

## *Philosophy 235: Meaning of Life*

Prof. Evgenia (Genia) Cherkasova

<http://meaningoflife.cherkasova.org/>

**T,Th 2:30—3:45 p.m. Sawyer 908**

Office Hours: 73 Tremont Street, 10<sup>th</sup> floor, Office 1066; W 11:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. and by appointment.

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### *Required Materials:*

Hermann Hesse. *Siddhartha*. Modern Library, 2008.

Lao Tzu. *Tao Te Ching: An Illustrated Journey*. Frances Lincoln Limited, 1999.

Viktor Frankl. *Man's Search for Meaning*. Beacon Press, 2006.

Walpola Rahula. *What The Buddha Taught*. Grove Press, 1974.

Other materials (books, stories, essays, and fragments) are available online.

**Handouts and links to online texts will be posted on Blackboard.**

*Recommended Texts:* <http://meaningoflife.cherkasova.org/resources/bibliography/>

### *Course Description:*

The meaning of life is a question that spans the totality of existence. How can we tackle it in one semester? This seminar introduces perspectives on life-meaning in philosophical and religious texts, in art, fiction, and autobiography, and in the scholarly work of philosophers and psychologists. The great artists and thinkers from diverse traditions of Europe, Asia, and America will be our guides. The sages' reflections on how to live and how to think about life and death encourage us to examine our beliefs and values; we explore different paths to meaning, learn about crises of meaning and their causes, and clarify our own perspective on what it means to live a meaningful, fulfilling life. The course will be roughly divided into three units.

*A Life Worth Living: Humanity's Ideals* (the ancient and modern visions of human flourishing);

*Threats to Meaning: Humanity's Discontents*, (disillusionments leading to the loss of meaning); and

*Recovery of Meaning: Crises and Hopes*, (self-discovery and growth as a result of a crisis).

### *Class Requirements and Grading:*

Students keep a folder containing all completed assignments marked with the date, student name, assignment title and text references. Students bring their folders to each class since assignments are consistently discussed and reviewed. Folders are collected and graded several times throughout the semester. All completed work, graded and ungraded, is kept in the folder. At the end of the course the

students submit a *Portfolio of their best work* completed and revised throughout the semester.

### *Meaning of Life (MoL) Portfolio:*

- MoL Profile (10%): students answer questions about their life goals, ideals, and values
- Collection of MoL questions and quotes (15%): students share their impressions of the texts and discuss memorable passages
- Reflection Papers (40%): in-depth, engaged exploration of a text or a key idea of the course
- Crisis of Meaning Interview (25%): students interview a friend, family member, or colleague about a turning point in their life

Detailed written instructions for completing each assignment is posted online and distributed in class.

**Active Class Participation (10%):** this course will employ a lecture/ discussion format. A high degree of preparation, engagement, and participation is expected of all students.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Assigned Readings, Topics for Discussion</i>
Jan 14	Introduction. Course Goals and Objectives.
Jan 16	Ecclesiastes. <a href="#"><u>The Bible: Authorized King James Version.</u></a>
	<i>Unit I: A Life Worth Living</i>
Jan 21, 23	Aristotle. <a href="#"><u>Nicomachean Ethics.</u></a>
Jan 28	The Hedonists: Epicurus. <a href="#"><u>Letters, Principle Doctrines, Fragments.</u></a>
Jan 30	The Stoics: Epictetus. <a href="#"><u>The Handbook.</u></a>
Feb 4	The Stoics: Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. <a href="#"><u>The Emperor's Handbook.</u></a>
Feb 6	Marcus Aurelius; the Humanists: Pico della Mirandola.
Feb 11	Pico della Mirandola. <a href="#"><u>Oration on the Dignity of Man.</u></a>
Feb 13	Confucius. <i>The Analects</i> (selections).
Feb 18, 20	Confucianism and Taoism. Lao Tzu. <a href="#"><u>Tao Te Ching.</u></a>
Feb 25	Taoism: Chuang Tzu. <i>The Way of Chuang Tzu.</i>
	<i>Unit II: Crises of Meaning</i>
Feb 25	Schopenhauer, <a href="#"><u>"On the sufferings of the world" and "On the vanity of existence."</u></a>
Feb 27	Anton Chekhov. <a href="#"><u>Ward No.6.</u></a>
March 4	Introduction to Existentialism: Sartre, <i>The Wall.</i>
March 6	Existentialism: Camus, <a href="#"><u>"The Myth of Sisyphus."</u></a>
	<i>Spring Break</i>
March 18	Tolstoy. <a href="#"><u>The Death of Ivan Ilyich.</u></a>
March 20	"Crises of meaning" review. Tolstoy, <i>Confession.</i>
March 25	Tolstoy, <i>Confession.</i>
	<i>Unit III: Recovery of Meaning</i>
March 27	Introduction to Buddhism. PBS film "The Life of the Buddha"
April 1, 3	Rahula. <i>What the Buddha Taught.</i>
April 8	Buddhism, the Bodhisattva path, Zen Buddhism: tranquility and beauty
April 10	Review of various paths to meaning: Stoic, hedonist, existentialist, Taoist, Buddhist.
April 10, 15	Frankl. <a href="#"><u>Man's Search for Meaning.</u></a>
April 15	Yalom. "Meaninglessness and Psychotherapy."
April 17, 22	Hesse. <i>Siddhartha.</i>
April 24	Hesse. <i>Siddhartha.</i> Review of the Course.
<b>April 28</b>	<b>Final Portfolios due</b>

