REVIEW: FINAL EXAM

• 12/10 Tuesday: 1:45-3:45pm
• 3 Short Answer Questions
• 1 Long Form Question
• 10 multiple choice questions from past 2 quizzes.

• Last Class (Next Monday):
  • Wrap up the course.
  • Help you prepare for the last question.
  • Help you prepare for the multiple choice
  • AND get a chance to earn bonus points towards Final Exam.
REVIEW: MEANINGFUL LIFE

Based on our discussions thus far, what does it mean to live a meaningful life?

1. **Meaningful Activity**
   - Doing activities that you find important or give you joy.
   - Feeling that your actions matter.

2. **Having a Sense of Purpose within Life** (knowing what to do with yourself).

What have we been doing the past few days, and even during the entire course, that is related to the question?

3. Experiencing a life that is **Full of Meaning**.
REVIEW: SPIRITUAL/RELIGIOUS INTERPRETATIONS

How might a religious/spiritual person interpret and describe some of the events in the movie *Joe vs. the Volcano*?

- "God gave them purpose."
- "They were saved by grace."
- "God saved them."
- "God loved them."
- "Joe found God."
- They have good Karma.
- They are more connected to Spirit.
- They were more in flow with the Tao.
- They are closer to escaping the Wheel of Samsara

Is this language “meaningful” or is it false and “meaningless”? 
Meaningless

1. Doesn’t make any claim that can true or false.
   • “It snowed in Dallas last summer.”
   • “Blue running was tall.”

2. Emotive rather than informative
   • “Ouch!” – expression of one’s feelings.

3. Just be “empty talk” – gibberish with no usefulness.
   • Simply linguistic ritual.
Paul Tillich: (1886-1965)  
**German-American Philosopher & Theologian**

**Two Types of Language:**

1) **Literal:**  
   • The primary meaning, factual

2) **Symbolic/Figurative:**  
   • Representation pointing to something beyond the literal meaning.

**Religious Language as Symbolic**  
To understand his point, let’s take a closer look at what *symbolic* means?
Review: Why Ever Communicate Symbolically? (Why use non-cognitive language?)

At Least 4 Reasons

1. To make something more memorable.

2. To speak more powerfully to our emotions and imagination (the other half of our brain).

3. To suggest layers of meaning that a simple, literal statement could never convey.
   - Some knowledge can best (most correctly) be presented symbolically.
   - Language is limited.

4. There is no such thing as non-symbolic communication(?)
   - Just levels of symbolic communication.
4. ALL COMMUNICATION SYMBOLIC?

Word are Just Symbols Too

- “Fire truck”
- “Blue”
- “Table”

What’s the difference between the first three “symbols” vs. the last three?

- “God”
- “Spirit”
- “Nirvana”

Is it just a matter of convention/agreement?
4. ALL COMMUNICATION SYMBOLIC?

So what is the difference between these two statements?

- John’s brain is full of neurons.
- John’s brain is an awesome computer

What does it mean for one to be literal and the other symbolic?

What happens when the culture (or masses) decide to change the meaning of words?
4. ALL COMMUNICATION SYMBOLIC?

What is this? How would you describe it?

Is there a problem with taking language too literally?

Really Big Fish?
Was this description ever literal or was it symbolic all along?

So is literal language ever really anymore symbolic than symbolic language?
4. ALL COMMUNICATION SYMBOLIC?
THE PROBLEM WITH TAKING LANGUAGE LITERALLY

Zeno (490 BC-?)

- Wrote a series of famous paradoxes “proving” that motion is impossible.

- Is motion really impossible?
  - Why ask this question?

- If it is, maybe all is “One” and thus are motion and change simply illusions?
4. ALL COMMUNICATION SYMBOLIC?
THE PROBLEM WITH TAKING LANGUAGE LITERALLY

Zeno (490 BC-?)
“Zeno’s Paradox”

• One could never move from point A to B
• In order to get to point B you must go halfway,
• But, this is a problem. Why?
• Thus, motion is impossible even if it were possible
Eternal Bliss

Oliver: What is better than eternal bliss?

Javy: Nothing.

Oliver: But a slice of bread is better than nothing.

Javy: So a slice of bread is better than eternal bliss.
4. ALL COMMUNICATION SYMBOLIC?

The Common Mistake
(According to SOME religious.)

• We mistake reality for the words we use to point to it.

• For the religious, this causes misunderstandings of teachings.

• For the non-religious, this makes religious teachings seem incorrect or meaningless.

But if our words are just fingers pointing to the moon, we must be aware of the limitations of thinking with our fingers.
RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE?

Paul Tillich: (1886-1965)
German-American Philosopher & Theologian

Two types of language Literal:
1. Literal
   - The primary meaning, factual
2. Symbolic/Figurative:
   - Representation pointing to something beyond the literal meaning.

