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ofc hrs: Mon-Th 2:30-3:30pm
or by appointment

PHIL 234—Philosophy of Education

Socrates claimed that the most important education is to learn what is good, and to discipline oneself to pursue it unswervingly. Yet the restraint he advocated to educate desire seems to conflict with the freedom and spontaneity we hope would characterize a fully flourishing person. A university education today is primarily designed to provide knowledge and skills that empower a person to pursue her or his goals, whatever they may be. Yet from trends in politics, the economy, the environment, and elsewhere we can see that the mere pursuit of power can lead to serious problems. What are the proper goals of education, and what is the role of a notion of the good?

In this course, we will read and discuss classic works in the philosophy of education by authors such as Plato and Rousseau, contemporary writings such as Martha Nussbaum's *Cultivating Humanity*, and recent news and opinion articles on pressing questions in education today. We will consider the goals and value of education for an individual and for a society, and the importance of cultivating values and desires as well as knowledge and skills. We will consider the reasons for studying various subjects and the effectiveness of various methods of education, actual and proposed, and the opportunities and dangers of specialization. We will consider specific features of educational institutions at the primary, secondary, and college level and how well these fit with the goals of education. Students will reflect on their own experiences in education, and develop their views as to what sort of education they should pursue for themselves. They will also develop and argue for their views on what kind of education is best to build a healthy, flourishing society.

Course strategy

The themes of this course have been topics of serious study for millennia, and we will see that contemporary thinkers continue to find ancient sources crucial. The goal of the course is for you to participate in this philosophical conversation across the ages: to *do* philosophy. The questions we will consider are not easy questions, and the texts are not easy to understand. Developing your own thoughts in response, in an intelligent way, is also not a simple business, and this is crucial to your participation in the conversation. It will take a significant amount of work for you to be able to participate in a substantial way. The assignments in this course are designed to help you do this. In particular, to participate in this conversation, you will need to *understand* our texts thoroughly, *critically evaluate* the ideas and reasoning in them, and *respond by developing your own ideas and reasoning to support them*. As a result you will be much better prepared to answer the questions we raise intelligently and in an informed way, for yourself.

A text-centered course

Since our goal is to participate in a conversation across the ages, nearly everything we do will be tied to the people we are conversing with, and they are present through our texts. The texts in this course are different from many that you have read before, and a major goal of the course is to help you learn to read them for yourselves. They are densely packed with meaning and ideas, and require patient chewing. Be prepared to read and re-read, in order to master them. Reading assignments are intentionally short, to allow you to do this. Lecture and discussion in class is designed to help you digest the material in the texts, to practice applying

it to concrete, familiar situations, and to develop your own thoughts on the themes they discuss. *Lecture and discussion are designed to enhance and build on your reading of the texts, and will not replace it.*

Essays and tests will be based mainly on the texts themselves, not on what I say in class. Accordingly, it is imperative that you consistently read the assigned texts before each class meeting. When you read before class, you usually will not completely understand the text, but after discussing it in class, you should understand the main ideas well. If you come to class without reading, you may feel that you are understanding the class discussion, but you will not recognize how the discussion connects to the texts, and when you go back to the texts, you will be confused. It is essential that you be able to understand the texts on your own in order to do well on papers and exams. Papers and exams are designed specifically to send you back to the texts, to clarify and deepen your understanding of them, and in many cases to develop new perspectives *beyond* what we were able to explore in class.

Reading

To participate in this conversation, you will need to read the texts seriously, usually multiple times. These are not flat, pre-digested textbooks, with facts laid out like insects pinned to a board. You usually will not understand them fully the first time you read them. However, you won't get to the second time unless you read them the first time! and the second time will feel a lot like the first time unless you make a real effort to understand them, while reading them for the first time.

Read the text listed for each class period *before* coming to class, and read *actively*. Reading actively means reading as though you were listening to a human being, with whom you can have a conversation, and responding appropriately with thoughts, questions, and feelings of your own. The way to respond to a book is to write. Read with a pencil in your hand. Mark passages you find particularly interesting, or puzzling, or convincing, or exciting, or infuriating. Write questions and comments in the margins. Thoughts that won't fit in the margins, write in a notebook or on a separate piece of paper, and bring all of it to class.

I will sometimes hand out reading questions to help you read actively. These questions will give you some landmarks to watch for as you read. Having something you are looking for helps you to read with a purpose, actively. It also helps you to check whether you are understanding the text. In some cases I will ask a question so that you will pause and examine something you might otherwise not notice.

The readings are not long, but they are dense. You will need to read them more than once to do well. You should read them at least once, and *often more than once*, before we discuss them in class. During and after class, you should review the texts to solidify your understanding in light of class discussion. You will then need to return to the texts again as you work on your papers, and again as you prepare for exams. Make friends with our texts and get used to spending time with them. They are a window into the minds of some of the most remarkable people who have ever lived, and may change the way you see and approach your own life.

