



Practical Philosophy

An introductory course

Practical ancient wisdom for the modern age



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Welcome



On behalf of all our students and tutors, it's a real pleasure to welcome you to the Midlands School of Practical Philosophy and to our introductory course in practical philosophy entitled 'Wisdom'.

The School has been presenting practical philosophy courses here in the Midlands for over 30 years. So you're in very good company, hundreds of local people have been through our doors and found something of value from our courses. We hope you will too and that you'll also tell your friends and family so that they, too, can gain the benefit.

In putting together this folder, we've tried to think of the information you might need and the questions which our students often ask us. You will have your own questions as well, whether arising from the course itself or about the School more generally, so please don't hold back from asking them; that's why we're here.

Over the page are some of the main details you'll need, including your tutor's contact details and term dates.

Enjoy the course!

David Nock
Branch Leader
Midlands School of Practical Philosophy

Key information for this term

Your tutors are: Steve Davy, Darren Wagstaff and David Nock

Email: davidnock@philosophymidlands.org

Mobile: 0121 454 2540

Please speak to your tutor if you have any questions arising from the course. It's also appreciated if you can let them know in advance if you won't be able to attend an evening for any reason.

Term dates

Term starts a choice of either:

Tuesday 6th January

Wednesday 7th January

or Thursday 8th January

Last evenings: 10th, 11th and 12th March

Please aim to be seated **by 7.15pm** to enable a prompt start and finish (approximately 9.30pm).

Course venue and parking

Newland House, 137-139 Hagley Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B16 8UA.

There's usually plenty of free parking available on Plough and Harrow Road and on Beaufort Road. The entrance to the school rooms in Newland House is on Plough and Harrow Road.

School's website: www.philosophymidlands.org

School Phone Number: 0121 454 2540

Working Principles

The School has adopted various working principles with the aim of protecting the welfare of its students and the integrity of its work. These include the following:

- All are welcome to sample what the School has to offer through the introductory courses, and to continue further with their studies if so inclined.
- The intent of the School is that everyone attending, however long or short their stay, will find something of value.
- The School not only seeks to deepen the understanding of its students but also encourages them to put what they have learned into practice. The aim is to lead a balanced life and to serve society to the best of one's ability.
- Students are asked not to indulge in criticism of others, but to practise tolerance and respect towards fellow students.
- All tutors are also students of philosophy in the School, one of the principles of the School is; learn and teach
- Tutors receive no remuneration for their services.
- The fact that someone is attending courses in the School, or has a position of trust within it, should never be used for the purpose of securing financial gain.
- Course fees are kept to a practical minimum and are used to pay for the hire of the building and to advertise the introductory course to make it as widely available as possible.

