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Teaching Philosophy as a Way of Life

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> *Most people think that. . . practicing philosophy is only a matter of conducting dialogues from the heights of a chair and reciting lectures from books. But the uninterrupted practice in both politics and philosophy, which may be observed on a daily basis in deeds and in actions, escapes those people. For they claim that those who walk back and forth in the porticoes are 'peripatetic,' as Dicaearchus used to say, while those who walk to the countryside or to a friend's house are not. But practicing politics is just like practicing philosophy. Socrates, for instance, did not set up desks for his students, sit in a teacher's chair, or reserve a prearranged time for talking and walking with his friends. No, he practiced philosophy while joking around (when the chance arose) and drinking and serving on military campaigns and hanging around the marketplace with some of his students, and finally, even while under arrest and drinking the hemlock. He was the first to demonstrate that our lives are open to philosophy at all times and in every aspect, while experiencing every emotion, and in each and every activity.*[1]

That is a passage from Plutarch, the first-second century Greek philosopher, historian, biographer, and priest at Delphi who later became a Roman citizen. He is best known for his work *Parallel Lives* (Βίοι Παράλληλοι), a series of twenty-three pairs of biographies of ancient figures—one Greek, one Roman, such as Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar or Demosthenes and Cicero. The effect is to intensify the category of "life" or "living" as a mode of organizing a text and focus of analysis. How one *lived* is the first and last term. Everything else hangs on this. What this shows us is that one of the fundamental aspects of antiquity was the focus on a way of life. This includes philosophy.

Let us repeat Plutarch's last words, with a slight change in translation, so they might act as the downbeat or anacrusis for what follows: "*at all times and in every place, in everything that happens to us, daily life gives us the opportunity to do philosophy.*" This means that philosophy, in the ancient world, was a way of life, which makes

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us wonder what it might look like for us, contemporary philosopher teachers, to take up this question today.

Learning from Hadot

The phrase "Philosophy as a Way of Life" is typically associated with the French scholar of antiquity Pierre Hadot. Hadot was not a product of the elite French university schooling. He trained in a Catholic seminary and served as priest for several years. From this academically adjacent perspective, Hadot attuned to the elements of ancient thought that exceeded intellectual interests of the highbrow École Normale Supérieure. Hadot was fascinated by the seemingly simpler and less sophisticated texts—Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*, Epicurus' Letters, Plotinus' *Enneads*, etc. While many thought these less theoretically rich and complex than Aristotle's *Metaphysics* or Plato's *Parmenides*, Hadot sensed something that was not directly evident on the extant pages but still pulsed at his touch.

Eventually, he came to believe that there was a fundamental difference in ancient and modern philosophy. While philosophy is often considered an arid, merely theoretical discipline mostly divorced from everyday life and practices, ancient Greek and Roman philosophy was decidedly not. The study and practice of philosophy in European antiquity was primarily an art of living, grounded on the principle that "real wisdom does not merely cause us to know: it makes us 'be' in a different way."[2] More than esoteric quibbles, ancient philosophers sought to bring about an inner freedom through the cultivation of cosmic consciousness aimed to assuage existential anguish. The classic goal of philosophy, argued Hadot, was self-transformation through dedicated and intentional practices he called spiritual exercises. Importantly, it was not a solitary activity, but one deeply bound up with others. It required collective labor, often in intimate community, and ongoing mutual support. Philosophers "never gave up having an effect on their cities, transforming society, and serving their citizens."[3] In short, Philosophy was a "mode of existing-in-the-world" collectively, attentively, intentionally, compassionately.[4] Philosophy used to be a way of life.

The reason why Marcus Aurelius seemed, to others, simpler and less sophisticated was that the primary element of his *Meditations* was living. Although they might, at first, appear less sophisticated and complex, what is missing from the extant Hellenistic writings is what Hadot viewed as the main object of ancient thought: philosophy as an art of living. The embodied lives of Aurelius, Epicurus, and others disappeared with their deaths, leaving behind only their writings. What we have today are thus shells or fossils, which necessarily lack the concrete, dynamic, and embodied ways of living at which they were directed and embedded. It is mere prejudice to say that those Hellenistic philosophers were less sophisticated. Instead, their writings were subordinated to *living* as a Stoic or Epicurean.

Hadot's attunement to life itself is what gripped us personally and inspired us professionally to edit a journal issue. This special issue of *Studies in Pedagogy* focuses on the principles, practices, experiences, and scholarship of teaching philosophy as a way of life (PWOL).

