

Tragedy and the Meaning of Life

Bill Smoot

This course requires participants to read (and view one video) outside of class, so those enrolling in the course should be confident that their time and commitment are consistent with this demand. The ratio of lecturing to seminar-style discussion will be about 1:3.

Week One, April 1

1. Introduction to course
2. Discuss von Sternberg, *The Blue Angel* (view prior to first meeting of class)
3. Lecture: Aristotle's theory of tragedy

assignment for next week: read *Oedipus*

Week Two, April 8

1. Discuss *Oedipus*
2. Discuss Aristotle's theory of tragedy

assignment for next week: read *Antigone*

Week Three, April 15

1. Discuss *Antigone*
2. Lecture: Hegel's theory of tragedy

assignment for next week: read *Hamlet*, Acts I & II

Week Four, April 22

1. Discuss *Hamlet*, Acts I, II
2. Lecture: Nietzsche's theory of tragedy

assignment for next week: read *Hamlet*, Acts III, IV, V

Week Five, April 29

1. Discuss *Hamlet*, Acts III, IV & V
2. Discuss Nietzsche's theory of tragedy

assignment for next week: read *Death of a Salesman* and Miller, "Tragedy and the Common Man" (photocopied handout)

Week Six, May 6

1. Discuss *Death of a Salesman*
2. Wrap-up discussion: tragedies, theories of tragedy, and the meaning of life

Texts

It will be very helpful if all participants can read the editions listed below. If we all have the same pagination (and the same translation!), it facilitates referring to specific passages in our discussions.

von Sternberg, *Der Blaue Engel (The Blue Angel)* (1930) This film was shot in two separate versions, one in German (available with English subtitles) and one in English. I highly recommend the German. The acting is better and there are even a couple of script differences from the English version.

Sophocles, *Antigone, Oedipus the King & Electra* (Oxford University Press), ISBN 0-19-283588-2

Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (Folger, Simon & Schuster) ISBN 978-1-4516-6941-1

Miller, *Death of a Salesman* (Penguin Plays) ISBN 978-0140481341