

European Seminars in Philosophy of Education (ESPE)

The next meeting of
European Seminars in Philosophy of Education
will be held at the

American University of Paris,
France

June 4-5, 2026

This seminar will deal with the theme:

**Fragile Futures:
Technology, Responsibility
and the Idea of Education**

Fragile Futures: Technology, Responsibility and the Idea of Education

“Move fast and break things” – this Silicon Valley motto and catchphrase coined by Mark Zuckerberg describes the almost demiurgical self-understanding of entrepreneurs and engineers that aim to create a new world through an economically driven and total technological mobilization. The future is ours, this self-ascribed technological and cultural avantgarde seems to assume, and who is not with us, earlier or later inevitably will be an anachronistic relic of the past. Cultural critics, in contrast, traditionally have questioned the what, the how and the why of such wide-ranging transformational ambitions. They have pointed to non-intended side-effects of new technologies, to their often-grandiose promises and often meagre results as well as to the problematic and ambivalent consequences they may have for our self-, world- and other-relations and established institutions. In less techno-pessimistic variants, commentators have pointed to recurring past reactions to technological innovations in the history of cultural criticism, from the railways to the telephone to television, which in hindsight often look somewhat naïve and off the mark.

What is seldom taken into account though, is that such an historically informed and serene perspective on past technological changes and the dystopian speculations or utopian hopes associated with them risks extrapolating past experiences to the future, and thereby may radically underestimate the disruptive potential of new technologies. What if the ‘future’ in a way is already here and what if we mistake a revolution for a mere reform and lack the imagination necessary to grasp what is in the process of coming to dominate our lives in the near future? What if things are just moving too fast and are being broken too fast in the process, for us to come to theoretical and practical terms with them?

The educational context – with its generational asymmetries and enduring tensions between transformational ambitions and efforts to conserve the status quo – seems particularly vulnerable to such a danger. Being among the oldest ‘innovations’, which were developed and arguably also improved by human beings during long stretches of time in slow socio-evolutionary processes, educational practices are often assumed to be more or less immune to radical revolutionary changes by technological means. And indeed, education systems and educational institutions are famous for their inertia to change as one reform replaces another, usually without affecting the basic structure of the system. Similar things could be said about the teaching professions, which historically have seldom been among the early adopters of technological innovations implemented from above by education ministries.

Current technological and associated cultural, economic and political developments, however, may prove this type of status-quo thinking wrong. For instance, the partial replacement of teachers by AI systems is already a live option, the digitalization of educational environments increases at an ever greater pace, and AI systems are beginning to be embedded in all levels of the education system and therefore to transform more and more aspects of education and of childhood. Therefore, it is hardly an exaggeration to state that we are witnessing a technological revolution with the potential to radically reshape the world of education. This

raises many important questions, often of a philosophical nature, e.g. concerning the justifiability of educators' AI-based decisions and the attributability of results to AI-assisted students. AI also poses even more fundamental questions for educational theory, as one may wonder whether the manifold systems and their application (e.g. in toys and learning programs) are to be qualified as educational agents or as something else and whether these systems themselves and the educational experiences and processes they enable may be qualified as genuinely educational in light of classical conceptions of education or *Bildung*. The question of agency and what defines 'intelligent' agents, moreover, is also important in attempts to reconstruct and make sense of the educational and socio-emotional interaction orders that are emerging between AI systems and developing human beings in different contexts (e.g., debates about affective computing).

While all these difficult philosophical questions concerning our co-evolution with new technologies are certainly highly important, one should not forget that current socio-technological developments are primarily driven by large companies that have developed enormous economic, political and sociocultural power and have economic and political interests. In the near future this may lead to an increasing division between those parts of the education system governed by the state and those governed by privately owned companies, which both may create new claims and relationships of responsibility in education and also make it increasingly difficult to pin down who in the end may be considered responsible for what in the first place. This obviously opens manifold questions for the political philosophy of education as well as for moral and democratic education.

These are just some of the pressing issues to be dealt with in the context of this year's European Seminars in Philosophy of Education 2026 in Paris. Potential topics for contributions include, among others:

- History of new technologies in education
- Challenges for moral and democratic education in light of current cultural, economic and political developments triggered by new technologies
- Ethical questions raised by AI and other new technologies in educational contexts, for instance concerning responsibility and educational justice
- Impact of AI on teachers' professional identity
- Philosophical questions concerning the status of AI systems as educational agents and/or epistemic authorities
- Educational analyses of technology-inspired apocalyptic, dystopian, and utopian thinking

The deadline for submissions for the 2026 conference is the 1st of February 2026. Submissions should be anonymized as well as sent along with your name, title and affiliation (university and department) in a separate file. Contributors will be informed whether their submissions are accepted by the 1st of March 2026.

Please send your submissions to: ESPE_conference@hotmail.com

Submissions are invited for:

1. Papers (45 minutes):

Submissions of papers must consist of a short abstract of around 150 words for the conference booklet as well as a long abstract of around 500 words for review purposes. Presentations based on the papers should be between 15-20 minutes long, allowing for 25-30 minutes of discussion.

2. Contributions to roundtable sessions (30 minutes):

Submissions of papers must consist of a short abstract of around 150 words for the conference booklet as well as a long abstract of around 500 words for review purposes. Contributions for roundtable sessions may include papers that are work in progress as well as posters. Contributors will have 10 minutes to present their papers or posters. After this there will be 20 minutes for discussion.

3. Symposia (90 minutes):

A symposium comprises three papers focused on a single theme. Submissions should consist of an abstract that describes the form and focus of the symposium (around 500 words, including a shorter version of 150 words for the conference booklet) as well as outlines of the three papers (no longer than 150 words each). We welcome symposia that represent perspectives from different European countries and regions.

All submissions must be of unpublished material.

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