

Essaying Education

(ENG/EDUC 265)

Professor Newstok

Fall 2014

TuTh 8:00-9:15am

Palmer 203

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The semester after he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, the poet Joseph Brodsky was teaching a class on Russian poetry to a group of juniors and seniors. They were reading a poem by Osip Mandelstam that made reference to Ovid. When Mr. Brodsky asked how many had read Ovid, not a single hand went up. Mr. Brodsky said, "You've been cheated."

Course description

"Essaying Education" (ENG-265) surveys the pre-21st century philosophy of education through the genre of the essay. To 'essay' means to 'try,' to 'attempt.' We will attend to the rhetoric and style of thinkers attempting to argue about how we learn. Figures will be drawn from the classical era (Plato, Quintilian, Cicero), medieval Europe (Augustine, Aquinas), the humanist Renaissance (Erasmus, Elyot, Montaigne, Bacon, Comenius), the Enlightenment (Locke, Rousseau, Wollstonecraft), American pragmatism (Emerson, James, Dewey, Dubois, Washington), and more recent critiques (Jacotot, Freire, Arendt, Gatto, Ravitch, Sahlberg). We will also watch selected documentary films (e.g. *To Be and To Have; At Berkeley*). Particular attention will be devoted to the rhetoric of the essay, itself a mode of speculation. In kind, students will essay their own educational philosophy as part of a scholarly final research project. Topics will inevitably include pedagogy, ignorance, failure, knowledge, equity, and the *artes liberales*, or "crafts of freedom."

The topic is particularly timely, since in Fall 2014 Rhodes hosts two important symposia on the liberal arts, one sponsored by the **Project for the Study of Liberal Democracy (September 25–27)**, and another sponsored by a grant from the **Teagle Foundation (October 25–27)**. Students will attend and report on selected lectures from both events.

Required Texts

For ease of reference, the following editions are **required**:

- *Meno and Phaedo*, Plato (Cambridge, 2011)
- *Education: Ends and Means* (UPA, 1997)
- *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (Hackett 1996)
- *Emile* (Basic, 1979)
- *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Hackett 2013)
- *Experience and Education* (Simon & Schuster 1997)
- *Beyond the University: Why Liberal Education Matters* (Yale 2014)

Additional course materials will be distributed throughout the semester.

Have the texts read **before** our discussions each session. Ideally, you will read them once over the weekend, and then **re-read** them during the week—good reading always entails **re-reading**. Read aloud; read slowly; take notes. You should plan on **at least four hours** of preparation for every hour of class. If it becomes clear that not all of the class is keeping up with the reading, quizzes will be given. Bring the **assigned reading** to each class, **heavily annotated with your comments**.

You will often be encouraged to refer to the *Oxford English Dictionary*:
<http://dictionary.oed.com/>

Schedule—subject to revision, per student interest and instructor’s discretion

Introduction

Week 1 (Aug. 28) 'education,' 'essay,' 'end'— "To Be and to Have"

Classical Greece and Rome

Week 2 (Sept. 2) Plato, *Meno*
 Week 3 (Sept. 9) Cicero, Quintilian

Medieval

Week 4 (Sept. 16) Augustine, Aquinas

Renaissance Humanism

Week 5 (Sept. 23) Erasmus, Elyot
 Week 6 (Sept. 30) Montaigne
 Week 7 (Oct. 7) Bacon
 Week 8 (Oct. 14) Comenius, Hartlib, Milton

Interlude on the liberal arts

Week 9 (Oct. 23) Roth; **ROTH LECTURE (6pm, BCLC) [Berkeley film (?)]**
 Week 10 (Oct. 28) Locke

Questions of Travels

Week 11 (Nov. 4) Rousseau
 Week 12 (Nov. 11) Wollstonecraft

American Pragmatism

Week 13 (Nov. 18) Emerson, James
 Week 14 (Nov. 25) Dewey
 Week 15 (Dec. 2) Washington, Dubois

