

How I Got Here

I've followed a circuitous professional path. It might interest grad students and post docs to know that one does not have to start out with a plum job at a research institution to have a meaningful and enjoyable career.

I am Professor for International Political Theory at Goethe Universität Frankfurt. My primary academic appointment is in Political Science, but I also have a secondary appointment in Philosophy. My PhD is in Philosophy from the Claremont Graduate School, a place not known for high prestige placements. In graduate school I aspired to be a continental philosopher. I took as many courses as I could in Ancient, Phenomenology, Kant, Hegel, and Marx. I even went so far as to write a dissertation on Hegel's philosophy of subjective spirit (what would now be called philosophy of mind). Who would do that?

My first tenure-track job was in the California Community College system at Riverside Community College (RCC). As a grad student, I had been called in there to serve as an emergency, part-time, substitute instructor of Comparative Religions. The dean informed me that she would like me to apply for the permanent position that was opening up because the instructor was not returning. I was still working on my dissertation on Hegel, and had received a fellowship to study in Germany the following year. I told her that I did not want to forgo that opportunity, but she encouraged to apply nonetheless. In the interview I failed to say anything remotely intelligent about the difference between Buddhism and Hinduism, moreover I declared a commitment not to accept the job if it was offered! Shortly thereafter, I left for Germany. One day, out the blue, a contract for a tenure-track job arrived in the mail. I had no more funding and no prospects for employment after Germany. So I signed the contract and returned it.

My teaching load at RCC was 5 classes a semester (10 a year) with 50 students in a class. Because graduate school had taught me nothing about teaching, it was at the community college that I learned to teach. I taught courses in Intro, Critical Thinking, and Applied Ethics. It was grueling work, especially in combination with writing my dissertation, but it was also tremendously rewarding. The California Community College system has a racially and ethnically diverse student body, and it takes in a high percentage of working class and immigrant students. The fees and entrance requirements are lower than at all other institutions of higher education in California. If one is interested in making a difference through teaching, community college teaching is certainly worth considering. After three years of teaching at RCC, I had managed to finish my dissertation. I was probably delayed by two years.

The experience of pouring over obscure Hegel scholarship and teaching refreshingly clear pieces of analytic philosophy on applied ethics had a profound effect on me. I left the continental tradition behind and decided to focus my research and writing on analytic moral and political philosophy, especially egalitarian liberalism and analytic Marxism. These areas corresponded with my political convictions. I had, since grad school days, been nearly a full-time political activist, working in the anti-apartheid, anti-intervention, and union movements.

I longed to teach courses other than at the intro level and I hoped to have more time to do research. So I left RCC for a job at Cal Poly, Pomona, part of the California State University system. Cal Poly offered only a marginally lighter teaching load of 3 classes per quarter (9 per year), but it provided an opportunity to teach upper division undergraduate classes. I somehow managed to convince Cal Poly that I was the best person for them, given their need to cover courses in ancient philosophy and philosophy of mind.

A few years later a position opened at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa, I jumped sight unseen. South Africa had recently held its first democratic election. It was going through a process of democratizing society, and it had a lively civil society movement and a militant trade union movement. I convinced the colleagues at Wits that I was their person to teach continental philosophy and ethics. Teaching at Wits was remarkably challenging and meaningful. The university had a massive influx of Black students from poorly equipped township schools. They were joined in the classroom by white students many of whom were from elite public and private schools. Figuring out how to manage the huge differences in educational backgrounds and to serve the needs of the Black students was an enormous, but exciting, challenge. In South Africa I deepened my interest in global justice and wrote my first book, *Cosmopolitan Justice*. That book was published a full 12 years after I defended my dissertation. The time spent working in teaching heavy positions and being active in political movements had slowed my writing output considerably.

After nearly 7 years of living in South Africa, my wife and I reluctantly decided to move back to the USA where it was safer to raise our son who had been born in South Africa. I took a position as the founding Director of the Institute for Ethics and Public Affairs at San Diego State University. That position allowed me organize workshops, conferences, and lecture series on themes of contemporary moral and political philosophical importance. I had come from the margins of academic Philosophy; and it was through organizing those events at SDSU that I first met many of the leading moral and political philosophers. My second book *Global Inequality Matters* was published while I worked at SDSU. I finished it while on sabbatical at the School of Social Science at the Institute for Advanced Study (Princeton). The year at the IAS is one of the fondest memories of my career. A quiet and beautiful place, with smart people all working hard on their research projects, very few distractions, and an incredibly helpful staff, it was a dream.

After 11 years at SDSU, I was enticed to leave to join the incredibly exciting research environment of Normative Orders at Goethe University. Since arriving at Goethe University I've published a book on climate change, called *The Moral Challenge of Dangerous Climate Change*. That book was begun while I was at the IAS. Frankfurt is a great place to be working in political theory and philosophy these days. It stands at the crossroads of the Frankfurt School critical theory and the egalitarian liberal traditions, which allow me to bring back together various threads of my intellectual interests. The ethos is pluralistic. And I am surrounded by hardworking and smart young people who will be defining the discipline in the near future. I feel very fortunate to be among such a wonderful group of colleagues and students.

We have a great thing going on here in Frankfurt.