Discussion

Discussion is a central part of a philosophy class. In order to participate fully in discussion, be sure to read the assigned text carefully before coming to class. Then be ready to ask good questions and actively participate in the discussion as it unfolds. *You should come to class each day with at least one question or comment based on your thoughtful reading of the assigned text.*

Active participation in class discussion means that you have your own thoughts, your own questions, your own sense of some issues that you want to explore. I will usually ask what you thought of the text at the start of class, and part of how class runs will depend on your responses, then and throughout the class period. I expect you to read and think about the text before coming to class, and if you have done so, you will have something to say. If I get the sense that not enough of you are reading carefully, I may introduce additional incentives (e.g. pop quizzes).

In addition to informal participation in class discussion, I may make a few small assignments that will count toward your participation grade.

There is much more of value in these texts than we will be able to address during class time. I encourage you to discuss them with classmates outside of class, for example forming reading groups. I also encourage you to pursue topics further with me right after class, or at another time in my office.

Essays

Essays are academically the most important parts of the course, because in them you will develop your thinking in the greatest depth. In your essays you have the opportunity to make your most serious contributions to the philosophical conversation we are pursuing, because you have the time to develop and revise your thoughts carefully on a specific topic. Essays will require you to engage critically with the course texts and their topics. You will examine and assess the reasoning and evidence in favor of the ideas in our texts, and you will articulate and support your own judgment.

The essay assignments I distribute will be fairly specific; follow them carefully! These are not book reports. You will usually have to summarize some idea(s) from the text, but this is only a preparatory step to the real work – often evaluating the idea, and articulating your response, or sometimes developing an original interpretation where you develop ideas beyond the point to which they are presented in the text. A paper that does not address the assignment has failed, no matter what else it does. *A paper which merely summarizes what one of our authors or texts says without presenting your own assessment or synthetic judgment is only half of a paper.* As you write, be sure to use the space allotted in a way that reflects the importance of the critical and synthetic portions of the paper.

Custom topics: Much of the point of essays is for students to develop their own thoughts in writing. If you would like to write on a topic of your own choosing, instead of a topic I have assigned, you may describe the topic in a proposal (normally 1-2 paragraphs) and submit it in writing for my approval before writing your paper. Custom papers must engage both the *claims* and the *reasoning* of our course texts, and present *reasoning of your own* in support of a *clear thesis*. Your proposal should make it clear how your paper will do each of these things. If the timing justifies it, we may set a different due date for a custom paper than those listed on the syllabus. Be sure to state in your topic proposal the *due date* you propose for the paper. In most cases your topic will need some refinement, to make it clearer and deeper, before I approve it, so allow time for this. You may propose a custom topic at any time until 5pm Wednesday, Jan. 27, but may only turn in a maximum of two custom papers in a given week.

Exams

Exams test both comprehension of the course texts and your ability to think critically about the texts and their themes. You will need to be able to explain key ideas from our reading in your own words, to show how they fit together, and to use them intelligently in new ways. Exams will include both short answer and essay questions. You will also need to be able

to identify passages we have read, by author and/or work, and to interpret them intelligently during the exam. Get used to reading the texts.

I will distribute a study sheet including sample exam questions in advance, to help you study. However, the best way to prepare for the exams will be to read carefully, participate actively in class, and re-read the texts in light of the discussion. Don't wait until a few days before to start preparing for the exam! You will get much better results, with less effort, if you put in the time consistently along the way.

Course Texts

- Plato, *Gorgias* (Hackett, 1987).
- Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (Hackett, 1992).
- John Taylor Gatto, *Dumbing Us Down* (New Society Publishers, 2005)
- *Tough Choices or Tough Times* (Nat'l Center on Education & the Economy, 2007).
- Martha Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity* (Harvard UP, 1998).
- other readings distributed in class

Please bring with you the relevant texts for each day's class. While other editions of these works exist, I recommend using these editions to make it easier for us to work together as a class (same pagination, terms translated in the same way, etc.), as well as because they are excellent editions. Unless you can freely draw pictures, arrows, comments and questions in the margins, and have them stay there, an electronic version is not good enough. Buy the paper book!

Grading and submission policies

The various kinds of work you perform for the class will receive the following weights in your grade for the course.

<i>Assignments</i>	<i>% of grade</i>
class participation	14%
4 papers (about 4pp each)	60%
minitest	6%
final exam	20%

I will distribute four essay assignments, spaced through the term, typically three class days before the listed due dates. Philosophical writing is different from other writing, so if you have not taken philosophy before, I strongly encourage you to bring a draft of the first paper to me for feedback on Thursday or Friday the first week of class. I am happy to read drafts of papers if you *bring a copy* so we can *discuss it in person*. I will answer specific questions about papers by email, but I normally will not read a full draft unless you are present.

