Recapitulation
A summary of truths from Professor Dechene’s philosophy course

Note: this list is for the most part in no special order, and is undoubtedly incomplete. It is a work in progress. If you have taken the course and see that I have missed something, email me about it.

Motto: I am not what I appear to be. I am the Being, empty and infinite, the one and only.

The five big truths:

1. Philosophy is first and foremost about discovering the Truth in order to heal souls.
   - The Truth that can heal must be discovered (or remembered), not invented. To do this you must spend a great deal of time in mental silence.
   - Authentic philosophy is nondual.
   - Authentic philosophy stresses direct personal experience of Truth, and confirmation of our experience by reason and logic. (Parmenides’ teaching.)
   - We all come into this world believing crazy, impossible things.
   - As Parmenides’ goddess said, we are crazy people wandering around in circles combining Being with not-being.
   - Outward physical, mental, moral, political, social, and environmental sickness is due to inward craziness.
   - Only Truth will cure this fundamental mental illness. As the Jewish philosopher, Jesus, said, You will know the Truth and the Truth will set you free.
   - Note that Parmenides’ was a priest of Apollo. The Apollonian religion of western Anatolia (where the Phoçaeans, Parmenides’ people, came from) emphasized Truth, light, and healing. When a person is enlightened by knowing the Truth of Being she is healed mentally and set free from (“gone beyond”) what the Heart Sutra calls the imprisonment of “delusive thinking.”
   - As Tao Te Ching (poem 1 and other poems) said, there is a way (tao) to mental health. It is based on knowing these things:
     - Reality is empty (and mental stillness will prove this to us). Recall the wheel image: the physical wheel depends on the formless eternal whole in order to work, in order to be a wheel.
     - Our beliefs create the world we experience (“naming”).
     - Chronic desiring is the chief obstacle to knowing the Truth and becoming free (because it convinces us that we lack something when in fact we are pure Being and lack nothing; and because it binds us to this illusory world and thus detaches us from awareness of the Truth).

2. Being is (and not-being is not).
   - This is the only Truth in this world we can be certain of. It and its corollaries are the only “necessary” truths. Another way of saying it is, Only God is real (the idea that there are real beings “outside of” God is a delusion). (Source: Parmenides, the Bible story of the burning bush.)
   - We can also be certain of its logical corollaries (there can be no things or substances, time and space are illusions, reality is formless and thus indivisible, etc.)
   - Unlike other ontologies or anti-ontologies, this is not a doctrine, not just someone’s opinion. Anyone can experience it directly by emptying his or her mind in silent meditation.
• Also you can prove it rationally. It’s like Euclidean geometry: you can see directly that a triangle has 180° of interior angularity, and you can also prove it rationally, as Euclid did.

• But first, you must long for the Truth and long to escape the suffering and frustration of ordinary life (what the Buddha called dukkha). Parmenides taught the way to the Truth of Being is longing for the Truth, spending time in the silence, and using logic (which he gave the world).

• The Truth that only Being is and that it is empty of all forms was taught by these sources we studied: Tao Te Ching, Ashtavakra Gita, Nagargjuna, Heart Sutra, and, especially, by Parmenides.

3. We create our experience of this illusory, temporary life by what we choose to believe in.

• It takes a life-time of work to improve our beliefs. It’s a “life-discipline.”

• It’s an ongoing self-discipline of substituting better thoughts for worse. F.S. Shinn taught that (she called it “the law of substitution” in the first chapter of The Game of Life and How to Play It).

• fMRI studies (at U. Pennsylvania) have shown that it is easy to create negative beliefs and harder to create positive ones. Compare a first-class competitive athlete: it’s easy to practice when you feel like it and create a fat and weak body, but it takes work every day to become a top competitor.

• The U. Penn group (The Center for Spirituality and the Mind) understands neuroplasticity and the reshaping of our minds, and also teaches to repeat a list of positive words for at least twelve minutes every day while in a relaxed or meditative state. This will make you happier, healthier, and more fun to be around, etc.

• Ashtavakra Gita 1:11: “When we believe we are enlightened, we are. When we believe we aren’t, we aren’t. Thinking makes it so.”

• All people are always manifesting the world they experience with their thoughts. Most do it badly and are unhappy. The challenge is to learn how to manifest the world you really want.

• To manifest what you want affirm what you want until it feels like you already have it (say, a better job) or are it (say, a nonsmoker). Go even farther and everyday affirm that you are peaceful, happy, and wise (etc.)

• You heal others by healing your image or experience of them, not by sending them positive thoughts. See them in your own mind as healed and perfect. Healing others is actually correcting your own false impressions of them—i.e., it’s working on yourself, not on them, changing your mind about them.

