EDPS 210: Historical and Philosophical Perspectives on Education
Professor Campbell F. Scribner cfscrib@umd.edu
MW, 2:00-3:15 (Section 301) Office: 2204 Benjamin Building
Symons Hall, Room 215 Office hours by appointment only

Decisions about how, what, and whom we teach necessarily depend on deeper questions about why we teach. One’s educational philosophy derives from deep-seated beliefs about human potential, social organization, and the nature of power. The purpose of this course is to identify some of the primary questions about education in Western philosophy, encourage students to engage with those questions, and help them develop their own philosophy of education. Students should expect to read and think deeply, to engage in active discussion, and to write with concision and insight. While this course fulfills requirements for aspiring teachers, it is in no way limited to education students.

Course Requirements/Grading

Co-teaching a Class (10%)
A pair of students will help lead the discussion of each reading selection. Students will meet with the professor before they co-teach, and must bring three to five possible discussion questions to that meeting. Students will be graded on their preparation, understanding of the reading, and active participation in directing class discussion.

Participation (20%)
All students are expected to contribute to class discussion at least once a week. Participation can include asking questions as well as answering them, rephrasing a classmate’s comment, or offering references to the reading.

Please note that conjecture, disagreement, and devil’s advocacy are integral to our discussions. All students should feel comfortable voicing their opinions and experimenting with new ones, even if doing so challenges or discomforts others. However, discussion also depends on respect, listening, and a degree of charity. Please ensure that your comments and demeanor are conducive to a collegial environment: no one likes jerks.

Public Conversation or Debate (30%)
In pairs, students will engage in a five- to ten-minute public conversation on a topic of their choosing. The conversation must make substantive use of course readings and cannot merely rehash a previous class discussion. The goal of this assignment is to think deeply about a particular issue and arrive at a tentative truth-claim. Students might role-play an imaginary discussion between two of the philosophers that we
read, apply one or more philosophers’ perspectives to a contemporary educational debate, or offer a detailed critique of one or more philosophers.

Each student must submit a script or a very organized outline (at least five pages in length) on the day of their presentation, which will allow me to retrace your conversation after class. Students may write these cooperatively, in epistolary form (as an exchange of emails), or independently. It is possible that one student will “win” the debate, so please do not feel obliged to pull up your partner’s end; on the other hand, the assignment is not competitive, so your success may to some degree depend on your partner’s.

**Personal Philosophy of Education (40%)**  
The final assignment will be a brief philosophy of education, eight to ten pages in length, which will offer you a chance to respond to our readings in a way that is both rigorous and personally valuable. Possible topics may include your opinion of human nature or children’s academic ability and the methods of teaching best suited to that judgment, the appropriate organization of school governance, the role of the teacher, or the definition of a successful education. Students must demonstrate substantive engagement with course readings throughout the assignment (meaning direct quotes and/or paraphrasing with citations), and although they may bring in outside readings or examples, I would recommend that they do so sparingly. Successful papers will include a clear thesis sentence, quotations from course readings, accurate citations, and insightful analysis. More than anything else, they will wrestle with overarching questions from the class.

*Please note that I am not obligated to accept late work at all, and that I am free to assign any penalty that I deem appropriate after a deadline. I am very generous with extensions, provided that students have valid reasons for asking, so do not wait until the last minute to complete your work.*

*If you ever have a question about your grade, please make an appointment to speak with me in private.*

**Assigned Readings**  
I ask that students arrive in class prepared to engage in rigorous discussion, preferably with a hard copy of the reading. *Please note that there are no screens allowed in my classroom.* The following texts are available for purchase or rental at the university bookstore. They may also be available through online retailers or the university library system. However, to ensure that you track the same page numbers, if you purchase the texts from an outside vendor, please ensure that you get the correct edition.

All other readings for the course, designated with an [R], are available electronically on the course website at elms.umd.edu.

**University of Maryland Honor Code**

The Student Honor Council requests that all instructors post the following notice:

The University of Maryland, College Park has a nationally recognized Code of Academic Integrity, administered by the Student Honor Council. This Code sets standards for academic integrity at Maryland for all undergraduate and graduate students. As a student you are responsible for upholding these standards for this course. It is very important for you to be aware of the consequences of cheating, fabrication, facilitation, and plagiarism. For more information on the Code of Academic Integrity or the Student Honor Council, please visit http://www.shc.umd.edu.

To further exhibit your commitment to academic integrity, remember to sign the Honor Pledge on all examinations and assignments: “I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance on this examination (assignment).”

**Disability-based Accommodations**

Class members who have a documented disability requiring academic accommodation should speak with the instructor privately to make appropriate arrangements.

**Absences From Class**

Absences for illness will be accommodated under the conditions specified in the university policy. For more information, please refer to [http://www.president.umd.edu/policies/v100g.html](http://www.president.umd.edu/policies/v100g.html). Students should contact the instructor if they will miss more than one class for medical reasons and discuss how to document the medically-necessitated absences and how to make-up the missed class sessions.
Absences for religious holidays and events will be accommodated. Students affected should contact the instructor for assistance in securing information about class sessions they have missed or assignment due dates that may have to be adjusted. The following website should address any questions about course policies or student rights: [http://www.ugst.umd.edu/courserelatedpolicies.html](http://www.ugst.umd.edu/courserelatedpolicies.html)

**Schedule of Readings**

**Part I—Introductions**

*Our course begins with basic questions about the purpose of philosophy and its relationship to education. Who are “philosophers,” and what, if anything, makes them different than the rest of us? What do their questions and claims hope to accomplish? What tools or tricks help guide their thinking?*

