

## HUMS 411: LIFE WORTH LIVING

MW 9-10:15a; Th 3:30-4:20p M. Croasmun  
MW 9-10:15a; Th 3:30-4:20p M. Pardon  
MW 1-2:15p; Th 3:30-4:20p S. Misgen  
MW 2:30-3:45p; Th 3:30-4:20p L. Schroeder  
TTh 9-10:15a; Th 3:30-4:20p H. Havranek  
TTh 11:35a-12:50p; Th 3:30-4:20p D. Collins  
TTh 11:35a-12:50p; Th 3:30-4:20p R. McAnnally-Linz  
TTh 1-2:15p; Th 3:30-4:20p D. Strehle

### 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 seven 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.

### Course Questions

- a. To whom or what are we responsible for living our lives a certain way?
- b. What is a human being and what is their place in the world?
- c. What does it mean for life:
  - i. to feel good? (And does it matter? Might the life worth living be miserable?)
  - ii. to go well? What is important in terms of life's circumstances?
  - iii. to be led well? What do we need to *do* in order to *lead* a life worth living?
- d. What is the role of suffering in a good life? How should we respond to suffering, our own and others'?
- e. What should we do when we fail to live a good life?

### Admission to the Course

Enrollment for this course is managed through [Preference Selection](#). Pre-registration will open Friday, December 6, 2019 and close **Wednesday, January 8, 2019 at 5pm**. Notice of assignments will be available on **January 10, at 5pm**.

While preference may be given to students who have taken HUMS 065, admission to the course is otherwise by lottery. Students assigned a spot in a seminar will forfeit that spot if they miss a class without notifying their instructor in advance. Students not selected by the lottery who still want to take the course will need to attend the seminar meeting(s) of their choice in order to be placed on a waiting list and will need to continue attending a given seminar's meetings in order to keep their spot on that seminar's waiting list.

### 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 the Yale community advocates or implicitly endorses. **Due February 15 by 11:59pm.** (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. The espoused vision and the adhered-to vision may or may not be the same. Specify which set of peers (e.g., college classmates, young adults in a particular culture or subculture, etc.) you will discuss. **Due March 28 by 11:59pm.** (20 percent of final grade)
3. 1250 word (maximum) paper outlining your own personal vision of a life worth living. **Draft due April 20/21 by 11:59pm. Final draft due by the end of reading period.** (20 percent of final grade)
4. 2-minute presentation commending your own personal vision of a life worth living. **To be presented in class during your seminar's last meeting.** You will work on developing this presentation with assistance from communication coaches during the last three weeks of the semester. You will meet twice in a small group with your communication coach (meeting times to be arranged later in the semester). (10 percent of final grade)
5. One purpose of a seminar like this one is to provide the opportunity for dialogical learning, not only between students and faculty, but also among students. Consequently, the quality of your participation in class greatly influences the relative success or failure of this course. Accordingly, your participation will be assessed. (20 percent of final grade) But since the goal is a flourishing seminar, not a competition for "participation points," participation cannot be reduced to "saying smart things frequently." Please put some thought into how you contribute to the seminar environment. Bear the following in mind. (1) Quality matters more than quantity. (A few moments of silence spent thinking things through is nothing to be afraid of.) (2) Charity counts for more than cleverness. Scoring points at another's expense is not to be smiled upon. (3) Listening should demand more of your attention than talking. You are here primarily to learn, not to perform. Wondering how you might participate fruitfully in seminar? Consider these examples:
  - 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. Take notes when your classmates speak, so you can remember their contributions and formulate good questions and comments in response.
  - d. Make a comment that underscores the link between two people's contributions.
  - e. Make a comment that summarizes our conversation so far and/or suggests new direction and questions to be explored in the future.
  - f. Make a comment indicating that you found another person's ideas interesting or useful.
  - g. Contribute something that builds on, or springs from, what someone else has said.
  - h. Find a way to express appreciation for the insight you have gained from the discussion.

In order to help monitor this crucial component of the course, you will submit weekly self-assessments of seminar preparation and participation.

NB: There will be an **all-day course retreat Saturday, February 1, 2020**. While accommodations will be made for student unable to attend due to religious commitments, otherwise participation in the course retreat is expected of all students. (Students in previous years have described the retreat as a highlight of the course as a whole!)

## 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 and lecture 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).

## Schedule of Meetings

### 01. Introduction

January 13/14: Course Introduction  
(Dates for MW/TTh)

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

January 15/16: Implicit and Explicit Visions of the Good Life

Readings: James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 19-27, 93-103.  
David Foster Wallace, "This is Water"

January 16: 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"

January 17/23: 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.  
David L. McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, 28-31, 36-39  
Saba Mahmood, *The Politics of Piety*, ix-xii.

January 22/21: The Tripartite Structure of the Good Life (seminar)

Readings: Review all readings from the January 16th lecture and bring them to class.

