

PHIL 221 / Philosophy as a Way of Life

Fall, 2011

Syllabus

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Office Hours: Tues 1:00–3:00

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:
 - Did the author and/or adherents of the relevant school actually live as prescribed?
 - What effects did the "way of life" advocated in the text have on people?
 - 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 an 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.

All formal written assignments should include the following statement on the title page:

- "In accordance with the Honor Code, I affirm that this work is my own and all content taken from other sources has been properly acknowledged."

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. [15% of final grade]
- Initial Drafts of essays 1 and 2. [Each 20% of final grade]
- Final Drafts of essays 1 and 2. [Each 10% of final grade]
- Final Project. [25% 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
- [2] Wed, Sep 7 – Hadot, chs. 1, 3, 4, 11; Mini-lecture on Confucius

Confucius

- [3] Mon, Sep 12 – *Essential Analects*, selections TBA
- [4] Wed, Sep 14 – *Essential Analects*, selections TBA
- [5] Mon, Sep 19 – *Essential Analects*, selections TBA; Mini-lecture on Plato

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

Socrates

- [6] Wed, Sep 21 – *Euthyphro*
- *[7] Fri, Sep 23 – *Apology* and *Crito*
- [8] Mon, Sep 26 – Continued discussion of Socrates; Mini-lecture on Zhuangzi
 - PAPER 1, Initial Draft due today by 9am

Zhuangzi

- [9] Wed, Sep 28 – *The Essential Writings*, selections TBA
- [10] Mon, Oct 3 – *The Essential Writings*, selections TBA
 - PAPER 1, Initial Draft returned this morning via email
- [11] Wed, Oct 5 – *The Essential Writings*, selections TBA; Mini-lecture on Lucretius

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

Lucretius

- [12] Mon, Oct 10 – *On the Nature of Things*, selections TBA
 - PAPER 1, Final Draft due today by 9am
- [13] Wed, Oct 12 – *On the Nature of Things*, selections TBA
- *[14] Fri, Oct 14 – *On the Nature of Things*, selections TBA; Mini-lecture on Seneca

Seneca

- [15] Mon, Oct 17 – *Stoic Letters* (on-line), selections TBA
- [16] Wed, Oct 19 – *Stoic Letters* (on-line), selections TBA; Mini-lecture on Zhu Xi

[Oct 24: Fall Break]

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

Zhu Xi

- [17] Wed, Nov 2 – *Learning to Be a Sage*, selections TBA
 - 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

[20] Mon, Nov 14 – *Walden* (on-line), selections TBA

[21] Wed, Nov 16 – *Walden* (on-line), selections TBA

- PAPER 2, Final Draft, due today by 9am

[22] Mon, Nov 21 – *Walden* (on-line), selections TBA; Mini-lecture on Shusterman

Shusterman, Presentations, Conclusion

[23] Mon, Nov 28 – *Practicing Philosophy*, Introduction and ch. 1

[24] Wed, Nov 30 – *Practicing Philosophy*, chs. 2, 3, 6

[25] Mon, Dec 5 – Presentations

[26] Wed, Dec 7 – Presentations

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

**PHIL 221 / Philosophy as a Way of Life
Fall, 2011
Introduction and Hadot Assignments**

Monday, September 5

[Reading: None]

Wednesday, September 7

[Reading: Hadot, chs. 1, 3, 4, 11]

What does “philosophy” mean to you? What did it mean to do philosophy, to philosophize, in the ancient Western world? Is it possible for philosophy to have a similar significance today?

What relations exist among reasoning, learning the tenets of a philosophical school, and engaging in what Hadot calls “spiritual exercises”? In what sense(s) are these exercises “spiritual”? What types of exercise does Hadot identify, and what are their distinctive aims?

In what sense(s) can philosophy be said to be “training for death” (p. 95)? Are you convinced?

In what way(s) do the Greeks and Romans conceive of divinity, and how is this related to humanity? How is “philosophy” (as we now are understanding it) related to Christian philosophy and practice, especially in the monastic traditions?

