SAMPLE

Course Materials

Philosophy as a Way of Life

PHIL221 – Fall 2018

Steven Horst (shorst@wesleyan.edu)
Department of Philosophy
Wesleyan University
Middletown, CT 06459

Introductory FAQ

What is this document?

This PDF file is a compilation of the materials used in Professor Steven Horst's course Philosophy as a Way of Life in Fall 2018 at Wesleyan University. These materials were originally presented to students using an online tool called Moodle, and have been compiled as a PDF for dissemination to faculty interested in such courses, such as members of the NEH Summer Institute "Reviving Philosophy as a Way of Life".

What is contained in the PDF?

The PDF is divided into several sections, which can be navigated using the Bookmarks function in Acrobat:

- Course Syllabus (as distributed to students)
- Schedule of Classes (as actually presented)
- Instructions for each class session with discussion questions, organized by topic
    - Confucianism
    - Taoism
    - Western Philosophy Before Plato (Pre-Socratics, Sophists, Plato, Cynics)
    - Plato
    - Aristotle
    - Stoics
    - Buddhism and Christianity
    - Existentialism
- Paper assignments
- "Spiritual Exercises" used over the course of the semester

I had originally intended to include PDFs of the supplementary readings that I had made available to students at the online Moodle site, but this resulted in a very long document that might be too large for some to download. (Probably due to a high scan rate for some of the parts of it that were photocopied.) **I shall make *most* of these available as a separate PDF**, though I have omitted several that are simply too long, and given URLs for versions of those texts where available.

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- The syllabus, assignments, and discussion questions are copyrighted by Steven Horst, but may be freely used and adapted by faculty at Wesleyan and other institutions teaching similar courses.
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- Many of the readings in the accompanying file are sections of copyrighted works that are the intellectual property of their authors and/or publishers. They were made available to students under fair use laws, in some cases with minor editing or adaptations. They should not be distributed in ways that may infringe upon copyright.

Note on Page Numbers

This large PDF was compiled from separate PDFs for different units of the course, the exercises, and the offprints. Page numbers begin at 1 for each section with numbered pages.

PHIL 221 – Philosophy as a Way of Life (Fall, 2018)
(First-year Seminar)

Instructor: Steven Horst, Department of Philosophy
Email: shorst@wesleyan.edu
Office: 207a Russell House (350 High Street)
Phone: x3645 (860-685-3645)

Why "Philosophy as a Way of Life"?

The title of this course is borrowed from the intellectual historian Pierre Hadot's 1995 book, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*. The point of Hadot's book was that, 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). In fact, Hadot points out that 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 several of these ancient traditions, both Eastern and Western. 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. What is distinctive in this course is that we will *try out* some of these practices – what Hadot refers to as "spiritual exercises" – as a way of trying to get a feel for what it might be like to live as, say, a Confucian, a Platonist, 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.

Evaluation and Grading

Much of the work for this course involves doing "spiritual (or philosophical) exercises" involving self-reflection. This is not the sort of thing that can be evaluated with a grade. I shall supply feedback and commentary on written exercises, but shall not assign grades in letters or numbers. In terms of Wesleyan's grading system, the "grading" will be Credit/Unsatisfactory (basically, Pass/Fail). It is possible to fail the course by not attending class or not doing the assigned work, but the measure of success beyond that lies in whether the things you do here provide resources for leading a more thoughtful, reflective, meaningful, and fulfilling life. I am not in a position to assess that, and indeed you may be in a position to assess it only long after the course is done.

Structure of the Course

The course will include units on a number of philosophical schools/traditions. These units will include reading of important primary texts, secondary texts, and "exercises" either taken from or based upon the traditions. I have included a *rough* outline of number of sessions for each unit below. However, I will ask for some feedback a few weeks into the course that will influence the rest of the semester.

1) **Depth vs. breadth.** The longer we spend on any given tradition, the better we will understand it and the more we will learn from it – but this will also mean covering fewer traditions. The sessions for first two units of the course (Confucianism and Taoism) are already planned out and up on the Moodle site. The Confucianism unit offers an example of a somewhat longer treatment of a tradition (7 sessions), the Taoism unit a much shorter one (2 sessions). Often, some people would prefer spending longer on fewer topics and others would rather cover more ground in the sense of learning about additional traditions. It may be that preferences on this will be divided and it will be impossible to do both, but if there is a strong and broadly shared consensus to orient the course rest of the course one way or another, I will attempt to reshape it accordingly.

2) **Class time on "spiritual exercises".** Some familiarity with practices relevant to a tradition are an important part of this course. However, it is a separate question how fruitful it is to spend *class* time doing or discussing them, as opposed to making them exercises to do and reflect upon privately. After we have had a few class sessions involving such exercises, we will discuss how useful group discussions of them are and plan the rest of the semester accordingly. (Including more of these in class sessions will, of course, push us in the "depth" vs "breadth" direction, as it will mean more sessions in a given tradition. However, if these are what people are finding the most fruitful part of the class, this may recommend doing and discussing more of them.)

Rough and Tentative Initial Syllabus
(Detailed descriptions of the units on Confucianism and Taoism are already in place on the Moodle site.)

Classical Chinese Philosophy

- Confucianism (about 7 sessions – **first paper towards the end of this**)
- Taoism (2 sessions)

Classical Western Philosophy

- Western Philosophy Before Plato (6 sessions)
- Plato (5 sessions – **second paper**)
- Aristotle (5 sessions)
- Stoicism (4 sessions)

Religious Philosophical Traditions

- Buddhism (4 sessions)
- Christianity (5 sessions)

(**final paper due during exam week**)

Work for the Course

This is a seminar, which means the majority of class time is devoted to discussion. Attendance and participation are an important part of the seminar experience. Some people are more comfortable than others in speaking up in class, but if you have always been shy about speaking up, a course like this is a good opportunity to become more comfortable with it.

There is a good deal of writing for this class. Some of it – 3 written assignments to be turned in – is of the more formal sort you will find in any class. But much of it is less formal. For example, for most class sessions, there will be a discussion forum set up where you will be asked to post a reflection on the readings.

One special feature of this class is the inclusion of a number of "spiritual exercises". In some cases, we will discuss these extensively in class and/or write about our experiences with them. The main point of these, however, is not what you say or write up about them, but what you get out of the process of *doing* them. This will be a highly individual thing: there will probably be some exercises that will engage you deeply while others will not, and different people will be engaged by different exercises.

Where To Find Assignments

Wesleyan uses an online tool called Moodle as a resource in classes. This is a platform that allows posting daily assignments, discussion forums, etc. You should

be able to get to Moodle through your WesPortal, and there should be links there to any class you are enrolled in that has a Moodle site.

The Moodle site for this course will be the main place to go to find assignments. Units are grouped by topic (e.g., Confucianism, Taoism, etc.), and within these there are detailed instructions for each day's work: readings (including links to any that are online or available for download), and usually a set of questions to think about in doing the readings. For most class sessions, you will be asked to post a reflection on one or more of these in a discussion forum set up for that session. (There will be a link for this with each session that has a forum.)

Assigned Texts

The textbooks below have been ordered for this course. There will also be some additional readings that will be available for download from the Moodle site.

Soccio, Douglas. *Archetypes of Wisdom*. 9th Edition. Cenage. **ISBN-10:** 1285874315 **ISBN-13:** 978-1285874319

Philip J. Ivanhoe (Editor), Bryan W. Van Norden (Editor), *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy* 2nd Edition. Hackett, **paperback. ISBN-10:** 0872207803 **ISBN-13:** 978-0872207806

Plato (Author), Erich Segal (Editor) *The Dialogues of Plato* (Bantam classics) **ISBN-10:** 0553213717 **ISBN-13:** 978-0553213713

Aristotle (Author), Terence Irwin (Translator, Introduction), *Nicomachean Ethics* 2nd Edition. Hackett. **ISBN-10:** 0872204642 **ISBN-13:** 978-0872204645

Epictetus (Author), Nicholas P. White (Translator), *The Handbook (The Encheiridion)* (Hackett Classics) **ISBN-10:** 0915145693 **ISBN-13:** 978-0915145690

PHIL221 – Philosophy as a Way of Life

(Fall 2018)

Schedule of Classes

Note: Classes are numbered by week/session within week. E.g., 1a is Monday of Week 1, 3c is Friday of Week 3, etc.

1a (Monday, September 3) Introduction
1b (Wednesday, September 5) Confucius (Kongzi) 1: Goodness and the Gentleman
1c (Friday, September 7) Kongzi 2: Overview

2a (Monday, September 10) Kongzi 3: Ritual and Filial Piety
2b (Wednesday, September 12) Exercise and discussion: Reclaiming Ritual
2c (Friday, September 14) Mencius: The Four Sprouts

3a (Monday, September 17) Xun: "Human Nature is Bad"
3b (Wednesday, September 19) Neoconfucianism and cultivation
3c (Friday, September 21) Quiet Sitting and Reverential Attention

4a (Monday, September 24) Taoism
4b (Wednesday, September 26) Taoism and Confucianism
4c (Friday, September 28) Before Socrates

5a (Monday, October 1) Socrates vs. Sophistry
5b (Wednesday, October 3) Socrates in Plato's *Euthyphro*
5c (Friday, October 5) The *Apology*

6a (Monday, October 8) Write Your Own Apologia
6b (Wednesday, October 10) The *Crito*

6c (Friday, October 12) The Cynics

7a (Monday, October 15) Plato: Introduction
7b (Wednesday, October 17) The Tripartite Soul
7c (Friday, October 19) The Education of Philosopher-Kings

8a (Monday, October 22) **FALL BREAK**
8b (Wednesday, October 24) Exercise: The Examined Life
8c (Friday, October 26) Aristotle 1: What Do We Want?

9a (Monday, October 29) Aristotle: Happiness and Virtue
9b (Wednesday, October 31) Aristotle: The Nature of Virtue and How it is Acquired
9c (Friday, November 2) Aristotle: The Particular Virtues

10a (Monday, November 5) Aristotle: Impediments to Virtue
10b (Wednesday, November 7) Aristotle on Friendship
10c (Friday, November 9) Stoicism Introduction (begin exercises)

11a (Monday, November 12) Epictetus
11b (Wednesday, November 14) Live Like a Stoic 1: Life, Control
11c (Friday, November 16) Live Like a Stoic 2: Mindfulness, Virtue

12a (Monday, November 19) Live Like a Stoic 3: Relationships, Resilience, Nature
12b (Wednesday, November 21) **THANKSGIVING BREAK**
12c (Friday, November 23) **THANKSGIVING BREAK**

13a (Monday, November 26) Introduction to Buddhism
13b (Wednesday, November 28) Introduction to Christianity
13c (Friday, November 30) The Desert Fathers and Mothers

14a (Monday, December 3) *Orthodox Psychotherapy* 1
14b (Wednesday, December 5) Existentialism (Kierkegaard, Sartre)
14c (Friday, December 7) Reflections in class

Section 1: Confucianism

Note: I have numbered classes by week and session within a week. For example, Monday of the first week is 1a, Wednesday of the second week is 2b, etc. Dates are also included.

1a (Monday, September 3) Introduction

In-class introduction to the course. No assigned reading.

1b (Wednesday, September 5) Confucius (Kongzi) 1: Goodness and the Gentleman

The *Analects* is the seminal text of the Confucian tradition. It is understood to be a collection of sayings of Kongzi (whose name is Anglicized as Confucius) [551-479 BCE], probably compiled by his students. It is thus not written as a systematic treatise, and the reader must reconstruct Kongzi's views from the various sayings. We will read secondary texts that attempt to present core Confucian views more systematically in subsequent classes, but we will begin by reading selections from the *Analects* and try to get a sense of both the content of Kongzi's views and his style of philosophical engagement.

Reading:

- In Ivanhoe and van Norden, *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*): Kongzi (Confucius), *Analects*, Introduction and Books 1, 4–8.

Some Discussion Topics:

These are some things to think about in reading the assigned passages. Please post reflections on at least one of the topics listed below on the Moodle discussion forum for this class session.

- What are the key characteristics of the gentleman [*chun-tzu*] (see especially Book 4)? With whom do you resonate more strongly, the gentleman or the petty person [*hsiao-jen*]?
- Does Confucius give us a characterization of what goodness consists in?
- What are some of the other moral characteristics which seem to be related to, yet subtly distinguished from, goodness?
- What are some of the things that seem to be barriers to or shortcomings in goodness?
- What seem to be some of the important Confucian practices in the pursuit of goodness?
- Does Confucius seem to view anyone as truly good?
- What do you think of Confucius' preference for transmission over innovation? (7.1)
- How does he think one ought to live differently depending on whether one's society practices the Way? (8.13)
- If the *Analects* is to be considered a work of philosophy, what would seem to be the Confucian view of what "philosophy" consists in? How does this accord with or differ from your prior assumptions about what "philosophy" is?

1c (Friday, September 7) Kongzi 2: Overview

Reading:

- Introduction to section on the Asian sages in *Archetypes of Wisdom* (pp. 22-25)
- "Confucius" in *Archetypes of Wisdom* (pp. 34-41).
-

Discussion Topic (post to forum):

Please post reflections on the Moodle discussion forum for this class session.

- Describe one thing in Confucian philosophy that you find appealing and one that you find alien, problematic, or difficult to understand. Explain briefly what appeals or does not appeal to you about them.

2a (Monday, September 10) Kongzi 3: Ritual and Filial Piety

This set of readings deals more with what modern Westerners are likely to find to be among the more alien aspects of Confucianism: ritual and filial piety. The video by Michael Puett presents an overview of the Confucian views of the human person, the relation between the individual and society, and how Kongzi viewed the process of cultivation of a person.

Reading/Video:

- *Analects*, Books 2-3, 9-11, and passage 12.1. (In Ivanhoe and van Norden)
- Michael Puett lecture, "The Path": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MfnSTr6-1g4 (The video is 52 minutes long. Puett is lecturing on a stage, so if you wish to listen while doing something else that does not engage your mind – say, taking a walk or working out – it lends itself to that.)

Some Discussion Topics:

These are some things to think about in reading the assigned passages. Please post reflections on at least one of the topics listed below on the Moodle discussion forum for this class session.

Ritual

- What function or ends would be served by the kind of behavior and ritual rules that are described in Book 10?
- Can you think of examples of rituals in your own culture (or religious or family life)? Pick one or two and think about what purpose it serves. What difference does it make if we observe or neglect it?
- To what degree do you gather that the authors of the *Analects* are committed to the details of the rituals depicted throughout the text? To what degree might change be possible, and on what basis (see 9.3).
- 3.4 talks about the "roots" of ritual. What is this passage telling us?
- What do you make of the comments on ritual and goodness in 3.3?
- Based on 2.4 and any other passages that seem relevant, describe the ideal of spontaneity that Confucius is said to reach at age 70. What is so excellent about such a state? Can you see any problems with it? Isn't spontaneity the opposite of what one does in carefully observing ancient rituals?

Filial Piety

- 1.2 (previous set of readings) says that filial piety can be thought of as the root of Goodness. How so? Does this seem plausible?
- In what sense might being filial and a good brother amount to already taking part in government (2.21)?

Social Change

- In one sense, Confucianism's emphases on ritual, filial piety, and respect for social order make it seem as though there is no room for social or political criticism or change. Yet Confucius (and, we shall see, Mencius) seem to have regarded the social and political situations they faced as deeply flawed, and hoped to change these by influencing the rulers. Must a Confucian simply accept the status quo (even enshrine it!)? If not, what seems to be the recommended approach to changing the world around us?

2b (Wednesday, September 12) Exercise and discussion: Reclaiming Ritual

There are no new readings for this class, though you may wish to review previous reading.

Our society is not so highly ritualized as classical China. (And Confucius seems to have recommended even more ritual, practiced in very particular ways, than was prevalent in his day.) Yet when we think about it, some of the things we do *are* ritualized to a greater or lesser extent: certainly things like marriage ceremonies and high school graduations, but also (to a lesser extent) things like the ways we greet one another or writing a thank-you letter. If Confucius is right, rituals can and should play a function in our self-cultivation and/or our relations to one another, and *how* we do them makes a difference.

Assignment (two options), to be posted to Forum, and we will discuss some of them in class.

Option 1: Choose an activity you are familiar with that is to some extent ritualized. (For example, your high school graduation or writing a thank you letter. *Feel free to choose your own examples – the more variety we get, the better!*) Describe the steps of the ritual. Then explain the function of the activity, and how its ritualized steps are supposed to fulfill that function. Reflect on whether the ritual is important and useful, and how the ways it might be done can make a difference in the outcome that it is aiming at. (You might end up deciding that the ways you have seen it done are not perfect, and suggest some improvements!)

Option 2: Design a ritual of your own. It does not need to be particularly formal, and can be something that is done alone or with others. (For example, the German philosopher Immanuel Kant wrote about the importance of dinner parties and what should be done at them and in what order!) Explain what the function of the ritual is. (For example, a dinner party might be an opportunity to get to know new people or to have respectful intelligent conversation.) How would you recommend it be conducted, and why? (To stick with the dinner party example, how many people should be invited (or what is too few or too many)? Should you start with easy safe topics? Should alcohol be served and if so, why and how much? Are there topics that should be avoided? Are there ways of structuring the event so that everyone has a chance to participate and interacts respectfully with one another?)

(If you want to read a summary of Kant's rules for dinner parties, see http://www.marquette.edu/kdpi/rules.php)

2c (Friday, September 14) Mencius: The Four Sprouts

Mengzi (Mencius) [371-289 BCE] is the second major figure in the classical Confucian canon. As with Confucius, we have a collection of sayings probably compiled by his students. One important development we see in Mencius is a more psychological turn – an account of some basic components of human psychology (the "four sprouts") and the role they play in becoming a gentleman. Among other things, this provides a kind of explanation for why some of the Confucian practices – the rites, filial piety, study – might be important (because of the roles they play in cultivating our native human potential into virtues). Mencius also places a greater emphasis on the role of compassion and benevolence than we find explicitly in Confucius. Indeed, the capacity for benevolence seems to be the crucial fact about human psychology that makes us all capable of becoming good and flourishing, though (like the other sprouts) it needs to be cultivated in the proper ways.

Reading:

- In Ivanhoe and van Norden: Mengzi (Mencius): Introduction and Books 1 and 2.

Discussion Topics:

- Read Mencius 2a6. (129-130) Try to characterize, in your own words, what seems to be the point of the metaphor of the "four sprouts" in Mencius. What does he seem to mean in saying that no human being is devoid of them? Do you agree or disagree?
- If Mencius is correct, what sorts of practices might be important in the cultivation of character traits like benevolence? What sorts of things might impede their growth? (Find examples in the text and then also think of one or two of your own.)
- Try to think of a practical sort of exercise or practice a person might employ to try to cultivate benevolence. Try putting it into practice for a few days and observe how and whether it has any effects in your day to day life.
- Mencius seems to think there is a natural progression in the cultivation of benevolence: we first and most naturally feel it to members of our immediate family, and it is only if it is properly cultivated there that it can then be extended to our neighbors, communities, and ultimately to the entire kingdom and perhaps all of humanity. Does this seem psychologically realistic? Or can one cultivate a general care for human beings in general (and, in the proper circumstances, become a good ruler) without first really developing compassionate and benevolent relations with those closest to us? If Mencius is right, what implications does this have for self-cultivation?

- What sort of attitude do you think Mencius would recommend that we take towards people when we see them doing bad things?

3a (Monday, September 17) Xunzi: "Human Nature is Bad"

Xunzi [310-235 BCE] is the third of the major figures of classical Confucian thought. Unlike Confucius and Mencius, he wrote more systematic treatises with arguments against those (like Mencius) with whom he disagreed, and as a result his writings look more like what we think of as "philosophy" today. In today's reading, we see how he has a somewhat different view than Mencius on human nature and the role of practices of cultivation (like learning and the rites). We will use this reading, in combination with the Mencius reading from the last class, to compare their views, and will spend much of our class period trying to clarify what they agree and disagree about, and debate whose view seems correct.

