PHIL 221 / Philosophy as a Way of Life
Fall, 2011
Syllabus

Course Summary

For many philosophers, East and West, philosophy has been more than an effort to answer fundamental questions. It has been an activity aimed at changing one's orientation to the world and, thus, how one lives one's life. We will explore Chinese, Greco-Roman, and more contemporary versions of the idea that philosophy should be seen as a way of life. How does philosophical reasoning interact with lived practice? How do metaphysical views lead to ethical commitments? Despite their differences, Confucians, Daoists, Epicureans, and Stoics all agreed that philosophy should aim at making us better people. Can such an idea still get traction in today's world?

We will explore these questions via close reading, intensive discussion, and various group and individual activities over the course of the semester.

Readings

The course will revolve around the reading and discussion of a series of great but often difficult texts. It is vital that you come to class having read the day's assignment, ready to discuss or ask questions about its key points. Bring the current book to class; if you are reading on-line, make sure to take good notes so that you can draw on your reading, in detail, during class discussion.

Readings will be from the books that I have ordered through Broad Street Books (860-347-1194), as well as from materials that are available on-line. In order:

- Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Broad Street)
- Confucius, *The Essential Analects* (Slingerland, trans.; Broad Street)
- Socrates/Plato, *Five Dialogues* (Grube, trans.; Broad Street)
- Zhuangzi, *The Essential Writings* (Ziporyn, trans.; Broad Street)
- Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* (Smith, trans.; Broad Street)
- Seneca, *Stoic Letters* (selected; available on-line)
- Zhu Xi, *Learning to Be a Sage* (Gardner, trans.; Broad Street)
- Thoreau, *Walden* (available on-line)
- Shusterman, *Practicing Philosophy* (Broad Street)

Some of these are available in other editions or translations; please be sure to see me before deciding to use an alternative.
Classroom Activities and Groups

Attendance is mandatory. The main activity in class will be discussion of our texts, but there will be several other activities as well, including:

• The last fifteen minutes of the final class of each module will be devoted to a mini-lecture introducing the following Module’s text and author.
• The beginning of the second class in each module during the first half of the semester will be devoted to a report from a Group Investigation. The class will be divided into five three-person groups, one for each of the first five modules (not counting the initial Hadot reading). The group will independently investigate and report on the following questions:
  o Did the author and/or adherents of the relevant school actually live as prescribed?
  o What effects did the “way of life” advocated in the text have on people?
  o Are there any contemporary manifestations of these ideas and practices, or some other form of contemporary relevance?
• In the second half of the semester, students will play a role in leading class discussion for most class sessions; details will be available later.
• The final two classes will be devoted to individual presentations on Final Projects; for details, see below.

Writing

There will be a considerable focus in this class on writing philosophical essays. Two five-page essays are required, each with a mandatory re-write. I will grade and comment on the initial drafts of each essay in the normal fashion. The grade (and comments) on the final drafts will be based solely on improvement from the initial draft. In other words, if a student earned an A on his or her initial draft, but then turned in that same essay, without improvements, as the final draft, it would earn an F for the final draft. (For the contribution of these grades to the final grade, see below.)

Students in the class will have several meetings with the class’s writing tutor, Ben Resnick, as detailed on the schedule below. Ben will also be available for additional help as needed.

Final Projects

The final project for this course aims to incorporate practice into our investigations. Students will choose one of our texts and isolate one or more techniques, modes of living, or specific goals from the text and try to put this into practice in their own lives for a period of at least five days. Students will keep a daily journal about their experiences, and then both give a class presentation, and write an essay, summarizing their experiences and the philosophical reflections the experiences provoke. Additional details will be available later in the semester.

Assignments and Grades

To summarize, the requirements for the course are:

• Active class participation. Quality and quantity of participation both matter, but note that I will work with the class, and with individuals as needed, to ensure that we have an environment in which everyone has, and is able to take advantage of, opportunities to participate. Contribution to group investigations; discussion leading; and preparation for and attendance at meetings with our writing tutor are all included in the participation grade. [3/12 of final grade]
• Initial Drafts of essays 1 and 2. [Each 2/12 of final grade]
• Final Drafts of essays 1 and 2. [Each 1/12 of final grade]
• Final Project. [3/12 of final grade]
Schedule

Detailed assignment sheets for each module will be distributed separately

Introduction
[1] Mon, Sep 5 – No reading; Mini-lecture on Hadot

Confucius

[Week of Sep 19–23: mandatory meetings with Ben]

Socrates
*[7] Fri, Sep 23 – Apology
[8] Mon, Sep 26 – Crito; Mini-lecture on Zhuangzi
  • PAPER 1, Initial Draft due today by 9am

Zhuangzi
  • PAPER 1, Initial Draft returned this morning via email

[Week of Oct 3–7: mandatory meetings with Ben]

Lucretius
  • PAPER 1, Final Draft due today by 9am
*[14] Fri, Oct 14 – On the Nature of Things, selections TBA; Mini-lecture on Seneca

[Oct 24: Fall Break]

[Oct 26 and 31: No Class (Beijing Forum). Mandatory meetings with Ben prior to Nov 2]

Zhu Xi
  • PAPER 2, Initial Draft, due today by 9am
[18] Mon, Nov 7 – Learning to Be a Sage, selections TBA
[19] Wed, Nov 9 – Learning to Be a Sage, selections TBA; Mini-lecture on Thoreau
  • PAPER 2, Initial Draft returned this morning via email

[Week from Nov 9–Nov 15: mandatory meetings with Ben]
Thoreau
  • PAPER 2, Final Draft, due today by 9am
[22] Mon, Nov 21 – *Walden* (on-line), selections TBA; Mini-lecture on Shusterman

Shusterman, Presentations, Conclusion
[26] Wed, Dec 7 – Presentations

[Fri, Dec 16: Final Project due, 5pm]