PHILOSOPHY 230: Meanings of Human Life – A Multicultural Approach

Spring 2005

Class meeting time: T R 11:40 AM – 1:20 PM
Instructor: JeeLoo Liu
Class location: KH-C4077
Office hours: M W 11:00-12:30 am
E-mail: jeelooliu@gmail.com
Office: E & T 424
Telephone: (323) 343-4180

2. The Death of Ivan Ilyich, by Leo Tolstoy. (any edition)

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Content of discussion</th>
<th>Assignments for this class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T    3/29</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>None</td>
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<tr>
<td>R    3/31</td>
<td>Film: The Tibetan Book of the Dead</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T    4/5</td>
<td>Tolstoy: The Death of Ivan Ilyich</td>
<td>Read The Death of Ivan Ilyich</td>
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<tr>
<td>R    4/7</td>
<td>Rosenbaum: How to Be Dead and Not Care: A Defense of Epicurus</td>
<td>Life, Death &amp; Meaning, Chap. 11</td>
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</tbody>
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**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

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Packet</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4/12</td>
<td>The Daoist’s Attitude toward Death</td>
<td>Zhuangzi</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Packet</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4/14</td>
<td>Suffering and Unhappiness</td>
<td>Baumeister, Chap. 10</td>
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<tr>
<td>4/19</td>
<td>The Buddhist’s Worldview</td>
<td>Dalai Lama, The Meaning of Life</td>
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<td>4/21</td>
<td>Life Impelled by Ignorance &amp; The Value of Altruism</td>
<td>Dalai Lama, The Meaning of Life</td>
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<td>4/26</td>
<td>Schopenhauer: On the Suffering of the World</td>
<td>Life, Death &amp; Meaning, Chap. 25</td>
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<td>4/28</td>
<td>Mid-term Review</td>
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### 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

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5/3</td>
<td>Film and discussion</td>
<td>None</td>
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<tr>
<td>5/5</td>
<td>Self-Identity and the Value Gap</td>
<td>Baumeister, Chap. 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>5/10</td>
<td>Film and discussion</td>
<td>None</td>
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<tr>
<td>5/12</td>
<td>Work, Work, Work, Work</td>
<td>Baumeister, Chap. 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>5/17</td>
<td>Passionate Love, Domestic Bliss</td>
<td>Baumeister, Chap. 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/19</td>
<td>Film and discussion</td>
<td>None</td>
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### V. The Meaning of Life and Philosophy

The meaning of life is that it stops.  
—— Franz Kafka
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5/24</td>
<td>The Philosophy of the Absurd</td>
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<tr>
<td>5/26</td>
<td>Taylor: The Meaning of Life</td>
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<tr>
<td>5/31</td>
<td>Nozick: Philosophy and the Meaning of Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/2</td>
<td>What Makes Life Worth Living?</td>
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**FINA EXAM** | **June 7 (Tuesday)** | **10:45 AM – 1:15 PM**

- *Life, Death & Meaning*, Chap. 1
- *Life, Death & Meaning*, Chap. 5