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Diversity in Teaching and in the Profession

Being conscious about how I can help create a better, more inclusive atmosphere in the world is important to me. Philosophy doesn't happen in a vacuum; we have to at least acknowledge the realities beyond the academy (and even within it) that constrain or distort the learning and practice of philosophy. In my work, this means doing what I can both as an educator for my students and as a colleague for my academic peers.

In the classroom, I try to be inclusive both through how I teach and in what I teach. Unfortunately, philosophy is often taught with metaphors of combat, where we use the power of arguments until our opponents submit. I think this way of conceiving of philosophy is off-putting. It does real damage to our attempts to make philosophy a more diversified, accepting environment, and I also think that this is a terrible way methodologically to think about how we make progress in philosophy. We do better when we work together to try to figure out the right view, the biggest problems for it, and how to answer those problems. Seeing how subtle the issues can be and how there always seems to be a rebuttal is where I think all the fun of philosophy resides. Teaching students to relish out-arguing one another only perpetuates an attitude of arrogance and privilege. So, while it is a virtue to be able to stand up for yourself and make your case, and I certainly encourage class participation, I try to be mindful of who is contributing, who is not contributing, and why.

When creating a class, I put thought into both the philosophers being read and the topics covered. I don't think it's an appropriate excuse to shrug and say that there just aren't enough important works by non-white males to assign for reading. We do have an obligation to teach the material to the best of our ability, and in many cases the students need to read the classic texts. That being said, we can't ignore the history of who decides what's classic, and there is an unarguable plethora of materials that are pedagogically just as good and developed by diverse philosophers. Besides, one of the most important things I want students to learn is that *they themselves* could make big contributions to these fields (if they put in the time needed to master them). A good way to signal that is to show people like them that have already contributed.

Where appropriate, I also try to include in the content of my classes some work that intersects with the field being taught and questions/issues surrounding diversity. For example, in an introductory metaphysics class, while there will be weeks where we need to discuss endurance and personal identity, I think it is also appropriate (and interesting to the students) to introduce topics in the metaphysics of race and gender. As another example, on a class of free will and responsibility, I would include a section on the criminal justice system, and how our view of responsibility may influence our intuitions concerning it. My class, "Are Corporations People?" even offers the opportunity of considering what constitutes a corporate or collective apology for wrongs done by groups, and whether we can be satisfied by them.

In terms of fostering diversity in the profession of philosophy, I do this by practicing philosophy with as little pretense as possible. Philosophers, more than those working in other fields, often fetishize genius, or accede to a kind of awkward and haughty attitude. At best, this attitude makes those who don't understand feel dumb, unable to contribute, or as imposters. In contrast, I always try to be maximally transparent about the nature of my research. I only resort to formal tools when it is necessary to make a point (or to make it even more clearly), and I take myself to be responsible for being clear enough for other philosophers and students to understand my thoughts. I trust that my students and colleagues are smart and interested enough to understand just about anything if it is explained well and with the air of excitement that philosophy deserves.