

A Template for Teaching 21st Century Technologies of the Self
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Abstract

Technologies of the self, a term coined by Michel Foucault, refers to the practices and strategies by which individuals represent to themselves their own ethical self-understanding, and through which they are enabled to become the subject of their lives. On their own, or with the help of others, they act upon their bodies, souls, thoughts and conduct in order to transform themselves and to attain a certain state of perfection or happiness. Within Greco-Roman philosophy, these practices fell under the general rubric of knowing and taking care of oneself. They were among the main rules for social and personal conduct.

Western philosophy died out in the beginning of the Christian era. When it made its reappearance in the late Middle Ages, it did so within the confines of the university and without the technologies of the self it once had. If western philosophy wishes to be of practical value once again, it must restore its original technologies and adapt them to 21st century man. Western philosophy students must be taught these practices so they can go out into the world and offer historically and philosophically grounded ways for people to know themselves and to care for themselves and their souls. The aim of this paper is to offer a pedagogy to support technologies borrowed from the Ancients and adapted for use by the modern person, as well as to present a model for teaching some of these technologies.

Key Words: attention, death awareness, highest good, Know Thyself, perception, symbols, technologies of the self, virtue.

Introduction

Socrates said in the *Phaedrus* that he had no free time at all for extraneous matters that did not concern knowing himself. He preferred to put his attention and concern on becoming a simple human being whose nature contained a divine and noble essence. For him, and the other Greek and Hellenic philosophers of that time, knowledge was inseparable from the love of the good and the inner transformation of the person.

There was a lived philosophy, a unique act which had to be practiced everywhere and at all times. It required constant attention, vigilance, and regular, disciplined, practice. It was not an intellectual theory, a complicated, pretentious, artificial construction of a learned system. Rather it was participation in reality that supported a person knowing and caring for his self and his soul. It had practices and strategies by which individuals represented to themselves their own ethical self-understanding, and through which they were enabled to become the subject of their lives. This participation and discipline led to a greater wholeness of being for the person, and enlarged his experience of meaning in life. (Hadot, P.,2002.)

“Technologies of the self,” a term coined by Michel Foucault, encompasses not only the philosophical practices and exercises used by the Ancient Greeks and Hellenes to transform themselves, but also those used by the Christians, who usurped and Christianized them. The term equally includes 20th century psychoanalysis, which seeks to help a person to become the subject of his life and to deal with the struggles he has in modern times. Each of these systems of thought has in common techniques

devised to enable the person to know the truth about who he is, as well as to evoke larger realizations of meaning in his existence. (Martin, L., ed.,1988))

Though no treatise exists which outlines all of the exercises utilized by the Greeks and Hellenes, two lists have been passed down from Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 B.C.E. – 40 C.E.). Included were: research, reading, the development of attention, self-mastery, and indifference to indifferent things. Also included were therapies of the passions, remembrance of good things, self-mastery, the accomplishment of one's duties, meditation, the examination of one's conscience, and philosophical discourse. Regardless of the exercise, each was designed to form souls more than to inform minds. (Hadot, P.,1995.)

Unfortunately, since Western philosophy became largely confined to universities, the technologies given to us by the ancients are, for the most part, talked about rather than practiced. "Know thyself" and "Care of self and soul" are terms found in textbooks rather than lived. This is a shame, because it essentially means that the practices that go with these terms are not available to be used in today's times, when they are sorely needed. If Western philosophy wishes to be of practical value once again, it must restore its original technologies and adapt them to 21st century man. Western philosophy students must be taught these practices so they can go out into the world and offer historically and philosophically grounded ways for people to know themselves and to care for themselves and their souls.

The aim of this paper is to offer a pedagogy to support technologies borrowed from both the Ancients and modern psychology which have been adapted for use by the modern person, as well as to present a template for teaching some of these technologies. A body of thought which has inspired mankind for millennia deserves our respect. One way philosophers can show respect is by offering honest, jargon free classes fully centered on these technologies that genuinely matter to peoples' lives. In order to do this, instructors must realize beforehand that the classes will not be greatly involved with teaching a conscious set of beliefs or philosophical paradigms. Rather they must provide support for a profound and continuing experience which involves students in an atmosphere dealing with the nature of themselves and reality.

The template for teaching 21st century technologies of the self includes spiritual exercises borrowed from the Ancients, as well as relevant exercises from more recent eras. The Socratic maxim "Know Thyself," constitutes the basis for all the spiritual exercises and guides the total learning environment. Each class utilizes the same basic tools: the development of attention, reading, writing, dialogue, and, frequently, the use of symbols. Individual exercises should be tailored by the instructor in order to mesh their interests with those of their students. The exercises I have chosen for this template include: a meditation for the development of attention and perception; attending to the question, "Who am I?" awareness of death- both one's own and that of others; working towards the highest good; and the learning and practicing of specific virtues.