Reading:

- Xunzi (in Ivanhoe and van Norden anthology): Introduction (255-256), "Human Nature is Bad" (298-306)

For consideration and discussion: (post on at least one of these topics in the Forum):

- The article is entitled (in translation) "Human Nature is Bad". This might suggest that Xun has a very pessimistic view of human nature – that we are all incurably bad, and motivated only to do bad things. (Perhaps like some of the more extreme Christian views of Original Sin.) Upon reading the article, do you think this would be an accurate characterization of what he is really saying?
- Xun clearly thinks that the traditional Confucian practices are important and make a difference in what sort of a person one becomes. How would you characterize the role he thinks these play, and how is this tied to his assumptions about human psychology?
- What do Xun and Mencius agree about? What are their main points of disagreement? Where they disagree, who do you think is right? (Be prepared to discuss and debate in class.)

SHORT WRITING ASSIGNMENT -- DUE Saturday, September 22

About 3 pages, due by email [shorst@wesleyan.edu] by 11:59pm on Saturday, September 22. **Please include your last name in the file name for your document (preferably in Word) and the text "PHIL221-1" or "PHIL221-2" (depending on which section you are enrolled in) in the subject header of your email**.

Mencius and Xun seem to present radically different views of human nature and the role of practices of self-cultivation in shaping it for the better. Briefly explain what you take to be the view of each and identify what they seem to agree and disagree about. Then, either (1) make a brief case for which you take to be the more realistic view, or (2) make a case that they do not really fundamentally disagree but merely present equivalent views with different emphases, or (3) make a case that they are both fundamentally mistaken and present an alternative of your own.

3b (Wednesday, September 19) Neoconfucianism and cultivation

Confucianism came to play an important role in Chinese culture. Indeed, in some ways it was the center of Chinese education and philosophy up until the Maoist revolution in the 20th century, and in many periods formed the basic framework for education and government (though this varied greatly over 2500 years and dozens of dynasties). However, even in the classical period, it had an important rival in Taoism and later in Buddhism (which spread to China from India). There was an important revival of Confucian thought and scholarship in the Middle Ages, and this is often called Neoconfucianism. This involved a great deal of scholarly debate about philosophical ideas and their implementations. Neoconfucians argued against their Taoist, Moist, and Buddhist rivals, but many of them also incorporated some of their insights and practices, resulting in lively debates amongst Neoconfucians. One thing we find in this period are much more systematic discussions of the best practices of education and cultivation (and education itself was considered central to cultivation). Today's reading provides a brief introduction and overview, particularly emphasizing the Neoconfucians' views of self-cultivation and the role of study and education in this.

Reading:

- Angle and Tiwald, "Self-Cultivation" from *Neoconfucianism: A Philosophical Introduction* (see link below to download)

To Consider and Discuss:

- Can you identify ways in which the Neoconfucians have changed or expanded upon what we have seen in classical Confucianism?
- What seem to be the essential elements of their view of self-cultivation?
- What do you think of the emphasis they place on study and education as vehicles of self-cultivation? How might this be different from how we think of "study" and "education" in our own educational system?
- What do you make of the distinction between the "lesser learning" and the "greater learning"? Does this seem at all familiar from your own experience of learning?
- The Confucian educational system was also an important part of the structure of Chinese society – a preparation for administrative positions in the government that were the chief means of advancement, and they were tied to a system of civil service examinations. In light of this, would it be proper to characterize Confucianism primarily as a philosophy aimed at individual self-cultivation? Is there a tension between the two aspects of the education, or would a Neoconfucian see them as intimately connected? What implications might this have for how to think

about setting up an educational system if you had the task of designing one for your community? For approaching your own education?

- Could Confucianism provide the basis for a way of life in a contemporary, democratic, pluralistic culture? Can an individual practice a Confucian way of life without a Confucian community or society?

ASSIGNMENT (see previous page) DUE SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 22 – Please send by email to shorst@wesleyan.edu

3c (Friday, September 21) Quiet Sitting and Reverential Attention

No new reading. In-class exercise in the Neo-Confucian practice of "quiet sitting" and discussion of "reverential attention"

PHIL221: Philosophy as a Way of Life

Wesleyan University, Fall 2018

Section: Taoism

3c (Friday, September 21) Taoism

Taoism (or Daoism, depending on the system of transliteration of Chinese words employed) is of a similar age as Confucianism. It is traditionally thought to have been originated by a figure called Laozi [?6th century BCE], an older contemporary of Confucius. Like the *Analects*, the *Tao Te Ching* is probably a collection of sayings and stories compiled by Laozi's followers, with little obvious organization, and many of the stories seem quite cryptic. Indeed, if you look at several translations into English, some of the passages seem entirely different. The later Taoist thinker Zhuangzi is a bit more approachable, but the texts can still strike us as cryptic. For this reason, it is helpful to read them along with an overview from a secondary text rather than simply try to puzzle out what is meant by the original sayings.

Readings:

- *Archetypes of Wisdom*, Section on Laozi pp. 25-34
- Laozi, *Tao Te Ching*, 1-35. (There is a translation in the Ivanhoe and van Norden, but go to https://ttc.tasuki.org/display:Year:1972,1988,1996,2004/section:1, which contains four translations side by side. This will give you some sense of how different translations of this text can be and how much interpretation can go into a translation. You will probably not want to read all four versions of all 35 verses. Look at the alternative renderings of a few, and then read whichever translation(s) you prefer.)
- *Zhuangzi*, Chapters 1 - 3 (in Ivanhoe and van Norden)

For Consideration and Discussion (post on Forum):

- Taoist writing seems almost deliberately cryptic. **Select one saying or story from Laozi or Zhuangzi where you think you can see what they are getting at and post your interpretation of it.**

Also to consider for discussion in class:

- The Taoists say some interesting (if cryptic) things about opposites, linguistic distinctions, the senses, and important notions like goodness and beauty, success, and hope. What seems to be the point of these sayings?

- Do you get some sense of what would be involved in trying to live like a Taoist? How different would it be from the way you live now? From the kind of life the Confucians seem to recommend?
- What would it mean to empty the mind, and why might it be recommended? How would one go about doing this?

4a (Monday, September 24) Taoism and Confucianism

Classical Chinese philosophy included three major schools: Confucianism, Taoism, and a third philosophy called Moism (which we will not discuss). Michael Puett's video (see link below) provides some helpful ways of understanding Taoism and its differences from Confucianism. We will use it, and a review of previous material, to discuss their relationship to one another.

Reading/Viewing:

- Puett video on Confucius and Zhuangze https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4wOtPOo_vlM
- Review sections on Taoism and Confucianism from *Archetypes of Wisdom*

For Reflection and Discussion:

- What seem to be the major points of contrast between Taoism and Confucianism?
- What would be a Taoist assessment of what is wrong about the Confucian philosophy and way of life?
- Would Taoism's concerns about Confucianism also be applicable to contemporary ways of thinking about and moving within the world?
- If one wished to explore a Taoist way of life, what sorts of practices, exercises, and ways of thinking might one wish to cultivate in order to do so?
- In some sense, the Taoists seem to think that our ordinary ways of thinking about the world are confused or illusory, and that this is an impediment to leading the best sort of life. Does this idea make sense to you? Can you think of one or two examples of how it might be applied to our customary ways of thinking and acting?
- Could a person successfully live a Taoist life while engaged in our ordinary ways of living in the world – say, pursuing a career, having a family? Or would it require living as a hermit in remote places (as many of the Taoist sages in fact did)? Would a Taoist in any sort of social or political action?

PHIL221: Philosophy as a Way of Life

Wesleyan University, Fall 2018

Section: Western Philosophy Before Platonism

(Pre-Socratics, Sophists, Socrates, Cynics)

4c (Friday, September 28) Before Socrates

Socrates (470-399 BCE) is generally considered to be the pivotal figure in the foundation of Western philosophy as we know it. Socrates wrote nothing himself, but the founders of some of the important ancient schools of philosophy were directly influenced by Socrates – Plato, Diogenes the Cynic – and other schools (the Skeptics, the Stoics) looked to Socrates as the role-model of the exemplary philosophical way of life.

The word 'philosophy' means "love of wisdom" in Greek. (*philia* is one Greek word for love, and *sophia* the word for wisdom.) But there were a number of thinkers before Socrates who pursued wisdom in various forms. Some of these are called "Pre-Socratic philosophers", though some of their works look more like early attempts at natural sciences, and others a blend of mathematics and mysticism. There are, however, several important themes that unite them with one another and with what would become the mainstream tradition of Western philosophy, such as the distinction between appearance and reality and a turn towards the use of reason rather than myth to understand the world. Chapter 2 of the Soccio text presents an overview of these. Chapter 3 turns to a development on the Greek intellectual scene closer to the time of Socrates and particularly influential in the city in which he lived, Athens: the emergence of a group of people called "sophists". The sophists were among the first people in Greek history to offer education for a fee. They taught many different things, but the most important of these was how to influence people with words – the key to political success, particularly in a democratic city-state like Athens. We shall see in the next class that Socrates and Plato came to understand what they were doing (philosophy) in part by contrast with the way they understood sophistry. (A word that now has negative connotations, partly as a result of how Socrates and Plato interpreted the sophists.) In this session, we will attempt to understand the sophists, as well as the Pre-Socratic philosophers, in more or less their own terms.

<u>Readings:</u>

- Soccio, Chapter 2, "The Presocratic Sophos"
- Soccio, Chapter 3, "The Sophist: Protagoras"

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

- Ancient Greece, like China, had people who were described as "sages" (*sophoi*) – basically, people esteemed for their reputed wisdom. Around the sixth century BCE, the term 'philosopher' began to be used to mean something subtly different. What seem to be the important differences between a sage (*Sophos*) and a philosopher?
- From the outset, Greek philosophers saw the notion of the Logos as very important. The Greek word '*logos'* is an interesting word, in that it has many uses that require different translations. Its principal meaning is 'word'. But it is also the root of our word 'logic', and *logos* can also mean such things as a saying or quote, an argument, a rational account of something, or even intelligible patterns such as mathematical truths and the principles underlying the material world. How might this emphasis on rational understanding have provided a distinctive foundation for Western thought? In a way, there are some similarities with the word *tao,* which can also mean the pattern or principle underlying everything. Is the Pre-Socratic notion of the Logos different from that of Confucian or Taoist philosophers towards the Tao?
- The word "sophistry" has, over the years, come to have a bad name. What do we mean by the word today? Does this description seem to accurately describe the ancient Greeks who called themselves Sophists?
- Ancient Sophistry was often associated with a might-makes-right view of the world. Explain the connection.
- The text discusses two ideas often connected with Sophistry: relativism and the idea of the "superior man". Explain why Sophistry might be tied to one or both of these ideas. Are relativism and the idea of the "superior person" really compatible? If all judgments are relative, can one person (or one way of living) really be superior to another?
- Confucians also speak of the "Gentleman" or "superior person". How does the Confucian conception of such a person compare to that of the Sophists?

5a (Monday, October 1) Socrates vs. Sophistry

Socrates appears as a character in almost all of Plato's dialogs, doing what he is known to have done in real life: engaging people in conversations in which he questioned them about their beliefs. At least in Plato's dialogs, the conversations in which Socrates examined people's views were not simply a matter of accosting random people on the streets. Rather, they are conversations with people who took themselves to be *experts* on the subjects at hand (such as piety in the *Euthyphro*, and topics like justice, beauty, and courage in other dialogs). As we saw in a previous class session, the Sophists set themselves up as experts and teachers on just about every conceivable topic, and so it is little surprise that several of Plato's dialogs depict Socrates engaging well-known Sophists, such as Protagoras and Gorgias. (The dialog *Protagoras* is contained in our collection of Plato dialogs. We will not read it for this course, but it is available as additional reading should you wish to see Plato's treatment of Protagoras.) Like Sophistry, philosophy is also concerned with persuasive speech and argumentation, and so part of Plato's interest is in illustrating the different attitudes they take towards argumentation and their audiences.

Today's readings are from a dialog called *Gorgias*. In it, Socrates converses with three different individuals who call themselves "rhetoricians" (something closely related to Sophists and difficult to distinguish from them): Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles. We will read two passages (out of order). In the first, Callicles presents a powerful case for rhetoric and against philosophy and then Socrates tries to engage him in careful critique. In the second, Socrates is examining the key assumption of Sophists and rhetoricians alike: that mastery of persuasive speech gives a person great power. This section contains an important analysis of the nature of action, as well as a version of Plato's striking claims that wrong-doing is always a result of ignorance and that no one does evil willingly.

Readings:

- Plato, *Gorgias*, Part 3, in *Dialogues of Plato* (PDF)
- Plato, *Gorgias*, Excerpt from Polus section (PDF)

Discussion Topics:

- What it is it about rhetoric that supposedly confers great power on the person who is able to use it effectively? Why might the ability to persuade others be deemed to be comparable to the power of a monarch or a dictator? Is this assessment correct?
- Artful persuasive use of words is by no means confined to people who call themselves professional rhetoricians or sophists. Where are some of the places

that we see rhetoric practiced in contemporary society? Give some examples. Do these examples seem to confirm the view of Callicles and Polus that rhetoric is a kind of "master art" that confers great power? Do they confirm the suspicions that Plato and Socrates seem to have towards the use of rhetoric?

- In the passages we read for this class, we find some important criticisms, not only of the effects of rhetoric, but also of the way its practitioners understand it. Try to explain one such criticism, and evaluate whether you think it is a just criticism.
- In the Polus section, Socrates takes issue with Polus's view that rhetoric confers great power upon the person who has mastered it. (In fact, he goes so far as to claim that rhetoricians are the least powerful people in the state.) Try to make his argument for this claim explicit.
- In the course of the Polus section, Socrates suggests a theory of human action – how we act and what our actions aim at – that trades upon ideas about doing what we will and doing what we think best. Try explain this theory, and how it leads to the conclusion that virtue consists in a kind of knowledge and that no one does evil willingly. Do you agree with the conclusion? (And if not, is it because you disagree with the theory of action, or is it something else you disagree with?)

5b (Wednesday, October 3) Socrates in Plato's *Euthyphro*

Socrates (470-399 BCE) is generally considered to be the pivotal figure in the foundation of Western philosophy as we know it. Although he wrote nothing, he had a transformative influence on many of the people around him in Athens, and several of the major classical Western philosophical schools – Platonism, Cynicism, Skepticism, Stoicism – viewed him as the paradigm of what a philosopher should be. A number of Socrates' contemporaries wrote about him, and the present very different pictures of the man.

Plato was the most important philosopher who spent time with Socrates, and used him as a character in almost all of his dialogs. It is sometimes hard to tell when Plato is presenting an accurate picture of the historical Socrates and when he is simply using him as a character, but many historians believe that Plato's early writings present something close to the historical Socrates. Our next reading, from a dialog called *Euthyphro* (named for the other principal character in the dialog), is a good example of this: a conversation between Socrates and someone who considers himself an expert on some subject (in this case, *piety*) in which Socrates asks the interlocutor questions that subject his views to critical scrutiny. As you might expect, going around pointing out the holes in the views of self-styled experts was the sort of thing that could make a person unpopular, and in fact the dramatic setting for this dialog is that it occurs when Socrates is on his way to being put on trial for his activities and way of life. One of the charges against him is impiety, so there is a natural connection with the topic of discussion in the dialog. It also makes for a good starting place given that we have already studied Confucianism, in which filial piety and respect for rites are central principles.

<u>Reading:</u>

- Soccio, Chapter 4: "The Wise Man: Socrates"
- *Euthyphro*, in *The Dialogues of Plato*

<u>Discussion Topics:</u>

- In the dialog, Socrates tries to engage Euthyphro in critical scrutiny of his (Euthyphro's) understanding of piety. But this does not come in the form of simply comparing Euthyphro's view of piety with his own. Based on the conversation reported in the dialog, how does Socrates seem to think we should go about clarifying our understanding of some particular notion like piety? Do you think that it is useful and important to subject our own ideas to this kind of scrutiny? Those of others?

- Piety is in part concerned with rituals. Does Socrates seem to have a different attitude towards ritual than that of the Confucian philosophers? Would Confucians approve of Socrates' subjecting rituals to critical scrutiny? What might their attitude be towards Euthyphro prosecuting his own father for killing a slave? What do you think of Euthyphro's justification of his actions?
- Over the course of the dialog, Euthyphro gives more than one definition of 'piety'. Try to enumerate these, and identify the possible problems Socrates points out with respect to each of them.
- Why do you think that Socrates seems to think it important to get at a clear understanding of just what piety is by way of definitions?
- Do we ever reach a definitive conclusion about what piety really is? Or even of what Socrates believes it to be? Why might Plato have decided to write a dialog about piety in this kind of format?

5c (Friday, October 5) The *Apology*

Reading:

Plato, *Apology* (in *The Dialogues of Plato*)

Several ancient authors provide accounts of the trial of Socrates. Plato's principally consists of the speeches of Socrates responding to the charges (of impiety and corrupting the youth) and then, after the assembly votes to convict him, his proposal for a fitting "punishment". It also contains a brief cross-examination of one of his accusers. The Greek word *apologia*, which is used as the name of this dialog, does not mean "saying you're sorry", but giving an account of one's life and actions, perhaps (as in this case) a defense of them.

Discussion Topics:

- From the evidence we have from the dialog, and examples of the kinds of conversations Socrates engaged in (for example, in *Euthyphro* and *Gorgias*) that got him in trouble, what do you think were the real reasons Socrates was put on trial? Would someone doing similar things today get into trouble, legal or otherwise?
- What is Socrates' own account of why he went around asking important people vexing questions? If we assume the reasons he offers were genuine, what might someone hope to accomplish through such conversations? Is this a kind of activity that a person should pursue?
- What is Socrates' view of his reputation for wisdom? Does it make sense to say that a person who understands his own ignorance is in fact wiser than everyone else?

6a (Monday, October 8) Write Your Own Apologia

This class will be devoted to discussing the exercise below, which is to be completed before the class. There is no new reading for this day.

In philosophical terminology, giving an "apology" (Greek *apologia*) is not saying you are sorry, but providing an account of your life and your actions. In Plato's *Apology* (of Socrates), for example, Socrates describes what he saw as the salient points of his actions and also provides his rationale for living in this way. His ability to do this, of course, was tied up with his commitment to self-scrutiny and self-examination, and he was providing this account at the end of a fairly long and reflective life. We may never have engaged in the same sorts of reflection and self-scrutiny, and even if we have done so, we probably have not done it so thoroughly as Socrates nor for so long a time. (And hopefully none of us will ever be called upon to justify our lives in a courtroom.) Nonetheless, we can begin to reflect in this way, and one way to do so is to attempt to write an account of the major themes we find in how we ourselves live and our reasons for living in the way we do. You will probably not produce something as coherent and compelling as Socrates' *apologia* – in fact, you may find yourself more in the position of Euthyphro or other people Socrates questioned, confused about why you do the things you do or believe the things you believe. (But, if Socrates is right, even this can have a beneficial result: of bringing us to the stage of "Socratic ignorance", where we at least know what it is we do not know and want to find the answers to.)

The assignment is to attempt to write a philosophical *apologia* for your own life. The best place to begin here may be to try to describe the major things you do and pursue. If there are guiding principles you attempt to follow, describe these as well. You may not have thought much about such things before, and if so, it is useful to think about what you do and pursue and ask *why* you do and pursue them. This will help identify *deep implicit values*, which then can be submitted to scrutiny in the way Socrates examined his own life and beliefs and those of others. Try to give as honest an account as you can of your way of living and the (possibly heretofore implicit) rationale behind it. If it seems like a completely convincing rationale, well and good. If not, try to identify a few critical questions that you might ask yourself about it, or that Socrates might have asked you if you had met him.

(As this exercise may touch upon some very private matters, it should not be posted to the forum and will not be turned in. I shall, however, invite those who wish to do so to share their reflections in class. This seems in accordance with Socrates' own practice: he did not try to force anyone into conversation or self-reflection, but only carried on such conversations with those interested in doing so. It may be a new experience to have an assignment that is not to be handed in, but note that this is in its way also quite

Socratic: the most important form of education is transformative self-reflection. Socrates probably really did not care much whether other people found his reasons for living as he did persuasive – what mattered to him was that it seemed to conform to Reason.)

