Teaching Statement

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Think of me as your outback tour guide. In the coming weeks, we'll be exploring some difficult terrain: perhaps the desert landscapes of metaphysics, or the lush rainforests of scientific realism. This territory has been mapped before. But you can't trust everything you read—you'll need to think for yourselves, question what you see, and develop your own sense of the land. I'll guide you, but you'll need to work together too. We're in an unusual environment here—perhaps it seems unfamiliar. But you'll find all sorts of experiences from your own lives will help you.

Philosophy is a continuing project—it is not as a completed subject matter, or a fixed debate. I want students to take part in the adventure, and see philosophy as something they can own and find everywhere. I want students to be engaged in the material, stimulated by each other, and actually *do* philosophy in the classroom—not just learn about it.

I've had experience designing and teaching my own course ('Time Travel, Free Will and Causation'). I've TA'd for a variety of courses, including giving guest lectures (Kant, Ethics, Feminism and Philosophy, and general introductory courses), and leading discussion sections (Ethics, Metaphysics, general introductory courses). I've learnt a lot from trialling my own methods, observing others, and talking with other teachers. And I've used a range of approaches to test the effectiveness of my teaching—including observations, observer reports, informal discussions with students, surveys, assessments and student evaluations. I'm keen to develop my teaching as a core part of my professional life, closely integrated with my own research.

A first step in adventuresome philosophy teaching is choosing challenging and exciting material. In designing the course 'Time Travel, Free Will and Causation', I selected topics from my research that would engage students, supported with fiction, film and art. Students discussed causal loops in *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure*, blogged about the oozing representations of time in art, talked about free will and responsibility in Bob Dylan's songs, and debated whether causation could run backwards. The topics we considered formed a coherent whole, allowing students to broaden their expertise as we progressed, while still encountering new and interesting twists and turns. All students in my course 'strongly agreed' in their evaluations that it was 'intellectually stimulating'. My own research interests are wide-ranging, from philosophy of science, to German Idealism and ethics. I'd like to drawn on these surprising combinations in future courses, such as an undergraduate class on classical epistemology that draws on thinkers like Kant, Fichte and Hegel, or a graduate-level course in realism and anti-realism that covers approaches from metaethics, metaphysics and philosophy of science. I'm also keen to teach graduate-level philosophy of science and metaphysics courses, particularly examining the role of science in metaphysics, as well as undergraduate courses in ethics, epistemology, philosophy of physics and German Idealism.

As a teacher, I also want students to see themselves as part of a group, whether in a large lecture hall or a close discussion setting. Professional philosophers depend on each other to develop their ideas, clarify their thoughts and motivate their research—the same is true for students. Yet expressing your own ideas is a risky business, particularly when philosophy is something you're learning for the first time. So where possible, I use small group activities to

encourage participation and get students comfortable with each other. I use brainstorming and discussion at the start of even formal lectures. And I'm particularly interested in developing collaborative assignments that can be used in large courses. In my last course, I trialled an assignment that required students to collaborate on analysing time-travel movies. And at a teaching institute, I designed a philosophy of science assignment in which students share their annotations of science articles to help their own writing. I found students surprisingly willing to spend time outside of class responding to each other's ideas—I hope to harness this enthusiasm in future courses.

I've found one of the most challenging yet rewarding aspects of teaching to be learning to be responsive to students in the right way. In seminar courses, I've encountered the student who doggedly pursues a line of questioning far outside the purview of the course. And when lecturing, I've met the blank stares of a stadium theatre full of students. I've found patience and inventiveness to be key to responding in the right way. The stubborn student was thanked for his contributions, and invited to spend more time with me after class discussing his ideas. I then adjusted the content of the next lecture to incorporate his interests more fully. The blank stares were acknowledged and sympathised with. I then retraced to common ground before continuing on to new material. In response to observer feedback, I'm also training myself to more provocative and less structured in my lecturing. I tell my students that none of them has free will, and see what they come up with. I argue for the subtly invalid argument, and wait patiently for them to figure out what's wrong. Overall, I aim to question, probe and challenge my students, and observers report I do well in these engagements—seeing what they're aiming at, without fudging what they leave out.

Finally, I want my students to learn to do philosophy themselves. One of the most valuable ways philosophy can improve the lives of its students is by encouraging them to think clearly and deeply. This is far more important to me than any particular theory. I want students to see themselves as active participants in the philosophical project, and embrace its unfixed and open-ended nature. In designing my metaphysics course, I included activities whose main function was to get students talking, thinking and writing throughout the course—including quizzes, group activities and discussion posts. I also had students present their paper topics to the class—and was surprised by the useful and thoughtful feedback they received from their peers. I'm also keen to help students develop their thinking through writing. I'd like to try even structuring an undergraduate course around teaching the steps for successful paper writing—with assignments focussed on outlines, introductions and argument strategies.

I want my students to take part in the adventure of philosophy, and I design my teaching with this in mind. The material should be stimulating, the learning environment engaging, and the teacher should be there to guide and direct, helping students see the rich and surprising landscapes around them.