

Introduction to Philosophy and Education (Phil 115)

Pennsylvania State University, University Park
Tu-Th 1-2.15p, 109 Boucke
27 Aug – 12 Dec 2013

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Required Texts

Plato, *Protagoras* and *Meno*, Penguin
A.N. Whitehead, *Aims of Education*, Free Press
J. Dewey, *Experience and Education*, Free Press
J.D. Salinger, *Catcher in the Rye*, Little Brown
A.S. Neill, *The Summerhill School*, rev. ed., St. Martins Griffin
E. Duckworth, *The Having of Wonderful Ideas*, 3rd ed., Teachers College
M. Nussbaum, *Not for Profit*, Princeton

Course

Philosophy of education articulates and evaluates the concepts, arguments, and values that people use or could use to justify school arrangements, beliefs about the sources and guides for human development, the appropriate treatment of children, attitudes toward teachers, and other elements of a culture's educational situation. At its most fundamental, the philosophy of education seeks to understand the meaning of the idea "education" itself—its ideals, its tolerance for non-ideal instances, the roles proper to it, and the people proper to those roles. At higher levels of detail, it distinguishes education from other modes of influence (e.g., punishment, conditioning, "nature"), coordinates education with other social structures (e.g., economic work, family participation, religious observation), and orients thinking about education among other disciplines (anthropology, child psychology, political theory).

In this course, we will approach the philosophy of education through a series of excellent and sometimes canonical texts, and let our questions come from our interpretation of our authors' questions. We will assess their answers, trying mostly to determine *what* answers the authors give, and *why* they do so. We will also work to develop the skills appropriate to philosophical investigation: making our assumptions explicit; inferring to the consequences of those assumptions in a step-wise fashion; construing our remarks precisely enough so that others may develop, critique, or

contradict them in ways that will, in turn, be helpful to us; using imagination to generate as many possible solutions, interpretations, or further investigations as possible; and coming to recognize the relative significance of general and concrete statements made by those attempting to justify their positions. In our readings, we will focus on several principal themes: the liberal arts, democratic citizenship, the development of freedom, and the anxiety of burgeoning responsibility. We will be especially interested in the assumptions and expectations underlying the question, “How am I to become a good person?”

By course’s end, you should (i) appreciate the connection between conceptual-“philosophical” difficulties and practical disagreements in education, (ii) have greater skill in argument, judgment, and exposition, and (iii) develop critical self-knowledge about your own educational ideals and evaluations.

Class time

Most classes will begin with student presentations. We will then move into general conversation about the reading inspired by those presentations. Sometimes students will work in small groups on directed-reading assignments. Other times I will present some philosophical or historical background. At all moments, every student should be engaged by talking, listening, taking notes, and being otherwise visibly attentive.

Presentations [30 pts]

Students will be divided into eleven presentation groups; each group will give two class presentations during the semester. The primary task of the presentation is to present the day’s reading in as clear, organized, incisive, effective, and imaginative way possible. Your secondary tasks include identifying important topics for continued discussion, relating the present reading to previous readings, and integrating relevant blog discussions. You may also discuss, to a lesser degree, recent articles or other media related to questions or themes your book raises.

Each presentation must include each group member, though members may have distinct tasks. You may use handouts, slide-shows, demonstrations, lectures, or other pedagogical methods studied or imagined. Presentations should last 20 minutes. They may involve participation by other members of the class, but they should not be simply a sequence of questions (as my own class-leadership will often seem). Presentations are an important part of your grade. They will be graded primarily by the degree to which they improve upon all previous presentations, in the following terms:

- preparation and professionalism
- pedagogical effectiveness and creativity
- comprehension and conveyance of the meaning and significance of the reading
- group dynamic
- incisiveness and insight, including cognizance of the relation to other readings

Papers [40 pts]

You will have two short papers, each with one revision.

The first paper, one page about some arguments in Plato's *Meno*, is due Wednesday, 25 September, hardcopy, by noon, in my department mailbox (in the mailroom across the hall from my office). You will receive the prompt the previous week. I will return your drafts with copious comments. You will then revise the paper and turn it in the following week (with the commented-upon draft stapled behind it). Part of the grade will come from the clarity, accuracy, effort, and incisiveness of the first draft; the other part will come from the prompted and self-directed improvements of the second draft.

The second paper, two pages about some arguments about radical education, is due Tuesday, 12 November, in triplicate hardcopy to class. You will exchange papers within assigned groups of three. You will comment on the two other papers from your triad, with the help of a rubric. Then you will meet in person as a triad to discuss ways to improve your papers. After meeting, you will (i) revise your paper in line with all comments, and (ii) fill out a description-and-evaluation document about your comments on the other papers, the quality of the meeting, your peers' comments on your own paper, and the improvement your own paper underwent. Half the grade will come from your first and second drafts; the other half will come from your description-and-evaluation document.