Practical Philosophy

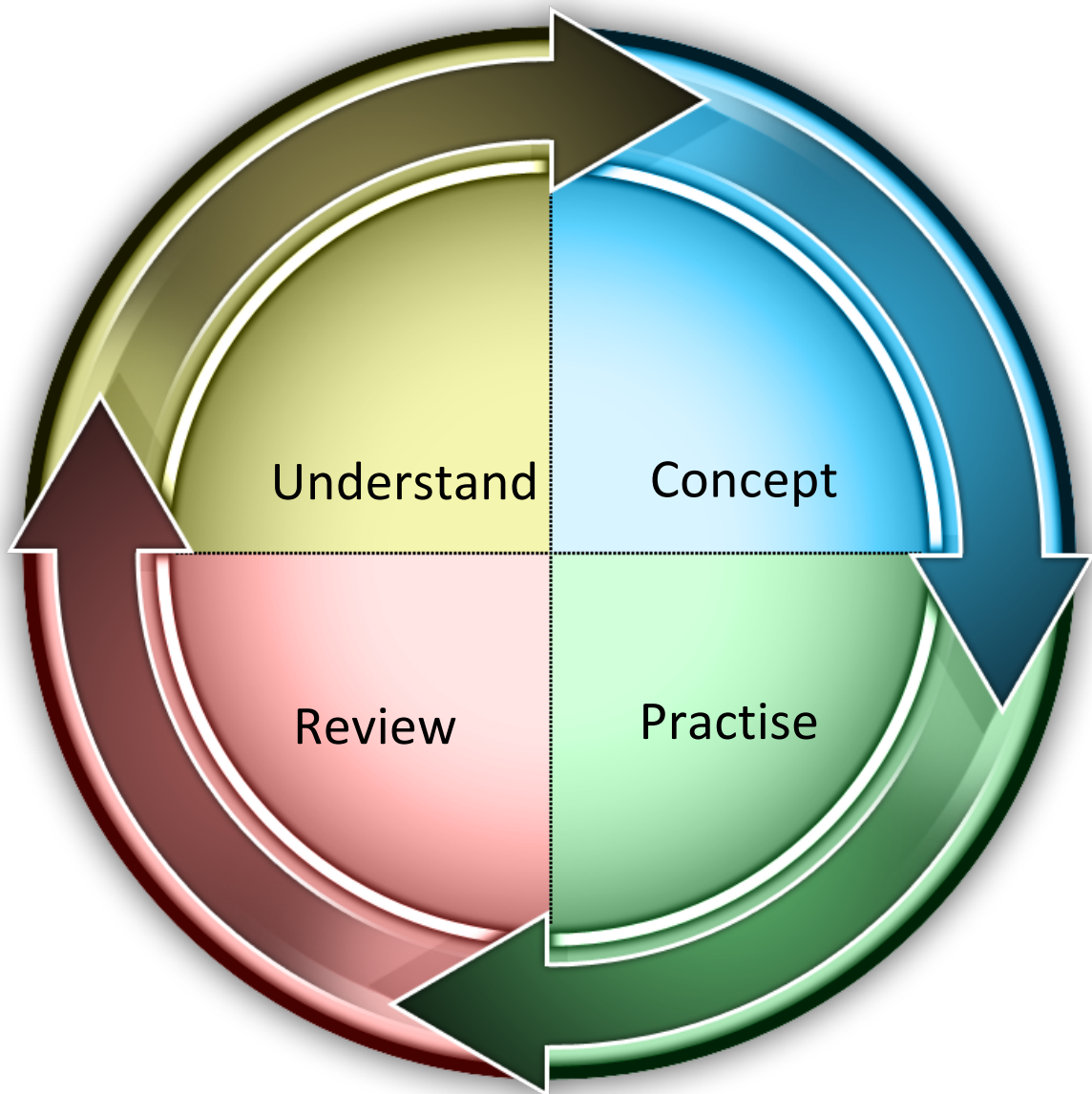
The introductory course

- 1. The wisdom within** *The course as a whole. Philosophy and wisdom. Being and awareness.*
- 2. Know thyself** *Self-discovery. Self-knowledge. Who or what am I? What is my potential in living? How may I realise that potential?*
- 3. Being awake** *Different levels of awareness. What is our usual state of awareness? Are there greater levels of awareness? If so, how may we gain access to them?*
- 4. Attending to the present moment** *Living in the present moment, the now. What is the potential of the present moment? The power of attention to connect with the present moment.*
- 5. Living justly** *What is justice and injustice? What does it mean to live justly? Plato's 'six tyrants'.*
- 6. The three-fold energy** *How to understand and use energy well. Can we increase the energy available to us?*
- 7. The light of reason** *Two practical frameworks for reason. How can reason enrich our lives?*
- 8. The power of beauty** *What is beauty? What is its purpose? Where does it come from?*
- 9. Unity in diversity** *How to see unity in diversity, the common thread of life*
- 10. The desire for truth** *How does the desire for truth show itself? How may it be satisfied?*

Practising Philosophy

We will discuss this learning cycle diagram in week 2 of the course. It shows the important role of practice in real-life situations in developing understanding and wisdom. The golden rule in practising philosophy is 'neither to accept or reject anything presented in the course but to try it out and see'.

Remember to use your hand-outs not only to remind you of the concepts and practices during the week, but also to make notes on what you have observed in putting the practices into use. This will help when it comes to reviewing at the next weekly class.



A reminder of the most important of these practices is on the next page....

The Mindfulness Awareness Exercise

In order to help bring about a greater depth of experience it is necessary to gain the ability to become truly still. This is not just stillness at the physical level but also stillness of the mental and emotional activity.

During this 10 week course we will be developing this practice, building on the concepts on a week-by-week basis. The following is the basic form, the cornerstone of the practice: developing the experience of stillness through connection to the senses.