## *Philosophy 235: Meaning of Life*

### **Information and Policy:**

#### **Classroom Etiquette**

I do my best to create an open environment in which students feel comfortable asking questions and freely discussing ideas and concerns. However, I will not tolerate rudeness such as private conversations in class, reading or working on other homework, eating, sleeping, taking breaks to leave class temporarily, texting etc. **Please make sure that all beepers and cell phones are turned off during class period. Laptops are not allowed unless a student needs one to take notes in class (e.g. in case of a documented learning disability).** Most important of all, we should all treat each other with courtesy and respect, even (and especially!) when we disagree. Please come to class on time. If for any reason you have to leave class early, please inform me ahead of time. Coming to class late and leaving early is very disruptive. In the case of students who do this on a regular basis, I will count each tardiness the same as absence. In addition to regular class attendance you may be asked to attend a lecture, recital, film, theater performance, poetry reading, etc.

#### **Academic Standards**

be sure to understand Suffolk's policy on cheating and plagiarism. In sum, **do not ever present someone else's work and/or ideas as your own.** Even partial borrowing of ideas constitutes plagiarism. This includes materials on the internet. Always use a footnote to cite material that you found helpful in your research, and *always* use quotation marks to identify direct quotes from sources other than your own head. Remember that a single incident of cheating or plagiarism can result in your failing the course.

#### **Academic Honesty**

Academic honesty is a fundamental value of teaching, learning, and scholarship. University policy expects faculty members who suspect academic dishonesty to report incidents to the Student Affairs Office for adjudication. For more information and for tips on preventing academic dishonesty, please go to <http://www.suffolk.edu/studenthandbook/17534.php>

### **Suffolk Resources:**

**Physical/Emotional Health:** A range of issues can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, health issues, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating, lack of motivation or feeling ill. These concerns or other stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance or may reduce your ability to participate in daily activities. University resources can help you address these and other concerns. You can learn more about Suffolk's broad range of medical and confidential mental health services at [www.suffolk.edu/health](http://www.suffolk.edu/health)

**Students with Disabilities:** If you anticipate issues with the format or requirements of this course, please meet with me—I would like to discuss ways to ensure your full participation in my classroom. If you determine that you need formal, disability-related accommodations, it is very important that you register with the Office of Disability Services (located at 73 Tremont Street, 7th floor, 617.994.6820, [disabilityservices@suffolk.edu](mailto:disabilityservices@suffolk.edu)) and notify me of your eligibility for reasonable accommodations. We can then plan how best to implement your accommodations.

**The Early Alert Project:** This class participates in Suffolk's Early Alert Project. Around week 6, I will notify the Center for Learning and Academic Success (CLAS), if you have struggled with writing or language skills, excessive absences, incomplete work, or difficulty with the course content. This warning is not an official grade, yet it indicates concerns about your progress that need to be addressed immediately. If you receive an Early Alert, please visit me during my office hours so we may talk about strategies for how you can be successful in this class.

**The Center for Learning and Academic Success (CLAS)** offers academic coaching and tutoring in math, writing and English, and many other CAS and SBS courses. Students may join study groups, participate in drop-in services, or make appointments with tutors and academic coaches to reinforce course content, develop writing, and strengthen effective study habits. For a complete review of free services, workshops and online resources go to [www.suffolk.edu/CLAS](http://www.suffolk.edu/CLAS), call 617.573.8235, email [clas@suffolk.edu](mailto:clas@suffolk.edu) or visit CLAS on the 2nd Level of Sawyer Library at 73 Tremont Street.

**International Student Services Office (ISSO)**, a part of the Center for International Programs and Services, provides comprehensive support to international students regarding immigration status and DHS regulatory responsibilities. If you are an international student in F-1 or J-1 status, you are responsible to maintain full-time enrollment (minimum of 12 units) every semester, else your immigration status is at risk. For more information, go to <http://www.suffolk.edu/isso> , call 617.573.8154, email [isso@suffolk.edu](mailto:isso@suffolk.edu) or visit ISSO on the 6th floor of 73 Tremont.

**Technology Services:** Suffolk University provides a variety of resources to support course technology:

- University Help Desk (Mon-Fri, 8:30am – 8pm): 617.557.2000 or [helpdesk@suffolk.edu](mailto:helpdesk@suffolk.edu)
- For Blackboard and Collaborate assistance, please contact the 24-hour support line at 866.886.4861.
- Step-by-step Blackboard tutorials are accessible within every Blackboard course via the Bb Tutorials menu
- On Demand Knowledge Base provides information on all other technologies that are used in courses, including teaching, learning, research and productivity tools