

The Philosophy of Education

Chapter 5



What is Philosophy of Education

- All teachers have a personal philosophy that colors the way they teach
 - Engaging in philosophy helps clarify what they do or intend to do, justify or explain why they do what they do in a logical, systematic manner
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Understanding two important notions

- Who they are or intend to be
 - Why they do or propose to do what they do
 - Eric Berne's three important questions:
 - Who am I?
 - Why am I here?
 - Who are all these other people, and what do they want of me?
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The meaning of Philosophical Inquiry

- “Whatever people choose to embrace, if their choices are made in a logical, rational manner, they are engaged in the process of ‘doing philosophy.’”
 - Three specific areas of philosophical inquiry: metaphysics concerned with questions about the nature of reality; epistemology concerned with the nature of knowledge; axiology concerned with the nature of values
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Particular Philosophies of Education

- Idealism, the first systematic philosophy in Western thought...Socrates and Plato, the Socratic method was dialogue
 - Generic notions: Philosophers often pose abstract questions that are not easily answered but are concerned with the search for truth
 - World of matter in constant state of flux, senses are not to be trusted, continually deceive us
 - Truth is perfect and eternal, but not found in the world of matter, only through the mind
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Idealism

- The only constant for Plato was mathematics, unchangeable and eternal
 - Plato's method of dialogue engaged in systematic, logical examination of all points of view...ultimately leading to agreement and a synthesis of ideas...this approach known as the *dialectic*.
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Idealism

- Plato believed education helped move individuals collectively toward achieving the *good*.
 - The State should be involved in education, moving brighter students toward abstract ideas and the less able toward collecting data...a gender free tracking system
 - Those who were brighter should rule, others should assume roles to maintain the state
 - The philosopher-king would lead the State to the ultimate good
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Idealism

- Evil comes through ignorance, education will lead to the obliteration of evil
 - More modern idealists: St. Augustine, Descartes, Kant, Hegel
 - Goal of Education: interested in the search for truth through ideas...with truth comes responsibility to enlighten others, “education is transformation: Ideas can change lives.”
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Idealism

- Role of the Teacher: to analyze and discuss ideas with students so that students can move to new levels of awareness so that they can ultimately be transformed, abstractions dealt with through the dialectic, but should aim to connect analysis with action
 - Role of the teacher is to bring out what is already in student's mind: *reminiscence*
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Methods of Instruction

- Lecture from time to time, but primary method of teaching is the dialectic...discuss, analyze, synthesize, and apply what they have read to contemporary society
 - Curriculum...importance of the study of the classics...many support a back to the basics approach to education
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Realism

- Aristotle was the leading proponent of realism, started the Lyceum, the first philosopher to develop a systematic theory of logic
 - Generic Notions...only through studying the material world is it possible to clarify or develop ideas...matter is real independent of ideas
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Aristotle's Systematic Theory of Logic

- Begin with empirical research, speculate or use dialectic reasoning, and culminate in a syllogism
 - A syllogism is a system of logic that consists of three parts: (1) a major premise, (2) a minor premise, and (3) a conclusion
 - For a syllogism to work, all the parts must be correct
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Philosopher's Concerns

- What is the good life?
- What is the importance of reason?
- Moderation in all things...balance in leading one's life: reason is the instrument to help individuals achieve balance and moderation

Realists

- Neo-Thomism...Aquinas affected a synthesis of pagan ideas and Christian beliefs...reason is the means of ascertaining or understanding truth, God could be understood through reasoning based on the material world...no conflict between science and religion
 - The world of faith with the world of reason, contemporary Catholic schools
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Modern Realism

- From the Renaissance, Francis Bacon developed induction, the scientific method...based on Aristotle, developed a method starting with observations, culminating in generalization, tested in specific instances for the purpose of verification
 - John Locke and *tabula rasa*, things known from experience... ordered sense data and then reflected on them
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Contemporary Realists

- Tend to focus on philosophy and science...Alfred North Whitehead, concerned with the search for “universal patterns”
 - Bertrand Russell with Whitehead, *Principia Mathematica*...universal patterns could be verified and classified through mathematics
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Goal of Education for Realists

- Notions of the good life, truth, beauty could be answered through the study of ideas, using the dialectical method...for contemporary realists, the goal of education is to help individuals understand and apply the principles of science to help solve the problems plaguing the modern world
 - Teachers should be steeped in the basic academic disciplines
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Pragmatism

- An American philosophy from the 19th century...Peirce, James, Dewey
 - “By their fruits, ye shall know them.” Pragmatism encourages people to find processes that work in order to achieve their desired ends...action oriented, experientially grounded
 - Rousseau... “back to nature”, environment and experience...*Emile*, little regard for the education of women other than to be Emile’s companion
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John Dewey

- Intellectual heir to Charles Darwin, constant interaction between organism and environment, dynamic and developing world...child centered progressivism and social reconstructionism
 - Instrumentalism and experimentalism, pragmatic relationship between school and society and applying ideas of education on an experimental basis
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John Dewey's Philosophy

- Education starts with the needs and interests of the child, allows the child to participate in planning her course of study, employ project method or group learning, depend heavily on experiential learning
 - Children are active, organic beings...needing both freedom and responsibility
 - Ideas are not separate from social conditions, philosophy has a responsibility to society
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Dewey's Role for the Teacher

- Not the authoritarian but the facilitator...encourages, offers suggestions, questions and helps plan and implement courses of study...has command of several disciplines
 - Inquiry method, problem solving, integrated curriculum
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Existentialism and Phenomenology

- Kierkegaard, Buber, Jaspers, Sartre, Maxine Greene...existentialists
 - Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty...phenomenologists
 - How do one's concerns affect the lives of an individual...the phenomena of consciousness, perception and meaning in an individual's experience
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Existentialists and Phenomenologists

- Based on the earth alone, must make sense of the chaos one encounters
 - “Existence precedes essence.” People must create themselves and create their own meaning...done through the choices people make in their lives, in a state of constant becoming...an individual can make a difference in a seemingly absurd world
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Existentialists

- Education should focus on the needs of individuals, include the nonrational as well as rational, the notion of *possibility*
 - Teachers should understand their own “lived world” and help students to understand their world
 - The need to be “wide awake”...the role of the teacher is intensely personal
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Neo-Marxism

- Radical critique of capitalism
 - The role of education should be to give students the insight to demystify capitalism and become agents of radical change
 - Marx believed the history of civilization was defined by class struggle
 - General conflict theory...the teacher is a “transformative intellectual”
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