Teaching Philosophy and Teaching Values

DAVID T. OZAR

*Loyola University of Chicago*

Teaching is a process which is notoriously difficult to explain. When the topic is "teaching values," i.e., moral education, this difficulty seems to be at its greatest. I believe that there are important similarities between the processes involved in teaching and learning philosophy and the processes involved in teaching and learning values. As a consequence I believe that a careful examination of the former processes will cast some valuable light on the latter. My claim is not that teaching philosophy has some close and necessary connection with moral education. I am quite sure that these two things are quite different from each other. If someone claimed that teaching philosophy bears important resemblances to teaching math, this would not imply that teaching philosophy somehow involves teaching math. In the same way my claim is simply that the processes involved in teaching and learning philosophy resemble the processes involved in teaching and learning values. They are quite different from each other, but they also have similarities and by studying the points of similarity we can learn something valuable about each of them.

**Teaching Philosophy**

What happens when we teach philosophy and our students learn philosophy? I think there are three fairly distinct processes involved in the teaching and learning of philosophy. The most obvious is the acquisition by the students of the skills and techniques of clear and careful reasoning and, at least on the part of more advanced students, of correct information about past and present philosophers and philosophical positions and traditions. I will consider first the skills and techniques of clear and careful reasoning.

Whatever else we might think of someone and however much we might respect his or her views, we would have serious trouble thinking of this person as a philosopher if his insights could not be shown to be based on reasons and if his insights are not at least distinguishable from alternative claims. Clear and careful reasoning is the hallmark of the good philosopher. For this reason one of our chief standards in measuring our students' progress in learning philosophy is their acquisition of these skills.

How do we teach our students to reason clearly and carefully? There are two techniques which we employ above all. One of these we might call *modeling* and the other we can call *training*. In the modeling process we expose our students to clear and well reasoned arguments that we respect. We hope—and...
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regularly discover—that they will gradually discern what these arguments have in common. We also expose them to unsound or unclear arguments and explain what is wrong with these in order to strengthen the students' grasp of what is there when things are right. This process sometimes seems more like a kind of osmosis than anything else because the activity of the students in relation to it is often not very obvious. But in fact their learning to model the positive features and avoid the negative features of the examples given involves a great deal of careful activity on their part, sifting and testing hypotheses about what is right and wrong in the various examples and forming habits that will enable them to imitate what is best. I will have more to say about the modeling process in the next section.

Another important part of teaching the skills of clear and careful reasoning is training. This element, like all training, is essentially a matter of eliciting performances from the students and judging the performances positively or negatively according to the degree that they embody the desired skills and techniques. So we require them to defend positions taken and we critique their reasonings when they are unsound. We require them to explain what they mean by the key concepts in the arguments they formulate and we criticize vagueness and ambiguity. We train them also in the formal techniques of good reasoning and in the various philosophical methodologies that have been developed—the techniques of dialogue and definition, the transcendental, dialectical, pragmatic, phenomenological, and hermeneutic approaches, formal language analysis, ordinary language analysis, and so on—to assist them in developing the skills and techniques of clear and careful reasoning.

As stated above, another aspect of this process involves, at least for our more advanced students, the acquisition of accurate information about past and present philosophers, positions, traditions, and so on. I am not suggesting that our beginning students be given inaccurate information of course, but only that the emphasis at the outset must be on the skills of clear and careful reasoning. At this stage information about philosophers and their positions should be used in the service of communicating the skills of clear and careful reasoning rather than having any significant status of its own. The student who has amassed great quantities of information about what various philosophers have thought and whether their arguments are considered sound, but does not understand why they are sound, is not yet on his way to being a philosopher. Such a student has no grasp as yet of what philosophy is. Therefore I think that emphasis on mastery of the information should wait until the student begins to develop the skills that will help him or her understand its significance. There are those who will disagree with me on this point and, in any case, in the process of teaching philosophy the information must come at some point. When it does, it will contribute to the process of learning philosophy in two ways. First it provides the student with more and more examples of clear and not-so-clear, of sound and not-so-sound, reasoning to enable him or her to perfect the skills of clear and careful reasoning still more. Secondly, it puts the student in contact, at least when the information begins to be more detailed, with individual
philosophers other than the teacher. The student becomes able to enrich his or her view of what a philosopher is by contact with the great and with the more ordinary philosophers of the past and present, with philosophers whom the student could not meet in any other way. In order to understand the importance of this, we need to move on to the second process that is involved in the teaching and learning of philosophy.

