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Statement of Teaching Philosophy

Mission. As a teacher, my primary goal is to teach my students how to approach any discussion with a genuinely open mind. When we do philosophy, no perspective is too strange to be worth taking seriously, and even our most firmly held beliefs are subject to challenge. This can risk leaving students with the impression that philosophy is an intellectual game with no real stakes, like a debate competition. One of the first things I tell my students is that a philosophical debate is not a contest, but a collaborative inquiry into questions that all parties take to be worth asking. By studying philosophy, they will develop the ability to engage in meaningful dialogue with others whose perspectives differ significantly from their own.

Engaging students. Working with a variety of student populations—STEM majors at MIT, computer science majors at Harvard College, master's students in public policy at the Harvard Kennedy School, nontraditional students at the Harvard Extension School, and gifted high school students at the North Carolina Governor's School—has taught me the importance of tailoring lectures to the interests and experiences of each group. To engage students, I connect the philosophical ideas we cover to things my students already understand and care about. When I teach ethics to computer science students, I build my lessons around detailed case studies featuring real-world decisions faced by working computer scientists. For example, in an ethics module for a cybersecurity course, I developed a lesson about whether it is morally permissible for security researchers at large companies to "hack back" in response to a cyberattack. The case study for the lesson was the Facebook security team's 2011 response to persistent cyberattacks conducted by the "Koobface gang," a group of cybercriminals based in St. Petersburg, Russia. When I teach political philosophy to master's students in public policy, by contrast, I ask them to apply the concepts we discuss (such as democratic legitimacy) to political debates that are unfolding in real-time (such as Boris Johnson's recent decision to suspend parliament). Where direct personal connections are more elusive, I use concrete examples that are immediately compelling. To introduce high school students to the Turing test, I staged a mock version in which students try to distinguish a chatbot's responses to their questions from my own. To introduce undergraduates to the problem of personal identity over time, I had them watch a short video in which an Italian neuroscientist explains his plans to perform the first "head transplant."

Getting to know students. I view getting to know my students as an essential part of teaching: it helps me find out what interests them, helps them feel more comfortable in class, and gives me a better sense of what they understand and what they are still struggling with. To encourage students to meet with me, I emphasize throughout the course that I *want* to meet with them, even if it's just to touch base about how things are going. I also make a point to stay behind after class to answer any questions they might have. Finally, I ask students who seem less engaged, or who are otherwise struggling with the course, to come to office hours to check in. I often find in these meetings that the student is struggling for a reason I can help address: feeling lost, anxiety about speaking in front of their peers, difficulties with writing or language, an illness or disability that requires accommodation, or the belief that "philosophy just isn't their thing."

Inclusive discussion. Doing philosophy is an inherently social activity, which makes it important to create a classroom environment where everyone feels comfortable participating. This can be a challenge, especially in courses where most students have little prior exposure to the subject. Before we begin, I explain that the course is a collaborative enterprise, and that the goal is for us to learn as much as we can from each other and from the authors we read. I then punctuate my lectures with a variety of short activities such as "think-pair-share." For example, early on in a lecture on fake

news and the ethics of censorship for more than a hundred students, I had students quickly brainstorm possible strategies that Facebook might use to suppress the spread of potentially harmful content on its platform. After introducing them to arguments for and against censorship, I asked them to evaluate two of their suggestions in light of these arguments (deleting the content, or displaying it alongside a warning).

I find that this strategy works well in both large lectures and small seminars, and that it has a number of advantages beyond simply keeping students engaged. First, it ensures that every student gets plenty of opportunities to practice doing philosophy with their peers. Second, it gives students a chance to gather their thoughts. Many students find speaking in front of the whole class intimidating, or simply need more time to work out what they want to say. A short, low-stakes discussion with their classmates helps these students prepare. Third, it helps me to bring new voices into the conversation by "warm calling" on students who might otherwise be reluctant to speak.

Improving my teaching. To improve my teaching, I constantly seek out opportunities to get feedback and to exchange ideas and materials with other educators. I'll give two examples.

First, in addition to longer midterm and end-of-term surveys, I have students fill out the following (anonymous) two-minute survey on their phones at the end of each class:

1. Today's class was interesting (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree).
2. Today's class was relevant to me (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree).
3. (Optional) What was one idea from today's class that you found particularly helpful?
4. (Optional) What was one idea from today's class that you found confusing?

The results give me insight into what is and isn't working, and help me figure out what to spend more time unpacking in the next session.

Second, I have found pedagogy workshops to be an invaluable opportunity to learn from other educators. For example, I recently attended a national workshop on teaching ethics to computer science students in my role as a postdoctoral fellow with the Embedded Ethics @ Harvard program. I was delighted to learn that some of the computer scientists in attendance had been inspired by our approach, and were working to adapt it to different courses and institutional contexts. One had developed an exciting approach to training computer science faculty to lead discussions of the social and ethical implications of new technologies. Another was working closely with philosophy graduate students to develop lessons, complete with coding exercises, that would teach students how to compare the expected impact of different possible algorithms on CO_2 emissions. Both generously offered to share their materials with me so that our program could adapt them, which I hope to do over the next year.