

LIFE, DEATH, FREEDOM
A Comparative Introduction to Philosophy:
The Classical Greek, Indian and Chinese Traditions

Course: PHIL 100-03
Semester: Spring 2014
Professor: Peter Groff
Times: TR 9:30-10:52 am
Location: Coleman 251

Office: Vaughn Lit. 227
Phone: x. 73130
Office hours: TR 11:00 am-12:00 pm
or by appointment
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Required texts:

Plato, *Meno* (Focus Philosophical Library)
Plato, *Phaedo* (Focus Philosophical Library)
Epicurus, *The Epicurus Reader* (Hackett)
Eliot Deutsch, *Advaita Vedanta: A Philosophical Reconstruction* (University of Hawaii Press)
Christopher W. Gowans, *Philosophy of the Buddha* (Routledge)
Confucius, *The Essential Analects* (Hackett)
Zhuangzi, *Basic Writings* (Columbia University Press)

Some additional readings will be provided as PDFs posted on our course's Moodle page.

Course Description:

“We are on the road from the evening glow of European philosophy
to the dawn of world philosophy.”

Karl Jaspers

This section of PHIL 100 is designed to introduce you to philosophy through a comparative examination of some key Western and Eastern intellectual traditions, focusing in particular on what Karl Jaspers called the “axial age” in the history of ideas. The axial age was a period of cross-cultural philosophical awakening and remarkable intellectual ferment that stretched from approximately 800 to 200 BCE. We will thus be looking at the *origins* of Western and Eastern philosophical thought in this class, focusing specifically on classical Greek/Hellenistic, Indian and Chinese philosophy, three traditions that have had an enormous impact far beyond their original cultural context.

In the first third of the semester, we will focus on ancient Greek and Hellenistic thought, beginning with Socrates and Plato, who are traditionally seen as the founding figures of Western philosophy. We will read a couple of key Platonic dialogues, focusing on Socrates' reason-centered quest to gain knowledge about virtue and genuine happiness. We will then turn to the thought of Epicurus, whose controversial school offered a purely naturalistic/materialist, empiricist and hedonistic system of philosophy. In the middle third of the semester, we will look at classical Indian philosophy. We will begin with a survey of the *Upanisads*, ancient revealed scriptures that constitute the foundation and origin of all philosophical thought in the Indian tradition. We will interpret these texts through the lens of the Advaita Vedanta school, an *astika*

(yea-saying/orthodox) perspective that maintains the non-duality of all that exists. Then we will examine Buddhism, originally a *nastika* (nay-saying/heterodox) school of Indian philosophy that denies the independence and substantiality of all things, including the self. In the last third of the semester, we will turn to the Chinese philosophical tradition. We will start with Confucius (Kongzi), the first philosopher in that tradition and founder of its most important and influential school: Confucianism. Finally, we will engage with Zhuangzi, whose eponymous book presents the most radical and challenging insights of the Daoist movement.

In examining these three intellectual traditions, we will be focusing in particular on three related philosophical topics: life, death and freedom. In other words, we will be tackling questions like: How should we live? What is the good life for human beings both individually and collectively (i.e., in what does human flourishing consist)? What happens to us when we die? How should we confront and understand the fact of our own inevitable death? What does it mean to be free? What is the relation between freedom and human desires?

These questions will sometimes point us toward other, even more fundamental questions: Who or what am I, ultimately? What is the nature of selfhood? What can we really know? What is truth? What is reality? Is there a more fundamental reality than the ever-changing realm of nature, and if so, what (if anything) can be known about it? All these questions have emerged in different ways, and have elicited widely divergent responses in both the European and Asian philosophical traditions. Throughout this course these diverse philosophical voices will be set up in dialogue with one another.

In addition to acquiring a broad familiarity with some of the founding historical architects of Western and Eastern philosophical thought, and grappling with ultimate questions concerning life, death and human freedom, the more general educational aims of this class are for you to acquire (1) a general comprehension of at least one major period in the history of Western philosophy (and within that several major traditions, schools, and thinkers) (2) a capacity to read and analyze complex, abstract philosophical texts, (3) an ability to explain and evaluate these texts and arguments in a critical fashion, (4) an appreciation of the fundamental ambiguities and complexities involved in the human attempt to answer questions about knowing, valuing, and living, and (5) the intellectual resources to take a reasoned stand of your own on these philosophical issues.