What is most important about these exercises is that each constitutes an experience of authentic presence of the self to itself. Each is to be undertaken with the understanding that it is necessary to know oneself, and to make necessary changes in one's point of view, attitudes and convictions when appropriate. Each is designed to involve the individual in a continuous dialogue with himself, aimed at realizing a transformation of his vision of the world and a metamorphosis of his being. (Gould, 2005.)

Unlike most work done within an academic environment, it is to be remembered that these exercises are not first and foremost intellectual. They don't involve just speaking and writing, but consist of being,

acting and seeing one's self and the world in new and different ways. In choosing to undertake them, the individual exercises an existential option that will ultimately enlist from him a desire to be and to live in a philosophical manner. The exercises require effort but, little by little, with their aid and his perseverance, he can achieve an indispensable metamorphosis of his inner self. (Buzare, E., 2011.)

The main body of this paper begins with a brief introduction to the use of symbols. Because the use of symbols may not seem rational to academic philosophers, I will justify their use. Thereafter, each section of the paper concerns itself with the significance of each exercise mentioned above, suggests at least one specific exercise to be offered at each class, and suggests homework assignments designed to facilitate personal reflection and insight. For the purposes of the class, students should keep their reflections in one specific journal.

At this point, an academic philosopher might be wondering if I am talking psychology rather than philosophy. First, it is important to remember that Plato did not distinguish between the two disciplines. For him, philosophy was a process for helping people to become self-actualized. And, as Michel Foucault pointed out, both the Socratic way and modern psychology are instances of man's disciplined attempts to reach toward reality in modes of thought that fit the tone and temper of their times. Beyond their differences lies an integrity that unites them. The mutual synergies of philosophy and psychology can help to build a template that answers a modern need of mankind – to find meaning in an increasingly disenchanting and alienated universe

The Importance of the Use of Symbols

Since the Middle Ages, the theory of knowledge developed by philosophers has concerned itself almost exclusively with the appreciation of 'facts' and the development of orderly thoughts about facts. Symbols and myths were routinely excluded from their field of interest, being thought of as miscarriages of logical explanations or as products of ignorance. But the realm of symbolic representation is too great a phenomenon to be accounted for in these ways.

Symbols are images which have a complex of associated meanings derived chiefly from the framework in which they appear. Mental activity begins with the birth of an idea can become fixed when it has been embodied in a symbol, be it verbal, artistic, or mathematical. All mental processes fail to grasp reality itself, only the symbols that represent it. Conversely, symbols are the keys to the formation of our mental conceptions.

All the significance to which language lays claim is still really nothing more than mere suggestion. The variegated totality of existence is often better expressed by symbols. This is true of both the internal and the external worlds. Symbols, then, are born of necessity, presenting a greater wholeness than can be given by language itself. (Cassirer, E., 1946.)

Symbols are not imitations of reality, nor are they mere records of some fixed category. They are spontaneous laws of generation, original ways and tendencies of expression, forces which produce and posit worlds of their own. It is by their agency that anything real becomes an object for intellectual apprehension.

All symbols, whether language, art, or science, have their own particular and proper source of light. Once they are recognized as ideational forms rather than as absolute reality, the only remaining problem is one of their mutual limitations and how they together can supplement each other. For

example, symbols, as images, can never break out of their arena of figurative ideas. Nor can the gap between their notions and those of science ever be narrowed without language. Born out of that same arena, language has the power to break those bounds by taking the individual from the symbol making phase of human mentality to the phase of logical thought and the conception of facts. The two become a plastic medium in which they do not merely make contact, but actually fuse.

21st century technologies of the self can be taught more effectively with the use of symbols intertwined with the use of language, both written and spoken. For example, rather than solely lecturing about any one of the virtues, I have students bring objects from their homes which, for them, are representations of themselves. Or, I have them comb through magazines to find pictures which evoke qualities of the virtue we are studying. Discussions in dyads, in which one person questions the other about why they picked their particular symbol(s), is where the use of language begins to draw forth the capacity of guidance that is inherent in symbols.

Within these discussions, the chosen symbols serve not only as organic expressions of each individual's life process, but also as a means of social communication. The representations become a source of energy for the revitalization of his personal experience, as well as an active, non-directive means of bringing forth his potential and of evoking transpersonal understandings. They enable the individual to preserve his unique form of expression and at the same time, to merge it with universally human, collective symbols. In this way, he can literally see how his representations are a part of the unfolding world of meaning. (Proffoff, I., 1963.)

With symbols, the primary material to be communicated is not intellectual ideas, but rather a quality of experience. Their essence is a tone of feeling, something that a flat statement of concepts and ideas cannot convey. By their means, the person works his way to concepts which can be recognized, investigated, and applied. The point of contact at which this happens becomes a turning point in the individual's experience because he thereby enters a very different atmosphere. The relationship between his personal existence and the universe around him is transformed. By means of this transformation the person discovers his intimate connection with a principle that works within himself and sustains an active and effective process in his life. For these reasons, and more, symbols are highly effective teaching and learning devices. (Jacobi, J., 1959.)

