

PHIL 1101
Philosophy as a Way of Life
Fall 2020
TR XX:XX-XX:XX

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Credit Hours: 3

First-year seminar:

This course is a first-year seminar (FYS). It fulfills the FYS requirement of the 2015 University Studies Program (USP). In this course, students will consider what makes for a good life, and think about what kind of life they want to live. To do this, they will learn to examine and evaluate evidence, claims, beliefs, and points of view about meaningful, relevant issues. They will be involved in active learning, inquiry of pressing issues, and individual and collaborative processing of ideas through the FYS course. These are skills that students then continue to build and reinforce throughout the rest of their college years.

Course Description:

While today philosophy is an academic discipline like chemistry or art history – the sort of thing people study and write academic papers in – philosophy in the ancient world was something quite different. It was, to be sure, quite intellectual, but being a philosopher was, first and foremost, a way of living. In fact, there were a number of ancient philosophical traditions, each with its own way of life, in the Greco-Roman world (Platonism, Aristotelianism, Skepticism, Stoicism, Epicureanism, to name a few), and others in parts of the world like China (Confucianism, Taoism, Moism) and India (Vedic philosophies and Buddhism, which of course spread to other parts of the world). Additionally, early Christianity was often viewed in the Roman world as a philosophical school with a distinctive set of teachings and way of life.

In this course, we will look at some of these traditions, including Eastern and Western, ancient and modern. We will learn about their ideas – their understanding of the world and human nature, their theories of knowledge and ethics – but we will also pay special attention to how these ideas formed the basis for ways of living, and to the kinds of practices that were involved in living different forms of philosophical lives. But we won't just talk about them -- we'll live them out. We'll try out some of these practices as a way of trying to get a feel for what it might be like to live as, say, a Confucian, an Existentialist, or a Stoic. "Book knowledge" of the traditions we will read is important for this class, but if there is anything to the idea that the ancient philosophical traditions were influential (and perhaps beneficial) ways of life, the more important goal of the course is to try out the idea that living a reflective, intentional (philosophical) life is something to be pursued for its own sake.

USP learning outcomes:

1. Access diverse information through focused research, active discussion, and collaboration with peers.
2. Separate facts from inferences and relevant from irrelevant information, and explain the limitations of information.
3. Evaluate the credibility, accuracy, and reliability of conclusions drawn from information.
4. Recognize and synthesize multiple perspectives to develop innovative viewpoints.
5. Analyze one's own and others' assumptions and evaluate the relevance of contexts when presenting a position.
6. Communicate ideas in writing using appropriate documentation.

Required Texts:

All texts will be made available through WyoCourses.

Course requirements:**Descriptions of Assignments (More specific details will be distributed throughout the term):**

- 1) Your own *Apologia* - Early in the term, you will be asked to write an “*Apologia*” - or defense - of your own philosophy of life, so far. Looking to the famous example of Socrates, you will consider the following two questions:
 - a. How have you lived?
 - b. Why is your way of life the best way of living, or why is it defensible?
SLO 4, 5, 6
- 2) Philosophical/Spiritual Exercises - For three of the five ways of life that we consider, you will be asked to extract one practice, habit, or exercise from the texts we consider (that is not mentioned in class). You will be asked to explain:
 - a. How this practice is grounded in the texts/ tradition in question?
 - b. How does this practice enhance the way of life advocated by the tradition?
 - c. What would it look like to add this to your life?
SLO 2, 3, 4
- 3) The Practice of Philosophy -- Living it Out - For this assignment, you will be asked to choose one of the ways of life we are studying and actually practice it. This assignment will be composed of three parts:
 - a. Create your *Enchiridion* - you will create a handbook carefully explicating the passages, exercises, etc., that you will be practicing, and... 2, 4
 - b. Some sort of record of your experience - a journal, podcast, video, etc.
 - c. A presentation to the seminar on your experience.
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
- 4) *Apologia* re-visited - After having studied these traditions, write a new *Apologia*. What has changed, if anything? Why?
1, 3, 4, 6

