1. Below is a letter from Henny Wenkart in which she is asking for volunteers to be on a committee to arrange a T.V. program for the bicentennial.

"As I told you over the telephone, the section on American Philosophy of the American Philosophical Association has asked me to chair the Television Committee of their bicentennial activities. American philosophy is one of the best products of the two hundred years of our history, and expresses some of the best and vigorous aspects of the American experience. It is involved with the life of the common man: it concerns itself with his concerns, interacts with science, with education, with questions of faith and of belief and truth."

"We are hoping that you will do a series on the most representative American philosophers, and there is an enthusiastic, active and very knowledgeable committee of philosophers from all over the country eager to help write, generate visual ideas, narrate, discuss - whatever we like. They are even willing, once the videotape exists, to approach their local PBS stations about air time, if by some chance that were a problem."

"Many of the chief American philosophers flourished in Boston and Cambridge, or nearby - we think immediately of Emerson, Thoreau, Peirce, James, Santayana, Royce, Perry. This means that much of the scenic background is probably already in your files, reducing production costs - or, at least, is easy to obtain. (The house of William James is one block from my house, as you know.)"

"You asked me to put on paper some specific proposals, and what follows will be a sample of the kind of thing I hope we can do together."

"There is no doubt that we can do something very much like what Bronowski did with Ascent of Man, though must less ambitious in length. I am thinking of probably six half-hour shows. There are some unifying themes, and we do not want to short-change the viewer or underestimate his interest in serious philosophical ideas, provided these are adequately illustrated and explained. I shall get to these a bit later."

"We would probably begin, in each case, with a biographical introduction to each philosopher, and also an introduction explaining where he fits into the running philosophical "argument" we are following throughout the series. Often the biography and the argument are closely tied together, and very easily illustrated. Peirce, for instance, had a much more powerfully analytic mind than James, and probably deserves the credit for originating pragmatism - the one American idea most widely attributed to us throughout the world. Peirce was an acute mathematician and logician, while James was more interested in

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psychology. In James' hands pragmatism became something much less precise if more humanistic - considerations of what is "satisfying" become important for James. . . at any rate, the human relationship between the two men is fascinating. Peirce seems to have been very hard to like, personally. He was irascible, made many enemies. And the gentler James, who was well established at Harvard, and very fond of Peirce, seems to have tried very hard, over and over, to get Peirce jobs - which Peirce muffed because his demands on truthfulness and his expectations of people in general were much more imperious."

"How can we be sure that we know anything at all? This "problem of knowledge" has been central in American philosophy, and has been "solved" in various typically American ways. Emerson thought of it like this: Each of us is encased in a glass bead (that's a nice visual idea!) and these beads may be strung together, and we can look out at each other, but not one of us knows that there really is anyone else at all - it may all be illusion. He advises, however, to treat other people as though they exist - because they may."

"At first, religious faith in God was part of the solution - for God, being beneficent, wouldn't fool us. Later, when science and religion seemed to threaten to contradict one another, religious faith became part of the problem instead of being part of the solution. But science presents its own problems of knowledge - what does it mean to say that something has been scientifically proved? What does proof, what does truth consist of? And before you can test whether a statement is true, you have to know what it means. What does meaning consist of?"

"Show a night-time scene, with an owl hooting. Question: Is there a ghost in that dark tree? Answer: well, maybe! What do you mean by 'A ghost in the tree'? "I mean that whenever I pass that tree at night, something cries out and asks, 'Who? Who?'" "Then if that is all you mean by 'A ghost in the tree', there is one there, all right! you have just tested the statement." Unsatisfactory? Then you are beginning to struggle with the problems of meaning and of truth and testability."

"In each philosopher's story there are some more spectacular ideas which, without distorting his view, we could bring as easily illustrated examples. James, for example, was interested in the varieties of religious experience. He studied mysticism with great interest, and was particularly interested in the effect that hallucinogenic drugs may have upon producing mystic "union" - he studied mescaline, in particular. Much of what he says about this could be illustrated with the "psychedelic" color film sequences we know how to make now. I don't mean that we would overstress this, but it is an interesting thing about someone who taught as a respected professor at Harvard long ago."

"In the case of Santayana, who is my particular specialty, there is a very strong influence of his early life upon his later philosophy. His father was Spanish, and his mother was connected with the Sturgises on Beacon Hill, Boston. Santayana spent his childhood between the two places - and never melded the two perspectives, seeing life now from one, now from the other. We could get some beautiful footage both of Beacon Hill and of his father's house in Spain. His mature philosophy was characterized by its various approaches to the same subject from various points of view, which he doesn't always try to match or overlap point for point. He lived all during the war with the Blue Nuns in Rome, and his secretary is still alive and would probably like to do something for this."

"Dewey, of course, was very much interested in education, in "educating the whole child", and much of progressive education, "learning by doing", 
owes its theory to him and his followers. We could show un-Dewey schools, in action - and then "Dewey" schools and maybe "pseudo-Dewey" schools for contrast. A transitional figure was Davidson, who pioneered the idea of workingmen's college, and the buildings of his enterprise, and maybe some of his students, are available."

"Incidentally, the definitive editions of the works of many of these philosophers are in preparation now. This is very important work, and in the course of it many things are coming to light. There are things like letters to Santayana from his father, pictures of philosophers, and so on. The editors of these definitive editions will all be eager to serve as resource people and consultants to make sure of our accuracy and fidelity to their philosopher, and to feed in picture and text ideas. I have met with several of them already. (I am one of the consultants on the committee for the Santayana edition.)"

"Each of the segments should end with a five-minute or seven-minute discussion between two living philosophers, explaining which of the issues that have been presented are still in active debate among philosophers today, and giving the current views and controversies on the particular topic."

"In the past few years a very lively interest has developed all over the world, in American philosophy and American philosophers. At some foreign universities there are more professors teaching American philosophy than we have at many institutions here. I have no doubt that if we do a very nice series there will be interest in it abroad, particularly of course in England."

"Several professors on the committee will be happy to come to Boston to meet with you, me, and whoever on the station and the network is appropriate to make the decision about this series. They will also be happy to travel to Washington or wherever to back up funding proposals. It doesn't seem to me that anyone wishing to fund an intellectually and visually attractive contribution to the Bicentennial could do better than to go with the American philosophers!"

"Incidentally, there is a series of hour-long films on contemporary British philosophers available, which we could view to get ideas on how to present the intellectual content. I have not seen them yet, but from the description I have the impression that those films are perhaps talkier than we would want to be. But it might be helpful to screen them sometime for ourselves, or maybe at Harvard as a combined look-see for us and for some Harvard people."

"This letter is somewhat sketchy and off the top of my head, but I hope that it can get us started. More detailed outlines of each segment would perhaps be the work of the committee, coordinated in the first instance largely by me in rough form, to save you work, if you are going to do this. "I hope you are!"

"Most cordially,

Henny Wenkart, Ph.D.
Department of Expository Writing
Harvard University"

2. So far we have had many replies to the letter sent to all philosophy chairmen in which I asked them to arrange lectures, etc., in American Philosophy for the bicentennial celebration. If any member is interested in giving a lecture or participating in a symposium, I would appreciate receiving a topic and fee required. In this way I would be able to coordinate persons, topics and areas. A speedy reply is mandatory.