Pedagogy Statement Gounoue WIP

What do I want students to take away from my classes? This question guides my approach to teaching. Throughout their studies, students of philosophy encounter and engage with a variety of problems, theories and approaches. In order to successfully navigate a plurality of authors and areas, I regard the following skills as indispensable: critical reading and thinking, writing, and the ability to voice your thoughts and question others.

Centering the acquisition of skills not only allows students from diverse (disciplinary) backgrounds to come as they are, without requiring them to possess any specific knowledge prior to entering my philosophy classroom. These skills will also be helpful to students no matter where their academic and/or intellectual paths may leads them. Such a flexibility seems crucial in a time where interdisciplinary philosophy programs are gaining in popularity, and where taking classes in different fields is encouraged.

But how is a skill acquired and how does one go about teaching it? My answer is repeated practice. This translates into my approach to teaching through stumbling blocks and group works. What I call stumbling blocks are moments of irritation, insight, criticism or unclarity that they come across in their reading, moments that make them pause and think for a second. I ask my students to stay with with these moments for a little before continuing their reading, encouraging them to sit with their thoughts and further explore them. While this, at first, bears the risk that students won't make it through the whole text, it allows them to explore their own thinking and gain confidence in it, which I highly value. Around the insights and questions from their stumbling blocks I construct group works. These smaller, more private settings allow students to exchange their thoughts and critically engage with each other. If students feel comfortable speaking in group discussions, this confidence will eventually translate into more self-assured participation in class discussions.

My group works not only allow students to practice critical reading, thinking and speaking, but also writing: While there is a move towards more creative and multi-media projects in philosophy, there is a way of writing distinct to philosophy that can initially be hard to access. For that matter, I constructed a group work assignment (see

attached below) that enables students to practice how to structure a philosophy paper. Besides coming up with a thesis and arguments, the students were asked to make explicit what it is they are doing. Such a self-reflective awareness helps students to keep themselves in check: did they really create the project they initially set out to pursue? Did they provide strong arguments and counter arguments? Would their project stay within or go beyond the limitations of a final paper?

Being an educator for me implies a responsibility for and responsiveness to my students. This means that I regularly check in with students to hear their perspectives on the class: Can they follow the speed of the class? Do they regard the amount of reading as appropriate? Are there specific topics they want to talk about or skills they want to further practice? Responding to their needs and desires for me lies at the center of what it means to be a teacher. After all, to be responsible for their progress and success requires first and foremost to care.

Group Work March 28th - Carson & Essay Structuring

Goal: To practice essay-structuring and become more reflective about what you are doing in your written projects.

Task: In groups, select one stumbling block. Each stumbling block serves as a prompt based on which you are asked to come up with a thesis for a potential paper. Then question yourself: what do we need to do in order to make this point? Come up with at least two sections and think about what each section is doing.[1] Is it explanatory or illustrating a problem/idea? Is it providing an argument? What kind of argument? In favor of a position, strengthening it? Or challenging/ attacking/criticizing? Make sure that both sections are connected, with the latter ideally being a response to the former (overcoming a limitation you explored, offering an alternative, criticizing the previous section).

Do: Create a structure/table of contents for your hypothetical paper. Use indentation to visualize what sub-points you address in each section. Add comments/meta-remarks if you want, e.g. *after we illustrate this problem with this example we created, we want to use Concept X in this section to theorize and further explore the problem*. Write down thoughts, none of this needs to be polished!

Do not: Come up with fully worked out arguments. Worry about whether your content is 100% perfect/right/thought through. While not losing site of the book, don't venture too far into the level of content. This exercise is about structure and method!

Evaluation: At the end of the group work, please submit to me your structures,

[1] Feel free to use more sections if needed. Just make sure it's not all contained in one!

electronically or on paper. Make sure each group member is listed. In our next class you will receive feedback on your outlines and there will be room to discuss problems/challenges/questions that came up while working on it.

Example:

Introduction

Context: Whatever happens to/in the environment has an effect on all humans. All humans, in turn, have an effect on the environment. Humans can be grouped in different actors with different influence/power, e.g. private individuals/civilians, companies, politicians, scientists etc.
Thesis: Civilians/private individuals have the main responsibility for environmental change/activism

While we want to acknowledge that there are many actors involved, we only want to focus on these two groups, the scientists and private individuals, for x, y, z reason.

1 The (lack of) responsibility of Scientists

In order to show that Civilians have the main responsibility, we need to rule out that any of the other groups has more responsibility!

> Scientists don't have the main responsibility!
→ Science is disinterested
→ They are mere tools and don't decide what their research is supposed to be used for
⇒ They are not responsible for what their research is put to use, hence it is not their responsibility to facilitate change if their research is abused and has negative effects on the environment

2 Civilians have the main responsibility

After ruling out the responsibility of other groups, we need to actually show that Civilians are not only responsible, but also that they have much more responsibility than the other groups!

! How do we understand "Civilian/Private person?" *We need to make clear what we mean with these terms so that we can properly distinguish this group from others! While thinking about it, we also noticed that scientists at the end of the day are still private individuals once they leave the lab. We need to be careful about this!*
> Civilians are most effected by the environment
→ if they feel bothered, they should do something about it

> Civilians, precisely because they don't represent an institution or cooperation can act according to their own, self-chosen interests and don't have to subsume them under the interests of a company/cooperation/state etc.

> Through voting they decide who is in power

→ They are responsible for choosing leaders that act in their and nature's best interests

Conclusion

> need to recollect what we did

> did we actually argue for and justified our thesis?

Is our paper convincing? Are our arguments strong? Why, why not? What makes them weak, what would make them stronger?

> [concluding remarks] Sure, we only looked at 2 groups of actors, but we generally think that the argument holds true across all groups. We do see some challenges, but addressing them would go beyond the scope of this paper.

Science & Facts

How are we to relate to science if the same science that approves of something as beneficial, fails to see its dangers? Or only sees them once the harm is done? Which scientists can we trust and based on what? What security mechanisms do we have to ensure that scientific research is employed in our best interests? If we want a cautious science that spends a lot of time on making sure the results are solid, are we then jeopardizing immediate/quick action in the face of a problem?

Man's interest in nature

Different people have different interests in nature: Some want to use it for profit, some want to use it for recreation (outdoor activities, ranging from a walk in the forest, to hunting, to scuba-diving), some want to preserve and live in tune with it. Out of these groups, does one have a "right" to nature? What does right here mean and consist in? What responsibilities and obligations come along with it?

Man's involvement in saving nature

Man's actions have had detrimental impact on nature. Nature has been fighting back and bounced back from many of man's interventions. Many scientists believe that we are approaching a tipping point where we run the risk of destroying the fabric of nature if we continue down our current path. In order to preserve or save nature, should man be completely stopped from interfering with it on large scale levels? E.g. should we just fully stop the use of pesticides and let nature do its thing, even at the risk of making some financial/material losses? Or should we have more control over what is done to nature, e.g. through a committee that has to assess and sanction any large scale action, having nature's best interests in mind?