The Practice

1. Find a balanced and comfortable posture, not stiff or slouching, but “poised”.
2. Start with connecting to the sense of touch, the most immediate sense. Connect with your feet on the ground, the weight of your body as it is distributed through your seat. Feel the touch of clothes on the skin, and the play of air on the face and hands.
3. Be aware of taste and smell, the subtle odours and flavours as they play on the senses.
4. Now be aware of sight. Be aware of simple form and colour, the rich contrasts, curves and shapes. This is a strong sense so just keep it simple. Some people may prefer to close their eyes if they find sight too distracting.
5. Now connect with the hearing, starting with those sounds close to you, within the room. Then allow the hearing to run slowly out, encompassing more sounds from the street outside, the surrounding town or area, and then letting it run right out to the furthest and gentlest sounds, embracing all. Try not to let the mind name or comment on the sounds, just allow them to flow through your awareness.
6. With the body completely relaxed, stay with the moment, stay with the edge of the awareness and the reality of what the senses are telling you. Simply rest with the awareness for a few moments.

What To Do

Practise this exercise twice a day. Following the exercise, carefully note the effects. How do you feel? What was experienced? What new things did you notice? How does it affect the quality of the day that follows?

Sources and Traditions

The course makes no attempt to cover all philosophers or traditions. Rather we draw inspiration from a wide range of teachings which seem to have most to offer to those seeking happiness and truth in their lives. The following list provides further information on some of the people and traditions quoted in this introductory course.

- **Advaita.** One of the most influential schools of Indian philosophy. *Advaita* (literally, 'not two', or *non-duality*) is a system of thought which refers to the identity of the individual with the universal. Recognition of this identity leads to liberation. See Shankara.
- **Bhagavad Gita** (composed 200-500 BC). A 700-verse Hindu scripture containing a conversation between Pandava prince Arjuna and his guide Krishna on a variety of philosophical issues. Faced with a fratricidal war, a despondent Arjuna turns to his charioteer Krishna for counsel on the battlefield. Krishna, through the course of the Gita, imparts to Arjuna wisdom, the path to knowledge, devotion, and the doctrine of selfless action. The Gita upholds the essence and the philosophical tradition of the Upanishads. The Gita forms part of the ancient Sanskrit epic The Mahabharata.
- **Blake, William** (1757 –1827). English Romantic poet, painter, and printmaker.
- **Buddha, Siddhārtha Gautama** (ca 400-500 BC). Indian spiritual teacher, whose teachings form the basis of Buddhism
- **Churchill, Sir Winston Leonard Spencer** - (1874 –1965). British politician and statesman known for his leadership of the United Kingdom during the Second World War. Widely regarded as one of the greatest wartime leaders of the century.
- **Confucius** (551–479 BC). Chinese teacher, politician and philosopher. His philosophy emphasised personal and governmental morality,

correctness of social relationships, justice and sincerity and his principles were based on common Chinese tradition and belief. He espoused the principle "Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself".

- **Dickinson, Emily (1830-1886)**. American poet. Many of her poems deal with themes of death and immortality.
- **Einstein, Albert (1879-1955)**. German-born theoretical physicist, father of modern physics, developed general theory of relativity.
- **Emerson, Ralph Waldo (1803-1882)**. American essayist, lecturer, and poet, who led the Transcendentalist movement (followers believed in the inherent goodness of both man and nature).
- **Epicurus (341BC-270BC)**. Ancient Greek philosopher. Founder of Epicurean school of philosophy. For Epicurus, the purpose of philosophy was to attain the happy, tranquil life. He believed pleasure to be the greatest good. The way to attain pleasure was to live modestly and to gain knowledge of the workings of the world and the limits of one's desires. This led one to attain a state of tranquillity and freedom from fear.
- **Galileo Galilei (1564-1642)**. Italian physicist, mathematician, astronomer and philosopher. Has been called "the Father of Modern Science".
- **Gibran, Kahlil (1883-1931)**. Lebanese-American artist, poet and writer. Author of *The Prophet* (1923). Said to be the third best-selling poet of all time.
- **Humanism**. A body of philosophies and ethical perspectives that emphasise the value of human beings, individually and collectively, and generally place more importance on rational thought than on strict faith. During the Renaissance period, humanists attempted to demonstrate the benefit of gaining learning from classical, pre-Christian sources, previously frowned upon by the Church.
- **Jesus (ca. 3 BC-AD33)**. Jewish teacher from Galilee in Roman Judaea. Central figure of the Christian religion; worshipped by Christians as the incarnation of God.
- **Khan, Hazrat Inayat (1882 -1927)**. Indian Sufi writer and musician; founder of The Sufi Order in the West (London) and teacher of

Universal Sufism. His message of divine unity focused on the themes of love, harmony and beauty.

