Course Title: The Meaning of Life: Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and More  
Course Code: PHI 91  
Instructor: Frederick Dolan

Class Sessions and Recording  
Meeting Days and Times: Wednesdays, 7:00 - 8:50pm PT  
Meeting Location: Zoom.

The class sessions will be recorded. It’s important to attend the live meetings, but the class sessions will be recorded, and I’ll accommodate students who have schedule conflicts or are in other time zones.

Course Features:  
• Live session  
  o Lecture, discussions, and Q&A  
  o An informal drop-in time for student Q&A  
• Assignments & Coursework  
  o Assignments and course materials posted in Canvas  
  o Instructor will provide feedback on assignments  
• Individual conferences available by request

Grade Options and Requirements:  
• No Grade Requested (NGR). No work will be required; no credit shall be received; no proof of attendance can be provided.

• Credit/No Credit (CR/NC). Students must attend and/or watch at least 8 of the class sessions.

• Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass). Students must attend and/or watch at least 8 of the class sessions and complete a 1000 word memorandum on a relevant theme or evaluating a relevant argument.

*Please Note: If you require proof that you completed a Continuing Studies course for any reason (for example, employer reimbursement), you must choose either the Letter Grade or Credit/No Credit option. Courses taken for NGR will not appear on official transcripts or grade reports.

Required Textbooks:  
• Friedrich Nietzsche, R.J. Hollingdale (trans.), Beyond Good and Evil.
• Friedrich Nietzsche, Kevin Hill (trans.), The Joyous Science.
• Søren Kierkegaard, Alastair Hannay (trans.), Fear and Trembling.

Please contact the Stanford Continuing Studies office with any questions  
365 Lasuen St., Stanford, CA 94305  
continuingstudies@stanford.edu  
650-725-2650
Tentative Weekly Outline:

Week 1. Asking and answering the question.
There’s no assigned reading for the first meeting. I’ll talk about how the philosophical method can be applied to the meaning of life, about the meaning of “meaning,” and about two approaches to the question: Externalism and Internalism.

Week 2. Assessing the value of life.
Is there a meaning of life? Maybe life is pointless, absurd, or evil.
Leo Tolstoy, “My Confession,” ML.
Albert Camus, “The Myth of Sisyphus,” ML.
Thomas Nagel, “The Absurd,” ML.

Week 3. From the meaning of life to the meaning of death.
What is the significance of mortality? How should we think about living with death?
Thomas Nagel, “Death,” ML.
Phillip Larkin, “Aubade.” (On Canvas.)

Week 4. An Externalist answer: Kierkegaard.
Life offers us a stark choice between two alternatives: despair versus anxiety.
Søren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, Preface, Attunement, Speech in Praise of Abraham, and Preamble from the Heart.
Handout: Background on Fear and Trembling. (On Canvas.)
Handout: Genesis 22: Abraham Tested. Optional. (On Canvas.)
Handout: Notes on Fear and Trembling. Optional. (On Canvas.)

Week 5. An Externalist answer: Kierkegaard (continued).
The moral ambiguities of the authentic life.
Søren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, Problema I-III, Epilogue.
Handout: Kierkegaard on being a self. Optional. (On Canvas.)
Handout: Movements of faith and resignation. Optional. (On Canvas.)

Week 6. An Internalist answer: Nietzsche.
Passive nihilism, active nihilism, and the death of God.
Friedrich Nietzsche, The Joyous Science, §§ 1, 116, 125, 143, 343-44, 349, 357.
___ Beyond Good and Evil, §§ 199-201, 257-265.
Handout: Quotations from Nietzsche’s writings. (On Canvas.)
Week 7. An Internalist answer: Nietzsche (continued).
The “higher types”: free spirits, new philosophers, noble souls, and supermen.
__. *Beyond Good and Evil*, §§ 24-44, 268-70, 272-73, 284, 287, 292.

Week 8. From the meaning of life to meaning in life.
The place of meaning in life as a whole.
Susan Wolf, “Meaning in Life,” ML.

Week 9. Meaning and politics.
Expressive action, freedom, and the narrative self.

Week 10. The ultimate question: Why is there something rather than nothing?
Living with inescapable but unanswerable questions.
Ludwig Wittgenstein, “A Lecture on Ethics.” (On Canvas.)
Derek Parfit, “Why Anything? Why This?” (On Canvas.)