

# Philosophy of Education

Susan C. Anthony, P.O. Box 111704, Anchorage, AK 99511, 907-345-6689, SusanCAnthony.com

## What Is Philosophy?

Philosophy in Greek means “love of wisdom.” It is concerned with discovering what in life is true and valuable. There are five basic philosophical questions:

*Who am I?*

*Where did I come from?*

*Why am I here?*

*Where am I going?*

*How then shall I live?*

A complete philosophical system, or world view, must be consistent, comprehensive, based on adequate evidence, and free from contradictions or absurdity. We need to think clearly, critically, correctly and comprehensively as we evaluate ideas and truth claims.

Our educational philosophy must be firmly grounded in our general philosophy. A philosophy of education should address the following questions:

*What is the purpose of education?*

*What is the role of the teacher v. the child?*

*What should be the standards and objectives?*

*What methods should be used?*

*How should progress be evaluated?*

There are five fundamental schools of educational philosophy. Progressivism (liberal) and essentialism (conservative) are the most popular. Progressive ideas are contrasted with Christianity on p. 2 of this handout.

- *Perennialism* holds that the major purpose for education is to study timeless values and knowledge. A common approach is the study of Great Books.
- *Essentialism* holds that the major purpose for education is to transmit culture and core knowledge to each new generation. Dr. E. D. Hirsch takes this approach with his *Cultural Literacy* series.
- *Progressivism* holds that truth is relative. Since knowledge is always changing, we should teach children *how* to think rather than *what* to think. Problem-solving skills are vital. This philosophy is based on evolution and John Dewey’s pragmatism.
- *Reconstructionism* holds that the purpose for education is to establish new cultural patterns and to eliminate social evils. Karl Marx held this view.
- *Existentialism* holds that “all life is an empty bubble on the sea of nothingness” (Sartre). Students use their freedom to seek self-realization and fulfillment.

## Why Is Philosophy Important?

*Our plans miscarry because we have no aim. When a man does not know what harbor he is making for, no wind is the right wind.* —Seneca

Ideas are powerful! They shape our reality. We have a philosophy *whether or not we’re aware of it!* It’s foundational, the basis for all of our daily decisions. Long-term and short-term goals “fall out” of a philosophy. To discover what you truly value, look at how you *actually* spend your time and money right now!

*The unexamined life is not worth living.* —Socrates

*I think that in no country in the civilized world is less attention paid to philosophy than in the United States.*  
—Alexis de Tocqueville  
*Democracy in America, 1831*

## Which Philosophy Is Christian?

Both Perennialism and Essentialism, the traditional schools of philosophy, are compatible with Christianity. Reconstructionism and Existentialism are not. Although many Progressive *methods*, such as unit studies, may be used within the context of a Christian education, progressive philosophy assumes upward evolution and the natural goodness of humans. It is most compatible with secular humanism.

## Bibliography

- Clark, Gordon H., A Christian Philosophy of Education, The Trinity Foundation, P.O. Box 169, Jefferson, MD 21755, 1946. \$9.95 inc. shipping.
- Geisler, Norman L. & Paul D. Feinberg, Introduction to Philosophy, A Christian Perspective, Baker Book House, P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287. ISBN 0-8010-3818-9. \$19.99.
- Kienel, Paul A., Philosophy of Christian School Ed., ACSI, P.O. Box 35097, Colorado Springs, CO 80935. 800-367-0798. \$18.95 plus shipping.
- Ozmon, Howard A. & Samuel M. Craver, Philosophical Foundations of Education, Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, Columbus, OH 43216. ISBN 0-675-08049-5.

## ***Who Am I? (What Is the Nature of Man?)***

I am a physical product of nature and evolution. I was born innocent. I am naturally good. My feelings and motivations can be trusted. I am my own authority. Freedom is the highest good—free inquiry, questioning of basic assumptions, untrammelled freedom of expression, freedom of conscience, unlimited intellectual and moral freedom. Repression, imposed authority, or orthodoxy of any kind is bad. I am equal in dignity and worth to all others and I deserve equal rights, opportunities, consideration, and rewards.

I am a unique creation of God, made up of body, soul and spirit. God knows and loves me personally. I was born sinful and cannot trust that my own inclinations are good. I am free to choose my actions but not the rules that govern them or the consequences that follow. My authority is God and His Word. Obedience and love for to God, expressed through prayer, love and service to people, is the highest good. Legalism and narcissism are to be avoided. *All* good things are gifts from God to which I have no inherent right.

## ***Where Did I Come From?***

Life originally arose in a primordial pond and then evolved over the course of billions of years through mutation and natural selection into diverse life forms which include man. Man is closely related to apes and chimpanzees and shares 99% of their genetic material.