Requirements:

Class Attendance and Participation: In accordance with Bucknell's official attendance policy, you will be expected to attend all class periods. Because this class meets only twice a week, more than two unexcused absences will adversely affect your grade (class attendance and participation comprise a significant percent of this). If you have a legitimate excuse for missing class (e.g. sickness, family emergency, religious holiday) you need to let me know *before* the class period, as far in advance as possible.

The format of this class will alternate between lecture and class discussion, with an emphasis on the latter. Philosophical texts are generally dense and complex, so mastering the material will require active engagement on your part. The readings will range from approximately 15-30 pp. in

length, depending in part on the difficulty of the material. Some of the assignments may require a second reading for comprehension. You will be expected to bring your texts to class consistently, keep up with the reading assignments (which must be completed prior to the course meeting for which they are scheduled), read carefully and critically, participate in class discussions, and complete all writing assignments in a timely manner. Students who show up without the relevant book or have obviously not read the assigned material will be marked absent for that day. All late work without legitimate, documented excuse will be marked down in accordance with the extent of lateness (1/3 grade lower for every day they are late).

Class attendance and participation are an essential element in this course, and accordingly, they will constitute 20% of your final grade. In evaluating your participation in this class, I will not be looking merely at quantity, but more importantly, *quality*—i.e., I'm not simply interested in how frequently or how much you talk, but more whether your comments, questions and suggestions reflect a thoughtful and considered engagement with the ideas and arguments we are examining. I realize not everyone is equally comfortable participating in discussion on a daily basis. While I encourage you to find your voice in class, I also count after-class discussion, office hour discussion, and email exchange as legitimate forms of participation.

Bucknell University expectations for academic engagement. Courses at Bucknell that receive one unit of academic credit have a minimum expectation of 12 hours per week of student academic engagement. Student academic engagement includes both the hours of direct faculty instruction (or its equivalent) and the hours spent on out of class student work. This class meets for a total of 2 hours and 44 minutes per week. That means you are expected to dedicate over 9 hours a week on the average outside of our meetings to reading, writing, etc for this class. Sometimes it will be less; sometimes more. As rule, expect to spend at least 2-3 hours on each class' reading assignment. As a rule, the more closely and carefully you read, and the more time you invest in writing and revising papers, the better you will do.

Electronic Device Policy: Absolutely *no* electronic devices (i.e., laptops, ipads, smartphones, cellphones, etc) are permitted in this class unless you have prior written authorization from the Dean. Violations of this policy, especially those that distract or disrupt the class, will severely lower your participation grade (one full grade reduction for each incident). Do us both a favor and liberate yourself from these tedious distractions for the measly 2 hours and 44 minutes we have together each week!

Paper and Exams: You will be assigned two papers, based on the sources we have read in class. The first paper will be on classical Greek/Hellenistic philosophy; the second and final paper will be on classical Chinese philosophy. Because they are relatively short (ranging from 6-8 pp.) they will need to be dense papers, chockfull of philosophical explication, analysis and critique, and with no fluff or padding. It will be your responsibility to say what needs to be said as economically, clearly and precisely as possible. Detailed instructions for these assignments will be provided on topic handouts, which I will distribute approximately 2 weeks in advance of their due dates. You will also receive a more general set of guidelines/expectations for writing philosophy papers in this class. The middle section of the class (on Indian philosophy) will culminate in an in-class exam rather than a take-home paper. It will mainly involve explication of key concepts and some short essay questions.

I will be glad to give you clarification, feedback and advice during office hours on any of the above assignments. Feel free also to stop in during office hours if you have any questions throughout the course of the semester, or just want to talk about whatever. If you cannot make it to my office during the posted hours, let me know and we can schedule some alternative time.

NB: All papers must be submitted both in hard copy *and* electronically to Turnitin via Moodle on the date they are due. Further details will be provided with the first paper prompt.

Grading:

Your final grade breaks down as follows:

- 20% attendance and participation
- 25% 1st paper: Greek Philosophy (6-8 pp.). Due date: (Tuesday, February 25).
- 25% Mid-Term: Indian Philosophy. Exam date: (Tuesday, April 1).
- 30% 2nd paper: Chinese Philosophy (6-8 pp.). Deadline: Friday, May 2, at 6:30 pm.

Academic Honesty: You are expected to know what constitutes plagiarism. If you do not, please consult the following links for Bucknell’s policy on the matter:

<http://www.bucknell.edu/x1341.xml> and <http://www.bucknell.edu/x1343.xml>

All cases of plagiarism will be pursued and passed on to the Board of Review on Academic Responsibility for prosecution.

