

Teaching Dossier

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1 Teaching Statement

For the duration of my academic career, I've been committed to working for a more inclusive discipline. I wrote my present department's comprehensive *Guide to Reporting Misconduct, Resolving Disputes, and Accessing Care*, and am organizer and facilitator for the Graduate Student Association's focus group on climate for women and transgender students in all UT Austin graduate programs. I was the inaugural president, and subsequent policy advisor, of my department's Minorities and Philosophy (MAP) chapter and founder of the department's Feminist Philosophy reading group, both of which have become durable department institutions. But nowhere in my professional life have the entailments of this commitment been more far-reaching than in my role as an instructor. I take seriously my duties to my students, and bring my belief in the liberatory power of a philosophical education with me every time I enter the classroom.

Philosophy, especially in classes on logic, or on formal approaches to language and epistemology, tends to be regarded as a discipline where one's success is determined by innate ability. Carol Dweck's influential work on "learning mindsets" bears out the observation that this perception is dangerous for all but those students who come in with very high confidence in their abilities. I work hard to dispel this perception, and to instead instill a "growth mindset," in which students regard their success as achievable through sustained effort, rather than some genius that they either already have or are doomed permanently to lack.

One way I bolster this mindset is by avoiding a grade structure that places all the weight on a few evaluations. Instead, I offer lots of early- to mid-semester opportunities for a student to raise their grade through small assignments, through in-class participation, and by talking through the subject matter with me in office hours. I have the strong impression that, once a student feels like their instructor knows who they are, they feel more accountable for their performance in class and on assignments. When I teach formal logic courses this way, I've seen that students' consistent attendance in office hours has been more predictive of course success than has, say, their score on the first problem set. I take this as some evidence that encouraging students to seek out extra opportunities to discuss course material is genuinely helpful to them, and moreover that this sort of engagement tends to sustain a student through any difficulties early in the semester.

We know that learning mindset variation occurs across student demographics. But the social and educational psychology literature tells us that the academic performances of students who identify with groups affected by a subject-relevant negative stereotype (i.e. stereotype threat) are at additional risk, particularly when the student's group is underrepresented in the classroom (i.e. solo effects) or the relevant stereotype is made salient. It's hardly novel to observe that, particularly in upper-level philosophy classrooms, women, people of color, and other minorities are both underrepresented and likely to have gotten

a whiff of the odious stereotype that they are ill-suited for philosophical work. I've worked to direct students affected by this sort of stereotype threat toward resources that are there to help them, and to create these resources where they didn't previously exist. Under my leadership, my department's Minorities and Philosophy (MAP) chapter worked to establish standards for bias reduction in grading and for inclusive pedagogy in general among all graduate student instructors. I've also advised undergraduate philosophy majors in my department on the formation of women's and minorities groups at the undergraduate level, and coached women and minority students through their applications to summer philosophy programs like the *Philosophy in an Inclusive Key Summer Institutes* (PIKSIs) and related programs.

The relevant research also suggests a variety of strategies, like exposing students to successful figures in the field who are also members of a minority group, or offering students the chance to affirm their strength in other domains, which alleviate the harms of stereotype threat. These sorts of targeted remedies are best provided in a one-on-one setting, which is one more reason that I work to make myself extremely available to my students for individual appointments.

In short, the action characteristic of my pedagogical approach is to instill in my students the sense that they are competent handlers of the course material. Philosophical material was, in my own first experiences of it as an undergraduate, an incredible revelation and stimulant. As an educator, part of my job is to help clear away the socio-psychological clutter that makes some students conclude that philosophy isn't for people like them, so that they can access its gifts as well.

2 Teaching Evaluations

1. *Evaluations as Course Instructor*

I've served as course instructor for two previous courses. Per my institution's policy, students were given an opportunity at the end of each course to anonymously evaluate nine aspects of instructor performance and to provide written comments. Evaluations were on a **5-point scale**, with a score of 1 signifying "strongly disagree" and 5 signifying "strongly agree". The chart below documents average scores. All courses listed were taught at UT Austin.

