

LS 812: Science and Human Values: The Meaning of Life

Fall 2015 | Dr. Michael Kenny

COURSE OUTLINE:

This seminar will explore the significance of the concept of 'life' -- broadly defined in a biological sense. Topics will include the following:

- the boundary between the living and the non-living; the origins of life
- the nature of vitality
- structure, evolution, and intelligent design
- taking control of evolution; eugenics & human enhancement
- artificial life, artificial intelligence, and the Turing problem

A disquieting Promethian theme runs throughout -- the search for mastery of life, whether as organic process, political program, or capitalist commodity.

COURSE READINGS:

Richard Holmes – *The Age of Wonder: How the Romantic Generation Discovered the Beauty and Terror of Science*

UK General Books: 978-0007149537

Aeschylus – *Prometheus Bound and Other Plays*

Penguin Classics: 978-0140441123

Percy Shelley – *Prometheus Unbound*

Nabu Press: 978-1178047646

Mary Shelley – *Frankenstein*

Dover Publications: 978-0486282114

H.G. Wells – *The Island of Doctor Moreau*

Dover: 978-0486290270

Diane Paul – *Controlling Human Heredity, 1865 to the Present*.
Humanities Press (1995): 978-1573923439

William Paley – *Natural Theology*
Oxford UP: 978-0199535750

Richard Dawkins – *The Blind Watchmaker*
Penguin UK: 978-0141026169

Erwin Schrödinger – *What is Life?*
Cambridge UP: 978-1107604667

Craig Venter – *Life at the Speed of Light*
Penguin: 978-0143125907

Ray Kurzweil – *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology*
Penguin: 978-0143037880

Karel Capek – *R.U.R.*
Dover: 978-0486419268

Isaac Asimov, *I, Robot*
Spectra: 978-0553294385

Phillip K. Dick – *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*
Del Rey: 978-034504473

Custom Courseware:

Arthur Lovejoy – *The Great Chain of Being* (extracts)

Thomas Henry Huxley – "On the Physical Basis of Life" (extract from: *Collected Essays: Methods and Results*. Greenwood.

Aleksandr Oparin – *The Origin of Life* (extracts)

J.D. Watson & F.H.C. Crick – "A Structure for Deoxyribose Nucleic Acid." *Nature* v.171 (1953): 737-38.

Alan Turing - "Computing Machinery and Intelligence" (*Mind*, v.59, 1950: 433-460)

Searle, John – "Can Computers Think?" (extract from: *Minds, Brains and Science*, Harvard UP, 1984).

Nikolas Rose – "An Emergent Form of Life?" (extract from: *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power, and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century*. Princeton (2007)

