Philosophical Discussion Plans and Exercises

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If the casting philosophy in the modality of fictional narrative is one way of dramatizing philosophy, the devising of philosophical discussion plans and exercises is another. This may at first seem to be stretching a point: exercises are among the most humble tools of education and would seem to be totally lacking in the glamorous glow that radiates from the more heavily dramatized portions of the curriculum. And yet, the case can be made that discussion plans and exercises, properly constructed, can embody the praxis of philosophy in an acceptable fashion, and at times can do so superbly.

Would-be classroom teachers of philosophy need models of **doing philosophy** that are clear, practical and specific. They need to be able to distinguish essentially decidable concepts from essentially contestable concepts, if they are to understand why only the latter are truly philosophical. The same is true with respect to other aspects of philosophical practice: teachers in preparation need to be able to distinguish the non-philosophical from the philosophical and the pseudo-philosophical when it comes to questions, counter-questions, follow-up questions, inferences, justifications and so on. They need to be able to tell philosophical epistemology from psychological epistemology. But above all, they must be prepared to see that these differences may lie more in the function than in the form. What makes a question philosophical rather than non-philosophical may lie not in the verbal form of the sentence but in the circumstances under which it is uttered, and it is only through the repeated exposure to the doing of philosophy that such circumstances come to be recognized.

Prospective teachers of philosophy at the elementary school level repeatedly want to know what it is that makes a discussion philosophical, and while this question is legitimate enough, it should be kept in mind that what such teachers are struggling to understand is **what makes a practice philosophical?** The discussion is only one part of that practice. Exercises and discussion plans represent another component, for they are integral parts of the elementary level philosophy curriculum, and without a curriculum of some kind, the chances that one will be able to do philosophy at all are greatly reduced.

Although similar in many respects, exercises and discussion plans have different emphases. Exercises aim to sharpen and strengthen cognitive skills, as well as to promote precision and specificity. Discussion plans aim to improve concept-formation through equipping students with such tools as criteria, reasons, arguments and definitions. But both exercises and discussion plans are embodiments of certain aspects of philosophical praxis, with exercises focussing on individual problems and cases and with discussion plans centering on general or universal concepts. Both are representative of the philosophical tradition, as embodied in the theories of the discipline or in its practice. At the same time, both provide opportunities for going beyond that tradition, as philosophers have always managed to go beyond it. These modes of transcending the tradition are as authentically a part of the tradition as are the modes of conforming to the tradition. To do philosophy is to belong to a community whose members teach one another to do both. Doing philosophy also involves recognizing and respecting those whose openness of mind and freshness of thought enables them to be philosophically creative without prior instruction in how this might be helped to happen. Those who refuse to acknowledge the philosophical originality of a thinker simply because that thinker happens to be a child are guilty of the fallacy that is awkwardly called "ad hominem."

If we are to strengthen the bridge-the curricular bridge-between philosophers and home philosophers, we could do worse than to examine exercises and discussion plans with a view to constructing a taxonomy that will enable us to understand more readily what each of these is attempting to do: what its strategy is, how it functions, and how it embodies the philosophical tradition or is representative of the philosophical discipline. As long as

we fail to do this, prospective teachers will reproach themselves for an incompetence which they wrongly assign to themselves rather than to us.

PHILOSOPHICAL DISCUSSION PLANS

A philosophical discussion plan consists of a group of questions that generally deal with a single concept, relationship (such as a distinction or connection) or problem. The questions may form a series, in which each builds upon its predecessors, or they may form a circle around the topic so that each question focuses upon the topic from a different angle. We can speak of these two families of discussion plans as cumulative and non-cumulative.

There are many different ways in which the questions in a discussion plan can be cumulative. For example, the questions may be formally the same, but deal with more and more comprehensive topics or domains:

DISCUSSION PLAN:
Does everything have a story of how it happened?

Answer the following questions:
1. Does your desk have a story?
2. Does your school building have a story?
3. Does your home have a story?
4. Does your family have a story?
5. Does your street have a story?
6. Does your town or city have a story?
7. Does the Statue of Liberty have a story?
8. Does the United States have a story?
9. Does the world have a story?
10. Can a story have a story?

If you answered yes to any of the above questions, can you tell that story? *(Looking for Meaning, p. 8)*

On the other hand, the discussion plan (see next example) may be said to be cumulative when the questions build on one another in the sense that each is a slight variation on its predecessor, as these questions shift from like to prefer to want and to desire, along with shifts from singular to plural subjects and from positive to negative predicates:

DISCUSSION PLAN:
When should we call things "good?"

