

As an undergraduate, I fell in love with Philosophy while reading Cicero. It was, specifically, while agonizing over Cicero's discussion of the difference between seeming and actually being a good person in *On the Good Life*—a simple passage that left me absolutely undone. As a person who had, like many of my students today, spent much of my life attempting to do whatever I needed to do to give the appearance of success, I was riveted by the idea that I did not know, for certain, whether I were really a good person, or merely seemed to be one. I found myself at once haunted and compelled by a line of the text in which Cicero quoted Socrates: "Make yourself the sort of [person] you want people to think that you are." Though I initially turned to Philosophy hoping to find answers—certainty, solutions, and assurance that I was what I thought—I realized later that one of Philosophy's greatest gifts to me would be those difficult moments of questioning. That realization, and the drive to *be* better that Cicero drew out in me, still inform my goals as a Philosophy teacher.

In keeping with my own experience with Cicero, I hope that when my students leave my class, they are driven to ask why, to be unsatisfied with too-simple answers, to wonder whether the world could be better than it is now, and to seek to make it so. In more concrete terms, this means that my broad goals for each of my classes call for my students to:

1. Learn to think critically and analytically
2. Improve as writers and communicators
3. Connect their work to the world around them
4. Know more about the discipline of Philosophy and its history

In what follows, I offer a detailed explanation of each of these goals and how I work to achieve them; along the way, I hope to make clear their connections to the goals of a liberal education and to that of self- and world-improvement.

Thinking Critically

Though "critical thinking" is a watchword for liberal arts education in general, it is the fundamental methodology of Philosophy. It involves, I think, at least these four fundamental components: the analysis and evaluation of arguments, asking questions about underlying assumptions, drawing out the implications of beliefs, and cultivating self-critique. In each of my courses, I explicitly thematize these methodologies from the first day of class, and involve students in deliberately structured activities to engage in them.

In my Ethics and Greek and Medieval Philosophy classes, for example, I highlight argument analysis and evaluation by using structured small-group exercises: when we are discussing a complex argument or an argument for a counter-intuitive conclusion, I ask students to conduct argument analyses in small groups, using a close-reading worksheet. These worksheets contain four to five questions about specific sections of the text, which are designed to guide the students through a detailed analysis of the argument, in order to set up a more informed discussion of merits of the position. This keeps students from slipping into the belief that what matters most in Philosophy are opinions, or that simply stating agreement with or opposition to a view is sufficient. I want my students to approach arguments and texts, whether in the classroom or beyond, with a view not only to seeing the "what," but searching for the "why."

Closely related to asking "why" is the impulse to ask "but how do you know X" or "If that is true, what else follows?" These are the main questions I want my students to ask when they

work to uncover hidden assumptions and consider the implications of a position. These are difficult conceptual moves for young Philosophy students to make, and I realized early in my teaching career that they did not come naturally for many students—so here, too, I began developing exercises explicitly designed to cultivate these habits. In my 200- and 300-level courses, students are responsible for leading the class discussion on at least one day during the semester, during which they are expected to come prepared with critical questions, usually about an assumption or implication in the text. We make use of these exercises throughout the semester, and I emphasize to students that these discussions are useful not only for allowing them to think through potential paper topics for later in the semester, but also because this kind of critical engagement is the very act of thinking philosophically, which they can and should take outside of the course.

Logic provides ample opportunities to practice this critical engagement in highly structured exercises, but its importance becomes more salient for students when they complete the final assignment of the year, in which I ask them to offer (in essay format) an extended analysis and evaluation of an argument that they wrote earlier in the semester. Though their argumentative skills usually improve over the semester, many still have a difficult time recognizing their own assumptions and thinking through the implications of their position. To help them with these skills, I conduct a paper draft workshop in which I deliberately pair them with students who argued for the opposing position on the same topic. Exposure to arguments for the opposite conclusion—and interlocutors who are invested in them—allows students to see more clearly what they are taking for granted, and how they might anticipate objections.

This exercise is also important for cultivating a healthy sense of self-critique, a habit that I also attempt to instill in students through the careful selection of course readings—including one in Ethics entitled “Am I a Jerk?”—and in-class activities in which they are asked to defend positions that oppose their own. I also chose to focus on normative issues that have profound implications for students’ own lives, challenging them to consider whether they ought to live differently in very concrete ways—as in my Philosophy of Sport class, when students considered whether fans bore moral responsibility for the exploitation of baseball players in the Dominican Republic, or for the debilitating head injuries of football players.

