

Philosophy 169:

Eastern and Western Philosophy

Reason, Suffering, and the Self

T/H 4:15-5:30 Walsh 498

Instructor: Marcus Hedahl

Office: New North 237

Office Hours: Thursdays 2-3 Midnight Mug or by appointment

Just let me know – we'll find a time that works!

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Course Description

Some claims that have played a central role in the development of certain eastern philosophies (such as Buddhism and Daoism) are regarded as heterodoxy in the West. For example, whereas Descartes famously argued that the most fundamental belief about which he was directly and non-inferentially certain was that he existed, the belief in *anatman* (or, no-self) lies at the heart of traditional Buddhist philosophy. From no-self and idealism (rather than materialism) to arguments about the cause of suffering and the limits of reason, topics that have typically been found on the fringes of western philosophy have played a prominent role in several eastern philosophies.

This course is designed to critically examine these claims: the cause of suffering, no self, non-being, and the denial of non-contradiction. These are claims that are in many ways central to questions about who we are and how we ought to live, claims that many of us in the west have never thought to question. The course will include readings from traditional eastern philosophies (E.g., Buddhist sutras, *Dao de ching*, Zen sayings) in order to better understand how these claims fit within specific philosophical systems. This course will also involve readings from classic western philosophy (E.g., Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus) in hopes of better understanding why these claims seem counter-intuitive to many western readers. The central enterprise of the course, however, will be an examination of recent defenses of these traditionally eastern claims by western philosophers such as Perry, Siderits, and Parfit; as well as, to a lesser degree, recent criticisms of these claims by western philosophers such as Korsgaard.

Assessment will include 3 two-page papers, a final paper, group presentations, and blackboard discussions.

Objectives

Through participation in this class, we will engage in philosophical investigation into ancient philosophy with a focus on the claims of Eastern Philosophy. To succeed in such an investigation, you should develop the ability to:

- Interpret historical philosophical texts
- Understand the nature and impact of philosophical arguments
- Critically evaluate philosophical positions and arguments
- Reflect on how these philosophical positions impact our lives

- Develop your own philosophical positions and arguments in support of those positions

Texts

Dao De Jing Translated by Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall; Ballantine Books,
ISBN 0-345-44419-1

Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*; Harvard University Press; ISBN 978-0-674-02746-6

Lin-Chi *The Zen teachings of Master Lin Chi: a translation of the Lin- Chi Lu*; Translated by Burton Watson; Columbia University Press; ISBN 978-0-231-11485-1

John Perry, *Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality*; Hackett Publishing;
ISBN 0915144530

Marya Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves*; Cornell University Press; ISBN 0801474175

Mark Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy*; Hackett Publishing; ISBN 0872208737

Between Worlds: A Prelude

Thurs 13 Jan – Between worlds
Syllabus

Tues 18 Jan – Bridging gaps

Lear, *Radical Hope* pp. 1-26,
34-62, 66-73, 82-108,
113-123, 148-154

I Buddhism: Suffering and its Causes

Thurs 20 Jan –Western Pleasures
Epicurus “Principle Doctrines” (BB)
Mill *Utilitarianism* Ch 2 (BB)

Tues 25 Jan – 4 Noble Truths
Siderits Ch 1,2
“Ariyapariyesana Sutra”
(Noble Search) (BB)

Thurs 27 Jan – 4 Noble Truths
“Samannphala Sutra” (BB)
(Ascetic Life)
“Brzyabhereva Sutra” (BB)
(Fear & Dread)

Tues 1 Feb -Western Parallels
Seneca “On the Happy Life” *Selections* (BB)
Epictetus “The Handbook” (BB)

II Buddhism: No Self

Thurs 3 Feb - Plato’s Souls/Selves *BB Disc*
Plato’s *Phaedo* (BB)

Tues 8 Feb – The Self: Issues
Perry, *Dialogue on Personal ID*

Thurs 10 Feb – The Self: Issues
**Schechtman *Constitution
Of Selves* pp. 7-38**

Tues 15 Feb – The Self: Issues
**Schechtman *Constitution
Of Selves* pp. 38-66**

Thurs 17 Feb – The Possibility of No Self
Parfit Ch 10 *Reasons and Persons* (BB)
Geffen *Intro to Buddhism* Ch 6 (BB)

