Teaching Dossier
Oded Na'aman, Stanford University

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Teaching Statement

Although demanding in its methodology, philosophy can engage students’ deepest concerns. Indeed, a good philosophy class can reveal concerns students had not even realized they have. Philosophy has this capacity because basic philosophical questions are questions that every person encounters in the course of his or her everyday life. Nevertheless, the abstractness and generality of philosophy can make it seem remote or vague. Students may find philosophy intimidating or irrelevant. The primary challenge of teaching philosophy well, as I see it, is to present and discuss its grandiose questions accurately, but in a way that makes apparent their bearing on students’ lives.

Of course, not everyone is, or need be, a philosopher. But the study of philosophy can enable anyone to be more independent in his or her thinking and more faithful to his or her own concerns. A philosophy class should therefore aim to inspire and equip all students. Those who do not wish to make philosophy their main concern may still recognize the importance and relevance of philosophy to their own lives and pursuits, while those who are gripped by philosophy should be given the means, and be encouraged, to delve into it even deeper.

In my own teaching, I pursue these goals in a number of different ways. First, I find that expressing one’s excitement and passion for the topic taught is the most effective way to elicit students’ engagement. Thus, in addition to maintaining a general enthusiasm throughout the course, I take care, at each meeting, to explain what I find most important about the ideas discussed and ask students how the topic might bear on their own projects and concerns. For instance, in a class about moral complicity I had asked senior students in college to reflect on how the questions discussed might be relevant to their future professional pursuits: would they take a high-paying job that is morally questionable? What is the point of declining such a job offer if another person would take your place? Along these lines, I was especially pleased to read this student feedback: “His sections were incredibly fun: we’d always find ways to apply even the most theoretical and abstract concepts to real life and trigger discussions.”

Second, students cannot understand why a philosophical topic or debate is important if they do not understand the main theses and arguments. My emphasis on the significance of the material is therefore intertwined with substantive explanations of the material. For instance, I begin every class in considering where we are in the overarching scheme of the course and end every class with a clear statement of the main issues
discussed and of what hangs on them. In addition, I find that weekly handouts help students understand the structure of the arguments discussed and facilitate students’ concentration in lecture and discussion. Selection of course materials and content is also important to insure understanding of the material. When the lecturer moves too quickly between arguments, the students are likely to lose the thread of the discussion and with it their interest. I therefore generally prefer to cover less ground more thoroughly with the aim of fostering a deep understanding. I also strive to aid student comprehension by being accessible outside of class, not only because discussions in office hours can be helpful to students, but also because they provide me with useful information about what students are and are not understanding.

Third, logistical concerns often distract students from the material taught in class. I try to be as clear as possible with regard to my expectations and the general course requirements, as well as the demands of particular assignments. I also explain the manner in which classes are to prepare the students for the final exam or paper. It is crucial that the students have a clear grasp of what they need to do in order to complete the course successfully. Thus, I wish for my students to be inspired by the lecture and discussion in class, but I also want them to succeed in their studies. For the same reason, I provide constant, specific feedback on students’ work and participation in class. This allows students to assess their own progress. My hope is that even those students who do not leave my courses with a passion for philosophy still leave with a sense of satisfaction from seeing improvement in their own mastery of the material. The following student comments on my instruction reflect the experience I strive to offer all my students:

At first, I was pretty nervous about taking this class since I’ve never taken a philosophy class before, but you did an incredible job breaking down the complex readings. It is clear that you are passionate about teaching and the topics we discussed, which made lectures that much more captivating. Your enthusiasm is contagious. It was an absolute pleasure to be one of your students.

Incredibly engaging. Very clear about expectations. Willing to listen to the views of all students and rearticulate major points. Thorough yet concise explanations of concepts. Responsive outside of section, in one-on-one setting and over email. A fantastic section.

It is a distinctive feature of philosophy that its age-old questions are accompanied by a sense of urgency: they threaten to pull the rug out from underneath us. Perhaps, to employ the metaphor more accurately, philosophical quandaries threaten to pull a rug we haven’t even realized we’re standing on. I wish for my students to experience and confront this philosophical sense of urgency; I wish to help them address it, rather than dismiss it; and I wish for them to live with it.

Selected Teaching Evaluations

Lecturer for PHIL72/EHICSOC185/POLISCI134: Contemporary Moral Problems
Winter 2016, Stanford University

1. Amazing amazing class that will blow your mind.
2. Oded is a wonderful professor, very funny, made class super interesting.
3. It was my first philosophy class and it made wish I had more time to take more
4. Definitely take it if you want an introduction to really relevant philosophy. Its immediately useful knowledge to put into use.
5. thanks oded! appreciated the effort you put into this course. i feel like a more well-rounded person

6. What skills or knowledge did you learn or improve?
   How to think deliberately about moral problems. I think this class could be called "How to Have a Conscience". It doesn't force you to take a certain side, but it makes you at least think about the problems.

