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 live 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 received 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

January 20: Life Led Well (seminar)
Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, excerpts.

January 21: Life Going Well (lecture)
Plato, *Crito*, 50a-54e.

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

Buddhism

January 25: The Buddha
Readings: *Jataka-Nidana* (selections).
*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
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.

February 3: Judaism, Work, & Rest (seminar)
Readings: Genesis 1-2:3; Exodus 1-14, 20; Lev 25.

February 4: A Life Shaped by Judaism (lecture)
Guest: Paul Franks

**Synthetic Topics**

February 8: Food (seminar)
February 10: Reputation (seminar)

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 Risė Nelson Burrow

“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.

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


February 24: Christianity & Forgiveness (seminar)

**February 25:** A Life Shaped by Jesus (lecture)

Guest: Luz Colville


**Millennials and the Good Life**

**February 29:** Authenticity and the Good Life


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


**March 9:** Effective Altruism


**March 10:** A Life Shaped by Utilitarianism

Guests: Jeff Kaufman and Julia Wise

— 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 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

**Section 02: Romantic Expressivism**

**March 29:** Oscar Wilde

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

**March 31:** Expression (seminar)

Readings:

**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
NTanya Lee and Steve Williams, “No Shortcuts,” *Jacobin*

**Synthetic Topic**

**March 31:** Suffering (lecture)

**Guest:** TBA

Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, excerpt.

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

**Islam**

**April 4:** Muhammad


**April 6:** Islam & Prayer (seminar)

Asad Tarsin, *Being Muslim*, 44-73.

**April 7:** A Life Shaped by Islam (lecture)

**Guest:** Shaykh Hamza Yusuf


**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”.

———, Beyond Good and Evil # 188.

———, On the Genealogy of Morality 2.24-25.


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.

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)