

TEACHING PORTFOLIO

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Teaching Statement

Philosophy is challenging. This is true of the field in general but my familiarity with the fact derives particularly from experience as a student and teacher of decision theory and related subfields, including logic, ethics, and social choice theory. The characteristic features of our discipline in general and of these subfields in particular (e.g. elaborate arguments, involved examples, subtle distinctions, technical terms, formal models, etc.) can render their study daunting for undergraduate and graduate students alike. Moreover, while most of us have some idea that the topics of concern to philosophy (like justice, well-being, truth, probability, etc.) are important, the dense scholarly presentation of these matters in our discipline can sometimes obscure this significance, leaving the study of academic philosophy not only intimidating but inadequately motivated.

The teachers that have impacted me most have been ones that broke down these barriers and instilled a real sense that mastery of some aspect of philosophy was both attainable and worthwhile. In my own teaching, I strive to emulate these models by centering my pedagogy on the twin instructional aims of (i) stirring my students' interest in the course material and (ii) facilitating their comprehension of that material. In any course, my first goal is to convince my students that the course is worthy of their attention, that the topics we discuss are of some value and relevance to their own lives, belief systems, ways of thinking, etc. Once my students are convinced that they *want* to learn the relevant course material, my goal becomes to convince them that they *can* learn it by coaching them through unfamiliar intellectual terrain.

To these ends, I always strive to design my courses according to a *narrative structure*. By weaving weekly classes together into a unified, semester-long story, individual lessons are rendered better motivated and more memorable for students. For example, in my critical thinking course, *Reasoning in an Uncertain World*, I concentrate on one central question: how do we effectively reason about important questions and make good decisions when confronted (as we usually are) with extensive uncertainty about the world? From start to finish, the course is then structured around telling a coherent story about the extent to which elementary probabilistic reasoning might supply a useful tool for managing our uncertainties and (where possible) resolving them. Initial lessons bring out the significance of the question by highlighting the limits of deductive inference, while subsequent lessons review the pitfalls of our unreflective psychological tendencies vis-à-vis inductive reasoning in order to motivate the need for a rigorous theory. The rest of the course covers the prospects for probability theory to fill such a role and help us navigate uncertain inferences in both everyday and academic contexts. Throughout the semester, I emphasize this narrative and our current place in it so as to assist students in mentally organizing the various components of the course, enabling them to grasp the significance of each topic we discuss.

A further technique I have found indispensable in realizing these ends is *active learning*. One cannot gain a real appreciation of formal philosophy without dirtying one's hands with it. While traditional problem sets are one activity I employ in this regard, they are far from the only effective tool in active learning's toolkit. In

my critical thinking and inductive logic courses, for example, students participate in a semester-long forecasting tournament, which invites them to try their hands at offering and updating probabilistic forecasts for various significant global events whose truth will be decided before the course's end. The activity gives students a chance to apply key ideas from the course (e.g., avoiding Dutch books, paying attention to historical base rates, computing their ultimate accuracy with a scoring rule, etc.) in a practical and even fun way. Moreover, in my experience, even simple in-class exercises designed to bring home a relevant idea can significantly advance student engagement and comprehension. For example, in introducing the concept of conditional probability in my course *Rationality and Decisions*, I have my students play a number of live rounds of the *Monty Hall* game (with a Subway gift card replacing the new car), and have found that students are uniformly interested and excited by the problem.

One final aspect of teaching conduct that merits mention, as a prerequisite for motivating course material and facilitating its comprehension, is classroom ethics. Nothing is more important to me as a teacher than that my classroom be a welcoming and compassionate place where every voice is heard and every idea or question brought up is given thoughtful consideration. Realizing that philosophy is challenging and that class participation can be intimidating, I encourage students more hesitant to participate, and I try to affirm every comment spoken or question asked (within the boundaries of basic decency) as a valid contribution to the class discussion. Additionally, I make myself available to students outside of the classroom via ample and frequently emphasized office hours so that any confusions the students may have felt uncomfortable expressing during class can be cleared up. If I want my students of every background and disposition to love the material I teach as much as I do and to gain the confidence to believe they can be proficient in it, then fostering a course environment that makes them feel respected and secure is absolutely essential.