Bucknell University Honor Code. You are expected to abide by the following code: “As a student and citizen of the Bucknell University community (1) I will not lie, cheat, or steal in my academic endeavors, dishonesty, person or persons I believe to have been dishonest in academic work, and (4) I will let my conscience guide my decision on reporting breaches of academic integrity to the appropriate faculty or deans.”

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(3) I will le

Schedule:

Jan 16 (R): Introduction.

I. GREEK PHILOSOPHY

- Jan 21 (T): Plato, *Meno*, pp. 1-18 (stop at 81E); see notes (pp. 47-61).
- Jan 23 (R): Plato, *Meno*, pp. 15-32 (from 80A to 90B); see notes (pp. 61-68).
- Jan 28 (T): Plato, *Meno*, pp. 31-46 (from 89D, line 407 to end); see notes (pp. 68-76).
- Jan 30 (R): Plato, *Phaedo*, pp. 27-53 (stop at 78B).
- Feb 4 (T): Plato, *Phaedo*, pp. 53-75 (from 77E to 96A).
- Feb 6 (R): Plato, *Phaedo*, pp. 75-101 (from 96A to end).
- Feb 11 (T): Epicurus, *The Epicurus Reader*, pp. 3-19.

- Feb 13 (R): Epicurus, *The Epicurus Reader*, pp. 28-40.
Feb 18 (T): Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, Bk III (pp. 63-92)—PDF on Moodle.
Feb 20 (R): **Review of Plato/Epicurus; no new reading.**

II. INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

Feb 25 (T): Sue Hamilton, *Indian Philosophy*, Chapters 1-2 (pp. 1-12 & 18-33)—PDF on Moodle.

FIRST PAPER DUE.

Feb 27 (R): *The Essential Vedanta: Upanisads* selections (pp. 8-16 & 22-40)—PDF on Moodle.

Mar 4 (T): Eliot Deutsch, *Advaita Vedanta*, Introduction & Chapters 1-2 (pp. 3-26).

Mar 6 (R): Eliot Deutsch, *Advaita Vedanta*, Chapter 3 (pp. 27-46).

Mar 11 (T): **SPRING BREAK.**

Mar 13 (R): **SPRING BREAK.**

Mar 18 (T): Christopher W. Gowans, *Philosophy of the Buddha*, Chapters 2-3 (pp. 17-39).

Mar 20 (R): Christopher W. Gowans, *Philosophy of the Buddha*, Chapters 6.3, 7.1-3, & 8 (pp. 69-72, 76-87 and 91-103).

Mar 25 (T): Christopher W. Gowans, *Philosophy of the Buddha*, Chapters 10-13 (119-57).
NOTE:

Long reading this time—leave yourself extra time!

Mar 27 (R): Christopher W. Gowans, *Philosophy of the Buddha*, Chapters 14.1 & 4, 15-17 (pp. 161-65, 172-74 & 176-200).

Apr 1 (T): **MID-TERM (on Indian Philosophy).**

III. CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

Apr 3 (R): Confucius, *The Essential Analects*, Introduction, pp. xii-xxii, Books I-III, pp. 1-9; see commentary (pp. 57-66).

Apr 8 (T): Confucius, *The Essential Analects*, Books IV-VIII, pp. 10-24; see commentary (pp. 66-92).

Apr 10 (R): Confucius, *The Essential Analects*, Books IX-XIII, pp. 25-40; see commentary (pp. 92-112).

Apr 15 (T): Confucius, *The Essential Analects*, Books XIV-XX, pp. 41-56; see commentary (pp. 112-38).

Apr 17 (R): Zhuangzi, *Basic Writings*, partial Intro (pp. 1-7), and Sections 1 & 2 (pp. 23-44).

Apr 22 (T): Zhuangzi, *Basic Writings*, Sections 3-4 (pp. 45-62).

Apr 24 (R): Zhuangzi, *Basic Writings*, Sections 5-6 (pp. 62-88).

Apr 29 (T): Zhuangzi, *Basic Writings*, last 3 anecdotes of Section 17 (pp. 110-11) and all of Sections 18 & 19 (pp. 113-32).

FINAL PAPER DUE: The final paper will be due on **Friday, May 2, at 6:30 pm**. This time is based on the final exam hour period established by the registrar for this course (note: although a final exam time is scheduled, there is no final exam in this course, only the final paper). Please drop your paper off at Vaughn Lit 227 (If I am not there, or you want to hand in the paper before this deadline, please slide it under my office door or leave it in my mailbox in Vaughn Lit 243).