1. If you like something, does that make it good?
2. If a lot of people like something, does that make it good?
3. If you prefer apples to oranges, does that make apples better than oranges?
4. If you want something, must the thing you want therefore be good?
5. If you don't want something, must that thing be bad? or worthless?
6. Is it possible to like something that's bad? 7. Is it possible to know something's bad, and still like it?
8. If something is good, does that guarantee people will like it?
9. If something is good, does that guarantee people will prefer it to something bad?
10. If people know that something is good, and know the reasons why it is good, is it possible they could still dislike it?
11. Can something be good, even though there are lots of things that are better?
12. Can something be bad, even though there are lots of things that are worse?
13. Do you think that, if you fully understood the reasons why one thing was better than another, you might still want the worse thing?

14. Could something be valuable, even though no one valued it?
15. Could something be desirable, even though no one desired it?
16. Could a person whom no one liked still be likable?
17. Which would you prefer, something worthless that everyone wanted, or something valuable that no one wanted?
18. Which things should we call "good," those are desired, or those that are desirable? *(Writing: How and Why, p. 263)*

With regard to non-cumulative discussion plans, we should again be prepared to encounter a number of varieties. Thus there may be a number of alternative solutions to a given problem:

EXERCISE:
Freedom

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? If you agree, why? If you don't agree, why not?

Agree Disagree ?

1. We are free if no one tells us how to live.
2. We are free if we make up and follow our own rules for how to live.
3. We are free when nothing gets in our way.
4. We are free if we think we're free.
5. We are free when we can do what we think best.
6. We are free if we are healthy.
7. We are free if we are intelligent.
8. We are free only when everyone is free.
9. We are free if we are ourselves.
10. We are free when all the above statements are combined. *(Looking for Meaning, p. 235)*

In the foregoing case, the discussion plan leaves open the possibility that the various definitions of freedom may be mutually exclusive or may be adequate only if taken in combination with one another. There are, however, other ways of examining the concept of freedom. Thus a dictionary will offer a variety of alternative connotations, some of which have little in common with others, and which are not meant to be taken additively. Here is an example:

DISCUSSION PLAN:
What does the word "freedom" mean?

Discuss the way the word "free" is used in the following cases:

1. A shipwrecked sailor is washed up on a small desert island in the Pacific. "Oh, well," he says to himself, "I'm free to leave whenever I want to."
2. A service station sign says "Free Air and Water."
3. Some picketers are carrying signs reading, "Free All Prisoners of War."
4. The prisoner walked out of the jail saying, "Today I'm a free man."
5. People living in a democracy are free people.
6. The parachutist set a record for a free fall.
7. "I don't like rhymes," said the poet. "I much prefer free verse."
8. "I bought this handbag in Japan," she remarked, "but it was tax free."
9. We checked the building out to make sure it was free of termites.
10. The policeman said, "Since your car wasn't involved in the accident, you're free to go."
11. The prisoner's left hand was handcuffed to the guard, but his right hand was free.
12. The fight that broke out on the playground was a real free-for-all.

13. "When you come to the border checkpoint," said one spy to the other, "don't be too free with information."
14. We enjoyed their free and easy way of dancing.
15. "Behave yourself at the party," said Mrs. Jones. "Don't be too free with the people you meet there."
16. An ad says that you get 100 free stamps for every $10 worth of groceries you buy at the supermarket.
17. "Let me give you some free advice," I told him.
18. I know some kids who attend free schools.
19. "At least," said mr. Brown, "I now own this house free and clear."
20. "The better we are at thinking," said Joe, "the more free we are to think for ourselves."

Below are some possible ways of understanding and using the word "free." Can you match the meanings below to the items above?

Hints of alternative uses of the word "free":

a. not restrained
b. without charge or cost
c. able; having the power to do something
d. to liberate or set at liberty (verb)
e. without entanglements
f. unconfined, not in servitude
g. not part of a system
h. living under rules of one's own making
i. unobstructed
j. frank, open
k. unrhymed (verse)
1. uninhibited, casual, natural
m. open or release (verb)
n. exempt
o. easy
p. able to live the way one wants to *(Ethical Inquiry, p. 145)*

Another type of discussion plan poses a **problem** that, it is hoped, will be a springboard for discussion. The problem may be in the form of an anecdote, a proverb, a parable or merely a distinction, but it has to be one that is intrinsically enticing. Thus, in the case of a distinction, what is controversial is whether the difference it rests upon is real but generally unnoticed, and whether the things thereby separated are of importance to people. (This is why ethical distinctions, such as "Pity is not sympathy" or "Rashness is not courage" may be sufficient to provoke classroom discussions.) On the other hand, the fictitious anecdote may be fairly elaborately contrived, such as this:

DISCUSSION PLAN:
What is Fairness?

