CHAPTER TWO
Philosophies of Life

General Overview

So often we hear students assert how they are overwhelmed by the array of choices they have to face in their day-to-day lives. For the most part, these moments of anxiety crisis appear to be over relatively simple concerns – Where do we go for lunch? What clothes do I need for the dance? What should I do this weekend? Am I going to be popular with my classmates? However, as students become more active in their relationship to the world, they witness more complex challenges, and their questions begin to center on issues such as: What is the meaning and purpose of my life? What in my life is ultimately worthwhile?

In this chapter the student is presented with four specific philosophies intended to have a direct and practical bearing on his or her personal life. Although there are certainly many other philosophies of life, the four categories of Stoicism, Existentialism, Hedonism and Buddhism have been purposely selected to give the student a wide range of philosophical thought that encompasses the ancient and modern worlds, Eastern and Western thought, theistic and atheistic approaches, as well as several rational and nonrational philosophical perspectives. As you proceed through the chapter, remind your students that no one philosophical outlook is being presented as “the way to go”; rather, these examples are to provide guidance and direction as the student begins to think about and develop her/his own personal philosophy of life.

Class Suggestion:

As a class activity for this section, you might want to take a few minutes and do the second “Know Thyself” self-diagnostic: The Philosophy of Life Preference Indicator. It will certainly help students determine their own positions on the assumptions, values and beliefs imbedded in any one of the philosophical viewpoints discussed in this chapter. As this is usually the first time students have been given the opportunity to actually ‘categorize’ some of their own philosophical values, I’ve found that they often want to discuss their outcomes with fellow classmates. Have them discuss how and why they feel their own preference indicator choices help them with some of those ‘ultimate questions.’
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Stoicism: A Prescription for Peace of Mind

Stoicism
- Goodness lies in wisdom, self-control, and perfecting the soul.
- You can’t choose your ‘role’ in life; must deal with the ‘role’ you’ve been ‘assigned.’

School Founded by Zeno of Citum (Cyprus)
- Held lectures in great central square of Athens.
- Name develops from location of lectures
  Stoa Poikile (Painted porch) = stoics (men of the porch)

Notable Followers of Stoic Philosophy
- Epictetus the Slave
- Marcus Aurelius the Roman Emperor
- Seneca the Roman Statesman

Stoic philosophy owes some origins to the cynicism developed by Antisthenes (a disciple of Socrates).
- Chose life of poverty over display of wealth.
- Led life of physical toughness and forthright honesty.
- High society living is by its very nature corrupt;
  e.g., Diogenes chose to live in a wine barrel to avoid corruption of luxurious living.

Cynics conclusions (inspired by Socrates)
- Excessive desires are prescription for unhappiness.
- The cure -- life must be characterized by detachment, courage, dignity, and self-control.
The Stoic Universe

According to the Stoic, Chrysippus
• We live in an ordered universe.
• Universe is rational, structured and shaped by design.
• The appearance of ‘randomness’ is really synchronicity or meaningful coincidence.
• Everything is fated and predetermined according to plan (god/dess?);
  i.e., In the Stoic’s monistic universe, god is immanent in forces such as creative fire, ether, fate, providence, destiny and the law of nature that determines all physical objects and events.

As Epictetus states:

Events do not just happen, but arrive by appointment.

How to Live in a Fated Universe

Primary Cosmological Principle
• In ordered universe, we must come to terms with the fact that good cannot exist without evil.
• However, evil may be blessing in disguise if we transform it into personal triumph.
• ‘Failures’ and ‘twists of fate’ can be preparation for new beginnings.

Freedom and Value
• Moral evil manifests itself when human will is out of harmony with right reason.
• We can succumb to evil, or use interior freedom to recognize evil is an expression of God’s will.
• We must develop attitude of courageous acceptance, and alter judgments on events – if life gives us lemons, make lemonade.

Purpose of Life
• Stoic Maxim – Be happy (eudaimonia) living life according to nature.
• Emotional detachment from worldly affairs/ills can lead to tranquility and peace of mind.
Marcus Aurelius stated:

*If you are pained by an external thing, it is not the thing that disturbs you, but your judgment about it. And, it is in your power to wipe out this judgment now.*

**Stoicism and Stress Management**

- Things and events, in themselves, don’t make us unhappy; rather, our interpretations of them do.
- Both Epictetus and Albert Ellis state we must identify *irrational assumptions/interpretations* and abandon them.
- A rational lifestyle leads to less stress and negative emotion.

**Emotions in Life**

**The Emotion/Passion Question**

- Some argue Stoics rejected all emotions where humanly possible.
- Others argue that Stoics really wished to abolish ‘excessive passions’ only.
  - In either case, ‘disturbing passions’ should be considered unreasonable and unnatural; e.g., *feelings of love* for humanity are natural, and so not necessarily to be avoided.