- **Kipling, Rudyard (1865-1936)**. Indian-born English short-story writer, poet, and novelist. Winner of Nobel Prize for Literature in 1907.
- **Lusseyran, Jacques (1924-1971)**. French author, and political activist, blind from the age of eight. French resistance fighter in WW2. Spent time in Buchenwald concentration camp.
- **Mascaro, Juan (1897-1987)**. Spanish translator responsible for one of the most popular English translations of the Bhagavad Gita. His first work, Lamps of Fire, was a collection of religious and spiritual wisdom from across the world; a selection from the book inspired the Beatles song The Inner Light.
- **Plato (424-348 BC)**. Classical Greek philosopher, mathematician and student of Socrates, founded the Academy in Athens. “The safest general characteristic of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato.” (A. N. Whitehead)
- **Rumi (1207-1273)**. 13th-century Persian Muslim poet, jurist, theologian, and Sufi mystic.
- **Seattle, Chief (1780-1866)**. Leader of the Duwamish Tribe of Washington State, USA.
- **Seneca (4 BC – AD 65)**. Roman Stoic philosopher, statesman, dramatist. Tutor and advisor to emperor Nero. Enjoyed a good reputation among the early Christians and remains one of the few popular Roman philosophers from the period.
- **Shakespeare, William (1564- 1616)**. English poet and playwright, widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's pre-eminent dramatist.
- **Shankara (ca. AD 788-820)**. Indian philosopher who had a profound influence on the growth of Hinduism at a time when chaos, superstition and bigotry was rampant. Shankara advocated the greatness of the Vedas and was the most famous Advaita philosopher who consolidated the doctrine of advaita vedānta. His teachings are based on the unity of the individual (atman) and universal (brahman). Died aged 32.

- **Shantananda Saraswati (1913-1997)**. Indian Swami, Shankaracharya of Jyotir Math 1953-1980 and one of the great spiritual leaders of India. The School made contact with Maharaja Shri Shantananda Saraswati in the mid 1960s and was introduced through this connection to Advaita philosophy.
- **Socrates (c. 469 BC – 399 BC)**. Classical Greek Athenian philosopher. A founding father of Western philosophy. His life and words are known chiefly through the dialogues of Plato. Plato refers to Socrates as the “gadfly” of the state: just as a gadfly stings a horse into action, so Socrates stung various Athenians, confronting people to consider justice and the pursuit of goodness. His attempts may have led to his trial and execution. Socrates' life as the "gadfly" of Athens began when a friend asked the oracle at Delphi if anyone was wiser than Socrates; the Oracle replied that no-one was wiser. Since Socrates believed he possessed no wisdom whatsoever, he proceeded to test the riddle by approaching men considered wise in order to refute the Oracle's pronouncement. What he discovered, however, was that, while each man thought he knew a great deal in fact they knew very little. Socrates came to realise that the Oracle was correct, in that while so-called wise men thought themselves wise and yet were not, he himself knew he was not wise at all; paradoxically, this made him the wiser one, since he was the only person aware of his own ignorance.
- **Stoicism**. School of Hellenistic philosophy founded in Athens in the early 3rd century BC and popular throughout Greece and the Roman Empire. The Stoics taught that destructive emotions resulted from errors in judgment, and that a wise person would not suffer such emotions. To the Stoics, their philosophy was a way of life: the best indication of an individual's philosophy was not what a person said but how he behaved. Because "virtue is sufficient for happiness", a sage was immune to misfortune. Stoics included Seneca and the Emperor Marcus Aurelius.
- **Upanishads, The**. A collection of philosophical texts, passed down orally over thousands of years and forming the theoretical basis for the Hindu religion. They are also known as Vedanta.
- **Vivekananda, Swami (1863-1902)**. Indian Hindu monk, instrumental in bringing Vedanta and yoga to the West.

