



UCDAVIS

ECS 88 – Winter 2026

[Week 10]

ETHICS, RELIGION, AND THE MEANING OF LIFE

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Thou hast made us for **Thyself**, O Lord,
and our **heart** is restless until it rests in **Thee**.

St. Augustine
[Confessions, p. 3]

Whenever there was an opportunity for it, one had to give them a **why**—an aim—for their lives, in order to strengthen them to bear the terrible **how** of their existence

Viktor E. Frankl
[Man's Search for Meaning, p. 121]

Happiness is the condition of a rational being in the world,
in whose existence everything goes according to **wish** and **will**.
It thus rests on the **harmony of nature** with the essential determining **ground** of **his will**.
But the **moral law**, as a law of **freedom** through which this end is to be attained,
commands as a law of freedom through motives wholly independent of nature
and of its harmony with our faculty of desire.

Hence there is not the slightest ground in the moral law for a necessary connection between
morality and the proportionate **happiness** of a being which belongs to the world as one of
its parts and is thus dependent on it.

Immanuel Kant
[Critique of Practical Reason, p. 129]

No being nature's **cause**, his will cannot by its own strength bring nature, as it touches on **happiness**, into complete **harmony** with his practical principles. Nevertheless, in the practical task of **pure reason** such a connection is postulated as **necessary**. We should seek to further the **highest good** (which therefore must be at least possible).

Immanuel Kant
[Critique of Practical Reason, p. 129]

It follows of itself that, in the order of **ends**,
man (and every rational being) is an **end-in-himself**, i.e.,
he is never to be used as a **means** for someone (even for God)
without at the same time being **himself an end**,
and that thus the **humanity** in our person must **itself** be **holy** to us.

Immanuel Kant
[Critique of Practical Reason, p. 136]

There is but one truly **serious philosophical problem**, and that is **suicide**. Judging whether **life** is or is not **worth living** amounts to **answering** the **fundamental** question of **philosophy**. All the **rest**—whether or not the world has three dimensions, whether the mind has nine or twelve categories—comes **afterward**.

Albert Camus
The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 3]

Sisyphus is the **absurd** hero. He is, as much through his passions as through his torture. His scorn of the gods, his hatred of death, and his passion for life won him that unspeakable penalty in which the whole being is exerted towards **accomplishing nothing**.

If the **descent** is thus sometimes performed in **sorrow**, it can also take place in **joy**.

One does not discover the **absurd** without being tempted to write a **manual of happiness**... There is but one world, however. **Happiness** and the **absurd** are two sons of the same **earth**. They are **inseparable**.

It would be a mistake to say that **happiness** necessarily **springs** from the **absurd** discovery. It happens as well that the feeling of the **absurd** springs from **happiness**.

The **struggle** itself toward the **heights** is enough to fill a man's **heart**. One must imagine Sisyphus **happy**.

Albert Camus

The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 108, p. 109, p. 110, p. 123]

Faith is the state of being **ultimately concerned**.

Paul Tillich
[Dynamics of Faith, p. 1]