

STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

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My primary goals in teaching philosophy are to (i) improve my students' abilities to read, think, write, and speak clearly and critically about difficult philosophical ideas while (ii) encouraging their enthusiasm for these topics. Developing critical thinking skills requires a lot of practice. I therefore structure my courses to maximize the time students spend actually practicing these skills.

One way I facilitate such practice is by breaking up each of my lectures with an in-class writing session asking students to either evaluate an argument from the reading or to construct their own argument on a related topic. For example, in a recent course we were discussing the traditional idea that introspection is an especially reliable, perhaps infallible, faculty. I gave students numerous demonstrations of both change blindness and inattentional blindness and then gave groups the question, "Do these experiments present a challenge to the reliability of introspection?" We then came together, each group presented their argument, and we discussed the merits of each.

A second way I help improve students' critical thinking skills is, for any paper assignment, I require students to include a cover page with a reconstruction of their argument in a numbered premise/conclusion format. Students thereby notice what is and is not essential to their argument, which helps minimize the amount of tangential or unnecessary information included in their papers. Creating this reconstruction also helps students to pay close attention to the structure of their argument, which often translates into a more organized paper.

Teaching epistemology and metaphysics, my classes often discuss very abstract and technical philosophical ideas. Consequently, I develop creative ways to make this material more accessible and to ease students into talking about these abstract matters. For example, in a recent introductory class we were beginning to discuss the idea of artificial intelligence and I actually performed my own *informal* Turing Test in class. On my computer I opened an Internet chat bot and arranged for a friend to chat with me via Facebook messenger. I had students come up with questions for me to ask and I then read the responses. After four minutes students voted on who was the machine and who was the human. This activity gave students a clear example of the Turing Test. Moreover, in the resulting discussion students thought about the strategies testers and programmers should employ, which naturally led them to question whether one could design a program that passed the test by using specific tricks that merely gave the illusion of understanding.

My classes also stress how philosophy applies to students' own lives. While teaching Nozick's "Experience Machine" in my ethics courses, I give students six to seven minutes to (i) list the main points of the thought experiment and (ii) explain how these points might be relevant to evaluating the value of using (or, perhaps, over-using) technology such as video games, smart phones, and social media. Afterwards I asked three to four students to share their responses, and we then discussed as a class the overall value of these new technologies. Students thereby noticed how doing philosophy and thinking about even an unrealistic thought experiment can be both useful and relevant to their own lives.

I also encourage students to pursue their own original research. When teaching Descartes' *Meditations* I stress the chaotic intellectual changes that took place during the scientific revolution and how this motivated Descartes' search for acceptable criteria for distinguishing the good information one receives from the bad. In class I relate this to the predicament students find themselves in when bombarded with contradictory information from online sources. For final papers I then give my students the opportunity to take on a similar project of creating and defending their own epistemic principles for determining when one should and should not trust what one reads on the Internet.

In conclusion, when teaching, I create an environment that gets students to collaborate with the other students and myself, makes philosophical discussion accessible, has students reflect on their own thinking, and encourages the application of philosophical ideas to contemporary issues.