Tues 22 Feb – No Self
Siderits Ch 3,5

Thurs 24 Feb – No Self
Siderits 6
“Mahanidana Sutra” (Discourse on Origination) (BB)

Tues 1 Mar – No Self?
**Chakrabarti, “I Touch What
I Saw” (BB)**

Thurs Mar 3 – No Self?
Korsgaard “Personal Identity & ... Agency” (BB)

Tues 8 Mar –
No Class Spring Break

Thurs 10 Mar-
No Class - Spring Break

III Taoism (and Mahayana Buddhism): Emptiness & The limits of concepts

Tues 15 Mar – Western Concepts
Plato’s Allegory of the Cave (BB)
Aristotle’s Categories (BB)

Thurs 17 Mar – An appropriate manner *BB Disc *
No Class Meeting – read:
Dao De Ching Introduction pp. 11-53

Tues 22 Mar – Dao
Dao De Ching (Stanzas 1-37)

Thurs 24 Mar – An appropriate manner
Dao De Ching (Stanzas 38-81)

Tues 29 Mar - Emptiness
Siderits Ch 7-8
Heart Sutra (BB)

Thurs 31 Mar – Non-Being and Being
Siderits Ch 9
Putnam “Realism and Reasonableness” (BB)

Tues 5 Apr – Empty yet Full
Velleman “Way of Wanton” (BB)
Chekszentmihalyi *Flow*
pp. 45-49 (BB)

Thurs 7 Apr – Synthesis *BB Disc *
Presentations I

IV Zen: The possibility of a true contradiction

Tues 12 Apr – Non-Contradiction
Plato’s Republic *Selection* (BB)
Aristotle’s Metaphysics, *Book Γ* (BB)

Thurs 14 Apr – The Way meets the Blessed One
The Zen teachings of Master Lin Chi
Introduction & Stanzas 1-20

Tues 19 Apr – WMBO
Zen teachings of Lin Chi
Stanzas 21-69

Thurs 21 Apr
No Class Easter Break

Tues 26 Apr – P & ~P ... really
Dialethism Overview (BB)
Miller *Becoming God* - Ch 2 (BB)

Thurs 28 Apr – Synthesis *BB Disc *
Presentations II

Course Requirements and Grading

Daily Class Expectations: I expect you to come to class prepared to discuss the texts, the arguments within them, and most importantly the ideas they present. This means that I will expect you to:

- 1) Have completed the assigned reading
- 2) Have thought about themes raised
- 3) Come with questions and ideas
- 4) Take a stance, but be open-minded and willing to change it
- 5) Come on time
- 6) Turn off / Stow all electronic devices (Laptops, Phones, etc.)

Honor Code: You are expected to uphold the GU honor code in all phases of this class (<http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/honor/system/53516.html>).

Assignments By Area:

All

Reading Questions (10 Sets); Class Participation

Eastern ideas

Group Presentation; Blackboard Discussions (1 post / 4 Comments)

Analytic arguments

3 Short Papers (600-750 words each)

Synthesis

Final paper -- Dialogue (1,500 words minimum)

Assignments By Percentage of Final Grade:

10 % - *Group Presentation*

40 % - *3 Short Papers*

Paper 1 - 10%

Paper 2 - 15%

Paper 3 - 15%

30 % - *Final Dialogue*

20 % - *Participation / Reading questions / Blackboard Discussions*

Assignments By Due Date:

Feb 4 / Feb 7- *Blackboard Discussion #1 Posts / Comments (*)*

Feb 10 or Feb 15 (Your choice) – Paper #1

Mar 1 or Mar 3 (Your choice) – Paper #2

Mar 18 / Mar 21- *Blackboard Discussion #1 Posts / Comments (*)*

Mar 29 or Mar 31 (Your choice) – Paper #2

Apr 7 – Presentations I (**)

Apr 8 / Apr 10- *Blackboard Discussion #1 Posts / Comments (*)*

Apr 28 – Presentations II (**)

Apr 29 / May 1- *Blackboard Discussion #1 Posts / Comments (*)*

May xx (Registrar Assigned Final Day) - *Final Dialogue*

* You will be assigned 1 of 4 dates to provide an original post, and 2 of 4 dates to comment

** You will be assigned a group to present on 1 of 2 dates

1. Class Participation:

Discussion is a fundamental part of philosophy. Some, such as Plato, might go so far as to say discussion is *the* constitutive element of philosophy. Thus, class attendance is mandatory. However, there are, I am certain, many other interesting, significant and even perhaps obligatory conflicts one could have with a given class session. So everyone is allotted three (3) absences, for any reason, without penalty. If you believe that you will miss more than three classes, please let me know as early as possible.