6b (Wednesday, October 10) The *Crito*

The *Euthyphro* and *Apology*, which we have already read, take place just before and at the trial of Socrates, where he is sentenced to death. His death is depicted in Plato's *Phaedo* (which we will not read, though it is in the collection of dialogs should you wish to read it on your own). In-between is another dialog, the *Crito*, which takes place in Socrates' jail cell. Crito, a wealthy friend of Socrates, has arranged to bribe the guards and help Socrates escape into exile. Socrates refuses to go along with this, but to remain and fulfill his death sentence out of respect for the laws of Athens. The dialog's topic, appropriately enough, is justice, injustice, and what to do in the face of injustice (such as the unjust conviction and execution of Socrates).

Reading:

- Plato, *Crito*. (In *The Dialogs of Plato*)

For Discussion:

- Why does Socrates refuse to escape from prison, even though he knows it will cost him his life? Do you agree with his reasoning? Could Socrates have escaped without being untrue to the way of life he has described in the dialogs?
- Some readers have seen the *Crito* as an important text for discussions of civil disobedience. What seems to be Plato's view of the nature and appropriateness of civil disobedience? Under what constraints must it be performed to be done rightly?
- Listen to the interview with The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King (link below), in which he famously expresses his view on breaking an unjust law as an act of civil disobedience. Would Socrates' conduct accord with Dr. King's characterization? Would it do so if he escaped into exile?

Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBkgdGIBv00

6c (Friday, October 12) The Cynics

Socrates inspired a number of different approaches to philosophy. We have seen him principally as presented in Plato's dialogs. But Plato was not the only philosopher to be influenced by Socrates, and others drew different lessons from his life. One such group was called the Cynics. (The word 'cynic' comes from the Greek word for dog. Antisthenes called himself the "complete dog".) The Cynics followed Socrates in his unconventional lifestyle, going about barefoot in nothing but a cloak and in some cases being homeless by choice. They were critics of convention and conceit in others. Like Socrates, they did not leave behind written texts, and our knowledge of them comes principally through the stories others told.

Reading:

- From Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* (use link below). Read at least the lives of Antisthenes and Diogenes.

https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/ancient/diogeneslaertius-book6-cynics.asp

Discussion Topics:

- Antisthenes, Diogenes, and Crates seem to have been very different people. From the reports of their lives and sayings, can you identify common themes that might be characteristic of the Cynic philosophy and way of life?
- How do you think the Cynics would have regarded Sophists and orators? What would have been their attitude towards Confucian philosophers and their way of life? Would their criticisms of these be just?
- The Cynics saw themselves as imitators of Socrates – in fact, they regarded themselves and not Plato as the true heirs to the mantle of Socrates. Clearly, Plato and the Cynics saw very different things as important in Socrates' way of life. What similarities and differences can you see between the Cynics and Socrates as he is presented by Plato? If the Socratic way of life and style of philosophy amounted to more than rejecting convention and pretense and showing up the pretensions of others, what was it that the Cynics missed out on?
- How would one go about living a Cynic way of life today? Is it a way of life you would be inclined to follow?
- Taoists, like Cynics, recommended a profound rejection of conventional ways of living and thinking. What similarities and differences do you see between the two schools, and the ways of life each recommended?

PHIL221: Philosophy as a Way of Life

Wesleyan University, Fall 2018

Section: Plato

7a (Monday, October 15) Plato: Introduction

We have read several of Plato's dialogs already. The *Apology* presented an account of Socrates' way of life and the *Euthyphro* may have presented an example of the kind of conversation the historical Socrates had with people, trying to draw out and test their claims to knowledge. The *Gorgias* contrasted philosophy with rhetoric and Sophistry. But we have not yet seen Plato's more distinctive philosophical views, which are found mainly in his "middle" and "late" dialogs. Plato's best-known work, the *Republic*, weaves together theories about several important themes that were raised as questions in the earlier works: the nature of knowledge, the nature of justice in the state and in the soul, and the best form of education for cultivating the soul. The *Republic* is well worth reading in its entirety, but it is a long work, one that would take at least two weeks to read and discuss in class if we read it in full. (We will read two sections of it for next class.) Soccio's chapter on Plato provides an overview of these major Platonic ideas.

<u>Reading:</u>

- Soccio, Chapter 5, "The Philosopher-King: Plato"

<u>Questions for Reflection and Discussion:</u>

- Why is the distinction between knowledge and opinion so important for Plato? What seem to be the characteristics he identifies with knowledge? How is it obtained? Would most of the things we say we "know" count as knowledge for Plato?
- Mathematics seems to play an important role in Plato's ideas about knowledge. What recommends mathematical knowledge as a kind of standard or ideal? Apart from its practical applications, why might training in mathematics be a crucial part of a Platonic education? Can you see ways in which Plato's theory of knowledge about other topics – say, goodness or justice – are influenced by the model of mathematical understanding? Is it possible to gain the sort of understanding of these matters that we can have in arithmetic or geometry – an understanding that is completely clear and certain? What would be the advantages if we could do so?
- Pick one of Plato's metaphors – the Sun, the divided line, or the cave – and try to explain what Plato is trying to convey in it.

- The *Republic* seems to recommend a form of government in which the state is governed by "philosopher-kings". What is a "philosopher-king" supposed to be, and why would Plato think this would be the best form of government? (Why, in particular, might he think democracy is an inferior form of government?) How is this like and unlike what Confucians were trying to achieve in their aspirations to educate a governing class and return to a (mythical?) age of sage-kings? Do you agree that this would be the best form of government (assuming it could actually be achieved)?

7b (Wednesday, October 17) The Tripartite Soul

In the Polus section of the *Gorgias*, Plato presented a very *intellectualist* account of action: we always seek what is good, and we do whatever we believe to be best. (Hence, the key to goodness lies in having knowledge of what is really good, because no one who knows what is good would even be motivated to do otherwise.) This makes it seem as though our only sources of motivation are intellectual beliefs. In the *Republic*, Plato introduces a more complicated theory of the soul and its motivations. In addition to Reason (which entertains and tests beliefs), there are also a number of *appetites* or *passions* (a second "part" of the soul). And there is also a third part, sometimes translated as "the spirited part", though the Greek word here *(thumos)* does not really have a good English equivalent. We will read two passages in the *Republic* in which Plato discusses this idea of the "tripartite" (three-part) soul. The first, in Book IV, introduces it by analogy to the three classes of citizens that had been discussed previously. The second, in Book IX, is more metaphorical, likening the soul to a many-headed animal.

Readings:

- Plato, *Republic*, Sections on the Tripartite Soul from Book IV [pdf]
- Plato, *Republic*, The Image of the Beast from Book IX [pdf]

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

- At one level, the theory of the Tripartite Soul is a claim about human psychology. What does Plato seem to be saying about human psychology here? How is it different from the idea that our inner life consists entirely of acting on beliefs about what is good? What difference might this make for how we go about the work of philosophical self-cultivation?
- How is Plato's theory similar to or different from Mencius' notion of the four sprouts? Xun's view that human nature is "bad" and must be regulated and kept in check if a person is to flourish?
- How does Plato use this psychological theory to present an account of what justice is in the soul?
- In the passage likening the soul to a many-headed beast, what is the proper attitude Reason should take towards the appetites? Can Reason influence or control the appetites? What is the rule of *thumos* (the spirited, honor-loving part of the soul) in this?

Exercise (you don't have to write about it in the forum, but we may discuss them in class.): Plato suggests that the soul has different "heads" – different sources of motivation – that can be likened to the heads of different animals. Take a sheet of

paper and draw a picture in this vein of your own soul. What are the different things that drive or motivate you? Try to label them and find an appropriate animal head to represent each. (It doesn't matter whether you are a good artist – this is for your own reflection.) Reflect on your drawing. What does each of them want? Do they live harmoniously with one another, or do some of them compete and contend with one another? Which one(s) are in control of your life? (If you want to extend the exercise further – perhaps on another day – think about how Reason might try to tame one or more of the other heads and bring your soul into greater order. Would *thumos* be of help in this? If so, how?)

7c (Friday, October 19) The Education of Philosopher-Kings

Plato takes up the subject of how to train rulers for the City twice in the *Republic*. The second account expands significantly on the first, especially with respect to the additional philosophical training needed to become a philosopher-king. For this session, we will read a secondary text describing the two accounts.

Reading:

- Online text, "Education in Plato's Republic" https://www.scu.edu/character/resources/education-in-platos-republic/

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

- Plato regards education in "music" (more generally, the arts) and "gymnastic" (physical training) as essential foundations. In one way, this reflects Greek assumptions about the kinds of training any cultivated citizen should receive. But Plato has his own ideas (tied to the Tripartite Soul) about the *reasons* for such training and the form it should take. What seems to be the rationale for such training? Do you agree that the arts and physical training can play important roles in the formation of character? (Feel free to provide an example from your own experience with the arts or athletics.)
- Mathematical education plays a surprisingly large role in the education of philosophical rulers. In fact, in the text, it is suggested that rulers-in-training should study mathematics for *ten years* before they are introduced to "dialectic" (argumentation, including the sorts of conversations we see Socrates having with people in the dialogs). Why might Plato have thought it important to have a sound foundation in mathematics before proceeding to what we might think of as more philosophical discussion? Why might a premature introduction to argument and debate be harmful? What might Plato have thought of an introductory philosophy class offered to first-year students in college?
- The educational program Plato describes seems to have two goals: (1) making the individuals who undergo it into better people and (2) producing the sorts of people who could govern a state well. Are these two goals complementary, or do they pull in different directions? Does the course of education he describes serve one of these goals better than the other?
- Plato in fact established a school (something like a college) that existed until about 86 BCE. If its educational program was like what is described in the *Republic*, would you be inclined to apply to it? Why or why not?
- In both Plato and the Confucians we have seen outlines of educational programs that are designed both to cultivate individuals and to make them into the sorts of people who could govern well. Suppose you were given the task of designing a form

of education with similar goals. What would be in your curriculum? What is it important for people to learn and to do in a process of self-cultivation? To prepare them to govern well?

8a (Monday, October 22) NO CLASS – FALL BREAK

8b (Wednesday, October 24) Exercise: The Examined Life

Plato's philosophy was not meant to simply be learned as a set of *theories*. It was deeply tied to practices of self-reflection. For this session, we will try to put this into practice with the help of some "Platonic spiritual exercises" developed by Professor Tushar Irani. [pdf] These are to be done over the course of a day, so do them through a day before the next class session. We will discuss your experiences with them in class.

PHIL221: Philosophy as a Way of Life

Wesleyan University, Fall 2018

Section: Aristotle

8c (Friday, October 26) Aristotle 1: What Do We Want?

Aristotle was Plato's greatest student, and most regard him as the other truly great philosopher of Greek antiquity. Plato's Academy did not teach Plato's ideas as doctrine, and other members of the Academy like Aristotle often ended up disagreeing with their teacher. However, Aristotle remained a member of the Academy until Plato died, and only then went to found his own school, the Lyceum. We do not have all of Aristotle's works. (Like Plato, he also wrote dialogs, all of which were unfortunately lost in late antiquity.) What we do have are more in the form of treatises, in which we find not only the arguments for his own views but also arguments against other philosophers, including Plato. The *Nichomachean Ethics* is one of his most important works, and we will be reading sections of it over the next several classes. Soccio's chapter provides a broader overview of Aristotle's thought and influence.

Reading:

- Soccio, Chapter 6, "The Naturalist: Aristotle"
- Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics,* Book I, Chapters 1-3

Exercise:

Exercise on desires. (See next page.)

Exercise: Aristotle and Desires

In Book I, Chapter 2 of the *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle writes:

> If, then, there is some end of the things we do, which we desire for its own sake (everything else being desired for the sake of this), and if we do not choose everything for the sake of something else (for at that rate the process would go on to infinity, so that our desire would be empty and vain), clearly this must be the good and the chief good. Will not the knowledge of it, then, have a great influence on life? Shall we not, like archers who have a mark to aim at, be more likely to hit upon what is right? If so, we must try, in outline at least, to determine what it is

Even before reading further in the *Ethics*, it is worth looking for ourselves at the idea that Aristotle is proposing here. This two-part exercise helps us look at it in our own case before reading further to see what Aristotle proposes.

Part 1

Set aside about 20 minutes to do this exercise early in the day. You may want to come back to it after further reflection during the day before proceeding to Part 2.

Take a sheet of paper and simply list things that you desire, seek, or work for. This list is for your eyes only, so be honest with yourself and don't worry about what anyone else would think of some of the items on your list. You'll probably find that a number of things will come to you very quickly, and you might think you are done, and then later you'll think of other things that should go on the list as well. You might want to carry this list around with you through the day and jot down additional things that come to mind when you think of them.

Part 2

Look over the list you have compiled.

Now, look for relationships between things you have listed: are some of the items you desire *means* to others that are the *ends*? (For example, you might desire good grades as a *means* to get into medical school, which in turn you desire in order to become a doctor, and so on.) On another sheet of paper (or multiple sheets), begin to map out such relationships using arrows – e.g., good grades → medical school → become doctor. You may find that in doing this that you have discovered some desires that you had not explicitly named in Part 1. Feel free to fill these in, but you might mark them by underlining them. Don't worry if there are some things on your original list that don't seem to have connections to other things. You don't have to include *everything* in the diagram you are constructing.

Look over the diagram(s) you have constructed. Is there one or more thing that emerges as something like an *ultimate* end or goal – a thing or things that many of your other desires are aiming at? Circle these.

Look at the items you have circled and ask yourself the questions: Does it make any sense to ask the further question of what I want these *for*? Are they really my ultimate desires, or do I desire them, too, as means to something further that is not on the page? If so, can I put a name on what that something might be?

Are there desires on the list that are incompatible or in tension with one another? E.g., if you want to be both the next Einstein and the world's greatest concert pianist, these might not be things one could do both of in a single lifetime. Or if you want to be famous and also want to live a quiet private life, the conditions for one might make the other difficult or impossible.

9a (Monday, October 29) Aristotle: Happiness and Virtue

Reading:

- *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book I chapters 4-5, 7-9, 12-13

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

- How does Aristotle argue for the conclusion that happiness is the greatest good?
- What do you think Aristotle means by 'happiness'? We sometimes think of "happiness" as a kind of feeling. Can Aristotle's notion of happiness (which is a translation of the Greek word *eudaimonia)* be a kind of *feeling*? (Say, the opposite of sadness?) If there were mood-elevating pills that could produce a feeling of elation and satisfaction, would Aristotle regard taking them as a way of attaining *eudaimonia?*
- Aristotle's teacher Plato seems to have held (1) that nothing bad can befall a good person (e.g., Socrates' claim in *Apology* that his accusers have no power to harm him), (2) that all one needs in order to lead a good life is virtue, and (3) that virtue consists in a particular type of *knowledge*: namely, knowledge of the good (which we may assume is supposed to come in the form of the kinds of definitions and theories we have seen Plato exploring in the dialogs). Would Aristotle agree or disagree with these claims?
- How you would characterize Aristotle's view of the relationship between *eudaimonia* and virtue? Between virtue and pleasure?

9b (Wednesday, October 31) Aristotle: The Nature of Virtue and How it is Acquired

Reading:

Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book II

For this class there is both an exercise and some discussion questions. You may post either on your reflections on the exercise or on one of the questions.

Exercise:

- "Virtue as a Craft" [pdf] -- this is a one-day exercise which you should complete before the class session so we can discuss experiences with it. (This exercise was developed by Professor Tushar Irani and is used by permission)

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

- How does Aristotle distinguish moral virtue from intellectual virtue? How does he think moral virtue is acquired?
- Does Aristotle think the virtues are part of our nature? Compare his views on this to Mencius and Xun. Aristotle does not explicitly address the question of whether human nature is good or evil, but what sort of answer do you think he would give if asked? Is there anything corresponding to Mencius' idea of the "four sprouts" in Aristotle's theory?
- In Chapter 5, Aristotle argues that virtues are "states of character" rather than "passions" or "capacities". Try to explain what this distinction means with respect to one particular virtue. How is it related to particular passions and particular capacities, yet distinct from them?
- Not *every* state of character is virtuous. (Vices are states of character too, after all.) In Chapter 6, Aristotle tries to explain what kind of state of character a virtue is, and in Chapter 7 he attempts to provide some examples. His general account is that each virtue involves a "mean" – an intermediate between excess and deficiency. But an excess, intermediate, or deficiency *of what*?
- In Chapter 9, what is Aristotle's advice for how to steer towards the mean?

9c (Friday, November 2) Aristotle: The Particular Virtues

Reading:

- Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book III: 6-12, Book IV, Book V: 1.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

- Compare Aristotle's list of virtues with those states of character treated as virtues by another philosopher we have read (Plato or one of the Confucians, or if you know one of the Christian or Buddhist lists of virtues from other parts of your education, you may use one of them. You can find a useful overview of what virtues were recognized by a number of traditions here https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtue . Oddly, Confucian virtues are listed there in the section on Daoism). Are there things they agree upon? Where different items appear, do you think this is simply a matter of oversight (e.g., would Mencius have looked at Aristotle's list and said "Oh yes, I could include those as well")? Or do they reflect real differences in either their views of psychology or the good life?
- Given Aristotle's general characterization of virtue, there might well be other beneficial character traits that are acquired through habituation that could be counted as virtues. Make your own list of what you consider to be the most important virtues for a person to possess. (You can include those of other philosophers, and you can also use things none of them listed.)
- Look over Aristotle's virtues and "score" yourself on each of them – whether you have hit the mean or tend to err on the side of excess or deficiency.

10a (Monday, November 5) Aristotle: Impediments to Virtue

Aristotle discusses several kinds of impediments to the cultivation of virtue. Some of these (not discussed here) have to do with intellectual shortcomings. (Remember that there are both intellectual and moral virtues for Aristotle.) In Book VII, he discusses two other types of impediment: incontinence (or weakness of will, *akrasia* in Greek) and pleasure.

Reading:

- Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book VII

Discussion Questions:

- Explain Aristotle's distinction between virtue and continence.
- Aristotle takes issue with Plato's view that evil can only come from ignorance. Why does Aristotle think we can know what is good and yet fail to do it? Whose view seems more psychologically realistic?
- The 18th century philosopher Immanuel Kant took the view that it is of greater moral value to do the right thing if it is against our inclinations than if we spontaneously want to do it. Explain how this is different from Aristotle's view of the relationship between continence and virtue. Who do you think is right?
- Why does Aristotle seem to be suspicious of pleasure? Does he think pleasure is always a bad thing? Are you persuaded by what he says?
- There is an *optional* day-long exercise examining Aristotle's views on virtue and pleasure linked below. If you do it, you may post on this.
-

Optional Exercise: "Virtue and Pleasure" [pdf]. This exercise was developed by Professor Tushar Irani and is used by permission.

10b (Wednesday, November 7) Aristotle on Friendship

Aristotle is the first of the philosophers we have read who discusses the importance of friendship as a component of a good (and philosophical) life. This interesting discussion occurs in Book VIII of his Ethics. There is an exercise for this reading, and you may discuss your experience with that in lieu of the discussion questions below.

Reading:

- Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics,* Book VIII: Chapters 1-8

For Reflection and Discussion:

- What are the three types of friendship Aristotle distinguishes? Does this classification reflect different types of friendship you have experienced? Which category/ies do the friendships you value most fall into?
- Aristotle seems to think that "virtue-friendships" are an invaluable part of a good life, and an important aid in the acquisition of virtue. In your experience, is this the case? What does having a friend of this type do for you in the enterprise of moral cultivation? Do you think one could attain Aristotelian *eudaimonia* in the absence of such friendships?

Exercise: Aristotle and Friendship. [pdf]. This exercise was developed by Professor Tushar Irani and is used by permission.

PHIL221: Philosophy as a Way of Life

Wesleyan University, Fall 2018

Section: Stoics

"Live Like a Stoic Week" Exercises (START DOING THESE NOW!)

For several years now, there has been an international "Live Like a Stoic" week, used in courses and by individuals around the world, in which people read texts and do Stoic exercises and meditations. (https://learn.modernstoicism.com/p/stoic-week) The schedule for the event did not match up with our class schedule, but our study of Stoicism will be based around daily exercises (developed by Tushar Irani) that we will discuss in class.

There is a different exercise for each day (see PDFs below), and to keep us on schedule to discuss them, **you should begin doing them on or before the first class meeting on Stoicism**, even though discussion of the exercises will not begin until the second Stoicism class session. Among other things, these will involve meditations on passages from famous Stoic philosophers. (This actually seems to have been an important part of Stoic practice – to memorize such maxims in order to apply them to daily life.) We will talk about your experience with these exercises over three classes. Please post your reflections on each exercise on the forum set up for it. (I will set up one for each exercise, rather than one for each class.)