Becoming Pedagogy

This special issue is, in a sense, our answer to the concluding questions of Matthew Sharpe and Michael Ure's excellent *Philosophy as a Way of Life: History, Dimensions, Directions*. They ask

> how, after all, could one exactly teach PWL in conditions of mass higher education? One can hardly be a Seneca to several hundred Lucilius for the eleven- to twelve-week span of a standard university term. How could one assess a students' ethical or spiritual progress, or their meditative practices, their self-control and serenity in the face of adversity? Isn't the role of spiritual director that ancient pedagogy supposed no longer possible, respecting alike our pupils' privacy, and the limitations of the time-pressed modern adjunct who increasingly typifies the really-existing professional?[5]

In the following essays, our contributors take up Sharpe and Ure's challenge of trying to imagine and enact what teaching PWOL could be in contemporary mass higher education. While literally reviving the ancient schools in the contemporary world is impossible, and not necessarily desirable, there are countless reasons to take up this approach to teaching philosophy.

There is, for example, great value for our *students*. As young thinkers grapple with perennial and new challenges of seeking meaning, value, and purpose in a complex and fraught world, seeing philosophy as a way of life keeps alive questions of meaning and value beyond jobs and the economy. We see enormous value for *teachers*, too. As educators of all fields try to keep our eyes on the crucial pedagogical question, "what's at stake in all this"—in our lesson plans, in our assignments, in our field of study generally—philosophy as a way of life, we think, helps us stay inspired, committed, and creative. We even see great value for the *discipline of philosophy* itself. As we try to forge philosophy's future in higher education, navigating and challenging its present form, we must grapple with the institutional call to instrumentalize the value of wisdom and think in the language of marketplace skills or specialists training other specialists.

We believe, moreover, that the value of pedagogy rooted in philosophy as a way of life is not exclusive to professors specifically teaching ancient philosophy or those dedicated to designing explicitly way of life courses. Indeed, its insights and innovations—in reflective teaching, experiential learning, philosophical exercises, embodied theorizing, community-engagement, and other high impact practices—offer tools and strategies for effective philosophy teaching, full stop.

Over the last decade or so this Hadotian conception of philosophy has evoked global interest for reviving the study and teaching of philosophy within modern disciplinary settings. The publication of this special issue appears near the crest of a rising tide of current and forthcoming scholarship and publications. As we detail in the annotated bibliography, there are many new special issue journals and book series, cutting-edge individual articles, conference presentations, blogs and other media on the study and teaching of philosophy as a way of life. There are also well-funded national projects centered on teaching philosophy as a way of life. (See the annotated bibliography for examples.) Yet despite this rise in conversation and creativity for this approach to teaching, little published literature focuses specifically on how we bring this commitment into our classrooms, and ground it in pedagogical principles and research. Given this lack of, yet clear thirst for, specifically pedagogical literature on Philosophy as a Way of Life teaching, we believe that this issue showcases the examples of brilliant teachers of philosophy seen as ways of living. As our contributors come from across the globe, we are honored to have collected such exciting pedagogical innovations and insights in the world.

More than reviving ancient philosophy or filling a gap in the literature, pedagogical or not, there is something more at stake in this for us, Jane and Ryan. Philosophy as a way of life is not another area of competency. It is not a trendy theme that vaguely appeals to most people yet is specific enough to garner national funding and publisher's interest. It is not even an approach that can be used in some classes or with some texts, but not in all. If philosophy is truly a way of life, then it is not something you can pick up and put down, like a lens or methodology. To teach philosophy as a way of life means every class, no matter the subject, must consist of concrete practices, spiritual exercises, and lived experience. It is an entire *way of life*, a full *mode of existence*. To live philosophically means philosophy infuses every dimension of a life, from teaching introductory classes to eating lunch, walking around campus, and even sleeping. What Hadot noticed in the ancients is far more demanding and comprehensive than a person might at first realize. Philosophy, to be clear, is not the kind of specialized academic discipline as most people know it today. Rather, philosophy is the sculpting of a form of being in the world that cannot not be anything but philosophical.

