The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Department of Philosophy

UGED1815 Philosophy as a Way of Life 哲學與生活之道
Course Outline

(The primary teaching language in class is Cantonese.)

Course overview

This course guides students to think about the ultimate practical question—How should we live?—from the perspectives of ancient Greek and Roman philosophers, such as Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and Epicurus. Their profound reflections on the ways of life have produced a variety of proposals for how one should live. This course will look at and examine the thoughts on which these proposals are based, as well as the responses of critics at their time and modern-day assessments. Students will understand and reflect philosophically on such ethical concepts as excellence, virtue, and happiness. They will also learn to appreciate how these various proposals can make a distinctive and practical contribution to their search for a good life.

Learning outcomes

1. Formulate the theoretical principles underpinning ways of life.
2. Demonstrate familiarity with major practical skills of ways of life.
3. Identify and characterize the central ideas of ancient Western ethics.
4. Illustrate how ancient ethical thought can be applied to life in contemporary society.
5. Acquire philosophical thinking skills and critical disposition.
6. Articulate the meaning and the goal of life.
7. Describe the essential elements of good life.

Topics

1. Introduction: On Philosophy as a Way of Life
2. The Epicurean Way of Life and the Life of Pleasure
3. The Stoic Way of Life and Following Nature
4. The Aristotelian Way of Life and the Pursuit of Happiness
5. The Platonic Way of Life and Contemplating the One

Learning activities and workload

In-class:

1. Lecture: 2 hours each week.

Out-of-class:

1. Reading: 3–4 hours each week on the required and suggested readings.
2. Essay: an average of 2–3 hours each week on preparing and writing essay assignments throughout the term.

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 class discussion and learning through argumentative writing.

Task nature	***Description***	***Weight***
Midterm examination	Take-home examination. Essay questions will be given to students three weeks in advance of the due date.	40%
Final examination	Centralized examination	40%
Class participation	In-class discussion	20%

Late submission policy: Unless satisfactory reasons are provided, examination answers handed in after deadline will be rejected.

Prohibit all use of AI tools

Students are not allowed to use any AI tools in any kind of learning activity or assessment that will be counted towards students' final grade of the course. Students are expected to produce their own work independently without any collaboration or use of AI tools.

Recommended learning resources

1. John M. Cooper, *Pursuits of Wisdom: Six Ways of Life in Ancient Philosophy from Socrates to Plotinus*, Princeton, 2012.
2. James Rachels and Stuart Rachels, *Problems from Philosophy*, 3rd ed., McGraw Hill, 2012.
3. Susan Sauve Meyer, *Ancient Ethics: A Critical Introduction*, Routledge, 2008.
4. William B. Irvine, *A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy*, Oxford University Press, 2009.
5. Susanne Bobzien, *Determinism and Freedom in Stoic Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, 1998.
6. Steven M. Cahn and Christine Vitrano, *Happiness: Classic and Contemporary Readings in Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, 2008.
7. Pierre Hadot, *Plotinus or The Simplicity of Visiion,* The University of Chicago Press, 1993.
8. Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life: spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, Blackwell, 1995.
9. Pierre Hadot, *What is ancient philosophy?* Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002.
10. Julia Annas, *Platonic ethics, old and new*, Cornell University Press, 1999.
11. Plato, *Republic*, Oxford University Press, 1993.
12. Robert Heinaman (ed.), *Plato and Aristotle's ethics*, Ashgate, 2003.
13. Susan K. Allard-Nelson, *An Aristotelian approach to ethical theory: the norms of virtue*, Edwin Mellen Press, 2004.
14. Aristotle, *Aristotle's Nicomachean ethics*, University of Chicago Press, 2011.
15. Phillip Mitsis, *Epicurus' ethical theory: the pleasures of invulnerability*, Cornell University Press, 1988.
16. Epicurus, *The essential Epicurus: letters, principal doctrines, Vatican sayings, and fragments*, Prometheus Books, 1993.
17. Christoph Jedan, *Stoic Virtues: Chrysippus and the Religious Character of Stoic Ethics*, Continuum, 2009.
18. A. A. Long, *Stoic Studies*, University of California Press, 2001.
19. Epictetus, *Epictetus: with an English translation by W.A. Oldfather*, Harvard University Press, 1998.
20. Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Seneca: with an English translation by John W. Basore*, W. Heinemann, 1989.