Grades:

- 10% -- First *Apologia*
- 30% -- Philosophical/Spiritual Exercises
 - 10% each for the three chosen
- 40% -- Living it Out
 - 10% -- Enchiridion
 - 20% -- Record
 - 10% -- Presentation
- 20% -- Final *Apologia*

Grading Scale:

- A 90-100
- B 80-90
- C 70-80
- D 60-70
- F < 60

Withdrawal Notice: Students may not withdraw from this course without instructor and advisor permission.

Classroom Statement on Diversity: The University of Wyoming values an educational environment that is diverse, equitable, and inclusive. The diversity that students and faculty bring to class, including age, country of origin, culture, disability, economic class, ethnicity, gender identity, immigration status, linguistic, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, veteran status, worldview, and other social and cultural diversity is valued, respected, and considered a resource for learning. More information can be found here: <http://www.uwyo.edu/acadaffairs/resources/syllabus/index.html>

Academic Dishonesty Policy: Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated in this class. Cases of academic dishonesty will be treated in accordance with UW Regulation 2-114. The penalties for academic dishonesty can include, at our discretion, an “F” on an exam, an “F” on the class component exercise, and/or an “F” in the entire course. Academic dishonesty means anything that represents someone else’s ideas as your own without attribution. It is intellectual theft – stealing - and includes (but is not limited to) unapproved assistance on examinations, plagiarism (use of any amount of another person’s writings, blog posts, publications, and other materials without attributing that material to that person with citations), or fabrication of referenced information. Facilitation of another person’s academic dishonesty is also considered academic dishonesty and will be treated identically.

Classroom Statement on Disability:

If you have a physical, learning, sensory or psychological disability and require accommodations, please let us know as soon as possible. You will need to register with (and possibly provide documentation of your disability to) Disability Support Services (DSS), room 128 Knight Hall. You may also contact DSS at (307) 766-3073 or udss@uwyo.edu. Visit their

website for more information: www.uwyo.edu/udss.

Duty to Report: UW faculty are committed to supporting students and upholding the University's non-discrimination policy. Under Title IX, discrimination based upon sex and gender is prohibited. If you experience an incident of sex- or gender-based discrimination, we encourage you to report it. While you may talk to a faculty member, understand that as a "Responsible Employee" of the University, the faculty member **MUST** report information you share about the incident to the university's Title IX Coordinator (you may choose whether you or anyone involved is identified by name). If you would like to speak with someone who may be able to afford you privacy or confidentiality, there are people who can meet with you. Faculty can help direct you or you may find info about UW policy and resources at <http://www.uwyo.edu/reportit>.

You do not have to go through the experience alone. Assistance and resources are available, and you are not required to make a formal complaint or participate in an investigation to access them.

Tentative Schedule

(Subject to change; all changes will be announced in class and via WyoCourses)

T 8/25 – Introduction, David Foster Wallace -- "[This is Water](#)"

R 8/27 – Plato, *Apology*

T 9/1 – *Apology*, continued

Nihilism / Existentialism

R 9/3 – Tolstoy - Confessions

T 9/8 – Sartre - Existentialism is a Humanism

R 9/10 -- Nietzsche - Selected Passages

T 9/15 -- Approaches and methods in philosophical research -- extracting a philosophy of life from philosophical text

Stoicism

R 9/17 – Epictetus, *Enchiridion*

T 9/22 – Epictetus, Discourses (selections)