*Fear, revenge, envy, jealous, even pity, are exaggerated, unreasonable emotions to be avoided.*

*We are the ones who exaggerate the importance of ‘negative emotions’ and take them out of context of the ‘Grand Design.’*
How to Progress Morally

First, we must live by Socratic injunction to “Know Thyself.”

- Both Seneca and Epictetus state that we should engage in daily self-examination and monitor thoughts, feelings, and actions.
- We should substitute good habits for bad ones, avoid temptations and wayward companions.
- We should become masters of our emotions – eliminate emotions leading to ‘passionate disturbances.’
- We should recognize ‘divine providence.’
- We should become indifferent to external goods and ‘consumerism.’

Temperance and abstinence are more likely to result in happiness than efforts directed to gratification of desires.

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Existentialism

Whatever its ultimate meaning, the universe into which we have been thrown cannot satisfy our reason – let us have the courage to admit it once and for all.

-- Gabriel Marcel

Broad Definition of Existentialism:

- Revolt against rationality and philosophical system-building.
- A philosophical movement focusing on concepts such as individuality, freedom and human existence.
- Primary statement -- we are responsible for creating and making ourselves what we are.

Basic questions addressed by Existential Movement:

- What am I to do?
- To what can I commit my life?
- What does life mean?
Range of ‘Membership’ Within Existential Movement

- Atheist
- Theists (primarily Christian and Jewish)
- Political conservatives
- Marxists
- Fascists
- Humanitarians
- Anti-political

Methods of Investigation by the Movement

- Tends to be unorthodox and contrast systematic rational argument.

Philosophical Insights communicated in form of

- Aphorisms – concise statements of principles
- Dialogues – conversational exchange
- Parables – short story to illustrate moral attitude
- Novels and poetry – other literary forms

Two Prominent Existentialists

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980)

- French novelist, playwright and major philosopher of 20th century.
- Studied at the Sorbonne in Paris.
- Noted for developing the ideas of Husserl and Heidegger in coherent body of thought known as Existentialism.
- Primarily concerned with a ‘philosophy of decision making,’ a philosophy of freedom.

Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986)

- Life partner with Jean-Paul Sartre.
- Read and critiqued most of Sartre’s works.
• De Beauvoir provides conception of existential ethics (Sartre did not).
• Questions male domination in philosophy and its construction of women as ‘other.’
Other Philosophers Associated with Existentialism

Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) considered father of existentialism.
  • Philosophy starts and finishes with the individual. The individual
    must act and choose – this is existence.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)
  • There is no universal morality. Men are individuals and must be
    judged as such.

Karl Jaspers (1883-1969)
  • Existential philosophy is that kind of thinking through which man
    tries to become himself. This thinking does not recognize objects,
    but clarifies and enacts at once the being of the one who thinks in
    this way.

Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973)
  • Question: How does one deal with the devastating sense of
    emptiness, superficial activities and fractured relationships that
    plague the modern era?

Known for Existential Literature
  • Albert Camus, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Franz Kafka

Existentialism as Revolt
  • Reason and rational inquiry only good for mathematics/natural
    sciences, too vague and general for everyday life.
  • We lose notions of individual self in elaborate meta-systems
    developed by philosophers such as Plato or Hegel.
  • Universalized concepts such as Plato’s realm of forms does
    violence to humanity by obliterating uniqueness of individuals
    and their subjective experience.
Viktor Frankl
- We experience a spiritual malaise in contemporary society (*the existential vacuum*).
- We need to make sense of the world (the will-to-meaning).
- With no meaning we develop noögenic neurosis (excessive existential frustration).

Solution:
- We must transcend egoistic preoccupations.
- We must find meaning in love and work, and gain a sense of personal dignity.

*Essence vs. Existence*
1) Religious existentialists (e.g., Kierkegaard) believe that God envisioned the world and made human beings by design (*the essence of humanity*).
   - Thus *essence precedes existence* – a divine plan preceded the project of producing reality.

2) Atheistic existentialists (e.g., Sartre) reject an all-knowing God, the ‘Grand Design,’ and ideas of *worldly essence*.
   - We are not good, nor are we evil by nature.
   - Existence precedes essence.
   - We are nothing else but what we make of ourselves.
   - There are no hidden divine messages.
   - Human beings themselves are the creators of meaning.

There is no “answer” or ultimate meaning to life to be discovered “out there” somewhere.
Existential Themes

Individuality and Subjective Experience
We find meaning by creating a sense of individuality, not through systems, universal or general categories.
- Existentialism glorifies ‘rich’ subjective experience over the reduction of human beings to a ‘universalized cogito’ (thinking thing).

