The Good Life

Philosophy 190x
Spring 2014

Instructor

Jonathan Ellis
108 Cowell Annex
Office Hours: Thursdays 2:15 – 3:45, & by appointment
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Course Description

How should I live my life? What factors should I take into account when deciding this? What makes for a meaningful life? Or a happy life? Or a “good” life? Or a rewarding or fulfilling life? What is “happiness” anyway? Or meaning or fulfillment? These perennial philosophical questions are the central questions of this seminar.

The course will be divided into four parts. We will begin with the Ancient Stoics and their approach to some of these questions. We will then turn to some empirical research from psychology, especially concerning happiness. In the third part of the course, we will investigate some ideas from Eastern philosophy, primarily from the Buddhist tradition. We will conclude with the notion of meaning and the role that it plays in various answers to the central questions of the course. In each part, we will not only critically assess the ideas we study but also consider the possibility of applying them to our own everyday lives. We will also pay close attention to the relationships among the ideas discussed in the four parts of the course.

Texts

1. Books

Available for purchase at The Literary Guillotine, 204 Locust St., one and a half blocks west of Pacific Ave. in Downtown Santa Cruz. (Tel.#: 457-1195)

The Heart of the Buddha’s Teaching (1999) by Thich Nhat Hanh
Man’s Search for Meaning (1946) by Viktor Frankl
The Myth of Sisyphus (1955) by Albert Camus
2. Selected readings posted on eCommons

Seneca, “On the Happy Life”
Epictetus, Handbook (Enchiridion)
Nozick, R. “Happiness”
Harvard Medical School Special Health Report: “Positive Psychology”
Bok, S., from Exploring Happiness
Schopenhauer, A., from Essays and Aphorisms
Axel, B. “The Trouble with the Subject”
Nietzsche, F. On the Genealogy of Morals (excerpt) (eCommons)
Thich Nhat Hanh, from The Miracle of Mindfulness
Knightly, N. “Art and Philosophical Practice”
Ben-Shahar, T., from Happier
Tolstoy, L., “My Confession”
Nagel, T. “The Meaning of Life”

3. Supplementary (Optional)

Dharma Punx by Noah Levine (2003)

Course Requirements

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Percent of Semester Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In-Class Presentation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weekly Journal</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<td>Project (including two drafts of a 1-2 page proposal and one 6-8 page report)</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Paper (10-12 pgs.)</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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Guidelines on Presentations

Each student will, with another student in the class, give a presentation of one or two of the week’s readings. Each presentation should have three components:

1) Exposition. This is the first part, in which you will summarize the main points of the text(s). Summaries should be roughly 5 to 7 minutes long. They should certainly not be more than 8 minutes. Summarizing a week's reading in 5-7 minutes is not an easy thing to do, but it is an important skill to practice; it requires distilling many pages into what you take to be the most crucial points and then figuring out how best to convey those points. Concision and clarity are key here. In some cases this will involve walking slowly through the author's argument for one particularly important thesis; in others it will not. The best summaries will almost never involve walking chronologically through the text, saying "he then says. . . and then he says...and then he says...." You may choose to present on all of the readings for the week or on the primary text only (i.e., the book the class is reading at that juncture). These summaries are worth 25% of the presentation.
2) Questions for discussion. This is the most important part of the presentation. Here you will raise a number of discussion questions about the text, maybe 6 or 8 (between the two presenters). You are required to bring to the meeting hard copies of your discussion questions, one copy for each student in the class (and one for me). The idea is to raise the questions that you think are most worth exploring. Raising a particular question should involve more than merely saying "what do you think of the author's claim that such-and-such?" You want to motivate the question. For instance, if you are raising a question about a particular claim the author makes because you yourself are suspicious of the claim, you should explain persuasively why you are suspicious. The questions you raise might be interpretive, or philosophical, or practical. They might have to do merely with the author's text, or they might have to do with issues we've been discussing in the seminar more generally. (The motivation behind the questions need not be given on the hard copies distributed to the class; the questions on the hard copy may be one sentence.) This part is worth 50% of your grade on the presentation.