PHIL 221 / Philosophy as a Way of Life

Fall, 2011

Confucius Assignments

Monday, September 12

[Reading: *The Essential Analects*, Introduction and Books 1, 4–8. First read the text alone, then consult the Commentary and re-read.]

“Goodness (*ren*)” and the “gentleman (*junzi*),” as versus the “petty person”

- What are the key characteristics of the gentleman (see especially Book 4)? With whom do you resonate more strongly, the gentleman or the petty person?
- The nature of “Goodness” can seem quite elusive. What passages are helpful in beginning to pin it down?

“Filial piety”

- 1.2 says that filial piety can be thought of as the root of Goodness. How so? Does this seem plausible?

Self-examination

- What do we learn of Confucian daily practice from passages like 1.1, 1.4, 7.3, 7.6, and 7.10? (What other passages seem especially relevant?) What would it be like to live this way?

Wednesday, September 14

[Reading: *The Essential Analects*, Books 2-3, 9-11, and passage 12.1. First read the text alone, then consult the Commentary and re-read.]

First Group Investigation report

Spontaneity or “*wu-wei*”

- Based on 2.4 and any other passages that seem relevant, describe the ideal of spontaneity that Confucius is said to reach at age 70. What is so excellent about such a state? Can you see any problems with it?

Ritual

- What function or ends would be served by the kind of behavior and ritual rules that are described in Book 10?
- To what degree do you gather that the authors of the *Analects* are committed to the details of the rituals depicted throughout the text? To what degree might change be possible, and on what basis (see 9.3).
- 3.4 talks about the “roots” of ritual. What is this passage telling us?

Monday, September 19

[Reading: *The Essential Analects*, Books 12-20. First read the text alone, then consult the Commentary and re-read.]

Governance

- How does a gentleman participate in governance? What relation does it have to his individual learning? What do you make of Confucius’s response to Chang Ju and Jie Ni in 18.6?
- Is there a tension between family and state (see 13.18)? Shouldn’t “Goodness” help one resolve this tension?

Socrates Mini-Lecture

PHIL 221 / Philosophy as a Way of Life

Fall, 2011

Socrates Assignments

Wednesday, September 21

[Reading: *Euthyphro*]

How does Socrates's term "piety (*hosion*)" compare to Confucius's term "ritual (*li*)"?

Based on this dialogue, what can we conclude about the relation between philosophy and religion?

At 10a1, Socrates makes a crucial distinction that Euthyphro does not immediately grasp. Why is the distinction so important?

At 14c4, Socrates describes himself as a "lover of inquiry." What is distinctive about the kind of "inquiry" he loves? What does it mean to "love" inquiry in the way he apparently does?

Friday, September 23

[Reading: *Apology* and *Crito*]

Socrates denies that he is an accomplished speaker (17a5), and in general seems to downplay the importance of rhetoric (i.e., beautiful, flowery language, which might make the weaker argument appear stronger). He emphasizes instead a particular kind of examination and reasoning. In both cases, though, the goal is to persuade. What is the difference?

What is most unusual about the "life of the philosopher" that Socrates describes (28e5, etc.)? What would be most challenging about living this way? What would be most rewarding?

In light of both *Euthyphro* and *Crito*, what contrast do you see between the Socratic and Confucian attitudes toward family? What about toward the City or State?

Would Confucius agree that "one must never in any way do wrong willingly" (49a3)?

Are you convinced by Socrates's reasoning in *Crito*? Does he fail to do justice to any of Crito's arguments?

Monday, September 26

[Reading: None]

PAPER 1, Initial Draft due today by 9am

Continued discussion of Socrates; Mini-lecture on Zhuangzi

PHIL 221 / Philosophy as a Way of Life

Fall, 2011

Zhuangzi Assignments

Wednesday, September 28

[Reading: *Zhuangzi*, Chapters 1 & 2 (pp. 3-21)]

- Perspectives
 - What do the Kun and Peng, and cicada and dove, respectively, represent? Is one pair superior to the other? Why or why not?
- Chapter Two
 - What passages seem related to the creation and flexibility of linguistic distinctions and subject-object distinctions?
 - Is it good or bad to be “fully formed”? Why?
 - What is the point about the story of the monkeys in “Three in the Morning”?
 - What are we being told about the sage? What does “illumination of the obvious” mean?