	Contemporary Moral Problems Spring 2016	Introductory Symbolic Logic Fall 2016
Course objectives were clearly defined	4.6	4.6
Instructor was prepared for class	4.7	4.5
Instructor communicated effectively	4.5	4.3
Instructor encouraged students to take active role in learning	4.4	4.5
Instructor was available to students	4.6	4.7
Course was organized well	4.4	4.5
Students felt free to express ideas	4.8	4.6
Course materials were helpful	4.0	4.1
I learned a lot in this course	4.4	4.5

- "This has been the best class I've had at UT thus far and I believe it was mostly because of my instructor. She is always willing to help and extremely patient which I deeply appreciated because I'm not usually the brightest in a room. I would recommend this class to anyone and gladly take more courses with her."
- "Megan was an incredible professor. The course itself was challenging but she was

always available in office hours. Megan is very articulate, explains the logic of the material (and steps) well, and is one of the most patient and helpful professors I've had at UT. She's brilliant."

- "This course and your teaching was great! I really enjoyed learning logic and you explained everything quite clearly."
- "Megan was a knowledgeable and helpful professor. She always made time to meet with students and offered help if we were struggling."
- "Megan is an excellent instructor and was very helpful during her office hours."
- "Megan is a great professor overall. Always prepared, ready to teach, and available for extra help."
- "GREAT with answering questions/ being available during office hours– aware that this is often difficult material and was super helpful"

2. *Evaluations as Teaching Assistant*

The chart below documents student evaluations for a selection of courses in which I have acted as Teaching Assistant (TA). Per my institution's policy, students were given an opportunity at the end of each course to anonymously evaluate eight aspects of TA performance and to provide written comments. Evaluations were on a **5-point scale**, with a score of 1 signifying "strongly disagree" and 5 signifying "strongly agree". The chart below documents average scores. All courses listed were taught at UT Austin.

A: Contemporary Moral Problems, Spring 2017

B: Introductory Symbolic Logic, Summer 2016

C: Introduction to Philosophy, Spring 2015

D: Contemporary Moral Problems, Fall 2013

E: Contemporary Moral Problems, Fall 2012

	A	B	C	D	E
TA available for scheduled office hours	4.4	4.8	4.6	4.5	4.6
TA knowledgeable about subject matter	4.8	4.7	5	4.7	4.6
TA interested in subject matter	4.8	4.7	5	4.8	4.5
TA explained material clearly	4.6	4.6	4.4	4.6	4.4
TA was kind and respectful	4.8	4.5	5	4.7	4.6
TA patient with questions	4.7	4.6	5	4.6	4.6
TA receptive to questions	4.6	4.7	5	4.6	4.5
TA gave helpful feedback on assignments	4.3	4.7	4.6	4	4.2

- "As a senior, I have had many TAs. Megan has been my favorite in my time as a student. She was able to explain very complex concepts in a manner that everyone could clearly understand."
- "Respectful, knowledgeable, and easy to talk to."
- "Megan is an extremely knowledgeable and intelligent educator. She is very articulate and should have taught the course herself."
- "She is definitely the most well-spoken TA I have ever had."
- "The TA's form of teaching was extremely effective. Thoroughly clarifying to make

students understand. Excellent mood to teach everyday.”

- “You did an excellent job of having knowledge over the various subject matters over the course of the semester. The presentations were helpful visually and were a great resource for studying since you put them online. It was admirable that you respected people’s views/ opinions in class where we discuss controversial topics, which could lead to divisive and heated arguments, but that didn’t happen.”
- “Sooo fast and effective at grading!”
- “Megan was awesome. She knows the material well and is good at explaining it in ways that are easy to grasp. She’s very patient and seems like she genuinely cares.”
- As good a TA as they come, her feedback on assignments was really nice.”
- “By far one of the best TAs I’ve had in a long time.”
- “She is super intelligent and passionate about what she teaches, and discussions with her during her office hours are immensely helpful. She was a 10/10 TA.”
- “Megan is obviously very intelligent and she always explained the material clearly. She was also good at listening to students’ questions and was able to understand what we were trying to say eve when we didn’t!”

