

## Teaching Philosophy

Philosophical education certainly contains an element of information transfer—the students must learn their -isms after all. I take this task seriously and attempt to lecture in such a way that students walk away from my classes with a basic factual knowledge of the important terms, concepts, and historical figures. I hope that students will go on to future classes with an enriched ability to discuss these ideas in an informed way. Nevertheless, I see the goal of teaching factual information as subordinate to the more important goal of teaching students how to think these -isms through in a philosophically rigorous way. I hope to inspire in students a desire to ask for themselves the ultimate questions that all those important terms, concepts, and historical figures revolve around. And I further hope to walk students through the slow process of answering these questions for themselves in an intellectually mature and responsible way, regardless of their background, prior education, or aptitude. Ideally this produces genuine insights that students can call their own because they came from their own careful thinking. During a recent class discussion about Plato's understanding of beauty, I saw a student on the back row with eyebrows scrunched together and fist to mouth. At first, I thought he was angry about something I had said. As the class continued discussing, however, I saw his expression change to something like joy as he came to a realization. When, at length, he spoke, it turned out that he disagreed with Plato about beauty in a fundamental way, but would not have realized the depth of his own conviction had the discussion not forced him to think carefully through the ideas. The look of realization on this student's face is the prize I try to win each time I open up a discussion.

For a typical class session, I have the students read a short text (usually a primary text). I hold them accountable to do this reading with a short online reading quiz. In class, I typically orient the conversation by lecturing for about ten minutes, giving background information about the author and the ideas involved in the text. I then attempt to get a discussion rolling with a prompt that I prepare before hand (with a couple backups just in case). I hope each time that this conversation will develop a life of its own as students dialogue with each other, and I do everything I can to make the environment inclusive and welcoming to all the students involved. During these discussions, my primary objective is to coach the students in how to think about what other people have to say carefully, humbly, and responsibly.

Typically, I base the semester's grade off three components that align with the two educational goals of transferring information and coaching critical thinking. First, as mentioned, I make sure the students gain a familiarity with the assigned texts by using short, multiple choice quizzes. Second, exams focus mostly on factual knowledge of

definitions and major philosophers, but they also contain short answer questions that solicit the student's own perspective. Third, a series of short, argumentative essays aim to assess the students' ability to think through philosophical questions in the ways that they have practiced in group discussion.

While keeping some stability, I attempt to adjust this approach each semester by incorporating feedback from students together with other pedagogical techniques and schools of thought from my colleagues. For example, I am currently experimenting with a topically organized course structure for Introduction to Philosophy in place of the chronological and more historically focused approach I am more comfortable with. Every adjustment, however, aims to intensify and increase in frequency those moments of hard-won insight that students achieve for themselves through careful thinking.