Children as well as adults are concerned about *fairness.* Everyone agrees that people should be treated *fairly,* but what is *fairness?* We agree that we should abide by the rules of "fair play," but what are the rules of "fair play?"

This is an opportunity for you to discuss the notion of *fairness.* Here is a story you might use for this:

A teacher comes into he classroom one day with a large bag of candy. She explains that the candy is a gift to the class, and she has been told she must distribute it *fairly.*

"Now," she says, "what is fair? Would the fairest thing be for me to give the most to those who deserve the most? Who deserves the most? Surely it must be the biggest and strongest ones in the class who deserve the most, for they probably do most things best."

But the teacher is greeted by a loud outcry from the class. "What you propose is most unfair," they tell her. "Just because this one is better at arithmetic or that one at baseball or still another at dancing, you still shouldn't treat us all differently. It wouldn't be fair to give some members of the class, say, five pieces of candy, while others might get one piece or none at all. Each of us is a person, and in this respect we're all equal. So *treat us as equals and give each of us the same amount of candy."*

"Ah," the teacher answers, "I'm glad you've explained to me how you feel about this. So, although people are very different from one another in many respects, fairness consists in treating them all equally."

"That's right!" the pupils answer, "fairness is equal treatment!"

But before the teacher has a chance to distribute the candy, the phone rings, and she's called down to the office. When she gets back, some minutes later, she find that the children have all been fighting over the candy. And now each of the biggest and strongest children has a great handful of candy, while the remainder have varying amounts, and the smallest children have only one each.

The teacher demands order, and the class becomes very quiet. Obviously she's very disturbed about what the children have just done. But she's determined to be *fair,* and fairness, they have all agreed, is *equal treatment. So* she tells the children, "You taught me what fairness is. Each of you must give back one piece of candy."

This is where the story ends. Now-discuss what you think fairness is.

(Philosophical Inquiry, p. 63)

The sequence of questions in a discussion plan generally proceed from **simple** to **difficult** and from **clear-cut** cases to fuzzy cases. Very often, the beginning questions address the readers directly, while the questions towards the end seek greater impartiality and generality. Here is an example:

DISCUSSION PLAN:
Doing

1. If you see some people playing cards, are they making or doing?
2. If someone invents a new game of cards, is that making or doing?
3. What is the difference between making something and doing something?
4. When you say, "There's nothing to do!" would you rather be doing something or making something?
5. When people ask you if you're "doing well in school," what do they mean?
6. When someone you're introduced to says "How do you do?" what does he mean?
7. When you are told to do to other people what you'd like them to do to you, what does that mean?
8. People who are getting married say "I do." What do they mean when they say that?
9. When you're resting, are you doing something?
10. When you're hungry and your stomach growls, is that something it does or something you do?
11. Are there some times when you do your homework because you have to and other times that you do it because you want to?
12. Would you like to live in such a way that everything you did would be something you wanted to do?
13. It is sometimes said that "everything you do expresses the kind of person you are." What do you think this means?
14. Do you think it possible that people can just look at your face and figure out the sort of things you do when you're alone?
15. What is the difference between doing something and it well?

(Philosophical Inquiry, p. 84)

Here is an example of a discussion plan which moves from the clear-cut instances in the early part to more fuzzy instances in the latter portion:

DISCUSSION PLAN:
Loyalty and reciprocity

Under what circumstances is it appropriate for loyalty to be reciprocal, and under what circumstances is it not appropriate? Perhaps we can shed some light on this problem by discussing the following questions:

1. Is it appropriate for friends to be loyal to each other?
2. Is it appropriate for married people to be loyal to each other, or is it all right for one to be loyal but not the other?
3. Is it appropriate for comrades to be loyal to one another?
4. Is it appropriate for classmates to be loyal to one another?
5. Is it appropriate for brothers and sisters to be loyal to one another?
6. Is it appropriate for children to be loyal to their parents, but unnecessary for parents to be loyal to their children?
7. Is it appropriate for children to be loyal to their pets, but permissible for their pets not to be loyal to them?
8. Is it appropriate for citizens to be loyal to their government, but all right if their government is not loyal to them?
9. Do people over whom authority is exercised have to be loyal to people in authority, but not the reverse?
10. Can one be loyal to one's natural environment?
11. Is there a sense in which one's natural environment might be referred to as "loyal?" 12. What is meant by the phrase, "the loyal opposition?"
    (Ethical Inquiry, p. 308)

Discussion plans also differ among themselves with regard to the degree of didactic guidance they provide. One of the discussion plans we have already considered ("What does the word `freedom' mean?") is fairly non-didactic, in the sense that it does not **lead** students towards a particular understanding. A moderately didactic discussion plan might select several interpretations of a concept for underscoring or emphasis, as this one does:

DISCUSSION PLAN:
What is Understanding?