R 9/24 – Seneca, *On the Shortness of Life*

T 9/29 – Seneca, *On Anger*

R 10/1 – Stoicism, Extracting a philosophy of life from philosophical text

Confucianism

T 10/6 – Confucius, *Analects* Introduction, Book 1

R 10/8 – Confucius, *Analects* Books 2-3

T 10/13 – Confucius, *Analects* Book 4

R 10/15 – Confucius, *Analects* Books 9, 10

T 10/20 – Confucianism, Extracting a philosophy of life from philosophical text

Christianity

R 10/22 – Augustine -- *Confessions*, Books 2 and 7

T 10/27 – Aquinas -- *Summa Theologiae*, on Contemplation

R 10/29 – Interlude: Discussion of the morality and rationality of voting

T 11/3 – Election Day: No Class

R 11/5 – St Ignatius of Loyola -- “Spiritual Exercises”

T 11/10 -- *Enchiridion* Workshop

Modern Approaches

R 11/12 – Martin Luther King, Jr -- “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”

T 11/17 – Singer -- “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”

R 11/19 – Nagel -- “Death”

T 11/24 Thanksgiving – No Class

R 11/26 Thanksgiving – No Class

Symposia

T 12/1 – Living it Out Presentations, Day 1

R 12/3 – Living it Out Presentations, Day 2

T 12/8 – Living it Out Presentations, Day 3

R 12/10 – Living it Out Presentations, Day 4

Final Exam: Final *Apologia* Due

Assignment Description: First *Apologia*

Background: In the *Apology*, Socrates defends his way of life. He offers reasons that the way that he lived was a good way to live -- even the best way to live. In so doing, he addresses a number of criticisms that have been directed at him and that have been part of what led him to be put on trial. In reading and thinking about this text, we can easily see that the Greek word “*Apologia*” does not mean what we tend to think of when we think of an apology. Rather, it is a reasoned defense of one’s life or some aspect of one’s life against those who might accuse one of not living rightly, not having the right values, or doing things one should not be doing.

You have been alive for a number of years. During that time, you have made choices and done things. Those things have partially formed your character -- you have become the kind of person that does those things. You have also, most likely, made some plans for the future. Perhaps you plan to continue living much the way you have. Perhaps you plan to make some changes. Whatever you did in the past, you had reasons for. And what you plan to do, you have reasons for too. Taking that into consideration, we are going to follow in the footsteps of Socrates.

The Assignment: Pick one particular action or choice that you have made that a) you value and think is right, but that b) another or others think is wrong and not valuable. (for instance, maybe you want to pursue a major that your family doesn’t understand or agree with. Or maybe you hang out with the “wrong” people. Or maybe you have another life commitment that some might consider off-track.). (The key here is to select a real choice you’ve made about something important to you, that people you care about have disagreed with (“people you care about” can be close people (your family, friends), but it can also be larger groups you care about (your culture, your nation, your human-community)).

Your *Apologia* should have the following elements:

1. An explanation of your choice and its context. Include here an explanation of who your “accusers” are. Why is their view on this issue important to you? Why, in other words, are you moved to justify your choice here to them?
2. A presentation of the best reasons your ‘accusers’ give for why they think you are wrong. As you present their accusations and reasoning, be sure to be generous in your explanation of what they think you’re doing wrong. Present their best reasons. (If you can’t defend your choice against their best well-intentioned arguments, then you don’t really think you are right).
3. The reasons you give for why, despite your accusers’ concerns, you nevertheless believe your choice is grounded in solid values, an accurate assessment of reality and a commitment to consistent thinking. Ultimately, here you will be explaining how your choice reflects a “way of life” that you aim to live (in other words, a set of practices and choices that reflect a worldview resting on an ethics, an epistemology and a metaphysics).

Format: This is a 2-3 page essay, and is to be submitted on Canvas. It should be formally-

formatted (12 pt font, normal margins, proper writing mechanics, clean look). If you like, you can write it in the form of a letter to your accuser, or in the style of closing remarks at a trial, or what-not. Feel welcome to choose a style (and an organization of points) that fits the task, and that gets you excited about writing. But remember that it is designed to be an argument: taking a position and defending it with reasons/values/beliefs against those who would critique it.

