

Philosophy as a Way of Life

Introductory-Level Course Outline

What is this course?

Philosophy is a discipline that tries to ask and answer questions about the fundamentals of our reality—what exists, what can we know, what is right and wrong, how should we treat others, how we organize society, and so on. Doing philosophy also requires the development of critical thinking skills, including the ability to analyze, understand, respond to, and construct arguments.

While this course certainly will help you develop those skills, its intentions are somewhat distinct and grandiose. This course is designed to help you think through **how you ought to live your life**.

By studying various philosophical traditions, from the ancient world to today, we will be examining how philosophers have argued how one ought to live their life. We will be taking a tour through philosophical history in order to answer the following kinds of questions:

- What is the meaning of life? Does it have meaning?
- What is the best way to live your life? According to what principles should you live?
- What does it mean to live according to *a way of life*?
- What are your values, and what kind of life do they require you to live?

In many ways, this class will likely be quite different from most classes you have taken or will take. You will be asked to *live* in accordance with the philosophies that we study, to reflect upon your experiences, and to examine your own life with respect to these ways of life. These “spiritual exercises” are key to experimenting with different ways of living, different ways of interpreting the world, and different ways of finding meaning in one’s life. The intention of our course is to provide ourselves with philosophical tools for our toolkits of life.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of this course, all students will have developed the following knowledge and capacities:

- Students will be able to identify and express the basic philosophical tenets of numerous ways of living
- Students will develop the capacity to present clear, cogent arguments in favor or against certain philosophical ways of life and their relation to their own lives
- Students will be able to clearly articulate their own values in writing, in person, and in concert with others
- Students will build a capacity to respectfully discuss and debate core philosophical commitments with their fellow students
- Students will live out, reflect upon, and assess the various ways of living discussed throughout this course
- Students will develop a sense of how they want to live their lives and express it in both creative and analytical ways

Reading Schedule:

Week 1 – What can philosophy teach us about *how* to live?

Day 1 – Introduction – what is a “way of life”?

Day 2 – David Foster Wallace, “This is Water” and Pierre Hadot, “Philosophy as a Way of Life” and “Spiritual Exercises”

Week 2 – Socrates (The Examined Life)

Day 1 – Eric Weiner, “How to Wonder like Socrates” and Plato, *The Apology*

Day 2 – No readings – write your own apology

Week 3 – Confucianism/Ruism (The Virtuous Life)

Day 1 – Eric Weiner, “How to be Kind like Confucius” and Confucius, *Analects*, selections

Day 2 – Confucius, *Analects*, selections

Week 4 – Taoism (The “Way” of Life)

Day 1 – Ursula Le Guin, “Introduction” to *Tao Te Ching*, and Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, selections

Day 2 – Zhuang Zhou, *Zhuangzi*, selections

Week 5 – Buddhism (The Awakened Life)

Day 1 – Mark Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy*, Chapters 1-2

Day 2 – Mark Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy*, Chapters 3-4

Week 6 – Aristotelianism (The Virtuous Life)

Day 1 – Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books I and II

Day 2 – Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books III and IV

Week 8 – Epicureanism (The Pleasurable Life)

Day 1 – Eric Weiner, “How to Enjoy like Epicurus” and Epicurus, *Letter to Menoecus*

Day 2 – Cicero *On Moral Ends*, selections, and Diogenes Laertius, “The Principal Doctrines of Epicurus”

Week 9 – Stoicism (The Natural Life)

Day 1 – Eric Weiner, “How to Cope like Epictetus” and Epictetus, *The Enchiridion* selections

Day 2 – Eric Weiner, “How to Get Out of Bed Like Marcus Aurelius” and Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, selections

Week 10 – Existentialism (The Free, Authentic Life)

Day 1 – Jean Paul Sartre, “Existentialism is a Humanism”

Day 2 – Albert Camus, “The Myth of Sisyphus” and Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, “Prologue”

Week 11 – Transcendentalism (The Simple Life)

Day 1 – Eric Weiner, “How to See like Thoreau” and Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, selections

Day 2 – Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, selections

Week 12 – Mysticism (The Compassionate Life)

Day 1 – Eric Weiner, “How to Pay Attention like Weil” and Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, “Attention and Will”

Day 2 – Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots*, selections

Week 13 – A Week of Living

Day 1 – No readings

Day 2 – No readings

Week 14 – Reflections on Ways of Life

Day 1 – Susan Wolf, “The Meaning of Lives”

Day 2 – Last Class