Monday, October 3

[Reading: *Zhuangzi*, Chapters 3-5 (pp. 21-38)]

- Role Models?
 - Would the cook (pp. 22-3) be a good ruler? Or archer? Would you say he represents a Daoist ideal?
 - How does the advice of the Confucius character in Chapter Four differ from the teachings of the *Analects*?
 - What does it mean to “fast the mind”?

Wednesday, October 5

[Reading: *Zhuangzi*, Chapters 6 & 7 (pp. 39-54)]

- Roaming Outside the Lines
 - What would it be like to be Mengzifan or Ziqinzhong (pp. 46-7)? Do they represent an appealing ideal?
 - What is wrong with Humanity (*ren*) and Responsibility (*yi*), ritual and music? (See p. 48 and 49, though compare p. 28.)

PHIL 221 / Philosophy as a Way of Life

Fall, 2011

Lucretius Assignments

Monday, October 10

[Reading: Epicurus, "Letter to Menoeceus" (<http://www.epicurus.net/en/menoceus.html>); Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, 1.1-1.482; 1.922-951; 2.1-293]

- Epicureanism
 - Epicurus says, in the "Letter," that pleasure is our end, but also denies that this means "pleasures of the prodigal or the pleasures of sensuality." Explain how he arrives at this conclusion.
 - What does Epicurus mean by saying that if one practices his philosophy, one will live "as a god among men"?
- Religion and Philosophy
 - Epicurus defined "philosophy" as "an activity, attempting by means of discussion and reasoning, to make life happy." Find some examples of careful argument in Lucretius's Book 1, and assess. Are you convinced?
 - How does this reasoning relate to happiness?
- The nature of *On the Nature of Things*
 - Why is Lucretius's great work composed as a poem that is largely devoted to nature?
- Free Will
 - At 2.222, Lucretius speaks of a "swerve" in the motion of matter. Why is this important?

Wednesday, October 12

[Reading: Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, 4.823-4.1287; 5.1012-5.1455]

- Lucretius's analysis of love and recommendations concerning sex are famous. Supposing that one accepts his basic premises, can you dispute his conclusions? Or are there flaws in his premises (one of which is that sexual desire is "natural" but not "necessary" (cf. Epicurus's "Letter" and note 70 on p. 128 of Smith's translation))?
- "Of a little there is never a lack" (5.1120): Are you convinced by Lucretius's arguments in favor of poverty?

*Friday, October 14

[Reading: Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, 3.417-3.1094; 6.1138-1286]

- Spirit (*anima*), mind (or heart; *animus*) and body. The spirit, which is distributed through the body, gives us sensation. The mind, the seat of thought and emotion, is in the chest (a view rather similar to the Chinese).
 - Are you convinced by Lucretius's arguments that the mind must die when the body dies? Which arguments are best, and which most suspect?
- Epicurean arguments against the fear of death, especially in Lucretius's formulations, are very famous.
 - How many different arguments against fearing death can you find?
 - Which are most convincing?
- Why does the text end with a vivid account of plague?

PHIL 221 / Philosophy as a Way of Life

Fall, 2011

Seneca Assignments

Monday, October 17

[Reading: Seneca, *Epistles*, 92, 98, 9, and 124]

- The readings are available on-line at the following URLs (note that each is composed of multiple pages; the end is marked by the beginning of a new Epistle):
 - Epistle 92: http://www.stoics.com/seneca_epistles_book_2.html#%91XCIII1
 - Epistle 98: http://www.stoics.com/seneca_epistles_book_3.html#%91XCVIII1
 - Epistle 9: http://www.stoics.com/seneca_epistles_book_1.html#%91IX1
 - Epistle 124: http://www.stoics.com/seneca_epistles_book_3.html#%91CXXIV1
- What are Seneca's arguments against pleasure being the central or sole good? See in particular 92 and 124. What are the strengths/weakness of the Epicurean and Stoic positions?
- Health, rest, and freedom from pain are not "goods," says Seneca (E. 92, p. 453). Why not? What are they? What *is* good, then?
- Explain the status of friends for both Epicurus and Seneca. What do you make of Seneca's claims that the wise man (or sage) is self-sufficient? In particular, explain Chrysippus (important early Stoic)'s statement that "'The wise man is in want of nothing, and yet needs many things" (E. 9, p. 51).
- How does Seneca's notion of God compare to others we have seen?

