

# Everyday Philosophical Practice (EPP)

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*Introduction to Philosophy*

## Overview of the Whole Process

### What is it?

Everyday Philosophical Practice is the way we use philosophy in our daily lives to make improvements to ourselves and our world.

- Everyday philosophical practice = awareness + analysis + action
- We become *aware* of problems with ourselves and our lives that need changing through a practice called *mindfulness*.
- We then *analyze* the problems we find in mindfulness by being *thoughtful*—using philosophical methods to determine how things need to change.
- Finally, we put all this into practice by *acting* on our analyses to improve ourselves and our lives.

### What are those components, again?

- Awareness through mindfulness.
- Analysis through thoughtfulness.
- Action through doing.

### And, uh, how do I do all this?

This is all really simple. There are four main steps:

1. Become aware by being mindful
2. Think about your mindful experiences through freewriting in your philosophical journal for 30 minutes every day.
  - This should be *at least* 30 minutes of sustained writing.
  - If you are unsure how to do this, there is a plethora of resources on the net discussing freewriting.
  - Just remember: it isn't difficult; you can't do it wrong; anything goes.
3. Analyze your insights.
  - Spend one or two of your freewriting sessions looking over the previous week's entries and listing your insights.
  - Then write about those insights—see how they fit together and what they tell you about you and your thought processes.
4. Look at the big picture and prepare an action plan.

# Awareness Through Mindfulness

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*(EPP Stage One)*

## What is Mindfulness?

- We can talk about mindfulness in many different ways: it is the central practice of Zen, it is a skillful method for understanding ourselves, it is a special kind of knowing.
- In Zen, mindfulness is simply a way to be; one is aware of oneself in order to be present in the moment.
- In philosophy, we take mindfulness further, as a way to understand ourselves, our beliefs, our values.
- At its most basic, mindfulness is simply self-awareness.
- Practical philosophy takes this self-awareness to another level through the careful analysis of that of which we are aware.
- Don't be deceived; mindfulness is simple, but its practice can be confusing at first.
  - If you feel like you don't know what you are supposed to be doing when being mindful, I would suggest you read the relevant recommended texts—or any other books on mindfulness you might find interesting.
  - The recommended text only discuss mindfulness as awareness—the rest is applied philosophy, which we will learn in class.

## Why Mindfulness?

- Mindfulness allows you to become aware of aspects of yourself that are normally hidden.
- Mindfulness is a way to become intimate with your own values, concepts, experiences, and feelings.
- You cannot become the person you want to be unless you know the person you are. I guarantee that if you practice mindfulness this semester, you will find that you are definitely *not* the person you think you are.
  - Without mindfulness of ourselves, our feelings, motivations, actions, perceptions, and so on, we are not really living, but simply going through the motions—we are living on autopilot.

## How to Practice Mindfulness

- Mindfulness itself is simple, as I said above; but practicing mindfulness can be very demanding.
  - The main obstacle is forgetting to practice being mindful.

- Remember, as soon as you realize you have forgotten to be mindful, you are immediately back in the moment!
- Another challenge arises when we practice mindfulness and realize just how different we actually are from the image we have of ourselves.
- This realization can be uncomfortable and sometimes painful, making us want to stop being mindful.
- Being mindful means that we make ourselves consciously aware of what we are doing, feeling, perceiving, etc., at all times.
- One way we can become aware of ourselves through mindfulness is by creating a running dialogue in our heads describing to ourselves what we are doing, thinking, feeling, perceiving.
  - For example, when you are washing your car, you could say to yourself, “Now I am washing the car. I am putting the soap in the bucket. Now I am getting out the hose and taking it to the bucket. Dang, I forgot to turn on the water. Now I am going back to turn on the water. I do not want to wash the car. I feel stressed because I need to wash the car and I need to fix dinner and I need to read my philosophy assignment. I resent my wife for thinking that a clean car is more important than my school work. Now I am putting water into the bucket. I have sprayed my feet and they are wet. So is the driveway. I can feel my feet sinking into the mud . . .”
- Get the idea? Just tell yourself what is going on, what you feel, think, perceive, etc.
- As you are practicing mindfulness you will find that there are things you do or feel, to which you feel uncomfortable drawing attention.
- Perhaps you will notice yourself picking your nose or intentionally being mean to a family member, being dishonest about something, doing something you know is wrong, but you want to do anyway.
- When you notice such situations, there are two basic things you can do: you can ignore your mindfulness exercise and just do what you were doing, or you can use those uncomfortable feelings as an opportunity to learn about yourself.
- If you choose to learn from those realizations, you can try the following:
  - Stop what you are doing and take a time-out from the situation.
  - Think about what you were doing and how it made you feel. Find out why you were feeling uncomfortable:
- Ask yourself questions like:
  - Was I doing something wrong?
  - Was I doing something that I don't want other people to know I was doing?
  - If so, why was I doing it? Or, why would I care if others knew?
  - Is the problem that I was not acting in accordance with my beliefs?
  - Should I change my behavior or my feelings about my behavior?
- There are no hard and fast rules about mindfulness other than to practice it. Exactly what you say to yourself is up to you and your situation.

# EPP Paper 1: General Mindfulness

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For this paper, you have only to be mindful every waking moment and then write two pages (all of your EPP papers will be 2 pages long) about your experiences being mindful.

Often students say those instructions are not detailed enough. I will expand: Give me evidence that you have been mindful. Write in English. Cover both sides of a piece of paper with typed text. You can give me stream-of-consciousness writing for a period of time. You could also tell me what you noticed while being mindful. Alternatively, you could let me know about the trials and tribulations you had trying to be mindful. Just write me 2 pages about YOU being MINDFUL.

More information will be forthcoming in the next two handouts covering stages two and three of the EPP process we will be using this semester.