

**PHILOSOPHY 230: Meanings of Human Life – A Multicultural Approach**

**Spring 2005**

**Class meeting time:** T R 11:40 AM – 1:20 PM

**Class location:** KH-C4077

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**Instructor:** JeeLoo Liu

**Office hours:** M W 11:00-12:30am

**or by appointment**

**Office:** E & T 424

- Required Texts:**
1. Life, Death & Meaning: Key Philosophical Readings on the Big Questions. (ed.) David Benatar. Rowman & Littlefield, 2004.
  2. The Death of Ivan Ilyich, by Leo Tolstoy. (any edition)
  3. A packet of supplementary readings. (Ed.) JeeLoo Liu.

**Course Description:** What is the meaning of *my* life? Should I be afraid of my own death? Why should I live when I could commit suicide? What sense can I make of my life up to now? What should I do with the rest of my life? What could have been different about my life? What do I want to accomplish so that I'll have no regret when I die? What is it about *me* that makes *my* life worth living? How much of my self-identity is dependent on my relationships with others? What meaning can I derive from my job or my career? Does my life lose its meaning if I am forlorn and jobless? Is there any *meaning* to life in general at all? How could I go on if I should find life *meaningless*?.... These and many other questions about life's meaning make up the content of this course.

In this course we will be reading many views expressed by thinkers East and West, ancient and modern. We will be analyzing the significance of life and death with the help of many Western philosophers; we will be learning about the Chinese Daoist's attitude toward death and the Buddhist's analysis of the roots of our suffering. We will be studying the establishment and fulfillment of the individual self in our social settings through the analysis of a social psychologist, Roy F. Baumeister. We will also view several interesting and thought-provoking films for further discussion on alternative life styles. The goal of exploring various views is for each student to gain a better insight on his or her own life. For this purpose, students must attend classes and must actively participate in class discussion.

**Phil 230 fulfills Block E of the GE requirement.**

**Course Objectives:**

1. To help students think philosophically about their own views concerning human life and its possible meanings.
2. To help students understand some of the central issues and concepts closely related to the meaning of life.
3. To help students exercise and thereby improve their analytic and critical thinking skills.
4. To help students appreciate and learn from points of view, ways of living and life experiences that are different from their own.

**Grading Plan:**

Mid-term exam	30%
Final exam [non-cumulative]	30%
Active Participation	40%

**\* General Policies:**

1. To succeed in this course, you should keep pace with the syllabus. Your regular attendance is strongly emphasized, and you are expected to finish the reading assignments *prior to* each class.
2. To receive a final grade for the course, **all assignments must be completed.**

**Class Schedule**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Content of discussion</b>	<b>Assignments for this class</b>
<b>T 3/29</b>	Introduction	None
<b>I. Death</b>		
<i>It's not that I'm afraid to die. I just don't want to be there when it happens.</i> ____ <i>Woody Allen</i>		
<b>R 3/31</b>	Film: The Tibetan Book of the Dead	None
<b>T 4/5</b>	Tolstoy: The Death of Ivan Ilyich	Read <i>The Death of Ivan Ilyich</i>
<b>R 4/7</b>	Rosenbaum: How to Be Dead and Not Care: A Defense of Epicurus	<i>Life, Death &amp; Meaning</i> , Chap. 11

T 4/12 The Daoist's Attitude toward Death [Packet: Zhuangzi]

## II. Suffering

*Unless suffering is the direct and immediate object of life, our existence must entirely fail of its aim.*  
\_\_\_\_\_ Arthur Schopenhauer

R 4/14 Suffering and Unhappiness [Packet: Baumeister, Chap. 10]

T 4/19 The Buddhist's Worldview [Packet: Dalai Lama, *The Meaning of Life*]

R 4/21 Life Impelled by Ignorance & The Value of Altruism [Packet: Dalai Lama, *The Meaning of Life*]

T 4/26 Schopenhauer: On the Suffering of the World *Life, Death & Meaning*, Chap. 25

R 4/28 **Mid-term** **Review**

## III. Self-Identity and Society

*People have always had selves, but selves have not always had to carry the burden of supplying meaning to life in such a far-reaching fashion.*

\_\_\_\_\_ Roy F. Baumeister

T 5/3 Film and discussion None

R 5/5 Self-Identity and the Value Gap [Packet: Baumeister, Chap. 5]

T 5/10 Film and discussion None

R 5/12 Work, Work, Work, Work [Packet: Baumeister, Chap. 6]

T 5/17 Passionate Love, Domestic Bliss [Packet: Baumeister, Chap. 7]

R 5/19 Film and discussion None

## V. The Meaning of Life and Philosophy

*The meaning of life is that it stops.*

\_\_\_\_\_ Franz Kafka

- T 5/24**      The Philosophy of the Absurd      [Packet: Albert Camus, ‘The Absurdity of Human Existence’ & ‘The Myth of Sisyphus’]
- R 5/26**      Taylor: The Meaning of Life      *Life, Death & Meaning*, Chap. 1
- T 5/31**      Nozick: Philosophy and the Meaning of Life      *Life, Death & Meaning*, Chap. 5
- R 6/2**      What Makes Life Worth Living?      [Packet: Owen Flanagan, ‘What Makes Life Worth Living?’]

**FINA EXAM      June 7 (Tuesday)      10:45 AM – 1:15 PM**