Wednesday, October 19

[Reading: Seneca, *Epistles*, 63, 70, 116]

- URLs for the readings:
 - Epistle 63: http://www.stoics.com/seneca_epistles_book_1.html#%91LXIII1
 - Epistle 70: http://www.stoics.com/seneca_epistles_book_2.html#%91LXX1
 - Epistle 116: http://www.stoics.com/seneca_epistles_book_3.html#%91CXXVI1
- What is Seneca's attitude toward death? Mourning? Does it strike you as inhuman, liberating, or what?
 - Note the specific exercises that Seneca mentions (E. 63, p. 437). Can you imagine this having the effect he supposes?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of Seneca's views on suicide? Are you persuaded that "Humanity is well situated, because no man is unhappy except by his own fault" (E. 70, p. 65)?
- Seneca says he recognizes that emotions bring pleasure, but wants us to be "lord" rather than slave" of these pleasures (E. 116, p. 333). How is this supposed to work?

PHIL 221 / Philosophy as a Way of Life

Fall, 2011

Zhu Xi (Chu Hsi 朱熹) Assignments

Wednesday, November 2

[Reading: Gardner, Preface (pp. ix-xii) and Introduction (pp. 3-81); Chu Hsi, "Lesser Learning" and "The Method of Learning," in Gardner, trans., *Learning to Be a Sage* (pp. 88-115)]

- We will begin class with a short lecture about Chu Hsi and Neo-Confucianism, which will assume that you have read the Preface and Introduction. I'll be happy to answer questions about this material, but it will not be the focus of our discussion.
- "Learning (*hsueh [xue]*): The Basis for Ethical Cultivation and Sagehood"
 - In these first two chapters we see a distinction between two phases of learning, the "lesser" and the "greater." What is the difference between the two? Why is "lesser learning" necessary?
 - Consider the role of personal effort in the different kinds of learning that Chu discusses in these two chapters. Is it important at every stage?
 - Are the kinds of learning that Chu discusses here entirely alien to you? What relation, if any, do they have to the kinds of learning that you have experienced?

Monday, November 7

[Reading: Chu Hsi, "A Discussion of Knowledge and Action," "On Reading, Part I," and "On Reading, Part II" in Gardner, trans., *Learning to Be a Sage* (pp. 116-162)]

- "Knowledge" and Action
 - In 3.1, Chu tells us that a person with eyes but no legs cannot walk, just as a person with legs but no eyes cannot see. Surely this is obvious...but Chu seems to think that he's illustrating an important point. What is that point? How do his examples help us to see it?
- Reading the Texts
 - Why and how does Chu want students to read? List as many reasons and methods or techniques as you can, and rank them in terms of importance.
 - How is what Chu says about the need to make reading "personally meaningful" related to the tie he sees between knowledge and action (discussed in the previous class)? Does this mean that Chu believes that we all might take something different away from reading a particular text?

Wednesday, November 9

[Reading: Chu Hsi, "Holding On to It" and "Energetically Putting It into Practice," in Gardner, trans., *Learning to Be a Sage* (pp. 163-196)]

- Choose a medium-length passage from the *Analects*, or a series of 3 or 4 short passages (they need not be consecutive). Read repeatedly and memorize. Reflect. Be prepared to recite in class today (11/9) and offer a brief reflection on the personal meaning this passage(s) has for you.
- Consider 3.19 and especially 7.20. Have you ever experienced failings of the kind that Chu describes here? Do these failings strike you as appropriately ascribed to a lack of the proper kind of knowledge?
- What is "reverential concentration (*jing* 敬)" supposed to be all about, according to Chu? How does it help us? How might it change us? How, finally, does the contrast with "extension of knowledge" and "subduing the self" in [3.12] help us to understand what Chu has in mind?

