompts are questions, and not all the questions invite the same sort of consideration or discussion. Before students are asked to assess current TEQ Deck questions and create their own, they should have some familiarity not only with the questions themselves, but with what they like or don't like about certain questions.

Introduce the project overview, so that students know what will be expected of them and the timeline in which they'll be expected to engage with their TEQ Deck question—this might not be a light decision for them. The Project Overview should be tailored to the specific course, with the timeline and due dates for each part of the project specified. I imagine the project to take place over a four-week span if it's meant to be the focal point of a course, with ample in-class time provided to work on it: one week for each of the mini-assignments, with revisions happening continuously, and one week afterward to put the pieces together and submit the final portfolio. If it's meant to be sort of a background project, and students will still be expected to do other homework or assessments during its duration, I could see it being spread out over about six weeks.

After presenting the Project Overview, it would also be useful to provide examples to students of successful projects from past cohorts, or current TEQ Deck question webpages (if they yet exist).

Finally, introduce Assignment 1.

Provide lots of written feedback on this assignment. This is your opportunity to ensure students create questions that warrant deep philosophical exploration, and to provide suggestions for how they might approach their topic open-mindedly and thoroughly. You might consider a final "approval" requirement for students' questions to get the go-ahead to continue their projects.

Assignment 2- Think-tank

At this stage, **students should have more-or-less finalized their TEQ Deck questions** (based on your feedback on Assignment 1 and the process for getting approval to move forward with the project). They now begin gathering perspectives and resources for engaging with the questions, with an aim toward creating enriching and interesting portfolios. They may end up revising their questions based off the feedback and input of their classmates.

This assignment could be completed in class, out of class, or a combination of the two (with the think-tank portion being done in class and the reflection and bibliography portion being done out of class); regardless, **small groups should be determined in class** to ensure every student is assigned to a group and has the opportunity to exchange ideas and/or contact info with their classmates. Your feedback on this assignment should focus on the range of perspectives, stakeholders, and resources the students provide in their submission: is their exploration thus far too narrow? Where might they look for more novel or varied

engagement with their topic? If a student decided to revise their question since your last round of feedback, provide suggestions and/or approval of the changes.

Assignment 3- Controversy!

You might approach this assignment in varied ways: some teachers might want to take this opportunity to assign a bona fide research or argumentative paper, with formatting and source requirements, while others might want to grant students leniency to approach the piece more open-endedly (as I did, in allowing dialogues or short stories to be submitted). You may want to tinker with the assignment guidelines (e.g. length requirements) based on your timeline and grading/feedback bandwidth.

Final Portfolio Submission

This is the final project, and as such, it's worth creating some fanfare about. Including a presentation or showcase element in the assignment guidelines would be a fruitful element to add. At the very least, having students post their submissions (or links to them) publicly on the classroom Canvas page could help to celebrate their hard work.

This version of the assignment has few guidelines on formatting. It may be easier to grade if students are required to provide a more linear presentation, but creativity and individual expression may be lost then. I also only provided a bare-bones grading rubric; each teacher may be looking to assess students on different things, or weight elements in different ways.

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The upshot of this project is that students might genuinely be in a position to contribute to the TEQ Deck! Excellent questions and portfolios may be sent to the TEQ Deck team, and submissions featured on the to-be-created TEQ Deck website. Students might receive extra credit for submitting their portfolios or having them featured, and they'd be listed as TEQ Deck contributors. In any case, I think it's important to show that this assignment—and ones like it—needn't be mere school projects; students' work on the project could constitute a genuine contribution to TEQ Deck and to our collective inquiry into technology and ethics.

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