

School for New Learning
DePaul University AI 267
“The Examined Life: A Question of Philosophy”
Tuesday/O’Hare
6/16/09-8/18/09

“The unexamined life is not worth living,” exclaimed the Greek philosopher Socrates, setting the tone for the philosophical quests that have shaped our thought and civilization. “Neither is the examined one,” retorted the German philosopher Schopenhauer 2300 years later, after surveying the prospects of humanity in the modern world. In between these positions are a myriad of speculations that make up the tradition of critical thinking called Western Philosophy.

This quarter, SNL students will take a quick 10-week, around-the-world philosophical tour to sample the writings of some important ancient and modern Eastern and Western philosophers dating from 700 B.C. to 2000 A.D. We will begin with Lao Tzu and Confucius in ancient China; take a look at Hinduism and Buddhism in ancient India; then jump to classical Greece in the fourth century B.C. to read Plato and Aristotle and view the origin of Western Philosophy; then leap forward to 17th century A.D. France to look at the genesis of modern critical philosophy with Descartes; move on to 18th century Germany to think about the foundation of rational ethics with Immanuel Kant; and flee to England and the 19th century utilitarian philosopher John Stuart Mill and the 20th century thinker Bertrand Russell, finally back to France and the Existentialism of Jean Paul Sartre.

Of course, it is impossible to study all these philosophers in any detail, or to touch upon scores of others who have made great philosophical contributions. But through this brief around-the-world tour, students will get a basic overview of some philosophical theories and traditions developed in various regions of the world since the beginning of civilization. Along the way we will discuss some of the enduring questions of metaphysics, epistemology, logic, ethics, language, aesthetics and politics (the seven fields of philosophy) from these different perspectives.

Each week we will read out loud together from the text of these philosophers in a “reading circle.” Each person will read a paragraph or two before the narrative passes to the next person in the reading circle. We will stop along the way to interpret what we are reading, to ask questions and for the Instructor to put the text in the context of the history of philosophy.

We also will look at the tools of critical thinking, including: observation, conceptual analysis, logic, inference, intuition, imagination, metaphor and speculation. Students will use these and other tools to discover and articulate their own stand on several critical philosophical questions that will make up the nine writing assignments of the quarter; and to turn the great questions inward.

After each class, students will think about what we have read, read further on their own, read an on-line biographer of the author or subject, and write a Meditation based on the weekly writing question, a copy of which will be handed in to the Instructor for comment, either on the subject you have written about, or on your writing style. (The Instructor is a professional writer who may be able to make suggestions to strengthen your writing skills and style.)

Plato concluded that the only worthy goal in life is pursuit of “The Good, The True, The Beautiful.” Indeed. But each of us needs to develop critical thinking skills to evaluate our own values and goals. This course will help provide both substance and methods to sharpen our skills of critical thinking and our personal philosophy.

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Competences Offered:

A-4 Can analyze a problem using two different ethical systems.

A-3-A Can interpret experience in relationship to the perspective of a significant thinker or tradition.

A-3-E Can compare substantially different theological or philosophical systems.

Location: O’Hare Campus

Time: Tuesday evenings, June 16 – August 18, 2009
6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Expected Outcomes:

Upon successful completion of this course, the student should have:

1. A broad overview of the history of philosophy and some important thinkers and issues;
2. Familiarity with diverse thinking styles;
3. An ability to think about, discuss and write about, philosophical questions;
4. An ability to organize and present a rational argument and employ critical thinking skills;

5. Experience in relating philosophical questions and thinking to one's own self and society.

Learning Strategies:

1. Formal and informal lecture;
2. Weekly readings in philosophy. Each student will be expected to complete weekly reading assignments and keep a Reading Log of pages read in a spiral notebook. Students should also make a page in the notebook for New Vocabulary words;
3. Weekly writing assignments. Each student will be expected to complete a short, informal, weekly writing assignment based upon the readings. These "Meditations" should be aimed, in part, at the specific competences that a student has signed up to fulfill, and it is the student's responsibility to make sure they do so. These may be hand written or typed. If handwritten, keep a Xerox for your records. See the list of writing questions for your "Meditations";

Meditations may do things like: 1. Identify a specific quote from the text to focus on a major ideas in the reading; 2. Attempt to analyze the quote and concept by trying to define what these ideas mean; 3. Discuss what other ideas might be related to the first idea; 4. Pose some questions for the philosopher/writer of the text to clarify or defend the idea; 5. Or discuss how you think about that idea in the context of their own life.

Or the weekly Meditation based on the reading may take any other direction the student finds interesting and related to ideas.

Each week, the student will bring in a copy of this Meditation to class for the instructor. The Meditation will not be graded, per se, but may be discussed in a small group or full class as a point of departure for a class conversation on the weekly reading. I will categorize it as "Read my comments, then do over," "Good," "Very Good," "Excellent," or occasionally, "Outstanding."