Assignment Description: Philosophical/Spiritual Exercises

The texts that we are reading are concerned with philosophy, but not philosophy merely as an academic practice; rather, they care about philosophy as a way of life. They think that critically thinking through how you live your life, you'll end up living better. They think that philosophy has something to say about how you ought to live your life. Sometimes the practical applications are not clear, though, and must be extracted from the text.

Such extraction is the point of this assignment. For three of the five ways of life that we consider, you will be asked to extract one practice, habit, or exercise from the texts we consider (that is not mentioned in class). The texts talk about how we ought to live, but they often do so abstractly. In this assignment, you will make concrete applications of those abstract thoughts.

For each practice, you should:

- (i) explain how the practice is grounded in the text or tradition in question
- (ii) how the practice enhances the way of life advocated by the tradition, and
- (iii) what it would look like to add this to your life.

Each Extraction assignment should be 1-2 pages.

Assignment Description: Living it Out

Broad Overview: For this assignment, you will be asked to choose one of the ways of life we are studying and actually practice it.

The Assignments (3)

1. Create your *Enchiridion*

When we're faced with real-time suffering, real-time challenge, we don't always have time to go to our shelves to find the nugget of wisdom from the pages of a book. So, many practitioners of these traditions pre-prepared for life's unknowns by engaging in a series of "intellectual exercises"—like reading, investigation, listening—so that they would be prepared when "stuff" hit the fan. In other words, the whole idea of an *Enchiridion*—a "little handbook"—was to pull together some of the most important sayings, so that they could be practiced, memorized, recalled, and repeated to ourselves when we find ourselves in the thick of trying situations.

We are going to create our own Mini-Enchiridions. The idea here is to condense our most-valued sayings from the tradition we want to practice into nugget-sized mantras that we can carry with us and repeat to ourselves in troubling times.

In-class, in small groups: 1) We will work to whittle our favorite passages down to short, easily memorizable sayings that capture our chosen tradition's basic points or essential elements.. At-home, each of you, individually, will: 2) Select a dozen or so of those sayings that you would want to "carry" in your own Mini-Enchiridion. 3) For each, write the saying (perhaps with artistic flair?) on a 3x5 card. 4) Carry these cards with you and read their contents as often as you think your chosen tradition would want.

2. Create a record of your experience.

As you go through the days with your *Enchiridion*, you will no doubt find that at times it's there right when you need it, and at times you don't seem to connect with it. Jot down your thoughts each time you use it -- just for yourself. Then when the week is up, look over your notes. Reflect on your experience with your *Enchiridion*. Did it help? Did it harm?

3. A presentation to the seminar on your experience.

This will be a short (10 min. max) presentation to the seminar of your experience. What worked? What didn't? Why did you choose this tradition? If you had to do it over again, would you choose the same tradition? Why or why not? Will you keep your *Enchiridion* to use in the future? - That sort of thing. This can be a research-style paper you present (*not read!*), a podcast you recorded, a video you made, a piece of art you created, or whatever mode of presentation your chosen tradition and lived experience calls for.

Assignment Description: Final *Apologia*

Our first assignment was to write an *Apologia* of some aspect of our lives. For this final assignment, we will revisit that initial *Apologia*, based on some of the philosophical traditions we have been studying and the tools to do so, and expand that idea further into our lives.

This *Apologia* must be at least 5 pages, and will do the following:

- 1) Revisit the choice we were defending in the earlier version. Do we still stand by our choice and reasoning as described before? Have we come up with reasons for abandoning that choice? Have we come up with even better reasons?
- 2) Now, consider another choice we may be faced with in the future. How might we go about making that choice? Consider some of the following:
 - a) What values do I hold that are especially salient with respect to this choice?
 - b) Are those values defensible and consistent with other values I hold?
 - c) What conceptions of self and the universe are implicated in my values and choice?
 - d) How, exactly, does our choice reflect the values that I hold?
 - e) How might We defend this choice to an objector?