The Development of Attention and Perception

To pay attention, this is our endless and proper work.

Mary Oliver

Attention is recommended as a way of life – a way of living. What would getting up in the morning and assuming a discipline of attentiveness look like? Attention is defined as the notice of someone or something. When coupled with perception, which is the awareness a person has of physical sensations, one has the capacity to comprehend what is happening around himself. Thus, attention and perception are our vehicles for knowing the truth.

Attention was the fundamental philosophical attitude in ancient Greece. Various exercises philosophers used helped them to develop their attention, which enabled them to concentrate upon the present moment, to maintain a continuous presence of mind, and to be conscious of themselves at all times. Through attention they achieved self-mastery and self-control, and were able to do appropriately what they did as a result. (Hadot, 1995.)

Attention and perception have remained important to both Eastern and Western philosophers throughout the ages. For example, the German phenomenologists Franz Brentano and Edmund Husserl based their philosophical methods on them, as did the existentialist, Merleau-Ponty. Attending to, noticing, and describing are terms common to the philosophies of all three. Just like the ancient Greeks, their practices enable a person to see situations clearly and in their entirety, giving him access to truth comprised of intelligent reason.

Simone Weil, a 20th century French religious philosopher, also borrowed her view on the importance of attention from the ancient Greeks. For her, attention consisted in a person suspending his thoughts and letting his mind become available and empty, while yet remaining highly aware. It is an effort, and it is difficult, especially when a person directs part of his attention within, where he is likely to find things he would rather avoid. The effort is worthwhile, however, because it leads the person to know himself better, to live closer to reality, and to achieve the *summum bonum*. (Weil, S., 2012.)

For classic Chinese and Indian thinkers, attention and perception are also important matters. As in Western philosophy, perception is a person's fundamental contact with the world and is the unequivocal path to truth. Each of these systems of thought offer teachings about the importance of going beyond ordinary, superficial perceptions and mindless pre-conceptions. Mindfulness, concentration, and insight meditations are taught to help a person become calm and centered and to help him see more clearly what and how he perceives. (Goleman, D., 1977.)

According to all major teachings, then, it is clear that in order to be fully present to the truth, a person must be able to focus his attention while maintaining an undistorted perception of reality. Although there is not any one state of consciousness that offers a totally unlimited or undistorted perception of the world, the important things for a person are to recognize the state he is in, to know its advantages and disadvantages, and to utilize it optimally.

In class:

1. Dialogue: Attention and Perception: What they are, and why are they important.
2. Lead the Sensing Exercise: A Practice to Develop Attention and Perception (see Appendix A).
3. Students write their experience of having done the exercise in their journals.
4. Group discussion.

Homework:

Practice the sensing exercise every morning, soon after you get up and before you start your day. Attempt to maintain the state of sensing yourself throughout each day. At the end of the day, write in your journal about your experiences with this exercise.

Know Thyself

He who knows others is wise; he who knows himself is enlightened.

Lao Tzu

For Socrates, there was no greater wisdom than knowing oneself. The unexamined life was one that definitely was not worth living. He believed that it is only in striving to come to know and understand oneself that a person's life will have any meaning or value. When one thinks more deeply about it,

however, Socrates' advice could be interpreted in a number of different ways. For example, knowing oneself could simply mean knowing one's personality, one's place in life, or oneself, independently of others. Or it could be a project of solitary absorption in oneself and one's inadequacies. The latter kind of introspection could easily fill a person with discontent. This may be why, when trying to discover a way to 'know thyself' some people have been left scratching their heads. What is one actually looking for? How does one know when they have found it? Where should he or she start looking for this highly touted self in the first place? Given the potential perils of self-study, is it even worth it?

First of all, a person needs to know who he is in order to know his unique purpose and direction in life. Without knowing that, he is like an explorer without a compass - he will never know where he headed. Or, he will be like a ship without a rudder, unable to stay on a course. Armed with the knowledge of his reason for being, which no one else can tell him, an individual can make choices based on who he actually is rather than on who he, or others, thinks or tells him he is. This in and of itself offers the person a route to greater happiness and fulfillment.

Many wisdom traditions know that a person's pains and frustrations stem from false beliefs about himself. His qualities and capacities are frequently far more limited than he would like to believe them to be. Rather than being able to listen and act on his own well-founded vision of the truth, his mistaken judgments about himself can lead him to be swayed by others, which means he isn't truly free. This another reason why it is important for a person to know himself.

In addition, a person who displays an ability to understand and know himself is able not only to evaluate himself with a fair degree of accuracy, but he is also better able to evaluate others. This enables him to make allowances for their foibles and to acknowledge his own limitations. In addition, he is able to make better suppositions about how people are likely to behave, to have a fairly good idea about how people perceive him, and to know his own reputation. He can recognize when his perceptions of himself and of the people around him require revision. He can methodically devise ways of dealing with people and with life. All of this leaves him less open to accidents, errors and mistaken ambitions. (Tiberius, V. , 2008.)