Reading quizzes [20 pts]

On occasion through the semester, class will begin with some questions about the day's reading. These questions will reveal whether you read and thought about the evening's assignment, and provide us some material with which to begin discussion. Quizzes may not be retaken. Only the top four scores will stand.

Blogs [30 pts]

Our class blog is at sites.psu.edu/phileduc — you may access it by going to sites.psu.edu and, after signing in with your PSU ID, going to "My Sites." You are to post before each class, by 8pm. Each week, you should make at least one new post and one substantial response to another person's post (in either order). In each, focus on the reading: articulate what you find most perplexing, the reasons for your perplexity, and possible solutions (offered by the author, by other writers, or by your own imagination) for the perplexity. These blog posts should show the following:

- familiarity with the entire reading or listening assignment
- concern for clarity, directness, and completeness of expression
- curiosity about the philosophy of education
- effort to bring fellow students into productive exchange

On several occasions, the syllabus lists discrete blog tasks; and I may later stipulate other discrete blog tasks in class or on the blog itself. You are always expected to respond to others' responses to your posts, in addition to your other posting duties. In class or on the blog I will often identify strong posts; you may wish to model your own on these until you find a suitable voice of your own.

Each week, you will receive a blog grade, on a 2-1-0 scale. 2 is for genuinely thoughtful and productive posts and comments; 1 is for inadequately thoughtful or productive posts and comments, or just one post or comment; and 0 is for useless posts, or no posts. Bonus: each week I will give the blogger or bloggers with the most effective exchanges—containing, I would hope, insights into the text, reflections on class discussion, vivid personal observation, and/or careful argument reconstruction—a bonus of 2 points. This will, in effect, double your score for the week.

Podcast [30 pts]

In groups of two or three, you will spend the second half of the semester assembling an 5-8 minute podcast, to be presented during our Finals exam meeting. These podcasts may take reportorial, descriptive, interpretative, dramatic or story-telling, round-table, montage, or other suitable form or combination of forms. The purpose of each group's podcast is to consider a question in the philosophy of education in the most vivid, clear, engaging, and productive fashion possible. (Considering a question involves asking it in a precise, though not necessarily explicit, fashion, and taking steps toward answering it, even if those steps involve only listing possible answers and evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of those answers, again not necessarily in an explicit fashion.)

You should listen regularly to radio shows for examples of good segments (these are mostly on NPR, e.g., "This American Life," "Radiolab," "Planet Money," etc.; see also www.newyorkfestivals.com/worldsbestradio/2013/). You will be assigned several radio shows about education to listen and react to. We will meet as a class with Media Commons twice to learn about podcast-design; you will also gain access to podcasting rooms in Pattee library, with tech support.

Later in the semester I will distribute a grading rubric and a timeline for group formation, storyboard proposal, Media Commons sessions, and trailer exposition.

Administrative details

Grades

A 140-150 – Extraordinary	C+ 115-119
A- 135-139	C 105-114 – Acceptable
B+ 130-134	D 90-104 – Minimal pass
B 125-129 – Good	F 00-89 – Fail
B- 120-124	

Technology

Please check class-related emails each weekday, and respond within a day. I will do the same. I will email you additional handouts if I do not distribute paper copies. Please check with fellow students to ensure you have not missed any handouts. At no point may you look at or touch your phone or other electronic device unless asked to do so. Failure to follow this policy may result in lowering your course grade by two letters. You must silence such devices; vibrate mode is not acceptable. I may also restrict use of computers and tablets, as necessary, unless we discuss good-faith reasons for their use.

Absences and lateness

Because the value of the course depends largely on the conversations during the seminars, attendance is required. Repeated failure to attend may result in lowering your grade by up to two letters. If you must miss or have missed class because of legitimate university or medical activities, you must tell this to me in person, preferably in office hours and ahead of time.

Because class begins immediately with student presentations, any tardiness is inacceptably disruptive and limits your learning. Continued lateness will lower your grade by up to two letters.

Accessibility

Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments in this course, contact the Office for Disability Services (ODS) located in Boucke Building Room 116 at 814-863-1807(V/TTY). For further information regarding ODS, please visit their web site at www.equity.psu.edu/ods/. I should be notified as early in the semester as possible regarding the need for reasonable academic adjustments.

Cheating

Academic dishonesty in any portion of the academic work for this course shall be grounds for failing the entire course and communication of dishonesty to the College. This includes, but is not restricted to, any plagiarism on any homework, or cheating on any quiz or exam. Please ask about any case you're concerned about. For details on the PSU policy, see www.psu.edu/oue/aappm/G-9.html.