3) Finally, after raising your questions, you will, at least for a while, lead and mediate the subsequent discussion of those questions. The goal of this part of the presentation is to practice mediating a discussion, as someone who has thought hard about the questions and text under discussion. This will involve a mix of answering questions and comments raised by your classmates and of facilitating discussion among your classmates about these questions and comments. This part is worth 25% of your grade on the presentation.

Course Policies and Suggestions

1. The class will be divided into groups of 4 or 5 students, which will meet weekly outside of the seminar in order to continue discussion from the most recent seminar meeting as well as, when applicable, to discuss students’ projects. Attendance at these meetings is mandatory. We will divide everyone into groups the second meeting of the term.

2. The reading assignments below are tentative. I will occasionally assign additional readings (posted on eCommons). It is your responsibility to be aware of announcements made in class or by email. Please be sure that the email address I have for you is one that you check at least every other day. Surprise quizzes on the reading might sometimes be given and constitute part of the Participation component of the course requirements.

3. You are required to bring to each class your journals as well as the reading for that meeting.

4. Please drop by during my office hours. I’m always happy to continue class discussion or to discuss other philosophical matters or issues concerning the course. If I’m already talking with someone, be sure to let me know that you’re waiting.

5. My email is jellis@ucsc.edu. Feel free to email me about any administrative matters (deadlines, appointments, syllabus, etc.). Please do not email me with philosophical questions. Explaining a philosophical matter often requires more than a few sentences and in my courses is best reserved for office hours and appointments.
6. Policy on late papers: Each day a paper is late, one third of a grade will be deducted (i.e., a B+ moves to a B, a C to a C-, etc.). All days count—weekend days, holidays, etc.

7. If you qualify for classroom accommodations because of a disability, please attain an Accommodation Authorization from the Disability Resource Center (DRC) and submit it to me in person outside of class (e.g., office hours) within the first two weeks of the quarter. Contact DRC at 459-2089 (voice), 459-4806 (TTY), or http://drc.ucsc.edu/ for more information on the requirements and/or process.

8. You are responsible for being familiar with UCSC’s policies on plagiarism and proper sourcing. Plagiarism is a grave offense, which I take very seriously. Helpful guidelines and resources on academic integrity can be found at the following:

http://www.ue.ucsc.edu/academic_integrity

http://www.ue.ucsc.edu/ai_resources


COURSE CALENDAR

March 31  Introductory Meeting

April 7    Ancient Stoicism

Reading:
A Guide to the Good Life, introduction and parts 1 & 2
Seneca, “On the Happy Life” (eCommons)

April 14   Ancient Stoicism

Reading:
A Guide to the Good Life, finish book
Epictetus, Handbook (Enchiridion) (eCommons)
Nozick, R. “Happiness” (eCommons)

April 21   Contemporary Science

Reading
The Happiness Hypothesis, entire book
Harvard Medical School Special Health Report: “Positive Psychology” (eCommons)
Bok, S., from Exploring Happiness (eCommons)
April 28  
**Ideas from the East**

**Reading**  
*The Heart of the Buddha’s Teaching*, Part I  
Schopenhauer, A., from *Essays and Aphorisms* (eCommons)

May 5  
**Ideas from the East**

**Reading**  
*The Heart of the Buddha’s Teaching*, Part II  
Axel, B. “The Trouble with the Subject” (eCommons)  
Nietzsche, F. *On the Genealogy of Morals* (excerpt) (eCommons)

May 12  
**Ideas from the East**

**Reading**  
*The Heart of the Buddha’s Teaching*, Parts III & IV  
Thich Nhat Hanh, from *The Miracle of Mindfulness* (eCommons)

May 19  
**Art and the Good Life**

**Reading**  
Knightly, N. “Art and Philosophical Practice” (eCommons)  
Other readings tba (eCommons)

May 26  
**MEMORIAL DAY**

June 2  
**The Role of Meaning**

**Reading**  
*Man’s Search for Meaning*, entire book  
Ben-Shahar, T., from *Happier* (eCommons)

June 10  
**The Role of Meaning**  
7:30-10:30pm

**Reading**  
Tolstoy, L., “My Confession” (eCommons)  
Nagel, T. “The Meaning of Life” (eCommons)  
Camus, A. *The Myth of Sisyphus*

June 12  
**Final Papers due by noon**