Sources of biographical details: Various including School of Economic Science, Wikipedia

Suggested reading list

Our students sometimes ask us to recommend some additional reading. So here's an *optional* list if you're interested in doing further reading. Please be selective – it's a long list! And remember that, while good reading undoubtedly supports our growth, wisdom in the end comes from applying it in practice.

Title	Author/Translator/Editor
Jonathan Livingston Seagull	Richard Bach
Illusions: The Adventures of a Reluctant Messiah	Richard Bach
Mister God this is Anna	Fynn
Philosophy For Life (and other dangerous situations)	Jules Evans
The Essential Rumi	Coleman Barks
The Enlightened Heart	Stephen Mitchell
The Enlightened Mind	Stephen Mitchell
The Geeta	Shri Purohit Swami
Good Company	H.H. Shantananda Saraswati
The Heart of the Eastern Mystical Teaching	H.P. Shastri
Inspired Talks	Swami Vivekananda

I Think Therefore I Am	Lesley Levene
Letters of Mozart	H. Mermann, Ed.
The Man Who Wanted to Meet God	H.H. Shantananda Saraswati
Meditations	Marcus Aurelius
Meditations on the Soul	Marsilio Ficino
The Book	Alan Watts
The Passion of the Western Mind	Richard Tarnas
The Perennial Philosophy	Aldous Huxley
The Portable Emerson	Carl Bode (ed.)
The Power of Now	Eckhart Tolle
The Screwtape Letters	C.S. Lewis
The Tao Of Physics	Fritjof Capra
The Tao Of Pooh	Benjamin Hoff
Siddhartha	Hermann Hesse
The Ten Principal Upanishads	W. B. Yeats/Shri Purohit Swami
World Within the Mind	H.P. Shastri
Zen Flesh, Zen Bones	Paul Reps

Continuing your studies

Centred upon the question 'how do the wise live?', the course is a complete study in itself. However, we would encourage you to explore and deepen your understanding further beyond the first term and we offer a range of opportunities should you wish to do so.

For students who have completed the introductory term, we run a follow-on group which covers four further modules of 11 weeks on a rotating basis.

Module 2: Philosophy and Happiness

1. The true nature of happiness. The conscious perceiver and the present moment.
2. Happiness and the needs of others. Being in tune with one's own nature
3. The principle that all be happy. Observing the movements of the mind
4. Self as the source of happiness. The present and passing time
5. The work of the Renaissance philosopher Marsilio Ficino. Immortality and divinity of the soul
6. The difference between pleasure and happiness. The different states of attention.
7. Natural values and their misconceptions.
8. Natural values continued. Attention and efficiency.
9. The creative power of wisdom. Speech and conversation.
10. The process of self-identification. The four principles of work.

Module 3: Philosophy and Love

1. The importance of love. How it is gained and how it is lost.
2. Love as it is expressed in creation. The nature of love overcoming limits.
3. The expansion of love. The things that conceal love
4. What it is that is loved. The nature of gratitude
5. "Love thy neighbour" The subtle realm of mind
6. The importance of connecting mind with the senses
7. The causes of duality and hostility. The unity of knowledge and love
8. Lack of love and giving. The importance of stillness
9. The relationship between love and law. Freedom of love and law together
10. Love and work. Love guided by wisdom.

Module 4: Philosophy and Presence of Mind

- Introduction to the subject of presence of mind. What in truth is present and receiving knowledge from what is present.
- The unchanging true existence which is always present. Explanation in Advaita (non-dualistic) philosophy. Discrimination between transient and eternal.
- Further on the need to discriminate between the transient and the eternal. The Absolute which is infinite and liberating in nature.

- Plato's analogy of the cave.
- Being in touch with the present and the natural rhythm of events.
- The power of thought as influenced by sattva, rajas and tamas (The three qualities of nature). The importance of nourishing the mind and how that may be done.
- The power of decision. Some key decisions that need to be addressed in life. Decision making and how that may be done effectively.
- The power of love to transcend limits and overcome division. The five levels of love from the individual to the universal. The nature of criticism.
- The power of will or the power of 'I' associated with any desire, thought or activity. A practical approach to action.
- The powers of thought, decision, love and will as universal powers. Oneself as unlimited and the effect on this of identification. The power of attention.
- The need to trust the present moment. Practical approaches to achieve this. The principle of giving what you lack.