There are many obstacles to knowing oneself. For one, a person's notion of himself includes his global self-concept, his autobiographical memories, and his conscious here-and-now self. Each of these arise from many diverse information sources which are stored in different parts of his memory, making them difficult to access. Also, every individual has defense mechanisms, or manners in which he behaves or thinks in order to protect or defend himself from a full awareness of unpleasant thoughts, feelings and behaviors. Since defense mechanisms don't simply disappear, they play a continuing role in a person's life. They must be looked at time and again in order to help ensure he is accurately dealing with reality. (Freud, 1949.)

In order to avoid the acknowledged possibility of a descent into hell that can happen when one reflects on oneself, Nietzsche gave preference to idea of becoming what one is through the creative and dynamic project of self-transformation. While recognizing the psychological torments self-examination can bring, Goethe suggested that perhaps one can know oneself better by knowing one's world and one's place in it among other persons and things. By comparing his view of life and of himself with those of other people, he can gain a more objective and nuanced self-knowledge than he could through isolated introspections. (Chase, M., et.al., 2013.)

Though there are many ways an individual can come to know himself, self-knowledge will most successfully be achieved through a sustained process of self-observation, reflection, education and self-discipline. Through these methods, he can turn his attention to the question of his own purpose, cultivating and perfecting it so as to help make his life free, harmonious, and honorable. Though this may be an idealistic goal, one that an individual may not attain, it is worthwhile to adopt it as his trajectory, nonetheless.

In Class:

1. Lead the sensing exercise (to be done every class period).
2. Individuals share their experiences with the sensing exercise within the whole group.
3. Communal learning – “What does it mean to know oneself and why is it important?”
4. Writing exercise: Writing in one’s journal, answer the question, “Who am I?”
5. Share in dyads, and then in the larger group.

Homework:

1. Choose three items which reflect some important aspect of who you are. Write about why you chose them. Bring them to the next class.
2. Each day, reflect on who you were that day, and write about that reflection.

Awareness of Death

Like the convict, people are aware of an inescapable sentence of death as a function of life itself. (Robert Firestone, Ph.D.)

In earlier times, it was common to test a philosopher’s views by his manner of life, often with special emphasis on his way of facing death. Socrates, who produced no writings and whose words we only know through their interpretation by others, gave philosophy its inspirational power largely by his heroic model of living and dying in the courageous pursuit of wisdom, rather than by a specific doctrine or masterpiece. The Socratic example of actually meeting death with cheerful welcome rather than cowering fear gives a more powerful aura of credibility than any discursive arguments Plato could offer.

All perennial philosophies and religions know that a human being’s knowledge of death is of great concern to him. This was the case with the ancient Greeks, for whom the exercise of death was one of the most fundamental philosophical exercises. They knew that regular reflection on the possibility of death gives value and seriousness to each of life’s moments and actions. “Act, speak, and always think like one who might depart from life at any moment.” “Let death be before your eyes every day, and you will never have a base thought or an excessive desire.” These kinds of reflective exercises led them consider time and life in a completely different way, one which ultimately engendered a true transfiguration of the present. (Hadot, 1995.)

The Greeks knew that it is not simply a matter of consenting to the event of death once it **is imminent**. A person must prepare himself for it. One of the best-known Stoic spiritual exercises consisted in the “pre-exercise” of death, which meant imagining one’s death and the death of others. This prepared a person for facing in advance the various difficulties and fears associated with it. The pain of death, like other painful things which happen against our will, is always lessened by foresight. (Hadot, 2002.)

The Christians helped people deal with their anxiety of death by offering them the possibility of eternal life, an idea which may be true, but can’t be proven. In the 20th century, existential philosophers and

psychologists interested in the experience of being human, once again brought forth the importance of acknowledging our mortality. In fact, the cardinal sin for existentialists is for a person to deny the truth of his extinction. By doing so, he deprives himself of the chance to be fully alive in the time that he has. (Porter, B., 2017.)

Psychologists have studied our defense against what they call 'death anxiety,' of which there are two basic forms - literal and symbolic. Literal denial manifests itself in religion or religiosity and is the key defense that negates the obvious scientific conclusions that human beings, like other species, die and that there is no scientific proof of an afterlife. Symbolic defenses relate to trying to live on by leaving a legacy through one's creative productions, investment in causes, or one's children.

In the face of death, adults experience the same sense of powerlessness and helplessness that they felt as children when they first learned of their ultimate fate. Emotional responses to death awareness include terror and fear, anger and rage, shame, a sense of absurdity and meaninglessness of life, and sadness and guilt about leaving loved ones behind. (Firestone, 2009.)

