

HUMS 411: LIFE WORTH LIVING

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Section 01: MW 1-2:15, Th 1:30-2:20
Section 02: TTh 11:25-12:50, Th 1:30-2:20
Section 03: MW 9-10:15, Th 1:30-2:20

Course Description

What does it mean for a life to go well? What would it look like for a life to be *lived* well? In short, what shape would a life worth living take? We will explore these questions through engagement with the lives and visions of founding figures from six diverse traditions of imagining a good life: the Buddha, the Torah and the Hebrew prophetic and wisdom writers, Jesus of Nazareth, Muhammad, John Stuart Mill, and Friedrich Nietzsche. The course will also feature visits from contemporary individuals who understand their lives to be shaped by the traditions in question.

Assignments and Evaluation

All written assignments should be submitted in pdf format via the classesv2 “dropbox.” Late papers will receive a grade reduction of one step (e.g., from A- to B+) for each day or part of a day that they are late. Late reading responses and discussion questions will not be graded and will count as a score of zero for calculation of the final grade.

1. 500 word (maximum) paper analyzing the vision(s) of a life worth living that Yale University as an institution advocates or implicitly endorses. (This assignment is similar to one of the questions asked in your application for the course. If you have access to your answer to that question, feel free to use it as the basis for this assignment, but take the time to refine and expand it as needed. The instructor will not provide you with your answers if you do not have access to them.) **Due February 17 by 5:00pm.** (20 percent of final grade)
2. 750 word (maximum) paper analyzing the vision(s) of a life worth living that your peers (a) espouse and (b) adhere to de facto. Specify which set of peers (e.g., college classmates, young adults in a particular culture or subculture, etc.) you will discuss. **Due March 2 by 5:00pm.** (20 percent of final grade)
3. 1000 word (maximum) paper outlining your own personal vision of a life worth living. **Due April 27 by 5:00pm.** (30 percent of final grade)
4. For each tradition, students will submit *brief responses to the following five questions* (200 word maximum total). **Due January 25, February 1, February 22, March 7, March 28, April 4, and April 11 by 6:00pm.** (20 percent of final grade)
 - a. According to this tradition, what does it mean for life:
 - i. to go well? what is important in terms of life’s circumstances?
 - ii. to be led well? what do we need to *do* in order to *lead* a life worth living?
 - iii. to feel good? (and does it matter? Might the life worth living be miserable?)
 - b. What reasons and/or motivations does the tradition offer for its vision of a life worth living?
 - c. What resources does the tradition offer for human beings to be able to have a life worth living?

- d. According to the tradition, to whom are we responsible for living our lives a certain way?
 - e. What does the tradition suggest that people do when they fail to live such a life?
5. Students will be expected to actively participate in all class sessions—both by speaking *and* by listening generously. (10 percent of final grade)

Course Policies

Use of laptops, tablets, and phones will not be permitted at any time during the seminar sessions, except with prior permission from the instructor.

Attendance at all seminar meetings is expected except in case of emergencies. Unexcused absences from the seminar will result in a reduction of the final course grade.

Schedule of Meetings

Introduction

January 18: Course Introduction & Life Feeling Good

Readings: Dan Gilbert, *Stumbling on Happiness*, 29-39.
Robert Nozick, "The Experience Machine," *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, 42-45.

January 20: Life Led Well (seminar)

Readings: Martha Nussbaum, *Therapy of Desire*, 359-366, 386-401.
Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, excerpts.

January 21: Life Going Well (lecture)

Readings: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I.9-11.
Plato, *Crito*, 50a-54e.

Assignment: Reading responses for Buddhism due **January 25** at 6:00pm.

Buddhism

January 25: The Buddha

Readings: *Jataka-Nidana* (selections).
The Buddhacarita, 5.1-39, 14.
Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta.

- January 27: Buddhism and Compassion (seminar)
- Readings: Pema Chodron, *Start Where You Are*, 3-10, 96-121
- January 28: A Life Shaped by the Buddha (lecture)
- Guest: Steve Kanji Ruhl
- Readings: Charlotte Joko Beck, *Everyday Zen*, 3-8, 49-73, 77-101
- Assignment: Reading responses for Judaism due **February 1** at 6:00pm.