The Essays

In "PWL for the 21st Century Academic Philosopher" Matthew Sharpe proposes a third way of teaching PWL, one that is neither historical nor merely the attempt to introduce spiritual exercises into syllabi, which is in many places administratively impossible.[6] Sharpe proposes that insights from PWL's re-conception of philosophy as a situated, social as well as ethical activity can, and ideally should, be integrated

into modern syllabi by introducing and teaching capstone unit(s) for advanced students. Students would be asked to reflect critically on what it is to be an academic philosopher today. Such units would set out to: 1) explicitly thematize the ways that academic philosophers are not pure minds, but fallible, socialized human beings within wider societies, with material and social needs, fears and desires, and subject to all-too-human forms of cognitive limitation, bias, and propensities to error and 2) problematize the ways that the requirements of academic life can foster characteristic, avoidable forms of intellectual and ethical vices which pull against key philosophical values (such as truth-seeking, collaborative knowledge-sharing, or intellectual humility) and can even be damaging for individuals who take this career path. The paper sets out one possible syllabus for such a course modeled on the author's past teaching.

Jake Wright's "Transforming our Classrooms and Ourselves: Philosophy as a Way of Life as Radical Pedagogy" argues that Philosophy as a Way of Life represents a distinct pedagogy that differs from philosophy's signature pedagogy because of PWOL's differing views of what philosophy is and how it is successfully practiced. Wright further argues that this pedagogy is radical in two senses. First, PWOL is technically radical because it naturally incorporates cutting-edge pedagogical techniques that promote student success. Second, Wright argues that PWOL is transformatively radical because it seeks to transform students' understanding of themselves and the world around them. Following this argument, Wright discusses his own experiences implementing a PWOL-based course as a case study of PWOL's radical nature.

Laura J. Mueller and Eli Kramer's "Let's be Frank: Revitalizing Frank Friendship in the Contemporary Philosophy Classroom" sees Philodemus's *On Frank Criticism* as offering a unique conception of friendship that relies on frank speech, or truth-telling.[7] The ability to have frank conversations with one another is the heart of friendship, a friendship in which we are seen, heard, and acknowledged. This is the friendship through which we become better citizens and better selves. Yet, one would be hard put to find such trust and deep friendship in the university philosophy classrooms of today. Mueller and Kramer trace the roots of this friendship from Plato's *Lysis*, to Epicurean communities, to Arendt's and Foucault's analyses of friendship. Using these models of frank friendship, they show how the classroom practice of Modern Socratic Dialogue can re-enliven frank friendship as a spiritual exercise in the contemporary university-philosophy classroom.

In "Moving and Looking," Jacob Stump argues that often to teach philosophy is to give students information about a topic. Stump considers a different way. A philosophy teacher may give students the experience of philosophy as a way of life. In part, this requires giving students the experience of doing what Hadot calls 'spiritual exercises.' There is another part to it, though, and it is more fundamental: giving students the experience of being in love with wisdom. The main question of

his paper is what it might be to teach philosophy in a way that prioritizes giving students the chance to fall in love with wisdom. Stump does not so much argue for an answer as he invites the reader to follow him along a path of metaphor, reflections on teaching philosophy, and quotations.

Alex Stehn's "American Philosophy as a Way of Life: A Course in Self-Culture" fills in some historical, conceptual, and pedagogical gaps that appear in the most visible and recent professional efforts to "revive" Philosophy as a Way of Life. Stehn presents "American Philosophy and Self-Culture" as an advanced undergraduate seminar that broadens who counts in and what counts as philosophy by immersing us in the lives, writings, and practices of seven representative U.S.-American philosophers of self-culture, community-building, and world-changing: Benjamin Franklin, Frederick Douglass, William Ellery Channing, Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Henry Bugbee, and Gloria Anzaldúa. Students enter the class with preconceptions about who philosophers are, what they do, how they write, and the languages in which they write. Students walk out with new senses of self, place, and language that emerge through new ways of seeing, doing, and writing philosophy.

In "Philosophy for Living: Exploring Diversity and Immersive Assignments in A PWOL Approach," Sharon Mason and Benjamin Rider reflect on their experiences teaching a PWOL course called Philosophy for Living. The course uses modules focused on different historical philosophical ways of life (Epicureanism, Stoicism, Confucianism, Existentialism, etc.) to engage students in exploring how philosophy can be a way of life and how its methods, virtues, and ideas can improve their own lives. Mason and Rider describe and compare their experiences regarding engagement with and focus on diversity and the use of immersive experiences and assignments. In particular, they discuss how they recognize and center cultural and gender diversity in philosophy, but also diversity in how and which forms philosophy can be done and what "philosophy as a way of life" can be. Finally, Mason and Rider examine how the experimental and experiential aspects of immersive assignments promote deeper understanding and create possibilities for personal transformation.

