

TEACHING STATEMENT

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My pedagogical approach is largely driven by a sense of responsibility. I am convinced that philosophical education is a vital public good. The skills philosophy teaches are indispensable to the proper functioning of any society, and the topics philosophy invites us to reflect on are central to understanding how to live, both with others and with ourselves.

Accordingly, my teaching is guided by two general principles: (1) course material should always be *student-centered*, meaning that learning philosophical content for its own sake should never take precedence over learning how that content helps the students understand themselves and their places in the world; (2) course material should be *change-promoting* as far as possible. Rather than just surveying texts or theories, courses should aim to help students become better: better thinkers, citizens, companions, and writers.

A typical class discussion in my course will be based on a text. Our aim as a class will be to extract arguments from the text, clarify and evaluate those arguments, and identify the broader implications of the positions taken in the text. My primary tool for maintaining student engagement with the material is to harness their native curiosity. I regard each class as an unfolding conceptual drama: the students' desire to know 'what happens next' captures their interest, and their eagerness to guess the next turn of events drives their involvement. Objections, premises that require questioning, and inferences that don't seem to follow are presented as puzzles, moments of tension that require resolution, and we work together as a class to produce that resolution.

We work together because a philosophy course is fundamentally a collaborative effort, in my view. The instructor's role in the collaboration is to *trigger insight* in students. The understanding a philosophy teacher wants students to acquire cannot be directly imparted to them as if it were a set of descriptive facts. Philosophical truths are the product of a process of reasoning, and this process is always first-person. If a student comes to see a philosophical truth, it will be because she has walked through the reasoning that leads to that truth for herself. The role of the philosophy teacher is to guide students through this process, allowing them to see things for themselves, things they might not have seen but for that guidance.

It is far better to demonstrate my approach to teaching than to describe it, so I include links to recordings of my classes at the end of this statement (it should be borne in mind that the format of the class (team-taught) or the teaching situation (pandemic) may impose some limitations on how perfectly you see what I describe above instantiated in the recordings).

I see teaching and research as two inseparable aspects of a single vocation. Many of my research interests complement my teaching, and my pedagogical values in turn inform my research. My research focus is the Socratic dialogues of Plato, and some of these have long been staple readings of my intro courses. In these dialogues, we see philosophy characterized first and foremost as a component of a well-ordered life, as opposed to an academic subject matter. As I have labored over the years to help students see the connection between philosophical thinking and better living, many of the puzzles and difficulties inherent in this outlook have given rise to research projects. Conversely, success in solving some of these puzzles in my research has given me a clearer and stronger pedagogical voice, and made me a better advocate for the view that reflective living is better living.

I have a strong interest in developing teaching innovations, but believe such innovations should be problem-driven, and not introduced merely to conform to trends, appease administrators, or as a means of advertising one's own innovativeness. To innovate is to change past practices, and we are motivated to change when we observe the inefficacy of those practices. What we change them to will be the product of reflection and analysis on why past practices failed.

Current teaching goals include a short-term project of developing a comparative philosophy course tentatively called *Classical Philosophy: Three Traditions*. The course would survey major readings from the Islamic, Chinese, and Greek traditions. The motivation for developing this course stems from the fact the my current institution, Nazarbayev University, lies at the intersection of cultures informed by these traditions.

An over-arching long term teaching goal I have had for some time is to solve a certain problem in philosophical pedagogy. It is perennially difficult to fully integrate the teaching of good philosophical *method* (techniques for how to approach, analyze, and respond to philosophical questions or problems) and philosophical *content* (the results achieved by philosophers using good method). This is because adequate appreciation for content often assumes some command of method: you can best appreciate a philosopher's response to a problem if you also have a solid grasp of logic, argumentation, and analysis. Typically, courses on logic and reasoning are offered in isolation from courses that discuss substantial philosophical issues. I would like find a way to achieve better integration between the teaching of method and content. I have made one experimental attempt to achieve this integration in my Fall 2018 *Philosophical Writing* course at UHart, but am eager for further attempts.

Teaching Recordings:

- **Lecture on Virtue Ethics.** Plenary session for Ethics, NU, Spring 2022. Remote Synchronous.
- **On Richard Kraut's "Desire and the Human Good".** Seminar session for Ethics, NU, Fall 2021. Remote synchronous.
- **On Euthyphro's Dilemma and Socrates' Proof.** Intro to Philosophy, UHart, Fall 2020. Remote asynchronous.
- **On David Enoch's "Why I Am an Objectivist about Ethics".** Seminar Session for Ethics, NU, Spring 2022. Remote Synchronous.
- **On Onora O'Neill's "Consistency In Action", second part.** Seminar Session for Ethics, NU, Fall 2021. Remote Synchronous.
- **On Peter Singer's "Famine, Affluence, and Morality".** Seminar Session for Ethics, NU, Fall 2021. Remote Synchronous.
- **On the end of *Apology*.** Intro to Philosophy, UHart, Spring 2020. Pre-pandemic. Recorded for an evaluator who could not attend.