Philosophers, theologians, and psychologists all agree that a generalized anxiety and dread shapes our lives due to our inherent awareness of death. Dealing with it directly by bringing the subject into the foreground, feeling the painful effects, and then affirming life is the most positive approach.

In class:

1. Sensing Exercise.
2. Communal learning regarding death.
3. "Death Awareness Meditation" – See Appendix B.
4. Journal writing.
5. Dyad and group sharing.

Homework: Students write about the following experiences in their journal:

1. Your earliest death related experience. Relate what it was that made the experience more or less difficult.
2. Other death related experiences you have had which hold particular meaning.
3. Write your obituary as it might appear in a newspaper.
4. The death of loved one who has not yet died.
5. A description of one's own death and memorial service.

The Search for the Highest Good

May God grant me power to struggle to become not another man but a better man.
Samuel Coleridge

Aristotle thought the highest good is best represented as happiness achieved through living a virtuous life. However, when people are asked about this, many say happiness by itself results in the highest good. They conveniently leave out the part about how happiness is actually achieved - through living a virtuous life. Instead, they often define it within the narrower focus of their own narcissistic fulfillment. When they think of being happy, they don't consider other people or the situations around them. This can lead to less than desirable, if not disastrous, results. It is only through the pursuit of happiness

combined with the pursuit of virtue that a person will get the best result possible, which is also known as “the highest good. “

Living with the ideal of achieving the highest good means a person must hide nothing from himself. He should also not indulge himself. He must hold an “inner court” of his conscience by being his own accuser, judge, and defense attorney. He does this by being an intelligible person who imposes his own law on himself, which must include a larger perspective than just his own. With this kind of moral consciousness, which seeks at every moment to purify and rectify a person’s intentions, the person must be careful to allow no other motive for action than the will to do good. He must have a pure moral intention with which he will modify himself and his attitude whenever there is a need to do so. (Macaro, A., 2006.)

All wise people stress the fact that we must call upon our soul to give an account of itself. For example, Socrates believed there was only one evil thing – moral fault. There was also only one value - the will to do good. For Plato, a man could consider himself happy if he lived his earthly existence free of injustice and impiety. In that way, he could leave this life with peace of mind. To be aware of ourselves thus means to be aware of our moral state. This is what the tradition of Christian spirituality calls the examination of conscience. (Soccio, D., 2010.)

The neglect of all that matters most - a person’s moral shortcomings – means that he is guaranteed to be enslaved, hence not free. Why? Because the only thing that depends on him is his moral intention. The rest he has no control over. He is free to choose the highest good moment by moment, day by day, year after year. In addition, the person is free to feel his feelings all the more because he does not need to fear the consequences of them. No matter what he is feeling, he will always have a choice about how to act.

It is important to remember that fine words are not enough. Exemplary people feel shame if their words are better than their deeds. They know that fine words require fine actions to make them convincing. Without such actions the person is suspect. This is what is meant by integrity in action.

Most people have not been trained to reflect with reason aimed towards the highest good. On their own, they might even try to solve the questions and tough choices they face by avoiding them. They might endlessly brood over possible outcomes or agonize about which path to pursue. They may simply push their way through circumstances by sheer impatience and assertive self-will, as though getting it resolved were more important than getting it right. Since none of those behaviors guarantees good outcomes, it is important for people to learn a new way of thinking which includes concern for the highest good in every situation. Then, rather than unthinkingly deferring to their strongest motives, they can accomplish the best actions – the highest good - by consciously working towards them. Though a person might want a general rule or guideline he can follow in order to help ensure the “best” results, excellent ethical choices are not made through the use of cookie cutter methods. Instead, he must fit his choices to the complex requirements of the concrete situation in which he finds himself, while taking all of its contextual features into account. (Macaro, A., 2006.)

For specific situations, the person can be encouraged to think about things like his reasons in favor of, or against, a particular course of action he is considering and then to reflect on how important it is in the grand scheme of things. He should take into consideration his various inclinations and decide whether it would be harmful for him follow them. He must also look to see what his judgments are based upon and

what his duties and obligations are. He must think about all the possible consequences that could ensue from his actions. Finally, he must be sure he is able to endorse the course of action he has decided upon, and then be able carry it out. Throughout this process, the emphasis is on his use of reason and will. (Tiberius, V., 2008.)

Fortunately, other human beings have had to work their way through similar situations and have left us with different ways to think about the best ways to proceed. Rather than being left solely to his own resources, the person can be encouraged to explore other ways of thinking about the important situations he faces. The teachings of various religions, the writings of moral ethicists, the reasoning contained within legal moralism, among other things, can all be utilized in the service of the client furthering his quest to enact the highest good through a process of meta-ethical reasoning that balances general principles with an accurate understanding of his particular situation. (Marinoff, 2003.)