• At the core of the philosophy of naming the world we want and the person we want to be is recognition that Being is perfect, despite all evidence to the contrary.

• Many philosophers and artists have understood that we make our world with our mind, and the closely related American philosophies of New Thought and Christian Science have developed that understanding into a comprehensive method that, as the American philosopher William James said, actually works.

4. The connection between reality (or Being or God) and the temporary, highly imperfect and frustrating illusory world is kindness.

• Kindness, compassion, shining your light, caring for others, working for social justice and peace, forgiveness, etc. (Sources: Psalm 82, Dali Lama, Parmenides and Zeno, Jesus.)

• We don’t have to worry about being perfect. As illusory selves in this illusory world we are essentially imperfect, always wavering between better and worse. But in reality we are perfect Being, and we can never change that.

5. The most important and central way to detach from belief that the illusion is real is by forgiving every person, thing, and situation in it.

• Taught by the philosopher, Jesus, and by the American nondual philosophy of A Course in Miracles.

• You forgive not because anyone deserves your forgiveness (they may or may not), but because it is the only way to let go, to stop clinging to the false world. Jesus: My kingdom is not of this world.
• The mudra of forgiveness: Make a tight fist as if you were holding on for dear life to some person or situation or the whole universe. Then relax and breathe out and open your hand in a symbol of letting go. And notice: there was nothing there! You were holding on to nothing!

• We are deeply guilty for separating ourselves from God, and we are afraid God’s gonna get us (a primitive and childish idea, but none the less real to our subconscious selves—and the basis of many of the teachings of the Bible). To avoid facing up to this we project a world with people and events we can blame for our pain and make us look righteous and innocent in comparison. The purpose of the illusion is to distract us from our shame and pain.

Some other important truths (in no special order):

1. We can’t be sure why we created this illusion, this painful mess, but we know we did, and we can’t use not-knowing as an excuse.
2. This world is not just a world of constant change (Heraclitus, Nietzsche), but of constant murder. Schopenhauer’s idea of will expressed something like this. Certainly these philosophers indicated that optimism in philosophy (e.g., Kant, Hegel) is unjustified.
3. We will look for any excuse not to acknowledge the Truth—even though knowing the Truth is the only way to be happy and free. Plato: the mob (and the mob-mind in us) will murder the Truth-bringer. Freud: his patients, at a very deep level of their egos, didn’t want to be healed, they wanted to hold on to their pain.
4. Nietzsche saw correctly that everything we say and think—everything that we can say and think—is a lie. Except he didn’t understand the one true thing we can say with certainty, that Being is. He thought Parmenides’ words were empty. He didn’t understand that that’s the whole point, reality itself is empty.
5. Jesus said by their fruits you will know them. William James said Truth is measured by its cash value. Parmenides said (in effect) the buck stops here.
6. “Naming”: we create our experience of life with our thoughts and beliefs. Thoughts are things. Most people are very bad life-creators. For God’s sake don’t be one of them!
7. The belief that there are levels of being (Plato and many others), and that some beings are ontologically or morally better than others, is nonsense. The idea of a Great Chain of Being is nonsense. Being is Being, it doesn’t have parts or levels. A cockroach has as much Being as a human, a good person, as much as an evil one.
8. The problem of life is that everyone is almost always trying to combine Being and not-being. Parmenides taught that. Empedocles described it as a cave full of crazy people. Plato described it as a cave of darkness and ignorance and false beliefs. Simone Weil pointed out that the shadows that the masses believe in in the cave are projections of images chosen by the economic elite to ensure that the people believe things that keep them enslaved and willing to do the bidding of the elite (or, to use the Marxist terms we learned, the owners of the means of production were projecting an ideology that would create a false consciousness in the proletariat).
9. There can be different, and equally valid and even complimentary, ways of explaining the same thing. (Spinoza, William James.)
10. Bishop Berkeley showed that the world is what we experience it as (esse est percipe, the being of things is to be perceived). Other philosophers, especially Kant, followed with variations on this idea. Nietzsche said anything we can say about the world will be a lie. They’re all saying, we make all this up, the world is an illusion we are making up as we go along. Even the Observer Effect in quantum physics is like this: An event is not an event until it is observed.
11. All philosophy after Parmenides is déraciné, cut off from its ontological roots. Some philosophers made helpful observations, but all of them either ignored ontology, or said it was impossible, or created irrational ontologies like Plato and Aristotle. It was if they were house builders who were building houses in mid-air, without foundations.
12. It is necessary and good to search for wisdom wherever it can be found. For example, in our course we looked at several sayings and stories from the Bible, which is mostly religious nonsense but holds a few, mostly ignored, gems of philosophy (e.g., the burning bush story—which teaches that when we learn that God’s name is “the Being” we will be delivered from imprisonment in Egypt, which symbolizes ignorant polytheism—see Exodus 3:14).

