The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Department of Philosophy

UGED 2261 Philosophy and Life
Course Outline

Course overview

This course is meant to demonstrate the significance of philosophy for human life by concentrating on the general question of the meaning of human existence as well as by addressing more specific problems that confront humanity at the moment—problems relating to ecology, technology, abortion, and euthanasia. We will address this large set of issues by turning to a number of perspectives, starting with the views that were prevalent in Antiquity and ending with contemporary positions. Along with the Ancient philosophers we will ask: could the meaning of human existence be determining on the basis of the search for happiness? Along with the theistically oriented thinkers, we will wonder if human life in the absence of God should not be characterized as intrinsically meaningless and if religion might not be the only source of meaning that human existence could attain. Along with the Enlightenment thinkers as well as the proponents of existentialism, we will inquire into the diverse ways in which human beings can themselves determine the meanings of their existence. By turning to a number of contemporary philosophical perspectives, we will inquire into specific philosophical problems that technology has given rise to— issues relating to ecology, abortion, and euthanasia.

This course does not presuppose any prior knowledge of philosophy.

Learning outcomes

1. Become familiar with some philosophical problems, philosophical concepts and ideas.

2. Learn to see how philosophical reflection can provide meaning to the different directions of life.

3. Learn how to read philosophical texts (appearances to the contrary, this is not an easy task in the least!).

4. Develop critical and exegetical skills by means of reading and interpreting classical texts.

5. Acquire the skills of presenting philosophical arguments, both orally and in writing.

6. See how philosophy enables one to take on an attitude of resistance to diverse forms of dogmatism.

Topics

1. Introduction: What is Philosophy of Life and what is the Relations Between Philosophy and Human Life?

2. The Ancient View: Epicurus and Epictetus on Happiness

3. The Theistic View: Thomas Aquinas on the Existence of God

4. The Enlightenment View: Immanuel Kant and Hans-Georg Gadamer on the Responsibility in Human Life

5. The Existentialist View: Jean-Paul Sartre and Richard Taylor on Human Existence as the Source of All Meaning

6. Some Contemporary Issues: Hans Jonas, Richard Sclove, David Strong and Neil Postman on Technology

7. Some Contemporary Issues: Judith Jarvis Thomson and R.M. Hare on Abortion

8. Some Contemporary Issues: John Hardwig on Euthanasia

Learning activities

In this course, you are expected to

- read and think about the assigned readings;

- develop the skills mentioned in the course outcomes through philosophical discussion and writing (oral presentation, reflective summaries and the final essay);

- attend *all* lectures/tutorials to participate in discussion.

Activities and workload:

In-class (mandatory):

1. Lecture: 2 hours each week.

2. Interactive tutorial: one 2-hour session every two weeks.

Out-of-class (average workload per week):

1. Reading: 3–4 hours on the basic and suggested readings.

2. Writing Assignments and Presentation: an average of 2–3 hours each week on preparing for the tutorial presentation as well as writing reflective summaries and the final paper. You should try to design a schedule that allows you to apportion more time on writing and discussing your essay with your tutor/teacher two to three weeks before the essay is due.

Assessment scheme

Since a major aim of this course is to develop students' ability to interpret, analyze, and generate philosophical arguments through discussion and writing, the assessment methods are designed to encourage participation in tutorial and learning through argumentative writing.

Task nature	Description	Weight
Tutorial participation	Presentation and Participation	30%
Two Reflective Summaries	1 page length summaries of the readings	20%
Final Essay	Around 2000 words	50%

Remarks:

1. Tutorial participation: Grading is based on one presentation, one response to a presentation, and active participation in discussions. *Absence will damage your grades*. Detailed guidelines on requirements and assessment method of tutorials will be provided in the briefing session.

2. Four writing assignments: for each of these assignments, your task to submit one single-spaced typewritten page. In these assignments, you are supposed to a) provide a 1-2 paragraph long summary of the assigned readings, b) identify what you consider to be the weakest part of the work (philosophically, with argumentation) and explain why (one paragraph), c) identify what you consider the strongest part of the work (philosophically, with argumentation) and explain why (1 paragraph), d) come up with some good questions for discussion in class. Your summaries should be approximately 500 words long.

3. The term paper: you may choose to write on any philosophical problem addressed in this course. You will be asked to submit a preliminary statement on a chosen topic three weeks before the essay is due. You will be expected to do some independent research, to formulate a central thesis as well as to develop arguments in support of it.