Freedom of Choice
For existentialists, to be conscious is to be free.
- All our actions are our own personal responsibility (not fate’s).
- To live responsibly is to live with authenticity.
- We have the unique ability to make the possible a reality.

Existential Free Will
In an atheistic existentialist universe the individual must come to terms with the task of constructing a meaningful life.
- There is no ‘divine mission to complete,’ nor is there an ultimate meaning inherent in human experience.
- Meaning is self-created, and the freedom to make choices is in our own hands (this could lead to Sartre’s ‘existential crisis’).

Definitions of Freedom
1) Freedom can be defined as the absence of coercion (negative freedom or ‘freedom from’).
   - In this case, we are free to make choices without pressures of will by another person, the state, or other authority.

2) Freedom can also be a claim to a particular liberty.
   - In this case, we exercise an interest or form of activity such as freedom of expression, freedom of association, etc.
Deterministic Views that Challenge Notions of Freedom

1) **Fatalism** – Events occur in accordance with a fixed and inevitable destiny (God, fate, etc.).
   • Modified versions suggest we can influence our future even if we cannot totally control it.

2) **Scientific Causal Determinism** – Events occur in accordance with scientific laws.
   • Science replaces the divine/fate as predictive discipline able to tell us what is going to occur in physical universe.
   • Thomas Hobbes argued human behavior represents ‘behavior of matter’ -- everything operates according to ‘laws of physics.’

**Determinism vs. Fatalism**
• Stoics adhere to doctrine of ‘cosmological determinism’ in which future is fixed by providential God.
• Hobbes (*materialists*) argued that no event is inevitable (determined in advance), but ‘determined’ only if certain conditions are met.

**Psychological Determinism**
Behaviorists argue that human action is result of experiential learning.
• Freedom is an illusion.
• We are ‘products’ of environmental circumstances – psycho/social conditioning – or ‘products’ of our psychological (physical) structures (brain).

**Economic Determinism**
Material determinists such as Marx argued that socio-economic laws determine all social/political change.
• Social conditioning, class structure, material production, ownership of property, etc., determine our consciousness.
Hedonism

The achievement of his own happiness is man’s highest moral purpose.

-- Ayn Rand

Psychological vs. Ethical Hedonism
Psychological hedonism is based in motivational theory (why we do what we do).

• We wish to reduce pain and increase pleasure.
• We choose more attractive options over repugnant ones.
• We choose present option because past experience has been positive (conditioning).

Ethical hedonism is based on assumption that pleasure is intrinsically valuable, valuable in itself (values based).

• We should strive to create states of affairs that produce pleasure and reduce pain.
• Any action should be measured by quantity of pleasure produced.

Aristippus of Cyrene (Libya, North Africa 430-350 B.C.E.)
• First Western philosopher stating value of hedonism – develops Cyrenaic Hedonism.

Basic Tenets:
1) Pleasure is principal motive for living.
2) No qualitative distinction among pleasures.
3) Intensity is only criterion to determine best action or state of affairs.
4) Actual pleasure is more desirable than potential pleasure.
5) Physical, sensory pleasure is higher good than pursuit of knowledge/goodness/truth.
6) Mission in life, learn how to enjoy ourselves most fully.

Warning:
• We must use rational control over pleasure.
• Loss of self-control can lead to less pleasure in long run – Socratic self-control of debilitating desire creates uninhibited capacity for enjoyment.
• Better to enjoy today than dream of potential pleasures in future (only to be disappointed).
Pleasure is the absence of pain in the body and trouble in the soul.

--Epicurus

Epicurus (Samos, Asia Minor 341 B.C.E. –270 B.C.E.)

- In his school (The Garden) developed foundations of Epicureanism.
- Taught men, women, courtesans, slaves and aristocrats as equals – a progressive policy of the day.

Basic Tenets:

1) Pleasure is good and pain is evil, but not all pleasure is worthy of pursuit nor should all pain be avoided.
2) We must distinguish between momentary pleasure/pain and enduring pleasure/pain.

For example, the momentary pleasure of unprotected sex may produce greater pain of sexually transmitted diseases (STD).

Or

A painful operation for the short duration may produce greater good health in the long run.

Therefore, we must show a willingness to delay immediate gratification for longer-term benefits (endurance vs. intensity).

Kinetic vs. Static (catastematic) Pleasures

*Kinetic pleasure* accompanies motion and ceases when motion or activity ceases.

For example, we reach for a glass of water to satisfy thirst. Pleasure is achieved when immediate want or pain is removed.

*Static pleasure* is the state of having no pain, and is potentially a condition of indefinite prolongation.

For example, when all wants have been removed we achieve a tranquil state.