God created matter, then plant and animal life, then man in His own image. He did not create robots, but people who are free to choose or reject a relationship with him. In addition to a body, man has soul, spirit, language and creativity.

## ***Why Am I Here? (What Is the Meaning of Life?)***

Life has no meaning or purpose per se. We *invest* it with meaning. We get out of life what we put into it—the dreams and ideals we cherish or the plans and projects we initiate. Happiness, freedom, self-esteem, and service to man are virtues. It is folly to squander life by missing opportunities to enjoy the present.

Life has meaning because we are loved and cherished by God, so much so that Christ willingly *died* in our stead. This truth makes us free. Lasting meaning and enjoyment can be found in cultivating loving relationships and in serving God and people. Every person is uniquely gifted to do good works. (Eph. 2:10)

## ***Where Am I Going?***

There is no life after death, and we must face death as individuals with existential courage. We can, however, build a utopia on earth that is breathtaking in promise, a world of peace, prosperity, freedom and happiness for everyone, with no crime, poverty or disease. A system of world government is not only possible but is required for the good of humanity as a whole.

There is life after death. People are eternal beings, and the purpose of life on earth is to choose whether we wish to spend eternity with God (in Heaven) or apart from Him (in Hell). Physical death is temporary. God will destroy evil in His own time, but is patiently waiting to allow as many people as possible the time and opportunity to freely choose or reject Him.

## ***What Is of Value? (How Then Shall I Live?)***

There are no absolute values. Reality is constantly in process. Ethical values are relative. As long as we do not hurt or interfere with others, we are free to do as we wish. Others have the same privilege. Freedom, independence, open-mindedness, concern for humanity, self-esteem and toleration of alternate lifestyles are virtues. Discrimination, repression, indoctrination, bigotry, orthodoxy and irrational beliefs are vices. The basis for evaluating a truth claim is rational inquiry and the scientific method. Our feelings and the potential consequences guide our choices of what is right for us. What is right for us may not be right for others.

There are absolute values and universal laws which we as individuals can obey or reject but not change. Reality is objective and fundamentally unchanging. Love, joy, peace, truth, patience, temperance, kindness, faithfulness, obedience to parents, justice, gentleness, self-control, compassion, humility and wisdom are virtues. Arrogance, hatred, envy, gossip, selfishness, greed, insolence, deceit, malice, self-righteousness, pride, perverse speech, sexual immorality, murder and idolatry are vices. The basis for evaluating a truth claim is whether it aligns with the Bible. God's law and our conscience guide our choices of what is right.

## ***Sample Mission Statement***

Our mission is to teach our children about God, His Word, and His world, so they come to Christ for salvation and develop into wise, mature, and well-educated Christians whose lives glorify God and make attractive the Gospel of Christ to unbelievers.

## ***Sample Vision Statement***

Our vision for our children is that they will develop into well-rounded, academically sound, socially adept, solidly Christian adults who fear God and personally accept the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We want them to know right from wrong and choose what is right. We pray they will aspire to personal integrity and wisdom, as well as display such virtues as humility, responsibility, constancy, gentleness, perseverance, justice, self-discipline, resourcefulness and generosity in their everyday lives. We wish for them to enjoy learning, have a strong work ethic, be confident of their ability to achieve and overcome obstacles, and have a good background of foundational knowledge and skills. We want them to graduate with a sense of life purpose as well as vocational and entrepreneurial skills. We wish for them to marry well, establish stable Christian homes, be good stewards of all God entrusts to them, and always maintain an eternal perspective.

## ***Perennialism***

Charlotte Mason  
Dorothy Sayers  
David Quine  
Cornerstone Curriculum  
Lamplighter  
How Great Thou Art  
Grammarworks  
Generations of Faith  
Covenant Home Curriculums  
Berean Bookshelf

Key words: classical, trivium, Socratic dialog, liberal education, the arts, character training, Great Books, Western Civilization, formal logic, Latin, grammar

## ***Essentialism***

E. D. Hirsch  
Inge Cannon  
Bob Jones  
Saxon Math  
Moving with Math  
Writing Road to Reading  
A Beka  
Sonlight  
Ring of Fire  
Rod & Staff

Key words: basics, accountability, phonics, 3 Rs, vocational education, core knowledge, drill and practice, cultural literacy, memorization, drill, tests.

## ***Scriptures***

What is the purpose of education?

Eternal life: Proverbs 13:14

Sanctification: Titus 2:10-15

Equipping saints for ministry: Ephesians 4:12-13

What is the role of the teacher?

Listen to the Lord's direction: Isaiah 48:17

Hold fast to the Scriptures: Romans 15:4

Heed the Spirit: John 14:26

Depend on God's energy: Colossians 1:29

Teach and admonish: Colossians 3:16

Guard the good deposit: 2 Timothy 1:13-14

What is the role of the student?