The weekly writing assignment should be a minimum of one page. It may be as long as the student deems necessary to think about the reading and the Meditation writing question.

At the end of the quarter the student will collect all Meditations as a part of the final notebook. They may be written by hand or on a computer, as long as I get a "copy," not the "original."

4. Students will be expected to attend all classes (except for sickness or work travel and to notify the instructor about absences). Reading and writing assignments will be completed despite any absences;

5. Each student will be expected to actively participate in classroom discussions and debates and to seriously think about the assigned issues before attending class;
6. Each student will be expected to turn in a final spiral notebook that collects weekly writing assignments; and includes a weekly Reading Log of essays read; lists new vocabulary words looked up; and includes any class notes or any other reflective thinking/writing about essays or class discussions; plus a final essay section on “What I have learned this quarter.” (I will keep this copy) The notebook will be submitted to the instructor on class 10.

The cycle of class is different from many. We begin with our weekly reading/thinking class session; then on-your-own, you explore the topic/writer introduced in class for a week before the next class, with no prior reading is required; you have a week to read more and write about the philosopher/philosophy we explored in class through the weekly “Meditation.” Then we move on to a new thinker.

**Learning Tools:
(Order only Paperbacks)**

1. *Tao Te Ching* by Lao Tzu, Dover Publications, ISBN 0-486-29792-6, (\$2.50);
2. *The Analects* by Confucius, Dover Publications, ISBN 0-486-28484-0, (\$3);
3. *The Upanishads*, Penguin Classics, ISBN 9780451528483, (\$6.95);
4. *The Wisdom of the Buddha; The Unabridged Dhammapada*, Dover Publications, ISBN 0486411206; (\$2.50);
5. *Six Great Dialogues* by Plato, Dover Publications, ISBN 0486454657, (\$5)
6. *Nicomachean Ethics* by Aristotle, Dover Publications, ISBN 0486400964, (\$3.50)
7. *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy* by Descartes, Dover Publishing, ISBN 0486432521, (\$5.95)
8. *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals* by Immanuel Kant, Dover Publishing, ISBN 048443094, (\$4.95)
11. *Utilitarianism* by John Stuart Mill, Dover Publications, ISBN 0486454223, (\$2.50)
12. *The Problems of Philosophy* by Bertrand Russell, Barnes & Noble Library of Essential Reading, ISBN 139780760756041, (\$6.95)
13. *Existentialism and Human Emotions* by Jean Paul Sartre, Citadel Press Books, ISBN 0-8065-0902-3; (\$9.95).

I have hunted to find the cheapest versions of these texts. Total cost for new books: \$53.75 plus tax, at last year's rate; Used books will cost less; or many of these texts can be found in the library. Also, you can order them on-line by going to the publisher's web site. Also, some of the actual text can be found on line, if you search for it under the author's name.

We will only have time to read only small sections of each book, but this is the best way to get to authentic passages to think about. These also are "Life-Long Learning" resources for your library.

Emphasis in this class is put on reading, writing and thinking about, and discussing the selected text, as we read together. Our procedure is informal, as long as you are actively involved.

But additionally, for "Life-Long Learning," an Internet search engine, like Yahoo.com, can take you to Internet sights that offer biographical and textual documents on all the thinkers discussed in this class, although the text listed above and a notebook are all that you need in this class. You are required to read a short biographical sketch of each thinker.

Evaluation:

Grades will be assigned, based upon:

1. The completion of reading and writing assignments;
2. The quality of oral and written work;
3. The quantity and quality of class participation in discussions;
4. Class attendance.

Time Framework and reading schedule:

Week 1: *Tao Te Ching* by Lao Tzu

Week 2: *The Analects* by Confucius

Week 3: *The Upanishads*

perhaps *The Wisdom of the Buddha*; *The Unabridged Dhammapada*

Week 4: *Six Great Dialogues* by Plato. We will listen to a tape of "Apology," the most famous of Plato's "Dialogues" as we read along silently. Time permitting we will read some key passages from other famous Platonic dialogues *Symposium* or *The Republic*.

Week 5: *Nicomachean Ethics* by Aristotle

Week 6: *Meditations on First Philosophy* by Descartes

Week 7: *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals* by Immanuel Kant

Week 8: *Utilitarianism* by John Stuart Mill,

Week 9: *The Problems of Philosophy* by Bertrand Russell

Week 10: *Existentialism and Human Emotions* by Jean Paul Sartre

Weekly Meditation/Writing Questions

Week 1: First, what is “The Way” which Lao Tzu sought? What adjectives does he use? What else do you think about it? Next, what is the most simple, intuitive “Way” that you follow, or hear calling you, if you listen? Or, what is “The Way” of the Cosmos? And, what is “The Way” you lead your life?