*Static pleasures* are preferable over *kinetic pleasures* which are momentary and last only as long as the accompanying action.

- *Ataraxia* (tranquility) is the state of not having *tarachai* (troubles).
• In a state of Epicurean *ataraxia*, we use faculties without strain and without obstruction from fear, hunger and disease.

**Impediments to Ataraxia**

• Often the fear of divine punishment (i.e., by a divine being), the fear of death, or the fear of eternal damnation in the ‘afterlife’ prevents us from enjoying life in the here and now.

Death is not a thing to fear nor should it impede us in enjoying life because, with death, comes the end of physical sensation.

• Desiring the impossible and fearing the inevitable can only disturb the soul.

**Virtue in the Pleasant Life**

• If acting virtuously contributes to prolonged pleasure, then we should act virtuously.
• If virtuous acts stand in the way of personal pleasure, then virtuous acts should be overridden.

Ultimately, virtues grow to become part of happiness, and that part of the pleasant life is formed by acting and living according to the virtues.

• *Friendship* is not about using others to get pleasure for oneself; we get genuine pleasure from being concerned about and caring for others.

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**Buddhism**

*Suffering I teach – and the way out of suffering.*

-- The Buddha

Siddhartha Gautama (Nepal, born 563 B.C.E.)

• Born as a prince of the Shakya clan, he was confined to luxurious life in his father’s palace.
• At 16, Siddhartha married cousin, Yasodhara, who eventually bore him a son (Rahula) when he was 29.
• Dissatisfied with life in palace, Siddhartha persuades friend, Channa, to take him outside palace walls.

The Four Visions of Siddhartha:
1) first encounters an old man;
2) then a sick man;
3) then sees a corpse being carried away for cremation;
4) he then encounters a monk who appears to be in a serene state
despite being surrounded by the suffering of old age, sickness and death.

Renouncing the World

• Siddhartha renounces earthly attachment to princely life and
adopts austere life of rigorous fasting, meditation, wearing plain
clothes and eating simple food.

• After several years Siddhartha concludes that severe asceticism is
fruitless and instead adopts the “middle path” between a life of
sensual self-indulgence (palace life) and one of severe self-denial.

For the next 45 years the Buddha established his monastic community
(sangha), and preached that the way to nirvana (enlightenment, release)
is to understand the “Four Noble Truths” and follow the “Middle Way”
of living by following the “Eightfold Path”

Four Noble Truths
1. The problem of human life is suffering (dukkha)
There are three kinds of suffering:
   a) Ordinary Suffering
   b) Suffering Produced by Change
   c) Suffering as Conditioned States

a) Ordinary Suffering
The sensations associated with birth, old age, sickness, death,
association with unpleasant persons and conditions, separation from
beloved ones and pleasant conditions, not getting what one desires,
grief, lamentation, distress—all forms of physical and mental suffering.

b) Suffering Produced by Change
All pleasant sensations or feelings do not last. They fade away and this
produces pain, suffering, unhappiness, disappointment and craving for
their return.

c) Suffering as Conditioned States
The Self is a combination of ever-changing mental and physical forces
that can be divided into five groups or 'aggregates':
   Matter
   Sensations
   Perceptions
Mental Formations
Consciousness.
Our Belief (illusion)
We believe these changing aggregates to be ‘permanent personality.’
Suffering as conditioned states is produced by attachment to these five aggregates.

2. The Cause of Suffering
The principal cause of suffering is attachment to "desire" or "craving," and includes both the desire to have (wanting) and desire not to have (aversion):
   a) Desire for sense-pleasures,
   b) Desire to become,
   c) Desire to get rid of.

3. The Cessation of Suffering
The end of suffering is nonattachment, or letting go of desire or craving. This is the state of nirvana, where greed, hatred and delusion are extinct.
   • By letting go of attachment to desire for conditioned phenomena, desire can come to an end and we can be liberated from suffering.

4. The Noble Eightfold Path
The end to suffering will result by following the Noble Eightfold Path.

The Eightfold Path
   • By following the dharma (Buddha’s teachings), one can gain restraint and can end all cravings.
   • There are three qualities with a total of eight categories that must be developed to attain nirvana:
      a) Wisdom
         i) Right Understanding – grasp of Four Noble Truths.
         ii) Right Thought – move towards nonattachment.
      b) Morality
         iii) Right Speech – free from malice, gossip, lies, etc.
         iv) Right Action – cultivate goodness/virtue towards all.
         v) Right Livelihood – avoid work that harms others.
      c) Concentration
         vi) Right Effort – doing/action that which produces good.
         vii) Right Mindfulness – to be mindful of one’s actions.
viii) Right Concentration - scheme of meditation that leads to *samadhi* (release from the cycles of rebirth caused by *karma* – the law of moral causation).