Listen and obey: Proverbs 1:8-9

What should be the standards and objectives?

Become like the teacher (Jesus): Luke 6:40

What methods should be used?

Anything which does not conflict with philosophy

Purpose is to capture attention and motivate.

Teaching through living: Deuteronomy 11:18

Soft, gentle, consistent: Deuteronomy 32:2

How should progress be evaluated?

Avoid too much comparison: Galatians 6:4

## ***Progressivism***

Programs that assume all children naturally learn and bloom if unhindered are progressive. Although the underlying philosophy is not Christian because it assumes the natural goodness of humans, many progressive *methods* are excellent.

Key words: socialization, self-esteem, self-actualization, hands-on, problem-solving, learning by doing, discovery learning, unit studies, whole language, spark of divinity within, unschooling, thinking skills, unlimited potential.

## *Sample Philosophy Statement*

God is the source of all life and the Bible is His Holy Word, true and inerrant. We are created in God's image. Because of Adam's fall, we are born with a sinful nature. Jesus gave his life to make it possible for us to be reconciled to Him. The purpose for life is to accept or reject His free gift of Life, and if accepted, to glorify and enjoy Him and to live so unbelievers will seek a relationship with Him. Francis Schaeffer wrote, "The Christian life is to be a thing of truth and also a thing of beauty in the midst of a lost and despairing world." Life on earth is a beginning; we look forward to eternity with Christ. We aspire to be in the world but not of it as salt and light.

### ***What is the purpose of education?***

The purpose of education is to make Christian individuals, transformed by the renewing of their minds after Him who created them. Education is the vehicle by which culture is transmitted from generation to generation. The end result is individuals who have the knowledge and skills to learn on their own.

### ***What is the role of each participant in our school?***

The Holy Spirit is our true teacher. We will start and end each day in prayer. Father and mother will set aside time at least weekly to plan and problem-solve.

#### *The role of the father is to:*

- Provide leadership and hold the vision.
- Ensure a secure, stable environment and resources.
- Love, discipline and protect each individual.
- Encourage everyone to reach their full potential.
- Set and reinforce rules and standards.

#### *The role of the mother is to:*

- Plan for effective education.
- Select materials and resources.
- Teach, guide, model, encourage, impart information.
- Evaluate.

#### *The role of each child is to:*

- Obey and have a receptive attitude.
- Pay attention and ask questions.
- Have necessary supplies and materials.
- Study and complete assigned work on time.
- Behave and follow rules. Avoid distracting others.

### ***What should be the standards and objectives?***

- Character. Christian character and a work ethic.
- Academics. High objective standards in traditional subject areas. Neat and correct work. Low level skills learned to mastery. Pursue areas of strength while reaching competency in all areas. Instruction will proceed as rapidly as each child's readiness allows and we will teach the habit of connecting new knowledge to what is already known.
- Arts. Exposure to a variety of arts, pursue interests.
- Health. Exercise, nutrition, rest, cleanliness, habits.
- Socialization. Service, church groups, etc.
- Preparation for adult responsibilities.

### ***What methods should be used?***

We plan to expose children to a wide variety of learning experiences in an effort to discover their special areas of talent and interest. We will use a variety of methods based on the type of learning desired. We recognize that learning involves effort and self-discipline. Children must learn to focus and concentrate if they are to reach their potential. Selected textbooks will be used in the core areas of reading, spelling and math. We will use a phonics approach to teaching reading. Memorization and drill will be used to teach such things as facts, skills and Bible verses. Short daily practice periods will be required of each child. In the content areas of Bible, social studies, science and health, we will use a unit approach, rotating units for variety and balance. We will begin units with an overview, then study particulars and wrap up with a summary or project. Unit topics will be selected based on interest and all of the children will be involved at their own level. The library will be an important resource for unit studies. Textbooks in science, social studies, and health will be used as guides and resources to aid in the selection and study of units.

### ***How should progress be evaluated?***

We believe that every child should strive to reach high academic and behavioral standards. Because individuals differ in ability, some will be more successful than others at reaching the standards, but we believe in each child's potential to succeed and will reward progress, effort and humility. Children will be encouraged to set their own goals. "Failure" will be used as an opportunity to learn perseverance and to overcome discouragement and other obstacles in the continued pursuit of excellence. Most evaluation will be done informally by mother as she works closely with the children. Tests in the texts as well as teacher-made tests will be used to allow children to objectively demonstrate their learning. No "grades" will be given, but children will be rewarded for achieving objectives and goals. We will participate in standardized testing once a year as required by our state.