PHIL 221 / Philosophy as a Way of Life

Fall, 2011

Thoreau Assignments

Monday, November 14

[Reading: Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, chapters 1 and 2 (“Economy” and “Where I Lived, and What I Lived For”). Many versions of the text are available on-line; I suggest <http://thoreau.eserver.org/walden00.html>]

- Thoreau calls life an “experiment to a great extent untried by me.” Why is the metaphor of experiment important to him?
- Thoreau is highly critical of the everyday lives of many in his day. Why? What are ideas or terms that are key to his own sense of the good?
- In these chapters and throughout, keep your eyes open for connections to the ancient philosophers we have been reading. What are some important similarities? What differences do you note?
- Thoreau writes, “There are nowadays professors of philosophy, but not philosophers.” What does he mean? Are you convinced? In a later passage, he emphasizes that he came to Walden Pond to “live deliberately.” How might this be connected to “philosophy”?
- According to Thoreau, we should live as long as possible “free and uncommitted.” Why? Is no kind of commitment valuable?

Wednesday, November 16

[Reading: Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, chapters 5, 8, 9, and 10 (“Solitude,” “The Village,” “The Ponds,” and “Baker Farm”)]

- “I come and go with a strange liberty in Nature, a part of herself,” writes Thoreau. Elaborate on Thoreau’s understand of nature, and on the relation between humans and nature. Note that a few pages later he speaks of “an infinite and unaccountable friendliness”: how can nature be friendly? What do you make of his relationship with Walden Pond?
- Thoreau says that “never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude.” Does this suggest something unusual, even troubling, about his character?
- What do you conclude from Thoreau’s interactions with John Field and his family at Baker Farm?

Monday, November 21

[Reading: Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, chapters 11, 17, and 18 (“Higher Laws,” “Spring,” and “Conclusion”)]

- What do you make of the twin goods that Thoreau discusses in “Higher Laws,” namely the “higher” or “spiritual,” and the “primitive,” “savage,” or we might say, “wild”? Thoreau cites the classical Confucian Mencius, but do you believe that Confucians valued “purity” in that same way that Thoreau does?
- Individual truth is a great theme in *Walden*, especially in the closing chapters. How might you challenge Thoreau on this score? What objections can you think of?

PHIL 221 / Philosophy as a Way of Life

Fall, 2011

Final Assignments

Monday, November 28

[Reading: Shusterman, *Practicing Philosophy*, Introduction and ch. 1]

- Beginning in section II of Chapter 1, Shusterman develops a contrast between philosophy's practical goals as therapeutic and as aesthetic. What is the difference? Which of these have the thinkers we have read tended to emphasize? What advantages *and disadvantages* can you see in the "aesthetic" model, which Shusterman favors?
- What are the consequences, for philosophy as a way of life, of there being no "fixed human essence" (p. 37) and self-transformation consequently becoming a "distinctly individual challenge"? Was it not an "individual challenge" according to other texts we have read?
- Shusterman emphasizes the need to "democratize" the philosophical life (p. 50, etc.). What does he mean? What light does this shed on previous texts and approaches?
- Are you convinced that "philosophical living needs strong links to the disciplinary tradition of philosophical writing" (p. 62)?

Wednesday, November 30

[Reading: Shusterman, *Practicing Philosophy*, chs. 2, 3, 6]

- As seen in Chapter Two, Dewey and Rorty share a great deal but also differ crucially: Dewey believes that liberal democracy must lead to a kind of "positive freedom," namely the active empowerment of the people, while Rorty emphasizes the ways this might intrude on people's "negative liberty" (p. 72). How does this difference relate to different views of philosophy and philosophers?
- Sections V and VI of Chapter Three explores the idea of self-perfection in Cavell's thought, and especially its ties to the idea of philosopher as writer—even, perhaps, a self-absorbed writer. What do you make of this?
- Based on our semester's readings and conversations, how do you assess the idea that philosophy might take as its central goal "the production of better lived experience" (p. 173)? In particular, be sure to come up with a potential objection for us to consider.

Monday, December 5

[Reading: None]

- Student Presentations

Wednesday, December 7

[Reading: None]

- Student Presentations