

## **Philosophy 177: Educational Justice**

Gina Schouten

T 2:00-4:00, Emerson 106

### **Course Description and Goals**

This course will examine philosophical questions concerning social justice and distributive justice as they apply to education. Education acts as a gateway to vastly unequally-distributed social rewards: things like income and wealth, social status, leisure time, health, relationship success, and control over one's environment. Some of the most important and perplexing questions in social and political philosophy concern who gets access to that gateway, at what cost, and what they experience while passing through. We'll examine issues of justice in compulsory primary and secondary education, as well as issues of justice in higher education. To inform our exploration, we'll read philosophical contributions to the conversations on such topics as the distribution of education, the aims of education, and the rights of parents concerning their children's education. We'll also read some empirical literature, which will provide a working understanding of the structure and consequences of schooling in the US. Finally, we'll explore some case studies looking at specific choices that arise in real time for educational decision-makers. These case studies have been developed by a team of educators and philosophers in the US, and include decisions about discipline, charter schools, special education, and school districting.

The substantive goals of the course are to familiarize you with some participants in these debates, to carefully evaluate the arguments they give, and to work toward defensible positions of your own.

A second goal is more general: to work toward developing more refined skills of philosophical reasoning. This will involve exploring the tools philosophy has developed to critically assess political views, and applying these tools to evaluate the views discussed in the course as well as your own views. You do not need previous experience with philosophy in order to be successful in this class; in fact, our conversations will be richer if we are able to draw on the different disciplinary backgrounds of those among us who are *not* philosophers! But by the end of this class, you should have developed skills to think and write critically about important political questions on your own, to identify shortcomings with the answers proposed by other philosophers, and to defend the answers that you yourself believe to be correct.

A third goal is for you to see the relevance of these philosophical skills to your lives outside of the classroom. Philosophy can help all of us live more fully and more responsibly in our communities and in the world. My hope is that the skills you develop in this course will make your intellectual lives richer and make you more thoughtful, critical, and responsible citizens.

Because this is a philosophy class, you will all be expected to come to your own conclusions and defend them. You will not be graded on what your position is, but you *will* be graded on your ability to reason through, argue for, and express your ideas clearly, carefully, and cogently. This course will not be easy, but it is designed to ensure that you *can be successful*, and I'm here to support you on the journey.

### **Contact Information:**

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Office: Emerson Hall 206

Office Hours: Mondays 1:00 – 3:00 and by appointment

### **Teaching Assistant:** Noel Dominguez

Email: [ndominguez@g.harvard.edu](mailto:ndominguez@g.harvard.edu)

Office: Safra Center 527 (The Safra Center is on the 5th floor of 124 Mt. Auburn Street.)

Office Hours: Wednesdays 9:00 – 11:00 and by appointment

**Course Materials:**

Harry Brighouse, *On Education*

All other readings will be posted on the course website.

**What Makes for a Successful Seminar?**

A seminar should be an intense experience, and every one of us is responsible for making it work. As in all classroom settings, it is important that we be respectful of each other's time and views. Beyond respectful discussion participation, you will be expected to be proactive in helping to generate and sustain a collegial learning environment. In some ways, your role in the classroom is simple: You must show up to class on time, refrain from talk that does not contribute to your or your classmates' learning, stow all electronic devices, actively listen, and take notes. But I'll expect even more of you. I'll expect you to take intellectual risks, to support and encourage your classmates in taking risks, and to trust me that I'll be there to support you as well. Building this kind of trust will take work, and we'll check in as we go. In the meantime, be conscientious about doing your part to empower your classmates, and remember that we can all learn a great deal from a mistake that someone wasn't afraid to make.

Here are some tips on how to participate in a seminar well:

*Preparation* is essential. Come to seminar not only having done the assigned reading, but also having taken copious notes. Ruminates. Jot down questions that arise during discussion. Think about connections across seminar meetings. Steady work—rather than sporadic work—is a key to success in this course.

*Specificity and conciseness* keep us on task. When talking about an assigned reading, refer to it directly. Have it in hand, point to specific passages, and be precise. Sometimes, we have to talk our way into the point we're making: We learn by verbal exploration. We need to be patient with each other when this is happening. But the flip side of this is always striving to be as concise in our discussion contributions as we can. Try to say things only once, and trust others to give you the space to clarify later if necessary.