Recent Critiques

Week 16 (Dec. 9) Jacotot, Freire, Arendt, Gatto, Ravitch, Sahlberg, others

FINAL SCHOLARLY ESSAYS DUE MONDAY, DECEMBER 15

Requirements

Engagement (30%) is mandatory, broadly conceived to include active **participation** (*listening and responding* to your peers as well as the professor), consistent **preparation** of course readings, **enthusiasm** for assignments, **collaboration** with your peers, and **respect** for the course — a mature level of decorum when engaging with the professor, writing fellow, or peers. Frequent **quizzes** will be one way to evaluate your consistent preparation. **An absence is an absence is an absence, no matter the excuse (doctor-confirmed illness, personal matters, extracurriculars)—four (4) of them = two (2) full weeks! = grounds for failure in the course.**

Weekly essays (30%), marked throughout the term in order to give you a rough idea of your progress in the course. A “check,” “check-minus,” or “check-plus” will indicate a general, non-binding evaluation. **Due every Sunday via email by 8pm.**

Contextual presentation (10%) – pairs of students will help introduce us to the intellectual background of education within each particular era. To do so, they will consult with Professor Newstok, survey a range of pertinent scholarship, produce a concisely and intelligently formatted handout, and share their context with the entire seminar.

Recent critique presentation (10%) – for the final week of class, all students will survey a different educational philosopher who critiques contemporary education, again producing a shrewd handout to share with their peers. **(December 9)**

Final Essay (20%), retrospectively drawing from the long history we've surveyed in this course, with scholarly sources and argumentation. **(December 15)**

Preparation: Expect to prepare **four hours** outside of class for every hour inside class. Have the assignments read **before** our discussions each week; ideally, you will read assignments once over the weekend, and then re-read them during the week; good reading always entails **re-reading**.

Drafts: Writing drafts will invariably improve your final papers. Make an appointment with the **Rhodes College Writing Center** at least once.

Weekly Essays: These are due by **5pm** every Sunday.

Deadlines: Deadlines are firm; I do not accept late work or grant extensions. Late work causes problems for both students and teachers, particularly in a workshop; it frequently results in inferior writing and evaluation. **Expect to submit an essay every Sunday night.**

Email: I expect you to check your email regularly (at least once per day), as I will often detail or revise assignments in between classes. I am happy to receive queries by email regarding your writing, but I may not be able to reply immediately—and it's generally preferable to discuss writing in person.

Grading: 'C' (70–79%) represents *satisfactory* work; a 'B' (80–86%) represents *good* work; a 'B+' (87–89%) represents *very good* work; an 'A-' (90–93%) represents *excellent* work; and the infrequent 'A' (94% and above) represents *extraordinary* achievement. This holds true for your overall engagement, your short essays, your critical surveys, and your final projects.

Policies: As always, please observe Rhodes guidelines regarding the **Honor Code**. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated, and an Honor Code violation (including **plagiarism**) will be **grounds for failure in the course**.

Decorum: Respect the integrity of the course: please turn off **cell phones** and **remove hats** before entering the classroom. **Eating in class** and **leaving to go to the bathroom** are both disruptive to our conversations; please plan accordingly so that you won't have to do either. Treat **email exchanges** with one another and with the professor as formally composed correspondence.

Format: Please follow these simple guidelines to make grading papers more uniform:

- put your **last name on each page** in the top right corner, followed by the **page number**
- use **Garamond, Times, or Optima 12-point** font
- **single-space** the text of your essay (to save paper)
- **staple** all pages together
- **margins** should be an inch on top, bottom, and sides
- put the following information, single-spaced, in the **top left corner of the page**:

Your Name
ENG/ENG 265: Essaying Education
Professor Newstok
Month Day, Year

- your **tantalizing title** follows this heading, centered on the next line

Weekly writing—guidelines

These are concise, one-page, single-spaced (around 500 words) compositions designed to familiarize you with a number of different *kinds* of approaches to analyzing essays — from examining very minute details to considering larger issues across multiple texts. As the semester progresses, you will be able to incorporate the 'tools' from earlier essays into your increasingly nuanced compositions. They are also intended to give you some expertise on a particular topic for discussion that week, and serve as preparation for our seminar; it is often only through writing that we come to recognize what we have to say.

Hard copies are due via email every Sunday by 8pm to newstoks@rhodes.edu

Loose rubric for considering philosophical essays on education

What is *education*?

What is its *end* (purpose/*telos*/goal)?

Where does it take place? (locations)

What kind of *community* (*polis*) does it presuppose?

What is the relationship between the school and the wider *community*?

