

Editors' Introduction

(Second Edition—2012)

The present volume is a republication of *Teaching Philosophy Today* edited by Terrell Ward Bynum and Sidney Reisberg, published in 1977 in response to many requests from attendees of the 1976 [First] National Workshop-Conference on Teaching Philosophy, and in anticipation of the forthcoming 1978 Second National Workshop-Conference on Teaching Philosophy. (Both conferences took place on the campus of Union College in Schenectady, New York.)

Those two conferences were important events in the so-called “philosophy teaching movement” which arose in the late 1960s and early 1970s because of a flood of “non-traditional” students entering American higher education—students who, previously, would not have gone to college. In the 1960s and 1970s, a military draft was still in effect in the United States and the Viet Nam War was very unpopular. As a result, an enormous number of young men chose to go to college rather than to be drafted into the Army and sent to fight the unpopular Viet Nam War. Many of those young men had little or no interest in—as they would say—the “very dry, abstract, and irrelevant” kinds of courses, including philosophy courses, being taught in American colleges and universities at the time. Most philosophy courses, for example, were aimed at *philosophy majors* expected, eventually, to become *philosophy teachers*. The new, non-traditional philosophy students were not impressed by the symbolic logic, meta-ethics, and history of philosophy courses being taught then. The students demanded, instead, to have courses that were “relevant to real-world problems,” such as war and peace, racism, women’s rights, medical ethics, and many more “applied philosophy” topics.

As a result of student demands for “relevance,” as well as the many social changes and controversies occurring at the time (for example, an unpopular war, the civil rights movement, the feminist movement, affirmative action, abortion, organ transplants, the computer revolution, and on and on) the so-called “philosophy teaching movement” was very exciting and productive in the 1970s and beyond. The American Philosophical Association established a Committee on Teaching Philosophy, the journal *Metaphilosophy* created a section entitled “The Philosopher as Teacher,” and the new journal *Teaching Philosophy* was launched. New “applied ethics” subjects (for example, medical ethics, computer ethics, caring ethics) generated courses, textbooks, conferences, research centers, journals, and teaching methods. A variety of non-lecture teaching methods in philosophy were tried and refined; and

an important re-examination of the nature of philosophy arose. Is philosophy *a set of traditional ideas* about which to lecture and write books, or *an activity* that one must learn *how to do*? Should the teaching of philosophy occur primarily in colleges and universities, or should it also be taught in elementary schools, high schools, old folks' homes, even prisons?

The present volume was first published at a crucial time during the “teaching philosophy movement” and it had a significant impact upon that movement. It emerged as one of the influential consequences of the first two National Workshop Conferences on Teaching Philosophy. Those conferences, in turn, led to the founding of the American Association of Philosophy Teachers (AAPT) whose national and international conferences have occurred every two years since then with significant impacts upon the teaching of philosophy in America and a number of other countries.

This volume is being republished by the Philosophy Documentation Center as a service to everyone who teaches philosophy. The collection contains all of the papers originally published in *Teaching Philosophy Today*, including the original introduction. Arnold Wilson went through the volume and made minor corrections to remove blemishes in the original edition. We both agree that many of the ideas and teaching methods discussed here are still relevant and helpful, more than three decades after they were originally published. The most dated part of the book is clearly the Marxist critique of philosophy teaching presented at the end, though this still has historical interest.

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