

Book Discussion

Possible Uses of Tennant's Methodology in Secondary Education

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*The paper addresses the issue whether Tennant's textbook *Introducing Philosophy*, a demanding textbook based on the methodology of Analytical philosophy, can be useful for high school teachers not trained in Analytical methodology. The pedagogical background is presented through a conceptual framework of problematization, conceptualisation and argumentation, and I follow Tennant's methodology through these three principles. The issue which I discuss is how Tennant's methodology can help teachers to foster the three analytical abilities in students. I will show how his presentation of topics as content demonstrate his methodology and how particular examples can be used by teachers in secondary education, as well as in introductory university courses in philosophy. If teachers pay attention to this methodology within the content, they can apply it to other topics.*

Keywords: Teaching, content, methodology, argumentation, conceptualisation, problematization, thought-experiment.

1. Introduction

In this paper I would like to discuss a specific issue related to a very specific domain of teaching philosophy in secondary education, which could be relevant for general introductory courses at the graduate level as well. Usually philosophy teachers in secondary education (at least in the continental Europe), especially those who were educated in the previous decades, did not have an education in analytical philosophy. Therefore, it is a special challenge to examine and find out how a textbook based on analytical methodology could be helpful and used by these teachers. Tennant's book *Introducing Philosophy* offers this kind

of challenge, because a teacher without knowledge and experience in analytical philosophy can very soon get lost in reading and studying the book. What is the novelty, thus, of this author's methodology, and can it be accessible to teachers and consequently for students?

2. *Philosophy education: the background*

Within theoretical approaches to philosophy education (didactics of philosophy) there are several approaches concerning how to teach philosophy. Despite their varieties, their common ground can be reduced to three basic principles: problematization, conceptualization and argumentation. They can be included in the aims and objectives of teaching of philosophy, in its methodology of teaching, and in assessment criteria. The French author M. Tozzi (2008) talks about three processes in which philosophy happens: problematization, conceptualization and argumentation, which to a certain extent represent a methodology. These activities develop appropriate abilities, or we could say that these abilities form the basis for the activities: i.e., for doing philosophy (Kotnik 2014: 152). These processes, however, are not separated but interwoven and interrelated: "Conceptualisation is an attempt to philosophically clarify the concept, problematization undermines it, and argumentation corroborates the thesis. All three are the aspects of reflection" (Šimenc 2007: 29). This is the conceptual ground of our philosophy education. We are going to follow Tennant's book through these three methodological principles and processes trying to find out to what extent and in what ways this textbook can provide teachers some of the benefits of this book.

3. *Outline of the book through the three principles*

The main division of Tennant's book is between philosophical content and methodology. Although the subtitle *God, Mind, World, and Logic* partly refers to the content as traditional topics, these topics serve as a demonstration of methodology.¹ His emphasis is on providing methodology, as he puts it "groundwork, orientation, and wherewithal: concepts; distinctions; characterization of important '-isms'; and philosophical methodologies such as analysis, explication and thought-experiment" (p. XXI). He says that "it provides a more methodical survey of the basic tools for thinking that the beginning philosopher must acquire" (p. XV). This is elaborated systematically, carefully, and thoughtfully, occupying the first half of the book, which consists of 433 pages. The introductory chapter (Part I) *The Nature of Philosophy* is followed by the chapter (Part II) *Philosophy and Method* and continued in two

¹ The book review by Reeve (2015) surprisingly presents Tennant's book as dealing with content.

more chapters (Part III: The Existence of God and Mind and Part IV: Body and External World) presenting two topics which can be read as a demonstration of methodology. The method of philosophy is elaborated through eight subchapters: What is Logic?, Inductive Reasoning, The Method of Conceptual Explication, The Method of Thought-Experiment, Intellectual Creativity and Rigor, Deduction in Mathematics and Science, and The Methodological Issue of Reductionism. Following these sections step by step, we can also recognize principles of argumentation, conceptualization and problematization. While the first two seem more explicit, the last one can be noticed in each section as well. At the end of each section the author invites the reader to think about the questions he raises. In the section Intellectual Creativity and Rigor he explains this and we can understand this as problematization:

A great philosopher, likewise, is one who can identify concepts and fundamental beliefs of great importance; offer interesting, illuminating analyses of those concepts, or necessary and sufficient conditions for the truth of those beliefs; and construct imaginative counterexamples to defective rival analyses (p. 162).

Since he is addressing teachers as professional philosophers and those who want to become teachers, we ask the question: can teachers in secondary education or in introductory university courses help students who will not be professional philosophers to learn philosophy by means of Tennant's textbook? His highly demanding methodology seems inaccessible for average high school students and even for some of their teachers. Is it, therefore, an impossible task for teachers to use Tennant's textbook in the philosophy class? In the following section I'll try to show the scopes and limits of using this textbook for this purpose. My guidelines will be the above mentioned three principles.