3 Two Course Ideas

What follows are descriptions for two courses I would be thrilled to have the opportunity to teach in the future. The first is intended for a group of lower-level undergraduates from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds; I think it has something to offer to those interested in everything from philosophy, to politics, to computer science. The second could be adapted for upper-level philosophy undergraduates or for a graduate-level seminar.

1. Propaganda: Form and Function

Description

We often feel that we know propaganda when we see it. However, it's harder to give any precise characterization of the phenomenon, and without one we're in danger of not recognizing propaganda in its contemporary forms. This course takes up the challenge of investigating propaganda, both in its famous manifestations in 20th century totalitarian regimes, and in a variety of contemporary states. Drawing on both case studies and theory, we will approach some of the hard ethical and political questions that propaganda raises: Is propaganda always morally wrong, or rather sometimes OK? Does its use necessarily violate the tenets of a liberal democracy? What tools does a liberal democracy have for combatting it? How do new media, like Twitter, and the extensive automation and collection of user information that they enable, change the face of propaganda?

The bulk of the coursework will consist of two papers. The first, due mid-semester, will argue for a position concerning an ethical questions about propaganda brought up in the course. The final paper will be a case study of a particular instance, historical or contemporary, that the student regards as propaganda. This could be a film or poster, a case of "propaganda of the deed," a particular rhetorical device, a speech, an essay, an automation algorithm, or anything else the student can defend as an instance of propaganda. The student's case study will focus on how the form of the propaganda determined its function.

Possible Readings

- Excerpt from Aristotle's *Politics*
- Excerpt from *The Language of the Third Reich*, by Victor Klemperer
- Excerpt from *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, by Hannah Arendt
- Excerpt from *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, by Jacques Ellul
- Excerpt from *How Propaganda Works*, by Jason Stanley

- Excerpt from *Nothing is True and Everything is Possible: The Surreal Heart of the New Russia*, by Peter Pomerantsev
- Excerpt from *Manufacturing Consent*, by Edward S. Herman & Noam Chomsky
- Excerpt from *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars From 4Chan And Tumblr To Trump And The Alt-Right*, by Angela Nagle
- Feinberg, Matthew & Willer, Robb. (2015). From Gulf to Bridge: When Do Moral Arguments Facilitate Political Influence? *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin*. 41.

2. On Relevance

Description

This course takes up a question of interest to logicians, linguists, philosophers of language, formal epistemologists and others: what in the world is *relevance*? While we will draw on readings from outside philosophy, the central project of the course is the distinctively philosophical one of clarifying the nature of the phenomenon. While we're at it, we'll try to make some sense of how the diverse inquiries into the nature of relevance relate to one another.

Linguists and philosophers of language have plenty of reasons to care about the phenomenon of relevance. Within the branch of linguistic inquiry called pragmatics, it's generally accepted that natural language users figure out what's meant by an ambiguous utterance, or pick up on a speaker's less-than-explicit implications, by making inferences about what kind of contribution would be *relevant* in the context. Those who study semantics have often argued that the meanings of some terms change from context to context, and said that what determines the meaning of such a term at a given context has to do with which objects or considerations are "relevant" then and there. And some logicians, irked by the way that classical logic allows for the validity of arguments whose premises and conclusion are "irrelevant" to one another, have invented their own logics tailored aiming to address these issues.

In these regions of the logic and philosophy-of-language literature, as well as in others, the notion of relevance plays a crucial role. We'll be interested in asking whether all those thinkers making use of the notion of relevance have the same phenomenon in mind, and in how that phenomenon might be precisified in either logics or formal semantics and pragmatics.