Given the significant problem of the underrepresentation of women and minorities in philosophy classes and departments, I also make efforts in lecture and in course handouts to employ gender inclusive language and to avoid examples that might subtly reinforce stereotypes or tend to put down any segment of the class. Recognizing the socioeconomic diversity of my students, I further strive not to impose undue financial burdens upon my students and, without sacrificing the quality of their education, aim to select textbooks and educational resources that are low cost and accessible. Moreover, I seek to provide students with disabilities or those that may face extra challenges an equal opportunity to succeed in my courses. I find it is important to be proactive in providing general accommodations to students so that disabled or disadvantaged students are neither singled out nor made to jump over undue hurdles to obtain the resources they need. In general, I aim to be sensitive to the unseen challenges and difficulties my students may be facing with the hope of unfettering their learning experience from those challenges to the greatest extent possible.

Thus far, my academic journey has been greatly enriched by the experience of teaching, and the range of classes I have taught has served as an excellent foil to my research endeavors. In the future, I hope to teach an even wider array of classes, confident that I will only ever find the opportunity to do so even more rewarding.

LIST OF COURSES TAUGHT

GERARD J. ROTHFUS

Primary Instructor: UNC, Chapel Hill

Fall 2024, Spring 2024: Philosophy, Politics, and Economics Capstone.

This course serves as the capstone of the PPE sequence and aims to apply ideas and tools taken from all three branches of PPE to investigate various matters of contemporary and perennial interest. The course will be structured as a Great Ideas in PPE seminar, focused on exploring central topics like justice, social welfare, and forecasting. Assessment will take into account participation, homework, and a final PPE Capstone project/presentation.

Spring 2024/2023, Fall 2022: Introduction to Bioethics.

This course surveys (some of) the rich field of contemporary bioethics, with an emphasis on examining controversies in modern medicine surrounding the making and taking of human life. Students will wrestle with classic philosophical questions like when and why is killing wrong?, what are the extent and limits of bodily autonomy?, what duties do parents owe their offspring?, etc., and then consider how different answers to these questions bear upon topics as significant and contested as the ethics of abortion, euthanasia, assisted reproductive technologies, and use of animal subjects in medical research.

Fall 2023: Practical Ethics.

This course surveys (some of) the rich field of contemporary practical ethics, with an emphasis on examining controversies surrounding the making and taking of life. Students will wrestle with classic philosophical questions like when and why is killing wrong?, what positive duties do we have to save the lives of others?, what do parents owe their offspring?, etc., and then consider how different answers to these questions bear upon topics as significant and contested as the ethics of abortion, capital punishment, anonymous gamete donation, and the use of animal subjects in medical research.

Fall 2023/2022: Logic and Decision Theory.

This course introduces students to formal techniques for making and evaluating decisions. Along the way, we will explore various models for framing and analyzing both individual and social decision problems using resources drawn from a diverse array of fields including symbolic logic, probability theory, game theory, and voting theory. While our focus will be primarily normative and centered upon characterizing rational decision making, we will also consider the descriptive plausibility of the models we consider as applied to typical human agents. The course aims both to enhance students' understanding of decision theory as an academic field and to equip them with tools for use in their own practical decision making.

Spring 2023: Philosophy, Politics, and Economics Capstone.

This course serves as the capstone of the PPE sequence and aims to apply ideas and tools taken from all three branches of PPE to investigate various matters of contemporary and perennial interest. The course will be structured as a Great Ideas in PPE seminar, focused on exploring three central topics: Justice (philosophy), Markets (economics), and Democracy (political science). Topics to be covered include major theories of justice, moral limits on markets, and the paradoxes of voting.

Primary Instructor: University of Konstanz, Germany

Spring 2022: Collective Choice and Social Welfare.

This course invites students to explore the basics of social choice theory and formal approaches to the measurement of social welfare with an emphasis on these fields' significance for moral and political philosophy. The course is structured as a guided tour of Amartya Sen's classic text, *Collective Choice and Social Welfare*, from which the course takes its title. Select topics covered include Arrow's Impossibility Theorem, Sen's Liberal Paradox, interpersonal comparisons of utility, Rawls' theory of distributive justice, and Harsanyi's utilitarianism.

Winter 2021/2: Formal Epistemology.

This course surveys (some of) the rich field of formal epistemology, with an emphasis on exploring different ways of mathematically modelling uncertainty and its rational management. Topics

covered include formal representations of uncertainty (esp. probability theory and its variants), rules for updating beliefs, and the relationship between full and partial belief.

