

HUMS 411: LIFE WORTH LIVING

Instructors: Matt Croasmun, Drew Collins, Angela Gorrell,
Ryan McAnnally-Linz, Miroslav Volf
matthew.croasmun@yale.edu | drew.collins@yale.edu | angela.gorrell@yale.edu
ryan.mcannally-linz@yale.edu | miroslav.volf@yale.edu

Section 01: TTh 9:00-10:15, Th 3:30-4:20 (Volf)
Section 02: MW 2:30-3:45, Th 3:30-4:20 (Croasmun)
Section 03: MW 9-10:15, Th 3:30-4:20 (Gorrell)
Section 04: TTh 11:35-12:50, Th 3:30-4:20 (Collins)
Section 05: TTh 1:00-2:15, Th 3:30-4:20 (McAnnally-Linz))

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 Canvas assignments. 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. *750 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 7 by 5:00pm.** (20 percent of final grade)
2. *1000 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 7 by 5:00pm.** (20 percent of final grade)
3. *1250 word (maximum) paper outlining your own personal vision of a life worth living.* **Due April 25 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 28, February 11, February 18, February 25, March 25, April 1, and April 8 by 6:00pm.** (10 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. (20 percent of final grade) For example:
 - a. Ask a question or make a comment that shows you are interested in what another person says.
 - b. Ask a question or make a comment that encourages another person to elaborate on something they have already said.
 - c. Make a comment that underscores the link between two people's contributions.
 - d. Make a comment that summarizes our conversation so far and/or suggests new direction and questions to be explored in the future.
 - e. Make a comment indicating that you found another person's ideas interesting or useful.
 - f. Contribute something that builds on, or springs from, what someone else has said.
 - g. Find a way to express appreciation for the insight you have gained from the discussion.

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.

Readings

To facilitate conversation that will often involve close readings of assigned texts, *every student needs a physical copy of each seminar reading with them in class*. Because laptops are not allowed in seminar, printing readings from Canvas before class is required (cost of printing readings double-sided totals to approximately \$50 over the course of the semester).

Required Text

Taylor, C. *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Harvard University Press, 1992. (\$38)

Schedule of Meetings

Introduction

January 16: Course Introduction

Readings: Rob Riemen, *Nobility of Spirit: A Forgotten Ideal*, 83-96.

January 18: Implicit and Explicit Visions of the Good Life

Readings: James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 19-27, 93-103.

January 18: Authenticity I (lecture)

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

January 23: Authenticity II (seminar)

Readings: Charles Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, 43-80

January 25: What is a Tradition? (seminar **at the Beinecke**)

Readings: Philip J. Ivanhoe, "Being in and Learning from Tradition," *Confucian Reflections: Ancient Wisdom for Modern Times*, 1-16.

January 25: The Tripartite Structure of the Good Life (lecture)

Readings: Robert Nozick, "The Experience Machine," *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, 42-45.
Martha Nussbaum, *Therapy of Desire*, 359-366, 386-401.
Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, excerpts.
"The Tripartite Formal Structure of Human Flourishing: A Hypothesis"

Assignment: Reading responses for Utilitarianism due **January 28** at 6:00pm.

Utilitarianism

January 30: 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) (Please read this article online as background; you need not bring a printed copy to class.)

February 1: 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.

February 1: A Life Shaped by Utilitarianism

Guests: Julia Wise

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

Yale's Vision of a Life Worth Living

February 6: 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.

Assignment: Reflection Paper 1 (Yale) due February 7 at 5:00pm.

February 8: Yale and the Good Life (seminar)

February 8: Yale and the Good Life

Guest: Secretary Kimberly Goff-Crews

Assignment: Reading responses for Judaism due **February 11** at 6:00pm.

— **Course Retreat, Sunday, February 11** —

Judaism

February 13: The Law and the Hebrew Prophets

Readings: Genesis 1-3, 12:1-7, 17:1-17, 21:1-5, 22; Deuteronomy 5-6, 28; Leviticus 19:9-18; Job 1-10, 42; Amos 5:1-6:7; Isaiah 57:14-61:11
Jonathan Sacks, *Letters to the Next Generation 2: Reflections on Jewish Life, Intro-Letter 6, 10, 14-16.*

February 15: Judaism, Work, & Rest (seminar)

Readings: Exodus 1-14, 20; Lev 25.
Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath*, vii-xvi; 1-32; 95-101.
Jonathan Sacks, "If I Ruled the World," *Prospect*, July 18, 2013.
Jonathan Sacks, *Radical Then, Radical Now*, 130-135.