**Monday (8/29)—**
- Introductions.
- Review syllabus.
- Select classes to co-lead.

**Wednesday (8/31)—**
- Nickloas Pappas, “Socrates, Cynics, and Flat-Nailed, Featherless Biped” [R]
- Justin McBrayer, “Why Our Children Don’t Think There Are Moral Facts” [R]

**Monday (9/5)—**
- No class, Labor Day.

**Part II—Socrates: Truth, Inquiry, and Power**

*Socrates, one of the earliest and most famous Western philosophers, spoke very little about formal instruction, yet his goals and methods clearly intended to educate the public. What does Socrates’ example tell us about questioning, the relationship between teacher and student, and the possibility of truth overcoming entrenched social arrangements?*

**Wednesday (9/7)—**
- Plato, *The Apology* [R]

**Monday (9/12)—**
- Plato, *The Apology* [R]
Part III—Plato: Justice and Social Harmony

Plato continued Socrates’ use of dialogue to pursue systematic truth, though, disillusioned by his mentor’s fate in Athens, he came to sharply different conclusions about the appropriate role of education in society. How do Plato’s assumptions about justice and human reason influence the structure of his imaginary city? What role must the state play in guaranteeing equal educational opportunity, and again, how should we reconcile truth and power?

Wednesday (9/14)—
- Plato, The Republic (excerpts) [R]

Monday (9/19)—
- Plato, The Republic (excerpts) [R]

Wednesday (9/21)—
- Plato, The Republic (excerpts) [R]

Part IV—Locke and Rousseau: Educating Independent Citizens

As the Enlightenment introduced ideas of human goodness and liberation, many of its leading writers attacked the injustices of monarchy by writing about children—specifically, the ways in which children could grow into self-governing citizens. Their arguments will force us to think about the appropriate relationship between teachers and students, the methods and goals of education, and the potential limits on human freedom.

Monday (9/26)—
- John Locke, Some Thoughts Concerning Education

Wednesday (9/28)—
- John Locke, Some Thoughts Concerning Education

Monday (10/3)—
- Excerpts from American and British Romantics [R]

Wednesday (10/5)—
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Emile (excerpts) [R]
Monday (10/10)—
  • Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile* (excerpts) [R]

**Wednesday (10/12)—**
  • Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile* (excerpts) [R]

**Part V—Wollstonecraft: The Mind Has No Sex**
Although Mary Wollstonecraft was sympathetic to other Enlightenment philosophers, her views on women’s equality sharply contradicted prevailing assumptions of her time. Are there natural differences between men and women, or (as Wollstonecraft argues) are those differences largely social? In either case, how should educators respond to sex differences? Had earlier writers merely overlooked the education of women, or does the category of gender represent an intractable obstacle for teachers?

Monday (10/17)—
  • Mary Wollstonecraft, “The Prevailing Opinion of a Sexual Character Discussed” [R]

**Part VI—Smith, Mill, Neill: Education and Freedom**
Freedom is a tenet of democratic societies, and presumably education should reinforce the freedom of children and families. What are the benefits of competition and choice in education, and what are their potential drawbacks? What assumptions do liberal philosophers make about reason and human nature? Whose freedom are educators bound to respect (parents? students?) and what are its appropriate limits?

**Wednesday (10/19)—**
  • Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (excerpts) [R]
  • John Paul Rollert, “Sleight of the Invisible Hand” [R]

**Monday (10/24)—**
  • John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (excerpts) [R]

**Wednesday (10/26)—**
  • A.S. Neill, *Summerhill* (excerpts) [R]
**Part VII—Dewey: Cooperative Learning and Living**

John Dewey, probably the most influential American philosopher, derived many of his theories from applied study of children’s schooling. How do his educational practices relate to notions of change, cooperation, and progress? How does Dewey envision the relationship between the school and society, the child and the curriculum, or the individual and the group to which he/she belongs?

**Monday (10/31)—**
- Lecture on John Dewey.

**Wednesday (11/2)—**
- John Dewey, *The School and Society*

**Monday (11/7)—**
- John Dewey, *The School and Society*

**Wednesday (11/9)—**
- Dewey, *The Child and the Curriculum*

**Monday (11/14)—**
- “Human Nature: The View From Kindergarten,” *This American Life, Ep. 27*
- “Climates Change, People Don’t,” *This American Life, Ep. 424*

**Part VIII—Marx: Class, Race, and Power**

Although Marxism has lost some cachet since the end of the Cold War, its intellectual underpinnings remain influential to postcolonial and critical race theories. How does Marx’s interpretation of historical progress and social inequality apply to the function of schools? What are the benefits and potential limitations of a Marxist approach? Short of revolution, is it possible to ameliorate the forms of alienation and inequality that Marx describes?

**Wednesday (11/16)—**
- Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto* [R]

**Monday (11/21)—**
- Jean Anyon, “Social Class and School Knowledge” [R]
**Wednesday (11/23)—**
- No class, Thanksgiving.

**Monday (11/28)—**

**Wednesday (11/30)—**
- Matthew Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft*

**Part IX—Conclusions**
*Our last weeks will be spent reflecting on the entirety of our readings, primarily through in-class discussions/debates. Students are encouraged to pose questions to their classmates and the refine their own thinking in advance of submitting the final paper.*

**Monday (12/5)—**
- Public discussions/debates.

**Wednesday (12/7)—**
- Public discussions/debates.

**Monday (12/12)—**
- Public discussions/debates.
- Final thoughts.
- Course evaluations.