For this unit, we will have two sessions that are reading-oriented, and then three that are exercise oriented. The exercises are in a separate Moodle section, **but you should begin doing them no later than Monday, so that you will have completed the first two for discussion on Wednesday.**

10c (Friday, November 9) Stoicism Introduction (begin exercises)

Reading:

- Soccio, Chapter 7, "The Stoics: Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius"

Reflection Questions:

- Enumerate what seem to be the major ideas of Stoicism.
- How does the philosophy known as Stoicism differ from what we mean in ordinary language in calling a person or their behavior "stoic"?
- Think about how the Stoic ideas have points of commonality or difference with those of other philosophical schools we have read so far. Explain what you see as one important area of agreement or disagreement with one of the other schools.

11a (Monday, November 12) Epictetus

Reading:

- Epictetus, *The Handbook* (*Enchiridion*)

Epictetus' *Enchiridion* is one of the principal surviving classics of the Stoics. His life and philosophy are the more remarkable because he lived much of his life, and developed his Stoic philosophy, while a slave. Epictetus' lived 55-135 CE, substantially after Socrates, but the movement was founded in the century after Socrates' death, and Stoics (like Platonists and Cynics) viewed Socrates as a role model. (The first Stoic teacher, Zeno, had first been influenced by the Cynics and then had some contact with Plato's Academy before founding his own philosophical school.)

Reflection Questions:

- Pick a quote from the reading that made an impression on you and try to paraphrase what you think Epictetus is recommending. You might wish to try to bring it alive with a modern-day example if you think that it is an idea that is still applicable today.
- Epictetus, like Plato and the Cynics, looks to Socrates as a role model for the philosophical life. What seem to be the characteristics of Socrates that make him a role model for Stoics? Are these different from what Plato or the Cynics saw as the important aspects of the Socratic way of life?

Schedule for Discussion of Stoic Exercises

(These exercises were designed by Professor Tushar Irani and are used by permission.)

11b (Wednesday, November 14) Live Like a Stoic 1: Life, Control

11c (Friday, November 16) Live Like a Stoic 2: Mindfulness, Virtue

12a (Monday, November 19) Live Like a Stoic 3: Relationships, Resilience, Nature

PHIL221: Philosophy as a Way of Life

Wesleyan University, Fall 2018

Section: Buddhism and Christianity

Buddhism and Christianity are generally thought of as religions rather than philosophies. Yet Soccio includes Buddha among the "Asian sages" and Hadot points out that Christian monasticism was sometimes called "the Christian philosophy" in Late Antiquity. One reason for this might be that both traditions developed voluminous philosophical traditions within them. Yet there might also be something more here: if philosophy is understood as "a way of life", Buddhism and Christianity – or at least some ways of living out being a Buddhist or a Christian – might amount to ways of life that could count as philosophical, even when not expressed in terms of academic philosophy.

One part of this is that each contains core commitments to view about the human condition and about the nature of a good life. Another is that both contain traditions of cultivation of the soul – really, more than one tradition within each of them – and "spiritual exercises". (In fact, the language of "spiritual exercises" was taken over from a particular Christian writer, St. Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Jesuit order, who wrote an important spiritual manual by that name.)

Unlike some of the philosophical traditions we have studied, Buddhism and Christianity are both *living* traditions – with millions (or in the case of Christianity, billions) of adherents. Both have existed for over 2000 years, have spread throughout the world, and can be found in many variations. So it is much harder to get an adequate understanding of them in a short time than it is with, say, Greek Cynicism. We will not even try to get an understanding of their *breadth*. Instead, we will start with some founding texts and then explore a very little bit of the philosophical/spiritual/cultivation traditions in each.

As we look at them, we will find both commonalities and contrasts. Both were very much centered around the life and teachings of particular individuals – Gautama Buddha and Jesus of

Nazareth. Both are “missionary religions” that seek to convert large numbers of individuals, and not merely an intellectual or spiritual elite. Both are “otherworldly” to one extent of another, in the sense that they point beyond our current reality to something larger that we still have stake in beyond our deaths. Both have contemplative traditions, pioneered by monks and containing techniques of spiritual practice.

13a (Monday, November 26) Intro to Buddhism

As a point of entry into Buddhism, we will read Soccio's section on Buddha from *Archetypes of Wisdom*, and canonical ancient Buddhist texts. (These are from what is called "the Pali Canon" – a "canon" being a set of texts treated as authoritative, and Pali the Indian language in which they were written.). I have supplied a PDF of a longer version of these (of which I have assigned only a portion, as the whole PDF is a book) and a shorter alternative for those who do not have time for the longer reading, consisting only of the Buddha's first sermon after he had discovered the Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. (Chapter 1 of this, which I have marked as optional, will nonetheless be interesting for purposes of comparison with the cosmic perspective on Jesus found in John's Gospel.)

Readings:

- "The Buddha" in Soccio, *Archetypes of Wisdom,* pp. 41-56

Canonical Texts: Minimal Short Reading:

- The Buddha's first sermon http://www.mesacc.edu/~thoqh49081/handouts/buddhasermon.html

Canonical Texts: Longer Reading:

- Bhikkhu Nanamoli, *The Life of the Buddha* (translations of central texts from the Pali Canon) – PDF
    - (Optional, 1. The Birth and Early Years (1-9))
    - 2. The Struggle for Enlightenment (10-29)
    - 3. After The Enlightenment (30-47)

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

- Most of us are probably likely to think of Buddhism primarily as a religion rather than as a philosophical school. Having read several philosophical schools as ways of life before reading about Buddhism, does it seem appropriate to think of Buddhism as a philosophical way of life? This might actually be a good time to reflect on what the characteristics of a "philosophical way of life" really are. What, if anything, do the different traditions we have studied have in common, and does Buddhism share these features?
- Alternatively, pick on passage from the *Life of the Buddha* and comment upon it.

13b (Wednesday, November 28) Introduction to Christianity

Like Buddhism, Christianity is more often thought of as a religion than as a philosophy. In *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, however, Pierre Hadot points out that it was often viewed in the ancient world as a philosophical school. We will read Hadot's chapter on "the Christian philosophy" for the next class session, as it is particularly engaged with the forms of Christianity that developed with the monastic movement in the fourth and fifth centuries. Today's readings provide an introduction and overview of the basic Christian beliefs and commitments.

Readings: (all in PDFs)

- [Optional: Horst, "Overview of the Christian Bible". This reading may provide useful context for those who are not already familiar with the Bible, and also provides summaries of major features in the four Gospels – the books of the Bible that tell the life of Jesus. **Not everyone will need to read this, but if you need it, it might be most helpful if it is read *first*.**]
- Gospel of Mark
- Prologue to Gospel of John
- Horst, "Introduction to Christianity" [document prepared for this class]

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

- If you wrote last time about the distinctive elements of a philosophical way of life, use these to evaluate the aptness of Hadot's suggestion that Christianity can be viewed in similar terms as a philosophical school with its own distinctive analysis of the human condition and spiritual exercises. (Do so as far as you can at this point – if you want to read Hadot's chapter before doing so, it is posted with the next class's assignments.)
- Alternatively, choose one passage from one of the Gospels and reflect upon its content, particularly its implications for the cultivation of the soul and how one ought to live.

13c (Friday, November 30) Desert Monasticism

While Buddhism recommended a monastic way of life from its outset, Christian monasticism did not really begin until the fourth and fifth centuries. It began with people withdrawing to uninhabited places like the Egyptian desert to "flee the world", pursue a life of prayer and contemplation, and save their souls. This movement became the basis for much of the Christian spiritual tradition, its spiritual methods, and of deep reflection on the cultivation of the soul. Some of its practitioners were also people trained in Greco-Roman philosophy, particularly Platonism and Neoplatonism, and there came to be an amalgamation of some threads of Christian spirituality with ideas derived from Plato, which became part of Christian theology and moral psychology, particularly in the Eastern Orthodox Churches. (We will read some of the descendants of this school of thought next week.).

The reading from Thomas Merton provides some background on the movement as well as quotes from some of the desert monks (or "desert fathers and mothers"). Athanasius *Life of St. Anthony* is a more extended biography of the person who is regarded as the founder of Christian monasticism, St. Anthony of the Desert. **(It is a somewhat long reading, and if you need to choose things to omit because of limited time, read in this one selectively.)** The final reading is the chapter from Hadot's *Philosophy as a Way of Life* which relates Christian thought and practice of this period to the spiritual exercises of the ancient philosophical schools.

Readings:

- Merton, *Wisdom of the Desert* (excerpts, PDF)
- Athanasius, *Life of St. Anthony* (PDF)
- Hadot, "Ancient Spiritual Exercises and Christian Philosophy," Ch. 4 of *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (PDF)

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

- What parallels in style or content do you find between the "sayings" and the *Life of Anthony* and other texts we have read in this course? In what ways do the desert monks seem to be like or unlike the sages of Confucianism, Daoism, or Stoicism? Do they address common concerns? Is their advice for the cultivation of the soul similar or notably different?
- Christianity and Buddhism are both more often spoken of as religions rather than as philosophical schools. Are there elements that they share in common, over and against the others we have studied, that might justify this distinction? Are there important ways that Christianity and Buddhism seem different from one another in what they have to say about how to live and the cultivation of the soul?
- What seem to be Hadot's main reasons for including early Christianity in a book entitled *Philosophy as a Way of Life?* What seem to be the most important or controversial points of contact? Are you persuaded that at least the form of

Christianity he describes is engaged in much the same sort of enterprise as the classical philosophical schools of Europe and Asia?

Optional: Exercises in Silence and Contemplation (pdf)

14a (Monday, December 3) *Orthodox Psychotherapy* 1

In both Buddhist and Christian monastic traditions, we find what we might think of as a long *experimental/practical* tradition investigating the self or soul and how it can be cultivated. We get glimpses into this as a kind of practical wisdom in things like the Sayings of the Desert Fathers. But within these traditions, writings also developed that are in a sense "theoretical", with theories about different parts or aspects of the soul, catalogs of types of temptations and "negative thoughts", and techniques by which they can be addressed, and likewise with descriptions of virtues and how they might be cultivated. But this was not done in the spirit of abstract intellectual investigation. It was done in the service of a kind of *therapy* of the soul. Every monk was attentively and reflectively involved in such therapy in his or her own case, and those who were experienced were engaged in guiding the less experienced along the way.

The Christian literature of this sort begins to appear in the fourth century, and is mostly the work of people who had an interesting intersection of backgrounds: the very practical spiritual tradition of the Desert and the intellectual tradition of Platonism and Neoplatonism. A few Christian thinkers actually took over a good deal of the ideas of Platonism, but for our purposes the important influence of Plato comes more in the form of taking a few ideas about the soul and the terminology Plato used to talk about them and applying them in an understanding of what had been discovered in the course of distinctively Christian spiritual practice. I shall mention two of these. One of the Greek words for "mind" is *nous*, sometimes translated "intellect". In the figure of the Divided Line, Plato seems to distinguish what the *nous* does (*noesis*) from the kind of intellectual activity involved in reason*ing* (which he calls *dianoia*). *Dianoia* involves things like working out the implications of an argument or analysis. *Noesis* is the direct apprehension of the Forms – something like the intellectual equivalent of direct perception of higher intelligible truths. For some of the Christian writers, *nous* becomes the name of a part of the soul, whose function is to apprehend God and spiritual truths. For some of them, it is the specific part of the soul where the Holy Spirit comes to dwell, illuminating it, and when this happens, the *nous* can set the whole person in order. The other Platonic idea that takes on a new life in this tradition is *thumos* ("spirit" or "spiritedness"). This is *not* "spirit" in the sense of the Holy Spirit, but something akin to anger, and is sometimes translated "incensive power". The Christian writers say that the proper function of this is *not* to direct it against other people. Rather it is to be used to say no to the temptations of the flesh and the demons (something like the way Plato suggests that Reason must get *thumos* to aid it in governing the appetites).

Most of the original literature in this tradition is difficult to understand. It was written by monks for other monks who were already engaged in the kinds of activities described, and it is assumed that the reader already shares a certain vocabulary and set of experiences. I have chosen readings from a contemporary writer who is trying to explain these ideas to a modern audience of lay people. He is an Eastern Orthodox priest and monk, and his main theme is that Orthodox spirituality is to be understood as a kind of therapy of the soul, or "psychotherapy".

(Hence the title, *Orthodox Psychotherapy.*) The text is not without its drawbacks. To my mind, it could be much briefer without the frequent appeals to supporting texts from the Church Fathers, and I do not think the use of terminology is always consistent. However, it provides as good a point of entry as I can find into how a tradition of spiritual practice grew into a theoretical philosophical understanding of the soul and its cultivation. (For those who are interested, another fine modern source is Theophan the Recluse's books, *The Spiritual Life* and *The Path of Salvation*.)

Reading:

Vlachos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy,* 97-156 and 201-214 (PDF)

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

- In this reading, we find a number of the major themes of Christianity presented in terms of a moral psychology – a theory of the soul and its healthy and unhealthy states. Pick one or more of the following core Christian ideas and discuss how it is recast in psychological terms:
    - Human beings are created in the image and likeness of God
    - The Fall
    - Temptation
    - Sin
    - The Holy Spirit
    - Sanctification
    - The virtues

PHIL221: Philosophy as a Way of Life

Wesleyan University, Fall 2018

Section: Existentialism

14b (Wednesday, December 5) Existentialism

Reading:

- Soccio, "The Existentialist: Søren Kierkegaard", in *Archetypes of Wisdom*, Chapter 14
- Soccio, "Jean-Paul Sartre", Chapter 18, pp. 510-520

Topics for Reflection and Discussion:

- What does Kierkegaard seem to mean by "subjectivity" and why is so centrally important to him? Is "subjectivity" the same thing as subjectivism?
- Sartre's notion of freedom seems to amount to something more than just the claim that we have free will. What is Sartrean freedom, and why is it so central to his philosophy? What does it mean to be "condemned to be free"? Do you think we really have this radical sort of freedom?
- Kierkegaard and Sartre are in some ways very different philosophers. What might be meant in categorizing them both as "existentialists"?

PHIL221 – Philosophy as a Way of Life

(Fall 2018)

Writing Assignments

PHIL221 Fall 2018 – Philosophy as a Way of Life

First Written Assignment

About 3 pages, due by email [shorst@wesleyan.edu] by 11:59pm on Saturday, September 22. Please include your last name in the file name for your document (preferably in Word) and the text "PHIL221-1" or “PHIL221-2” (depending on which section you are enrolled in) in the subject header of your email.

Mencius and Xunzi seem to present radically different views of human nature and the role of practices of self-cultivation in shaping it for the better. Briefly explain what you take to be the view of each and identify what they seem to agree and disagree about. Then, either (1) make a brief case for which you take to be the more realistic view, or (2) make a case that they do not really fundamentally disagree but merely present equivalent views with different emphases, or (3) make a case that they are both fundamentally mistaken and present an alternative of your own.

PHIL221 – Philosophy as a Way of Life (Fall 2018)
Paper 2 Assignment

For the second paper, I have provided a number of alternative topics to write about below. Pick whichever one you prefer to write on. My guess is that these should be in the 5-8 page range, and that some topics might lend themselves to longer essays than others, but do not take those numbers as meaning you have to fill at least 5 pages or have to stop at 8. Let your own sense of what it takes to address the topic well be your guide to how long the paper should be. (In the first set of papers, I often had the sense that people had more to say and didn't go on to say it because they had reached 3 pages. Feel free to write more, but only if it contributes to the essay. Likewise, if you write an elegant, efficient 4-page essay, don't feel obliged to find something more to say to fill an extra page.)

Due by email Saturday, October 27 by 11:59pm. Please put your last name in the file title and phil221-section(#) in the Subject line of the email. (I now have a current version of Apple Pages, so there is no need to convert those to PDFs for me. Pages and Word are both fine, as they allow me to insert comments.)

1. In the *Gorgias*, Plato argues for the views that virtue consists in knowledge of the good and that no one does evil willingly. The second of these, at least, is a claim that many would find surprising, and hence it is important that Plato does not merely *state* it a claim, but *argues* for it. Explain the argument for these two theses, identifying the starting points (premises) on which it is based and the line of reasoning leading from these to the conclusions. (Remember that this line of reasoning, in the Polus section of the dialog, begins with the distinction between "doing what you will" and "doing what you think best".) Describe one way of objecting to this argument. (This can be (a) an argument that the conclusion is false in its own right, (b) an argument that one of the premises is false, or (c) a demonstration that the conclusion does not follow from the premises.)

2. Polus and Callicles take the view that rhetoric/oratory confers great power upon the person who knows how to wield it, but Socrates disagrees. In the course of the discussion, Socrates and Polus agree on a definition of "power". Why does Polus think that rhetoric gives its user power? How does Socrates use the agreed-upon definition of "power" to argue that rhetoricians in fact do not possess power?

3. Plato's dialogs *Gorgias* and *Republic* each contain a moral psychology – that is, an account of our sources of motivation, the role they play in determining how we will act, and what makes the difference between a person who is good and one that is not. First explain the moral psychology found in the Polus section of the *Gorgias* (the one that leads to the conclusion that virtue consists in knowledge of the Good). Then describe the moral psychology involved in the theory of the tripartite soul in the *Republic*. How is this different from the psychology of the *Gorgias* and what has been retained? What new elements have been introduced (and why might Plato have thought it necessary to introduce them)? How might the two theories have different implications for what a person has to do to cultivate herself so that she can be virtuous? Which psychology seems a more realistic description of our inner make-up (or if neither seems like a good psychology, present an alternative or identify what is missing that requires a better theory)?

4. Socrates became a model for the philosophical life among several schools of classical Western philosophy. However, Plato and the Cynics seem to have very different understandings of what it would be to live like Socrates. What did the Cynics see as the important aspects of Socrates' lifestyle that they sought to imitate, and what did they see as the rationale for living in this way? What seem to be the important features of Socrates' life as presented in Plato's dialogs? What do the Cynics and Plato agree about, and what is different about their views? Pick one point of disagreement. We are not in a position to determine who was right about the historical Socrates, but we can discuss what is a good philosophical way to live. So with respect to this point, which philosophical school (Cynic or Platonist) presents sounder principles for how to live philosophically?

5. In the *Apology*, Socrates says that, even if Athens were to forbid him from continuing to engage in philosophical conversations, he would continue to do so. Yet he also refuses to escape from prison out of a kind of respect for the laws of Athens. Explain his reasoning on both counts – why he would keep doing what he has been doing and his attitude toward the laws. Is Socrates being inconsistent here? Perhaps he had not actually disobeyed any Athenian laws by having the kinds of conversations he had, but if there *were* laws forbidding them, could he break those laws and still respect them?

6. One of the surprising features of Plato's description of the education of philosopher-kings in the *Republic* is that dialectic – the kind of conversation we see Socrates involved in in the dialogs – is not introduced until very late in the educational process, after ten years of mathematical training. If Plato was serious about this, would he approve of our reading his dialogs in an introductory philosophy class? What might have been his reasons for delaying a student's exposure to dialectical argumentation until after s/he had studied mathematics? Are there dangers he might have seen in the practice of Sophists, or perhaps of Socrates' own career, that might have led him to this conclusion? What might the study of mathematics do to protect a student from such dangers?

7. We have now studied two schools of Chinese philosophy and several Greek philosophers (mostly Plato, but also an overview of the Pre-Socratics, the Cynics, and Plato's depiction of Socrates, which arguably presents a different kind of philosophical life than what is presented in the education programme of the *Republic*). Pick one school or figure from Chinese philosophy and one from the Greeks we have read to compare and contrast them. In what ways does there seem to be a common enterprise called "philosophy" that both are involved in? What do they agree about? How are they different? (This may include their beliefs, their aims, their practices, and the style of their texts.) You might not feel that one is, on the whole, better than the other, but pick one element of one of the philosophies that you think contains something important and beneficial that the other lacks and explain why you think it is important and how we could make use of it.

