

Teaching Philosophy

In Plato's *Meno*, Socrates asks his interlocutor, Meno, whether virtue can be taught. This question continues to steer both my philosophical research and teaching. While I am not sure if virtue can be taught, I am confident that virtue can be learned. And my role as a teacher is to provide my students knowledge, skills, and experiences to better enable my students – both inside and outside of the classroom – to grow in intellectual and moral virtue.

My path towards teaching first began by being on the receiving end – as a student in a liberal arts institution, where my professors took great interest in my academic and personal flourishing. I was nurtured with exciting classroom discussion and open office doors, mentorship in my research, and guidance through philosophical and personal doubt. These experiences were invaluable in forming me as a person and philosopher and continue to guide me today in my pedagogical approach.

Before I entered my PhD program, I taught philosophy courses at the high school level. My vocation for teaching took root during this time, as I aimed to educate the whole person – nourishing the intellect with new information and concepts, directing desires towards the good, and creating learning environments conducive to intellectual and social formation. During my PhD program, I took on extra pedagogical training opportunities, resulting in my further development as an educator. In order to accomplish the purpose of educating the whole person and forming students in virtue, my teaching is focused on three main dimensions: (1) Learning to live well; (2) Active learning (3) Accessibility for all students. These aims were developed through my own teaching experiences as well as through seeking extra teaching certification and pedagogical workshops.

Learning to Live Well: Many students fail to see the practical import of academic philosophy, which is perhaps not a surprise, given the issues often covered – such as the relation of properties to objects or the form of a valid argument. I approach my teaching with the end goal of helping my students learn to live well, and I believe that this aim has successfully guided my students in their learning, as a student's course evaluation comment illustrates: "I actively utilize the knowledge I gained from this class and I think it makes me a better person, US citizen, researcher, and ultimately, it will make me a much better nurse." This approach permeates the texts I choose for my courses, the classroom activities that I have students engage in, as well as the homework assigned. For instance, in my Bioethics course, students not only read and evaluate contemporary analytic arguments on the moral (im)permissibility of euthanasia, but they also examine what makes for a good death by considering the Medieval handbook of dying well, *Ars Moriendi*. In teaching this lesson, I have students consider the importance that should be given to a lifelong commitment to virtue as preparation for a good death, and if the relevant virtues for a good death in today's world have changed at all since the Medieval times. The lesson culminates with students writing their own contemporary *Ars Moriendi*, or an instruction manual for guiding a person today towards a good death. I clearly communicate the goal of having my students learn to live well, and I believe positive impact is made in many cases.

Active Learning: After observing my teaching many years ago, a colleague had a few simple words of feedback for me: "You've got to do less; the students want to do more." I quickly learned that a good teacher isn't one who gives students information to passively absorb, but makes opportunities for students to understand ideas, point out problems, and create solutions. My approach to teaching is to try to get my students to teach each other, and to teach themselves. I employ in-class debates and student-led discussion assignments where small groups of students come up with their own argument or activity for a particular viewpoint. Instead of giving my students an argument to evaluate, I will first have them 'map' it out – they are given the premises, sub-conclusions, and conclusion, and they must assemble the pieces in the right logical order before critically engaging with it. Not only does active learning almost always lead to enhanced comprehension by the student, I also derive great benefit from it: I find myself learning from my students every day. I believe that this

contributes to the mutual respect that my students and I have for each other and creates for a supportive learning environment.

Accessibility for all Students: Within a given classroom, students will likely vary widely in life experiences, cultural and religious background, upbringing, and academic readiness. However, by making use of various resources and platforms – ranging from in-person lecture to online discussion boards, classroom polls, videos, and poster presentations – I help ensure that all of my students have equal access and opportunity for learning. During my experience as a high school teacher, much of my pedagogical focus was directed at differentiation, whereby students of varying academic levels could grasp the material to differing degrees and be intellectually stimulated and engaged. I set up my classroom so that some students would lead discussion of an activity while I worked more closely with other students who needed further help and attention. Within my role as a college instructor, I have often designed my courses with a diverse group of students in mind, putting forth various options for assignments from which students can choose, depending on what will best suite their learning needs. In the past, I also have held regular individual or small group tutoring sessions in which students who are falling behind can come in to go over course material. Various students often comment about how much they value opportunities for this additional help and accommodations in their course evaluations: “Thank you for being so accessible and willing to help;” “I appreciate her taking the time out of her day to accommodate me with a family situation. That spoke volumes;” “Maria was very easy to talk to and work with for any questions/problems/help I needed.” One reason I find it particularly pressing for instructors to make their courses accessible to all of their students is that failing to do so amounts to failing to provide their students a basis of questions (and answers) that matter to their formation as a moral person and member of society. Letting students fall through the cracks doesn’t just amount to poor academic success but will be a danger to the growth of the whole person. I see teaching as not merely defining concepts and giving arguments, but also as importantly aiding in the social and intellectual formation of human persons. This means that each student matters in an immeasurable way. My teaching aims to reflect that. If virtue can be learned, then I take myself to play an important role in helping my students with this endeavor. My vocation as a teacher is aimed at educating the whole person and prompting the learning of virtue by helping my students to learn to live well, taking an active role in their own learning, and making sure that this education experience is accessible to all