Judaism

- February 1: The Law and the Hebrew Prophets
- Readings: Genesis 12-13, 15-19, 21-22; Deuteronomy 6, 28; Amos.
Jonathan Sacks, *Letters to the Next Generation 2: Reflections on Jewish Life*.
- February 3: Judaism, Work, & Rest (seminar)
- Readings: Genesis 1-2:3; Exodus 1-14, 20; Lev 25.
Jonathan Sacks, "If I Ruled the World," *Prospect*, July 18, 2013.
Jonathan Sacks, *Radical Then, Radical Now*, 130-135.
- February 4: A Life Shaped by Judaism (lecture)
- Guest: Paul Franks
- Readings: Emmanuel Levinas, "Damages Due to Fire," in *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trans. Annette Aronowicz (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990).

Synthetic Topics

- February 8: Food (seminar)
- Readings: Leon Kass, *The Hungry Soul*, 79-93.
Norman Wirzba, *Food & Faith: A Theology of Eating*, 1-8.
Chris Kresser, *The Paleo Cure*, 1-17.
The Dalai Lama, "Compassion for All Sentient Beings," *Religious Vegetarianism*, 87-91.

February 10: Reputation (seminar)

Readings: Dan Schawbel, *Me 2.0*, 1-22.
Eugene B. Borowitz and Frances Weinman Schwarz, *The Jewish Moral Virtues*, 227-36.
Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, I.89
Joan Jett and the Blackhearts, "Bad Reputation,"
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LeYn_W14zTU.

February 11: Universality & Particularity (lecture)

Guests: Dean Kelly Fayard and Dean Risë Nelson Burrow

Readings: *The Way*, "Powwow Trail," <http://theways.org/story/powwow-trail>
"More than that," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FhribaNXr7A>
Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*, 5-12

Yale's Vision of a Life Worth Living

February 15: Reading for Implicit Visions

Readings: James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 19-27, 93-103.
Philip J. Ivanhoe, "Being in and Learning from Tradition," *Confucian Reflections: Ancient Wisdom for Modern Times*, 1-16.

Assignment: Reflection Paper 1 (Yale) due **February 17** at 5:00pm.

February 17: Yale and the Good Life (seminar)

February 18: Truth (lecture)

Guest: Miroslav Volf

Assignment: Reading responses for Christianity due **February 22** at 6:00pm.

Christianity

February 22: Jesus

Readings: The Gospel according to Luke (especially chapters 4-24).
Miroslav Volf, "Epilogue," *Flourishing*, 195-206.

February 24: Christianity & Forgiveness (seminar)

Readings: Miroslav Volf, *Free of Charge*, 121-126, 157-191.

February 25: A Life Shaped by Jesus (lecture)

Guest: Luz Colville

Readings: Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 204-206, 285-286.

Millennials and the Good Life

February 29: Authenticity and the Good Life

Readings: Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 13-41.

Assignment: Reflection Paper 2 (peers) due **March 2** at 5:00pm.

March 2: Peers' Visions of a Life Worth Living

March 3: Health

Guest: TBA

Assignment: Reading responses for Utilitarianism due **March 7** at 6:00pm.

Utilitarianism

March 7: John Stuart Mill

Readings: John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*.
Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, s.v. "John Stuart Mill," § 1 ("Life").
[\[plato.stanford.edu/entries/mill\]](http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mill)

March 9: Effective Altruism

Readings: Peter Singer, *The Life You Can Save*, 3-41.
Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1 (1972): 229-43.

March 10: A Life Shaped by Utilitarianism

Guests: Jeff Kaufman and Julia Wise

Readings: Larissa MacFarquhar, "At Once Rational and Ardent," *Strangers Drowning*, 71-102.

— Spring Break —

Assignment: Reading responses for Secularisms due **March 28** at 6:00pm.

