

PHILOSOPHY AS A WAY OF LIFE

PHIL 3975, Spring 2016

Tuesday/Friday 10:00-11:15, Keating 219

Professor: Dr. Stephen Grimm

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Office Hours: Friday 2:00-4:00 p.m., and by appointment

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Course Description

The goal of this course is a little audacious: to help you become wiser, and to lead a better life.

The idea of “philosophy as a way of life” is that this goal cannot be achieved just by discussion, argument, and reflection—the usual tools of philosophy as it is practiced today. Although these methods are important, what is needed in addition is an attempt to live out the theories we learn in class, to try to incorporate their insights into our lives, and to see whether they bear fruit.

In the first part of the course we will focus in particular on four approaches to life—Stoic, Buddhist, Confucian, and Jesuit—and you will be asked to choose one of these ways of life to “live out” for three days, and then to report back to the class with your observations and experiences.

In the second part of the course we will then consider different theories about the purpose or goal of life, and about what makes life meaningful. Along the way, you will be asked to develop your own views about what makes life meaningful, and to defend them.

Texts

Required texts:

Seneca, *The Stoic Philosophy of Seneca*, trans. Moses Hadas, W. W. Norton

Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Pocket Thich Nhat Hanh*, Shambhala

Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Beacon

Blaise Pascal, *Selections from The Thoughts*, Wiley-Blackwell

Additional articles will be available via Blackboard (under “content”)

Optional texts (helpful for the course, but not required):

William B. Irvine, *A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy*

Jonathan Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom*

Grading

Quotes and Questions=25%

First Impressions Paper=5%

Way of Life Paper=25%

Final Paper=25%

Class Presentation=10%

Attendance=5%

Participation=5%

Your grades for the semester will be posted on Blackboard as the course progresses.

Requirements for the Course

Readings

I have tried to keep the readings to a manageable length. I recommend that you read each assignment at least three times during the time we are studying it—twice before class (once quickly to get a general idea of what the author is saying, and a second time more carefully to better understand the structure of the arguments being made), and a third time after we've discussed it. Also, it is *essential* that you bring the text under discussion with you to class.

For the readings on Blackboard, please either print out the texts and bring them to class, or download them electronically on a tablet. Please do not bring laptops to class (see below for “classroom courtesy”).

Quotes and Questions

On the day before each class, beginning with the day before our class on 1/22, you should collect and comment on three or four memorable passages from the assigned reading. A passage may be chosen because it rings true or sounds completely absurd; because it is deeply moving or highly controversial, pessimistic or uplifting, illuminating or obscure.

The quotes themselves should not be more than five sentences long, and your question + comment should be between three and five sentences. The quotes should reflect your familiarity with the whole reading, not just the first few pages.

These “Quotes and Questions” will be recorded in a personal Dropbox document that I will set up for everyone, and the assignments will be evaluated as follows: 3=very good, 2=good; 1=could be better. Note that I will drop your three lowest scores when calculating your “Quotes and Questions” grade for the course.

The final versions of these assignments are due by midnight before the relevant class. This means that the assignment should not be modified or edited, as recognized by the Dropbox timestamp, after midnight of the day before class. You will receive a zero for that assignment if you do not submit a *final* version by midnight, or if you do not hand in an assignment at all.

By the end of the course, you should therefore have a stimulating record of your thoughts and reflections from throughout the term.

Papers

Three papers are due over the course of the semester.

The first is a short “first impressions” paper of 2 to 3 pages due at the beginning of class on 1/22. I will distribute the assignment during our first class.

The second is connected to the “way of life” assignment (described in the following section), and is due at the beginning of class on 3/29. I will distribute the assignment two weeks before it is due, and the paper will be 4 to 5 pages.

The third and final paper will revisit and update your “first impressions” paper, and is due at the beginning of class on 5/3. I will distribute the assignment two weeks before it is due, and the paper will be 4 to 5 pages.

