



中央民族大学
MINZU UNIVERSITY OF CHINA

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Minzu University of China
PHI 115 Introduction to Philosophy
Summer 2020

Basic Information

Class hours: Monday through Thursday, 2 hours each day
Discussion: Friday, 1 hour (60 minutes)
Review Section: Saturday, 1 hour (60 minutes)
Office Hour: 2 hours (According to professors' teaching plan)
Field trip: According to professors' teaching plan
Credit: 4
Total contact hours: 60 (50 minutes each)
Instructor: David Youkey

Course Texts

There will be a series of readings that I will make available to you electronically.

Course Description

Let's say you and I disagree with each other. One thing we could do to settle our disagreement is to attach bombs to our chests and blow each other up. That seems to be a common practice in the world today. There's an ideal in the West, however, an ideal that was given to us by the ancient Greeks, especially Socrates and Plato and Aristotle. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle all thought that some points of view are better than other points of view, and if you see the world differently than I see the world, we can sit down and talk it over. You can present the reasons for your point of view and I can present the reasons for my point of view. That is, we both give arguments. Eventually, because we are rational beings, we will both come to see that one of these points of view is superior to the other one. This is the heart of Western philosophy: giving arguments, or presenting reasons for points of view. Or, another way to put it: one's goal in studying philosophy is to become morerational.

This type of thing – weighing up arguments, keeping the good ones and throwing out the bad ones – might sound like science. That's because science itself evolved out of the Western philosophical tradition. It's only very recently in our history that people doing science began to call themselves “scientists” rather than “philosophers.”

This is what the Western university system is based on. The skills we learn at the university – no matter what our majors might be, is how to think critically, or scientifically, how to weigh up different points of view. This is because of those old Greeks, Socrates and so on.

Notice how different this is from the Chinese tradition. Consider the Cook Ding story from Zhuangzi. Zhuangzi emphasizes an approach to life that is very different from Socrates, or the other ancient Greeks.

Though historically science and philosophy in the West are connected, today what we call “philosophy” differs in two main ways from what we call “science.” First, philosophy deals with questions that are broader, or where the evidence and arguments are harder to judge, than those questions dealt with by science. For example, the question “Does God exist?” was influential in the history of philosophy, but that's not the sort of question you are likely to find in a science class.



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Second, the goal of the sciences is to describe how the world is. This is known as a “descriptive” study. In addition to being descriptive, philosophy takes on questions concerning how the world ought to be, or what we call “normative” questions.

One goal of our class is to learn something about the history of the Western philosophical tradition, and to compare it to the Chinese tradition. We’ll do this by looking at arguments from some of the most important philosophers: Plato, Aquinas, Descartes, Karl Marx, and so on in the West, and Confucius and Zhuangzi from China. Along the way, we’ll touch on many of the main branches of philosophy: moral philosophy (how should we live?), political philosophy (what’s the best form of government?), metaphysics (what exists? What is the ultimate nature of reality?), epistemology (what is knowledge? How do I know what exists?)

The Reading

There will be a reading assignment for each day of class. Please have the assignment read before class on the day it is listed below. Many of our readings will be from the book *Problems from Philosophy*, by James and Stuart Rachels. There will be many other short readings from philosophers who have been influential both in the Chinese and in the Western traditions. I will make these readings available to you electronically.

Week 1:

- 1) Introduction
- 2) Socrates and Plato. We’ll begin by looking at the foundations of Western thought, or, to put it another way, the foundations of science. Read Plato: Euthyphro
- 3) Socrates and Plato. Read Plato: Apology, and Allegory of the Cave
- 4) Daoism. We’ll compare the approach taken by the Chinese Daoists to the approach taken by the early Greeks. Read Zhuangzi: Cook Ding story.
- 5) Discussion
- 6) Review

Week 2:

- 1) The 17th Century Scientific Revolution, and the modern conception of “objective truth.” Read Descartes: First Meditation.
- 2) Disagreements on the nature of knowledge. Read Rachels ch. 10: Our Knowledge of the World.
- 3) The Rachels reading from the previous day outlines debates concerning knowledge that, in some ways, were around since the ancient Greeks, but in other ways came into existence around the time of the 17th Century Scientific Revolution. Karl Marx is possibly best known as the defender of communism, but Marx (and Engels) also added some very interesting twists to the traditional debates concerning knowledge. Read Marx and Engels: Notes on Historical Materialism.
- 4) One of the major differences between Chinese history and Western history is that concerns about God played a central role in the West, and they played little role in China. Discussing these concerns will allow us to put some of these arguments about knowledge into effect, and also to discuss some cultural differences. Read Rachels ch. 2: God and the Origin of the Universe
- 5) Discussion
- 6) Review