4. The nature of philosophy through the three principles – emphasis on conceptualization

Before proceeding to methodology, Tennant's extensive introductory chapter "The nature of Philosophy" explains important concepts and distinctions as well as opposing -isms. This can be understood as a necessary clarification of terms. For my purpose these clarifications have a wider significance. Following Tennant's approach, we can notice that he is already raising problems and that problematization is there from the very beginning, together with argumentation and conceptualisation. By presenting and discussing the major conceptual distinctions (appearance/reality, mind/body, objective/subjective, abstract/concrete, descriptive/normative, empirical/rational, necessary/true/false/impossible, theory/evidence, and in a special section Kant's distinctions a priori/a posteriori, analytic/synthetic), he shows the necessity to introduce new concepts and distinctions by italicizing them and reminding the reader about their importance in philosophical inquiry. These ital-

ics appear throughout whole book and have a significant educational role inviting the reader's mindfulness. It is, therefore, worthwhile to follow his approach carefully to see how he makes these distinctions throughout this section. This way of doing it can be a learning experience in itself. Of course, this refers to the whole textbook.

Let me illustrate this section with the distinction between subjective/objective, which is useful for high school students. The term *subjective* is often used without further explanation or justification and students are happy with that. Tennant draws the readers' attention "to make clear the exact sense in which one is intending the notions of 'subjective' and the 'objective' to be understood, in the context at hand" (p. 44). For this purpose, he offers five contrasts, between secondary and primary qualities, perspective limitation and group consensus, probability and objective chances, projections onto the world and properties of agents (in ethics), first person perspective and shared experience (p. 44–45).

The pedagogical significance of this approach is not only in offering further distinctions to clarify particular concept and/or distinction but also in learning *a new philosophical habit*, attitude not taken concepts for granted and being mindful for them, which is one of the beginner's way to practice conceptualisation as well as problematization. As in all other sections or chapters he ends the section with dilemmas and questions which, again, is an example of problematization.

The section *Important Opposing -isms* is of equal significance as previous one. Opposing -isms are not just that but also author's mindful reminder of the nature of philosophy which approaches to a problem because of its controversy. They show to a beginner that philosophical approach as -ism is a view from a certain position regarding what draws philosopher's attention. Often we follow a philosophical discussion by ending with classification of opposing views or ending by identifying certain position as one of the -isms. Tennant reminds the reader that this is not enough and offers to the beginner clarifications of these -isms indicating problems which some of them deals with in detail in Part III.

What would be the use (usefulness) of Tennant's isms? The most important aspect is to be reminded that -isms, which are used so easily and sometimes without care, can be questioned about their precise meaning. For both, teachers and students, can be useful: they are reminded to challenge obviousness of -isms with scrutiny. They can clarify their knowledge about them more precisely. The teacher can help students by equipping them with a framework to map their already obtained knowledge and therefore to put particular pieces of knowledge to the map of -isms and consequently to have systematic insight into the whole. Moreover, Tennant's explanations could be useful for the students to overcome common sense understanding of particular concepts and relations among them.

5. *Tennant's methodology through the three principles*

The extensive chapter on methodology starts with logic and symbolization. How important logic is for Tennant, can be seen from his words: "A philosopher who shies away from formal analysis is like a surgeon who ignores the need for basic hygiene" (p. XVIII). In comparison with other introductory textbooks, he consciously "makes uninhibited use of logical analysis, schematization, and regimentation in order to clarify important views or methods as they are laid out" (p. XVII). High school teachers can go with students to the limit where students can follow. They can learn the basics of logic but they can also learn its significance, which Tennant explains and illustrates in quite an impressive way. The chapter includes the basics of inductive reasoning, methods of conceptual analysis, the method of conceptual explication, and the method of thought-experiment. The section Intellectual Creativity and Rigor introduces problematization and continues with issues of Deduction in Mathematics and Science, ending the chapter with The Methodological Issue of Reductionism.

The section on conceptual analysis provides an important pedagogical aspect for our purpose. Tennant's intention is to inform the beginner in philosophy that "a great deal of contemporary philosophical discussion in the journals is concerned with providing counterexamples to proposed conceptual analyses" (p. 125). Although his step by step detailed presentation of conceptual analysis as a technique illustrated with examples (such as "Gettier cases") aims for a "professional" analytical philosophy, high school teachers can still gain something valuable for doing philosophy with students. Students can learn not to take concepts for granted and to question them as described by Tennant: "stating individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for the application of the concept in question" (p.126). In the section as a whole, we can notice a method as a unity of problematization (questioning concepts), conceptualization (conceptual analysis) and argumentation, which can be applied to introductory courses of philosophy. A part of the above analysis is philosophically "sharpened intuitions" which "lead to the construction of thought-experimental counterexamples to faulty conceptual analyses on offer" (p. 125). This section then introduces the necessary and important method of Thought-Experiment, which needs attention in a special section.