Secularisms

Section 01: Scientific Naturalism

March 28: Carl Sagan

Readings: Carl Sagan, *Pale Blue Dot*, 1-55, 109-125
Carl Sagan and Ann Druyan, *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*, 3-8

March 30: Scientific Naturalism & Awe

Readings: Carl Sagan, *Billions and Billions*, 1-12
Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, s. 25, pp. 103-106
“The Astronomer,” <https://vimeo.com/114563321>

Section 02: Romantic Expressivism

March 29: Oscar Wilde

Readings: Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis*, selections.

March 31: Expression (seminar)

Readings: Charles Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, 55-69.
Lewis Hyde, *The Gift*, 143-152.

Section 03: Marxism

March 28: Karl Marx

Readings: Karl Marx, “Alienated Labor,” *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, in *Selected Writings*, 58-68
———, *Towards a Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right: Introduction*, in *Selected Writings*, 28-29
———, *Theses on Feuerbach*, in *Selected Writings*, 99-101
———, *The German Ideology*, in *Selected Writings*, 106-115, 127-129

March 30: Marxism & Organizing

Readings: Antonio Gramsci, *The Gramsci Reader*, 106-109, 301-311, 320-322
Antonio Negri, "Communism: Some Thoughts on the Concept and Practice," in
The Idea of Communism, 155-165
NTanya Lee and Steve Williams, "No Shortcuts," *Jacobin*

Synthetic Topic

March 31: Suffering (lecture)

Guest: TBA

Readings: Christian Wiman, "Mortify our Wolves," *My Bright Abyss*, 145-162.
Michael Pollan, "The Trip Treatment," *The New Yorker* (abridged).
Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, excerpt.

Assignment: Reading responses for Islam due **April 4** at 6:00pm.

Islam

April 4: Muhammad

Readings: Martin Lings, *Muhammad*, 43-55, 58-69.
Asad Tarsin, *Being Muslim: A Practical Guide*, 1-35, 155-163, 217-225.
Hamza Yusuf and Zaid Shakir, *Agenda to Change Our Condition*, 1-39.

April 6: Islam & Prayer (seminar)

Readings: Hamza Yusuf and Zaid Shakir, *Agenda to Change Our Condition*, 40-46.
Asad Tarsin, *Being Muslim*, 44-73.

April 7: A Life Shaped by Islam (lecture)

Guest: Shaykh Hamza Yusuf

Readings: Hamza Yusuf and Zaid Shakir, *Agenda to Change Our Condition*, 47-65.

Assignment: Reading responses for Nietzsche due **April 11** at 6:00pm.

Nietzscheanism

April 11: Friedrich Nietzsche

Readings: Friedrich Nietzsche, selection from "Letter to His Sister".
———, *The Gay Science*, ## 125, 140, 143, 343, 353, 377.

———, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “Zarathustra’s Prologue” (## 3-5), “On the Three Metamorphoses,” “On the Pitying,” “On the Tarantulas,” “On Redemption”.
———, *Beyond Good and Evil* # 188.
———, *On the Genealogy of Morality* 2.24-25.
———, *The Anti-Christ* ## 32-35, 39-40.
Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, s.v. “Friedrich Nietzsche,” § 1 (“Life: 1844-1900”). [plato.stanford.edu/entries/nietzsche]

April 13: Nietzsche and Overcoming (seminar)

Readings: Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, ## 22, 36, 259.
———, *The Gay Science* # 349.

April 14: An Atheist Life Worth Living (lecture)

Guest: Martin Hägglund

Readings: Martin Hägglund, *This Life*, selections

Synthetic Topics

April 18: Beauty

Readings: Sheila Jeffreys, *Beauty and Misogyny*, 5-27.
Zehra Naqvi, "Why I Chose To Stop Wearing The Hijab...& Why I Went Back," *Refinery29*.
Daniel Duane, “How the Other Half Lifts: What Your Workout Says About Your Social Class,” *Pacific Standard*.

April 20: Sex (seminar)

Readings: *Students will propose readings for this session.*

April 21: Security (lecture)

Guest: Ret. Gen. Stanley McChrystal

Readings: TBA

Conclusion

April 25: Reflection and Student Feedback on the Life Worth Living Seminar

Assignment: Reflection Paper 3 (personal) due **April 27** at 5:00pm.

April 27: What Is a Life Worth Living?: Discussion of Final Papers (seminar)

April 28: The End (lecture)