7. Oded did a great job remaining interactive and balancing our time in class in order to foster conversation but also providing us with his lecture and an explanation of the text.

8. It's super interesting! Make sure to meet with the prof as often as you can. Every meeting I had was helpful and made the material even more interesting! (plus it's already pretty interesting)

9. Great course! Glad I took it.

10. I learned about a ton of new moral questions to ponder.

11. It was very engaging and relatable, giving me a lot to think about topics which I had encountered before but hadn't considered in great detail.

12. I really enjoyed the class and am very glad that I made the decision to take it!

13. Excellent class. Professor Naaman is dynamic and fosters dialogue with students.
   Issues are topical and he provides a strong structure and appropriate material that makes you think harder about your values and positions on what's going on society.


15. increased ability to evaluate current societal issues against moral and ethical considerations. challenged me to reevaluate my own positions.

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Section leader for PHIL 178q: Equality and Liberty
Spring 2012, Harvard University

1. Oded did a great job of paying personalized attention to the students- he was very accessible outside of class to give (very helpful!) advice on papers and the reading assignments, and did a great job of facilitating discussions that were actually helpful to understanding the material.

   [Evaluate the course overall.: 4 (very good)]
   [Evaluate your Section Leader overall.: 5 (excellent)]

2. Oded always came to section prepared and he did an excellent job leading discussions. As already mentioned, he was good at helping students clarify their thoughts (both in class and with his paper comments, which were extensive). He was also friendly, which is a plus.

   [Evaluate the course overall.: 5 (excellent)]
   [Evaluate your Section Leader overall.: 5 (excellent)]

3. Oded was a nice presence in section, giving some amusing comments on philosophy in general, while providing good connections and overviews of the course readings and lectures. Very fast in getting assignments back considering the decently large class size for one section leader. Well done!

   [Evaluate the course overall.: 3 (good)]
   [Evaluate your Section Leader overall.: 4 (very good)]

4. Oded is a very thoughtful TF - you can tell he really cares about his students. He does a great job of encouraging students to participate.

   [Evaluate the course overall.: 4 (very good)]
   [Evaluate your Section Leader overall.: 4 (very good)]
5. PHENOMENAL! Oded was a fantastic TF. He was so enthusiastic and helpful. He has a great teaching style and clear explanations. He also really has some great insight into philosophy that helped really bring about great discussions.

Section leader, ETH-REASON 13: Self, Freedom, and Existence
Fall 2011, Harvard University

1. He really encouraged us to speak and debate...it was much more Socratic than all my other classes. He built an environment really conducive to productive discussion...I definitely looked forward to coming to section every week.

2. Oded is the best TF I have ever had. He is very responsible, thoughtful, gives great feedback and is always available keen to help out. His sections were incredibly fun: we’d always find ways to apply even the most theoretical and abstract concepts to real life and trigger discussions. I wish sections were longer, they were always really fun.

Section leader for ETH-REASON 13: Self, Freedom, and Existence
Fall 2011, Harvard University

1. I thought section was great. Breaking down all of the ideas in the readings was extremely useful. I think the course could be taught completely through section. One week, I learned more in one section than I did in three lectures.

Section leader for ETH-REASON 13: Self, Freedom, and Existence
Fall 2011, Harvard University

1. Awesome section leader! Sometimes belabored simple points but always deepened understanding of the course material.
Section leader for ETH-REASON 11: Human Rights: A Philosophical Introduction
Spring 2011, Harvard University