Week 3:

- 1) Though the Western philosophical tradition provided the foundation for scientific thought, there is a main difference between what we today call “science” and what we call “philosophy.” Science tries to describe the world, and philosophy makes judgments about how the world should be. In other words, it asks questions like, “How should I live?” We’ll spend a few days looking at theories in ethics and in political/ social philosophy. We’ll start with rights theory. Read Hobbes and Locke Notes
 - 2) Next we will discuss some of the main philosophical differences within the Western political tradition. Read Hospers: The Libertarian Manifesto
- Midterm exam
- 3) Next we’ll look at some criticisms of the Western political tradition as a whole. We’ll start by looking at the collectivist notion of “self.” Read Menkiti: Person and Community in African Traditional Thought.



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- 4) Next we'll compare the Western political tradition to the most influential thinker in Chinese history, Kongzi (we call him Confucius.) Read Confucius Notes.
- 5) Discussion
- 6) Review

Week 4:

- 1) Continue the discussion on Confucius.
- 2) Another critic of the Western political tradition, one whose ideas are very influential in modern China, is Karl Marx. We'll begin with Marx's humanist criticism of capitalism. Read Marx: Estranged Labor.
- 3) Marx has two major criticisms of capitalism. Today we'll look at the second of those, his economic criticism. Though John Locke was a major architect of the US form of government, Locke had ideas about property ownership that were very influential on Marx. Read Locke: On Property.
- 4) After the United Nations was established, the UN backed the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights." But are there such things as universal human rights? Many anthropologists thought the answer was "no," and they published a statement rejecting the UDHR. Today we'll read an essay by an anthropologist struggling with this question. Read Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban: Anthropologists, Cultural Relativism, and Universal Rights.

Week 5:

- 1) Today we'll continue our discussion of cultural relativism. Read Rachels: The Challenge of Cultural relativism.
- 2) We'll continue our discussion of ethics. Today we'll discuss Utilitarianism, another theory that challenges the idea of universal human rights. Read Ursula Le Guin: The Ones who Walk Away from Omelas.
- 3) We will finish the term by discussing a few topics that have been influential in the history of thought. We'll start with the question of personal immortality, and personal identity. Read Rachels ch. 4 Do We Survive Death? And Rachels ch. 5 Problem of Personal Identity.
- 4) Read Rachels ch. 7 Could a Machine Think?
- 5) Final Exam

Grading

The grade will be based on two exams, two quizzes, and on attendance. Attendance will be worth 10% of your final grade. Each exam will be worth 40% of your final grade, and each quiz will be worth 5%. The quizzes and the exams will be discussed in class ahead of time.

Grading Standard

A+ 97-100; A 94-96; A- 90-93;

B+ 87-89; B 84-86; B- 80-83;

C+ 77-79; C 74-76; C- 70-73;

D+ 67-69; D 64-66; D- 60-63; F < 60

Classroom Policies

Electronic Devices in the Classroom

There have been MANY MANY studies that show: (1) students who use electronic devices (like smartphones) in the classroom have lower grades than students who do not.

Not only do smartphones distract you, they also distract people around you, and they distract me, the teacher. The distract from a serious learning environment. IF YOU INTEND TO BE A SERIOUS STUDENT, DO NOT BRING YOUR SMARTPHONE TO CLASS. IF YOU DO NOT INTEND TO BE A SERIOUS STUDENT, YOU SHOULD NOT BE

ATTENDING THE CLASS.

For further information, see the following:



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<http://news.stanford.edu/news/2009/august24/multitask-research-study-082409.html>

<http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2F02940852> <https://teachingcommons.stanford.edu/teaching-talk/class-multitasking-how-laptops-hurt-learning>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/04/28/why-students-using-laptops-learn-less-in-class-even-when-they-really-are-taking-notes/> <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/mental-wealth/201402/gray-matters-too-much-screen-time-damages-the-brain>

<https://www.winona.edu/psychology/media/friedlaptopfinal.pdf>

Cheating

CHEATING WILL NOT BE TOLERATED. If you cheat, I will catch you. If I catch you cheating, you will fail the class. If you plan to cheat, there is no point in taking the class. Do not waste my time, do not waste your time, do not waste your money.