# 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](mailto:puett@fas.harvard.edu)

Roberto Mangabeira Unger

Areeda 226

Telephone: 617-495-3156

E-mail: [unger@law.harvard.edu](mailto:unger@law.harvard.edu)

Faculty Assistant: Brenda Bee, 617-496-1764

[bbee@law.harvard.edu](mailto: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?

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

Extended take-home examination.

**CLASS SEQUENCE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS**

**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

**February 13**: Autonomy and Self-Construction

Emerson, “Experience” and “Self-Reliance” from *Self-Reliance and Other Essays*

**February 20:** The Project of Personal Fulfillment

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

Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, sec. I, II, III (on course website)

Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, chs. 8 and 11 (on course website)

**February 27**: Love and Infinity (Part 1)

Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death,* pp. 142-168, 200-213

Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, pp. 23-57 (on course website)

**March 6:** Love and Infinity (Part 2)

Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, “The Moral Teaching of Jesus: Love as the Transcendence of Penal Justice and the Reconciliation of Fate” (pp. 224-253) and “Love” pp. 302-308 (on course website)

Hegel, *On the Arts* (from *Aesthetics or* *The Philosophy of Art),* pp. 23-67 (on course website)

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

Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of Hope,* *Unity of the Love of Neighbor and Love of God* and *The Christian Future of Man* (on course website)

**March 13:** World Rejection and Universal Sympathy (Part 1)

Schopenhauer, *Essays and Aphorisms,* pp.41-76, 133-147

**March 20**: SPRING RECESS

**March 27**: World Rejection and Universal Sympathy (Part 2)

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

**April 3**: Happiness, Solidarity, and Society

The *Analects* of Confucius

The *Mencius* (excerpts) (on course website)

**April 10**: Major modern approaches to the conduct of life viewed in relation to

one another

**April 17**: Philosophy, Self-help, Truth

**April 24**: Conclusion

**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

Soren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death,* Penguin

Arthur Schopenahuer, *Essays and Aphorisms,* Penguin

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.