We use the word "understanding" to mean many different things. thus we may say we **understand** chess when what we mean is that we know the rules of chess and how the game is played. Or we may say we understand our cat in the sense that we **understand** what it wants when it meows (that it's hungry, or wants to come inside). And we may say we **understand** a person in the sense that we an put ourselves in the person's place by thinking and feeling as that person does. In using the following discussion plan, see if you can get your students to express the different ways in which they **understand** what it is to **understand**.

1. If you have a pet (like a cat or a dog), do you understand it?
2. What do you mean when you say you "understand" an animal?
3. Do you understand the game of baseball? What do you mean when you say you "understand" baseball?
4. What are the differences between understanding a game and understanding an animal?
5. Do you understand trees?
6. When you say you understand trees, do you mean this in the sense that you understand how they live (like how thee sap works, how
7. the chlorophyll works, etc.) or how they grow, or some other meaning?
8. What's the difference between understanding a tree and understanding a game?
9. Do you understand your classmates? Do they understand you?
10. Do you understand your parents? Do they understand you?
11. Do you understand your teachers? Do they understand you?
12. What's the difference between understanding a thing and understanding a person?
13. Can you understand the way that your teachers understand you?
14. Why does Harry say, "If we think about electricity, we can understand it better, but when we think about thinking, we seem to understand ourselves better?"
15. Do you now understand the word "understanding" better than you did? *(Philosophical Inquiry, p. 91)*

A discussion plan can be considered very didactic when it concentrates on a single alternative, even though it acknowledges that this alternative is controversial. For example, here is one that is fairly insistent that the epistemological approach known as "objective relativism" be understood and taken into account, even though it does not demand acceptance of that approach:

DISCUSSION PLAN:
On seeing things "as they really are."

1. Which person would you say is more likely to see the moon "as it really is"-a person looking at the moon from Earth, or an astronaut looking at the moon while standing on the moon?
2. Which person would you say is more likely to see the planet Earth "as it really is"-a person standing on the surface of the Earth, or an astronaut looking at Earth from the moon? (Are answers to 1 and 2 consistent?)
3. Suppose two people are looking at your school building. One is standing a mile away, and one is standing right up against the building with his nose pressed to the wall. Can either one see the building "as it really is"? Explain.
4. Is there an exact distance that you have to be from something in order to SEE IT "as it really is"?
5. If someone were lying on the floor looking up at your desk, while you're looking down on it, does that mean that his view of it is wrong and yours is right?
6. Is it possible that everyone in the class has a different idea of the way your desk looks?
7. Is it possible that some viewpoints are better than other viewpoints? (If so, how?)
8. Is it possible that the more you consider things from different points of view, the better you know "what they're really like"?
9. Is it possible that some things are right and some things wrong, regardless of what point of view they are observed from? (If so, give examples.)
10. When people tell you that you should try to "be objective," does that mean you should:
    a) see things more from their point of view b) see things from the points of view of grown-ups
    c) see things more accurately
    d) consider things from as many different points of view as possible
    e) all of the above
    f) some of the above (which?)
    g) none of the above *(Philosophical Inquiry, p. 438)*

Obviously the more didactic a discussion plan is, the more discretion should be employed in utilizing it. It does not follow, however, that curriculum developers should completely avoid discussion plans that concentrate on only a single alternative, so long as that alternative can be discussed by the students in an open and uncoerced fashion.

On this point too, there is room for variety. Most discussion plans do not provide suggestions for the manner in which the discussions themselves are to take place, but in some cases, the discussion plan will indicate some considerations that are to be taken into account, as in this case:

DISCUSSION PLAN:
Means-end problems

Discuss the following assertions:
NOTE: Your discussions should take the following considerations into account:

a) Clearly distinguish, in each case, between means and ends.
b) Clearly distinguish, where possible, between ends (in the sense of goals or objectives) and results or consequences.
c) Ask yourself whether the means that is proposed would in fact be likely to produce the end that is being sought.

d) Ask yourself whether the means, if used, would produce, in addition to the desired end, other consequences which would be undesirable.
e) Ask yourself whether another means might produce the same end more efficiently or with fewer undesirable side-effects.
f) Ask yourself whether the end or goal is itself desirable.

