Elliot Goodine | Teaching Statement

My teaching is centered around modeling a love of philosophical thinking in students, and by demonstrating how philosophical thinking can be done well through sustained, collaborative effort.

On the topic of demonstrating a love of philosophical thinking: in my early teaching (especially as a teaching assistant in courses on the history of philosophy) a particular challenge became salient: often, I focused too much in discussions on seeing whether students could recall factual details about the arguments in their readings and lectures. Sometimes while leading discussion sections, I would ask the class to tell me central terms, or to name philosophers and related arguments from earlier in the semester. Too often, these sorts of questions were met with long silences, as students scanned their notes. I eventually came to realize how much more productive discussions were when I gave my students succinct summaries of philosophical puzzles, with all the relevant facts laid bare. This way, my students could offer their own solutions to the puzzles, rather than trying to recall key terms and figures. When I put this new approach into practice, I discovered how much I was able to achieve my initial aim of making sure they got the details right. My students became more attentive philosophical readers and interlocutors when they clearly saw the force of a philosophical problem.

By the time I taught an introduction to early modern philosophy as a lead instructor, I put this more interactive approach into practice. I began the first day of classes by breaking the class into four groups, and had each group discuss a different question that would occupy us as a central theme throughout the semester (God, free will, skepticism, and the mind-body relationship). By discussing core philosophical questions first, rather than historical figures, I showed students how much they already cared about these philosophical questions prior to any historical inquiry. As each group offered their answers to the questions that I posed, I highlighted the parallels between the points they were making with the readings that we would work on throughout the semester. In this practice, which I continue to use, students are able to see how philosophical thinking is already very much part of their lives before they ever step into the classroom.

Active engagement with philosophical arguments crucially depends on each student's feeling comfortable to speak up about their own views. In many cases, students are hesitant to speak up because they are fearful of giving the "wrong" answer in a discussion. To combat this problem, I frequently assign discussion questions to small groups. I've found that this method helps less talkative students to express their opinions in a lower-stakes context, and during the class-wide discussions that follow. More recently, I've employed the method of "warm-calling" students, by assigning a question at the end of one class, and then asking students to submit their answers via email or on the course website before the next session. This allows me to review each student's thinking in a low-pressure scenario, and I can also give my less talkative students a heads-up, letting them know that I liked their response, and that I'll ask them to share it in our next session.

Relatedly, I make sure to select course content in a way that is sensitive to the many dimensions of diversity amongst my students. When students identify with the philosophers that they're reading, in my view, they more easily see *themselves* as philosophers. My early modern course

includes significant women philosophers of the era (e.g., Elizabeth of Bohemia, Anne Conway, Margaret Cavendish), and my course in political philosophy highlights work by women and people of color (e.g., Elizabeth Anderson, Bernard Boxill, Derrick Darby, and C.L.R. James). I view this project of cultivating conversations with diverse viewpoints to be an ongoing project, and I continue to consult with my colleagues and pedagogical research so I can develop more strategies for making philosophy accessible to everybody.

On the matter of demonstrating how philosophical thinking can be done well through sustained collaborative effort: recent research has shown that academic disciplines that overemphasize the importance of raw intellectual talent (rather than sustained effort) tend to achieve less diversity among their majors and faculty populations.[1] This research, I believe, goes a long way in explaining the troubling lack of diversity in philosophy. To combat this problem, I repeatedly remind my students that they can cultivate their skills as philosophical readers and writers through sustained effort. In this spirit of encouraging a malleable view of philosophical ability, I assign several smaller assignments, offering feedback for formative assessment, rather than relying on a small number of term papers and tests to track students' progress in my courses.

My overall approach to assignments and quizzes is aimed at helping students to develop skills of argumentation, analysis, and writing that will allow them to successfully think about philosophical questions on their own, should they continue to study philosophy. I recently produced a Youtube video for my students, giving a step-by-step demonstration of how to write citations correctly. For quizzes, I allow students to use their texts; in this context, I can show them the ways that annotation and active note-taking are important skills for properly reading a work of philosophy. The papers I assign make it clear that the task is never simply to show what any particular philosopher's view is. Rather, I ask students to make a philosopher's view clear so they can critique it, or defend the view against an important objection.

I work to make discussions about philosophy *fun*. I frequently integrate examples from literature and popular culture into my lectures. For instance, I include examples from Kurt Vonnegut and *Star Wars* into discussions on free will, and I use a passage from Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* to show how Hume's discussion of miracles employs epistemic principles that are used by philosophers and non-philosophers alike.

Recently, my teaching mentors at Guilford Technical Community College have offered me a helpful way of thinking to think about philosophy as a practice: as each class session is planned we repeatedly ask ourselves: what do we want students to be able to *do* by the end of each meeting? I employ this heuristic to remind myself to design my courses and my lessons in line with a guiding thought: philosophy is a fundamentally collaborative practice that helps us to grapple with difficult and important questions cooperatively.

I'm hopeful about my work as a teacher of philosophy: I've made great progress with my teaching methods in recent years, and I'm excited about continuing to learn new methods that will reach even more students.

[1] Leslie, S.J., A. Cimpian, M. Meyer, and E. Freeland. "Expectations of Brilliance Underlie Gender Distributions across Academic Disciplines." *Science* 347, no. 6219 (2015): 262–65.