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**Approach to Teaching**  
(written quite a while ago...)

In many ways, I do not have a worked-out 'teaching philosophy', strategy or methodology. I do, however, have a goal, and that is for my students to love the subject as much as I do. So in another way, I do have a teaching philosophy, strategy, method—but it is indirect. I love to learn, both about things that are clear, and about things that are less clear. So I love to translate Greek and work on logical problems, and I also don't mind feeling disturbed by the seemingly impossible task of speaking clearly about the beautiful.

This is what I love, and this is what I try to show to my students, that what is clear and what is indistinct are both worthy of investigation. Often enough the students don't end up loving the subject, but I think they do end up seeing that I do, and if I can't have it all, then this is a pretty good second prize; even if they don't love it, they may come to appreciate that there's something there that is loveable.

I do not, however, set out to make my students love the subject through a specific technique or method. Instead, I spend a lot of time preparing for my lectures so that when I walk into the classroom, the problem or topic of the day is real for me and I am worrying or excited about it. I have found that if I just 'go through the material' without losing myself in it, I don't feel engaged, and consequently my teaching becomes mechanical.

I try to alternate between what is clear and what is less clear in all my courses. For example, in PI Logic and Inquiry, very difficult material in epistemology and philosophy of language is broken up with exercises, for which there is a clear answer. In Philosophy of Art, what is clear is often only what is wrong with a particular view and this is placed next to the possibility that something else is knowable, but is extremely difficult. As often as it makes sense to do so, I give my students course 'Goals and Objectives' statements so that an end is clear to them, even if it isn't the whole story. In the classroom, I work through texts and ideas showing the students where something is clear-cut, and where it isn't. What I mean by 'showing' needs further comment. Telling a student that an idea is wrong is not the same as showing them that it is wrong. 'Showing them' means leading them through the argument step-by-step so that the conclusion that there is, say, an inconsistency in an author's ideas, is their own conclusion—one that they are led to by their own reasoning. 'Telling them' would mean that they had to take my word for it, and that would hardly be in line with a liberal education, nor would they be developing their critical thinking skills. Further, this distinction between the clear and the indistinct is not identical with the easy and the difficult. While often enough clarity means grasping something easily, it is also sometimes the case that clarity can be achieved only through a tremendous amount of difficult work.

It has taken me a long time to understand what I do in the classroom this way. I have had to grapple with fears of being too easy and then being too hard. During these past years I have become more and more comfortable showing the students who I am and what I believe. I have spent considerable time thinking about course design. From one run of a course to the next I usually revise the structure and content substantially. Working on college program review has helped me to think about content and skills outcomes and how I assess student learning. This has, I think, improved my course design and assignments. I have also begun to see my upper-level courses (PII and above) as extended arguments instead of 'survey of ideas' courses.

Consequently, my teaching has become more mature insofar as I am no longer just teaching what other people think, but also what I think. A new challenge that attends this is communicating to the students that my ideas are to be critically examined in the same way as the authors' that we read in a book.