Possible Readings

- Excerpt from *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* By Sperber & Wilson

- *Logic and Conversation*, by Paul Grice
- Excerpt from *Logics of Conversation*, by Nicholas Asher and Alex Lascarides
- Excerpt from *The Interactive Stance*, by Jonathan Ginzburg
- Bar-Hillel, Y. & Carnap, R. 1953. Semantic Information. In Proceedings of the Symposium on Applications of Communication Theory. Butterworth Scientific Publications, London.
- Excerpt from *Entailment: The Logic of Relevance and Necessity*, by Anderson & Belnap
- Roberts, C. 2012. Information Structure: Towards an integrated formal theory of pragmatics. *Semantics and Pragmatics*, 5:6, 1-69.
- Excerpt(s) from *Insensitive Semantics: A Defense of Semantic Minimalism and Speech Act Pluralism*, Cappelen & Lepore.

4 Sample Syllabus: *Contemporary Moral Problems*

Required Text: Coursepack, available at the University Bookstore.

Course Overview:

“How should I live?” is a question to which no one can be indifferent. All of us have decisions to make about our individual actions and also, perhaps even more importantly, about the collective actions—the policy regimes and cultural habits—we advocate for or rally against. In this course we explore questions clustered around three important moral issues of our time. These questions will include the following:

What is the purpose of punishment? Does the death penalty ever serve this purpose? What alternatives are there to the American penal system?

When is the state permitted, and when is it obligated, to place limits on individual choices about reproduction? In particular, is abortion morally permissible? What about gestational surrogacy? And whatever the moral status of these actions, what should their legal status be?

Is it ever alright to raise and kill animals for human consumption? What about for laboratory experimentation? And if animals are eligible for some kinds of ethical consideration, what is this eligibility based on?

Units:

- Punishment and the American Justice System
- Reproductive Health and Control
- Animal Ethics
- Students’ choice topic - to be voted upon in class. Will be discussed in last 3 normal lectures.

Core Competencies:

- learning to analyze, criticize and construct arguments
- gaining an understanding of concepts key to the discipline of normative ethics
- gaining empirical background relevant to the applied ethical issues we consider

Grade Scale

I reserve the right to lower grade cutoffs for the purposes of determining final letter grades, but will never raise them.

Range	Letter Grade
93 ≤	A
90-92.9	A-
87-89.9	B+
83-86.9	B
80-82.9	B-
77-79.9	C+
73-76.9	C
70-72.9	C-
67-69.9	D+
63-66.9	D
60-62.9	D-
<60	F

Grade Breakdown:

- 20% Participation and Attendance
- 36% Argument analyses
- 20% Midterm Exam
- 30% Final Exam

Participation and Attendance

Attendance for this course makes up part of your grade. I insist on attendance because a crucial aspect of philosophizing generally, and perhaps of ethical deliberation in particular, is engagement with others' opinions. Your first absence will result in no deductions, but after that you will receive deductions for every unexcused day that you miss. Excuses must be sent to me by e-mail before class begins. Keep in mind that when you don't show up, you're losing attendance points and participation points at the same time.

The primary way in which you will gain participation points is by speaking up in class and participating in in-class exercises. Enrollment this semester is relatively low, which confers on us a privilege associated with a small class: there is plenty of time for everyone to be heard. I particularly like to see students engaging with one another, and making comments that show that they've thought about their readings. I will be keeping notes concerning student participation, so you can be sure that your level of class activity will

not go unnoticed. You will also help your participation grade by coming to chat with me about the material in my office hours.

Argument Analyses

At six points throughout the semester you will hand in a written assignment of approximately 300 words in which you analyze an assigned argument. Each analysis is worth 6% of your grade. Well in advance of the deadlines, I will post a quotation (or set of quotations) from one of your future readings on Canvas. The quotation(s) posted will contain a summary of one of the author's main arguments. Your analysis will 1) reconstruct this argument in Standard Form, 2) give an objection to the argument based on the kind of analytic procedures we will learn in class, and 3) give one possible response to the objection. I will explain how to complete these assignments in class. Step-by-step instructions are also available in the *How to Analyze an Argument* handout under Files, on Canvas.