Summer 2021: Introduction to Inductive Logic.

This course served as an introduction to the basics of inductive logic. Topics covered include Hume's Problem of Induction and probability theory, with special attention being paid to Bayesian approaches to inductive inference.

Primary Instructor: University of California, Irvine

Spring 2020: Introduction to Inductive Logic.

This course serves as an introduction to the basics of inductive logic. Topics covered include Hume's Problem of Induction and probability theory, with special attention being paid to Bayesian approaches to inductive inference.

Summer 2019: Introduction to Symbolic Logic.

This course served as an introduction to the basics of formal logic. Topics covered include translation of natural language statements into both propositional and first-order logic, syntactic and semantic proofs in these (classical) systems, and their respective soundness and completeness theorems.

Primary Instructor: California State University, Long Beach

Fall 2019: Rationality and Decisions.

This course served as an introduction to formal theories of rational choice. Topics covered include measurement scales, expected utility theory, and basic probability theory incl. Bayesian inference.

Teaching Assistant: University of California, Irvine

Winter 2019: Voting and Political Manipulation. Primary Instructor: Marek Kaminski (Political Science)

Fall 2018: Naturalized Epistemology. Primary Instructors: Jeffrey Barrett and Kyle Stanford (LPS)

Winter 2015 and 2017: Philosophy of Biology. Primary Instructors: Brian Skyrms (LPS) and Francisco Ayala (Biology)

Fall 2016: Behavioral Economics. Primary Instructor: Igor Kopylov (Economics)

Spring 2016, 2017, 2018, and Winter 2018, 2020: Probability and Statistics. Primary Instructors: Various

Fall 2015: Business Decisions. Primary Instructor: Carter Butts (Sociology)

Spring 2015: The Good Life: Happiness and Well-Being. Primary Instructors: Jim Weatherall and Cailin O'Connor (LPS)

SUMMARY OF TEACHING EVALUATIONS

GERARD J. ROTHFUS

Below is a summary of student course evaluation statistics from all undergraduate classes I have taught as primary instructor. All numbers listed are mean scores. My complete evaluations for undergraduate courses I have taught as primary instructor, as well as for graduate seminars, are available on my website: www.gerardrothfus.com.

Primary Instructor, UNC	Scale: 1 (worst) to 3 (neutral) to 5 (best)			
	PPE Capstone (Spring 2024)	Bioethics (Spring 2024)	Practical Ethics (Fall 2023)	Logic/ Decision Theory (Fall 2023)
Treated students with respect	4.86	4.84	4.91	4.88
Encouraged students to participate	4.77	4.57	4.76	4.64
Challenged students to think deeply	4.45	4.65	4.79	4.73
Course design	3.86	4.22	4.32	4.12
Enhanced knowledge of philosophy	4.32	4.57	4.68	4.27
Overall evaluation	4.23	4.27	4.21	4.33
Respondents (enrollment)	22(28)	37(38)	34(39)	33(37)

Primary Instructor, UNC (cont.)	Scale: 1 (worst) to 3 (neutral) to 5 (best)			
	PPE Capstone (Spring 2023)	Bioethics (Spring 2023)	Bioethics (Fall 2022)	Logic/ Decision Theory (Fall 2022)
Treated students with respect	4.63	4.72	4.82	4.63
Encouraged students to participate	4.05	4.53	4.33	4.33
Challenged students to think deeply	4.42	4.56	4.59	4.29
Course design	4.21	3.92	3.91	3.78
Enhanced knowledge of philosophy	4.68	4.51	4.55	4.00
Overall evaluation	4.37	4.09	3.94	3.79
Respondents (enrollment)	19(23)	36(39)	33(39)	24(34)

Primary Instructor, UCI	Scale: 1 (worst) to 4 (average) to 7 (best)
	Intro to Inductive Logic (UCI, Spring 2020)
Communicates clearly	6.02
Prepared and organized	6.10
Graded fairly	6.42
Shows enthusiasm for the course	6.24
Willing to meet with students	6.37
Overall evaluation	6.15
Respondents (enrollment)	60(187)

