

I believe my most basic responsibility when teaching philosophy is to help my students develop an ability—innate in all of us but immature in most of us—to see beyond themselves when engaging some problem or viewpoint. I feel most fulfilled as an educator when I see one of my students recognize that there may be good grounds for a position he reflexively rejects, and that his own views are motivated by reasons, sometimes explicit but oftentimes not, that are themselves open to critical assessment. This tendency towards a liberal mindset is really the combination of two more basic habits: to charitably interpret the claims and reasons offered in debate, and to critically assess whether we have grounds for finding them motivating.

I approach the learning process with the goal of helping my students develop these skills of charity and criticism. In service of that end, I adopt four broad strategies in my teaching.

Making Philosophy Accessible

Thinking about and writing philosophy is challenging work, and especially for students engaging with philosophical material for the first time. With this in mind, I work to develop methods of explanation via analogies and examples that are meant to strip away the technical and often abstruse jargon of the primary materials we read, interacting with students in class both directly and via Socratic method to develop a sense of how well or poorly the class is grasping the material. I find popular media especially useful in this regard. For example, in my most recent *Introduction to Philosophy*, I introduced and discussed the mind-body problem partly by way of the TV show *Westworld*. Likewise, in my logic course this fall, we used a series of tweets from Donald Trump to illustrate different kinds of informal fallacies.

Fostering a Community of Learners

Philosophical inquiry is an essentially communal affair. We ask, debate, answer and evaluate not independently of one another but as members of a community, in dialogue with one another's views and reasons. It is only within a community that genuine self-inquiry can occur: a recognition that one's own positions and reasons are just as liable to interrogation and evaluation. In my classes, I seek to engage students in conversation with one another in a number of ways. That process often starts with a brief writing assignment on the day's or week's reading material. Those brief responses provide me valuable feedback in at least two ways. First, they inform me of how well the students, individually and collectively, understand the material, allowing me to frame the issues in class in a way that is challenging but not unduly so. Second, they provide information about the diversity of opinion among the students on various issues, and in particular which students hold which viewpoints. This allows me to bring out those differences of opinion in class. For example, in a recent *Introduction to Philosophy* course, many of the most vocal students were strongly in favor of some form of physicalism about the mind problem. With the written responses in hand, I could turn to students who I knew favored some version of dualism, (gently) inviting them to explain their own position. The result was a discussion among students, guided by me, rather than a lecture directed at students by me.

Engaging with Students Outside the Classroom

I believe it is important to provide students the opportunity to connect with me outside of the classroom. By developing those kinds of relationships, students feel more comfortable to contribute in class, because they know that I am an advocate for them as they try to articulate and defend (and perhaps even to change) the views that they hold. For lower-level classes, this comes in the form of informal discussion immediately following class, as well as semi-regular, optional lunches I take with students. For upper-level classes (and seminars in particular), I typically designate one session of class early in term where we meet off-campus, with some light fare, for an informal, get-to-know-one-another gathering. (Both have the added benefit of fostering a

close relationship among those students themselves, leading to increased comfort in the classroom.) Regardless of the level of the class, I try to make myself as accessible to students as I reasonably can, often meeting with students outside of office hours to discuss course material.

When I meet with students to discuss course material, moreover, I attempt to help students work themselves through concepts or arguments, rather than talking at students about those concepts or arguments. A meeting with Rachel, a past student of mine, is a good example of this approach in action. Rachel was struggling to make sense of David Velleman's "So It Goes," and especially struggling with the distinction between eternalism and presentism. So, to help her understand those concepts, I asked her to visualize a tapestry covering the far wall of my office, illustrating the whole of history. I suggested that we first imagine that the tapestry is illuminated all at once by the overhead light in my office. In that case, while points on the tapestry are fixed and distinct from one another, all points on it are illuminated. Second, and in contrast, I suggested we imagine that the overhead light is turned off, and that the only light source is my office is a laser pointer. Unlike with the overhead light, the light of the laser pointer can illuminate only one small portion of the tapestry. Yet, also unlike the overhead light, the pointer is mobile; as it moves across the tapestry, various images will come to be illuminated and then cease to be illuminated by it. Having provided these two analogies, I asked Rachel what they tell us about the nature of eternalism and presentism, respectively. Despite their limitations, Rachel found these analogies useful, explaining their point in fair detail, with only occasional help from me. Of course, not all conversations between me and my students proceed as smoothly (or are as successful) as this one. But, even in those cases, I find that interacting with my students in this way leads to a deeper insight on their part into the material.

Employing Constant Assessment

Our best current pedagogical research shows that student learning and student assessment go hand-in-hand; learning requires constant, assessed feedback. To that end, I structure courses so that students are constantly engaged in various kinds of assessed activity. While the particulars vary from course to course, in general, this will involve short written responses at least once a week, longer essays twice a term, and a final exam. I find that varied and constant assessment has a number of benefits, both for me and for my students. The most significant benefit for me is that I can better gauge how well or poorly my students are grasping the material. This is especially true when it comes to the reading responses I mentioned earlier. They are typically assignments that come with a focused prompt, rather than something more open-ended, requiring students to reconstruct an argument or explain a section of text, at times also requiring them to evaluate the argument or text. Longer essays, tests and exams likewise provide me an opportunity to see how well students are synthesizing key concepts and points of view. The students themselves seem to most appreciate the fact that constant assessment lowers their overall stress level about the course. With constant and varied assessment, no one assignment has the potential to significantly alter their final grade. From a pedagogical standpoint, however, I think that the greatest benefit for my students is that they grow significantly in their ability to charitably and critically assess the reasons they and others have for the claims they make. By routinely giving them the task of reconstructing an argument or explaining a text, and by providing constant and consistent feedback on those tasks, students learn that reconstruction and explanation is not mere paraphrase, that it requires them to consider how best to interpret a text, weighing different interpretations against reasons—some expressed, others not—that might motivate a given interpretation. In other words, students learn to utilize skills of charitable interpretation and critical assessment, skills fundamental to philosophical inquiry itself.