Each argument analysis is due on Canvas by 12pm on the day that we will discuss the reading from which the argument is drawn in class. Except under extraordinary circumstances, I cannot accept argument analyses handed in after we have begun to discuss the argument in class. This is because these assignments are designed to test your ability to make sense of an argument on your own.

Exams

The midterm will consist of short answer questions testing for factual recall and argumentation skills. It will cover everything covered to that date.

The final is cumulative, though with an emphasis on material covered since the midterm. It will consist of some short answer questions testing for factual recall and argumentation skills as well as an essay question.

Makeup Policy

I will permit makeups only for medical reasons, jury duty, family emergencies, some related emergency, or in observance of a religious holiday (for more information see: http://www.utexas.edu/provost/policies/religious_holidays/). If such a conflict arises, you must let me know as soon as possible so that we can make arrangements for you to make up the relevant assignment. Documentation for all other excuses will be required.

Academic Integrity

Absolutely no plagiarism will be tolerated. If you are found to have plagiarized any part of any assignment you will receive a zero for that assignment, and be reported to the university's disciplinary body.

Please note that ignorance of what constitutes plagiarism is not an excuse. For the Dean's official policy on academic integrity, please see http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php

Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability, I want to make sure you get the accommodations you need. Please contact Services for Students with Disabilities and inform me of any pertinent information early on in the semester.

Information about disability services is located at <http://www.utexas.edu/disability/>

Schedule

What follows is a tentative schedule of readings and assignments for the semester. Any changes will be announced well in advance. All readings will be from the coursepack or available on Canvas.

Date	Readings and Coursework
01.20	Introduction No readings
01.22	An intro to Argumentation No readings
01.25	<i>The Practice of Asking Ethical Questions</i>
01.27	<i>The Practice of Asking Ethical Questions</i> , Continued
01.29	Intro to Unit 1: Punishment and the American Justice System excerpt from <i>Texas Tough</i> , Robert Perkinson; excerpt from <i>The New Jim Crow</i> , Michelle Alexander. Optional, <i>The Black Family in the Age of Mass Incarceration</i> , Ta-Nehisi Coates
02.01	Continued
02.03	Argument Analysis 1 due Excerpt from <i>The Rationale of Punishment</i> , Jeremy Bentham
02.05	Excerpt from <i>The Moral Worth of Retribution</i> , Michael S. Moore
02.08	Excerpt from <i>Are Prisons Obsolete?</i> , Angela Davis. Optional: excerpt from <i>Discipline and Punish</i> , Michel Foucault
02.10	<i>The Radical Humaneness of Norway's Halden Prison</i> , Jessica Benko; <i>Restorative Justice Circles: An Exploratory Study</i> , Robert B. Coates. Optional: <i>Feminist engagement with restorative justice</i> , Kathleen Daly.
02.12	Continued
02.15	excerpt from Majority and Dissenting opinions in <i>Gregg v. Georgia</i>
02.17	<i>A Life for a Life</i> , Igor Primoratz
02.19	Argument Analysis 2 due