Who *pays* for it? (state? individuals? philanthropists?)

What is a *teacher*?

What is a *student*? (how old?)

What is the role of a *family*?

What can be *taught*? what *cannot* be taught?

What *motivates* a student to learn?

How is educational progress *judged*?

What is *knowledge*?

What is the presumption about *human nature* (and/or 'soul') — fallen/corrupt? innocent? blank slate (*tablua rasa*)?

What is the *medium*? (language; presence; materials; other infrastructures)

What kind of relationship to the *past* is presumed?

What (if anything) should all students *know in common*?

Do all students need/deserve to follow the *same education*?

What is the role of *mathematics* in an educational theory? *rhetoric*? *music*?

Does *moral* education coincide with *civic* education? *should* it?

What role does *making* or *doing* ('craft'?) have in the curriculum?

What is the relationship between *body* and *mind*? How ought *discipline* apply to both?

What is the role of *habit*? *memory*? *recitation*?

EDUCATION—Etymology is always revealing. "education" derives from *e-ducare*: **to bring out, draw forth** and from *e-ducere*: **to lead out**. Its double etymology suggests both **drawing something out of a learner**; and **leading the learner out to a new place**. *Erudire* typically suggests **taking someone or something out of a rude or crude condition**. Our "doctrine" and "indoctrinate" come from *docere*, to teach; and of course *disciplina* covers both senses of the English "discipline." "Instruction" comes from *in-struere*: "to build into." Hence the German *Bildung* to shape, form, cultivate. The German *erziehen* gives: to bring up or train. The verb "to school" derives from the Greek *scholē*: **discuss at leisure**, and *scholion*, a commentary, interpretation. The French use "**formation**" as well as "education." Greek has the general term *trophe*: rearing, and *paideia* which refers to the bringing up of young children, both surprisingly limited.—Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, "The Ruling History of Education," in *Philosophers on Education* (Routledge, 1998): 11.

ESSAY—*essai*—"a trial, an attempt" (Patridge). From this meaning comes English "to essay" in the sense of **"to make a trial or an attempt,"** as in Emerson's statement "I also will essay to be." The word also comes into English via Norman French *assaier* as "to essay," **meaning to try or test, as in testing the quality of a mineral ore.**

German has two words for essay: *Abhandlung*, a "dealing with" something, and *Aufsatz*, a "setting forth." . . . So far as I can learn, the first use of essay to refer to a literary composition was for the title of the most famous collection of such compositions ever published—Montaigne's *Essais*. If you look for the first English use of the term in this sense in the OED, you may be surprised at what you find. Instead of a majestic series of entries marching forward from the Middle Ages, you encounter this bald statement: "Essay. A composition of moderate length on any particular subject, or branch of a subject; originally implying **want of finish** . . . but now said of a composition more or less elaborate in style though limited in range. The use in this sense is apparently taken from Montaigne, whose *essais* were first published in 1580."

In other words Montaigne invented the term, and the English got it directly from him. Another surprise. The first English use of the term was on the title page of the *Essayes* Francis Bacon published in 1597. The second was on the title page of John Florio's translation of—you guessed it—Montaigne's *Essayes, or Morall, Politike, and Militarie Discourses* (1603). . . . the essay did not appear *ab ovo*. Montaigne's principal guide and mentor in the art of the essay was Plutarch, whose *Moralia* consists of short compositions on topics of general interest . . . Another writer much admired by Montaigne and more so by Bacon is Seneca, whose unfailingly uplifting letters often come close to being essays. . . . in spite of these and other precedents, the essay *is* something new [in contrast to *dispositio*, "the literary equivalent of the **foregone conclusion.**"]—O. B. Hardison, Jr., "Binding Proteus: An Essay on the Essay," *The Sewanee Review* 96.4 (Fall, 1988), 612-13.

END(S)—*telos*/purpose/goal/destination/completion/termination (Wittgenstein's ladder)
 "End" is «τέλος» ('telos, *neuter noun*), from the ancient «τέλος» ('tēlōs, *neuter noun*), lit. **fulfilment, conclusion**. PIE base **telā-*, to weigh, lift, probably due to the weighing of the correct amount of gold/goods one had to pay as a financial charge or other levy in order to meet the requirements or expectations of the State (from «τέλος», the ancient Greek unit of value and mass «τάλαντον», *talent* derives). This *amphibology* of «τέλος» has survived in Modern Greek: «Τέλος» describes both the *fulfilment, conclusion* and the *rate, tax* (e.g. stamp duty is τέλος χαρτοσήμου-*telos xarto'simu* in Greek).