*Respond directly* whenever possible: pick up from where the last person left off. Use the same examples and the same language. If you want to pull the discussion in a new direction, first check if anyone else wants to say something more directly related. *Eye Contact* is important. As I said, a seminar is an intense experience: look at your classmates when they talk; when you respond to something they say, look at the person to whom you are responding. Avoid interrupting others when they are speaking.

*Ask for clarity* if someone—including the professor—has said something you don't get. You can ask that person to repeat it. Try rephrasing it to see if you understood. Ask for definitions of unfamiliar terms.

*Awkward Silences* and hesitation are okay. Don't feel you need to rush to speak and don't worry if you need a little time to articulate something. Contributing to class discussion is more than the number of words you say. If you are struggling to articulate something, that's probably a sign that you are saying something that is new and not obvious!

*If you have a quiet personality*, you might find contributing to class discussion more difficult than your outgoing classmates. Don't let this stop you! Come with one or two things prepared and be sure to say them early on. You will find that challenging yourself to contribute early will break the ice and you'll feel more comfortable participating more as class goes on. *If you are a confident contributor*, use your confidence for good and not evil. Help bring others into discussion, refer to your classmates by name, and be positive about the contributions of those who don't say as much.

*Certainty is dull.* Avoid the “search and destroy” mode, both with your classmates and with the texts we read. Approach others’ ideas—and your own!—with charity and critical open-mindedness. Be open; be adventurous; be willing to take a risk and be wrong. Commit to being curious and having fun.

### **Class Policies:**

You should attend every session, arriving on time and staying until the end. This is a small seminar and everyone will play an important role.

You should print out all course materials as they are assigned, and bring a hard copy of each article with you to class on the day we’re scheduled to discuss it. (I didn’t make a course pack because it would cost you far more to buy the course pack than to print.)

With your paper copies of articles and pen and paper for note-taking, you won’t need a laptop or any other electronic note-taking device in this class. Please keep all such devices put away. I realize this might be inconvenient for those of you who are used to taking notes on a laptop, but the evidence is clear: For the kind of learning we’re after in this class, reading from paper and taking notes longhand just work better. If you have questions or concerns about this policy, I invite you to come talk to me after you have read up on some of the research about laptops and learning:

<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/reading-paper-screens/>

<http://pss.sagepub.com/content/25/6/1159>

[https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/17/08/note-taking-low-tech-often-best?utm\\_source=SilverpopMailing&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=09.05.2017%20%281%29](https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/17/08/note-taking-low-tech-often-best?utm_source=SilverpopMailing&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=09.05.2017%20%281%29)

Phones should be silenced and put away at all times during class. If some emergency arises and you need to be reachable during class on a particular day, please talk to me before we begin.

Barring some emergency, I will check email at least once per day during normal business hours. Please plan ahead. Because many questions aren’t best answered by email, I may ask you to meet with me in person. Two things to consider before emailing: First, is the answer to your question on the syllabus or on the course website? (If it is a question about a deadline or where my office is, the chances are high that you will find your answer in one of these places.) Second, would you learn more from asking your question in person, during class or office hours, rather than over email?

### **Course Requirements**

*Reading Memos: 9 memos, 8 points each, 72 points total*

Reading complex argumentative texts is difficult, and there is a specific set of skills you will need to develop in order to do it well. We will discuss these skills, and you will practice them by writing weekly reading memos during each of the nine weeks for which there are readings assigned (weeks 2-10; see course schedule below). You will choose one of the assigned readings to write on each week. The memos are due (to be posted in the “discussion” page on our course website) *by 4:00 p.m. each Sunday*, two days before we’re scheduled to discuss the relevant reading in class. You’ll choose one of the assigned readings for that week, and *in no more than 500 words*, reflect philosophically on some component of that reading. This might mean raising an objection, summarizing and clarifying some point that you took to be obscure, or providing some additional argument in support of a claim the author makes. The idea is for you to be engaging philosophically with the texts even before you come to class. I’ll read each memo before our class meetings, and use them to structure our discussion of the readings. If you write a memo and it’s clear to me that you’ve made a good-faith effort to carefully read and understand the article, you will get at least 7 points. If in addition you offer a cogent critical contribution—raise some objection or

offer some support of your own that challenges or reinforces the author's argument—you will get 8 points. In the event of an *excused* absence, you may turn in a reading memo late without penalty, as long as I receive it within one week of the due date. No late memos will be accepted otherwise.