1. Jerry: "I'd like to see Cynthia elected class president, but it's too much trouble to vote for her."
2. Francesca: "Sure we need an elevated walkway across the boulevard. But why use steel? Plywood's good enough!"
3. Maggie: "We've got to give those savages the benefit of our civilization, even if we've got to use force to bring it about."
4. Cecil: "If you really want a certain result, you'll make use of the means that will produce that result. And if you refuse to use those means, then you really don't want that result."
5. Harriett: "Vic's genuinely and sincerely committed to making a million dollars. I'm sure that explains why he's been working so hard, night and day, on those counterfeit plates."
6. Nick: "In order to have a revolution, you've got to break some heads, just as, in order to make an omelette, you've got to break some eggs."
7. June: "If you don't step on other people on your way to the top, they'll just step on you." 8.
8. Millicent: "From a food packaging point of view, egg cartons and egg shells make ideal containers for eggs."
9. Vivian: "No one becomes a great violinist without study and practice."
10. Irv: "Candy is made to be eaten, milk is made to be drunk, and laws are made to be broken."
11. Samantha: "In order to relax, I smoke, and since I'm always tense, I smoke all the time." 12. Carl: "I eat to live and I live to eat."

(Social Inquiry, p. 218)

It is obvious that directions for the conduct of the discussion are likely to restrict its open flow, and therefore should be employed sparingly. On the other hand, there may be situations where the dialogue is so free, uninhibited and voluminous that restrictions which channel and discipline it can be very welcome and beneficial.

Further clarification of the nature of philosophical discussion plans can obviously be achieved by continued classification, but the varieties can be almost inexhaustible. This is the case so long as the discussion plans are not turned out by formula, so as to be fairly predictable, but are devised afresh for each new concept or problem. As Martin Buber says, "Forgetting is good," and there is a sense in which the curriculum developer needs to forget what he or she has done in the past so as to be addressed by and to address each new challenge on its own terms.

PHILOSOPHICAL EXERCISES

If it is true that there are countless varieties of discussion plans, it is even more true, so to speak, that there are almost endless varieties of philosophical exercises. Philosophical practice is called for wherever something is taken for granted and needs examination, and such practice requires exercises in much the same way that athletes need to perform exercises as part of their professional preparation.

As has already been noted, exercises aim at exemplification, instantiation. But they also aim at the improved performance of standard procedures. After all, those who do philosophy, whether students or instructors, are all practitioners, engaged in philosophical inquiry. They need to perfect their technique no less than their insights and intuitions.

One of the ways in which the philosophical exercise emphasizes particularity rather than universality can be its citing the opinions of various fictitious individuals, usually students, with which one is expected to agree or disagree and provide a reason for one's judgment. The following is typical of this sort of exercise:

EXERCISE:
Copies and originals

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? In either case, give your reason.

Agree Disagree ?

1. Phyllis: "The flag that's on the flagpole in front of the school is a copy of the true flag, which is in a glass case in Washington, D.C."
2. Sue Ellen:"This dollar bill's a copy of the true dollar bill, which is in a glass case in Washington, D.C."
3. Shelley: "The light from the sun is original; the moon's light is only a copy."
4. Sid: "When you see a kid who's the spittin' image of his father, you have a case of copy and original."
5. Graham: "I've heard there's a new best-seller that has sold 10 million copies. I sure would like to see the original."
6. Tracy: "There's my silhouette in profile on the wall. It's a copy of my profile.
7. Zelda: "*My* memories are only copies of experiences I once really had."
8. Burt: "Right now I'm looking at the flag on the flagpole. But what I see isn't the flag itself; all I **see** is an image in my mind that's a copy of the flag."
9. Oscar: "*My* first, true love was Zelda. I've been in love many times since then, but all those succeeding times have been only copies."
10. Gus: "I've heard that Van Gogh made copies of paintings by Millet. I'll bet Van Gogh's copies were very original."

(Writing: How and Why, p. 155)

Of course, one can take these opinions as telescoped arguments and consider whether or not they represent valid inferences. This is to examine the logic of such assertions, taken as **testimony**. On the other hand, one can evaluate the testimony to determine to what extent it can be taken as **evidence**. Here is how this could be done:

EXERCISE:
Evidence

In each case, compare the two sentences and say whether they mean the same thing or different things:

In each of the following cases, a person makes a judgment and claims that the judgment is based upon evidence.

1. Decide whether each piece of information given is in fact evidence that supports the judgment.
2. Decide whether all the pieces of information taken together are sufficient to justify the judgment.

I. "Of course they're in love! Haven't you noticed the way they always go dancing together, and they don't sit together in class, and they never have anything to say to each other in public?"

II. "Yes, folks, this is a genuine antique table from ancient Greece. Noticvorite materials of Greek craftsmen -plywood and linoleum. And it has the date carved right on the front of it-the date of the high point of Greek culture-2000 B.C."

