

THE CONDUCT OF LIFE
IN WESTERN AND EASTERN PHILOSOPHY
SPRING 2019
ETHICAL REASONING - 20
LAW – 2392
HDS - 2313
WEDNESDAYS 1 TO 3

Michael Puett

2 Divinity 226A

Telephone: 617-495-8360

Email: puett@fas.harvard.edu

Roberto Mangabeira Unger

Areeda 226

Telephone: 617-495-3156

E-mail: unger@law.harvard.edu

Faculty Assistant: Brenda Bee, 617-496-1764

bbee@law.harvard.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

A study of approaches in the philosophical traditions of the West and the East to the conduct of life. Philosophical ethics has often been understood as meta-ethics: the development of a method of moral inquiry or justification. Here we focus instead on what philosophy has to tell us about the first-order question: How should we live our lives?

This year a major concern will be the study and contrast of two such orientations to existence. One is the philosophical tradition focused on ideas of self-reliance, self-construction, and nonconformity (exemplified by Emerson and Nietzsche). The other is a way of thinking (notably represented by Confucius) that puts its hope in a dynamic of mutual responsibility, shaped by role and ritual and informed by imaginative empathy.

No prerequisites other than a willingness to consider a wide range of problems and materials.

Extended take-home examination.

CLASS SEQUENCE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

INTRODUCTION: FROM META-ETHICS TO ETHICS

January 30: Introduction: themes and agenda of the course

February 6: Meta-ethics: Kantian, consequentialist, and social-contract theories

Derek Parfit, Summary of Meta-Ethical Theories from *On What Matters*, vol. I, pp. 14-28 (course website)

THE PROJECT OF SELF-CONSTRUCTION IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE WEST AND ITS ENGAGEMENT WITH CHRISTIANITY

February 13: The project of self-construction: non-conformity and greatness

Emerson, "Self-Reliance" from *Self-Reliance and Other Essays*

Nietzsche, "First essay: 'Good' and 'Evil', 'Good' and 'Bad' from *On the Genealogy of Morals*

February 20: The project of self-construction: self and society from Romantic struggle to post-Romantic disillusionment

Hegel, "The Romantic Art Form" from *On the Arts*, pp. 23-67 (course website)

plot summaries and analysis of two French novels of the 19th century: Stendhal, *The Charterhouse of Parma*, and Flaubert, *Sentimental Education* (course website)

RMU, on Christianity, Romanticism, Modernism from *Passion: An Essay on Personality*, pp. 22-39 (course website)

February 27: The project of self-construction and the paradise of desire

Barthes, from *Fourier, Sade, Loyola* (course website)

Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, sections I, II, III (course website)

RMU, on insatiability from *The Religion of the Future*, pp. 17-23 (course website)

March 6: The project of self-construction in the light of Christian hope

Hegel, "The Moral Teaching of Jesus: (pp. 224-253) and "Love" (pp. 302-308) from *Early Theological Writings* (course website)

Karl Barth, from *Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 48-54 (course website)

Karl Rahner, from "On the Theology of Hope" and "The Christian Future of Man" (course website)

RMU, the doctrine of the virtues reconsidered from *The Religion of the Future*, pp. 366-387

March 13: The future of the project of self-construction: contrasting visions

Simon May, "The New Ideal: 'To become what one is' "from *Nietzsche's Ethics and his War on Morality*, pp. 104-134 (course website)

RMU, "The Conduct of Life" from *The Religion of the Future*, pp. 341-366, 387-444

March 20: Spring recess

BEYOND THE PROJECT OF SELF-CONSTRUCTION

March 27: Mutual responsibility and imaginative empathy in the teaching of Confucius: ritual, role, the meritocratic division of labor, solidarity, and the imagination of the other

Confucius, *Analects*

Mencius (excerpts, course website)

April 3: Overcoming the world and the will: world rejection and universal compassion in the teaching of the Buddha

Sources of Indian Tradition, vol. I, pp. 29-40, 93-124, 153-187 (course website)

April 10: Overcoming the world and the will: Schopenhauer's proposal for salvation

Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. I, prefaces to the first and second editions, and sections 53, 57, 58, 59, 68, 69 (vol I to be acquired)

from vol.II, section XLIX, "The Road to Salvation," (course website)

CONCLUSION: MORAL INSIGHT AND ITS LIMITS

April 17: The political contexts and consequences of approaches to the conduct of life

April 24: Commitment and nihilism

ASSIGNED BOOKS

Many of the readings are drawn from six assigned books. All these books are paperbacks, available at the Harvard Coop and on Amazon. The remaining assigned readings will be posted on the course website.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Self-Reliance and Other Essays*, Dover

Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Penguin

Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*,
Volume I, Dover

Confucius, *Analects*, Penguin

Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *The Religion of the Future*, Verso

Note that in the class sequence below and in the readings assigned for each class there is no reference to *The Religion of the Future*. You should have read the following parts of this book, as background to the arguments of the course, by the class of **March 13**: chapters 1,

2, 3, 4, and 7. In addition, read the concluding section of Chapter 5, pp. 257-289.

WRITING REQUIREMENTS

During the semester undergraduates will write two brief papers. The first paper will be due in class on **March 13**. The second paper will be due electronically by **April 10**, 12 noon.

Each of these papers, on topics to be set, will respond to a major problem or idea discussed in the course up to that time. Each will be between 6 and 10 double-spaced pages long. Each will count for 20% of the final grade.

In lieu of a final examination, all students will write an extended take-home examination. This final paper or examination will provide them with an occasion to respond to a central aspect of the argument of the course. It should have a minimum of 15 and a maximum of 20 double-spaced pages. The topic or topics will be described in class on **April 10**. The final examination paper will be due by 4 p.m. on **May 2** (no extensions). It will count for 50% of the final grade for undergraduates. 10% of the final grade for undergraduates will be attributed to participation in section.

The grade for all graduate students, including law students, will be based entirely on their final take-home examination, which will be for them the only writing requirement in the course.