Module 5: Philosophy and Freedom

- The relationship between freedom, love and truth. Meeting the creation as a play. Enacting the part sincerely and truthfully but without attachment.
- Freedom of speech. The four levels of speech: superficial, with conviction, speech from the heart and speech from the self
- Homer's Odyssey. The place of myths in philosophic work.
- Buddhi, the aspect of mind that evaluates, reasons and discriminates. The relationship between valuation, choice, practice and memory.
- Letting go of attachments so as to enjoy the freedom that is naturally available. The three guides for life described by Ficino.
- Freedom from the tyranny of 'I', 'me' and 'mine'. The nature of ahankara (ego).
- The freedom to attend without pre-set attitudes, assumptions, likes or dislikes.
- Economic freedom. The importance of the family for economic stability and growth, staying clear of indebtedness and the need to be watchful.
- The African concept of Ubuntu, humanity.
- Humanity that is common to all mankind. Its relationship with freedom. The ten-fold eternal law.

Meditation

During the course of these four modules, the subject of meditation is also introduced and you are invited to be introduced to the practice should you wish. It is entirely voluntary and not a mandatory part of the course, but is certainly recommended to help deepen your understanding and sense of being. Regular meditation tutorials are also provided. Please ask your tutor if you would like to know more.

History of the School

The School of Economic Science was founded by barrister Leon MacLaren in London in 1937, a period of severe economic depression. Its purpose, during these inter-war years, was to discover the natural laws governing the relations between men in society. Courses in economics were offered, inspired chiefly by the work of the nineteenth century American economist Henry George. Economics courses continue to this day and there remains a thriving economics faculty within the School.

However, as time went on, the need became increasingly evident to look beyond the realm of economics. This led to an interest in philosophy – ‘the love of wisdom’ – as a means of gaining deeper insights into the natural laws governing humanity and the origin of those laws. The first public courses in philosophy started in 1954, based on the teachings of Ouspensky and Gurdjieff, and within a few years philosophy became the central subject of study and practice within the School

The arrival of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in London in 1959 brought the next stage of development, meditation. This was soon taken up by longstanding students of the School. In the early 60s, the School made contact with a leading figure of the Vedantic tradition in India, Maharaja Shri Shantananda Saraswati, from whom it received invaluable guidance in the study and practice of philosophy for over 30 years. Through this connection the School was introduced to the universal teaching known as Advaita, which means literally ‘not two’ or ‘devoid of duality’.

The School has expanded geographically so that courses in philosophy, and sometimes other subjects, are now available through more than 40 branch locations in the UK, including here in the Midlands. During the same period a number of associated overseas schools have been established. We first started offering courses in the Midlands around 1981, since which time hundreds of students have studied with us.

The internationally renowned arts festival, Art in Action, is run and staffed by students in the School. It began in 1977, is held every year in Oxfordshire and is now a major showcase for over 250 demonstrators from around the world. Many of our students from the Midlands School participate as volunteers for one or more days, experiencing first hand some of the magic of this world-class event.

News

School's contribution to education and the common good recognised by global award.



August 2013

The School of Economic Science has been awarded the second Globalisation for the Common Good Initiative Award at a presentation in Paris.

The Globalisation for the Common Good Initiative is an international think tank guided by principles of hard work, commitment, volunteerism and service, with a great passion for dialogue of cultures, civilisations, religions, ideas and visions which recognises that our economic problems are closely linked to our spiritual problems and vice versa. It recognises that socio-economic justice, peace and harmony will come about only when the essential connection between the spiritual and practical aspects of life is valued and that it is necessary to discover, promote and live for the common good.

“Education is the foundation for a good and fulfilling life, setting the individual on a path of personal fulfilment, economic security and societal contribution. In our opinion the key that unlocks the door to the building of a better world is EDUCATION - not any education- and surely not the education mostly on offer currently, but a truly different form of education, an education grounded in values and delivered by those who know that it is a great honour and responsibility to be a teacher, as well as knowing that teaching, above all else, is a vocation.

“From its very beginning the School of Economic Science has been at the forefront of providing education in the interest of the common good, as described above. The School has shown that education should consist of a series of enchantments, each

raising the individual to a higher level of awareness, understanding, and kinship with all living things.

“In this time of spiritual hunger, when the world of knowledge and competence is in a constant state of flux, the School of Economic Science has shown that education needs to do more than grope in the dark: it needs to point students to the light of the world.”