Primary Instructor, CSULB	Scale: 1 (worst) to 6 (best)
	Rationality and Decisions (Fall 2019)
Class time used efficiently	5.54
Concepts presented well	5.75
Assignments contributed to learning	5.67
Respectful to students	6
Effective at teaching subject matter	5.5
Communicates well	5.58
Graded promptly	5.46
Grading criteria well-defined	5.58
Available during office hours	5.58
Respondents (enrollment)	12 (20)

Primary Instructor, UCI	Scale: 1 (worst) to 9 (best)
	Intro to Symbolic Logic (Summer 2019)
Shows enthusiasm for the course	9.00
Accessible and responsive	8.71
Creates an open and fair learning environment	8.86
Explanation of concepts was clear	7.29
Overall evaluation	8.14
Respondents (enrollment)	14 (16)

SELECT EVALUATION COMMENTS FROM STUDENTS

0.1. **Philosophy, Politics, and Economics Capstone** (*UNC, Spring 2024*).

- “Hire this man. Perfect Professor. Ability to teach and show patience and care while explaining was better than 90% of professors I have had across several departments”.
- “Dr. Rothfus held office hours every week which was very helpful. He’s always very welcoming and willing to answer any questions. He’s an excellent teacher whose positive attitude create a class environment that is fun and engaging!”
- “He was great at facilitating class discussions and presentations that deepened my understanding of the material. He was very accessible outside of class for questions, and always helpful. The format of this course was simple and efficient, I liked always knowing what was expected of me each week. The readings he selected for our homework were also interesting, which helped.”

0.2. **Introduction to Bioethics** (*UNC, Spring 2024*).

- “Dr. Rothfus was very inclusive and informative during the discussions and allowed adequate space for students’ contributions in the classroom. The way the class is set up, starting with a short overview of moral philosophy before diving into several important topics within bioethics, was very conducive to learning and digesting information.”
- “He really fostered an environment where I was never scared to speak up or write anything, he would always respond graciously even if it was wrong and would talk about what was wrong in a friendly manner.”
- “Professor Rothfus is excellent. His lectures are quite good at challenging the students to think deeply about the material. He always tries his best to get students to participate in class discussion.”

0.3. **Practical Ethics** (*UNC, Fall 2023*).

- “I think professor Rothus was great! Coming into this class I thought philosophy was boring, but now that the class is coming to an end, I can say that I learned a lot and that it is interesting. This class really made me think and challenged my brain and reasoning. He also had no problem meeting outside of class hours to make sure we are on the right track.”
- “He is a very approachable teacher which made it easy to ask questions and participate in class. You can also tell how passionate and knowledgeable he is which makes the class engaging.”
- “Professor Rothfus kept the classroom environment friendly and welcoming, making sure that every student felt included during conversations. He made sure to encourage students to speak up in class and share their thoughts on course content, as well as provide positive, reassuring feedback to those students. He also made sure that every student had access to all materials/knowledge for the class in order to be successful.”

0.4. **Logic and Decision Theory** (*UNC, Fall 2023*).

- “Professor Rothfus held review sessions before every midterm, created study guides, held open office hours, and was extremely supportive after the shootings on campus earlier this semester.”
- “Dr. Rothfus has done a tremendous job of teaching during an especially stressful semester. His calm and kind demeanor helped all of us get through the lockdowns as well as could be expected. While it was obviously not an ideal situation, I am grateful that our class had him as a leader both times. The subject matter has been difficult (at least for me). Dr. Rothfus has been extremely patient throughout the semester, and welcomes questions in class about any of the topics. He has also made it a point to walk through exercises and examples step by step and always slows down and makes sure people are following along. He has shown more patience and encouragement than any of my other professors when it comes to understanding the material. He really seems to enjoy logic and philosophy and wants his students to have a good grasp of the material. He has also been very accessible and has held office hours regularly, and extends them before exams. He has also held review sessions before each exam which have been very helpful! All in all he is an excellent professor whose knowledge and teaching ability are matched by his patience, generosity, and kindness.”
- “Gerard has an unparalleled investment in and commitment to students’ learning. By holding extensive office hours, going out of his way to schedule alternative help sessions, and holding exams reviews Gerard gave ample opportunity for us students to work through problem areas. Gerard is affable and helpful, making complex concepts comprehensible. Gerard’s encouragement and positive disposition motivated my learning and added initiative to continue my learning outside of class.”

0.5. **Philosophy, Politics, and Economics Capstone** (*UNC, Spring 2023*).