Essays are due at the beginning of class on the specified day. Essays are to be turned in in hard copy. *I will not grade your essay unless you give it to me in hard copy.* If special circumstances (e.g. printer failure) prevent you bringing a hard copy by the start of class, essays I receive by email attachment in a standard format (RTF, PDF, Word) by the start of class will count as having been turned in on time, but you must bring me a hard copy by class time the next day. Late essays will receive a penalty of one letter grade per 24-hour day, counting from the start of class. On the first day only the penalty will be prorated: a paper turned in by 5pm on the due date will be penalized one grade step (e.g. B to B-); one turned in by midnight EDT on the due date will be penalized two grade steps. After midnight on the

due date, papers will be penalized a full letter grade for each 24-hour day or fraction thereof, not counting Sundays.

The mini-test must be taken in class on the specified day. Given serious reasons (e.g. job interview, College-sponsored sporting event), I may give permission to take the mini-test early. *You must attend the final exam to pass the course; plan accordingly.*

As in other classes at Randolph-Macon College, I will use the full range of letter grades.

Communicating with me

My scheduled office hours are time I set aside to be available for students to ask questions and discuss the course material in greater depth. I encourage you to come by not only if you need help, but also if you wish to pursue a topic beyond what we were able to do in class. With rare exceptions, unless I have announced otherwise, I will be in my office at these times. If in doubt, you are welcome to try my office phone to be sure I am there before making the trip over. If my scheduled office hours are not convenient for you, you may set an appointment with me at another time, or simply drop by my office. I will usually be on campus most of the rest of the business day, and more often than not I will be able to talk with you.

Email is a wonderful technology, but it has limitations. You are welcome to email me with questions that can be answered simply. I will usually respond within 24 hours, not counting weekends. For matters of any complexity, however, it is much more effective to speak on the phone or in person. These may include questions about the ideas in the course, about the meaning of particular passages, or ideas you have for your papers. You may email me about these, but do not be surprised if I give only a limited response by email, and invite you to call or come to my office for more.

I will occasionally send information about the class by email. Please do check your email regularly.

Academic Integrity

You, your classmates and I will be investing a substantial amount of work, thought, and energy into this course. There are few things more valuable than learning, and we are embarked on a process of learning together. Plagiarism or any other violation of academic integrity is a serious breach of the trust of your classmates and me and defeats the purpose of education. If you are tempted to cheat, you need to rethink why you are in college. If you are in a bind, have the self-respect to turn in weak work, or late work, rather than work that is not your own. If you turn in work that is not your own, you will probably fail the course, or worse. It is your responsibility to understand the College's Code of Academic Integrity and to follow it. If you have any questions about how the Code applies to your work in this course, ask me.

Course Schedule
January 2010
(subject to change)

<i>date</i>	<i>text</i>	<i>selections</i>	<i>due*</i>
4 M	Intro; Schramm, "Reclaiming Liberal Education"	(handout)	
5 T	Plato, <i>Gorgias</i>	beginning to 472e	
6 W	<i>Gorgias</i>	to 499b	
7 H	<i>Gorgias</i>	to end	
8 F	Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> and Cicero, <i>On Moral Ends</i>	selections (handout)	
11 M	Buddhist, Confucian thought	selections (handout)	P1
12 T	Rousseau, <i>Discourse on the Origins of Inequality</i>	pp10-34	
13 W	<i>Discourse on the Origins of Inequality</i>	pp34-end	MT
14 H	Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill on economics	selections (handout)	
	Mill, "Inaugural Address"	pp643-659 (handout)	
15 F	"Inaugural Address"	p659-end (handout)	
	Berkowitz, "Liberal Education"	(handout)	
18 M	<i>Tough Choices or Tough Times</i>	Parts I & II (pp1-95)	P2
19 T	Gatto, <i>Dumbing Us Down</i>	TBA	
20 W	<i>Dumbing Us Down</i>	TBA	
21 H	Kronman, <i>The End of Education</i>	selections (handout)	
	Nussbaum, <i>Cultivating Humanity</i>	Intro.	
22 F	<i>Cultivating Humanity</i>	Ch. 1, Ch. 2 thru p67	P3
25 M	<i>Cultivating Humanity</i>	Ch. 2, p67 thru Ch. 3	
26 T	<i>Cultivating Humanity</i>	Ch. 4, Ch. 8 thru p271	
27 W	<i>Cultivating Humanity</i>	p271 thru Conclusion	
28 H	Mission statements, Review and Reflection	(handout)	P4
29 F	<i>Final Exam (11:10am-2:10pm)</i>		

*P1, etc. – paper due
MT – minitest