

Philosophy as a Guide to Living

(24 lectures, 30 minutes/lecture)

Course No. 4244

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Is there a meaning to human life?

All of us have asked ourselves this question. But for philosophers through the ages, it was only the first of many, for they needed to know whether such a question was even *answerable* by philosophy. And if it was, they needed to ask whether any positive answer could be pursued through the practice of philosophy itself.

Today, these questions remain as timely and controversial as ever. But following the pathway of proposed answers on anything other than a level surface—no matter how fascinating we find the subject—can often be difficult for those untrained in philosophy and the profound rigor of its arguments and language.

Provocative, Accessible Lectures

What a delight, then, to be able to offer Professor Stephen A. Erickson's **Philosophy as a Guide to Living**—a thoughtful, stimulating, and most important, *accessible* discussion of how some of the greatest minds of the past three centuries have pondered why we are here and what journey we might be on.

It's a chance for you to take your own journey, as Professor Erickson guides you along the intellectual road traveled by post-Enlightenment thinkers such as Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and other European philosophers. These ideas persist to the present day, as contemporary philosophers have taken up the intellectual route so irresistible to the likes of later intellectuals—Marx, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, Sartre, Camus, Foucault, and Habermas.

Each one, says Professor Erickson, “speaks in important ways to the time in which we now find ourselves. They are concerned with exploring the limits of human reason and are focused on the likely course of history. These philosophers tend also to pay close attention to our lives *in* the world, enmeshed in culture and questing after significant opportunities for self-understanding and personal development.”

Most important, you can comprehend what each has to say equipped only with your own intellect, curiosity, and fascination with the course's central question. Professor Erickson has designed a course that requires no prior background in philosophy and avoids the often-intimidating language in which serious philosophy can be expressed. And he has done so without diminishing the extraordinary intellectual depth that each of the philosophers included here bring to the debate.

Anyone who has ever studied philosophy at length will understand what a remarkable achievement this course is. From his first lecture, when he removes any threat of confusion about the “axial model of understanding”—one of the few technical terms used in these lectures—it is clear that this is a different kind of philosophy course. Professor Erickson clearly explains that the term is the basic model of understanding life that has dominated philosophical and religious thinking in the West for 3,000 years—the idea that life is a process or journey between two different orders: from darkness to light, from bondage to liberation, from experiencing the world's *appearance* to understanding its *reality* .

A Comfortable Approach to Theory

This clarity soon becomes evident as the norm of the course; it is the result of an award-winning teacher's relaxed and contemplative style, free of jargon and favoring the concrete over the abstract. Professor Erickson is also skilled at weaving in quick summaries of what preceding philosophers had to say about the topic being covered, so it is always clear exactly where each new thinker fits in. The course is an ideal way to become comfortable with philosophical ideas. And it's an approach that brings to life the beliefs and arguments of these great thinkers, as well as the philosophers themselves.

Lecture by lecture, you'll encounter some of the inspirational minds that have helped humankind probe what is perhaps its most fundamental question, including:

Karl Marx , whose horror over working conditions in 19th-century England and contempt of the ways of the privileged would ultimately alter the political landscape of the world

Friedrich Nietzsche , whose own brand of Existentialism represented a dramatic detour from Kierkegaard's, and who left a lasting imprint on philosophical thought, even though he became hopelessly insane the last 11 years of his life

Sigmund Freud , whose impact on the field of psychology cannot obscure the relevance his work has for philosophers grappling with questions about meaning and the foundations of self-knowledge

The avenues opened by these thinkers, and by all the minds explored in these lectures, do not, of course, explain the meaning of life. Or even if such a meaning exists. But they do take us further along a journey that will almost certainly never end.

Course Lecture Titles

Part 1

1. The Axial Model
2. Kant's Hopeful Program
3. The Kantian Legacy
4. Kant and the Romantic Reaction
5. Hegel on the Human Spirit
6. Hegel on State and Society
7. Hegel on Selfhood and Human Identity
8. Schopenhauer's Pessimism
9. Schopenhauer's Remedies
10. Alienation in Marx
11. Marx's Utopian Hope
12. Kierkegaard's Crises

Part 2

13. Kierkegaard's Passion
14. Why God Died—Nietzsche's Claim
15. Nietzsche's Dream
16. Freud's Nightmare
17. Freud on Our Origins
18. Psychoanalytic Visions in and after Freud
19. Heidegger on the Meaning of Meaning
20. Heidegger on Technology's Threat
21. Heidegger's Politics and Legacy
22. The Human Situation—Sartre and Camus
23. Power and Reason—Foucault and Habermas
24. Today's Provocative Landscape—Thresholding