For details of the award visit: www.gcgi.info/news

Questions and Answers

How is the course run?

Your tutor presents material, and leads a discussion based on what arises. Being practical rather than academic, the emphasis is on personal knowledge. Students are encouraged neither to accept nor reject the ideas put forward, but to test them in practice for themselves, in the light of their own experience.

In this way, for those who wish, the whole week between classes can become a learning opportunity. As the course continues, the most vivid and valuable part of the evening is often sharing what has been seen in daily life between individual sessions.

As in so much of life, you get out of it what you put in.

Who are the students?

Our students come from all over the West Midlands (some just outside) and represent a broad spectrum of people from all walks of life. This diversity holds true for all School locations.

Who are the tutors?

The School has always operated on the principle of 'learn and teach'. Our tutors are appointed on the basis of having a thorough, practical understanding of the philosophic principles. They have attended the School for a number of years and demonstrated an appreciation of the practice of philosophy in their daily lives. They come from all walks of life and many different professions, but all share the same love of passing on knowledge in order that people can get the most out of their lives.

An important principle is that all tutors also remain students as well, since the learning process never ends. Another principle in the School is that no one is paid for tutoring.

Do I need any previous qualifications?

No. The course is intended for everyone, regardless of education, occupation, race, political or religious belief.

Do I get an academic credit or certificate?

No. This is not an academic course and there are no exams.

As the word *philosophy* (meaning 'love of wisdom') implies, the purpose of this study is to gain the wisdom that will allow you to lead a more useful and rewarding life.

What do I need to bring with me?

Just an open and enquiring mind, and a willingness to consider the philosophic principles being investigated. At the end of each evening we'll give you a hand-out with the key points and any quotations used.

What if I can't manage to come every week?

While we of course encourage regular attendance, it's quite normal for students to miss one or two evenings. This should not be a problem as each week we give a brief recap of the previous week and also provide a detailed hand-out which captures the key points.

It's always appreciated if you can let your tutor know in advance, by phone or email or, if it's a last minute hitch, sending him or her a text message.

Is there a reading list?

There is an *optional* reading list in this folder if you're interested in doing some further reading. But please be selective. And remember that, while good reading undoubtedly supports our growth, wisdom in the end comes from applying it in practice.

What do you mean by 'practical philosophy'?

The course is practical in the sense that it is designed to be of direct use in our everyday lives. The intention is to stimulate enquiry and through this expand the way we look at the world and ourselves, conferring happiness and freedom.

Will the course give me a good basic understanding of all the main philosophical traditions and approaches?

No. As we try to make clear in our communications, the course doesn't aim or claim to cover all the main philosophies or philosophers. Instead it draws on those found in practice to be most conducive to the discovery of happiness and truth. However, along the way, we hope you will learn about some of the world's great philosophers and teachers, eastern as well as western, including Socrates, Plato, Confucius, Jesus, Buddha, Krishna, Epicurus, Emerson, Shankara, Vivekananda and many others.

So is the course 'religious'?

In the end, that's for you to judge, but in our view the course is not religious and certainly it follows no particular religion. What it does do, however, is address the spirit in Mankind and doesn't shy away from including quotations from great religious leaders where these are relevant. It's designed to be suitable for people of all faiths – and those who follow no particular faith – and over many years this has been found to be so.

Does the School teach meditation?

Yes. Students who continue to study with us beyond the first few terms are offered the opportunity to take up meditation. This practice, which uses a mantra, helps gradually to bring about inner peace, harmony and clarity of mind and to release fine energy for practical use in daily life. The simple exercise introduced in the Philosophy and Wisdom course, as well as being

effective and helpful in its own right, is also quite a useful preparation for anyone wishing to meditate.

Am I expected to go along with everything I hear on the course?

Absolutely not! In fact, we ask that you neither accept nor reject any of the ideas, but rather test them yourself, in the light of your own experience.

Can I talk about what we discuss on these evenings?

Yes of course! Friends and family will want to know, so tell them as much as they need without boring them rigid! Where possible, speak from your own direct experience: what you have personally discovered, experienced, felt, observed always carries the 'ring of truth' and this is powerful. We would only ask that you respect each other's confidentiality by not discussing outside of the group the personal observations of your fellow students.

Is this a systematic series of courses that continue each term?