Week 2: For Confucius, what Virtues or admirable characteristics does the “The Good Man” exhibit? What about the Good ruler or good government?

And perhaps, compose one/two/three Confucian aphorisms about moral, political, spiritual truths or beliefs in the modern world. For example: “The Rich Man takes a long lunch. So does the poor man.”

Week 3: Pick two/three/four quotes about the nature of human existence or the path of spiritual development from the *Upanishads* and meditate in writing about what they mean and if they could have any relevance in the modern world? Why were you attracted to these ideas?

Week 4: If you were on the Athenian jury of 399 B.C. hearing the case of “Athens v Socrates,” would you find Socrates guilty? If you were on a Chicago jury hearing the same case, how would you vote? Use three/five quotes or more from “Apology” to support your decision if you were on the ancient jury.

Week 5: Make a list of the human characteristics that Aristotle calls “Virtues.” Pick two of these Virtues, with a quote from Aristotle, and meditate on why it is “good” or admirable in a person? What does it mean, for example, to be Wise? What does it mean to be Just? Why is moderation a virtue? (Or think about Aristotle’s “Golden Mean.”) Or pick other Aristotelian Virtues. What qualities does the Superior or Magnanimous Man exhibit? Or make a list of traits the contemporary, 21st century culture considers to be Virtues? What makes them admirable?

Week 6: Sit in silence for a few minutes. (Buddha thought this is one of the hardest things to do.) Descartes says by pure thinking, you can find your Self, perhaps your Soul, your “I” and that you can found a philosophy upon this contact or knowledge. Can you find your

self/soul/I? What is it like? What is it or is it made of? David Hume said that there is no real existing “I.” Hume thought the self/soul was the projection of imagination mixing images of experience, habit, custom, and memory together, but there is no real self or soul at all.

Or, battle with one of the classic “proofs of the Existence of God,” from St. Thomas Aquinas’ “Five Ways,” or St. Anselm or Descartes’ “Ontological Proof.” Both can be found online.

Week 7: State Kant’s “Categorical Imperative,” the CI. Take two/three contemporary moral problems to test with the Categorical Imperative. State the moral principle that is involved with the action you propose, such as “Should I cheat on my taxes?” “Should we use techniques of torture to get information in defense of National Security?” “Is capital punishment morally right?” “Should hand guns be banned?” Or pick your own example of a moral issue in the news.

First, state the moral issue involved. Second, Can you “rationally will that that principle could become a universal law of human conduct” as the Categorical Imperative stipulates? Why/why not?

Then conclude, does the C.I allow or condemn that principle as a morally permissible/recommended (rational) action? What about the opposite action: “I should pay my taxes,” “I should/shouldn’t eat meat on Fridays” and so forth.

Week 8: Apply Mill’s “Principle of Utility” (“the Principle of Happiness”) to two/three moral dilemmas. “Should I get a divorce?” “Should I steal from my employer if I don’t get caught?” “Should I start a rumor about a former friend?” “Is capital punishment right?” “Should police officers shoot to kill armed and attacking or fleeing suspects?” “Should we tax the rich to help the poor?” “Is torture of terrorists moral?” Or make up another example.

Argue each side of the equation of whether the action promotes more/less happiness for those affected by the action. Does the Principle of Utility morally approve or disapprove of these actions?

Which is a better moral principle, The Categorical Imperative or the Principle of Utility? Why?

Week 9: What is Bertrand Russell’s definition or conception of “knowledge?” How do we get knowledge? Find three/four Russell quotes from the text and analyze them.

Or:

Week 10: What is Existentialism according to Jean Paul Sartre? Assemble three/four quotes from Sartre and think about them in writing.

About the Instructor:

R. Craig Sautter is a poet, writer, editor, publisher, and political media consultant. He received an M.A. in philosophy from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. For the past 28 years, he has taught courses in philosophy, politics, history, literature, and creative

writing at the School for New Learning. During the winter he also teaches classes in “Critical Thinking and Ethics” at Miami Dade College.

Sautter is author or coauthor of 10 books and numerous articles, including for the academic journal, *Teaching Philosophy*. (You can view three of his books at www.presidentialconventions.com) He is a past president of The Society of Midland Authors. Twice, he has been cited by DePaul University for “Excellence in Teaching,” and in 1998, he was presented with the School for New Learning’s “Lifelong Learning Award.” He believes that meaningful learning is student-centered and should qualitatively enhance each student’s life.

Contacting the Instructor:

The best way to contact the instructor about questions or class absences is to e-mail him at rcsautter@aol.com. You first should ask your fellow students questions, especially if you miss a class. (We will exchange emails and phone numbers.) In an emergency: 773-262-5806.