*Memo Comment: 9 comments, 2 points each, 18 points total*

We will also be practicing the skills for you to learn *from one another*. Toward that end, you should all be engaging with one another's ideas outside of class. By 4:00 most Sundays, you and your classmates will have posted reading memos on the "discussion" page on our course website. You're required to respond to (at least) one of your classmate's reading memos on that page *by midnight Monday night* (the next day). If your comment demonstrates thoughtfulness, carefulness, and charity toward your classmate's ideas, you will get 2 points for that week's memo comment.

*Discussion Group Reports: 9 reports; 10 points each, 90 points total*

One of my main goals for this class is for you to see the relevance of the issues we're discussing and the philosophical skills you're developing in your own lives. This is often best accomplished through open discussion with others who are experiencing the class with you. During each of the nine weeks for which there are readings assigned (weeks 2-10; see course schedule below), you will meet outside of class to discuss that week's readings with your discussion group. You will be assigned a group, and you'll meet with the same group each week. At the end of your session, your group must submit a report on your discussion. I suggest that group members take turns typing up and sending the report, but you are welcome to handle this in whatever way you decide as a group. Each report will be due (submitted on the course website) by 4:00 p.m. on the *following* Monday. For example, for Week 3 (Sept. 19), your discussion group will meet to discuss material from that session sometime before the evening of the following Monday (Sept. 25).

I'll provide discussion prompts, but you can otherwise use your own judgment in determining how to structure your discussion. Maybe you want to work to clarify aspects of the reading you found confusing; maybe you want to workshop your critical papers; maybe you want to talk about frustrations you have about the class. Any of these possibilities is fine, as long as you're engaging critically, thoughtfully, and respectfully, in some way that relates to the material for the relevant week. The discussion group report that you submit should include: 1.) the names of the group-members who attended and 2.) a brief description of your conversation. If your group turns in a report on time and your name is on that report, you will receive full credit. *If any problems arise, please bring them to my attention right away.* In the event of an *excused* absence, you may write a reflection *about your group's report* for credit for that week, provided that you get your reflection to me within one week of your absence. Otherwise, not attending discussion group will result in receiving no credit for that week's report.

*Case Study Project and Presentation: (150 points)*

To further serve the goal of helping you develop a deeper understanding of the ways in which philosophical insights extend beyond the classroom, you will be required to have a Philosophy in Life experience. For this course, the Philosophy in Life experience will take the form of a case study project and presentation, which you will do with your discussion group. Each group will choose a case study from those developed recently by a team of educators and philosophers in the US. You will use newspaper articles, blogs, and scholarly articles to research your case study. You will also arrange an out-of-class experience that you yourself will design and execute, to help inform your philosophical thinking about the case. You will turn in both group and individual reflections on these experiences, and we will schedule a time for each group to present their learning to the class. The main objective of this assignment is to give you an opportunity to think carefully and critically about how your in-class learning applies to the real world. I will provide detailed guidance on this assignment in advance of the due date, and you will have plenty of time to ask questions.

*Critical Papers: (2 papers; 100 and 150 points, 250 points total)*

You will be required to hand in two critical papers on any of the articles we cover. Each one should be between five and six pages long, double spaced. These are more formal writing assignments than your reading memos, but you may use one of your reading memos as a jumping off point for writing your critical papers. In these papers, you are expected to do something very specific:

1. Identify one important philosophical claim for which the author is arguing.
2. Reconstruct a *valid argument* that the author gives for this claim.
3. Critically evaluate the argument.

To critically evaluate an argument is to say whether it is good or bad and why. There are several ways that an argument might be bad. It may be that the reasons given don't actually lend support to the conclusion, or it may be that some of the reasons offered in support of the conclusion are false. It may be that you think the conclusion is true, but that the argument for that conclusion is not the best available. In such a case, you may offer with what you take to be a better argument.

4. Explain the implications of your evaluation.

Where does your evaluation leave us with respect to the issue being discussed in the article? What are the broader implications of your evaluation? Does your evaluation show that we must give up some particular claim? Does your evaluation show that the initial argument can be strengthened in ways that make the claim more plausible? Etc.

*Attendance and Participation: 20 points*

My expectation is that you will attend every class, having read the assigned material as well as your classmates' reading memos, and prepared to discuss it. Your attendance and participation score will reflect your preparation for and thoughtful participation in class.

**Grading Scale**

The total number of points available in the course is 600.