Late papers: Penalty for lateness is a third of a letter grade per day, including weekends (A- becomes B+, C becomes C-, etc.). The clock starts after the due date of the paper, and the change is rounded up (that is, if you hand it in 1 hour late, or 10 minutes late, that counts as 1 day late; 25 hours after it’s due, 2 days late, and so on). To hand in a late paper, you do not need to submit a hardcopy—emailing it to me is sufficient.

Way of Life Assignment and Presentation

For the “way of life” assignment, by the end of the day on 3/6 you will choose one of

the ways of life covered earlier in the course—either Stoic, Buddhist, Confucian, or “Jesuit”— and then attempt to “live out” that way of life for at least three full days, from 3/7-3/9.

You will then give a brief class presentation about your experiences on either 3/11 or 3/15 (I will split the class in half, alphabetically). You will also be required to write an essay, described in the previous section and due on 3/29, summarizing your experiences and the philosophical reflections they provoked. Additional details will be available later in the semester.

Attendance

Attendance counts for 5% of your grade, and grades will range from 5 (highest) to 0 (lowest). Everyone will start with a 5, and I will allow two unexcused absences. After that, you will lose a point for each discussion section missed. Being late for class, or leaving early, may also result in attendance points lost.

Participation

Participation counts for 5% of your grade, and grades will range from 5 (highest) to 0 (lowest). Everyone will start with a zero, and gain points by engaging in discussion during class. Asking questions, raising objections, expressing puzzlement, etc. are all good forms of participation. Note that the attendance and participation grades are the easiest places to do well in this class, so make a point of participating regularly!

At the same time, no one should try to dominate the discussion, so if you’ve already participated once or twice during a class it is a good idea to take a step back to give others room to talk.

Classroom Courtesy

Cellphones should be turned off for the duration of the class, and texting during class is not permitted. Because of their tendency to distract other students, I would also prefer that you take notes with a notebook rather than a laptop. If you have a special reason to use a laptop please see me and I will try to accommodate you.

Academic Integrity

The most common form of cheating in academic situations is plagiarism. This occurs when you present someone else’s work or ideas as your own, whether it is intentional or not. There are extremely good reasons for thinking that plagiarism is unethical. Further, it is a sign of poor scholarship and in professional environments can result in litigation. It is your responsibility to know and understand Fordham’s

position on plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct as it is stated in the Student Handbook. If you are caught plagiarizing in a paper or exam, you will, at minimum, receive a 0 for the assignment, and at maximum, fail the course. If you are in doubt about whether something constitutes plagiarism or not, ask me.

Tentative Schedule

January

19 Welcome

22 David Foster Wallace, “Kenyon College Address”; Matthew Crawford, “Attention as a Cultural Problem”

26 Seneca, Selected Letters

29 Seneca, “On the Shortness of Life”

February

2 Seneca, “On Providence”

5 Dalai Lama, “The Art of Happiness”

9 **No class:** SRG at conference

12 Thich Nhat Hanh, “Mindfulness”

19 Confucius, *Analects* selections

23 Lao Tzu, *The Tao Te Ching* selections

26 Zhuangzi, “Free and Easy Wandering”

March

1 Walter Burghardt, “A Long, Loving Look at the Real”; Monika Hellwig, “Finding God in All Things: A Spirituality for Today”

4 **No class:** SRG at conference

8 Augustine selections; *The Power of Habit* selections

11 Class Presentations

15 Class Presentations

18 SPRING BREAK

22 SPRING BREAK

24 EASTER BREAK

29 Schopenhauer, "On the Sufferings of the World" and "On the Vanity of Existence" (maybe Camus)

April

1 Pascal, *Pensees*

5 Pascal, *Pensees*

8 Frankl, *Man in Search of Meaning*

12 Frankl, *Man in Search of Meaning*

15 David Foster Wallace, "Good Old Neon"

19 Paul O'Grady, "Philosophy and Gestalt Psychotherapy"

22 Susan Wolf, "The Meanings of Lives"

26 C.S. Lewis, "Living in an Atomic Age"; Tolstoy, "My Confession"

29 Class Choice

May

3 Last class