Statement of Teaching Philosophy

Tomer J. Perry, Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics, Harvard University

"Blimey, this redistribution of wealth is trickier than I thought!"

In preparing a discussion of Robert Nozick's historical entitlement theory, I sent my students a clip of the Monty Python sketch from which the abovementioned quote comes. The sketch depicts a highwayman that steals from the rich and gives to the poor so often that the rich become poor and the poor become rich. In class, we discussed the absurdity of excessive redistribution but also imagined a careful highwayman, who maintains rough equality by continuously transferring wealth. We even considered a polite utilitarian highwayman who only steals when the pain the robbery causes is outweighed by the resulting pleasure. The humorous example made the discussion memorable and enjoyable while providing the students a concrete example with which to engage. Students laughed, imagining John Cleese calculating utilities. They also learned how to think through the implications of utilitarian and libertarian justice.

As a teacher, I aim to help students develop the skills required for forming and revising positions on thorny moral and political questions. To achieve this goal, I bring to my teaching not only my training in analytic philosophy but also my experience as a dialogue facilitator, my background in theater, and my knowledge of game design principles, which includes significant experience in designing and running simulations. In class, I aim to foster a constructive environment for difficult conversations; a genuine and rigorous exchange, in which students express themselves openly and subject their views to examination and critique; and a fun, memorable experience that keeps students engaged and brings the material closer to their lives. Below, I elaborate on these goals by using illustrative examples.

In a constructive learning environment, students respect each other by listening with an open mind, making an effort to understand each other. I have learned a lot about creating such an environment through my lifelong involvement with *Seeds of Peace*, an organization that brings together Israelis and Palestinians. At *Seeds*, I trained and worked as a dialogue facilitator, leading intensely heated discussions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and developing useful pedagogical skills. For example, facilitation taught me to observe group dynamics, directing my attention not only to *what students say* but also to *how they treat each other*. I have found it invaluable in dealing with controversial opinions. While teaching a section on just war theory, one student expressed the unpopular position that the U.S. engaged in an unjust war in joining World War II. Noting the way students dismissed a minority opinion, I challenged the class to articulate a defense of U.S. actions using the standards of *Jus ad Bellum* that we learned in the course, and led the discussion as they realized it was not as easy as they thought. The purpose was not to prove the student right; it was to teach students how to take seriously and engage with a position that seems ridiculous or outrageous, and open space in the classroom for unpopular opinions.

Exchange between students is genuine and rigorous when students feel they can speak their mind but also aspire to articulate themselves according to a high intellectual standard. To secure this feeling, I work to gain students' trust and respect for the intellectual rigor I bring to the class. I believe it is important to challenge students without intimidating them; to hold students accountable to what they say in class without alienating them. I learned a lot about maintaining this balance first as a teaching assistant, and later as an instructor, teaching courses on democratic theory and global justice at Stanford and Harvard, respectively. One effective method for gaining trust and respect is leading by example and showing respect for students' intellectual efforts. I was once challenged in class by a student who thought my presentation of J.S. Mill's position on the permissibility of suicide was inaccurate. After class, I reread the material and found ample support for the student's argument. I researched the topic and sent my students a short write-

up, summarizing the strength of different interpretations of the matter. Showing an openness to rethink my own understanding encouraged students to reexamine their positions as well, a sentiment that was echoed in the feedback my students provided for that class.

A major challenge in teaching undergraduates is keeping students engaged. It is our job as teachers to present the materials in a way that is relevant and meaningful to our students. Working as an Oral Communication Tutor at Stanford, coaching graduate students on preparing talks, I realized that preparing for a presentation is a lot like preparing for a theatrical performance. The insight changed how I prepare my own lectures, rehearsing the text and thinking of the story arc of my own classes. It also inspired me to incorporate carefully selected humorous examples, dramatic storytelling, and fictional characters from popular culture into my lectures. I regularly assign or screen animated videos that engage the problem humorously, or use short clips from popular TV shows like *House of Cards*.

In addition, working on a pedagogy project at the Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics I have found that game design principles provide a useful toolbox for creating fun, immersive activities that keep students engaged while providing distinct educational benefits. At Harvard, I supported faculty in incorporating simulations into ethics-related courses across Harvard by writing and helping run these exercises. Simulations offer an interactive mode of situated-learning that challenges students to think on their feet as they confront a concrete moral dilemma, presented in the context of a realistic scenario. Collaborating in small groups, students get ample opportunity to participate as they gain practice in exercising their moral judgement and learn about moral theories in an accessible context. On top of it all, students love it! In consulting faculty, I emphasize the importance of debriefing simulations and 'games.' The educational benefits of active learning exercises shine through when the way students handled an exercise become a teaching moment for the rest of the semester. For example, in an exercise on the differences between ancient democracy and oligarchy, I divided the students into two groups, each representing a city that faces a decision regarding their next joint construction project. The cities were identical except for their political structure: while the democracy voted by a majority, the oligarchy was run by a small council. One of the students who played the role of a builder in the democratic city was frustrated that her knowledge and opinions were not taken seriously enough in the discussion and therefore invented a corruption scandal involving the mayor, which garnered her the support of her co-citizens and allowing her to push through her preferred proposal. The student's insight – that people tend to suspect elected leaders and unify against an alleged corrupt elite – was the basis of our discussions on populism and democracy's vulnerabilities. Having experienced it themselves, the students had a meaningful discussion of the theoretical concept and arguments. I've written and ran simulations for hundreds of students at Harvard, including at the College and the Kennedy School of Government. I was also invited to give a talk at Stanford's *Interactive Media and Games* seminar series,[1] where I presented the educational benefits of integrating game-design principles into ethics pedagogy.

Looking forward to an academic career, I am excited about teaching; I see it as a core part of the academic mission. I have taught hundreds of students and trained many others to be effective speakers and teachers. I have found these experiences not only enjoyable but deeply enlightening. Every course I teach, I learn something new—about myself, the material, and my teaching. As I endeavor to model the skills I wish to teach my students, I am reminded that I too need to constantly reevaluate and reconsider my positions on moral as well as pedagogical questions. It is for this reason, most of all, that I find teaching rewarding and exhilarating.

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[1] Available on: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zoRqtr-wYp4.