*There will be no opportunity for extra credit in the course.*

Final grades will be calculated as follows:

- A 90 percent range
- B 80 percent range
- C 70 percent range
- D 60 percent range

Pluses and minuses will correspond to the top and bottom two percent ranges in each group; for example:

A- for 90-92%.

Date and Topic	Readings and Assignments Due
<b><u>Week 1: Sept 5</u></b>  Political Philosophy: The Toolkit	
<b><u>Week 2: Sept 12</u></b>  Political Philosophy: The Toolkit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cohen, “How to Do Political Philosophy”</li> <li>• Rawls, <i>Justice as Fairness</i> (excerpts)</li> </ul>
<b><u>Week 3: Sept 19</u></b>  Education and Equal Opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rothstein, “Equalizing Opportunity”</li> <li>• Lareau, “Invisible Inequality”</li> </ul>
<b><u>Week 4: Sept 26</u></b>  Education and Equal Opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jencks, “Whom Must We Treat Equally?”</li> <li>• Anderson, “Fair Opportunity in Education”</li> </ul>
<b><u>Week 5: Oct 3</u></b>  Education and Equal Opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brighouse and Swift, “Educational Equality versus Educational Adequacy”</li> <li>• Schouten, “Toward a Prioritarian Principle of Educational Justice”</li> </ul>
<b><u>Week 6: Oct 10</u></b>  Aims of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brighouse, <i>On Education</i>, Chapters 1-4</li> </ul> <p><b>CRITICAL PAPER 1 DUE!</b></p>
<b><u>Week 7: Oct 17</u></b>  Aims of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Morton, “Molding Conscientious, Hardworking, and Perseverant Students”</li> <li>• Brighouse, <i>On Education</i>, Chapter 7</li> </ul>
<b><u>Week 8: Oct 24</u></b>  Schooling and the Rights of Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Howell, “Justice, Inequality, and Home Schooling”</li> <li>• Gutmann, “What Does ‘School Choice’ Mean?”</li> <li>• Brighouse, <i>On Education</i>, Chapter 5</li> </ul> <p><b>PRELIMINARY GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL REPORTS DUE!</b></p>
<b><u>Week 9: Oct 31</u></b>  Higher Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• White, “A Modest Proposal</li> <li>• TBA</li> </ul>

<b><u>Week 10: Nov 7</u></b> Higher Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ebels-Duggan, “Autonomy as Intellectual Virtue”</li> <li>• TBA</li> </ul>
<b><u>Week 11: Nov 14</u></b> Case Study Presentations	Case Study Presentations  <b>CRITICAL PAPER 2 DUE!</b>
<u>Nov 21:</u>	THANKSGIVING RECESS—NO CLASS
<b><u>Week 12: Nov 28</u></b> Case Study Presentations	Case Study Presentations
<u>Dec 5:</u>	READING PERIOD—NO CLASS  <b>FINAL GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL REPORTS DUE!</b>

**Special Needs:** Any student needing an accommodation due to a documented disability should speak with me before the end of the second week of term. Please bring along your Faculty Letter from the Accessible Education Office. You can find more information at <http://aeo.fas.harvard.edu/>.

**Academic Honesty:** *Cheating of any kind, including plagiarism, will not be tolerated.* A student’s placement of his or her name on any academic exercise shall be regarded as assurance that the work is the student’s own. Honoring the values of academic integrity is crucial to advancing learning. To that end, any instances of academic dishonesty will be addressed firmly, in keeping with the university’s guidelines. For more information, please visit <https://college.harvard.edu/academics/academic-integrity>.

**Other Concerns:** Life at college can be very challenging. Students sometimes feel overwhelmed, lost, anxious, or depressed. If you’re struggling, I’m happy to listen and to help you find help. For information on confidential counseling and mental health services at Harvard, you can call 617-495-5711 (24 hours) or visit <http://huhs.harvard.edu/services/counseling-and-mental-health>.

**Academic Help:** The Harvard College Writing Center provides individual consultations for any writing assignment (<http://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/>). The Bureau of Study Counsel offers individual and group tutoring for any course (<http://bsc.harvard.edu/>). Resident Deans of Freshmen and Allston Burr Assistant Deans will work with you in your Yard or House to provide academic assistance and personal support. The Philosophy Department has a Departmental Writing Fellow who is available to help with paper writing throughout the term. See <http://philosophy.fas.harvard.edu/writing-undergrad>.