III. "Of course it's the biggest *city* in the state. Look, according to this geography book it has more square miles and more population than any other *city* in the state. And the atlas says the same thing.

IV. "I think we're going to have a storm. There are heavy dark clouds in the west, the wind and the barometer are rising, and the wind is from the east."

V. "Certainly there's a real danger of war. Otherwise, why would there be all these peace conferences, and parades throughout the world of people demanding peace, and all the kids wearing tee-shirts with pictures of doves?"

(Social Inquiry, p. 216)

Perhaps the central aim of philosophical exercises is the cultivation of judgment, and this is generally accomplished through comparisons seeking to determine whether the things or relationships being compared are: a) different, b) similar or c) identical. One might seek all three of these determinations in the same exercise, such as this one:

EXERCISE:
"Only"

1. The box contained only kittens.
   1 a. Only the box contained kittens
2. All the kittens in the room were white.
   2a. Only the kittens in the room were white.
3. The kittens had only one tail.
   3a. Only the kittens had one tail.
4. All the kittens had blue eyes.
   4a. Only the kittens had blue eyes.
5. No kittens bark like dogs.
   5a. Only kittens meow like cats.

(Getting Our Thoughts Together, p. 17)

On the other hand, exercises provide practice in cognitive skills, and while this may involve judgment in each and every instance, it is the skill-building function that can be paramount. For example, here is an exercise aimed at sharpening students' skills in finding inconsistencies:

EXERCISE:
Finding inconsistencies

Which of the following cases do you think represent inconsistencies and which do not:
1. Alvin: "As a matter of fact, I never borrow from anyone, because if anyone lends me money, I always pay it back."
2. Dorothy: "I can dive, float and dogpaddle, but I can't swim."
3. Spud: "The reason I don't like history is that it just gives you lots of facts but never explains anything.
4. Pixie: Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, if there is any man among you who votes to convict my client, that man is no gentleman."
5. Hugh: "The doctors are right: I have terminal crud. But I never felt better in my life."
6. Violet: "I just happen to be a little of girl who's strongly success-oriented. Where do these people get the idea that I'm `ambitious'?"
7. Zizi: "I'll admit that, wherever you are on the earth's surface, if you move forward in a straight line, you'll eventually come back to where you started. But no, I wouldn't call the Earth spherical."
8. Hank: "The colors in the spectrum that I find most beautiful are the reds-like ultramarine and indigo and aquamarine."
9. Trudie: "Shut up, everybody! How do you expect a person to concentrate with all this noise? I don't want to hear another word out of anybody, and believe me, when I say something like that, I mean it!"
10. Bartholomew: "I think human beings should restrict their communication to other human beings. That's why, when the telephone rings, I won't answer it."
11. Edith: "It's important to learn from experience. That's why I say that now that the horse has been stolen, we've got to lock the barn door."
12. Brad: "Results are the only things that matter. The only time results won't matter will be when the world comes to an end."
13. Phoebe: "I don't care much for human beings, but I love humanity."

14. Carmel: "I oppose the tyranny of the majority but I favor democracy."
15. Josh: "The exception proves the rule-except in certain cases which are additional evidence for my contention."

(Ethical Inquiry, p. 43)

One of the criticisms often heard of critical thinking programs is that they build cognitive skills while neglecting to protect such skills from being misused by people with poor judgment or deficient values. This can be a trenchant criticism, but Philosophy for Children is not very vulnerable to it because skill-building and value-formation are so intertwined in that program. It aims to strengthen evaluative as well as classificatory judgments, so that students will learn what kind of thing a x is, and what makes it a good thing of its kind. This is a typical exercise involving skill-formation (reason-recognition) and evaluative judgment (distinguishing good reasons from ordinary reasons and non-reasons).

EXERCISE:

When is a reason a good reason?

Consider the following remarks, and say whether you think that what is being said represents a good reason, a reason (although not necessarily a good one), or something that is no reason at all.

1. Gary: "The reason I suspect this man, Grench, of being the murderer is that the murderer wore shoes and Grench wears shoes."
2. Lola: "I suspect Grench because the murderer wore size 7-1/2 shoes and Grench wears size 8-1/2, and that's close!"
3. Dora: "I think Grench is innocent, because I get headaches whenever I try to figure things out like this."
4. Sam: "I think Grench was the murderer, in view of the fact that he confessed."
5. Jake: "I refuse to draw any conclusions before Grench's trial because he retracted his confession."
6. Oliver: "Grench is absolutely innocent! My astrologist has told me so!"
7. Matilda: "Grench is one beautiful hunk of man! Of course he's innocent."
8. Nelda: "Grench did it, all right: his fingerprints were found on the gun. What difference does it make that the murder weapon was a knife?"
9. Howard: "Grench's grandfather served time for being a draft dodger. That's what convinced me he did it."
10. Sherryl: "Okay, I'm going to flip a coin. Heads he's innocent, tails he's guilty, How about that: tails!"