1. Clarified information very well, I always felt like I knew more walking out of section.
2. [Evaluate the course overall.: 4 (very good)] [Evaluate your Section Leader overall.: 4 (very good)]
3. Oded facilitated discussion and summarized arguments well
4. [Evaluate the course overall.: 4 (very good)] [Evaluate your Section Leader overall.: 5 (excellent)]
5. Discussions in sections sometimes seemed to get stuck on tangents and minor points, but overall section was very helpful for asking questions and addressing lingering issues from the lectures and readings. Oded has a good appreciation of the complexity and nuance of human rights and works hard to share that with the class.
6. [Evaluate the course overall.: 4 (very good)] [Evaluate your Section Leader overall.: 4 (very good)]
7. Oded was a personable and good section leader, in giving and receiving feedback and illuminating the philosophy.
8. [Evaluate the course overall.: 3 (good)] [Evaluate your Section Leader overall.: 4 (very good)]
9. Oded did a great job this semester. I liked the analogies he used to help us think about the issues in more tangible ways (though sometimes I found the connection a little confusing). Overall, though, I thought he was a great TF.
10. [Evaluate the course overall.: 4 (very good)] [Evaluate your Section Leader overall.: 5 (excellent)]
11. I can tell Oded really grew into his position as TF throughout the semester. He was a bit nervous at the beginning but as he got more comfortable, he let his great teaching skills and engagement with students show. By the end of the semester, I realized how much I had learned from him. He has a strong grasp on the material and tries to think of interesting examples to try to elucidate the philosophy. He's very approachable and made time to meet and talk over the content, which was very helpful.
12. [Evaluate the course overall.: 5 (excellent)] [Evaluate your Section Leader overall.: 5 (excellent)]
Past Syllabus
Contemporary Moral Problems (4/5 units)
Philosophy 72, Ethics in Society 185M, Political Science 134P
Winter 2016
Tuesday/Thursday 10:30AM-11:50AM in building 60, room 120

Instructor: Oded Na’aman
E-Mail: onaaman@stanford.edu
Office: Law School (Crown Quadrangle), Room 375
Office Hours: Thursdays 3:00-4:00 and by appointment

Teaching Assistant: Hyoung Sung Kim hyoungsk@stanford.edu

Course Description
This course considers some of the moral problems encountered on campus and elsewhere in our lives as citizens and individuals. We will begin with questions that pertain to our own classroom and gradually broaden our scope to include, eventually, questions about terrorism and torture. The primary aims of the course are to encourage students to recognize and address moral questions as they appear in the concrete messiness of life and to help students develop the skills necessary to do this. Questions to be considered include: What would make this a good class and is this very question a moral one? What is education and who is entitled to it? What is the value of equality on campus and beyond? What is institutional discrimination? Are Stanford athletes being exploited? What should count as sexual harassment and is it properly captured by Stanford sexual harassment policies? Should abortions be offered by the Stanford Division of Family Planning? Is it permissible to kill animals for the purpose of scientific experimentation? Should Stanford divest from coal companies? Ought the City of San Francisco allow the homeless to reside in its streets? Who has the standing to condemn acts of terror and how do such acts compare to torture?

Course Goals
The goal of this course is not merely to read philosophy, but to do philosophy. Toward that end, in each class meeting we will critically evaluate the arguments made in the readings, identify the tools philosophers use to make those arguments, and, ideally, use these tools to make and assess our own arguments. By the end of the quarter, students should be able to:

i. Reconstruct and evaluate arguments for controversial moral conclusions.
ii. Articulate shared presuppositions of conflicting views about one and the same moral problem.
iii. Distinguish and move back and forth between academic and literary modes of philosophizing.
iv. Tell the difference between an illuminating disagreement and a merely competitive one.
v. Communicate nuanced answers to the questions that drive this course.

Assignments and Grading
Paper #1 (≈5 pages): Due January 25th (20% of course grade) Paper #2 (≈5 pages): Due February 15th (30% of course grade) Paper #3 (≈10-12 pages): Due March 14th (40% of course grade) Informed, Respectful, and Productive Participation* (10% of course grade)
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*Participation will be evaluated on the following guidelines, which stress the quality rather than the quantity of contributions.

A range (A+, A, A-): The student is highly motivated and engaged. S/he has clearly thought about the material in advance of class—including the questions on the syllabus—and has substantive and thoughtful questions and ideas. S/he listens and responds respectfully to other students’ contributions.

B range (B+, B, B-): The student participates consistently and comes to class prepared. S/he listens and responds respectfully to other students’ contributions.

C range (C+, C, C-): The student is prepared for class and participates on occasion, but her/his contributions do not advance the discussion. S/he is respectful to other students.

Students who fail to meet this minimal set of criteria will receive a “D” or lower.

Attendance in lectures is mandatory. Failure to attend lectures will lead to a lower participation grade.