Just as mastery of information alone does not make a person a philosopher, so just the mastery of the skills and techniques of clear and careful reasoning will not make a person a philosopher either. These skills are a *sine qua non*; but they are not sufficient by themselves. This is why we are saddened when a student leaves our classes with the impression that a philosopher is simply a tactician of ideas, a skillful arguer and nothing more.

What is missing when this happens? What have we failed to communicate? I think it is something about what makes philosophers tick. It is something about the "inner dynamic" of the philosopher that prompts inquiry into every aspect of a question, to have every substantive presupposition and every detail of methodology laid bare, to answer every objection and to hear and respond to every counterexample. Socrates likened this to possession by a *daimon* and it is a sort of madness perhaps. But this striving and yearning for understanding, this love of wisdom that gives our profession its name, is most assuredly the dominant ideal that philosophers share and collectively profess.

How does one teach such things? How does one communicate them? To answer these questions let us focus our attention first on the times when we have succeeded. I would suggest that when some of our students do learn these sorts of things about philosophy, they do so primarily by way of a process of imitation. First the students observe in the philosopher who is their teacher—and then later, when they begin to acquire a richer store of information about philosophers not present, in these other philosophers as well—the element to be learned, in this case the "inner dynamic," what makes philosophers tick.

After observation comes imitation, first in the students' imagination and then, at least for some of them, in practice. The purpose of the imitation is to test the thing to see if it fits, to try it on for size, so to speak. If it seems to fit in imagination, then it can be tried on for size in practice. If it seems to fit in practice, then the student must make a choice whether it is important enough to adopt the thing as a habit, to establish it as a part of his or her way of life. This whole process—observation, imitation and testing, establishing the thing among one's habitual ways of acting—is the process I spoke of earlier as *modeling*. What was being observed, imitated, and established as a habit in the previous section was a set of skills and techniques, and because of this the modeling process could be reinforced and strengthened by a *training* process as well. In the present instance, however, there seems to be little room for training. Either our students learn this aspect of philosophy by observation and imitation or they don't learn it at all.

But then how does one teach this aspect of the philosophical enterprise?
The obvious answer would seem to be: by being a model. But very few of us think of ourselves as being model philosophers; we are conscious of our limitations and our need to have models ourselves. But I am not suggesting that, in order to teach what makes philosophers tick, what we need to do is take on the role of "being a model." Rather the role which we must take on, if we wish our students to be able to observe and to imitate what it is to be a philosopher, is just precisely "being a philosopher." The teacher who strives to "be a model" for his students, instead of simply striving to be a philosopher, is the one least likely to be actually imitated by the students; and in any case the students would be imitating the wrong thing. What the teacher of philosophy must do is be simply and straightforwardly what he or she is: a person powerfully moved by the concerns of the philosopher and sincerely committed to living important parts of his life in accord with them. This is the person whose role the students will be able to observe, to test out in their imaginations, and, if they choose, to try on for size. Some will not try it on, not even in their imaginations; and most who try it on will do so only for a time, to see what it is like. Some it will not fit, of course; some it will fit very well. But in any case this modeling process is the way in which we teach our students what it is that makes philosophers tick.

There is a third process in the teaching and learning of philosophy, the process of teaching our students to be creative. The philosopher does not bring his inquiry to an end simply because he has found a satisfying answer to his question. He turns to examine alternative answers to the question and the reasoning and the data which supports them. He tries to ask the question itself in different ways, to change his perspective on the question, and to discover the consequences for his answer of changing the presuppositions of his reasoning to it. He asks how his question would be dealt with by thinkers working from a base of data different from his own and by practitioners of philosophical methodologies different from the one he ordinarily employs. In all these ways he seeks to continually broaden the base of experience and reflection on which his conclusions are founded. This is what I mean when I speak of the philosopher as creative.