(Ethical Inquiry, p. 26)

An exercise may have multiple functions. It might, for example, contribute to the understanding of a concept, and at the same time strengthen the reasoning processes of the students who employ it. Consider, for example, how the following exercise fosters concept-formation, reasoning, and the sense of community:

EXERCISE:

What is real, and what only seems to be real?

Prepare cards for four different desks or tables. This is what the cards read:

1. Things that seem to be real, but aren't.
2. Things that seem to be real, and are.
3. Things that don't seem to be real, but are real.
4. Things that don't seem to be real, and are not.

Now, each person is to bring an item to class and put it on one of the tables. Here are some suggestions:

a. an artificial flower
b. a toy automobile

c. a book of fairy-tales
d. a coke bottle filled with water
e. a potato carved in the shape of a cat
f. a paper airplane
g. a photograph of a member of the class h. a small mirror

Go around the room, and each person, in turn, must challenge someone else to give the reason for putting that person's object on that particular table.

(Looking for Meaning, p. 4)

An exercise can have a logical function and at the same time it can simulate social practices that play an important role in social experience. In this connection, games represent exercises that sharpen student thinking about their daily lives, as the following version of "Simon says" can be helpful in distinguishing between intended and unintended meanings:

EXERCISE:
Do we sometimes say things we don't mean, and mean things we don't say?

Virtually all children are familiar with the game, "Simon Says," and the best way to begin this exercise is to play a round of that game (until all but one person has been eliminated).

But now, ask the class what is involved each time the leader suggests something to them. See if they come up with the following possible combinations:

1. The leader may tell the class to do something, but not do it himself. (He may say "Hands on hips," but not do it.)
2. The leader may tell the class to do something, and do it herself. (She may say, "Hands on hips," and do it.)
3. The leader may say nothing but do something.
4. The leader may neither say anything nor do anything.

Item 4 above, is of course fairly unimportant. And Item 3 does occasionally trick some of the more unwary members of the class.

But the important thing to note about Items 1 and 2 is that they are not to be obeyed unless the leader prefaces his/her command with "Simon Says." So the full array would look like this (using "Hands on hips!" as an example):

1. "Simon says, `Hands on hips'!" (Leader doesn't do it.)
2. "Hands on hips!" (Leader doesn't do it.)
3. "Simon says, `Hands on hips'!" (Leader does it.)
4. "Hands on hips!" (Leader does it.)
5. (Leader is silent, but puts hands on hips.)

Is it possible that, in accepting or refusing a date, a person may send out very confusing signals, like the Simon Says leader, and can seem to be accepting when in fact she wants to refuse, or can seem to be refusing when in fact she wants to accept?

(Writing: How and Why, pp 115-116)

Virtually any children's game can be reconstructed as to provide the basis for a philosophical exercise, and some (e.g., "Twenty Questions") are already useful for fostering classificatory or inferential procedures. It is because exercises pinpoint procedures that they can be effective in building skills. For example, if we want to expose underlying assumptions, we can employ an exercise involving necessary inferences, where the arguments are enthymemes (have missing premises) that need to be made explicit. Once the missing premise is supplied, it is obvious that the person using the argument may be guilty of stereotypical thinking. The two exercises that

follow illustrate this principle in different ways. The first demonstrates how the finding of missing premises can reveal underlying assumptions. The second shows how these assumptions can be stereotypical.

EXERCISE:
Underlying assumptions as missing premises

Sometimes someone offers a reason for a belief, but there appears to be an underlying assumption that has not been stated. Such an assumption may take the form of a missing premise. (A syllogism with a missing premise is called an *enthymeme.)* For example, if someone says, "These are snakes, therefore they are reptiles," we see that this can be arranged as a syllogism with a missing premise:

1. (missing premise)

2. These (things) are snakes. Therefore, these (things) are reptiles.

What is the missing premise that would make this deductive argument correct? Obviously, "All snakes are reptiles."