Writing and Communication

Effective writing and clear communication are crucial not only for the discipline of Philosophy, but a liberal arts education more broadly. As such, I make writing and oral presentation a graded component of each of my courses—even Logic, which is traditionally assessed exclusively via exams. Each course’s writing projects, moreover, are developed through scaffolded assignments that prepare the students to undertake longer writing projects with greater organization and success. These scaffolded assignments include shorter exegetical papers that build toward longer argumentative papers, as well as in-class collaborative exercises I call “argument reconstructions.” I introduced the latter after realizing that inexperienced students struggled with differentiating between simple description of the text (Aristotle says X, then Y, then Z), and analysis of the structure of an argument. In argument reconstructions, a small group of students is assigned a conclusion of one sub-argument in a passage, then asked to produce a step-by-step explanation of the argument leading to that conclusion that 1) uses no direct quotes, 2) clarifies the role of any examples used, and 3) could be followed by someone who had not done the

reading. Students write and revise these arguments on boards around the room, and are ultimately responsible for walking the rest of the class through their reconstruction. In the course of this exercise, students are actively involved and argue with one another over textual interpretation—and also come to realize that offering a thorough analysis of the argument will require them to say quite a bit more than they initially thought.

This assignment also allows me to reinforce the idea that in-class discussion is not throwaway time, but a valuable setting in which to try out ideas, wordings, and arguments. I have tried to foster further connections between in-class discussion, presentations, and essays by having students give oral presentations of the arguments that they will go on to make in their final essays. I expanded this approach in Philosophy of Sport, where I gave students the option to create videos featuring ESPN-style editorial segments offering presentations of their arguments in a format suitable for a lay audience. This approach was fun for the students, but more importantly, it gave them the opportunity to get feedback on their arguments in advance of turning in the final papers, and to think carefully about how they could best explain their positions clearly and concisely before heading into the final draft. Here, as elsewhere, I try to help students recognize that there is always room to improve, and that being an effective thinker and writer takes persistence and revision.

Connections to the Wider World

There are two primary senses in which I want students to understand their work in Philosophy as connected to the world around them: in the first place, philosophical investigation takes place within a community of inquirers, not in isolation; second, philosophical investigation can and should travel outside the constraints of the academy, bringing its insights and its methodology to bear on the problems of contemporary life. I have discussed several activities in which I ask students to work in response to one another. I do this not only because I believe that active learning is good pedagogy, but also because I am committed to the idea that knowledge is produced in communities, through dialogue, and by building on the insights of others.

I am, moreover, convinced that Philosophy's most enduring value is its potential to change the world—as I tell my students, I am a pragmatist, and would not bother to practice Philosophy if I did not think it mattered. I am, as a result, deeply committed both to assigning texts that explicitly take up the practical implications of philosophical positions, and to scheduling assignments that require students to think through the practical application of differing schools of thought. I do this through units on Applied Ethics whose specific content is determined by the class, through events like my class trip to a Braves game in the context of a unit on Native American mascots and racism, through Applied Logic and Applied Philosophy presentation assignments, and through the development of Special Topics classes that take up traditional philosophical questions via the investigation of pressing social issues. When my students leave my class, I want them to see philosophical problems in the world all around them.

Knowledge of Philosophy's History

There are, I think, at least three reasons to prioritize historical study in Philosophy. One is that knowledge does not simply appear; it is uncovered through practices of inquiry—and not simply by isolated individuals. Studying the history of philosophy is valuable in part because it enables us to draw on the vast resources of those who came before us. Second, confrontation with the

panoply of voices in that history—many of which are in strong disagreement with our own—fosters the sense of self-critique, or epistemic humility, that is so important for a liberal arts education. Finally, it is often easier to recognize difficulties and problems in others—particularly historically-removed others—than in ourselves. It is comparatively easy, for example, to see the masculinist partiality in Aristotle or Thomas Aquinas’s declarations that women are inherently lacking, but harder to see our own views about humanity as sharing such assumptions. I believe that the process of becoming intimately familiar with the foibles, prejudices, and the cultural/historical locatedness of the history of philosophy can make us more attuned to similar qualities in ourselves.

For these reasons, I almost invariably use an historical approach in teaching my classes, assigning texts from throughout the history of Western Philosophy, even in courses on contemporary topics. We likewise discuss Aristotle’s development of categorical reasoning and Mill’s motivation for the systematizing of causal inferences in *Logic*. Beyond the reading and discussion of historical texts, I assign my students work designed to enhance their knowledge of and engagement with the history of Philosophy. Students are required, for example, to write close reading papers of historical texts without using any contemporary secondary sources, and to write Applied Ethics papers that deal specifically with the application of ideas from the historical philosophical canon. They are also, moreover, expected to be able to recognize famous passages from the history of Philosophy on exams, to be able to attribute them to the correct author, and to write essay responses on those passages that demonstrate a thorough understanding of their significance. Though many Philosophy departments in the English-speaking world no longer make use of this historical approach, I am glad to have been trained in programs that value the history of Philosophy, and remain committed to teaching it well.

I prioritize each of these goals—critical thinking, good writing, connecting the classroom to the outside world, and knowing Philosophy’s history—because I believe they are integral to success in a liberal arts education. More importantly, however, I do so because I am convinced that they have the potential (to borrow a construction from Socrates) to make students into the kinds of people they want others to think that they are—and more importantly, to make our world better than it is today.