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Statement of Teaching Philosophy
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The most important thing that I want to impart to my students is that any book worth reading calls for a sympathetic critique. By this I mean that texts require something akin to what Nietzsche calls an "art of interpretation," and that the essence of this "art" is to provide careful support from one's reading first and foremost from within the text itself. My pedagogy is driven by a strong preference for teaching original and primary sources by reading them closely while attending to their historical, social, and political contexts. But above all, I want to teach my students that a critical engagement with a thinker begins with taking them seriously on their own terms, sympathetically and internally. I work for my students to appreciate the power and pleasure of such an approach, and to come away from any seminar, lecture, or advising session with the practical reading and writing skills to put this into practice in their own well-supported reading of a text.

This approach primarily comes out of my experience teaching in the "Common Core" at the University of Chicago. I currently teach multiple yearlong sections in the Social Sciences Core entitled "Classics of Social and Political Thought." This sequence spans the canon of social and political thought, including Sophocles, Plato, Aristotle, Alfarabi, Aquinas, and Machiavelli in the fall, Elizabeth I, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau in the winter, and Tocqueville, Marx, Mill, Nietzsche, Weber, Du Bois, and Beauvoir in the spring quarter. It is a long sweep of political thought that connects and complicates a broad set of themes such as justice, power, right, freedom, legitimacy, value, and difference. As a part of a liberal arts education, it grounds students in canonical social and political thought, develops their reading and writing skills, and ultimately prepares them to critically question the construction and basis of just such a canonical approach.

This approach of critical but immanent interpretation means that my courses rely on original and primary sources if at all possible. All class sessions, whether lectures or seminars, work from these texts and are structured around my goal of developing an interpretative and evidence-supported reading of the text. This requires historical sensitivity and close attention to the contingency of political and social practices as well as theoretical discourses. In this sense, I do not teach "truth" or "facts" of a text, but instead teach my students to appreciate the meaning of "truth" and "facts" by questioning the value of truth itself. This is what it means for me to give a meaningful account of a text, idea, or practice. As such, I insist that the skill of argumentative interpretation is a crucial method, a necessary approach, a powerful language, and above all, a productive style of analysis for any branch of the humanities or social sciences. To the degree that there exist important facts about a system of thought or about the political world, these facts are presumed to be contingent and open to interpretation, predicated on a certain regime of truth that must be rendered visible in order to be subsequently useful and productive for understanding.

The difficulty with this approach from a teaching point of view, however, is that it is incumbent on me to offer a reading of these texts in a way that is exemplary but never definitive. That is to say, while I want my students to understand what Aristotle or Hobbes "think" and know what Plato's *Republic* or Du Bois' *"Souls of Black Folks"* are "about," I am far more concerned in giving them the ability to give their own account of why it can be said that they "think" any particular thing or these books are "about" anything at all. Any reading that we develop in class, any interpretation of the text that I present, has to be taken as provisional, and only as good as the textual evidence we can marshal. I understand my role in this process as a guide, as someone who can model this method of reading and writing for them. This is not to say that I do not end up giving my students a specific reading of a text (this is especially unavoidable in lecture-based courses), but I work to present my reading as an illustration of how to build an interpretive argument supported with primarily internal textual evidence.

I realize these principles practically with two devices that keep my students grounded in close reading and centered on arguing for an interpretation of the texts. First, we belabor short passages, often spending entire class sessions on the opening paragraphs of texts. For example, the preface to *On the Genealogy of Morality* perfectly shows the necessity of close and careful reading, and gives students a taste of what close reading is like. In the preface are both the incredibly dense and difficult first section and the relatively straightforward assertion in the final section of how the book must be read. We work through each section, showing students the painstakingly slow way that a few lines can and must be unpacked. As a second example, this method of "belaboring" also works well with the first five paragraphs of Du Bois' *Souls of Black Folks*, whose poetic character, philosophical density, and literary and mythological allusions can motivate far more than a single seminar session. When we include the musical "texts" that mark the openings of each chapter, it becomes even clearer that close reading of texts can be much broader than students may have previously thought.

Second, I routinely shift the interpretive burden onto the students with an agenda-setting practice, beginning class sessions by collecting questions about specific passages from each student in turn. Each student offers their question while I stay at the chalkboard and record them, noting the specific passages they point to. In contrast to the "belaboring" session, where I directly guide the discussion through a linear reading of the text, I pull back in these sessions, asserting my control only by connecting their questions. What quickly emerges is a visual map of the day's reading, bringing together passages, page numbers, characters, and concepts that require our attention. We then try (usually in vain) to move through as much of the map as possible. For the students, even if we cannot possibly cover the entire agenda in class, they at least get a sense of what their classmates see as important, and (if they are taking good notes), they are building their own index of important passages and concepts from the text. Overall, the hope is that students come to see the value in analyzing a text through questions about it, rather than passively recounting its main points or searching for definitive answers.

In a larger lecture course, I adapt these two methods, self-consciously presenting my lectures as readings of the texts that are open to interpretation and refutation. I move between the two devices, alternating between close literary readings of short passages, and building a visual map of key moments, terms, and questions from the text either with slides or on the board. In both a lecture or seminar setting, the method of evaluation is essentially the same: my students must demonstrate through their own writing that they realize that it is insufficient to merely assert a claim, but that they must argue for it as an art of interpretation. I want students to see that the point of writing about hard books is not simply to be able to recount what the author says, but to argue that they are correct in their interpretation of what the author says. The quality of an interpretive argument rests upon the student's ability to offer a persuasive case that they understand the text, and understand the ways in which reading it might be contentious.

The demands of graduate education do not differ here in substance, but perhaps only in form. That is, the role of the canon takes on greater importance at this level, in that what I teach graduate students is self-consciously a disciplined and organized regime of knowledge. I do not understand my position to be to authorize or endorse this literature, but to enable my students to learn this literature. As such, the skills of interpretative argument and close reading are essentially the same. I also understand that my primary goal in graduate education is to teach pedagogy itself. The work of graduate education as always also about teaching teachers, and training them, above all, in the same skills of critical and sympathetic interpretation but with a constant eye toward their future roles as teachers themselves.