January 23: Course Questions (lecture)

## 02. Utilitarianism

January 27/28: Utilitarianism & Happiness

Readings: John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*.  
Peter Singer and Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek, "The Good Life—A Utilitarian Perspective"

January 29/30: 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.

January 30: A Life Shaped by Utilitarianism

Guests: Julia Wise

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

— Course Retreat, Saturday, February 1 —

## 03. Judaism

February 3/4: The Tanakh

Readings: Genesis 12:1-7, 17:1-17, 21:1-5; Deuteronomy 5-6, 28; Leviticus 19:9-18; Job 1-7, 42; Psalm 100, 119:1-16; Amos 5:1-6:7; Isaiah 57:14-61:11

February 5/6: The Rabbis  
*Pirkei Avot*, selections

February 6: A Life Shaped by Judaism (lecture)

Guest: Leah Sarna

February 10/11: Judaism, Work, & Rest (seminar)

Readings: Genesis 1-3; Exodus 1-3, 5, 12, 14, 20; Lev 25.  
Susannah and 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.

#### 04. Yale's Vision of a Life Worth Living

February 12/13: Yale and the Good Life (seminar)

Readings: Dan Schawbel, *Me 2.0*, 1-22.  
Pascal Bruckner, *Perpetual Euphoria*, selections  
"Yale's Most Popular Class Ever: Happiness," *New York Times*, Jan 26, 2018  
William Dereschewitz, "Don't Send Your Kid to the Ivy League"  
Hartmut Rosa, "Two Versions of the Good Life and Two Forms of Fear," selections  
Marina Keegan, "The Opposite of Loneliness"  
Peter Salovey, "Repair the World!"  
The Mission Statement of Yale College

February 13: Yale and the Good Life

Guest: TBA

**Assignment: Reflection Paper 1 (Yale) due February 15 at 11:59pm.**

#### 05. Expressive Individualism

February 17/18: Origins of Expressive Individualism

Readings: Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Soliloquies*, 9, 26–48, 69–88.  
Oscar Wilde, “The Soul of Man under Socialism,” selections.

February 19/20: Authenticity

Readings: Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 13-53

February 20: Expressive Individualism in Popular Culture (lecture)

February 24/25: Self-Reflection, Self-Realization, Self-Expression (seminar)

Readings: Wilde, “The Soul of Man under Socialism,” 247–53.  
———, *De profundis*, selections.

**Assignment: Reading response for Christianity due February 25 at 6:00pm.**

## 06. Christianity

February 26/27: New Testament

Readings: Mark  
Matthew 5-7  
John 14-17  
Romans 5-8  
Revelation 21-22

February 27: A Life Shaped by Jesus (lecture)

Guest: TBA

March 4/5: The Human Place in the World

Readings: Miroslav Volf, “Epilogue,” *Flourishing*, 201-204.  
Marilynne Robinson, “Psalm 8,” 227-244  
Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, “The World as Sacrament,” 217-227

March 5/6: Christianity & Forgiveness (seminar)

Readings: Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 74-109.  
Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom*, 90-107.  
Anne Lamott, *Hallelujah Anyway*, 3-19 and 141-157.

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March 6: Secular Faith

Readings: *This Life*, Martin Hägglund, selections

— *Spring Break* —

**Assignment: Reading response for Nietzsche due March 22 at 6:00pm.**

### 07. Nietzsche

March 23/24: 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.

March 25/26: Nietzsche and Overcoming (seminar)

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

March 26: Nietzsche’s Vision of a Good Life (lecture)

**Assignment: Reflection Paper 2 (peers) due March 28th at 11:59pm.**

### 08. Buddhism

March 30/31: The Buddha

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

April 1/2: The Self and the World  
Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, 123-126  
*Milinda Pañha*, 32-34  
The Dalai Lama, *How to See Yourself As You Really Are*, TBA

April 2: A Life Shaped by the Buddha (lecture)

Guest: TBA

April 6/7: Buddhism and Compassion (seminar)

Readings: The Dalai Lama, *How to See Yourself As You Really Are*, 32-38, 49-59, 67-73, 175-184, 201-208, 223-236

## 09. Islam

April 8/9: Muhammad

Readings: Martin Lings, *Muhammad*, 43-55, 58-69.

April 9: A Life Shaped by Islam (lecture)

Guest: TBA

April 13/14: The Way of Islam  
Asad Tarsin, *Being Muslim: A Practical Guide*, 1-35, 155-163, 217-225.  
Hamza Yusuf and Zaid Shakir, *Agenda to Change Our Condition*, 1-2.  
Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittack, *The Vision of Islam*, 120-131, 175-181, 267-288.

April 15/16: Islam & Prayer (seminar)

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

April 16: NO LECTURE (meetings with communications coaches)

## 10. Conclusion

April 20/21: Transformation & Commitment

**Assignment: Draft of Reflection Paper 3 (personal) due April 20/21 at 5:00pm.**

April 22/23: What Is a Life Worth Living? (seminar)

*2-minute presentations and discussion of student visions*

April 23: Visions of Flourishing Life (lecture)



*2-minute student presentations of their visions of flourishing life.*