**Review of Teaching by Teaching Assistants in the   
Department of Philosophy, University of Warwick**

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| Teaching Assistant: Zak Stinchcombe | Reviewer: Butterfill |
| Term: 2 | **Module: Plato & Descartes** |
| Year: 2018-9 |  |

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| **Structure, planning and organisation:**  *Consider, e.g.*  *Was the session structure explained/made clear to students?*  *Was the session well-planned/organised (e.g. was it set in the overall context of the module/course)?*  *Were links made to previous sessions?*  Zak opened by identifying the topics for discussion in the seminar, having distributed an extensive handout which students could use to revise key points.  Zak also explained that there would be a general discussion followed by breaking into smaller groups. |
| **Learning outcomes:**  *Consider e.g.*  *Were anticipated learning outcomes made clear to students?*  Learning outcomes were specified by identifying the topics for discussion. Where a seminar is led in a way that requires students to supply direction, this might be the most appropriate way to introduce learning outcomes, followed by a statement of what they are at the end (when learning outcomes are known). In this case, Zak provided some of the direction for the students, which is appropriate for this group in my view. So it might be useful to explicitly mention learning outcomes at the start or end. |
| **Methods and approach:**  *Consider e.g.*  *Were methods/approaches appropriate for the learning outcomes?*  *Could alternative approaches have been used?*  Zak started by asking questions to the whole group.  Half way through, Zak divided the students into groups of 3 and gave them a 15 minute task.  In the last minutes, Zak invited the students to ask general questions about the module. |
| **Content:**  *Consider e.g.*  *Were examples given?*  *Was the session pitched at an appropriate level for the students?*  As far as I could tell, the level was entirely appropriate for the students. Certainly their willingness to answer questions (nearly everyone spoke) and other signs of engagement indicated that the students felt reasonably confident with the material.  Zak did a good job of getting the students to refer back to the text frequently. |
| **Delivery, pace, tone and timing:**  *Consider e.g.*  *Was the delivery (e.g. pace, tone, timing of session) appropriate and/or engaging?*  *Were any parts of the session ‘problematic’ (e.g. too complex, drawn out, hurried etc.)?*  Zak got straight to the point; this worked well. Because students were willing and free to ask questions at any point, the pace was largely determined by the group. |
| **Participation/interaction:**  *Consider e.g.*  *How did the tutor interact with the students?*  *Was student participation encouraged and handled/managed well?*  *How (if at all) did the tutor check student comprehension?*  *How did the tutor deal with e.g. ‘the unexpected’/contingencies?*  Zak chatted informally with the students as they arrived, showing concern for their welfare.  Zak opened with a question to the whole group.  Towards the end of the seminar, the students were discussing questions with each other as well as talking to Zak. |
| **Learning resources:**  *Consider e.g.*  *What learning resources were used? Did they contribute/detract from the session?*  *Were learning support materials of good quality? (e.g. handouts, PowerPoint slides, etc.)*  *Did students appear engaged by use of the learning resources?*  Zak prepared and distributed a 3 page handout which students could use to revise key points on the topics covered in the seminar. |
| **Venue:**  *Consider e.g.*  *Was the venue/room appropriately organised for the session?*  *How well did the tutor utilise the venue?*  The room (H3.02) was laid out in a square arrangement with students sitting around the periphery. This is a good layout for this kind of seminar.  Students had space to lay out their materials and write or type notes. |
| **Overall style and ambience:**  *Consider e.g.*  *Did the tutor appear confident/enthusiastic and e.g. have a ‘good rapport’ with the students?*  *Did students appear attentive/engaged or show signs of boredom/disengagement?*  *Were the tutor’s presentation skills effective and was s/he clear and audible?*  *Did the session ‘go well’ overall?*  Zak built rapport by chatting informally with the students as they arrived, showing concern for their welfare.  I was initially concerned that some students appeared absorbed in their phones. But I later realised that they were searching the core text in order to answer Zak’s question.  He made good use of students’ names throughout, which may have enhanced students’ sense that Zak was interested in their contributions and progress. |

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| **Summary:**  Zak ran thoroughly prepared, well-structured and interesting seminar covering material in a way that engaged the students. |
| **Recommendations:**  The seminar was carefully organised and had a clear structure. I was impressed by your advanced planning. The students engaged well and appeared to be working hard. So my recommendation is not to change your approach too much, but to try making minor changes and evaluate whether they get results.  One simple first experiment would be to **attempt to talk less** in order to get the students doing even more of the work. Get the students talking among themselves more and answering your questions less. To this end, you might consider breaking them into groups much earlier. For example, you could start the seminar by setting a question and asking them to discuss it in pairs. (When doing this, I like to use a timer alarm to give them a predictable period, often 90 seconds.)  I also recommend experimenting with pair or small group tasks of much shorter duration. It’s often surprising how much ground students can cover in a timed 90 second discussion providing they know it’s really going to be 90 seconds (use an audible alarm). Even if they don’t understand, the 90 second discussion gets everyone talking.  After a pair or small group task, encourage the groups to present their thoughts to the whole group rather than to you.  You made notable efforts to ensure everyone contributed. Do keep doing this. |

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| **Teaching Assistant response:** |

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| **Comments by TA Coordinator:** |

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| Signed (Teaching Assistant) | Signed (Reviewer) |
| Date | **Date 2019-02-01** |

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| Signed (TA Coordinator) |
| Date |