

Teaching Statement

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I have been teaching at university level for more than ten years now. I started at the University of Buenos Aires (UBA), continued at Columbia University (CU) and lately at the Australian National University (ANU). At CU I was one of the few selected instructors of *Contemporary Civilization* Core Curriculum, and I also lead the outreach program *Rethink* for underprivileged communities that received a *prize* in the field. At ANU I taught Philosophy of Mind and since I had already graduated, I also focused on supervision.

During the last two years of my PhD I taught *Contemporary Civilization* (CC). This is a competitive position that only a few graduate students get to teach, since CC is the most important undergraduate class at Columbia University. This one-year course is central to the university's program and identity, because every student in the college has to take it. Furthermore, it is at the core of liberal arts education, and CC constitutes a standard of excellence with teachers from other universities coming to observe and emulate it. The class covers the great books and ideas of the Western canon, ranging from Plato, the Hebrew Bible and the Quran to early modern thinkers like Descartes, Rousseau and Hobbes, to XXth century scholars of race and gender like Du Bois and MacKinnon. Teaching it for two years required substantial dedication, but it was gratifying to play such a formative role in the education of my students. Since they came from different majors, they were variously interested in the material. To cope with this, I was attentive to their interests. For example, in order to discuss censorship in *Republic*, we discussed EU internet regulations. Reflection led students to understand how comedy (in the form of cynical memes) can be detrimental for character building and society, while still be an important exercise of freedom of expression.

Although CC was a wonderful experience, the class that I taught the most was *Symbolic Logic*, at UBA, CU, and ANU. One recurring challenge for introductory formal courses is that students scores have high variance and sometimes follow a bimodal distribution, with some students finding the course too easy and others too hard. To navigate this, homeworks include extra credit advanced exercises (occasionally in the form of a puzzle, sometimes unsolvable) to motivate the first group, and office hours usually helps students in the second face their fear to formal reasoning and enjoy the challenge that the exercises present.

At ANU I convened *Philosophy of Mind*. This was a wonderful and challenging experience, since the university is famous for the field and because I had a record breaking amount of students enrolled, north of one hundred.

A separate yet very informative experience has been my involvement with the outreach program *Rethink*. The project won the 2015 American Philosophical Association *Prize* for Excellence and Innovation in Philosophy Programs. It is a group based in New York City that aims to promote philosophical

engagement outside of traditional academic contexts. I was one of the co-founders and for two years I lead a cohort of around ten volunteers. We organized philosophical discussion sections with different at risk populations. This experience forced me to face important pedagogical challenges. For example, court-involved youth often have limited educational background, and they have a delicate relation with authority. Furthermore, the subtleties of group and class dynamics are of crucial importance, because unhealthy conflict can spark easily. Besides teaching skills and content, I believe the labor of a proper teacher involves dealing with psychological and sociological elements like the ones just mentioned.

Returning to my experience teaching CC, one of the most gratifying parts of it was the opportunity to inspire brilliant young students to pursue an academic careers. One such example is Nicholas Gauthier, one of my former students who I mentored through his undergraduate. He was recently accepted into a prestigious BPhil program at the University of Oxford and is thinking in pursuing a PhD. Its been a pleasure to see him grow intellectually and support him during that time.

Once I arrived at ANU, my interaction with students has reduced since I have fewer teaching duties; but I had the opportunity to engage with two of them. First, I fulfill a mentoring role with Ritsaart Riemann, a graduate student at Macquarie University who is attached to projects I am leading as part of an ARC Discovery Project. Besides helping him develop research skills, I have also encouraged him to give public presentations and helped him improve on that. More broadly, a great community for that is the Humanising Machine Intelligence (*HMI*) research group. In its regular meetings and workshops, I had the opportunity to meet several graduate students, some of which I am working in collaboration with. Second, this past semester I have been supervising an undergraduate student from the Computer Science Department, Charles Evans, in collaboration with Prof. Sylvie Thiebaux.

To conclude, I have been teaching at the university level for many years, in multiple universities, with very diverse populations, and a great variety of subjects from humanistic to technical.