Reading and Assignment Schedule

- Aug T 27** Visions of education. Syllabus and summary of course activities.
Read: Heller, "Laptop U."
- R 29** Themes in the philosophy of education. Student introductions.
Read: Nussbaum, *Not for Profit*, title-page to p. 26.
Listen: four segments from www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/tag/77
Blog: reflect on two radio segments and Nussbaum reading, together
- Sep T 03** Outlining philosophical arguments about education. Learning to critique ideas and to acknowledge people.
Read: Nussbaum, *Not for Profit*, pp. 27-94
- R 05** Presentation 1. The value of liberal arts. Introduction to Socrates and Plato.
Read: Nussbaum, *Not for Profit*, pp. 95-154
Listen: three segments from www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/tag/77
Blog: reflect on one radio segment and Nussbaum book, together
- T 10** The question "Is virtue teachable?" Reading a Platonic dialogue.
Read: Plato, *Protagoras* 309a1-328d3
- R 12** Presentation 2. The study of literature. The difficulty of becoming good.
Read: Plato, *Protagoras* 328d4-348c5
- T 17** Presentation 3. The pleasure-maximizing view. Teaching prudence.
Read: Plato, *Protagoras* 348c6-362a5
- R 19** Definitions and understanding.
Read: Plato, *Meno* 70a1-80b8
Blog: assess the dialogue's most plausible definitions of virtue, and then provide a better defense, or present a new definition and a strong defense
Receive: Paper prompt 1.
- T 24** Presentation 4. Geometry and its relation to the humanities.
Read: Plato, *Meno* 80b9-86c3
- W 25** Paper 1 due (noon, hardcopy, my mailbox)
- R 26** Presentation 5. The excellence of knowledge. The scandal of new teaching.
Plato, *Meno* 86c4-100b9
- Oct T 01** Presentation 6. Framework for thinking about philosophy of education in the modern age. Democracy and education, once again.
Read: Emerson, "The American Scholar"
- W 02** Paper 1 revision due (noon, hardcopy, my mailbox, with draft w/ comments)
- R 03** Presentation 7. How philosophy determines the structure of schools.
Read: Dewey, *Experience and Education*, chapters 1-3
Read: www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/bday/1020.html
Listen: four segments from www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/tag/77

- T 08 Presentation 8. Freedom at the heart of progressive education.
 Read: Dewey, *Experience and Education*, chapters 4-6
 Blog: describe any tensions in your high school's concerns for both
 freedom and discipline; give your examples with liveliness and care
- R 10 Presentation 9. Dewey the philosopher and educator.
 Read: Dewey, *Experience and Education*, chapters 7-8
 Read: www.iep.utm.edu/dewey/
- T 15 Presentation 10. Learning "duty and reverence."
 Read: Whitehead, *Aims of Education*, chapters 1-2
- R 17 Presentation 11. Discovery, pace, and generalization.
 Read: Whitehead, *Aims of Education*, chapters 3 & 5
- T 22 Presentation 12. The benefits of the specific disciplines.
 Read: Whitehead, *Aims of Education*, chapters 4 & 6
- R 24 Presentation 13. Universities and a "classical education."
 Read: Whitehead, *Aims of Education*, chapters 7-8
- T 29 Media Commons session 1: Pattee Library Knowledge Commons W140
 Read: Neill, *Summerhill*, "Summerhill School"
- R 31 Presentation 14. Making a school fit the child, or, a "go as you please school."
 Read: Neill, *Summerhill*, "Child Rearing"
 Receive: Paper prompt 2.
- Nov T 05 Presentation 15. Wilhelm Reich, psychoanalysis, and upbringing.
 Read: Neill, *Summerhill*, "Sex," "Religion and Morals"
- R 07 Presentation 16. Radical schools.
 Read: Neill, *Summerhill*, "Questions and Answers," editorial matter
- T 12 Presentation 17. Rethinking the philosophy of education.
 Read: plato.stanford.edu/entries/education-philosophy/
 Read: plato.stanford.edu/entries/civic-education/
 Due: Paper 2 (three hardcopies, to class)
- R 14 Presentation 18. Jean Piaget.
 Read: Duckworth, *Having of Wonderful Ideas*, chapters 1-3
- T 19 Presentation 19. Epistemology and education.
 Read: Duckworth, *Having of Wonderful Ideas*, chapters 4-7
- R 21 Presentation 20. Knowing others' minds.
 Duckworth, *Having of Wonderful Ideas*, chapters 8-10
 Due: Paper 2 revision, evaluation document, and supporting material
- T 26 **Thanksgiving: No Class**
- R 27 **Thanksgiving: No Class**

- Dec T 03** Media Commons session 2: Pattee Library Knowledge Commons W140
 Read: Salinger, *Catcher in the Rye*, chapters 1-7
- R 05** Presentation 21. Caulfield and his schools.
 Read: Salinger, *Catcher in the Rye*, chapters 8-14
- T 10** Presentation 22. Maturity, bildung, coming-of-age.
 Read: Salinger, *Catcher in the Rye*, chapters 15-20
- R 12** On having one's own philosophy of education.
 Read: Salinger, *Catcher in the Rye*, chapters 21-26
- TBA** **FINAL EXAM**