"The Essay Film"

<http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/features/deep-focus/essay-film>

André Bazin, reviewing Chris Marker's *Letter from Siberia* (1957), claimed "a given image doesn't refer to the one that preceded it or the one that will follow, but rather it refers laterally, in some way, **to what is said.**" Thus the very thing which makes *Letter* "extraordinary", in Bazin's estimation, is also what makes it not-cinema. Looking for a term to describe it, Bazin hit upon a prophetic turn of phrase, writing that Marker's film is, "to borrow Jean Vigo's formulation of *À propos de Nice* ('a documentary point of view'), **an essay documented by film. The important word is 'essay', understood in the same sense that it has in literature – an essay at once historical and political, written by a poet as well.**"

the **ruminative, digressive and playful qualities** we associate with the essay film. . . that **free play of the mind, the Montaigne-inspired meanderings of individual intelligence . . .**

"The secret history of the essay film"

<http://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/19816/1/the-secret-history-of-the-essay-film>

"Essay films are arguably the most innovative and popular form of filmmaking since the 1990s," wrote Timothy Corrigan in his notable 2011 book, *The Essay Film*. . . . essay films have been around since the dawn of cinema: they emerged not long after the Lumière brothers recorded the first ever motion pictures of Lyonnaise factory workers in 1894, yet their definition is still ambiguous.

Geoff Andrew, a senior programmer at the BFI who helped curate last year's landmark essay film season, explained, **"they are sort of documentaries, sort of non-fiction films."** The issue is that some filmmakers try to provide an objective point of view when it is just not possible. **"There's always somebody manipulating footage and manipulating reality to present some sort of message."** Andrew continued, **"So, in a way, all documentaries are essay films."**

1940 - Hans Richter's *The Film Essay*

The term "essay film" was originally coined by German artist Hans Richter, who wrote in his 1940 paper, *The Film Essay*: **"The film essay enables the filmmaker to make the 'invisible' world of thoughts and ideas visible on the screen... The essay film produces complex thought – reflections that are not necessarily bound to reality, but can also be contradictory, irrational, and fantastic."** So while World War II was blazing away, a new cinema was born.

"igniting a fire"

<http://quoteinvestigator.com/2013/03/28/mind-fire/>

"On Listening" in *Moralia* by the Greek-born philosopher Plutarch who lived between 50 and 120 AD (trans. Robin Waterfield, 1992):

*For **the correct analogy for the mind is not a vessel that needs filling, but wood that needs igniting — no more — and then it motivates one towards originality and instills the desire for truth.** Suppose someone were to go and ask his neighbours for fire and find a substantial blaze there, and just stay there continually warming himself: that is no different from someone who goes to someone else to get some of his rationality, and fails to realize that he ought to ignite his innate flame, his own intellect, ...*

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Ralph Cudworth (invoking Plutarch) in his *True Intellectual System* (1678):

*"all human teaching is ... **not the filling of the soul as a vessel, merely by pouring into it from without, but the kindling of it from within"***

Cudworth was one of the leaders of the Cambridge Platonists; the claim is intended to depend upon the Platonic account of learning (e.g. in the *Meno*).

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In 1968 a version of the saying was ascribed to Plutarch in the book "Vision and Image: A Way of Seeing" by James Johnson Sweeney. This instance placed "education" into the quote, and it used the word "pail" instead of "vessel". Interestingly, the Plutarch quotation was immediately adjacent to a quote credited to W. B. Yeats. One important mechanism for generating misattributions is based on the misreading of neighboring quotations. A reader sometimes inadvertently transfers the ascription of one quote to a contiguous quote:

*William Butler Yeats has expressed the heart of this viewpoint in his statement, "**Culture does not consist in acquiring opinions but in getting rid of them**" and Plutarch in "Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire."*

In 1987 the "Barnes & Noble Book of Quotations" included an aphorism that exactly matched the instance above, but the words were credited to Yeats instead of Plutarch. This reassignment fits the pattern of misattribution just described:

Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire. —William Butler Yeats