

# STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

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*The choice.* Knowledge and science are particularly valuable when their benefits are shared widely. Teaching is, I believe, the primary instrument that enables this just distribution of knowledge and the social consequences of science and research. In addition to my love of philosophical research, I have chosen to teach philosophy because it is remarkably well suited for developing communal sharing of knowledge. Specifically, what I find to be exhilarating about teaching philosophy is the opportunity it offers to develop learning practices guided by ideals of social and epistemic justice—as opposed to mere egoistic and competitive individual learning.

This opportunity to develop learning guided by justice principles is illustrated by the way teaching philosophy nurtures cooperation and critical inquiry among students and teachers. Because teaching enables the discovery and transmission of cultural innovations (e.g., novel norms, arguments, explanations), teaching philosophy contributes to social cooperation and the acquisition of new cultural skills and virtues. Moreover, because the teaching practice benefits from the cultural diversity of inquirers in the classroom, it can help us become aware of—and thus mitigate—the boundaries of our rationalities and individual histories.

*The scope.* As the date of the last edit of the present statement (2017), I have taught or co-taught fourteen philosophy courses and seminars at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Some of these courses included both undergraduate and postgraduate students. Most of these courses were taught in English, others in French. Because my areas of specialisation are philosophy of science, philosophy of cognitive science, philosophy of mind, and philosophy of art, most of my recent teaching has focused on these fields. Nevertheless, I have taught on a diverse range of topics, including classic metaphysical and epistemological topics (e.g., the mind-body problem, free will, personal identity, perception, knowledge, reference), topics that engage with recent scientific developments (e.g., heuristics and biases in reasoning, cultural learning, person recognition, gene-culture co-evolution, the science of the arts), and topics in ethics and bioethics (e.g., the ethics of informed consent and problems of autonomy, abortion, feminism, medically assisted death, global justice, surveillance, and privacy rights).

Although I am particularly passionate about teaching on my areas of specialisation, I am also enthusiastic about teaching a broad range of philosophical topics. I feel confident with undergraduate teaching of introductory courses on critical thinking, logic, metaphysics, and ethics (I have taught these topics at introductory levels in the past). When teaching undergraduate courses, I often supplement classic readings with contemporary research from the biological and cognitive sciences to demonstrate the relevance of traditional philosophical problems in contemporary scientific and historical contexts. For example, I have had success with using psychological research on ‘folk psychology’ and ‘folk metaphysics’ to add an additional dimension to a course on classical metaphysical topics. This approach to teaching mirrors my approach to research: my program of psychohistorical research aims to combine ontological research on the historical nature of physical objects and persons with research on the mechanisms we use to learn about and identify objects and persons.

*The approach.* I adapt methods and technologies to different teaching contexts. My preferred approach to developing undergraduate courses is to interweave compact modules of lectures with practical tasks that enable students to directly engage with core issues (e.g., student presentations, small discussion groups, mini ethnographies, and creative contributions posted online).

Typically, I introduce the core philosophical questions of lectures using concrete and striking case studies. I take into account information about my students’ academic and cultural background to guide my selection of these cases studies. These are typically drawn from history, art, popular culture, and contemporary events and debates. For example, I have used the life of “assisted dying” activist Sue Rodriguez to introduce bioethical debates about end-of-life decision making, depictions of radical bodily transformations in science fiction films to introduce questions about personal persistence, and artworks that explore deception and organised crime to introduce ethical and legal theories of social trust.

I have found it extremely rewarding to use Internet platforms to facilitate interactions among students. In particular, students who are not necessarily comfortable voicing their opinions during classroom

discussions frequently engage in discussions online. Being myself keenly aware of the challenges of being a non-native English speaker in an Anglophone academic environment, I am particularly sympathetic to the needs and concerns of international students, cultural minorities, and students with learning difficulties. For this reason, I like to provide one-to-one support when possible. This aspect of my practice, which derives from my effort to have my practice guided by principles of justice, is evidenced by positive teaching evaluations from my students (which demonstrate their understanding of my efforts).

Although I have found that textbooks can be useful companions for developing courses, my preferred approach is to build a syllabus that focuses on the close reading of a selection of key articles and book chapters. In addition, I prepare lists of optional readings that students can consult to prepare student-lead presentations or further explore topics of particular interest.

With respect to assessment, I use a variety of formats, including written assignments (e.g., essays, tests, and quizzes) and verbal presentations. When possible, I offer students opportunities to write essays on topics of their choosing.

Having taught in highly diverse cultural contexts (Australia, Canada, France, and Turkey), I have experience in adapting my methods and course content to students from very different educational, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds. Some of my teaching has focused on philosophy of science and cognitive science courses at interdisciplinary institutions where most postgraduate students came from a background in science (in particular, biology, neuroscience, nursing, psychology, and computer science), rather than philosophy. Because the skills and expectations of science students often differ from philosophy students, I have learnt to adapt my course content and pedagogy to develop philosophical skills in non-specialist audiences. To engage science students, I frequently use empirical research as a springboard for the exploration of philosophical issues.

The biological and cognitive sciences provide a wealth of empirical findings that challenge common-sense beliefs about human nature and cultural diversity. For example, I have taught about essentialist thinking about categories and individuals, theories of person recognition, dual-process theories of reasoning, and adaptationist theories of art. Nevertheless, and this is a direct influence of my research (see Bullock & Reber 2013, Bullock 2014), my methodology departs from approaches that minimise the contributions of the humanities and the social sciences.

In my teaching, I have found that it can be particularly valuable to invite academics from different fields to give presentations. I invite scientists to give presentations about their research and then question them about axiological and methodological assumptions rooted in their fields. I invite scholars from the humanities to give presentations about their research and then question them about whether engaging with empirical research from the biological sciences might be relevant to their research.

*The evaluation.* I employ a variety of methods to analyse the effectiveness of my teaching and identify both successes and areas for improvement. I invite peers to give me feedback when I develop syllabuses and students to give me feedback during courses. I use the advice from colleagues with whom I co-teach courses or who supervise the departmental curriculum. When available, I use formal anonymous teaching evaluations by students at the conclusion of courses. However, formal evaluation tools are not always available. When formal evaluations are not available, I try to collect both non-anonymous and anonymous critical feedback in writing from students.