

# PHILOSOPHY AS A WAY OF LIFE

**PHIL 3975, Fall 2013**

Tuesday/Friday 10:00-11:15, Faculty Memorial Hall 316

**Professor: Dr. Stephen Grimm**

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Office Hours: Friday 2:30-4:30 p.m., and by appointment

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## Course Description

For many philosophers, West and East, philosophy has been about more than an effort to answer fundamental questions. It has been an activity aimed at changing one's orientation towards the world, and thereby, how one lives one's life.

In this course we will consider several variations on the the idea that philosophy can (and perhaps should) make us better people. We will also ask whether philosophy can teach us something about how to live well that cannot be found elsewhere: e.g., by spiritual practice, or by psychoanalysis, or by some other means.

Other central topics to be considered include: philosophy's relation to wisdom; the meaning of life; and how philosophy is practiced today.

## Texts for the Course

Seneca, *Letters from a Stoic*, trans. Robin Campbell, Penguin

Alain de Botton, *The Consolations of Philosophy*, Vintage

*Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, ed. Philip Ivanhoe, Hackett

Pascal, *Pensees*, ed. Anthony Levi, Oxford

Josef Pieper, *Leisure: the Basis of Culture*, Ignatius

Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Beacon

Additional articles will be available via Blackboard (under "content")

## Requirements for the Course

### Quizzes

Nine brief, multiple-choice quizzes will test your knowledge of the reading and class discussion. From among these eight quizzes, I will count your top *eight* grades. In other words, I will drop your lowest grade. If you miss class, or are late for the quiz, you will receive a zero for that assignment. Make-ups will not be available.

Questions for the quizzes will be taken from the reading for that day, as well as from the material covered since the previous quiz (with the exception of the first quiz, of course; that will be based on everything since the first day). By “the material covered,” I mean all of the relevant reading assignments, as well as any material covered in class discussion during the relevant period.

**NB:** As you can see below, taken together the quizzes count for 40% of your grade—in other words, a large portion! Take the quizzes seriously from the outset, then, by doing the reading carefully and taking good notes in class.

## **Exams**

There will be a midterm on **October 18<sup>th</sup>** and a final (tentatively) on **December 13<sup>th</sup>**. The exams will be essay-based, and additional information about the essays will be provided in advance. Unless evidence of a serious emergency (death in the family, etc.) or medical crisis is provided, make-up exams will not be available.

## **Participation**

Participation will count for 5% of your grade, and grades will range from 5 (highest) to 0 (lowest). This is the easiest place to do well in the class, so I encourage you to participate regularly. Asking questions, raising objections, expressing puzzlement, etc. are all good forms of participation.

## **Classroom Courtesy**

Cellphones should be turned off for the duration of the class, and texting during class is not permitted. If you cannot wait until the end of class to send or receive a text, you should not be in class. Because they tend to be used for non-class related purposes, laptops will also not be allowed in class. If you have a special reason to use a laptop please see me and I will try to accommodate you.

Also, make it a point to be on time for class: walking into class late is disruptive both to the instructor and to your fellow classmates.

## **Academic Misconduct**

You will be strictly held to the Fordham University code of conduct. At a minimum, you will receive an “F” on any work that involves academic misconduct, and you may very well fail the course, depending on the circumstances.

## **Grading**

Midterm=25%  
Final=30%

Quizzes=40% (5% each)

Participation=5%

Note: All of your grades for the semester will be posted on Blackboard as the course progresses.

### **Tentative Schedule of Readings**

#### **August**

30 Welcome and Introduction

#### **September**

3 Plato (School of Plato?), *Alcibiades* [Blackboard]

- **Quiz #1**

6 Jonathan Lear, "The Socratic Method and Psychoanalysis" [Blackboard]

10 Epicurus, "Letter to Menoeceus" [Blackboard] (Optional: de Botton, "Consolation for not Having Enough Money")

13 Seneca, *Selected Letters*, pp. 33-90

- **Quiz #2**

17 Seneca, *Selected Letters*, pp. 90-144 (Optional: de Botton, "Consolation for Frustration")

20 Foster Wallace, "Kenyon Address"; Stockdale, "Courage Under Fire" [Blackboard]

- **Quiz #3**

24 Classical Chinese Philosophy: Confucius

27 No class: SRG college talks

#### **October**

1 Classical Chinese Philosophy: Mencius

4 Classical Chinese Philosophy: Xunzi

- **Quiz #4**

8 Pascal, *Pensees*, pp. 5-57

11 Pascal, *Pensees*, pp. 57-110

- **Quiz #5**

15 Pascal, *Pensees*, pp. 110-156

18 **MIDTERM**

22 Pieper, "Leisure: the Basis of Culture"

25 Pieper, "The Philosophical Act"

- **Quiz #6**

29 Frankl, *Man in Search of Meaning*

November

1 No class: SRG conference

5 Frankl, *Man in Search of Meaning*

- **Quiz #7**

8 Nagel, "The Absurd" [Blackboard]

12 Tolstoy, "My Confession"; another reading? [Blackboard]

15 Wolff, "The Meanings of Lives" [Blackboard]

- **Quiz #8**

19 Tiberius, "The Reflective Life: Meaning and Happiness for Real People" [Blackboard]

22 Knobe and Nichols, "Experimental Philosophy: A Manifesto" [Blackboard]

26 Chalmers, "Why Isn't There More Progress in Philosophy?" [Blackboard]

- **Quiz #9**

29 No class: Thanksgiving

December

3 Class choice

6 Last class

**FINAL EXAM: Friday, December 13, 9:30-11:30 a.m. (tentative)**