As the person becomes more adept at knowing how to achieve the highest good, he will be able to make appropriate shifts between reflection and engaging in specific situations. He will be able to reason and to act with perspective, to bring his actions into line with his value commitments, and to direct his life so that these commitments ultimately shape every important action and choice. He can live in the world knowing how to live the best life he can because he endorses his life from his own point of view.

In class:

After experiencing the sensing exercise, reviewing the homework from the previous class, and responses to it, each student is to write about a situation he faced in which he achieved what he perceived to be the highest good, and one in which he did not. He should include relevant factors which support each choice. Share in dyads, and then with the whole class

Homework:

1. Each day, the student is to look at the day ahead with the idea of achieving the highest good in every situation he faces. At the end of the day he is to write about how he did or did not succeed in doing so, and what he might do improve those situations where he did
2. Each student brings in one object from home which represents to him something of the meaning of the highest good.

Knowledge and Practice of the Virtues

Assume the virtue, even if you have it not. Your use of it can change the stamp of nature.

Shakespeare

Virtues are moral values which a person embodies and lives. A morally excellent person's character is made-up of virtues which are valued as good. For example, he is honest, respectful, courageous, or kind. Because of these positive character traits - made up of virtues - he is committed to doing the right thing, no matter what the personal cost. He does not bend to impulses, urges or desires, but acts according to his values and principles.

Virtues, then, are the essence of a person's good character. They are the values a person embodies and lives. They are what makes one person seem more excellent than another. To aspire to any virtue means to try not to be unworthy of being human. Indeed, without virtue, a person could legitimately be described as being less than human. (Comte-Spoonville, A., 1996.)

Possessing a virtue is a matter of degree, and there are quite a number of ways to fall short of the ideal. It is rare to find a person who fully possesses perfect virtue. Even people who could be described as virtuous still have blind spots. For example, someone who is honest or kind in most situations may at times act snobbish or be less than kind to strangers.

Virtues are associated with potency and functionality. A person who is lacking in virtue fails to function in some important way and will not end up being fully all he can be, in the best sense of the word. Without virtue, a person is dysfunctional, incomplete, and not what he is meant to be. On the other side of the coin, when he practices them, he is spiritually healthy and can thrive. (Popov, L., 1997.)

Though a person might have knowledge of certain virtues, he needs to consciously cultivate them in order for them to become more prevalent and habitual in his daily life. By and large, they are not innate. The person must obtain knowledge of them, make them into habits, and implant them into himself through the process of consistent training. There is no other way to learn them except by practice. For example, a coward cannot wait for courage to come to him, or he will always remain a coward. He must first act courageously if he wishes to become brave. Habitual behavior is the prime element in shaping his positive character. Or, as a number of people have posited, conduct leads to character; character leads to consciousness. Conduct comes first.

Virtues are universal, recognized by all cultures as basic qualities which are needed for the well-being of human beings and society. They enable a person to have a fulfilling life. When he practices being virtuous, he is more likely to achieve his goals and to be happy. For example, the moment the person decides to persevere (perseverance is a virtue) in order to achieve his goals in spite of any and all obstacles, including self-doubt and fear, a shift occurs within him where he more naturally becomes focused, determined, and courageous, leading him to success. (Peterson, C., 2004.)

A person can also know when he is becoming more virtuous in practice by way other people respond to him. His friends, families, co-workers and neighbors will trust and rely on him and come to him for guidance and help. Others will want to be around him because he inspires them to be better people. In addition, he will be known as a person with exceptional character who makes the right choices and strives for excellence in all he does. Can life be lived any better?

In class:

After beginning the class in the usual ways, lead a discussion on virtues – what they are and how they develop character. Then each student picks a virtue in which he is interested and writes about how he has (or has not) exhibited that virtue in his daily life. Share in dyads, and then in the larger group.

Homework:

1. Take the Values in Action Survey found at www.positivepsychology.com. This enables the student to know his top five character strengths.

2. Cut two pictures out of magazines for each of his top five character strengths (10 pictures in all). Make a collage from the ten photos and bring it to the next class.
3. Pick one of the top five virtues. Observe yourself in action each day in order to see how you use the virtue currently, and think about how you might use it in other situations and in other creative ways. Write about your observations at the end of each day.
4. Use Benjamin Franklin's exercise from his "Little Book of Virtues," Appendix c) to create a similar exercise for yourself.

Conclusion

I have offered a template for how the ancient technologies of the self can be revitalized and made relevant for modern man. The ancient and modern ways are simply two aspects of a single emerging and abiding reality. Far from breaking with tradition, 21st century technologies of the self offer ways by which ancient wisdom can extend itself and fulfill its promise in modern form. Through them, the modern person can come to know himself, to care for his self and his soul, and to achieve a larger experience of meaning in his existence.

The discourses of philosophy alone have not been sufficient to help most people in their daily lives. A program of personal discipline based upon philosophical exercises will have a greater possibility of success. I encourage efforts to provide situations, information, and a program of practice that will enable a significant number of individuals to encounter the reality of inward truth, to recognize its power and meaning, and to validate this larger knowledge as a fact of personal experience.