PHIL221 – Philosophy as a Way of Life
Fall 2018
Final Paper

Due via email by December 15 (last day of exams)

The final paper calls for deeper and more extended reflection on ideas and practices we have encountered in this course. I have given three options for general approaches to the paper – some more practical/experiential, others more analytic/theoretical. Feel free to take a bit of latitude with the assignments. For example, I have described each of them as engaging *one* set of exercises or one philosophy because that makes it more straightforward to address it deeply. However, some people might find that they want to bring a second into it – say, to show how one philosophy supplies useful ideas or resources precisely where you find another one lacking. This will make the paper more complicated to write, but the point of the assignment is to think through the things that you think are important, so you should feel free to do it if that is what will be most fruitful for you to think through.

I am not giving any upper limits to the length of the paper, as some of you may find this to be an occasion to work out things you have been thinking about at length, and really the length should be determined by what you need to say and how long it takes to say it. However, I think it would be difficult to do a good thoughtful job on these questions in less than 4-5 pages.

Option 1

Over the course of the semester we have done a number of "spiritual exercises" associated with different philosophical schools, and you will probably have posted short reflections on some of them. For your final paper, write a longer reflection, either on one particular exercise or one *set* of exercises (e.g., Stoic week). This should discuss what you did in the course of the exercise, what you learned about yourself from doing it, and some thoughts on where to go from here. (For example, are there things that you did in the exercise that might be useful to keep doing on a longer-term basis, and what might you hope to get out of it? Or, if you think you have gotten all you can out of this/these particular exercise(s), can you think of further types of exercise to do regularly to further cultivate what was begun in doing it/them? Are there things you realize you would like to work on that do not seem to be addressed by any of the exercises we have tried, and if so, so you have any ideas on what you might do to work on them?) One way of thinking about this as you write it: suppose someone were assembling a book of examples of people's experiences with these exercises to show others what a person can get out of them. Don't try to write it as a kind of *advertisement* for the exercises, but try to give a reader a sense of the process of doing the exercise(s), what went on in you in doing it, and what you got out of it.

Option 2

Pick *one* of the philosophies we have studied that you think says something important that you might benefit from thinking about further and trying to put into practice. You might not be inclined to accept everything a particular school has to say, and yet find that there is something in it that rings true – for example, the Confucian or Aristotelian idea that virtues are cultivated through practices that lead to habits, the Socratic idea of examining our assumptions, the Stoic notion that unhappiness is a result of not distinguishing the things that are not within our control (fate) and those that are (our reactions to what happens). Explain the philosophical view as it is presented by the school that holds it, and then explain in your own terms why you think it is a plausible view and some ideas of how it might be put into practice.

Option 3

While some of the ideas presented by the philosophers we have read in this course might seem plausible and beneficial, you may have found some that seemed problematic as well. (For example, you might think that examining our assumptions and motivations leads only to needless pain and confusion, or that while Socrates and Plato were right that examining them can be a good thing, they were wrong to think that *reason* is key to doing so, or that all virtue requires is a knowledge of the good. Or you might think that the Confucian emphasis on inherited ritual or filial piety goes too far or is a bad thing entirely, or that the Stoics were wrong in thinking that much of our life is fated or that we can be happy by adjusting our attitude towards what happens in our lives.) Explain what the view is that you wish to critique, and then explain what you think is wrong with it. (For example, does it involve an incorrect view of the good life or human psychology? Does it lead to a form of life that is harmful? Does it close off important beneficial possibilities? Is it something that might be good for some types of people or some situations by bad for others?) Then try to go a bit further: what problems of human life do you think the idea you are criticizing was trying to address? Can you make a suggestion about how to address those problems in a better way?

Option 4

We have done a number of spiritual exercises in this class. Perhaps you found some beneficial, others not. And perhaps along the way you thought of other such exercises people might beneficially undertake. Write up a spiritual exercise of your own, in a format similar to those used in the course. Give the reader a bit of background (e.g., if it is on a particular philosopher or tradition), and explain what the exercise is intended to work on. Write instructions for how to do the exercise and reflect upon it – with the intended audience being students in future versions of this course. In a separate section, write something to me as the prospective teacher

of that future course, telling me what you hope students would get out of the exercise, and perhaps a range of questions that might be posed for Forum discussion when it would be assigned.

PHIL221: Philosophy as a Way of Life

Wesleyan University, Fall 2018

Exercises Used in the Course

Pierre Hadot used the term "spiritual exercises" for various disciplines practiced by the ancient philosophical schools. A number of such exercises were offered as a part of this course (some assigned and discussed in class, others optional). Some of these were based on ancient practices, but most were designed for use in courses like this one. Some of these were created by Professor Horst for this course or previous courses, others by Professor Tushar Irani of Wesleyan University. One set of Professor Irani's exercises are inspired by the "Live Like a Stoic Week" event that takes place at many universities every fall.

Some of the exercises are designed to be done in conjunction with particular readings. The class sessions with which each exercise was paired is listed for reference, though many of the exercises could be adapted to very different courses and class sessions.

The Exercises:

- Write Your Own Apologia (Horst), session 6a
- Plato's Metaphor of the Many-Headed Beast (Horst), session 7b
- Live Like a Platonist (Irani), session 8b
- What Do We Want? (Horst), session 8c
- (Aristotle) Virtue as a Craft (Irani), session 9b
- (Aristotle) Virtue and Pleasure (Irani), session 10a
- (Aristotle) Virtue and Friendship (Irani), session 10b
- Live Like a Stoic Week Exercises (Irani)
    - Life, session 11b
    - Control, session 11b
    - Mindfulness, session 11c
    - Virtue, session 11c
    - Relationships, session 12a
    - Resilience, session 12a
    - Nature, session 12a
- Live Like a Monk (Horst), session 13c

PHIL221 F2018 – Philosophy as a Way of Life
Steven Horst, Wesleyan University

Exercise: Write Your Own Apologia

This class will be devoted to discussing the exercise below, which is to be completed before the class. There is no new reading for this day.

In philosophical terminology, giving an "apology" (Greek *apologia*) is not saying you are sorry, but providing an account of your life and your actions. In Plato's *Apology* (of Socrates), for example, Socrates describes what he saw as the salient points of his actions and also provides his rationale for living in this way. His ability to do this, of course, was tied up with his commitment to self-scrutiny and self-examination, and he was providing this account at the end of a fairly long and reflective life. We may never have engaged in the same sorts of reflection and self-scrutiny, and even if we have done so, we probably have not done it so thoroughly as Socrates nor for so long a time. (And hopefully none of us will ever be called upon to justify our lives in a courtroom.) Nonetheless, we can begin to reflect in this way, and one way to do so is to attempt to write an account of the major themes we find in how we ourselves live and our reasons for living in the way we do. You will probably not produce something as coherent and compelling as Socrates' *apologia* – in fact, you may find yourself more in the position of Euthyphro or other people Socrates questioned, confused about why you do the things you do or believe the things you believe. (But, if Socrates is right, even this can have a beneficial result: of bringing us to the stage of "Socratic ignorance", where we at least know what it is we do not know and want to find the answers to.)

The assignment is to attempt to write a philosophical *apologia* for your own life. The best place to begin here may be to try to describe the major things you do and pursue. If there are guiding principles you attempt to follow, describe these as well. You may not have thought much about such things before, and if so, it is useful to think about what you do and pursue and ask *why* you do and pursue them. This will help identify *deep implicit values*, which then can be submitted to scrutiny in the way Socrates examined his own life and beliefs and those of others. Try to give as honest an account as you can of your way of living and the (possibly heretofore implicit) rationale behind it. If it seems like a completely convincing rationale, well and good. If not, try to identify a few critical questions that you might ask yourself about it, or that Socrates might have asked you if you had met him.

(As this exercise may touch upon some very private matters, it should not be posted to the forum and will not be turned in. I shall, however, invite those who wish to do so to share their reflections in class. This seems in accordance with Socrates' own practice: he did not try to force anyone into conversation or self-reflection, but only carried on such conversations with those interested in doing so. It may be a new experience to have an assignment that is not to be

handed in, but note that this is in its way also quite Socratic: the most important form of education is transformative self-reflection. Socrates probably really did not care much whether other people found his reasons for living as he did persuasive – what mattered to him was that it seemed to conform to Reason.)

PHIL221 F2018 – Philosophy as a Way of Life

(This exercise was presented as an optional activity in conjunction with the discussion of the Tripartite Soul in class 7b)

Exercise: Plato's Many-Headed Beast

This exercise is done in conjunction with reading Plato's discussion of the soul in Book IX of the Republic, where he compares it to a many-headed beast. (588b-590a)

Plato suggests that the soul has different "heads" – different sources of motivation – that can be likened to the heads of different animals. Take a sheet of paper and draw a picture in this vein of your own soul. What are the different things that drive or motivate you? Try to label them and find an appropriate animal head to represent each. (It doesn't matter whether you are a good artist – this is for your own reflection.) Reflect on your drawing. What does each of them want? Do they live harmoniously with one another, or do some of them compete and contend with one another? Which one(s) are in control of your life? (If you want to extend the exercise further – perhaps on another day – think about how Reason might try to tame one or more of the other heads and bring your soul into greater order. Would thumos be of help in this? If so, how?)

Exercise by Professor Steven Horst, Department of Philosophy, Wesleyan University
(shorst@wesleyan.edu)

PHIL201-01 Philosophical Classics I

Live Like a Platonist
Day 3: The Examined Life

Post your reflections here after reading the selected passages below and practicing the assigned exercises for today.

Morning Text for Reflection:

"And in truth justice is, it seems, something of this sort. However, it isn't concerned with someone's doing his own externally, but with what is inside him, with what is truly himself and his own. One who is just does not allow any part of himself to do the work of another part or allow the various classes within him to meddle with each other. He regulates well what is really his own and rules himself. He puts himself in order, is his own friend, and harmonizes the three parts of himself like three limiting notes in a musical scale — high, low, and middle. He binds together those parts and any others there may be in between, and from having been many things he becomes entirely one, moderate and harmonious. Only then does he act. And when he does anything, whether acquiring wealth, taking care of his body, engaging in politics, or in private contracts — in all of these, he believes that the action is just and fine that preserves this inner harmony and helps achieve it, and calls it so, and regards as wisdom the knowledge that oversees such actions." (Plato, *Republic* 443d-e)

Today's Exercises:

Consider the notion of internal justice that Plato describes above in terms of the harmonious relationship he sketches between the three parts of the human soul: appetite (the pleasure-loving part); spirit (the honour-loving part); and reason (the wisdom-loving part). What is key to this harmony is that reason somehow regulates and forms a clear conception of what is good for the soul as a whole. And how does reason do that? For Plato, it's by orienting one's values around the pursuit of wisdom: by leading an examined life. The idea here seems to be that if it's essential to human happiness that we bring our desires into line with our values, and if it's in virtue of our status as reasoners that we can understand those values, then the role of the rational part of the soul in achieving the human good is assured.

Your task for today is to consider what the examined life — the life of reason as Plato understands it — requires of us and to test whether that is in fact a happy life. One thing Plato clearly believes the life of reason requires, and this goes back to Socrates' practice of philosophy, is a searching inquiry into one's personal beliefs and values. So I want you to spend some time today reflecting on your

beliefs and values. Do they stand up to scrutiny? Are they consistent? Are they well grounded? Are they in fact your beliefs and values, or do you affirm them simply on the authority of others?

For at least 30 minutes before or around the lunch hour today, spend some time by yourself considering the sources of influence in your life. Go offline, turn off your phone, find a quiet spot, and ask yourself the following questions:

- To what extent are my beliefs and values shaped by my upbringing, the media, and popular culture?
- How are my actions and choices influenced by a desire for prestige or social status?
- To what extent are my ambitions driven by the need to meet other people's expectations or approval?
- Are the people whose esteem I seek in my life people I also admire and respect?
- Do the desires I typically choose to act on reflect the values I wish to live by?

(Note: because many of these questions are general in nature, you may find it helpful to focus on a specific issue that's troubling you at the moment — say, a choice of career, your perspective on a controversial political matter, or a decision you made recently that you're uneasy about — and then examine that issue in light of some of the questions above.)

In considering these questions, try to internalise something like the Socratic method. Determine the coherence of your beliefs and values by testing their consistency. Explore the implications of a certain view or conviction you have and ask yourself whether you can affirm those implications. After you've done this on your own for a bit, raise the same questions above with someone else (you may prefer to do this with a friend or someone you know relatively well) for as long as you feel comfortable. This is important: you're not trying to cross-examine your friend's beliefs and values for this exercise, but engaging him or her in dialogue to help you sort through your own beliefs and values. Perhaps your friend will press you on a point you hadn't considered and thereby help you test the consistency of your views. They may even help you resolve a point of confusion you'd reached when you were examining your views on your own.

For the rest of today, think about how what you learned from this soul-searching activity might affect your conduct and choices more generally, if at all.

Evening Text for Reflection:

"Consider, then, what being released from their bonds and cured of their ignorance would naturally be like, if something like this came to pass. When one of them was freed and suddenly compelled to stand up, turn his head, walk, and look up toward the light, he'd be pained and dazzled and unable to see the things whose shadows he'd seen before. What do you think he'd say, if we told him that what he'd seen before was inconsequential, but that now — because he is a bit closer to the things that are and is turned towards things that are more — he sees more correctly? Or, to put it another way, if we pointed to each of the things passing by, asked him what each of them is, and compelled him to answer, don't you think he'd be at a loss (*aporia*) and that he'd believe that the things he saw earlier were truer than the ones he was now being shown?" (Plato, *Republic* 515c-d)

Socrates: "Therefore, calculation, geometry, and all the preliminary education required for dialectic must be offered to the future rulers in childhood, and not in the shape of compulsory learning either.
Glaucon: "Why's that?
Socrates: "Because nothing taught by force stays in the soul.
Glaucon: "That's true.
Socrates: "Then don't use force to train the children in these subjects; use play instead. That way you'll also see better what each of them is naturally fitted for." (Plato, *Republic* 536d-e)

The exercise you engaged in today was basically the experience of beginning the ascent from the cave that Plato describes at the start of Book VII of the *Republic*. Coming to reconsider the sources of our beliefs and values is comparable to being told that most of the things we're trained to see as "real" in our lives are merely shadows of puppets dancing on a wall, shadows manufactured by others. What's significant about Plato's description of this experience in the passage above from the cave allegory is that this experience is as <u>painful</u> for a person as it is beneficial.

What was your experience of the examined life like today? Was it painful? And even if it was painful, was it still beneficial? Do you agree with Plato that it's only through this means, by empowering the wisdom-loving part of ourselves — our reason — that we live harmonious and happy lives? Was it helpful for you to engage with someone else in this activity?

More generally: is it important to you in living well that the desires you choose to act on reflect the values you wish to live by? If so, what part of you exactly should determine the values you wish to live by? In the quote above, Plato says it's hard to get a person to stop believing something's good once they've grown accustomed to finding it pleasant or honourable: this is why feelings of confusion

or *aporia* typically lead us to fall back on our comfortable illusions inside the cave. And yet Plato thinks that if we handed the power to determine our values over to either the pleasure-loving or honour-loving parts of ourselves, we'd live deeply unhappy lives. Again, do you agree?

Feel free to consider these questions or share any other reflections you have on this activity in your journal entry for today. Also, as you ascend from the cave, you're likely to begin hearing the Music of the Spheres: to optimise the harmony in your souls, you may want to listen to this while writing your response.

Exercise: Aristotle and Desires

In Book I, Chapter 2 of the *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle writes:

> If, then, there is some end of the things we do, which we desire for its own sake (everything else being desired for the sake of this), and if we do not choose everything for the sake of something else (for at that rate the process would go on to infinity, so that our desire would be empty and vain), clearly this must be the good and the chief good. Will not the knowledge of it, then, have a great influence on life? Shall we not, like archers who have a mark to aim at, be more likely to hit upon what is right? If so, we must try, in outline at least, to determine what it is

Even before reading further in the *Ethics*, it is worth looking for ourselves at the idea that Aristotle is proposing here. This two-part exercise helps us look at it in our own case before reading further to see what Aristotle proposes.

Part 1

Set aside about 20 minutes to do this exercise early in the day. You may want to come back to it after further reflection during the day before proceeding to Part 2.

Take a sheet of paper and simply list things that you desire, seek, or work for. This list is for your eyes only, so be honest with yourself and don't worry about what anyone else would think of some of the items on your list. You'll probably find that a number of things will come to you very quickly, and you might think you are done, and then later you'll think of other things that should go on the list as well. You might want to carry this list around with you through the day and jot down additional things that come to mind when you think of them.

Part 2

Look over the list you have compiled.

Now, look for relationships between things you have listed: are some of the items you desire *means* to others that are the *ends*? (For example, you might desire good grades as a *means* to get into medical school, which in turn you desire in order to become a doctor, and so on.) On another sheet of paper (or multiple sheets), begin to map out such relationships using arrows – e.g., good grades → medical school → become doctor. You may find that in doing this that you have discovered some desires that you had not explicitly named in Part 1. Feel free to fill these in, but you might mark them by underlining them. Don't worry if there are some things on your original list that don't seem to have connections to other things. You don't have to include *everything* in the diagram you are constructing.

Look over the diagram(s) you have constructed. Is there one or more thing that emerges as something like an *ultimate* end or goal – a thing or things that many of your other desires are aiming at? Circle these.

Look at the items you have circled and ask yourself the questions: Does it make any sense to ask the further question of what I want these *for*? Are they really my ultimate desires, or do I desire them, too, as means to something further that is not on the page? If so, can I put a name on what that something might be?

Are there desires on the list that are incompatible or in tension with one another? E.g., if you want to be both the next Einstein and the world's greatest concert pianist, these might not be things one could do both of in a single lifetime. Or if you want to be famous and also want to live a quiet private life, the conditions for one might make the other difficult or impossible.

PHIL201-01 Philosophical Classics I

Live Like an Aristotelian
Day 1: Virtue as a Craft

Post your reflections here after reading the selected passages below and practicing the assigned exercises for today.

Morning Text for Reflection:

"To sum up, then, in a single account: a state of character arises from the repetition of similar activities. Hence we must display the right activities, since differences in these imply corresponding differences in the states. It is not unimportant, then, to acquire one sort of habit or another, right from our youth; rather, it is very important, indeed all-important" (*Nicomachean Ethics* I.1, 1103b).

Today's Exercises:

Aristotle evidently considered it essential to living virtuously that we habituate ourselves to act virtuously. Just as we acquire skill in a craft or a sport through constant practice, we acquire the virtues "by having previously activated them" (*NE* I.1, 1103a). According to this view, intellectual activity does not have the outsized role in behaving virtuously that it does for Plato. What's more essential is action. And while Aristotle doesn't believe everyone naturally has these virtues, he does think we're capable by nature of acquiring them. Your task for today, then, is to activate a few virtues through habit.

Choose two or more virtues from those in the following list. The first three are standard Greek virtues; the rest are commonly cited as character strengths or virtues in contemporary discourse. Only choose those which it seems important to you to develop:

- courage
- justice/fairness
- moderation/self-control
- kindness
- tolerance
- hope
- focus
- honesty/truthfulness
- acceptance
- gratitude

To activate these virtues, you'll need to display them all day. In many cases, this will mean reminding yourself in a relevant situation to respond with your chosen

virtue: e.g., if you've selected acceptance as a virtue to cultivate for today, you may need to respond with that virtue to a disappointing grade on an exam or paper; if you've selected honesty as a virtue to cultivate, you may need to respond with that virtue if a friend needs to be given some hard advice. You should assume this stance constantly throughout the day on every and any occasion that you're presented with to display your selected virtues.

However, it's important to note that taking this passive stance in cultivating your character isn't enough for a training regimen in virtue for Aristotle. To fully complete your exercises for today, you'll need to actively put yourself in situations where you have to display your selected virtues. So if one of your chosen virtues is courage, you will need to put yourself in situations where you would normally feel (unreasonably) afraid: e.g., if you have a fear of public speaking, you should take the opportunity to participate in class. Or if one of your chosen virtues is kindness, you will need to put yourself in situations where that virtue is called for: e.g., taking some time out of your day to assist someone in need of your help. You should set up activities of this sort for yourself throughout the day because Aristotle believes it's only in this way that you'll end up habituating yourself to act virtuously, just as anyone who acquires a craft must actively engage in constant practice to perfect his or her skills.