The Method of Thought-Experiment

This section can be useful for high school teachers. Thought-Experiments (TEs) can be very creative and this creativity could be productive in philosophy class, since "one tests to the limit the application of concepts of philosophical importance. One imagines wildly different 'possible worlds' or bizarre situations which serve to bring out distinctions among concepts that might otherwise be taken to be the 'same',

by virtue of applying to the same objects under normal circumstances” (p. 153). Although students are usually not as interested in testing application of concepts as professional philosophers, they could be interested in “possible worlds’ or bizarre situations.” Many students are familiar with Descartes’ thought-experiment of the evil demon. Teachers report that usually they show interest discussing the well-known movie *Matrix*, and they could be inspired to go further to other ‘bizarre situations’. Tennant challenges his students to engage themselves in TEs, putting “aside their beliefs concerning the probability or likelihood or feasibility of the imagined scenarios” for “acquiring this intellectual skill” (p. 155). He offers several TEs. However, for this purpose, I was (despite understanding his purpose) disappointed, that he does not offer more than a short summary of any particular TE. Maybe he could think about expanding this section in the next edition.

6. *Content as a demonstration of methodology in action*

Content is presented as “an explanation of ... certain main philosophical Problems. They are the ones that the author finds both engaging and tractable by the intellectual methods that he has available, as someone coming from a background of logic and foundations within Analytical Philosophy” (p. XVII). For my purpose I will take four examples.

Anselm’s Ontological Argument

After a methodological introduction explaining the nature of this a priori argument in comparison with mathematical theorems and scientific hypotheses, the problem “Does God Exist?” is presented in a systematic, extensive and detailed way: The original text in Latin, the English translation, a reconstruction in “logician’s English,” and exegesis of the argument in its formal shape, and various criticisms which are examined extensively and in detail. The first objection is that “Anselm tacitly uses a mistaken principle about linguistic understanding” (p. 217). The second is that “Anselm mistakenly treats existence as a property of things.” The third is that the “Ontological Argument keeps bad company” and that “There are other arguments, of the same form, for patently unacceptable conclusions” (p. 219). The fourth (raised by the anti-realist) is that the “Ontological Argument uses a strictly classical form of *reductio ad absurdum* to which the anti-realist would object (p. 220). These objections are followed by a “completely rigorous regimentation of the argument” (p. 221) and by “Translating Anselmian chunks into logical notation” (p.225) and by offering “Further reading on the Ontological Argument” (p. 227). The four objections are enough for the teacher and students to follow and understand the reasons Russell had in mind when he said that “it is much easier to be persuaded that ontological arguments are no good than it is to say exactly what is wrong with them. This helps to explain why ontological arguments have fas-

minated philosophers for almost a thousand years” (Oppy, 2016). This common journey with students has its limits, at which it makes sense to stop. Nevertheless, what follows is the advanced level. If students are motivated and equipped with the tools of analytical philosophy, they can proceed with the rigorous regimentation of the argument and its logical notation. Tennant’s detailed, exhaustive, thorough and systematic analysis is welcome because it offers what the many textbooks lack. He also shows how particular issues in the critique are not definite and are still open and subject to different approaches (e. g. realism vs antirealism). Students can, again, learn that in philosophy there is no single solution to a problem and much depends on the perspective from which it is approached.

The Liar Paradox

An example of the philosophical content in Tennant’s book describes how to approach some of the famous paradoxes. Among the reasons why paradoxes are worth studying, he mentions that “they are deeply puzzling, and often inspire young thinkers to pursue Philosophy more seriously” (p. 369). Let us illustrate the approach with two of them.

Tennant approaches the liar paradox in the following way:

- 1 The Liar is meaningless.
- 2 The Liar is meaningful, but the question of its truth or falsity cannot arise, since it does not ‘engage with’ any language-independent subject matter in a suitably ‘grounded’ way.
- 3 The Liar is meaningful, but is neither true nor false.
- 4 The Liar is meaningful, but is both true and false.
- 5 We should not use a language in which the Liar can be expressed; for such a language is incoherent.
- 6 We can and should use a language in which the Liar can be expressed; the alleged incoherence arising from the paradox is neither here nor there, and cannot threaten any serious scientific purposes. (p. 376)

For teachers, it can be useful to clarify which concepts and distinctions can be used and the extent that students can learn how to employ them (meaning, truth, language, coherence) and at the same time to realize that there is no one single solution to a problem. Tennant’s approach can be used to explain to students how the issue is controversial, i.e. how controversy is in the nature of philosophy. In this case the concepts of meaning, truth, language, coherence as perspectives reveal the controversy.