**Topics and Readings**

**Week 1: Education and Classroom Ethics**

**Tuesday, January 5.** What would make this a good class and is this very question a moral one?
- No readings.

**Thursday, January 7.** How should this class be conducted?

**Week 2: Equality in Education and Beyond**

**Tuesday, January 12.** Who is admitted to Stanford?

**Thursday, January 14.** Equality beyond education
Week 3: Discrimination

**Tuesday, January 19.** Institutional discrimination

- Stanford University Nondiscrimination Policy
  [https://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/registrar/policies/nondiscrimination](https://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/registrar/policies/nondiscrimination)

**Thursday, January 21.** Resistance and disobedience to unjust institutions


Week 4: Exploitation

*First paper due by 12PM Monday, Jan. 25.*

**Tuesday, January 26.** Exploitation of college athletes

- Alan Wertheimer, “The Exploitation of Student Athletes,” in his *Exploitation*, pp. 3 - 4, 10 - 12, 77 - 95,

**Thursday, January 28.** Exploitation and justice


Week 5: Sexual Harassment

**Tuesday, February 2.** What counts as sexual harassment?

- Overview of Stanford Policies on Sexual Harassment. [https://harass.stanford.edu/be-informed/overview-stanford-policies](https://harass.stanford.edu/be-informed/overview-stanford-policies)
Thursday, February 4. What is sexual harassment?


Week 6: Abortion

**Tuesday, February 9.** Abortion and regret

- Amelia Bonow, “My abortion made me happy,” *Salon.* Available online: [http://www.salon.com/2015/09/22/my_abortion_made_me_happy_the_story_that_started_the_shoutyourabortion_movement/](http://www.salon.com/2015/09/22/my_abortion_made_me_happy_the_story_that_started_the_shoutyourabortion_movement/)

**Thursday, February 11.** Abortion and wrongness


Week 7: Animals

**Second paper due by 12PM Monday, Feb. 15.**

**Tuesday, February 16.** Using animals

- The APLAC’s Mission. [https://labanimals.stanford.edu/](https://labanimals.stanford.edu/)

**Thursday, February 18.** Valuing animals


Week 8: The Environment
Tuesday, February 23. Should Stanford divest from fossil fuel companies?


February 25. Why value the environment and how?


Week 9: Homelessness

March 1. Do the homeless have a right to lie on the sidewalk?


March 3. Homelessness and freedom


Week 10: Terrorism and Torture

March 8. Who may condemn an act of terrorism?


March 10. How does terrorism compare to torture?


*Third paper due by 12PM Monday, March 14.*

**Course Information and Policies**

**Readings:** All of the readings for the course are posted in the Resources section of the course’s Canvas site. You should read the material *before* the lectures in which it will be discussed. At the end of each Thursday lecture I will let you know what will be covered in the next week and how to approach the readings. **Important note:** Tuesday readings will usually be less theoretical and easier to get through while Thursday readings will be more academic, abstract, and generally more demanding. I urge you to begin reading for Thursday over the weekend.
Many take for granted that we should pay for our mistakes and our crimes: we should regret them and be punished for them. But what is the justification for adding anguish to the sorrow we have already brought about in our folly? This is the question taken up in this seminar. In particular, we will ask: Why regret actions that cannot be undone and why punish criminals for crimes that can no longer be averted? Contemporary philosophers tend to treat punishment and regret differently. While many believe that regret is made appropriate by backward-looking considerations, it is often thought that institutionalized punishment is primarily justified by forward-looking considerations. Why should regret and punishment differ in their stance towards the past? We will consider, side-by-side, different accounts of regret and punishment found in contemporary philosophical literature.

1. Skepticism about the Rationality of Regret and Punishment
   - Excerpts from Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punishment*, tr. Alan Sheridan (New York: Random House, 1995 [1975]).

2. The Practice (or Institution) of Punishment and the Context of Regret

3. Threats and General Deterrence

4. Regret and Self-Alienation
5. Expressive and Communicative Functions of Punishment


6. Agent-Regret

- David Sussman, “Is Agent-Regret Rational?” (ms).

7. Political Authority and State Punishment


8. Regret and Practical Conflict


9. Consent and Forfeiture

Syllabus Outline: Love and Rationality

Can love be rational? We will consider three problems for the rationality of love. The first is that love seems objectionably partial; the second is that love seems objectionably focused on particulars; and the third is that love demands actions and attitudes that are merely permissible. As we consider these problems, we will also consider what hangs on the rationality of love. For example, if the aforementioned problems cannot be resolved, might we accept love as a merely psychological phenomenon that has no rational basis? Some believe such concession would bring with it alienation from the relationships that give meaning to our lives. Why should that be?

1. Introduction: Emotions, Attitudes, and Rationality

2. Partiality: The Problem

3. Partiality: Possible Solutions

4. Particularity: The Problem
   - Plato, excerpts from *The Symposium*.

5. Particularity: Possible Solutions

• Harry Frankfurt, “On Caring.”
• Kolodny, “Love as Valuing a Relationship.” pp. 146-161.

6. Necessity: The Problem


7. Necessity: Possible Solutions

• Korsgaard, *Sources of Normativity*. Chapter 3.
• Chang, “Commitments, Reasons, and the Will.”
• Setiya, “Love and the Value of Life.”