The Meaning of Life (Philosophy/Religion 108)

Fall 2005
MW 2:40-4:00

PROFESSORS:  Jay L. Garfield  Andy Rotman
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DESCRIPTION

This course asks the big question, “What is the Meaning of Life?” and explores a range of answers offered by philosophers and religious thinkers from a host of different traditions in different eras of human history. We will explore a variety of forms of philosophical and religious thinking and the ways in which philosophical and religious thinking can be directly relevant to our own lives. We will take these texts and ideas seriously; we will approach them critically; and we will learn from them.

REQUIREMENTS

Students in this course are expected to attend all class sessions, to have read and to have thought hard about all assigned reading prior to each class session, to participate in on-line discussions on the course blackboard site, and to participate in classroom discussions.

Each student will write three short papers on assigned topics. These should be 4–5 pages in length, double-spaced, and in 12-point font. These will be submitted on October 8th, November 22nd, and December 21st. Each of these will count for 30% of your final grade. The remaining 10% will be determined by your participation in class and on Blackboard.
REQUIRED READING


_Source Book_. (=SB)

•texts are available at Grécourt Bookshop, 585–4140
•the source book is available at Paradise Copies, 30 Crafts Avenue, 585–0414
SYLLABUS

WEEK 1 (9/12, 9/14)
i. INTRODUCTION

ii. When Should One Fight?
  The First Teaching–The Second Teaching, pp. 21–39

SUPPLEMENTARY READINGS
  chapter introductions (SB)
NOTE: You will find it helpful to read these chapter introductions along with each of the Teachings in Miller’s translation. For example, read Zaehner (pp. 120–121) and then Miller’s translation of The Second Teaching (pp. 29–39).

WEEK 2 (9/19, 9/21)
i. How Should One Act?
  The Third Teaching–The Ninth Teaching, pp. 41–87

ii. What Should One Think?
  The Tenth Teaching–The Eighteenth Teaching, pp. 89–154

WEEK 3 (9/26, 9/28)
i. What Is Human Happiness?
  Book I, pp. 3–32

ii. What Is Goodness?
  Books II–IV, pp. 33–110
NOTE: topic for first paper distributed
WEEK 4 (10/3, 10/5)
i. What Is The Good Life?
  Books VII–VIII, pp. 174–244

ii. Why Do Bad Things Happen To Good People? (guest lecture by Joel Kaminsky)
  *The Book of Job* (SB)

10/7: first paper due

WEEK 5 (10/10, 10/12)
i. NO CLASS—Fall Break

ii. How Does One Master Oneself?
  entire book

WEEK 6 (10/17, 10/19)
i. What Is The Way To Live?
  entire book, pp. 157–202 (SB)  
  NOTE: also available as an electronic resource from the library catalogue

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ii. How Does One Connect With God?

  “Conversations with Sufi Saints,” pp. 513–517 (SB)
WEEK 7 (10/24, 10/26)
i. How Does One Experience God?
  Excerpts, xvii, 41–59, 109–111, 143–149 (SB)

ii. What Is Enlightenment?
  “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?” 41–48 (SB)

WEEK 8 (10/31, 11/2)
i. What Is Left Of It?
  Introduction, 7–17 (SB)
  Excerpts, pp. 23–59, 85–96 (SB)
  NOTE: The translation by Duncan Large is available as an electronic resource from the library catalogue.

ii. What Does My Death Mean?
  complete story, pp. 35–134
  NOTE: The translation by Louise and Aylmer Maude is available online at http://www.geocities.com/short_stories_page/tolstoydeath.html.

WEEK 9 (11/7, 11/9)
i. What Is Truth?
  “Introduction,” 3–25 (SB)
  NOTE: topic for second paper distributed

ii. What Is This World?
  entire book
WEEK 10 (11/14, 11/16)
i. What Is Evil?
  Excerpts, pp. 3–67, 83–111

ii. How Abnormal Is Serious Evil?
  Excerpts, pp. 112–150, 220–298

WEEK 11 (11/21, 11/23)
i. What Does It All Mean?
NOTE: second paper due

ii. NO CLASS—Thanksgiving Break

WEEK 12 (11/28, 11/30)
i. How Does One Live With Compassion?
  Chapters 1–8, pp. 3–131

ii. How Does One Live With Compassion?
  Chapters 9–16, pp. 133–237

WEEK 13 (12/5, 12/7)
i. How Does One See the Divine?
  Chapters 1, 3, 7, 9, pp. 11–17, 42–71, 119–138, 154–173 (SB)
NOTE: topic for third paper distributed

ii. What Is Supreme Love?
  NOTE: Listen repeatedly!
  “Poetry and Prayer, 144–147 (SB)
WEEK 14 (12/12, 12/14)
i. NO CLASS
SCREENING OUTSIDE OF CLASS: The Seven Samurai (Shichinin no samurai). Directed by Akira Kurosawa. Written by Akira Kurosawa, Shinobu Hashimoto, and Hideo Oguni. 203 minutes. 1954.

   NOTE: time and place to be announced

ii. What Is The Meaning Of Life?
   discussion of The Seven Samurai

12/22: third paper due