The transition from theory to practice may be difficult for some. Since there are very few models for it, this is no surprise. Thus, a careful integration of fundamental philosophical doctrines with fundamental philosophical exercises can be helpful. As the process of integration continues, a systematic study of 21st century technologies of the self should be made, complete with contributions from psychologists, education theorists, cognitive scientists, and physiologists of the brain. In this way, we can understand precisely how this process of integration can take place, and how it can be promoted and optimized. As with any transition, it will take a concerted effort. I believe the effort will be more than worthwhile, because it will contribute to the rehabilitation of philosophy as it was before its takeover by the Academy. (Chase, M., et.al., 2013.)

Philosophy as a way of life can be realized once again when we find our way to employing the use of contemporary technologies of the self. Through them, as more and more people deepen and enlarge the dimensions of their reality, person by person, a special atmosphere will come into the world. With these philosophical building blocks, a new structure of beliefs about reality can be brought into being. This will be done not by the authority of doctrine, but rather by progressive deepening through experiences of involvement with reality and with life.

Two thousand years ago, philosophers had the courage to ask hard questions that actually had an impact on the way people lived their lives. Some of the answers they came up with have provided help, encouragement, and inspiration for real-life human beings in actual life situations for centuries thereafter. This is no small accomplishment, and it is still a goal well worth pursuing.

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Appendix A

Introduction to the Sensing Exercise

In its most general form, the sensing exercise is a practice of self-observation in which you pay sustained attention to everything in and around you, while you perceive whatever happens and are open-mindedly curious about everything you notice. This “everything” is a mixture of perceptions of external events and your internal reactions to them. You drop all *a priori* beliefs about what you should be interested in and about what is important and not important. Whatever is in your world in a particular moment is an appropriate focus for observation.

This open-minded attention is more than just intellectual attention. It includes emotional and bodily perceptions as well. What feelings are aroused in you by what is going on? What effects, if any, does this world that you are in have on what you sense in your body? Perhaps you find there are only one or two things to notice. However many there are, you should strive to be open to all of them all the time.

The practice of self-observation, as learned through the sensing exercise, is a practice of being curious while doing your best to observe and to learn, regardless of your preferences or fears. You learn to observe yourself and your world with complete objectivity. You discover and control the mechanisms of distortion and learn to be more objective. It a continual process that does not carry a guarantee that you will ever be perfectly objective. However, you will certainly have the experience of pronounced movement from deep subjectivity toward more objectivity, which is the best we can get. It is certainly worth the effort (Tart, 1987.)

The Sensing Exercise

Start by sitting upright in a comfortable chair. Be sure your legs are not crossed, and then place your hands on your knees. Release any noticeable tension in your body. Take a few, deep cleansing breaths, allowing your belly to expand.

Now, when you are ready, focus your attention on your right foot. When you are fully in touch with your right foot, keep paying attention to it for about a half a minute. Then shift your attention to the lower half of your right leg. Now pay open attention to the stream of sensations coming from your lower right leg for about 30 seconds

Next, shift your focus of awareness to your upper right leg, and sense it, again maintaining your awareness there for about a half a minute. Proceed on in the same manner with your right hand, right lower and upper arm, and your right shoulder. Then proceed to your left shoulder, and sense it. Take the time to sense each body part as completely as you are able, including even the sensations coming from your nervous system and blood vessels. Don't go on to another part of your body until you've gotten at least some contact with each preceding part. Move on down your left arm to your left hand, and then down your left leg in the same manner, until you finally come to your left foot.

Once you have sensed your left foot for a half minute or so, broaden your focus of attention. Bring your attention completely into both of your legs at the same time, sensing them as deeply as you can. Then add your arms, so that you are sensing both your arms and your legs at the same time. Then, when you are ready, without losing sensation in your arms and legs, add listening, so that you are sensing your

body and listening at the same time. Lastly, open your eyes while maintaining awareness of sensing your body, listening to the sounds around you, and looking at all there is to see, all at the same time.

As your awareness of your emotions, your body, and your intellect are brought into play, don't ignore other perceptual sensations, such as smell or touch. This systematic practice of self-observation is done with all of your faculties.

When you leave your chair, continue to remember sensing, looking and listening. The goal is to become so proficient that you can maintain this practice of self-awareness without cease. This clarity, the feeling of being more alive and present to the reality of the moment, is what it means to remember yourself.

Appendix B: A Buddhist Meditation on Death

Meditation on death awareness is one of the oldest practices in all Buddhist traditions. Here is one that does an excellent job of shining light on the realities of death.