- “He had a very clear plan and direction for the class throughout the entire semester. Everything was predictable and easy to follow.”
- “He is an amazing lecturer and discussion facilitator.”
- “Professor Rothfus was flexible with students throughout the semester. If I ever had a conflict that interfered with the class or an assignment, he was very lenient. He also fostered an inclusive environment during class discussions. Assignments and deadlines were very clear and Professor Rothfus was very communicative if questions ever arose.”

0.6. **Introduction to Bioethics** (*UNC, Spring 2023*).

- “Gerard was a really wonderful instructor. I appreciated his willingness to meet students where they were (in terms of philosophy background, many of us were beginners), and he always made himself available if we had questions. In class, he always walked through the readings at a reasonable pace. I appreciated his flexibility, candor, and sense of humor as well.”

It was evident that he had a lot of knowledge on the topics, and he always came well prepared to class, which made learning much smoother."

- "Prof Rothfus was a wonderful and considerate professor that really eased my nerves regarding the novel content of bioethics. He was extremely welcoming, available for extra credit and explain more complex content in digestible way without being condescending."
- "Professor Rothfus provided very interesting papers and topics for us to discuss. Each paper built off each other, so after each paper I felt like I came to a new understanding or just completely flipped my view on the topic. Specifically, after each paper the logic outlines helped me understand each text much better than just reading it, as I had to find the words to describe what exactly each author was trying to say. In class, there was plenty of discussion in which each member could say how they interpreted each paper, which I thought was neat and allowed me to understand some parts that I had missed during my first read."

0.7. **Introduction to Bioethics** (*UNC, Fall 2022*).

- "He is very knowledgeable about the subject matter and does a good job explaining it to others. He is flexible and willing to accommodate students' individual needs, which I appreciated."
- "He always had very open discussions in class. Whenever we went over the readings he asked people to clarify what was in the reading to get the class involved in the conversation. I found this very engaging, even if I wasn't answering that many questions."
- "Professor Rothfus was very knowledgeable and passionate about what he was teaching. He was very helpful and encouraging at office hours and was very flexible and understanding."

0.8. **Logic and Decision Theory** (*UNC, Fall 2022*).

- "All the components of the course, like lectures and homework assignments, helped me learn in this course. There were additional resources that were helpful as well, such as videos posted on Sakai, review sessions for each exam, and office hours."
- "Professor Rothfus was routinely available outside of class hours (even outside of office hours) to provide assistance and further explanation. This outside help was crucial to my success in this course and was greatly appreciated."
- "Dr. Rothfus helped the class go through decision theory very thoroughly. He explained all of the concepts in the course, as well as telling us which ideas were more contested amongst the various decision theorists. He encouraged us to state which ideas we found more compelling than others, but also made sure we would understand why all of the various modes of thinking were believed by some people."
- "He was very engaging and passionate about the content and would always stop during lessons to make sure we were understanding the material."

0.9. **Introduction to Inductive Logic** (*UCI, Spring 2020*).

- “The Professor is an amazing teacher he really has this great gift for making his lectures clear and understandable. He’s also very organized.”
- “Great transition to online learning. Lots of enthusiasm for the subject and made it interesting. Really makes you think”
- “The professor is very passionate and well informed about the course. It’s clear he truly cares about his students and wants them to understand the material rather than memorize it. He is very helpful when I have any questions and always glad to help. Although I found the exams challenging, they really made sure that I actually understood the material.”

0.10. **Rationality and Decisions** (*CSULB, Fall 2019*).

- “Prof. Rothfus took a lot of his own time aside from office hours to help teach the course so the students had complete understanding of the material. One of the best professors in my college experience.”
- “The professor contributed most to my learning... Everything was well-prepared.”

0.11. **Introduction to Symbolic Logic** (*UCI, Summer 2019*).

- “Gerard is a new teacher, and so seems to be trying to find his footing when it comes to teaching. In this regard, Gerard is doing amazingly. He certainly doesn’t seem like a first time teacher, and is always very helpful and open to explaining material further.”
- “He is very good at explaining the parts that confuse students in class. Also, he is very willing to work together with students in class. He makes the in-class environment very open and active.”
- “He is always willing to work with you, and take the time to explain concepts in different ways. He’s able to simplify complex problems that students can get.”