We have all had students who acquired the skills of clear and careful reasoning in some measure and who were moved by the inquiring spirit of the philosopher to some degree, but who were not creative. How can we teach our students to be creative? It seems unlikely that training will have much of a role to play in this process. It seems obvious that the modeling process will be of great importance here. But there is another process which we have not yet examined, a process of continual give and take, of open-ended dialogue, which is very important in helping students be creative.

When I speak of dialogue as the way in which we teach students to be creative, to be constantly challenging the base of experience and reflection on which their conclusions are founded and to be constantly striving to broaden that base of experience and reflection, it may seem that I am thinking of the teacher as the prime interlocutor with the student. But this is not necessarily what I have in mind. The student's base of experience and reflection will be
broadened when the positions, perspectives, data, and arguments offered by other students are also considered. The teacher will be able to contribute to this broadening process with special insight and with a special degree of clarity and pointedness in relation to the positions held by the student. He or she also will have more familiarity with what are blind alleys and with other relevant information. But the teacher’s point of view is still only one point of view, however clearly and carefully articulated and however well informed it may be; and the student, to become genuinely creative as a philosopher, must not be limited to assimilating the teacher’s view. The perspectives of fellow students and of other persons as well can serve in a significant way to broaden the base of experience and reflection on which conclusions are founded.

Nevertheless the teacher does play a primary role in this process. For it is the teacher who is formally in charge of the classroom (or other learning situation) and it is the teacher who will set the tone of what goes on there. The teacher will determine whether activity in the classroom is focused narrowly on his or her own experience and reflection or that of some other philosopher being studied, or whether it is broadened to include the importance of every person’s experience and reflection as data in the philosophic enterprise. Teachers can broaden this focus by suggesting alternative approaches, different methodologies or presuppositions, and the like, and—especially for more advanced students—by directing the students to other authors and other literature as additional sources of input for their reflections. But I think philosophy teachers do the most to help their students become creative—especially students who are just beginning in philosophy—by the manner in which they conduct classroom discussions: by making it clear that every point of view deserves to be heard and considered and that every participant has something to offer. Group discussions may not be the most efficient way to actually introduce different approaches and new ideas; but it is in such settings that the teacher gives evidence, in simple and obvious terms, of the philosopher’s commitment to continually try to broaden the base of experience and reflection on which the whole enterprise is based. It is in this setting especially that the teacher can construct an atmosphere in which exploration is valued, in which it is important to try out new moves and alternative approaches, even if they should be shown faulty later on, and to test alternative reasonings even if they should eventually—or even immediately—be proven unsound. It is by establishing an atmosphere of open dialogue and exploration that the teacher is most effective in helping his or her students learn to be creative in the sense I have described.

Teaching Values

I have proposed that there are three processes involved in the teaching and learning of philosophy. Now I want to suggest that there are three very similar processes involved in the teaching and learning of values. (I shall not attempt a detailed analysis of the notion of values here. Even a very rough and ready understanding of what this concept means, of what sorts of judgments are com-
monly called value-judgments, and the role which such judgments play in ex-
planations of human actions will be sufficient for my present purposes.)

In the first place someone who is wise or learned in values surely has values. That is, there is a set of goals, purposes, duties, perfections, or the like to which the person is seriously committed; and these serve both as the criteria that the person applies in judgments about alternative courses of action and as the basis of the person's explanations to other persons of why he acted as he did. How does one person teach another person to have a certain value? How does one person learn a certain value from another? The process I would suggest, is the same sort of process as that described above by which philosophy students come to learn what it is that makes philosophers tick. They observe the thing in the life of someone who is sincerely committed to it. They try the thing on for size, first in imagination and then, if they choose to, tentatively in their lives. Eventually, if it fits them, they must choose whether or not to adopt it as an habitual pattern in their lives. This is the process which I called the modeling process. It is how students learn what it is to have the basic commitments which characterize a philosopher; and it is the way in which persons learn from other persons what it is to have values of other sorts as well.