Feedback for evaluation

1. Students are strongly encouraged to provide feedback on the course via email or meetings with lecturer.
2. Students evaluate the course through a survey and written comments at the end of the term as well as via regular

feedback between teacher and students. This information is highly valued and is used to revise teaching methods, tasks, and content.

Course schedule

Week	***Topic***	***Required Readings***
1	Introduction: On Philosophy as a Way of Life	Rachels and Rachels 2012, pp. 176-184
2–4	The Epicurean Way of Life and the Life of Pleasure	Meyer 2008, pp. 95–115
5–8	The Stoic Way of Life and Following Nature	Irvine 2009, pp. 65-103; Bobzien 1998, pp. 73-75; p. 182; p. 204; Cooper 2012, pp. 166–190
9–11	The Aristotelian Way of Life and the Pursuit of Happiness	Cahn and Vitrano 2008, pp.19-34
12–13	The Platonic Way of Life and Contemplating the One	Hadot 1993, pp. 23-34

Contact details

Lecturer	
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Details of course website

We use Blackboard Learn for this course. Lecture notes and information on assignments will be posted on the website.

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/ With each assignment, 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.

Grade Descriptors for Essay Examinations

[Excellent] A (85–92) or [Very Good] A- (80–84)	Argument • You faithfully reconstruct the author's positions, and prove this knowledge by knowing the argument(s) supporting the theses in the text. • You evidence independent and self-initiated thinking and understanding of the arguments and philosophical problems through your ability to present your own counter-arguments and possible replies to counter-arguments. Theory Analysis • You exhibit thorough understanding of the relations of the themes presented in the various texts. • You demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the relations between the various subjects and authors discussed in the course. • You demonstrate an above-average facility in judgment by applying the various theories to cases and situations presented in the course of the exam.
[Good] B+ (76–79), B (72–75), or B- (68–71)	Argument • You can faithfully reconstruct the author's positions, and demonstrate a basic comprehension of the arguments supporting those positions. • You show some independence in thinking, but have difficulty developing your own criticisms and rebuttals to criticism. Theory Analysis • You exhibit relatively complete understanding of the relations between the authors and the themes presented in the various texts. • You show some basic, though average, facility in judgment by applying the various theories to cases and situations presented in the course of the exam.
[Fair] C+ (64–67), C (60–63), or C- (56–59)	Argument • You demonstrate an ability to properly relay information about the various texts and the positions contained therein, but have difficulty re-constructing the arguments, presenting counter-arguments, and criticism. • You can faithfully relay information, but you show no independence in philosophical thinking, fail to show basic competence in philosophical argumentation and have a difficulty understanding arguments. Theory Analysis • You show an incomplete understanding of the relations between the authors discussed in the course as well as the themes presented in the various texts. • You demonstrate competence to memorize information, but you have some difficulty applying various theories to cases and situations presented in the course of the exam.
[Pass] D+ (53–55), or D (50–52)	Argument • You demonstrate some understanding of the course content, but have difficulty relaying accurate information about the positions and the arguments for such positions in the text. Theory Analysis • Although the answers are readable, you exhibit seriously incomplete understanding of the content as well as the relationships between authors and themes covered in the readings and discussed in class. • You fail to demonstrate facility in the application of various theories to cases and situations presented in the course of the exam.

[Fail] F (0-49)	Argument • You demonstrate no understanding of the course content. You relay inaccurate information about the positions and arguments for those positions in the text. Theory Analysis • The answers are unreadable, and your answers exhibit a complete lack of understanding of the relationships between authors and themes covered in the readings and discussed in class.