

Ignatian Pedagogy in Philosophy: Finding Moments for Reflection

Elliott D. Chen, PhD

Mentor: Renea Frey, PhD (English)

With this project, I've tried to better understand what reflection means as a Jesuit practice and to find ways of incorporating such reflective practices into my own teaching in the philosophy core. My hope is that this will be pedagogically effective, draw out a kinship between the aims of philosophy and Xavier's mission and identity, and help students cultivate a lifelong habit of reflection.

Three reflective practices have been especially influential: a daily examen, *lectio divina*, and the mission mile; as have the five educational steps, or "wheel," of Ignatian pedagogy.

The first way I've begun adapting these practices is by deliberately setting aside time for reflection. Looking to the Ignatian pedagogical "wheel," both reflection and evaluation are conceived of as distinct steps in a student's learning. I think taking this seriously means recognizing reflection as an activity unto itself that requires space apart from engaging directly with course content.

I now dedicate class meetings during the semester exclusively to reflection. In the first week, for instance, we talk about how we'd like our class to be and what it'll take for us to create such a space. I've found these conversations to be helpful in shaping the atmosphere of the class. By asking with students what the value of the class should be and what is required of each of us for the space to be successful, we establish class norms and buy-in for policy and assessment decisions, as well as empower students to take shared ownership of their intellectual growth. For the middle and end of the semester, I take students on a reflection walk where we revisit the questions from these initial discussions. During this time, we talk about the ways in which we've grown or been successful and re-focus on those goals we've yet to reach.

A second way I've adapted these practices is by having students reflect regularly throughout the semester. Inspired by a colleague's practice and a daily examen, I ask students to post a reflection each week about one of our class meetings. This might develop an idea brought up by a peer, raise a question in light of the day's discussion, or express a confusion that persists.

These reflection exercises are meant to serve several purposes. For one, it encourages students to develop a habit of reflecting on what has happened in class so that they carry the discussion with them throughout their week and into the next class. It also builds a practice of attending more closely to what is said during our conversations, especially the contributions of their peers. Lastly, these weekly reflections lay the foundation for our group reflections where students revisit their past posts and scan them for patterns or meaning prior to reflection walks in the spirit of *lectio divina*.

An extension of this activity I've considered for future courses is to collect these reflections into a journal. The thought here is that the reflection exercises may then be framed as part of the larger project of gathering and sustaining one's thoughts throughout a semester, as opposed to

disconnected, individual assignments. If a physical journal is prepared, one could even pitch the assignment as a creative exercise in a course whose assessments might otherwise exclusively involve writing.

A third reflective practice is what I've called reflection walks. Taken as an abbreviated mission mile, I walk with students around campus, pausing periodically to reflect at various statues and gardens throughout campus. We begin each segment with a question that students are asked to consider while we walk. I usually lead with questions on recent course content and progress to overarching themes and reflective questions about our experiences in class so far. Upon reaching a point of interest, we'll pause and discuss the question raised earlier. Once enough time passes, I'll present the group with another question, beginning the cycle again.

These walks often culminate with a trip to the labyrinth. As we approach the labyrinth, I'll pause to talk briefly about the spirit behind a labyrinth and prepare students to enter. I encourage students at this point to walk through the labyrinth with some question or concern from their own lives and offer it as a space they may return to on their own should they find themselves in need of a quiet place to think something over. Once the class has finished walking through, I'll close with a final reflection on the walk as a whole.

I've found a reflection walk to offer several related benefits. For one, it organically brings a class outside and moving when weather is nice. If timed well, it can offer a change of pace to break up otherwise staling class rhythms while still being a structured activity. In the best of cases, it can uplift or restore class morale by reminding students that class can be fun and that one can learn outside a classroom.

A challenge I've found myself sometimes grappling with is whether, or how much, to push students to take these reflections seriously. Especially when done outside, it's very easy for students to see reflective activities as time to disengage and lose out on their value. In these moments, I've settled on a light touch with the idea being that fruitful reflection shouldn't be forced, and that my role is to provide suitable spaces for reflection that students may use when ready.

In trying these ideas out, I've been struck by how much time is required for reflective practices to mature. I've found that offering deliberate and frequent opportunities for reflection allows students to feel out these spaces and find their own ways of engaging with them. Moreover, sharing one's reflections in a group setting involves a great deal of vulnerability and requires students to trust one another. Fostering a supportive class atmosphere here ends up going hand in hand with cultivating a space ripe for reflection. Finally, there's real value in reflecting while moving in nature and carrying what you've learned outside the classroom.

References

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