Don't just sit there – say something. Remember, good questions are more important than good answers, and good arguments are more important than simply remembering the facts. I expect every student to contribute to class every week in some way.

1. With a question about something you didn't understand in the reading or the lecture
2. With an answer to a question asked by another student
3. With a clear statement of your disagreement with something in the thinker's view, followed by an explanation of why you disagree
4. With a statement of your agreement with something in the thinker's view, followed by an explanation of why you agree—many times specific examples that illustrate the thinker's point are helpful here
5. With a statement of agreement/disagreement with something someone else in the class has already said, followed by an explanation of why you agree/disagree, and you have to use the name of the person that you're relying on to give you something to say

Please come to class on time. If you enter the classroom after I have finished taking attendance (which is within the first five minutes of class), you will be considered late. Three minor lates equal an unexcused absence. If you are very late (more than 15 minutes), then you are considered absent from that day's class.

I do not assign participation grades for each day or even every week. However, I'll accept requests the week after break for a report on your progress to date, as well as suggestions for improvement.

2. Reading questions:

You should always come to class with questions. However, **on at least 10 occasions, you are required to post 2 written questions on Blackboard.** If you do more than 10, I will count your best 10 entries for this portion of the grade. You can pick any 10 with one restriction (These are half of the days we will meet that are not occupied by some other activity: Presentations, Papers, etc - So in effect you have to do questions every other reading.) **Questions must be posted by noon for the reading for that day.**

Examples of Outstanding questions/topics: (A range)

- “On page 79, Mill states that a person who violates ‘a distinct and assignable obligation’ to others can be punished. However, this view does not seem consistent with his Harm Principle. I was hoping we could discuss what Mill means by this sort of obligation.” [refers to the text and offers a specific question about it]
- “I'd like to discuss Aristotle's view of who can be virtuous. In arguing that a virtuous person must have moral exemplars to emulate, it doesn't seem like he can account for

cases in which persons have difficult childhoods, but still manage to live exemplary lives.” [specific, and raises a counterexample]

Examples of acceptable questions/topics: (B range)

- “I’d like to talk about Aristotle’s view of justice.” [too vague/general]
- “I was wondering what people’s reactions are to Hobbes’s argument for an absolute sovereign.” [this is the start to a good question, but it needs more development. What are you wondering about? Is there a particular aspect of the argument that is strong or weak?]

Examples of Unsatisfactory Questions

- “On what page does Aristotle talk about pride?”—non-philosophical questions generally
- “What does Aristotle mean by ‘virtue?’”—questions that are too vague/large generally
- “I think Aristotle is an idiot, because all he talks about is virtue.”—statements that fail to engage the issues
- “Isn’t Aristotle just talking about the inherent metaphysical fallibility of the human condition” Be clear, do not try to show off in your questions

I do not assign grades for each day or even every week. However, if you request it, I’ll send a brief feedback on your first 1 (or 2) posts. I’ll also accept requests the week after break for a report on your progress to date, as well as suggestions for improvement.

3. Blackboard Discussions:

At the end of each of the four units there will be a blackboard discussion. Specific topics for each discussion will be made available near the end of the unit (at least a week in advance of the date they are due). Each student will be assigned one of the four dates to provide an original post. **Posts are due Friday at 5pm** and should be in the 1-2pp range (~300 - ~600 words). Post need not be polished, paper level writing, but you ought to ensure your points are clean and clear. Posts ought to demonstrate understanding, and much more importantly, a significant level of reflection on the question asked.

Each student will be assigned two of the four dates to provide comments. Each of the two dates on which you are assigned to comment, please comment on at least two different posts (This will be a total of four comments over the course of the semester). Each individual comment ought to be between a paragraph and a page (~100 - ~250 words). **Comments are due Monday at noon.** Comments ought to demonstrate understanding of the question asked, and more importantly the post’s contribution to that question, as well as some reflection on that contribution.

4. Papers and Presentations will be described in detail closer to their respective due dates.