Complete the following arguments by finding the missing premise that will make the argument a correct one:

1. "He washed with soap; he must be clean."
2. "Of course he's a fool. Anyone who tries to fail at everything must be a fool."
3. "It's made by Grunchco; naturally it's good."
4. "They must be Texans, because they're all residents of Houston."
5. "You're a friend of Ed's, so you're a friend of mine."
6. "The only person in the world who has green hair is Margie, so you must be Margie."
7. "I hate all economic systems, so I hate capitalism and socialism."
8. "I like both tyrannies and democracies, so it follows I like Pangravia."
9. "They're not stupid so they must be crazy."
10. "If the light goes out, the lighthouse keeper must be sick. He must be sick."

(Social Inquiry, p. 206)

EXERCISE:
Stereotypes

In the following examples, decide whether or not the case in point is an instance of faulty reasoning. If you think the reasoning if faulty, give a reason for your thinking so.

Faulty Reasoning Why I think it's faulty Reasoning Okay

1. Andy says: "Boys are aggressive. The star player on the girl's volleyball team is very aggressive. I'll bet she's really a boy."
2. Daisy says: "Jim's stingy. And everyone knows Transylvanians are stingy. So Jim must be a Transylvanian."
3. Eddie says: "My uncle Frank is from Texas. He must be a cowboy."
4. George says: "I'm timid. Lots of girls are timid. I must be effeminate."
5. Ethel says: "Many students who get A's are fast readers. But I'm a slow reader. So I guess I'll never make A's.
6. Tom says: "All the parts of this machine are made of metal. This is a part of the machine, so it must be made of metal."
7. Joe says: "Any drop of water can freeze. This isn't a drop of water. So it can't freeze."
8. Mabel says: "Minnesotans live near Canada. Ed doesn't come from Minnesota. So he must not live near Canada."
9. Henry says: "I think lots of criminals are fascinating. Walter Zilch has just been convicted of bank robbery, so he must be fascinating."

10. Dora says: "All the parts of this sled are made of wood. this is a piece of wood. It must be part of this sled."

(Philosophical Inquiry, p. 36)

From the foregoing examples, it can perhaps be seen that philosophical exercises are not atomistic. Each illustrates a facet of the discipline of philosophy, and these facets are interconnected, just as each spot on the surface of the earth is different, but collectively they illustrate a single world. This is one reason why philosophy is so superior an approach to critical thinking. Instead of each exercise representing a discrete skill, it represents a vast network or system that is capable of funneling the power of the whole into each of its several parts.

PUTTING THE STUDENT CENTER-STAGE

If the philosophical novel represents the dramatization of the curriculum, the philosophical discussion plan and philosophical exercise represent the dramatization of the student. That is, the discussion plan and exercise put the spotlight on the student's performance, as this occurs in the theatre of the community of inquiry. This performance, however, is not like the playing of a part, the enacting of a role where someone else has written the lines, which the actor proceeds to memorize and speak as the play is enacted. Instead, the response of the student to the questions in discussion plans and exercises is virtually unpredictable. In the philosophical curriculum, the discussion plans and exercises are devices for extracting creativity from students, for getting them to think for themselves-to be independent and resourceful in their thinking, while cooperative with the overall inquiry in which the community as a whole is engaged.

To be sure, they work in somewhat different ways to arrive at this result. The discussion plan fosters conceptual dialogue, with the result that the judgments elicited from the student are procedural insofar as they have to do with the timing of the student in entering the discussion, and substantive insofar as they are responsive to the developing understanding of the problem as it emerges in the deliberating community of inquiry. The exercise, on the other hand, tends to present each student with a particular facet of the overall problem, and to spotlight that student's response as an individualized performance. Judgments therefore, in the case of exercises, tend to be reasoning judgments: the inquiry focuses upon the logic of particular cases.

Either way, philosophical inquiry is student-centered, and it is the thinking of each student that is dramatized, as well as the thinking of each collective group. The philosophical admonition to "Know Thyself" is not to be taken lightly, nor is the Socratic warning that "The unexamined life is not worth living." It is the life of each and every philosophy student that must be examined and understood. Each student's mind becomes a theatre within a theatre, a drama within a drama. As Pixie notes, each of us has a story, and that story itself is enfolded within another story and another and another, as the stories of persons intermesh with the stories of stories, and as the history of the flower in the crannied wall merges with our own history and the history of the world.

Philosophy is the discipline that rejoices in its own self-effacement so that it can call attention all the more dramatically to the cognitive performance of the student. And yet, strangely, by so doing it does not efface itself completely, but becomes more mysterious even as it becomes more intelligible, like the mind of the student as it hovers over the footlights and becomes illuminated from within as it is caught up in the spotlights that are aimed at it from throughout the theatre. We are indeed, as Michael Ende has remarked, beginning to approach a period which will be the Children's Enlightenment, as the 18th Century was a century of adult Enlightenment. But for this to occur, a philosophical curriculum for children will be utterly indispensable.

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