

PHIL 3711
PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION
Class Number 54088 Section ER6 Thurs 6:30 – 9:00pm
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The class is primarily structured around the following question: “what are the proper aims of education?” From the very beginning of philosophy, philosophers have thought about education in light of their inquiry into what the good life is for human beings. Studying these thinkers gives us valuable food for thought about education, philosophy of education, and philosophy as such, for two reasons: 1) these philosophers offer their insights into the issues and 2) they bring to our attention issues that are unfashionable and undiscussed in contemporary settings. We still have much to learn by responding to such topics as education for preservation of harmonious community life, individual salvation, artistic creativity, scientific learning, labor, etc.

We will read expositions by contemporary philosophers of education of the classical philosophers and their relevance to the contemporary debates. We will study many of the following figures, but probably not all: Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, Aquinas, Maimonides, Descartes, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Leibnitz, Condorcet, Smith, Luther, Rousseau, Kant, Jefferson, Hegel, Mill, Marx, Nietzsche, Dewey.

Here are few examples of the kind of inquiry – as assisted by the history of philosophy of education – that we will do in this class.

Traditional philosophy of education focused on the education of leaders for harmonious civic life. Our thinking about the ordering of our community life no longer focuses on the strong leader (or does it?). But we still think of ourselves as leaders who organize our own lives and relate as such leaders to others. Thus, the questions of traditional philosophy of education are still of interest to us. Should leader’s education focus on the theoretical knowledge, or should it focus on practical knowledge skills that are more about developing the proper habits of thinking, emotion, perception, action? Or, should leaders be educated simply to grasp and hold power by fear, control, manipulation, and seizing of opportunities?

Or, should all members of society be educated for democratic participation, rather than leadership? What kind of education is best for democratic participation – classical, occupational, or something in-between? Or, is it better to educate for the right sentiments?

Traditional philosophy of education focused on education for individual salvation. What do we think about the place and shape of education for individual salvation, if any? What is the function of prayer? Or is education for individual salvation simply teaching people how to read?

Modern philosophy of education focused on artistic creativity. What do we think about the place and shape of education for artistic creativity? Is education in artistic creativity essential for understanding of freedom, as the moderns have taught?

Modern philosophy of education also focused on the success of the natural sciences. Should education emphasize reflection on sense experience, in the way that is done in the natural sciences?