

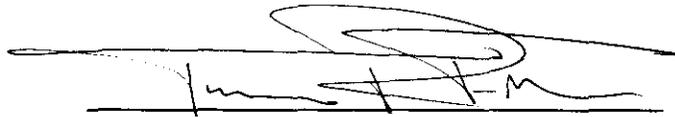
Working Towards a Text

An Honors Thesis(ID499)

by

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Thesis Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Thomas Foster', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized with a large, circular flourish at the top.

Thomas Foster

Ball State University

Muncie, Indiana

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Working Towards a Text

Logic was instrumental in my decision to make philosophy my second major, and as such logic was chosen as the focus of my Senior Honors Project. I had acquired some knowledge of the subject already through my regular course studies, as well as gained information from a quarter spent as a teaching assistant. My courses in logic included Introduction to Logic and Advanced Logic, and my assistantship was spent helping students, creating tests, and grading homework and tests. Despite my familiarity with the subject, I wished to expand on this area of philosophy that is so intrinsically important to the whole discipline of philosophy. My project consisted of helping to organize information that will be included in a logic text and to begin examining and critiquing some of the content to be contained in the text. This introductory logic text is being undertaken by my advisor for this project, Dr. Thomas Foster from the Department of Philosophy. This process has been long and sometimes frustrating, involving some change in directions, but it has been productive. The process consisted, basically, of studying notes, breaking these notes down into units, and asking questions about each unit. This entire process involved, especially, studying and criticizing Dr. Foster's initial rough draft.

The project got under way when I retrieved my old notes from their "hiding place" and looked them over again. Not only did I reread them, but then I began to outline them, picking out what I felt to be the main points, important subpoints, and examples. Next, my project advisor, Dr. Foster, gave me six other sets of

class notes from fellow assistants of Introduction to Logic. These were submitted to the same treatment - reading and outlining - and some common points began to appear. So, to find an organizational structure from which to begin, I synthesized the seven outlines into one main outline from which the major topics for discussion would be lifted. This was time-consuming, oftentimes redundant, and somewhat mechanical, incorporating periodic meetings with my advisor as well as an extensive session of sorting out materials and goals.

Then came a change of direction. According to Dr. Foster's wishes, the main points were not to be taken from this process of outlining, but were to be determined by the order that everyday lectures were given; hence, the organization of the book should approximate the order of class lecture. He then gave to me his breakdown of the day-to-day lectures plus some of his notes on the topics discussed there. In this way, he both outlined the course and book while he began to write rough drafts of the material. From this possible structure of the book, units are to be separated which will hopefully serve as chapters. I then applied the materials synthesized from the seven sets of students' notes to the breakdown that Dr. Foster had provided for me.

After grouping the class notes for each unit, the bulk of the project began. I was to ask questions about the information contained in each unit, probing into all areas of the subject: defining, clarifying, expanding, simplifying. Questions were to be written on separate sheets of paper for clarity. To stimulate the inquiry, I was given a series of questions to repeatedly ask myself: What is the subject that is being discussed? What does

it show? Where does it belong? What exactly is going on here?
Can lecture from this? If not, why not? What is missing?

Although there was less time spent on questioning the first time through than on outlining and organizing notes, the questioning procedure was more difficult for me. Since I already had some knowledge of the subject matter, I had to try to clear my mind and ask questions as if I was, once again, an Introduction to Logic student for the first time. Still, despite having some knowledge of the subject, I viewed myself primarily as a novice. As a result, there was at first a hesitation to question the work of someone with obviously more knowledge of the subject than I comparatively knew. This lack of confidence caused our one-hour weekly sessions to be less productive than they could have been, and, although some changes in the material for the units were made (whether organization, structure, or content) few of these changes were important.

But by the end of the first reading, breaking down and questioning all the material, I began to see a difference in the quality of the questions, in the importance of the questions. I recognized that the questioning process was becoming easier and more productive, so I continued going through the material, assessing, for a second time, what was missing or unclear in each of the units. I began to find that not only was the quantity of questions increasing considerably, but the quality of the questions also became better, more interesting, more focused, and more productive for conversation and text. My improving confidence (due probably to my increasing knowledge) led to less hesitation, and the questions themselves were more detailed, probing, and to the point; the result was increased volume as well as improved content of questions. To better handle the expanding amount

of work, we increased our sessions during Spring quarter to two hours per week, allowing for more time to discuss questions or problems.

But now, each of the twenty units has been twice analyzed, and graduation approaches; I can no longer continue with this process, but it has been beneficial to me. Throughout the project, I learned numerous facts - too numerous to recount - about many areas of philosophy. Because Dr. Foster allowed enough freedom throughout discussion to digress to different, but related, subjects, I learned more about the areas of aesthetics, Platonism, and mathematical philosophy, to name just a few. Mostly, I obtained a better sense of the whole area of logic through being able to ask and being able to understand the small issues and problems associated with them. Also, an idea of the comprehensive whole helps to foster a better grasp of a subject, and logic, in particular. I learned to question better, i.e. breaking ideas down and analyzing words, and this will be vital to my further studies in philosophy. Above all, I learned how much more there is to be learned in, especially, logic and philosophy. This fact alone makes this project a worthy conclusion to my Honors experience, which has been and continues to be an experience in the value of learning through inquiry into and exposure to unique subject matter and opportunity.