	<i>Deterrence and the Death Penalty</i> , Louis P. Pojman; <i>Common Sense, the Deterrent Effect of the Death Penalty, and the Best Bet Argument</i> , Jeffrey Reiman
02.22	Catch up and Review
02.24	Intro to Unit 2: Reproductive Health and Control Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <i>Privacy and Medicine</i> , 5.1-5.3
02.26	Majority Opinion in <i>Roe v. Wade</i>
02.29	Excerpts from Opinion in <i>Planned Parenthood v. Casey</i>
03.02	<i>On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion</i> , Mary Anne Warren
03.04	<i>Why Abortion is Immoral</i> , Don Marquis
03.07	Argument Analysis 3 due <i>A Defense of Abortion</i> , Judith Jarvis Thompson
03.09	Catch-up and Midterm Review
03.11	Midterm
03.14	Spring Break!!!
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03.18	
03.21	<i>The Wrong of Abortion</i> , Patrick Lee and Robert P. George
03.23	Argument Analysis 4 due <i>Taking Conscience Seriously</i> , Elizabeth Sepper
03.25	Continued
03.28	Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <i>Justice and Access to Health Care</i>
03.30	<i>Assisted Reproduction and Distributive Justice</i> , Vida Panitch
04.01	Guest Lecture and Animal Ethics preview <i>Puppies, Pigs, and People: Eating Meat and Marginal Cases</i> , Alastair Norcross
04.04	<i>Is There a Right to Surrogacy</i> , Christine Straehle
04.06	Excerpt from <i>Our Bodies, Our Crimes: The Policing of Women's Reproduction in America</i> , Jeanne Flavin; excerpt from <i>Arrests of and Forced Interventions on Pregnant Women in the United States, 1973-2005: Implications for Women's Legal Status and Public Health</i> , Lynn M. Paltrow and Jeanne Flavin
04.08	Catch-up and Review
04.11	Intro to Unit 3: Animal Ethics Argument Analysis 5 due excerpt from <i>Animal Liberation</i> , Peter Singer
04.13	Excerpt from <i>The Case for Animal Rights</i> , Tom Regan
04.15	Continued
04.18	<i>'Animals Do it Too': The Franklin Defence of Meat-Eating</i> , Elizabeth Telfer
04.20	Argument Analysis 6 due

	<i>Human Diets and the Illogic of the Larder</i> , Gaverick Matheny and Kai M. A. Chan
04.22	Continued
04.25	Excerpt from <i>Rattling the Cage</i> , Steven Wise; excerpt from <i>Introduction to Animal Rights: You child or the dog?</i> , Gary L. Francione
04.27	<i>Animal Rights and Feminist Theory</i> , Josephine Donovan
04.29	Student's choice topic Reading TBA
05.02	Student's choice topic continued Reading TBA
05.04	Student's choice topic continued Reading TBA
05.06	Catch-up and Review for Final No new readings

Helpful Resources

- Quizlet: Your textbook's glossary has definitions of many important terms perfect for use in making flashcards. Some prefer paper flashcards, but Quizlet is a great way to make digital ones. <https://quizlet.com/>
- The Logic Cafe: An online intro to basic concepts in logic (e.g. validity, soundness, and putting arguments in standard form), complete with exercises. Certain parts of Chapter 1 are all that are relevant to our work in this course, so don't be intimidated by all the other material. <http://thelogiccafe.net/PLI/>
- The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: There are many theoretical questions about the nature of morality and moral reasoning that we don't have time to address in this course. If you're curious about any of these issues, the SEP is a great reference tool, as all entries are written by experts in the field. <http://plato.stanford.edu/>
- The University Writing Center: This course doesn't have a writing flag, and the writing assignments are brief. However, mechanical errors can make it hard for the person grading your assignment to determine whether you are adequately grasping the material, and so can still harm you. It is therefore very much in your own interest to rigorously proofread your own assignments before handing them in. If you have a hard time identifying mechanical errors by yourself, The University Writing Center can help, and you can easily make an appointment online. <http://uwc.utexas.edu/>
- Canvas Files: These will include a step-by-step guide to analyzing arguments, and review sheets for the midterm and final (to be posted closer to exam dates).

- Your knowledgeable and enthusiastic instructor: Just sayin'... In my experience, students who visit their TAs and instructors in office hours consistently do better in their courses. Whether you are struggling with an aspect of the course, or are looking for extra enrichment (e.g. further reading suggestions or a chance to discuss the relevance of class topics to events in the news) I'm ALWAYS happy to chat with you. If you can't make my regular office hours, please don't let this be an excuse not to come see me; I'm more than happy to make appointments at alternative times. And if you are struggling in any way, reach out early and often so I can make sure you get the help you need.