Prepare for the meditation by sitting in a relaxed, upright position. Read the following in a calm, peaceful manner and at an appropriate pace:

1. "Although death is the only event that is *certain* to occur, we don't usually think about it or plan for it. Even if the thought of death does arise in our minds, we usually push it away quickly. We don't want to think about death. But it is important to think about and be prepared for it, to realize that it is inevitable. Everyone has to die.
 - a. Can you think of an example of someone who was born on this earth but did not die? No matter how wise, wealthy, powerful, or popular a person may be, his or her life must come to an end.
 - b. Now bring to mind people you know who have already died ... And think of the people you know who are still alive. Contemplate that each of these people will one day die, and so will you.
 - c. There are several billion people on the planet right now, but one hundred years from now, with the exception of a few who are now very young, all will be gone. Try to experience this fact with your entire being.
2. Now move your attention to the fact that your lifespan is decreasing continuously. As seconds become minutes, minutes become hours, hours become days, days become years, time passes, and you are traveling closer and closer to death. Imagine an hour glass, with the sand running into the bottom. The time you have to live is like these grains of sand, continuously running out. Hold your awareness for a while on the experience of this uninterrupted flow of time, carrying you to the end of your life.
3. Now that you have come to accept that you are going to die, realize that life can end at any point – at birth, in childhood, in adolescence, at the age of twenty-two or fifty, or ninety-four. Think of examples of people you know or have heard about who died before they reached the age you are at now. Generate a strong feeling of complete uncertainty of your own time of death. There is simply no guarantee that you have long to live.

4. Move your awareness to the fact that there are many causes of death. Sometime death happens due to external causes such as natural disasters or accidents. People also can be killed by murderers or terrorists, by dangerous animals, or even insects. Bring to mind cases of people you know or have heard about who have died, and think about **how** they died. Think that any of these things could happen to you as well.
 - a. Our human body is very vulnerable. It can be injured or struck down by illness so easily. Within minutes it can change from being strong and active to being helplessly weak and full of pain. Think about this: Recall the times you have hurt or injured your body, and how easily it could happen again and cause your death.
 - b. Your body will not last forever. In the course of your life, you might manage to avoid illness and accidents, but the years will eventually overtake you – your body will degenerate, lose its vitality and beauty, and finally die.
5. Imagine yourself on your deathbed. What kinds of thoughts come to your mind? You might think of family and friends, and have a strong wish to be with them. But even if they were present with you at the time of your death, would they be able to help you? Although they love you very much and do not want you to die, they cannot prevent this from happening.
 - a. When you die, you go alone – no one, not even your dearest loved one, can accompany you. Being unable to accept this and let go of your attachment to your loved ones will cause your mind to be in turmoil and make it difficult to have peaceful life.
 - b. Recognize the attachment you have to your family and friends. See if you can realize that having strong attachments to people can be a hindrance. See if you can decrease this feeling of attachment and let go.
6. Your mind will also probably also think of your possessions and property, which occupy a great deal of your time while you are alive and are a great source of comfort. However, they cannot stop death from happening, and when you die, you can't take any of it with you – not even one cent or one article of clothing. Not only will your possessions be unable to help you at the time of death, but your mind may be caught up in worries about them – who will get what, whether they will take proper care of your things. This will make it difficult to have a peaceful, detached, state of mind as you are dying. Contemplate this, and see if you can understand the importance of learning to be less dependent on and attached to material things.
7. Your body has been your constant companion since birth. You know it more intimately than anything or anyone else. You have cared for it, protected it, worried about it, fed it, experienced all kinds of pleasure and pain with it.
 - a. Now that you are dying, you will be separated from it. It will become weak and eventually quite useless. Your mind will separate from it, and it will be taken to the cemetery or crematorium. What good can it possibly do you now?
 - b. Contemplate the strong sense of dependence and attachment you have to your own body, and how it cannot benefit you in any way at death. Fear of pain and regret about leaving it will only compound your suffering
8. It is possible that in looking at death in all these ways, that you will feel some fear or sadness. This, too is a good thing. In getting a strong sense of what it means to die, you are compelled to make your life beneficial and positive and thus die with peace of mind.
9. Now, return to a place of equilibrium and peace within yourself. When you are ready, open your eyes, and take a few moments to write about this experience in your journal.

Khadro, S., 2002) <https://www.fpmt.dk/event/discovering-buddhism-how-to-meditate/2017-02-14/>

Benjamin Franklin's Little Book of Virtues

The little book of virtues Franklin devised for self-examination and progress toward moral perfection consisted of an inventory of 13 virtues, vertically listed on each page, with the days of the week running horizontally and perpendicular to the top of the list, thereby creating a grid of empty squares where he would mark by a little black spot every fault he found upon examination to have been committed respecting that virtue upon that day. Such a method prevented him from self-deception about his progress, even if his desire to think well of himself would incline his memory to forget his faults. Those faults would be marked there in baleful black to remind him, displaying with graphic clarity in the immediacy of a quick glance, precisely those virtues in which he had been the weakest and which required the greatest efforts to improve.

His book also included for each virtue an aphoristic precept and a few hortatory literary fragments from famous authors.