Evening Text for Reflection:

"But let us take it as agreed in advance that every account of the actions we must do has to be stated in outline, not exactly. As we also said at the start, the type of accounts we demand should reflect the subject-matter; and questions about actions and expediency, like questions about health, have no fixed and invariable answers. And when our general account is so inexact, the account of particular cases is all the more inexact. For these fall under no craft or profession, and the agents themselves must consider in each case what the opportune action is, as doctors and navigators do" (*Nicomachean Ethics* I.2, 1104a).

How did your experiment in cultivating Aristotelian virtue go today? Which virtues did you choose to cultivate? Did you find the method of habituation Aristotle recommends a good way to develop a virtuous character? You may have found it difficult in some of these exercises to determine the "right" or virtuous thing to do in a given situation. The quote above suggests that Aristotle believes this is an ineliminable feature of our moral lives: we simply cannot expect to find the sort of exact answers in ethics that we do in, say, the hard sciences. This is why he is often referred to as a "particularist" (but not a relativist!) about ethics. In each ethical situation that we're in, he thinks we have to attend to the particular circumstances we're presented with, and the virtuous person will be the one who perceives well what is relevant to virtuous action in those

circumstances. Do you agree this sort of ethical perception is the kind of thing we can train ourselves to develop?

A final question: as you reflect upon the exercises you completed for today, do you find that the virtues you sought to cultivate contributed to your well-being? That is, do you agree with Aristotle that the path to happiness (*eudaimonia* = human flourishing) is through developing these character strengths?

Share your thoughts on the above questions or any other reflections you have in your journal entry for today.

PHIL201-01 Philosophical Classics I

Live Like an Aristotelian
Day 2: Virtue and Pleasure

Post your reflections here after reading the selected passages below and practicing the assigned exercises for today.

Morning Text for Reflection:

"But actions are not enough; we must take as a sign of someone's state his pleasure or pain in consequence of his action. For if someone who abstains from bodily pleasures enjoys the abstinence itself, then he is temperate, but if he is grieved by it, he is intemperate. Again, if he stands firm against terrifying situations and enjoys it, or at least does not find it painful, then he is brave, and if he finds it painful, he is cowardly" (*Nicomachean Ethics* II.3, 1104b).

Today's Exercises:

Your task for today is to continue the training regimen in virtue you began yesterday, this time by training yourself to take pleasure in acting virtuously. Continue cultivating two of the virtues you chose from yesterday's list, but now select one more. This should be a virtue you know it will be difficult for you to display, but (like yesterday) one that you want to develop nonetheless:

- courage
- justice/fairness
- moderation/self-control
- kindness
- tolerance
- hope
- focus
- honesty/truthfulness
- acceptance
- gratitude

Your habituation regimen today should continue the same tasks you began yesterday. Be on the lookout as you go about your day for how to display your virtues in any situation that demands them, and be proactive about putting yourself in situations where you'll need to exercise these character strengths.

In doing this, it will be worth putting into practice Aristotle's "doctrine of the mean" by searching for the intermediate state between extremes in action. (Be careful here not to mistake the virtuous action for the extreme action: one good way to test whether you're in fact aiming at the intermediate state in an ethical situation is to

determine first what the two extreme states would be in that situation.) For today in particular, however, you will need to make a special effort to take pleasure — or at least not feel pain — in behaving virtuously.

You might think that training yourself to take pleasure in an activity is something outside of your control, since pleasure is a physiological response and nothing more. But consider: if these are virtues you truly want to develop, then engaging in the sort of action that displays each of them should be enjoyable at some level. Perhaps you're the sort of person who doesn't typically enjoy acting moderately, and so you have no (as philosophers and psychologists put it) "first-order desire" to be moderate. But if moderation was a virtue you chose to cultivate for today, you probably have a "second-order desire" to be moderate: a desire to desire to be moderate. And when you recognise you're satisfying that second-order desire, this will presumably provide you with pleasure.

Or will it? Test Aristotle's hypothesis for yourself. Much here may depend on the degree to which you identify (or want to identify) with your chosen virtues: do you identify with them? During the day, ask yourself whether the pleasure you get from acting virtuously differs in quality (not simply in quantity) from the pleasure you get from other activities. But be careful, too, not to mistake the motive of your action for pleasure when it should really be virtue. Aristotle clearly doesn't believe it's for the sake of pleasure that a virtuous person acts virtuously. As he puts it later in the *Ethics*, "pleasure completes the activity," not by representing the end or purpose of the virtuous action, "but as a sort of consequent end, like the bloom on youths" (*NE* X.5, 1174b).

Evening Text for Reflection:

"To be beneficent where one can is a duty, and besides there are many souls so sympathetically attuned that, without any other motive of vanity or self-interest they find an inner satisfaction in spreading joy around them and can take pleasure in the satisfaction of others so far as it is their own work. . . . [But] if nature had put little sympathy in the heart of this or that man; if (in other respects an honest man) he is by temperament cold and indifferent to the sufferings of others, perhaps because he himself is provided with the special gift of patience and endurance toward his own sufferings and presupposes the same in every other or even requires it; if nature had not properly fashioned such a man for a philanthropist, would he still not find within himself a source from which to give himself a far higher worth than what a mere good-natured temperament might have? By all means! It is just then that the worth of character comes out, which is moral and incomparably the highest, namely that he is beneficent not from inclination but from duty" (Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:398-399).

I've quoted this famous passage from Kant because it seems to me to suggest a polar opposite view to Aristotle's in evaluating a person's character. The virtue Kant is considering here is beneficence and his claim is that the cold and indifferent man who takes no pleasure in acting beneficently but who does so purely from duty is an exemplar of virtue. In testing Aristotle's hypothesis today, what do you think of Kant's view? Is pleasure necessary for full virtue? Or – as Kant suggests – does pleasure have the potential to cloud a person's motives for acting virtuously?

In terms of the pleasure itself, if there were occasions today when you found yourself enjoying acting virtuously, I'm curious to hear your reflections on the kind of pleasure you experienced. How does this pleasure differ, if at all, from other feelings of enjoyment in your life? In continuing your habituation regimen from yesterday, did you find having this pleasure component made it easier to train yourself to be virtuous? Or was it on the contrary more difficult? Did you come to doubt your own virtue because you found it enjoyable? Your reflections on these or other issues are welcome.

PHIL201-01 Philosophical Classics I

Live Like an Aristotelian
Day 4: Virtue and Friendship

Post your reflections here after reading the selected passages below and practicing the assigned exercises for today.

Morning Text for Reflection:

"There is also a dispute about whether the happy person will need friends or not. For it is said that blessedly happy and self-sufficient people have no need of friends. For they already have all the goods, and hence, being self-sufficient, need nothing added. . . . However, in awarding the happy person all the goods it would seem absurd not to give him friends; for having friends seems to be the greatest external good" (*Nicomachean Ethics* IX.9, 1169b).

Today's Exercises:

The problem Aristotle is raising in the quote above concerns why friendship is essential for human happiness. The problem is especially acute for his view because happiness is understood early on in the *Nicomachean Ethics* as a complete and self-sufficient activity of the human soul. But friendship is an external good. So if friendship is essential to the good life, how can the good life be a self-sufficient one?

Part of the way Aristotle answers this question, it seems, is by explaining the special nature of what he calls a "virtue-friendship," which is the best type of friendship in his view. The other two types of friendship he discusses in the *Nicomachean Ethics* are "utility-friendship" and "pleasure-friendship." The common feature of these lower forms of friendship is that they are fundamentally self-serving. In a utility-friendship, your dealings with another person serve your own advantage, oftentimes with the other person's tacit agreement. This is what relationships in the world of business and commerce look like, which are based on the mutual exchange of goods. There's nothing wrong with these relationships and they may even be necessary for the smooth functioning of political life, but Aristotle doesn't think they're essential for your personal happiness. Likewise with pleasure-friendships: you value the other person insofar as he or she provides you with pleasure or enjoyment, and you may even do so with the consent of that person. Such relationships are abundant in our lives, though once more, Aristotle doesn't think they're essential for personal happiness.

What is essential, he believes, is virtue-friendship. And what's characteristic about this relationship is that you value the other person for his or her virtue,

which is to say you value the friend for his or her own sake. As Aristotle puts it famously, such a friend is "another self" (*NE* IX.6, 1166a). Now, it's important to recognise at this point that just because you value the other person for his or her own sake, that doesn't mean you can't also derive pleasure or utility from the relationship. (We're not talking about complete altruism here.) In fact, Aristotle believes that the superiority of a "virtue-friendship" can be seen in the way it allows you to experience the goodness of virtue, utility, and pleasure all together, though what motivates you to treat the other person well in the relationship is not the prospect of utility or pleasure for yourself, but the well-being of that person.

Consider the role of friendship in human happiness and the types of friendship in your life for today. For much of this week, you've undertaken a training regimen in cultivating virtue in the way that Aristotle thinks you should. But he also thinks that friendship is a virtue or at least "involves virtue" (*NE* VIII.1, 1155a). How well do you cultivate your friendships? Scroll through your list of friends on Facebook or do an inventory of the various kinds of relationships you have with others in your life and ask yourself how you might classify them in terms of Aristotle's threefold scheme. How many are pleasure-friendships? How many are utility-friendships? How many are virtue-friendships?

Unlike the activities for "Live Like a Platonist" week, you may have noticed that your exercises in living like an Aristotelian this week have been mostly solitary. Today's a day when you can optimise your nature as a political animal — which is what you essentially are according to Aristotle (see *NE* IX.9, 1169b). Spend part of your day engaging with people you feel comfortable regarding simply as "pleasure-friends." Spend another part engaging with people you regard as "utility-friends." Spend another part engaging with people you regard as "virtue-friends." As you go about your day, ask yourself which group (if any) contributes more to your well-being. How does your mode of engagement with another person in each type of friendship differ?

Evening Text for Reflection:

"Deliberation concerns what is one way rather than another, where the outcome is unclear and the right way to act is undefined. And we enlist partners in deliberation on large issues when we distrust our own ability to discern the right answer" (*Nicomachean Ethics* III.3, 1112b).

Perhaps the necessity of friendship for a good life can be found in this quote. Given the difficulty in figuring out what virtue is and, as you saw yesterday, the pervasiveness of phenomena like implicit bias in our lives, having people we care about around to encourage us to try to be better than we are seems especially important to living well. But then are we at the end of the day

just using these so-called “virtue-friends”? Aristotle claims that to love another person for their own sake is to love their virtue. Is that right? Is it really just the virtue of another person that attracts us and demands our ethical attention? Can we be a friend to less than virtuous people on Aristotle’s view? What are your thoughts on Aristotle’s distinction between types of friendship?

Lots of questions to reflect upon today. Make of them what you will.

Stoic Week Exercises

These are a week's worth of daily exercises. The actual handouts presented here were designed by Professor Tushar Irani of Wesleyan University, but are based upon the Stoic Week activities put on by Modern Stoicism. (http://www.moderstoicism.com) Instructors may wish to formally participate in the Stoic Week online if it matches their schedules, and should check the website for any restrictions on use of original or adapted materials.

During the week we did these exercises, we devoted 3 class days entirely to discussion of them, one for days 1 and 2, one for 3 and 4, and a third for 5-7. Judging by students comments and final paper topics, this was among the most successful sections of the course.

Sequence of exercises:

Day 1: Life
Day 2: Control
Day 3: Mindfulness
Day 4: Virtue
Day 5: Relationships
Day 6: Resilience
Day 7: Nature

PHIL201-01 Philosophical Classics I

Live Like a Stoic
Day 1: Life

Post your reflections here after reading the selected passages below and practicing the assigned exercises for today.

Morning Text for Reflection:

"From Maximus [I have learnt the importance of these things]: to be master of oneself and not to be carried this way and that; to be cheerful under all circumstances, including illness; a character with a harmonious blend of gentleness and dignity; readiness to tackle the task in hand without complaint; the confidence everyone had that whatever he said he meant and whatever he did was not done with bad intent; never to be astonished or panic-stricken, and never to be hurried or to hang back or be at a loss or downcast or cringing or on the other hand angry or suspicious; to be ready to help or forgive, and to be truthful; to give the impression of someone whose character is naturally upright rather than having undergone correction; the fact that no-one could have thought that Maximus looked down on him, or could have presumed to suppose that he was better than Maximus; and to have great personal charm." (Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 1.14)

Practice the Early Morning Meditation

Today's Exercises: Life as a Project and Role Models

We begin our first day of Stoic Week by thinking about two themes that are central to the first book of Marcus Aurelius' philosophical journal, the *Meditations*. One is the idea that our whole life should be seen as an ongoing project or journey of ethical self-development. The other that, on this journey, we can take forward our own development by reflecting on the good qualities and way of life of the people who mean most to us. In the morning text quoted above, Marcus thinks about what he learnt from Maximus, an older family friend who was a leading politician with deep philosophical interests. He focuses on Maximus' integrity of character, his emotional balance, and his genuineness and ease in dealing with other people – all qualities valued by Stoicism whose basis will become clear in the coming week.

An important feature of Stoic theory lies behind Book 1 of Marcus' *Meditations*. It is the idea that human life, if lived properly, is an ongoing project or journey directed towards the best possible human condition, that of wisdom. There are

two strands to this journey, one is individual, the other social. At an individual level we can learn to move from an instinctive desire for such things as self-preservation, health, and property towards wanting to live in the best possible way. For the Stoics this means living according to the virtues, virtues such as wisdom, justice, moderation or self-control, and courage. The culmination of this strand is recognising that virtue is the only thing that is fundamentally of value and the only real basis for happiness. The second strand concerns our relations to other people. The Stoics thought that human beings and other animals are instinctively drawn to care for others of their kind — most obviously to care for their family. However, as human beings develop we deepen and extend this instinct of care, forming lasting family and community commitments and coming to recognise that all human beings are akin, our "brothers" and "sisters," because they are, like us, rational creatures capable of ethical development.

The Stoics also thought that these two strands of development go hand in hand and support each other; and that all individuals are capable of developing in this way, regardless of their inborn characters and social background. However, this progress does not just happen automatically; you need to work at it, otherwise it can go badly wrong. Marcus uses his regular note-taking and reflection (in the *Meditations*) to help this process of development, which he often describes as his real "job" or "work" as a human being — we will see this, for instance, in tomorrow's morning text for reflection. In Book 1 he thinks about his whole life from early childhood till his late 50s as a cycle of development, and reflects on the ethical qualities whose value he has learnt to recognise, and the way that his relationships with other people have helped him to do this.

The readings and exercises compiled for you this week have been written in a way that's designed to mirror Marcus' reflective practice and to encourage you to try to do the same as Marcus did, forming your own notes and reflections, based on the themes explored each day this week. For today, take a few minutes to think about the qualities you have come to value in the course of your life, however young or old you are. Have you changed your ideas about what is most important in the course of your life, as your situation has changed? Do you think your ideas have deepened on this topic over time — or not? You might like to make some notes on this, or draw some pictures suggesting the qualities you find most significant. If you want to do this collaboratively, feel free to do so with your friends.

Think too about the people who have helped you appreciate the importance of these qualities and what qualities or ways of life they have led you to value. They might be family members, close friends or partners, work associates or people you do not know directly but whom you respect and admire. You might like to

make notes on this, and also to chart links between specific individuals and the qualities you have come to value.

You might like to do this at one go, or space it through the day, while you are doing other things. Like most of the exercises we will suggest this week, it can be useful to come back to them as the week progresses, and see how your thinking has developed on these topics.

Evening Text for Reflection:

"Let us go to our sleep with joy and gladness; let us say 'I have lived; the course which Fortune set for me is finished.' . . . That man is happiest, and is secure in his own possession of himself, who can await the morrow without apprehension. When a man has said: 'I have lived!', every morning he arises he receives a bonus." (Seneca, *Letters*, 12.9)

Practice the Late Evening Meditation

PHIL201-01 Philosophical Classics I

Live Like a Stoic
Day 2: Control

Post your reflections here after reading the selected passages below and practicing the assigned exercises for today.

Morning Text for Reflection:

"Early in the morning, when you are finding it hard to wake up, hold this thought in your mind: 'I am getting up to do the work of a human being. Do I still resent it, if I am going out to do what I was born for and for which I was brought into the world? Or was I framed for this, to lie under the bedclothes and keep myself warm?' 'But this is more pleasant'. So were you born for pleasure: in general were you born for feeling or for affection? Don't you see the plants, the little sparrows, the ants, the spiders, the bees doing their own work, and playing their part in making up an ordered world. And then are you unwilling to do the work of a human being? Won't you run to do what is in line with your nature?" (Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 5.1)

Practice the Early Morning Meditation

Today's Exercises: What is in Our Control and Wishing with Reservation

Today we think about two important, linked Stoic themes: distinguishing between what is and is not in our power and wishing "with reservation." Both of them follow from the ideas about human development outlined yesterday. Stoics believe that all of us can and should work at taking forward our own ethical development by learning how to act virtuously and by broadening and deepening our relationships with other people. This is something that is "up to us" or "within our power" as rational beings. But there are many things we cannot determine by our own actions, such as whether we become rich or famous, whether we get ill or whether close family members die.

Stoics believe that what is "up to us" or "within our power" is of ultimate importance in our lives, rather than the things that we cannot control. Although they recognise that it is natural for us to prefer things such as being healthy or well-off, Stoics regard these as being fundamentally of less value than virtue. They also believe that recognising the distinction between what is and is not within our power is crucial for leading a good human life and one that is free from "passions" or negative and destructive emotions.

For this reason, when we form wishes about things that are not wholly within our power, we should wish "with reservation" or with a "reserve clause," a caveat such as “if nothing prevents it.” Otherwise, our plans and wishes are not based on the realities of human life and may lead to frustration and disillusionment.

The Stoic philosopher Epictetus, whose teachings influenced Marcus Aurelius greatly, expresses the distinction between what is and is not in our power very clearly in the following passage:

> “Some things are within our power, while others are not. Within our power are opinion, motivation, desire, aversion, and in a word, whatever is of our own doing; not within our power are our body, our property, reputation, social role or status, and, in a word, whatever is not of our own doing.” (Epictetus, *Handbook*, 1)

Epictetus also points out that if we focus our wishes and desires on things that are not wholly within our power, such as health, wealth and social status, this will lead to disappointment and negative emotions. This distinction is important for Marcus too, as is clear in these two passages:

> “Try out how the life of a good person suits you — someone who is pleased with what is allocated from the whole, and satisfied with his own just actions and kind disposition.” (*Meditations*, 4.25)

> “Love the expertise which you have learned and take support from this. Pass the remainder of your life as one who has entrusted all he has, in a full-hearted way, to the gods . . .” (*Meditations*, 4.31)

On the one hand, Marcus advises himself to focus on the project of ethical development, which is within his power: trying to lead the life of a good person (someone who does “just actions and has a kind disposition”) and gradually coming to love the “expertise” or “skill” of living in this way. On the other hand, Marcus also urges himself to accept that his actions and life are part of a much wider pattern of events, of which he controls a very small part. He is part of a much larger “whole,” an interconnected series of events, which can also be attributed to “the gods.” (We will discuss Marcus’ thinking on nature or “the whole” on Sunday.) This is a contrast that runs through much of the *Meditations*, and helps Marcus to face many harsh realities in his life, above all the looming prospect of his own death.

However, this does <u>not</u> mean passively resigning yourself to events. Stoic acceptance entails recognising that some things are outside your control, and that if those events have actually happened, this must be acknowledged and accepted.

But you still try to do your best in responding to these events, because that is something which is under your control. Put another way: Stoic serenity comes from "accepting reality" or "accepting the facts" — but not giving up! It is also about maintaining a sense of purpose regarding the aspects of your life that you can actually determine.

The famous "Serenity Prayer" used by Alcoholics Anonymous gives a memorable summary of the Stoic doctrine:

> God, grant me the Serenity to accept the things I cannot change;
> Courage, to change the things I can;
> And Wisdom to know the difference.

That is why the Stoics suggest that we form our plans and wishes with a "reserve clause" in mind. In a nutshell, it's a matter of qualifying every intention by saying, "I will do such and such, if nothing prevents me." This marks the distinction between what is and is not in our power, and helps us to recognise that it is only what is within our power that is genuinely important. (This is very helpful advice on journeys of all kinds, where lots of things are outside our power!)