Of course those who are observed and imitated will live many values at once and those who learn from them may observe and imitate a whole collection of values at once rather than just one at a time. This will depend partly on the circumstances and partly on how the learner chooses to deal with the situation. It may be the case, especially with younger persons, that those in the position of learner may not be able to distinguish one particular value commitment from another in the life of the person they are observing and imitating. In such a situation the learner will necessarily observe and imitate a whole collection of values at once, just as these values are actually lived all at once in the life of the one observed. I am therefore oversimplifying a bit when I speak as though a person always learned just a value from someone, one at a time. But be that as it may, the process by which a person learns what it is to have a certain value is the process of observing and then imitating and then choosing to establish that way of acting as an habitual pattern in his or her life.

What this means is that teaching someone to have a certain value is, like teaching students what makes philosophers tick, a matter of living that value honestly, straightforwardly, seriously. There is nothing else to be done. To adopt the role of being a model is to model the wrong thing and misses the point. One must simply live one's values sincerely and straightforwardly. There is nothing more to do. But, by the same token, in living one's values sincerely, a person unavoidably presents himself to others as one who has that value and therefore, willy nilly, presents himself to them as a potential model of it for them to observe, imitate, and so on, if they choose. There is a certain responsibility here that seems unavoidable, an unavoidable element of having a value as a part of one's life in the first place. To the extent that we have values we are all teachers of value, whether we like it or not. Teaching someone to have a certain value is, like teaching students what it is to be a philosopher, chiefly a mat-
A second characteristic which we would expect to find in a person who is wise or learned in values is that the person is able to reason soundly on the basis of the values which he or she has and is able to apply them and act in accord with them in the concrete. No matter how highly motivated or committed a person is, if he or she is unable to interpret concrete situations correctly in terms of the values he or she espouses, then we would not judge such a person wise or learned in values. How do we teach and how do others learn to interpret concrete situations correctly in terms of their values and to apply their values correctly in concrete courses of action? To some extent this aspect of teaching and learning values is, I believe, very similar to the processes described above in connection with the teaching and learning of the skills and techniques of clear and careful reasoning.

The very skills and techniques of clear and careful reasoning which the philosophy teacher wants students to learn are also needed by the student of values who wishes to apply his or her values correctly in the concrete. The student of values must understand the relationships of part to whole, means to end, of acts to consequences, and so on, to be able to interpret concrete situations correctly in relation to his or her values. The learning of these reasoning skills by the student of values will closely resemble the learning of the skills of clear and careful reasoning by the student of philosophy. Training, the process of eliciting performances on the part of the students and then critiquing or commending them in terms of the skills to be acquired, will play the same important role here that it does when students of philosophy learn to reason correctly. Examples of correct moral reasoning and examples of moral reasoning that is in some way faulty will play a role in this aspect of teaching values that is very similar to the role played by examples of clear and careful reasoning and examples of faulty or ambiguous reasoning in the teaching of philosophy.

There is also an important role for the modeling process in this aspect of teaching and learning values. The philosophy teacher, I have said, is the chief exemplar for his or her students of how clear and careful reasoning is to be done. The examples of these skills which the students are most able to observe and imitate are the ones evident in the actual practice of their teacher. In much the same way, the examples of interpreting concrete situations in the light of values and of applying values in concrete situations which the student of values is most able to observe and imitate are the examples of these activities that are evident in the actual practice of his or her teacher. Those who have values and live their lives seriously and sincerely in accord with them must constantly interpret concrete situations in the light of their values and apply their values in these situations the best they can. There is no simple rule for how this is to be done; it is a skill acquired only gradually over many years. But for the same reason there is no simple way for teaching this skill either. One must have the tools of sound reasoning and an accurate grasp of the concrete situations concerned; but beyond that the student of values must learn by observing, imitating, and eventually incorporating into his own habitual ways of acting the
insights and techniques of those who are more experienced. Training can provide the student with the basic tools; but only by observing and imitating can one learn how to apply them.

