

Philosopher wants more folks to mind their bodies

The trouble with intellectuals is that they live from the neck up. It's all words, words, words, blah, blah, blah. They're disconnected from their bodies, and it shows. In the physique department, they tend to look like Woody Allen. So you can imagine how pleasantly surprised I was when I met Richard Shusterman the other day.

He is chairman of Temple's philosophy department, has a Ph.D. from Oxford, and has written books with titles such as *Pragmatist Aesthetics* and *Practicing Philosophy*. In other words, he's a bona fide brainiac and egghead.

On the plus side, he was a soldier in the Israeli army, he runs five miles a day, and at one point he was so enraptured by the discipline of bodybuilding, he had to buy a new tuxedo to accommodate his more massive, manly chest.



Art Carey
Body Language

But not only does he know his way around a barbell, he is trying to encourage his fellow philosophers to take day trips from Mount Olympus and mix with us plebs. His aim is to make philosophy more relevant to our everyday lives by demonstrating that it is not just about words and intellectual diddling. It is also about ideas and wisdom that can help us with such mundane matters as how to understand, use and enjoy our bodies.

Back in the good old days (anywhere from about 500 B.C. to the birth of Jacques Derrida), "People studied philosophy not to get a degree but to live better," says Shusterman. In other words, the main concern of philosophy was "the art of living."

"Socrates wrote no books," says Shusterman, "but he inspired by his way of life."

Your local bookstore has aisles and aisles of self-help books, says Shusterman, because latter-day philosophers have ceded that turf to middlebrow sages like Robert Bly and Wayne Dyer. Modern philosophy has become so "textualized," so

See **ART CAREY** on C4

C4

Reuniting philosophy and body

ART CAREY from C4 preoccupied with language and propositions, that it's not only impossible abstruse and meaningless (for normal bozos like you and me) but also has no application to anything in the real world.

"Philosophy has forgotten that the body is a vehicle for the art of living," says Shusterman.

It is high time to fix that, to "get over the dogma that philosophy and the corporeal life have nothing in common," Shusterman declares.

Maybe post-structuralism will fool us all and someday improve the lot of humanity. In the meantime, says Shusterman, "thinking seriously about the body is useful."

As a philosophical pragmatist, Shusterman believes in usefulness. He knows that taking care of his body is good and right because it works, because it makes him feel and think better. "I don't fall asleep at lectures," he explains.

Shusterman also believes in practicing what he preaches, in translating ideas into action, which is why he is offering a noncredit course, beginning Friday at Temple University Center City, titled "Minding the Body." In four sessions over four weeks, it will cover such topics as body and identity; diet and exercise; sex, control and pleasure; and mind-body harmony. Among the compelling philosophical questions he will be tackling:

- If we are our bodies, why is it so hard to make them do what we want?
- Can we change ourselves simply by changing our bodies?
- What do Hippocrates, Socrates and Kant have to offer in the way of hot diet and fitness tips?
- Why is Descartes to blame for modern medicine's over-reliance on surgery and drugs?
- Is capitalism the result of sexual frustration?
- If Nietzsche hadn't suffered such awful migraines, would he have invented Superman?
- How did philosophers deal with impotence before Viagra, and what exactly was Montaigne's surefire cure?

The other day, Shusterman, who smiles easily and wears his erudition lightly, obligingly gave me a



TOM GRALISH / Inquirer Staff Photographer

Richard Shusterman's four-week noncredit "Minding the Body" course is to begin Friday.

preview.

Many ancient philosophers saw bodily fitness as necessary for achieving the classical goals of a happy life: truth, beauty and virtue. Socrates, for example, thought a healthy body was required for all efficient activity, including thinking. If you're pursuing truth, and you have jaundice, you won't be able to see clearly.

Zeno, the founder of Stoicism, went a step further. For him, care of the body was a duty. To be virtuous, it is not enough to have good will, Zeno contended. You also must do good deeds. But if you're not healthy and fit, you can't execute good intentions.

The bottom line: "A certain degree of bodily prowess and vigor," says Shusterman, "is essential for a virtuous person to perform virtuous actions."

Even those who rejected the body as earthly and profane, dirty and base, such as early Christian ascetics, still depended on it. It was by chastening the flesh through fasting, wearing hair shirts and wandering in the wilderness that they sought to enhance their spirituality. Says Shusterman: "They needed the body as a battleground for the victory of the spirit."

For More Information

Richard Shusterman can be reached at 215-204-8296. The four-week "Minding the Body" course is \$100.

It's the first part of a series that includes two other four-week courses, "Fits of Fashion" and "Eat, Drink & Think Merry," taught by others.