Take a few minutes to think in a specific way about what this distinction would mean in your life. You could begin by making two lists: one list of things in your current life and situation that you can control by your own actions and aspirations and another list of things that you cannot control. You could then examine the contents of the two lists and think about which of them is, on reflection, more important and valuable. How far do your lists match the Stoic distinction between things that are and are not within our power, as summarised by Epictetus, for instance, in his *Handbook* (quoted above)? How far does it match the Stoic distinction between virtuous actions and "externals" or "indifferents" (such as health, property, and social status)?

During your morning meditations each day, you can practice incorporating the "reserve clause," saying to yourself: "I will do x or y . . . if nothing prevents it" or "if this fits in with the larger pattern of events." Imagine all the things that could go wrong and adopt an attitude of detached acceptance towards them, remembering that the only thing that really matters is that you do your best and try to act in a way that helps you develop the virtues.

Evening Text for Reflection:

"Try to persuade them; and act even against their will, whenever the principle of justice leads you to do so. But if someone uses force to resist you, change your approach to accepting it and not being hurt, and use the setback to express

another virtue. Remember too that your motive was formed with reservation and that you were not aiming at the impossible. At what then? A motive formed with reservation. But you have achieved this; what we proposed to ourselves is actually happening." (Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 6.50)

Practice the Late Evening Meditation

PHIL201-01 Philosophical Classics I

Live Like a Stoic
Day 3: Mindfulness

Post your reflections here after reading the selected passages below and practicing the assigned exercises for today.

Morning Text for Reflection:

“People look for retreats for themselves, in the country, by the coast, or in the hills; and you too are especially inclined to feel this desire. But this is altogether un-philosophical, when it is possible for you to retreat into yourself at any time you want. There is nowhere that a person can find a more peaceful and trouble-free retreat than in his own mind, especially if he has within himself the kind of thoughts that let him dip into them and so at once gain complete ease of mind; and by ease of mind, I mean nothing but having one’s own mind in good order. So constantly give yourself this retreat and renew yourself. You should have to hand concise and fundamental principles, which will be enough, as soon as you encounter them, to cleanse you from all distress and send you back without resentment at the activities to which you return." (Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 1.3.1-3)

Practice the Early Morning Meditation

Today’s Exercises: Stoic Mindfulness and Examining your Impressions

We’ve already suggested that you can help yourself develop a Stoic approach to life by self-monitoring. Another way of putting this is to use the idea of "Stoic mindfulness." “Mindfulness" in modern psychotherapy is based on Buddhism. However, there is a comparable focus in ancient Stoicism on living in the here and now and paying close attention to our thoughts and feelings. Today’s morning text for reflection gives a very powerful expression of Stoic mindfulness, as Marcus reminds himself of the value of putting his mind in good order and renewing himself in preparation for the challenges of his life.

As with yesterday’s theme, Epictetus gives a very clear statement of what is involved in Stoic mindfulness, and one that influenced Marcus’ thinking too:

> “Practise, then, from the very beginning to say to every rough impression, ‘You’re an impression and not at all what you appear to be.’ Then examine it and test it by the standards that you have, and first and foremost by this one, whether the impression relates to those things which are within our power or those which aren’t up to us; and if it relates to those things which aren’t within our power, be ready to reply, ‘That’s nothing to me.’” (Epictetus, *Handbook*, 1.5)

Epictetus says that we should train ourselves to avoid errors in our judgements and being "carried away" by our thoughts and feelings. For Stoics, the key error of judgement lies in treating external things (such as health and money) as if they were intrinsically good or bad, and forgetting that virtue is the only true good. We've already looked at this aspect of Stoicism when we talked about reflecting on whether our judgements refer to things within our power or not. Epictetus says the key to retaining our grip on objective reality and not being swept away by irrational desire or emotions is that before we even begin to challenge our thoughts, we must learn to step back from them temporarily. That is what he means by "examining your impressions." "Impression" is a very general term in Stoicism covering all thoughts, feelings, and sensations. Epictetus stresses that we should "examine" all these before accepting them as valid and as matching objective reality.

To understand what Epictetus meant, it may help to compare it to a psychological strategy employed in modern cognitive therapy called "psychological distancing." In cognitive therapy, which was originally inspired by Stoicism, it's assumed that before we can challenge negative patterns of thinking, we have to spot them first, and interrogate our own thoughts. In Stoicism, the first step in responding to troubling desires and emotions is to gain psychological distance from them by reminding ourselves that the impressions they're based upon are just impressions, just thoughts, and not to assume that they are what matches reality, when we consider the situation more carefully.

One quotation from Epictetus puts this so well that it is still taught to clients in cognitive therapy today: "It is not the things themselves that disturb people but their judgements about those things" (*Handbook*, 5). The two passages from Marcus quoted below for the evening reflection convey the same point. Epictetus repeatedly advised his students that remembering this Stoic principle could help them to avoid being carried away by their troubling emotions and desires. We should be alert for the early-warning signs of problematic emotions and desires, which are often habitual and barely conscious. When we spot these initial signs, which often take the form of certain bodily sensations or internal feelings, we should quickly try to identify the initial impressions and underlying value judgements that are causing them.

For example, the modern cognitive model of anxiety, which is derived from Stoic psychology, says that anxiety is caused by a thought or judgement along the lines of "Something bad is going to happen and I won't be able to cope with it." Distancing would consist in saying "I notice I'm having the thought 'something bad is going to happen' and that's upsetting me," rather than being swept along by the impression that something bad is going to happen and allowing your fear to escalate unnecessarily.

One of the simplest ways of responding to troubling thoughts, when you spot their early-warning signs, is to postpone doing anything in response to them. Modern researchers have found that this can reduce the frequency, intensity and duration of worry episodes by about 50% on average. Epictetus gave very similar advice to his Stoic students, nearly two thousand years ago. He says when we spot initial troubling impressions, especially if they seem overwhelming, we should remind ourselves that these are just thoughts and wait a while before giving them any further attention, or deciding what action to take. In modern anger management, this is sometimes called a "taking a time-out" strategy. The Stoics talked about withholding our “assent,” or agreement, from upsetting initial impressions.

You’ve already started monitoring your thoughts, actions, and feelings, and distinguishing between things under your control and not. From this point onward during Stoic Week, try to catch the early-warning signs of strong desires or upsetting emotions. Pause to give yourself thinking space and to gain psychological distance from your initial impressions. If your feelings are particularly strong or difficult to deal with, postpone thinking about them any further until you’ve had a chance to calm down, which may be during your evening meditation. Then, try asking yourself the following three questions:

1. Most importantly, ask yourself whether the things that are upsetting you are within your power or not, and if they’re not, accept this fact, and remind yourself that such things are not fundamentally important in the way that virtue is.
2. Ask yourself what a perfectly wise and virtuous person would do when faced with the same problem or situation. The Stoics used the ideal of the “wise person” or “sage” in just this way. Think about someone you know personally or someone you know by reputation, who comes closest to this ideal, and take them as your model in your reflections.
3. Ask yourself what strengths or resources nature has given you to deal with the situation, e.g., do you have the capacity for patience and endurance? How might using those capacities help you deal with this problem more wisely?

Evening Text for Reflection:

“Get rid of the judgement and you have got rid of the idea. “I have been harmed”; get rid of the idea, “I have been harmed,” and you have got rid of the harm itself.” (*Meditations*, 4.7)

“All turns on judgement, and that is up to you. So when you want to do this, get rid of the judgement, and then, as though you had passed the headland, the sea will be calm and all will be still, and there won’t be a wave in the bay.” (*Meditations*, 12.22)

Practice the Late Evening Meditation

PHIL201-01 Philosophical Classics I

Live Like a Stoic
Day 4: Virtue

Post your reflections here after reading the selected passages below and practicing the assigned exercises for today.

Morning Text for Reflection:

"If you find anything in human life better than justice, truthfulness, self-control, courage… turn to it with all your heart and enjoy the supreme good that you have found . . . but if you find all other things to be trivial and valueless in comparison with virtue give no room to anything else, since once you turn towards that and divert from your proper path, you will no longer be able without inner conflict to give the highest honour to that which is properly good. It is not right to set up as a rival to the rational and social good [virtue] anything alien its nature, such as the praise of the many or positions of power, wealth or enjoyment of pleasures." (Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 3.6)

Practice the Early Morning Meditation

Today's Exercises: Virtue and Values-Clarification

The Stoics inherit from the ancient tradition the idea that the core virtues are wisdom, moderation, courage, and justice. They are also virtue ethicists in claiming that virtue is the only thing that is fundamentally valuable, and the sole basis for real happiness. Other things that people pursue in search of happiness, such as health and property, are things that human beings naturally desire; but, in comparison with virtue, they are relatively unimportant, even "matters of indifference" according to the Stoics. As we have seen this semester, other ancient philosophers thought that virtue was an important element in a happy life; the Stoics were exceptional in claiming that it was the only thing needed for happiness. To have a good life, in other words, it is only necessary to be a good person.

Why did the Stoics give the virtues such importance? Aren't other things also important, such as the welfare of our family, good health and a measure of material prosperity?

For the Stoics, the virtues are the qualities that enable us to live a fully human life. They are features of understanding and character, and ways of dealing with other people, which make us fully human, that is, rational and social beings in a complete sense. Taken together, the four core virtues (wisdom, moderation,

courage, justice) are intended to cover the main areas of human expertise or "living well": rational understanding, management of emotions and desires, proper treatment of others. The Stoics saw the virtues as a matched set, which were mutually supporting, so that you could not have one virtue without having the others too. They also recognised there were many subdivisions of these four virtues, and that they could be understood from a number of different perspectives.

The virtues are seen by the Stoics as forms of expertise in living. So if you have the virtues, you will be good at doing everything else in life. (Including looking after your health, property and the welfare of your family or friends.) But if you lack them, you will not be good at doing any of these other things, and will make mistakes in your handling of life. That is why the Stoics saw virtue as the only thing that is needed for happiness, in comparison with which other things are relatively unimportant and without fundamental value.

The Stoics acknowledged that achieving virtue in the full sense was extremely difficult. In that sense, the "wise person," who has all the virtues, remains very much an ideal. However, the Stoics also believed that all human beings are in principle capable of achieving virtue and that this should be our overall goal in life. They also thought that a life centred on aspiration and progress towards virtue was a far better life than one directed at other goals, such as gaining material wealth or power for their own sake. This means that the Stoic life is an ongoing journey towards virtue, which is how Marcus presents his own life in the first book of the *Meditations*, as illustrated in Monday's daily exercise. The morning text for today also shows the importance for Marcus of directing his life towards developing the virtues rather than towards gaining external things such as fame or wealth.

Let's suppose that you find this view of virtue attractive in general but want to know more about what it means for you personally and how you could live your life in this way. One way of reflecting on this is by a technique sometimes used in modern psychological therapy and counselling called "values-clarification." There are two main aspects of this method. One is reflecting on what our core values are, what qualities we genuinely think are most important for leading a good human life. The other is asking ourselves whether our actions on a day-to-day basis actually match our ethical beliefs, and if not, how we can begin to change our actions to match our values. Some modern psychotherapists think that psychological problems may stem from a mismatch between our actions and what we value, and that bringing the two closer together is crucial for helping us to get free of these psychological problems. Stoics also think it is very important to reflect honestly on your core values: Epictetus' advice to "examine your impressions" is partly about this. Stoics like Epictetus, Marcus and Seneca also

stress the vital importance of making sure that your day-to-day actions match your core ethical convictions. This may be part of what the founders of Stoicism meant by "living in agreement with nature," including our own rational and moral nature; later Stoics certainly placed great importance on what today we tend to call "integrity."

As a first move in this direction, here are two exercises that might help. First, use these questions to clarify your core values:

- What's ultimately the most important thing in life to you?
- What do you want your life to "stand for" or "be about"?
- What would you most like your life to be remembered for after you've died?
- What sort of thing do you most want to spend your time doing?
- What sort of person do you most want to be in your various relationships and roles in life, e.g. as a friend, daughter or son, sibling, student, at work, or in life generally?
- You could also ask how far your core values match what the ancient Stoics meant by "virtue," especially character strengths such as wisdom, justice, courage, and moderation.

Second, look at all your answers to the first set of questions and ask how far your real actions on a day-to-day basis match your core values. If they do not match completely (and it would be surprising if they did!), think about ways in which you could bring the two closer together. Think of one specific activity you could be doing (but aren't), which would help you develop towards expressing your core values or which would enable you to express them more fully.

Evening Text for Reflection:

"Every habit and faculty is formed or strengthened by the corresponding act — walking makes you walk better, running makes you a better runner. If you want to be literate, read, if you want to be a painter, paint. Go a month without reading, occupied with something else, and you'll see what the result is. And if you're laid up a mere ten days, when you get up and try to walk any distance, you'll find your legs barely able to support you. So if you like doing something, do it regularly; if you don't like doing something, make a habit of doing something different. The same goes for the affairs of the mind . . . So if you don't want to be hot-tempered, don't feed your temper, or multiply incidents of anger. Suppress the first impulse to be angry, then begin to count the days on which you don't get angry. 'I used to be angry every day, then only every other day, then every third . . .' If you resist it a whole month, offer the gods a sacrifice, because the vice begins to weaken from

day one, until it is wiped out altogether. ‘I didn’t lose my temper this day, or the next, and not for two, then three months in succession.’ If you can say that, you are now in excellent health, believe me.” (Epictetus, *Discourses*, 2.18)

Practice the Late Evening Meditation

PHIL201-01 Philosophical Classics I

Live Like a Stoic
Day 5: Relationships

Post your reflections here after reading the selected passages below and practicing the assigned exercises for today.

Morning Text for Reflection:

"Say to yourself first thing in the morning: I shall meet with people who are meddling, ungrateful, violent, treacherous, envious, and unsociable. They are subject to these faults because of their ignorance of what is good and bad. But I have recognized the nature of the good and seen that it is the right, and the nature of the bad and seen that it is the wrong, and the nature of the wrongdoer himself, and seen that he is related to me, not because he has the same blood or seed, but because he shares in the same mind and portion of divinity. So I cannot be harmed by any of them, as no one will involve me in what is wrong. Nor can I be angry with my relative or hate him. We were born for cooperation, like feet, like hands, like eyelids, like the rows of upper and lower teeth. So to work against each other is contrary to nature; and resentment and rejection count as working against someone." (Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 2.1)

Practice the Early Morning Meditation

Today's Exercises: Relationships with Other People and Society

Stoics are sometimes mistakenly seen as rather cold and detached from other people. This is a puzzling view, as Stoicism, more than any other ancient philosophy, stresses that human beings are naturally inclined to care for other people and to become involved in their communities. This is a key part of their theory about human ethical development (discussed on day 1).

Stoics think that human beings, like other animals, instinctively feel affection and care for others of our kind, above all our close family members. They also think human beings are naturally capable of deepening and extending this instinctive affection in rational and sociable ways: for instance, by engaging in family life or deep friendships and by involvement in local or national communities. Another very distinctive idea — and an unusual one in ancient Greece and Rome — is that we should extend this attitude of care to all human beings as such, seeing them as our brothers and sisters and as fellow-citizens in a kind of world-community. We have this kinship and co-citizenship because we are all naturally social animals, capable of reason, and of developing towards virtue and wisdom.

Marcus' *Meditations* are rich in reflections about interpersonal and social relationships. They also have a lot to say about the positive or good emotions that form part of a human life centred on virtue, as opposed to the negative and destructive emotions or "passions" based on ethical mistakes. Like other Stoics, Marcus believes that instead of eliminating emotions from our lives entirely, we should transform our natural sense of affection, in the light of reason and virtue. Here is one such passage:

> "Whenever you want to cheer yourself up, think of the good qualities of those who live with you: such as the energy of one, the decency of another, the generosity of another, and some other quality in someone else. There is nothing so cheering as the images of the virtues displayed in the characters of those who live with you, and grouped together as far as possible. So you should keep them ready at hand." (Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 6.48)

Book 1 of the *Meditations*, discussed on Monday, conveys very powerfully Marcus' affection for those who have shared his life and helped him understand the qualities that are really worthwhile in a human life. Thoughtful and affectionate care for others figures prominently in the qualities he picks out in the individuals he remembers in this way.

Marcus, like other Stoics, refers often to the "brotherhood of humankind," "citizenship of the world," and the idea that we are all part of a larger body of human beings or rational and social animals. He uses these ideas in two ways that are especially striking and may be helpful to us too.

He draws on these ideas in situations when other people are acting towards him in a hostile or negative manner — in a way that might have provoked him to feel emotions such as anger or resentment. He reminds himself that their behaviour stems from mistakes about what really matters in life and that, if they could be led to a better understanding, they would not act in this way. As in today's Morning Reflection, he reminds himself that these people — like everyone else — are essentially his brothers or sisters or parts of a single body of humankind, and that he cannot be angry with or hate those who are his own kin. Often he speaks of the good will or good intentions towards such people which result from his thinking about them in this way.

Marcus also draws on these ideas in reflecting on his social and political role, as Roman emperor. Like Seneca, he uses the image of "dual citizenship": "As Antoninus [his Roman family name], my city and fatherland is Rome, as a human being, it is the universe. It is only what benefits these cities which is good for me" (*Meditations*, 6.44). For Marcus, this serves to put his imperial status in a broader, cosmic perspective and to provide a moral framework and "reality-check." Elsewhere, he reminds himself: "Take care you are not turned into a Caesar, or

stained with the purple; these things do happen" (*Meditations*, 6.30). By being "turned into a Caesar," or "stained with the purple" (the purple robe worn by emperors), he means, being turned into a tyrant, who abuses his power. He also presents his political ideal as being "a state based on equality before the law, which is administered according to the principles of equality and freedom of speech, and of a monarchy which values above all the liberty of its subjects" (*Meditations*, 1.14).

Marcus' adult life was intensely political. From the age of 17, he was first the chosen successor of the emperor and then emperor himself for nearly twenty years. Many of his predecessors and successors as emperor (including his own son, Commodus) became tyrants, whereas Marcus was mostly seen by Romans of the time as a wise and benevolent ruler. The *Meditations* suggest that one of the things that helped him to act in this way was his belief that he was living his life as part of the community of humankind (rational and social animals) and trying to maintain the ethical aspirations that go along with this. Other Stoic thinkers refer to the idea of humanity's brotherhood as a way of setting higher than normal ethical standards for ourselves in our everyday business dealings with others, such as buying food or selling property.

The Circles of Hierocles: here is an exercise that you might use to explore and develop a similarly philanthropic attitude. It is based not on Marcus, but on the advice of another Stoic of the second century CE, Hierocles.

Hierocles suggested we should think of ourselves as living in a series of concentric circles, and that we should try to "draw the circles somehow toward the centre." He explained that, "The right point will be reached if, through our own initiative, we reduce the distance of the relationship with each person." He also suggests using verbal techniques such as calling one's cousins "brother," and one's uncles and aunts "father" or "mother."

The following visualisation or meditation technique is loosely based on Hierocles' comments:

1. Close your eyes and take a few moments to relax and focus your attention on the things you're about to visualise.
2. Picture a circle of light surrounding your body and take a few moments to imagine that it symbolises a growing sense of affection toward your own true nature as a rational animal, capable of wisdom and virtue, the chief good in life.
3. Now imagine that circle is expanding to encompass members of your family, or others who are very close to you, towards whom you now project an attitude of family affection, as if they were somehow parts of your own body.

4. Next, imagine that circle expanding to encompass people you encounter in daily life, perhaps colleagues you work alongside, and project natural affection toward them, as if they were members of your own family.
5. Again, let the circle expand further to include everyone in the country where you live, imagining that your affection is spreading out toward them also, insofar as they are rational animals akin to you.
6. Imagine the circle now growing to envelop the entire world and the whole human race as one, allowing this philosophical and philanthropic affection to encompass every other member of the human race.

Try to think of other people, as Marcus puts it, as if we were all limbs or organs of a single organism, extending the sense of oneness you have with your own body, to encompass others, and allowing yourself to feel less separate or alienated from them. Do you find this a helpful exercise in conceiving of your relations with others? How does it affect the way you engage with others?

