Required Readings

For Professor Dechene’s Introduction to Philosophy (PHIL 1301)

Summer 2010

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Required textbook:

- Be sure to purchase the fifth edition (blue cover).
- Should be available from the campus bookstore. Lists for about $45, Amazon.com has it for $27.81 (as of 5/22/10), and there are several low price textbook sites, and they may have it for less. However, sometimes they take a very long time to ship, and I won’t accept that as an excuse for not being able to prepare for a test. You need this book immediately.

Other required readings and audios:

- These readings are to be printed out by the student and brought to class at the appropriate time.
- We will not necessarily use every document in this list, and other documents likely will be added to this list.
- Note: I recommend that you wait until almost the last minute to print these, as I often make modifications to them before we use them in class.
- Note: The items that come before Plato’s *Myth of the Cave* are all wisdom teachings, and are to be compared with the wisdom teaching of the Western philosopher, Parmenides, the greatest wisdom teacher (i.e., the greatest philosopher) in history. These examples of wisdom teaching will be referred to throughout the rest of the course, and will be used as our standard of truth when compared with later, speculative, philosophers and philosophies.
  1. *The Story of the Prodigal Son*. This myth is from the Bible (New Testament), and there is also a Buddhist version. It is about nondual philosophy and its implications for the lives of individuals. It will be the most important metaphor in the course, and we will refer to it often. It also illustrates how important myth can be in philosophy.
  2. *Tao Te Ching* (*Dao Der Jing*) by Lao Tzu, Mitchell translation. I recommend that you print this in color as I have highlighted some of the most important passages to help you study the document.
  3. *Explanations of Some Terms and Concepts in Taoist (Daoist) Philosophy*. This study guide will be used in the section on Tao Te Ching, and also when we discuss the Cynic philosophy when studying Hellenistic and Roman philosophies, and again when we discuss “the problem of dreams” when studying Descartes.
  4. Florence Scovel Shinn, *chapter one of The Game of Life and How to Play It*. This is highlighted to help you study it, so print it in color. The full book is here. It’s the best example of the American New Thought philosophy, and how to understand and use the principle called “naming” in poem 1 of Tao Te Ching. I recommend you read the whole book, but only chapter one is required. This little book has been so popular with many of my students over the years that they purchased copies for their friends and family members.
  5. *The Heart Sutra*. Read it and listen to it on the Web. This Mahayana Buddhist document
is an excellent short expression of the philosophy taught in our course.

6. The first four chapters of *Ashtavakra Gita*. A very clear and helpful statement of the Advaita (Nondual) Vedanta philosophy of Hinduism.

7. Story of Uddalaka and Svetaketu from the Chandogya Upanishad, chapter 6. Being (Sanskrit: *sat*), or the essence of reality itself, is there, but we can’t see it and usually ignore it. You are that (Sanskrit: *Tat twam asi*).

8. Meditation: What is it? Why do it? How do you do it? What’s it got to do with philosophy? All wisdom teachings presuppose meditation, and stillness (meditation, incubation) is one of Parmenides’ three requirements for “realization” of what is eternally true (the other two are longing for the truth and logic).

9. Bible, Psalm 82. Even the Bible understands that we are gods.

10. Plato’s *Myth of the Cave*. One of the most famous stories ever told. It has many good and important ideas, but its ontology (philosophy of Being) is atrocious and irrational, and represents Western philosophy’s decisive movement away from wisdom and into speculation—where it has largely remained for the last 2500 years. This degeneration of philosophy into mere speculation started with Anaxagoras and was greatly reinforced by Plato’s pupil, Aristotle, and his doctrine of “substance.”

11. Seven key elements of what has been called Platonism or Neoplatonism.

12. Everybody Have Fun! New Yorker review of recent important books in the new field of happiness studies. Aristotle emphasized the importance of the concept of *eudaimonia* (happiness, or human fulfillment) for personal and political life. For him happiness is the function or goal of both the individual and of the state (see Palmer 87). But it’s only in the past few decades that we have, for the first time ever, been able to study empirically rather than speculatively what makes people happy.

13. A very good, and short, explanation of Berkeley’s philosophy—including why “matter” is impossible.

14. An excellent short article explaining Hume’s philosophy. Also shows Hume’s link to Locke and Berkeley.


16. Change Your Thinking, Change Your Life. My article on the American New Thought philosophy. It is an expression of what *Tao Te Ching* 1 called “naming.” William James called it America’s “only decidedly original contribution to the systematic philosophy of life,” and approved of it for its “cash value,” i.e., that it wasn’t just a theoretical philosophy but one that actually worked to heal and prosper people. It also agrees with the fundamental understanding of Existentialism that individuals create themselves in this world through their beliefs.