In "PWOL as Situated Pedagogy: Adapting Hadot's Model for Today's Classroom," Gaia Ferrari and Samantha Dragar articulate a pedagogical paradigm of philosophy as a way of life that can effectively re-invigorate the teaching of philosophy in today's academic world. This re-invigoration should take direct inspiration from Hadot's hermeneutical framework of how to live philosophically, while still recognizing the intrinsic limitations that his model presents when applied to the modern educational practices of academia. In particular, Ferrari and Dragar maintain that a literal application of Hadot's model would require turning the teaching of philosophy as a way of life into a systemic affair that demands from students a full commitment to particular schools of thought. Conversely,

Ferrari and Dragar argue for a pedagogical paradigm of philosophy as a way of life ("PWOL-as-Situated-Pedagogy") that enacts a triple balancing between theory and practice, progress and assessment, and depth and breadth. In this way, the problem of self-cultivation is tackled by engaging students with a broader consideration of philosophies and spiritual exercises.

In "Civically Engaged Philosophy as a Way of Life," Monica Janzen, Ben Hole, and Ramona Ilea, demonstrate how teachers committed to seeing philosophy as a way of life often focus on assignments that help students develop personal practices for the students to experience peace of mind, independence, and a cure from anguish. While Janzen, Hole, and Ilea applaud these goals, their work highlights another important aspect of PWOL that sometimes is overlooked. They want their students to see themselves as moral agents, developing "cosmic consciousness" and growing in civic virtues. To reach this end, they utilize a civic engagement (CE) project that they call the "Experiments in Ethics," which consists of a series of small, interrelated, assignments or "experiments" that help students develop habits and certain civic dispositions. Janzen, Hole, and Ilea argue that civically engaged philosophy as a way of life extends beyond the confines of the classroom and the semester as their students cultivate the ability to make changes in their own lives and the communities in which they live.

Carissa Phillips-Garrett's "Moral Development, Ethical Transformation, and Practice" shows that standard ways of conceptualizing moral development and measuring pedagogical interventions in ethics classes privilege the growth of moral judgment over moral sensitivity, moral motivation, and moral habits by too often conflating improvement in moral judgment with holistic moral development. Phillips-Garrett argues that if we care about students' construction and cultivation of their ethical selves, assessment design principles ought to take seriously the transformative possibilities of philosophy as a way of life and be based on a more robust and holistic account of moral development. Phillips-Garrett illustrates these principles of assessment design through an examination of the Character Project, which she created to help students engage in their own deliberate ethical transformation through self-directed, individualized, and concentrated practice. Finally, Phillips-Garrett concludes with a discussion about how to appropriately and fairly assess this kind of deeply personal learning.

In "Philosophy as a Way of Teaching: A Handbook," Jane Drexler draws on her experiences teaching Philosophy with a Way-of-Life approach to reflect broadly on our practices as philosophy teachers: how we think of our classrooms and design students' learning experiences, how we evaluate ourselves and our teaching, and generally, how we keep walking into the classroom each semester. Based on a talk she delivered in 2020, Drexler's contribution to this issue presents a series of chapters of an enchiridion for teaching: a handbook of loosely-connected

reflections, principles, struggles, and strategies for teaching Philosophy as a Way of Life, and also for Teaching (philosophy) as a way of life.

The volume concludes with "Talking Shop: Invitations to a Philosophical Life," where community philosophers Marisa Diaz-Waian and David Nowakowski enact a raw and playful series of focused conversations, examining the pedagogy of public philosophy, seen as a way of life. Blending historical and theoretical considerations with discussions of specific community programs and activities, they consider the roles of love, transformation, friendship, uncertainty, and courage in the pursuit of wisdom and excellence. In doing so, they open a space for wider reflection on what it means to live philosophically, and how best to do this—for ourselves, and as an invitation to others—both inside and outside of the classroom.

Notes

1. Plutarch, *How to Be a Leader: An Ancient Guide to Wise Leadership*, 325–29.
2. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 265.
3. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 274.
4. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 264.
5. Sharpe and Ure, *History, Dimensions, Directions*, 334–35.
6. Sharpe and Ure use 'PWL,' rather than 'PWOL,' which is a departure from other approaches.
7. Philodemus, *On Frank Criticism*.

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