Evening Text for Reflection:

"One type of person, whenever he does someone else a good turn, is quick in calculating the favour done to him. Another is not so quick to do this; but in himself he thinks about the other person as owing him something and is conscious of what he has done. A third is in a sense not even conscious of what he has done, but is like a vine which has produced grapes and looks for nothing more once it has produced its own fruit, like a horse which has run a race, a dog which has followed the scent, or a bee which has made its honey. A person who has done something good does not make a big fuss about it, but goes on to the next action, as a vine goes on to produce grapes again in season. So you should be one of those who do this without in a sense being aware of doing so." (Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 5.6)

Practice the Late Evening Meditation

PHIL201-01 Philosophical Classics I

Live Like a Stoic
Day 6: Resilience

Post your reflections here after reading the selected passages below and practicing the assigned exercises for today.

Morning Text for Reflection:

"Be like the headland on which the waves break constantly, which still stands firm while the foaming waters are put to rest around it. 'It is my bad luck that this has happened to me!' On the contrary, say, 'It is my good luck that, although this has happened to me, I can bear it without getting upset, neither crushed by the present nor afraid of the future'" (Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 4.49).

Practice the Early Morning Meditation

Today's Exercises: Resilience and Preparation for Adversity

The Stoics believe that as we develop ethically so our emotional life will change accordingly. And gradually we will come to have what they call the "good emotions," that is, positive or healthy emotions such as joy and wishing others well, rather than negative and misguided emotions such as irrational anger and fear.

However, the Stoics recognise that getting to this point requires a good deal of training and reflection, and one of the exercises they propose for this is the premeditation of future adversity. We need to remember that the Stoics did not think that many of the things people worry about are actually "bad" things: the only thing that is really bad is losing your moral integrity or becoming a vicious person. We naturally fear some situations, such as risk to our life; but even this is not "bad" in the full sense, just something we would naturally prefer not to happen. It is not unqualifiedly bad for the Stoics, because many of us will willingly give up our lives for the sake of something we deeply love or value.

There are numerous references in the surviving Stoic writings to a strategy of anticipating future catastrophes and preparing to face them by imagining them in advance. Typical examples include bereavement, poverty, exile, illness, and, perhaps most importantly of all, one's own death.

Marcus refers to death, especially his own future death, very often in the *Meditations*, and some people have mistakenly thought he was morbidly obsessed with death. Marcus was probably in the last years of his life (he died at 59) when

he was writing the *Meditations* and he may indeed have been aware of the imminence of his death. But he was also drawing on the well-established Stoic method of facing catastrophes by imagining them. Also, he often reminds himself that the looming presence of death does not prevent him from continuing with the most important human "work," of trying to make progress in virtue and wisdom. Indeed, the way you face your own death can become an integral part of this "work." This passage is typical: "Strive to live only the life that is your own, that is to say, your present life; then you will be able to pass at least the time that is left to you until you die in calm and kindliness, and as one who is at peace with the guardian-spirit [reason] that dwells within him" (*Meditations*, 12.3). Today's evening text for meditation expresses the same idea.

By repeatedly picturing future catastrophes — at least what are generally regarded as catastrophes — Stoics aimed to reduce anxiety about them, just as exposure therapy in cognitive behavioural therapy today aims to reduce the anxiety attached to specific situations. We know from modern psychological research that the best way to overcome anxiety is to expose yourself to the feared situation in reality, repeatedly and for prolonged periods. However, psychologists have also established that simply picturing the same event in the mind, repeatedly and for long enough, often works almost as well.

To begin with, you should not do this with anything that might lead you to bite off more than you can chew. Don't imagine things that are deeply personal or traumatic until you're definitely ready to do so without feeling overwhelmed. Begin by working on small things that upset you. Don't let yourself worry about them. Just try to picture the worst-case scenario patiently, and wait for your emotions to abate naturally. Remind yourself of the Stoic principles you've learned, in particular, the maxim that people are upset not by external events but by their own judgements about them, particularly value-judgements that place too much importance on things that are not under their direct control.

Try to spend at least 20-30 minutes doing this during your day. (If you cannot spare this much time then it's essential that you pick a much milder topic to work on, which generates a level of emotion low enough to naturally abate within fewer minutes.)

You might find it helpful to keep a record of your experiences as follows:

1. **Situation.** What is the upsetting situation that you're imagining?
2. **Emotions.** How does it make you feel when you picture it as if it's happening right now? How strong is the feeling (0-100%)?
3. **Duration.** How long (in minutes) did you manage to sit with it and patiently expose yourself to the event in your imagination?

4. **Consequence.** How strong was the upsetting feeling at the end (0-100%)? What else did you feel or experience by the end?
5. **Analysis.** Has your perspective changed on the upsetting event? Is it really as awful as you imagined? How could you potentially cope if it did happen? What's under your control in this situation and what isn't?

If your anxiety level hasn't reduced to at least half its peak level then you might need to pick an easier subject, or else spend more time on this exercise to get its full benefit. Use the natural "wearing off" of upsetting feelings as an opportunity to reevaluate the situation in a more rational and detached manner, i.e. from a more *philosophical* perspective. What do you think a Stoic like Seneca, Epictetus, or Marcus Aurelius would make of the same situation? How might you view it differently if you had made more progress towards developing the virtues of wisdom, justice, courage and self-control? Take time to note down what you can learn from this experience.

Evening Text for Reflection:

"At every hour give your full concentration, as a Roman and a man, to carrying out the task in hand with a scrupulous and unaffected dignity and affectionate concern for others and freedom and justice, and give yourself space from other concerns. You will give yourself this if you carry out each act as if it were the last of your life, freed from all randomness and passionate deviation from the rule of reason and from pretence and self-love and dissatisfaction with what has been allotted to you. You see how few things you need to master to be able to live a smoothly flowing life: the gods will ask no more from someone who maintains these principles" (Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 2.5).

Practice the Late Evening Meditation

PHIL201-01 Philosophical Classics I

Live Like a Stoic
Day 7: Nature

Post your reflections here after reading the selected passages below and practicing the assigned exercises for today.

Morning Text for Reflection:

"The works of the gods are full of providence, and the works of fortune are not separate from nature or the interweaving and intertwining of the things governed by providence. Everything flows from there. Further factors are necessity and the benefit of the whole universe, of which you are a part. What is brought by the nature of the whole and what maintains that nature is good for each part of nature. Just as the changes in the elements maintain the universe, so too do the changes in the compounds" (Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 2.3).

Practice the Early Morning Meditation

Today's Exercises: Nature and the View from Above

On our final day we think about our place within nature as a whole. Anyone who reads Marcus' *Meditations* is likely to be struck by his many references to the idea of seeing himself as part of a larger cosmic whole, governed by divine Providence — for instance, in today's morning text for reflection. He often stresses the vastness of space and time and the smallness of human lives within this. He also sometimes urges himself to adopt a view from above or from a cosmic perspective.

Why does Marcus think it is helpful to think about nature as a whole in this way? Partly this is a way to purge us of our over-attachment to trivial things by expanding our minds beyond their habitual, narrow perspective. We're less upset about things when we picture them as occurring in a tiny corner of the cosmos: like a grain of sand in cosmic space and the mere turn of a screw in terms of cosmic time. This helps us realise that we are, in reality, very small parts of the natural universe and that we do, in fact, have a very temporary existence within this larger whole.

But there is also a more positive dimension in Stoic thought about this topic. The Stoics believed that the universe as a whole exhibited qualities which could provide exemplary moral norms for human beings trying to lead a good life. The qualities they attributed to the universe as a whole were order, structure, and rationality on the one hand and providential care on the other. Order and

structure were shown in the repeated patterns of nature, such as the regular movements of the planetary system, the alternation of day and night, the cycle of the seasons, and the growth and regeneration of living things. Providential care was shown in the fact that all species, including human beings, have the in-built natural capacity and instinctive desire to maintain their own existence and to propagate and care for others of their kind. So, in aiming to carry out the two strands of ethical development natural for human beings discussed on Monday — the pursuit of virtue/excellence and care for others — Stoics think it is helpful to reflect on these features of nature as a whole and to think about yourself as part of a larger natural pattern.

Can we moderns share this view of nature and derive anything useful from it? Of course, the modern scientific worldview is very different from the Stoic one. On the other hand, at the very general (and by our standards non-scientific) level at which the Stoics thought about nature as a whole, it may still be possible for us too to see nature as ordered and providential. Also, we moderns have reasons the Stoics did not have that make it rather urgent for us to think about ourselves as part of a larger natural whole. Since the 19th century, human beings have done great damage to the environment and the ecology of the planet, which we are now belatedly trying to repair. We have also put at risk the survival of many species of animals and plants with which we share this planet. So we have very forceful reasons to want to recover a view of ourselves as parts of a larger whole, and to try to enable nature to regain its proper character as ordered and providential. Reflecting on the Stoic view of humanity as part of a larger cosmic whole may help us to do this, in addition to the reasons that the Stoics themselves had for taking this view.

Here is a passage from Marcus that expresses vividly the theme of adopting a view from above, from a cosmic standpoint. Marcus' main focus here is on standing back from your normal perspective and seeing the relative smallness and transience of human life. But elsewhere he also stresses the positive ethical dimension of viewing yourself as part of nature:

"A fine reflection from Plato. One who would converse about human beings should look on all things earthly as though from some point far above, upon herds, armies, and agriculture, marriages and divorces, births and deaths, the clamour of law courts, deserted wastes, alien peoples of every kind, festivals, lamentations, and markets, this intermixture of everything and ordered combination of opposites." (Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 7.48)

The "View from Above" is a guided meditation that is aimed at instilling a sense of the "bigger picture," and of understanding your role within nature and in the wider community of humankind. You can practise a visualisation of the "View from Above" with headphones by listening to the audio recording here. (The

feedback data gathered for Stoic Week over the last few years shows that this tends to be one of the most popular exercises for participants.) How does adopting this view on your place in nature change your perspective on your everyday actions, if at all?

Evening Text for Reflection:

"I travel along nature's way until I fall down and take my rest, breathing out my last into the air, from which I draw my daily breath, and falling down to that earth from which my father drew his seed, my mother her blood, and my nurse her milk, and from which for so many years I have taken my daily food and drink, the earth which carries my footsteps and which I have used to the full in so many ways" (Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 5.4).

Practice the Late Evening Meditation

Live (a bit) Like A Monk Exercises

(For PHIL221 Fall 2018)

It is not really possible to live completely like a monk the middle of a college semester, or at least not the kind of monk whose way of living involves withdrawal from ordinary life in the secular world. However, there are elements of monastic life that can adopted or tried out individually. Some monks have a lifestyle that is extremely austere and should not be imitated, at least without medical approval. (For example, some of the monks of the Egyptian desert are said to have lived on bread and water apart from Sundays and to have slept only an hour a night. You should not attempt this.) The lifestyles of most modern monasteries are generally more balanced and moderate, with set hours for sleep, meals, manual work, study, and prayer, but still seem austere by the standards of most people in the developed world.

Topics and exercises in this handout:

- Some elements of the monastic daily life
    - The schedule of the day
    - Silence
- Corporate and Formal Prayer and Meditation
- Individual Meditation
    - Silence, Mindfulness
    - Contemplative reading: *lectio divina*

The PDF for this document has bookmarks to navigate the sections. In Acrobat, you should be able to display these on the left side of the document.

Elements of Daily Monastic Life

Schedule

Most monks, both Buddhist and Christian, begin the day early – somewhere between 3 and 5 in the morning – with periods of individual and corporate prayer and meditation. They generally also go to bed earlier than college students – somewhere between sundown and 9 in the evening. Some also arise in the middle of the night for a period of prayer or meditation called a vigil.

Some possible changes to try:

- Adjust your schedule to earlier in the day, arising before the sun rises and while others are still asleep. You may be struck by how *still* the world seems at this hour, and it may inspire a new frame of mind. You may find it difficult to stay awake, but many find their minds particularly clear in the early hours of the morning. (In addition to being a good time for the prayer and meditation that is the primary work of monks, it can also be a good time for intense concentration on study and writing, which are also among the principal activities of many monks.)
- If you tend to wake up for a period in the middle of the night, experiment with making something out of this time by praying or meditating in a fashion compatible with your personal commitments. You may find that this is the perfect time for the silence that it is difficult to find during the day in our busy world, and you may also find that doing so allows you to return to sleep more peacefully than if you spent the same time tossing and turning in bed or distracting yourself with social media.
- Try to observe set hours for sleep, rather than fitting it in around your work and social schedule.

Silence

One of the most striking things in visiting a monastery is the *silence*. There is singing or chanting at some of the communal services, but there are no TVs or radios blaring, and people generally pass one another in silence. A few monastic orders take actual vows of silence, but the more important principle is avoidance of *unnecessary* speech – and monks find that most of our speaking is not really necessary. A certain amount is needed for practical tasks done with others, and of course it is necessary in things like classrooms. But it is worth seeing what a day is like without arguments, discussing the news of the day, or even friendly banter. This can be difficult at first: we tend to view silence as space that needs to be filled with speech, and can be uncomfortable when we are together with others and no one is saying anything. (And of course this is more true outside a monastery, where other people do not share the same goals.) But this discomfort may itself teach us something, if we ask ourselves *why* we are uncomfortable, and whether we *should* be uncomfortable.

Some possible changes to try:

- Resolve to spend the day without social media, or only so much as is truly necessary. (If you are expecting an important phone call or message, that is fine. But try to avoid the temptation to feel that every phone call or message requires your immediate attention, and if you can do so, turn off the notification sounds, which are a continual source of distraction.) Instead, devote your attention to inward meditation or be more attentive to what is really going on in the world around you. You may find yourself less distracted and more actively engaged. How does a day without social media affect your frame of mind, your concentration, your work, your ability to be present to others?
- Avoid unnecessary speech. This does not mean you should awkwardly be silent when someone asks you a question. But, when you feel the urge to speak, take a moment to reflect on what words are really necessary and helpful at the present time. (In Buddhist terms, *right* speech.). Avoid conversations in so far as you are able, or be present in such conversations listening to what others say but without speaking yourself, or doing so as little as is possible, and let your speech be guided by love and compassion. In doing this, you may learn things about yourself and others. Try to note the circumstances in which you feel a reflexive impulse to speak or a burning desire to do so. What does this teach you about yourself? What do you observe better about others when you disengage yourself from the need to contribute to the conversation?
- Communal mealtimes can be among the most difficult to observe silence. In Western Christian monasticism, based on the Rule of St. Benedict, the monks remain silent at meals and one monk reads from the Rule or from the Bible for the duration of the meal. If you have headphones, you might try spending mealtimes listening to an edifying podcast from whatever spiritual tradition suits you.

Corporate and Formal Prayer and Meditation

In many Buddhist monasteries, there are periods of chanting or silent meditation where everyone is gathered in one place. Christian monks have set hours for group worship and prayer. It is difficult to fully experience these without the structured environment of a monastery. But there are groups on campus (and in the community) that hold worship services or group practice of meditation, tai chi, etc. And there are podcasts available for daily services in a number of traditions. There is something powerfully engaging about praying, meditating, or doing exercises like tai chi with a group that can be very different from doing them on one's own. If you have the opportunity, seek out such an experience.

Some possible things to try:

- Look over the activities schedule at the University for the upcoming day(s) and find a group activity – a worship service, prayer service, meditation group, or a group doing tai chi or a martial art together. (You should probably pick one that is consistent with your own commitments, though visiting a service from a tradition not your own may be instructive even if you do not fully participate.)
- I do not know if there are comparable Buddhist practices, but Christian monks attend a series of worship services throughout the day collectively called "the Daily Office" that involve prayer and the recitation of Scripture. The stricter orders observe seven of these, beginning before sunrise. I am supplying links below to daily podcasts of the shorter Daily Office of the Episcopal Church, which has services of Morning Prayer, Noonday Prayer, Evening Prayer, and Compline (after dinner and before bed), and links to webpages that provide the texts for these to follow along. You can also search for links to webpages with podcasts or texts for the daily prayer services of other traditions. (If you find good resources, I would be grateful if you would write up a comparable set of links to use in future versions of these exercises.)
-
    - MORNING PRAYER (Rite II)
        - PODCAST: http://www.episcopalchurchingarrettcounty.org/morningprayermp3/today.mp3
        - TEXT: https://www.bcponline.org/DailyOffice/mp2.html
    - NOONDAY PRAYER
        - PODCAST: http://www.episcopalchurchingarrettcounty.org/Noondaymp3/today.mp3
        - TEXT: https://www.bcponline.org/DailyOffice/noonday.html
    - EVENING PRAYER
        - (no podcast currently available)
        - TEXT: https://www.bcponline.org/DailyOffice/ep2.html
    - COMPLINE
        - PODCAST: http://www.episcopalchurchingarrettcounty.org/Complinemp3/today.mp3
        - TEXT: https://www.bcponline.org/DailyOffice/compline.html

Individual Meditation and Prayer

A central focus of the monastic life is on individual prayer and meditation. When we think of "prayer" we often think chiefly of asking for something for ourselves or others – what Christians call "petition" and "intercession" – or compassionate attention to others. This is indeed a part of monastic life. But the more distinctive practices are more silent, and involve cultivation of "mindfulness" or "stillness". There are also types of prayer that are engaged with sacred texts. I shall provide links to a Christian form of this called *Lectio Divina*, which can be adapted to other sacred texts.

Petition and Compassion

- Set aside a period of time when you can be alone and uninterrupted. Sit quietly and let people and situations come to mind. Try to see them clearly and compassionately. If you believe in God, pray for God to meet their needs. If you do not believe in God, dwell on their situation with compassion, willing the best for them.
- You may wish to start a list of people or situations that enter your heart in such a process, or that come to your attention throughout the day. You can then use this intentionally to pray or dwell with compassion upon them at various times throughout the day.

Silence, Stillness, Mindfulness

Below I provide links to instructions for some basic contemplative practices in different Buddhist and Christian lineages. The Buddhist ones have the advantage that they are things one can do without being a Buddhist, while the Christian ones involve prayer to Jesus, which is probably not something one should do if one is not a Christian. Choose one that is suitable for you. These techniques share a great deal in common: sitting quietly, attention to breath, perhaps the use of a short phrase, acknowledging distracting thoughts and letting them go.

It is worthy of note that some traditions also find that the noting of distracting thoughts can also prove beneficial beyond the period of meditation. Becoming aware of *what* thoughts repeatedly intrude into our attempts at mindfulness can teach us something about ourselves. I may find, for example, that I am easily distracted by hunger, or that there is something that I am obsessively anxious about, or be thinking about what someone thinks of me, or that a particular person or situation is on my mind. These may teach me what some of the things are that I, personally, need to address through other techniques of cultivation. It may be useful to make a list of these when you are done with your meditation, or to jot them down in the middle of it. However, during the meditation they should not be dwelt upon, but simply noted and remembered for later. (Some links on the next page.)

Some Buddhist techniques:

Basic breath meditation: https://www.lionsroar.com/category/how-to/

Instructions on Zazen meditation: https://www.lionsroar.com/how-to-practice-zazen/

Instructions on Vipassana meditation: https://www.lionsroar.com/how-to-practice-vipassana-insight-meditation/

Some Christian techniques:

Instructions on the Jesus Prayer from an Eastern Orthodox site: https://www.orthodoxprayer.org/Jesus%20Prayer.html

A somewhat longer Orthodox discussion of the Jesus Prayer from the 19th century spiritual writer Theophan the Recluse: https://www.orthodoxprayer.org/Articles_files/Theophan-Jesus%20Prayer.html

Instruction in repetitive prayer from Franciscan Media (Roman Catholic): https://blog.franciscanmedia.org/franciscan-spirit/2016/02/meditation-prayer-of-the-heart/

Contemplative Reading of the Bible: *Lectio Divina*

Most Christians read the Bible in some fashion, but there are different ways of reading it. One form, called *lectio divina*, is a form of contemplative prayer, in which a short Bible passage is read, and the reader looks for God to speak to her through it and then responds to God. There are some instructions at the site linked to below. The method involves "listening for God" and "speaking to God", but if you do not believe in God, it may still be possible to let a passage "speak to you" and to respond to it from the heart. Likewise, the method can be adapted for the use of sacred texts from one's own tradition. You could, for example, do it with a passage from Confucius or Laozi, or from the Koran or Hebrew Scriptures. If you wish to do it with a Biblical passage and do not know much about the Bible, you could return to a passage from the Gospel of Mark that we read for class which caught your attention.

Brief instructions in Lectio Divina from a website of Carmelite (Catholic) nuns: https://ocarm.org/en/content/lectio/what-lectio-divina