Yes. The philosophy programme consists of a series of courses that build upon concepts taught in previous courses. See 'continuing your studies' in this folder.

Am I expected to join or sign up for anything?

No, never. No matter how long a student stays in the School, they only ever enrol for another term, except after the first term where there is an opportunity to enrol for two terms at a reduced rate. Students come and go all the time, and many who leave return years later.

The School has come in for some criticism over the years. Why's that?

The School has been around for over 70 years and, yes, like many organisations, it has been the subject of criticism in different places and at different times. Practices such as meditation haven't always been as 'mainstream' as they are today and have in the past been viewed with some suspicion. Back in 1983, a book by two journalists alleged, among other things, that the School was a secretive, cult-like organization. Other allegations have been made from time to time.

Understandably, criticisms like this can be quite upsetting for our students, as they greatly misunderstand and misrepresent the aims and activities of the School. Nevertheless, they have also served a useful purpose, alerting us to the need to be much more open and transparent, to provide more information about our courses and associated activities and to talk about and learn from any difficulties people have had. This we make every effort to do, through discussion, through our web site and in forums which bring together other organisations which share our interest in building a better, more harmonious world, with justice for all.

In the end, all that we can ask is that our students judge for themselves whether what they learn here is of use to them and indirectly benefits those around them (family, community, friends etc.) too. One thing our experience has taught us is how easily things can be misunderstood or misinterpreted, so do please ask your tutor if you have any concerns or questions. We would really appreciate the opportunity to provide clarification.

How are your course fees used?

Course fees are kept to a practical minimum. We believe they compare very favourably with those charged by other organisations, mainly because no one is paid for their work here in the Midlands school. Nevertheless, we still need to hire venues and advertise our courses, these two being our biggest areas of expense. We also obtain some administrative support from the School in London, for which we make a small contribution, and need to purchase new equipment (such as flip-charts) from time-to-time. Although not here in the Midlands, the School has in some locations acquired buildings from which to run its courses; these include the main school in London and Waterperry House in Oxfordshire, where residential courses are offered. Purchase of these buildings has not been funded from course fees, but by a number of generous donations, loans and legacies over the years from students with the means to contribute in this way.

We are a not-for-profit organisation and the purpose of our course fees is to cover our costs so that we can continue our philosophical work.

Can I pay my fees in any other way?

If you would like to continue after the first term, we offer the option of paying by monthly standing order. Our students like standing order as it leaves them in full control, being something you arrange with your bank and can stop at any time. The more regular outgoings also help with budgeting. We would simply ask that you keep the standing order running from one month to the next until such time as you no longer wish to attend a class.

Are there any opportunities to socialise with the group?

Social interaction is all part of the fun of being in a philosophy group and a natural consequence of meeting new, interesting people. Obviously this is an individual matter, but generally encouraged. We also try to organise a social event each term (or at least at Christmas) to which all our students are invited and which are usually also open to family and friends.

Can I have everyone's email address?

Please feel free to share your email address with other members of the group if you wish. However, our policy is to respect our students' privacy by not sharing email addresses on their behalf.

I also attend another group or activity which might be of interest / I'm doing some fundraising for a good cause. Is it OK if I pass on details to members of my group?

Although usually fine, this can sometimes be a little awkward. After all, we cannot vouch for another organisation and your fellow students may feel embarrassed at being asked. It's best with something like this if you have a quiet word with your tutor first.

Does the School offer wider opportunities to explore the philosophical approach?

Certainly. We hold workshops 1 or 2 Sunday's a term. Although further away, The School in London offers a good range of courses. It's situated just 5 mins from Bond Street station on the Jubilee Line at Mandeville Place.

What if I don't find the course useful?

All we would ask is that you give the course, the practices and your fellow students a reasonable chance (i.e. more than a couple of weeks!) and that you let your tutor know at an early stage if you are experiencing any difficulties. Of course, from time-to-time, someone really does find the course is just not for them or a change in circumstances prevents them from attending. We are always happy to give a refund for the remaining weeks of the course (no quibbles, our good name in the community is too important for that!)

Further questions?

Please ask your tutor or the Branch leader at any time.

My weekly hand-outs

You can file your hand-outs here as a record of what has been covered.

Do remember to add a few notes of what you observe during the week, as these will be useful at your next meeting.

If you miss a week, don't forget to ask your tutor for a copy of last week's hand-out.