Recommended learning resources

1. Camus, A. *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*. Trans. by Justin O'Brien. Vintage, 1991.

2. Epicurus. *Letter to Menoeceus*. Trans. by Robert D. Hicks. eBooks@Adelaide, 2007.

3. Epicurus. *Principal Doctrines*. Trans. by Robert D. Hicks. eBooks@Adelaide, 2007.

4. Epictetus. *Discourses and Selected Writings*. Beacon Press, 1997.

5. Frankl, V. *Man's Search for Meaning*. Trans. by I. Lasch. Beacon Press, 1992.

6. Gadamer, H.G. *Praise of Theory: Speeches and Essays*. Yale University Press, 1999.

7. James, W. *Pragmatism and Other Essays*. Ed. by Giles Gunn. New York: Penguin Books, 2000.

8. Jaspers, K. *Way to Wisdom: An Introduction to Philosophy*. Trans. by Ralph Manheim. Yale University Press, 2003.

9. Kant, I. *An Answer to the Question, What is Enlightenment?* Trans. by H.B. Nisbet. New York: Penguin Books, 2010.

10. Kant, I. *Political Writings*. Ed. by H.S. Reiss. Trans. by H.B. Nisbet. Cambridge University Press, 1991.

11. Marino, G., ed. *Basic Writings of Existentialism*. Modern Library Paperback Edition, 2004.

12. Mirandola, P. *Oration on the Dignity of Man*. Trans. by Robert Caponigri. Chicago: A Gateway Edition, 1956.

13. Nagel, T. "The Absurd," in Life, Death, and Meaning: Key Philosophical Readings on the Big Questions, ed. by D. Benatar, 2004.

14. Pascal, B. *Pensees*. Trans. by W. F. Trotter. Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2002.

15. Sartre, J.P. *Existentialism is a Humanism*. Yale University Press, 2007.

16. Sartre, J.P. *Basic Writings*. Ed. by Stephen Priest. Routledge, 2001.

17. Schmitz, D. "The Meanings of Life," in Life, Death, and Meaning: Key Philosophical Readings on the Big Questions, ed. by D. Benatar, 2004.

18. Taylor, R. "The Meaning of Life," in Life, Death, and Meaning: Key Philosophical Readings on the Big Questions, ed. by D. Benatar, 2004.

Feedback for evaluation

1. Students are strongly encouraged to provide feedback on the course via email or meetings with professor or tutors.

2. Midway through the term, students will also be asked to provide feedback via a brief questionnaire on the course.

3. As with all courses in Philosophy Department, students evaluate the course through a survey and written comments at the end of the term as well as via regular feedback between teacher, tutors, and students. This information is highly valued and is used to revise teaching methods, tasks, and content.

Course schedule

Week	Topics	Required reading	Tutorials
1	What is Philosophy of Life?	No Readings	
2	The Early Greek View (1)	Epicurus, "Letter to Menoeceus" and "Principal Doctrines"	
3	The Early Greek View (2)	Epictetus, *Encheiridion* (Selections)	Tutorial 1: Briefing Session
4	The Theistic View	Aquinas, "The Existence of God" (Summa Theologica Ia2)	
5	The Enlightenment View (1)	Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question, *What is Enlightenment?*"	Tutorial 2: William Sumner and James Rachels on Cultural Relativism
6	The Enlightenment View (2)	Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Science as the Instrument of the Enlightenment"	
7	The Existentialist View (1)	Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism" (I)	Tutorial 3: Richard Taylor, "The Meaning of Life
8	The Existentialist View (2)	Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism" (II)	
9	Technology and Responsibility	Hans Jonas, "Technology and Responsibility: Reflections on the New Task of Ethics"	Tutorial 4: E. Russo and D. Cove, "Frankenstein's Monster and Other Stories"
10	Ecology	Robert W. Kates, "Sustaining Life on Earth"	
11	Abortion	Judith Jarvis Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion"	Tutorial 5: R.M. Hare, "Abortion and the Golden Rule"
12	Euthanasia	John Hardwig, "Is There a Duty to Die?"	
13	Technology and Happiness	David Strong, "Technological Subversion"	Tutorial 6: Neil Postman, "Invisible Technologies"
14	Concluding Session	No Readings	

* This course schedule is tentative and it might be modified with the aim of adapting it to your intellectual interests and needs.

Details of course website

Relevant announcements and course documents will be posted on Blackboard.

Contact details for teacher(s) or TA(s)

Professor	
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Academic honesty and plagiarism

Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/

When submitting the final essay, students will be required to submit a signed declaration that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures. For group projects, all students of the same group should be asked to sign the declaration.

For assignments in the form of a computer-generated document that is principally text-based and submitted via VeriGuide, the statement, in the form of a receipt, will be issued by the system upon students' uploading of the soft copy of the assignment. Assignments without the receipt will not be graded by teachers. Only the final version of the assignment should be submitted via VeriGuide.