

Phil 155g: Modern Philosophy and the Meaning of Life

Location: SGM 101 | **Time:** 12:00-1:15 MW | **Professor:** Dr. David Manley
Office Hours: 10:00-11:30 MW in STO 99 | **Email:** djmanley@usc.edu

Texts: 1. Course Reader (CR)
2. Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*
3. Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*
4. Robert Solomon, ed. *Existentialism* (EX)
5. Jonathan Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis* (HH)

Description: This course is an introduction to philosophical treatments of the problem of the meaning or purpose of human life. Texts are taken primarily from the Western philosophical tradition, with special attention to modern philosophy, including Existentialism.

Quizzes and Exam:

- There will be 5-10 unannounced quizzes on the readings for the day. The quizzes will count for 25% of your grade. **If you are absent or late, your grade for that quiz will be zero.** No exceptions. However, because there are sometimes legitimate reasons for students to miss class, everyone can replace their *two* lowest quiz grades (even grades of zero) with the grade they receive for one optional make-up assignment.
- The final counts for 45% of your grade.

Assignments:

- You will be required to write 4 papers of 600 words each. Together they will count for 30% of your grade. Due dates for online submission (by 5pm): Feb 8, Mar 8, Apr 8, May 2
- You must submit each assignment to turnitin.com by uploading it using their website. Turnitin.com's database ensures that the content of submitted papers is not plagiarized. Instructions and passwords will be sent to you by email; if you do not get these well before the first paper is due, let your TA know.
 - The assignment questions will be made available in class the previous week, as well as at the turnitin.com website. You are responsible for finding out what the questions are in advance; you can always email your TA if you are uncertain about something.
 - **Late assignments will be penalized 5% per day.** All assignments that come in after the deadline count as at least one day late. If you will have to be absent on the due date, you should hand in your assignment early. If you are having technical difficulties uploading your assignment to turnitin.com you may email it to your TA or submit a hardcopy to the philosophy office and have it stamped by an administrative assistant to verify the time.

Disability: Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability must register with Disability Services and Programs each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure it is delivered to the TA for your discussion group as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

Academic integrity: Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Always cite work that you draw from, always acknowledge direct quotations, and never represent someone else's work as your own. For more specific guidelines, consult the Student Conduct Code. Any violation of academic integrity will be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards and sanctioned according to the Academic Integrity Review Process.

Schedule of Topics and Required Readings

The readings for a class day are to be completed *before* that class.

Due dates for online submission of papers (by 5pm): Feb 8, Mar 8, Apr 8, May 2

1 DEATH, SUFFERING, AND MEANING

1/14. **Introduction** (no reading)

1/16. **Tolstoy's crisis of meaning**

Reading: Leo Tolstoy, *A Confession* (CR)

1/23. **Portrait of a death**

Reading: Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (all)

1/28. **The philosophy of death**

Readings: Schopenhauer, 'On the Vanity...' and Thomas Nagel, 'Death' (CR)

1/30. **The will to meaning**

Reading: Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, part 1: 'From Death Camp to Existentialism'

2. SOME ANCIENT ANSWERS

2/4. **Introduction** (no reading)

2/6. No Lecture

2/11. **Buddhism**

Reading: *The Buddha and His Teachings* (CR)

2/13. **Platonism and Stoicism**

Readings: Plato, *Phaedo* and Epictetus, *Handbook* (CR)

2/20. **Aristotelianism**

Readings: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (CR)

2/25. **Christianity**

Readings: Basil of Caesarea, the *Gospel of John*, John Chrysostom, and Thomas Aquinas (CR)

3. GOD AND MEANING

2/27. **Introduction** (no reading)

3/3. **Religious meaning**

Readings: E. Fackenheim and L. Pojman (CR)

3/5. **The existence of God**

Reading: E. Nagel, 'Does God Exist?' (CR)

3/10. **Meaning without God?**

Reading: Robert Nozick, 'Philosophy and the Meaning of life' (CR)

3/12. **Pascal: the human predicament**

Reading: excerpts from the *Pensées* (CR)

4. EXISTENTIALISM

3/24. **Introduction** (no reading)

3/26. **Sartre: freedom & bad faith**

Reading: pgs 206-‡214, 229-232, 239-‡243, 251-258 (EX)

3/31. **Camus: the myth of Sisyphus**

Readings: pgs 183-‡198 (EX) and Thomas Nagel 'The Absurd' (CR)

4/2. **Nietzsche: morals & death of God**

Reading: pgs 67-68, 72-85, ‡92-‡93, 99-101

4/7. **Kierkegaard: truth & inwardness**

Reading: pgs 8-14, 17-29, 32-33 (EX)

5. MEANING AND HAPPINESS

4/9. **Introduction** (no reading)

4/14. **Pursuing happiness**

Readings: the Introduction, pgs 59-69 (most of ch. 4), and Chapter 5 (HH)

4/16. **Love and adversity**

Readings: Chapters 6 & 7 (HH)

4/21. **Virtue and balance**

Readings Chapters 8, 10, and 11 (HH)

4/23. No Lecture

6. REVIEW

4/28. **Review lecture**

4/30. **Review lecture**

Final Exam: Fri. May 9, 11am-1pm, SGM 101

‡ this symbol before a page number denotes a partial page (usually less than half).