13. The ethical implication of nondualism is that whatever I do to you or to the earth I do to myself, since reality is one. Thus, “Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.” Selfishness is thus the same as altruism.

14. Return to Being, to our natural enlightened state, is described well in the Christian story of the Prodigal Son. Note how the “good” brother relied on his righteousness, and thereby kept himself out of the party. Salvation is through knowledge, not through righteous behavior. In fact, salvation or enlightenment is realization of Being. Righteous behavior follows naturally from knowledge, as Socrates and Plato taught. (And remember how Ashtavakra Gita taught that we are the witness, i.e., the knower, and not the doer.)

15. Nussbaum’s concept of philosophy being, among other things, “winnowing the chaff from the grain”—that’s something I tried to do in much of our course. A good example would be Nietzsche. He made a huge error in not understanding Parmenides’ ontology (which he explicitly states is worthless because it’s “empty”), so he went on to deny that ontology itself is possible (remember “There is no original text” and “God is dead”). Yet we can see some great teachings from him—i.e., save separate some good grain from the chaff—especially his understanding that knowing is lying—as long as you recognize that he has relegated his philosophy to the realm of doxa.

16. PARMENIDES’ CONTRIBUTION TO PHILOSOPHY. Parmenides is the ignored and largely forgotten great philosopher, and the greatest philosopher of all, by far. Look at some of the things he was first to give us:

- Logic.
- Rational-logical ontology.
- The three elements of ontology (longing, stillness/silence, and logic).
  - One important point Parmenides didn’t notice is Tao Te Ching’s teaching that “pointing” is an important method in ontology. All throughout Tao Te Ching there are pointers (e.g., Being is like the emptiness at the center of a wheel) that lead us to what cannot be said explicitly.
  - What might be called a “Euclidean” approach to ontology. Euclid of Alexandria (fl. 300 BCE) started with direct observation of figures in plane geometry, and then proved those observations rationally. Parmenides started with what is most important in ontology, the direct “observation” of Being in silent contemplation, and then proved the Truth of the observation with modal logic (the logic of necessity and probability, also called alethic logic), ending up with the indubitable proposition that “It is necessary to say and think that Being is and not-being is not.” From this “the buck stops here” (think of William James’ “cash value”) proposition he further deduced the logical implications of that necessary Truth.

- Among these necessary (i.e., not contingent) logical deductions are the truths that motion and change are impossible, that space and time are unreal, that separate beings or things or forms are impossible, and that Being, i.e., reality itself, is formless and thus indivisible, which proves that all materialism is a mistake and impossibility.

- The Two Ways of Truth (aletheia) and of Opinion (doxa). The history of philosophy usually attributes the distinction between necessary and contingent truths to Leibniz (and indeed he did reinvent it) but it was there in Parmenides about 2200 years earlier (and a century after Parmenides Plato used it in the metaphor of the inside and the outside of the cave).

- The understanding that the only necessary Truth is that Being is and not-being is not, and the logical corollaries of that, and that in the realm of opinion, and thus of science, certainty will never be possible—which has
been proven by the history of science. (At first it seemed Plato’s perfect forms might prove Parmenides wrong—I’m sure Plato intended that—and two thousand years later it seemed that Newton’s laws proved Parmenides wrong, but then the non-Euclidean geometries of the 19th century and quantum physics proved that certainty about this world was impossible.)

- First to formulate the principle that would later be called *Ex nihilo nihil fit* when he showed that logically it is impossible for Being to have arisen from not-being.
- First western philosopher to create a nondual philosophy—i.e., to see and write that reality is one, not many—and further to see that the individual’s “salvation” or freedom depends on realizing this oneness. (His disciple Zeno’s courage unto death illustrated the freedom that comes from this philosophy, that people of his time called “the Parmenidean way.” I think that is the way that the philosopher Jesus taught and practiced.)
- First to write that the earth is a sphere—and this was not an intuition but an empirical fact that he learned from his seafaring people, the Phoçaeans, who had proved it in their voyages to the Arctic and to central Africa (and perhaps beyond).
- First to write that the earth’s moon does not generate light but reflects sunlight.
- Conclusion regarding Parmenides: No other philosopher has given us so much that was so important, even though his influence was tiny compared to that of Plato, Aristotle, Kant, and others who had so much less to give. In the context of our course this has to remind us of Freud and his patients who didn’t want to be healed: the history of philosophy is the history of philosophers who didn’t want to know the Truth. Philosophy after Parmenides was nothing but opinions, some better, some worse, but none on a foundation of healing ontological necessity.