Religious Language as Symbolic
- They point to a reality otherwise closed to us.
- Opens up truths/levels of reality attained no other way.
- Opens up levels and dimensions of the soul the corresponds to these levels of reality.
- Works in the same way art or poetry does.
RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE?

Instead of understanding religious language as factual, maybe it is best understand as “like a” language.

- The brain is an awesome computer.
- John is a good catch!
- You are an angel.
- This business is a gold mine.
- Life is like a box of chocolates.

- God was a burning bush.
- Jesus walked on water.
- Mother earth.
- The self is a flame.
- The kingdom of heaven.

Our language frames our experience, and can expand or limit what we think is possible.
PROBLEM OF RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE:
(RESPONSE FROM THE RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE #1)

- Should religious language be understandable to those outside the religious community?
  - Should a non-mathematician be expected to understand calculus?

- Language is meant to describe our normal world, but religious truths describe something “otherworldly” – an “ultimate” reality.

- How do we use human language about the transcendent, unlimited God?

- Hence, language is a limited way of describing ultimate reality.

Example:
What would it be like to describe color to a blind person?
What would it be like to describe sound to someone who can’t hear?
GROUP DISCUSSION
RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE

Describe Karen Armstrong’s distinction between mythos and logos. How might this address problems with religious language?
PROBLEM OF RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE:
(RESPONSE FROM THE RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE #2)

Logos & Mythos

Logos:
The search for objective, universal knowledge through rational progression and facts.

Mythos:
The search for meaning, based on imaginative/intuitive leaps, related experiences, and personal feelings.

Armstrong:
• Ancient world balanced logos and mythos.
• Modern world value logos over mythos.
• Fundamentalism (on either side) is when modern believer turns the myths of their religion into logos.
Some take them literally – like historical accounts.

But others…
• A symbolic account of reality.
• Timeless narratives that escape fixing into historical time frames.

Characters, setting, and actions stand for something beyond themselves (symbolic).
What do you think Everyman, the main character of the allegory, stands for?

What comment about fellowship, beauty, and strength does this allegory make?

Quick Check

One day, Everyman is summoned by Death to give an accounting of his life. Everyman ask his friends Fellowship, Beauty, Strength, and Good Deeds to go with him to tell Death that he has led a good life. Only Good Deeds stays with him to the end.

—summary of “Everyman”
On a symbolic level, what does it mean that only Good Deeds stays with Everyman to the end?

Quick Check

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—summary of “Everyman”
How might you interpret the following poems, parables, allegories, and myths.
PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE
(MYTHS, ALLEGORY, PARABLE & POETRY)

We are born with wings. Why prefer to crawl through life?

- Rumi (Sufi Mystic)

The minute I heard my first love story, I started looking for you, Not knowing how blind that was.

Lovers don't finally meet somewhere. They're in each other all along.

- Rumi (Sufi Mystic)
PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE
(MYTHS, ALLEGORY, PARABLE & POETRY)

Success is counted sweetest
By those who ne'er succeed.
To comprehend a nectar
Requires sorest need.

Not one of all the purple Host
Who took the Flag today
Can tell the definition
So clear of Victory

As he defeated—dying—
On whose forbidden ear
The distant strains of triumph
Burst agonized and clear!

- Emily Dickinson

"With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

-Jesus
Group Discussion

How might you interpret the following poems, parables, allegories, and myths.

*HINT:
• Don’t think of right or wrong (that would be logos).
• Free associate – what are the first things that come to mind which each element.
• Think of how they might relate to you and your life (mythos).
GREEK: MYTH OF ICARUS

Daedalus and his son Icarus were imprisoned inside a massive labyrinth in Crete. The father made them each a pair of wings, and with these they were able to escape.

Daedalus warned his son, “Don’t fly too high or the sun will melt the wax on your wings and you will fall. Follow me closely. Do not set your own course.” But Icarus became so exhilarated by his ability to fly, he forgot the warning and followed his own course instead.

He flew too high, the wax melted, and Icarus fell down into the sea and drowned.
Student: Great teacher, I have come to learn from you.

Teacher: (Sizing up pupil) I see. Welcome, please come in.

*Student sits down. Master prepares tea.*

Teacher: Would you care for some tea?

Student: Yes I would, Master

Master pours tea slowly, until cup is overflowing. *Student in shock.*

Student: Master, my cup is overflowing.

Master: Then how am I to teach you?
SUFI’S & THE MULLA NASRUDIN

• Most famously collected by Idries Shah
• Studied by Stanford Psychologist Robert Ornstein
A man was walking home late one night when he saw the Mulla Nasrudin searching under a street light on hands and knees for something on the ground. "Mulla, what have you lost?" he asked.

"The key to my house," Nasrudin said.

"I'll help you look," the man said.

Soon, both men were down on their knees, looking for the key. After a number of minutes, the man asked, "Where exactly did you drop it?"

Nasrudin waved his arm back toward the darkness. "Over there, in my house."

The first man jumped up. "Then why are you looking for it here?"

"Because there is more light here than inside my house."