Further, we do not think of someone as being wise or learned in values if they are closed to new experience. There is an openness to new experience and a willingness to face it and to grow in response to it which we associate with wisdom and learning in values. How is such openness taught? I think the teaching and learning process in this is very similar to the teaching and learning process which I described in connection with helping philosophy students become more creative. Once again the chief thing that the teacher can provide, besides new ideas and alternative ways of approaching things, is an atmosphere in which exploration and new ideas and new experiences are valued. He or she can provide situations in which the student will experience the value of an ever-broadening base of human experience and reflection on which to base his or her own reflections and value commitments. The teacher can provide the student with opportunities to apply his values to new types of situations and with chances to learn, through open dialogue with others, how other persons with different values live, feel, think, reason, and are themselves valuable. Such an openness and positive esteem of other persons, with their different value commitments, is the most important means to and is the chief hallmark of the creative openness to new experience which we associate with being wise and learned in values.

*Teaching Philosophy and Teaching Values*

I have proposed three points of similarity between the processes involved in teaching and learning philosophy and the processes involved in teaching and learning values. I think we are now in a position to ask why these two processes have points of similarity. I think there are two reasons for their similarities.

First, the teaching and learning of philosophy is the teaching and learning of a value—or a set of values—namely the values which we associate with being a philosopher. Whether we think of this as showing the fly the way out of the fly-bottle or in more traditional terms as the pursuit of wisdom, there is no denying that teaching and learning philosophy is teaching and learning a certain important set of values which characterize the philosophic enterprise. Clearly not all values are involved. There are many values that are not part of the process of teaching and learning philosophy. But one value—or one set of values—is surely involved; and this is one reason why the two processes that I have been studying have the similarities they do.

Secondly, the teaching and learning of values clearly involves, as I have said, the teaching and learning of certain reasoning skills. The person who is wise or learned in values must possess these reasoning skills and be able to employ them correctly in the concrete in relation to his or her values. But the arena for the application of these reasoning skills is only one arena in which sound reasoning is important; and it seems reasonable to think that not all the
skills of clear and careful reasoning will be involved in this particular arena. In philosophy on the other hand, the characteristics of clear and careful reasoning generally are constantly under investigation and its role in every arena of application is attended to. A second reason then for the similarities between teaching and learning philosophy and teaching and learning values lies in the fact that the criteria which we employ to judge reasoning sound, including reasoning about values, are the concern, first and foremost, of philosophers.

Thus the teaching and learning of philosophy and the teaching and learning of values are related in two ways. The teaching and learning of values is, from the one perspective, the more general pursuit, attending to the teaching and learning of values generally while the teaching and learning of philosophy is, by contrast, more specific, concerned solely with the set of values which characterizes the philosopher as such. But from the other perspective, the teaching and learning of philosophy is more general, attending to the skills and techniques of clear and careful reasoning wherever they have application, while the teaching and learning of values is more specific, concerned with clear and careful reasoning only in regard to the interpretation of concrete situations in terms of values and the application of values in those situations.

Given this dual relationship it is no wonder that philosophers often find it difficult to deal with the all too common assumption that the teaching and learning of philosophy is precisely the teaching and learning of values. The frequent instinct of the philosopher, if he wishes to make any headway in clarifying his situation, is to try to teach the person a little philosophy and then compare that process with the teaching and learning of values to show the difference. But there is rarely time for much of this outside the classroom and so it hardly every works. But with an understanding of the dual relationship between these disciplines, perhaps we can now give a better answer.

First there are certain points of similarity between the two fields. For teaching philosophy does involve teaching one value or set of values and the modeling process that is involved in all teaching and learning of values is certainly involved in the teaching and learning of philosophy. And teaching and learning philosophy involves a strong concern with clear and careful reasoning, which are certainly matters that teachers and learners of values would be concerned about. But the teaching and learning of values extends well beyond the teaching and learning of the values of the philosopher and the philosopher's concern with clear and careful reasoning includes far more than just the activities of reason in relation to values. Thus the two processes are the same in a certain way, but they are clearly very different as well. With such an understanding of our situation in hand, perhaps we can explain it more clearly to those who don't understand. As is often the case in philosophy, when we acquire a clear grasp of the aspects of similarity between two things known to be different, we acquire a much clearer grasp of their differences as well.