Zeno’s Paradox

Another well-known example is Zeno’s paradox, which is presented as a mathematical paradox. “Zeno (mistakenly) thought that this temporal

sum would have to be infinite. So, he concluded, the arrow would never reach its target. We can see today exactly how Zeno's reasoning was mistaken. It is possible for an infinite series of finite numbers (such as $1/2, 1/4, 1/8, \dots$) to have a finite sum. Zeno did not realize that. Paradox dissolved" (p. 378). This can be learned from high school mathematics. However, according to Tennant, if we want to discuss and solve the problem with students, we just need to look at Zeno's *assumption* and his *belief* about it: we need to introduce the concept of infinite series of finite numbers and their sum, which Zeno mistakenly believed was infinite. This mathematical *concept*, so obvious to mathematicians and analytical philosophers, needs to be recognized as an *assumption*, and this is the task of the teacher to help students, if they are not able to do so. By doing this, we train students to look for assumptions. Although the example itself has a simple solution, it invites students to deal with other examples, and to develop the habit of looking for assumptions and of articulating, expressing assumptions into appropriate form. This is something that is obvious to professional philosophers, but is an ability that still needs to be developed with students.

It is worth emphasising that the content presented serves as a demonstration of the author's methodology, which is the focus of my attention: how it can be used by teachers in their work with students.

Mind/body as an example of a content demonstrating methodology as the unity of the three principles

The mind/body topic is one of the traditional topics in high school or university introductory courses. Although teachers have many resources for designing their work with students, Tennant's textbook can still provide them new possibilities and clarifications. One of them would be the presentation of the contrast between Descartes' contribution in mathematics, "the system of Cartesian coordinatization" and his solution of the "phenomenon of mind" which leads Tennant to use a "different order of exposition" of Descartes' Meditations. It is worth following this interesting pedagogical approach to Descartes' dualistic solution of mind/body problem. However, there is another value to this approach in the continuation of the topic. Tennant carefully expose the *problems* of this solution and offers a very clear presentation of Ryle's critique and his indication of categorical mistake. In his *argumentation*, he clearly explains and illustrates the *concept* of categorical mistake, which is again useful pedagogical contribution. Moreover, he shows the difficulties, *problems* of Ryle's approach which leads him to present attempts to solve these difficulties (Materialism and Supervenience) and new *problems* attempted by Functionalism etc. The same method, therefore, continues through the elaboration of all the approaches presented in the chapter—and throughout the whole book. If teachers carefully follow the development of this chapter and the author's methodology as a unity of the three principles, they can find the value and relevance

for high school teaching. If they pay attention to this methodology, they can apply it to other topics.

8. Conclusion

Tennant's textbook as a possible source for high school teachers, especially those who prepare students for final exams like A-level or International Baccalaureate, provides a very demanding and unique way of looking at the methodology of philosophy as a unity of problematization, conceptualization and argumentation. Teachers can make a use of these principles, if they carefully examine *how* Tennant employs them and if they apply them in an appropriate way.

It is of special importance that Tennant, as "one of the most notable figures" in the field of contemporary philosophy, is devoted not only to research but also to pedagogical issues of philosophy. Tennant's textbook is praiseworthy because of its pedagogical contribution. The scrutiny of demanding philosophical research is transferred to the (theory of) philosophy education. The implications are far reaching: the book can remind departments of philosophy to think about not only how to design the study of philosophy but also how to develop teaching methodology and perform particular courses.² Since my particular interest is philosophy education within secondary education, it is worthwhile to emphasise the challenge to what extent the scrutiny of philosophy can be implemented in the teaching of philosophy in secondary education in general and in the domains of problematization, conceptualisation and argumentation in particular.

Least but not last, Tennant's textbook is an example of developing a pedagogical approach to philosophy, an approach which by emphasising the importance of teaching methodology, demonstrates the necessity of a distinction between philosophical content, its form, and the process in which doing philosophy takes place.

Although the teacher as a reader must keep in mind the author's "liberty of presenting certain matters from its author's point of view" (p. XV), this does not diminish the pedagogical value of the book.

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² Additional help for teachers with resources is available in the companion to the book on the website <https://godmindworldlogic.wordpress.com>

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