February 15: A Life Shaped by Judaism (lecture)

Guest: Leah Sarna

Assignment: Reading responses for Christianity due **February 18** at 6:00pm.

Christianity

February 20: Jesus

Readings: Selections from the New Testament
Miroslav Volf, "Epilogue," *Flourishing*, 201-204.

February 22: Christianity & Forgiveness (seminar)

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

February 22: A Life Shaped by Jesus (lecture)

Guest: George Chochos

Assignment: Reading responses for Islam due **February 25** at 6:00pm.

Islam

February 27: 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.

March 1: Islam & Prayer (seminar)

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

March 1: A Life Shaped by Islam (lecture)

Guest: Didem Kaya

Millennials and the Good Life

March 6: Calling

Readings: Genesis 12:1-4
Mark 1:16-20, Acts 9:1-6
Surah 96, *The Study Quran*, (be sure to read the introduction)
Søren Kierkegaard, “What Then Must I Do? Live as an ‘Individual’” from *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing*, selections
Bryan J. Dik and Ryan D. Duffy, “Recovering Calling,” *Make Your Job a Calling: How the Psychology of Vocation Can Change Your Life*, 3-22

Assignment: Reflection Paper 2 (peers) due March 7 at 5:00pm.

March 8: Peers’ Visions of a Life Worth Living

March 8: Social Media and the Life Worth Living (lecture)

Reading: Nathan Jurgenson, “Digital Dualism versus Augmented Reality”
<https://thesocietypages.org/cyborgology/2011/02/24/digital-dualism-versus-augmented-reality/>

— Spring Break —

Assignment: Reading responses for Nietzsche due **March 25** at 6:00pm.

Nietzscheanism

March 27: 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".
———, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 1.13-14, 2.24-25.
Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, s.v. "Friedrich Nietzsche," § 1 ("Life: 1844-1900"). [plato.stanford.edu/entries/nietzsche] (Please read this article online as background; you need not bring a printed copy to class.)

March 29: Nietzsche and Overcoming (seminar)

Readings: Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, ## 22, 36, 259.
———, *The Gay Science* # 349.
Ehrenberg, *The Weariness of the Self*, 217-219

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March 29: Publicly Contesting Visions of Flourishing

Reading: Miroslav Volf, *Flourishing*, "Introduction: Where I Stand," 1-26

Assignment: Reading responses for Scientific Naturalism due **April 1** at 6:00pm.

Scientific Naturalism

April 3: Scientific Naturalism

Readings: Carl Sagan, *Pale Blue Dot*, 1-55, 109-125
Carl Sagan and Ann Druyan, *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*, 3-8; 411-415
E. O. Wilson, "The Origins of Morality and Honor," *The Social Conquest of the Earth*, 241-254
Brian T. Swimme and Mary Evelyn Tucker, *Journey of the Universe*, 1-15, 81-102
Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 25-28, 59-61

April 5: Scientific Naturalism & Awe

Readings: Carl Sagan, *Billions and Billions*, 1-12
Brian T. Swimme and Mary Evelyn Tucker, "Emerging Earth Community," *Journey of the Universe*, 111-118
Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, s. 25, pp. 103-106

“The Astronomer,” <https://vimeo.com/114563321>

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April 5: A Secular Life Worth Living (lecture)

Guest: Martin Hägglund

Readings: Martin Hägglund, *This Life*, selections

Assignment: Reading responses for Buddhism due **April 8** at 6:00pm.

Buddhism

April 10: The Buddha

Readings: *The Story of Gotama Buddha* (selections).
Life of the Buddha, 5.1-39, 14.
Wheel of Law (Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta)

April 12: Buddhism and Compassion (seminar)

Readings: Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, 123-126
Milinda Pañha, 32-34
The Dalai Lama, *How to See Yourself As You Really Are*, 32-38, 49-59, 67-73, 175-184, 201-208, 223-236

April 12: A Life Shaped by the Buddha (lecture)

Guest: TBA

Synthetic Topics

April 17: Sex (seminar)

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

April 19: 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.

April 19: Farming and the Good Life

Guest: Jeremy Oldfield, Yale Farm

Conclusion

April 24: Transformation & Commitment

Readings: Jill Bolte Taylor, "My Stroke of Insight"
Christian Wiman's "Gazing Into the Abyss"
David Brooks' 2015 Dartmouth Commencement Address

Assignment: Reflection Paper 3 (personal) due **April 25** at 5:00pm.

April 26: What Is a Life Worth Living?: Discussion of Final Papers (seminar)

April 26: The End (lecture)