

PHIL 1100 N
Winter 2017-2018
SLH D
Tu Th 9:30-10:30

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Ross S 431
Office hours: Tu 10:30-12:00
and by appointment

The Meaning of Life

Course Description and Objectives

This course explores a number of practical philosophical questions. What is the meaning of life? What is it for life to have meaning? Is there a single universal meaning to all human lives, or does the meaning of life differ from person to person? Could it be that life has no meaning at all, and would that be a bad thing? What is death, and what does it mean to me? Should we fear death? Is immortality preferable to a limited lifespan? What is wisdom? What is happiness, and how can I achieve it? In the first four weeks, we will be reading a number of philosophical texts from earlier eras that reflect on life, death, and their significance. In the rest of the course, we will concentrate mainly on articles by contemporary philosophers who have considered the same issues.

We will be tackling these questions by way of a careful investigation of philosophical arguments. The aim is not merely to consider various answers to these questions, but to examine the reasons given for these answers and to assess the cogency of the supporting arguments. Throughout, we will be concerned to evaluate the logical structure of arguments and to uncover their premises and hidden assumptions. We will construct objections and counter-arguments, and then try to come up with replies to these objections. The aim of this course is not merely to impart knowledge but to strengthen the skills of critical reasoning and argumentative writing.

Course Requirements

IN-CLASS QUIZ (10%)

There will be an in-class quiz on Tuesday, February 6 (during our normal lecture time). The quiz will require you to write short answers to questions closely related to the readings. You will have some choice as to which questions to answer. Sample questions and further details concerning the quiz will be contained in a handout to be distributed at least one week beforehand. If, because of a serious medical or other emergency, you have to be absent from the quiz, you must email me *in advance* to say so and then produce proper documentation within a week of missing the quiz (e.g. a doctor's note). In such cases, a makeup will be administered (but note that makeups may not offer a choice of questions).

FIRST ESSAY (20%) & SECOND ESSAY (25%)

The first essay will consist of a 1000-word paper on a topic chosen from a number of pre-set topics, and the second essay will consist of a 1500-word paper on another set of topics. These topics will be distributed roughly two weeks before the due dates for the essays, which are indicated on the schedule below. The deadlines are firm and can only be missed in case of a medical or other emergency and if approval is sought from me *in advance*. If approval is granted, proper documentation must be produced in due course (e.g. a doctor's note).

FINAL EXAM (35%)

The final exam will contain some short-answer questions and some essay questions, building on the quizzes and essays. A sample exam will be distributed well in advance of the exam date. Please make sure that you do not make travel plans during the examination period since the date of the final exam has not yet been set by the university. I will announce the date of the exam in class and on Moodle as soon as it is formally announced, usually around halfway into the semester. If, because of a serious medical or other emergency, you have to be absent from the final exam, you must email me *in advance* to say so and then produce proper documentation within a week of missing the exam (e.g. a doctor's note). In such cases, a makeup exam will be administered on a non-negotiable *specified date* (but note that the makeup exam may not offer a choice of questions)..

TUTORIAL ATTENDANCE and PARTICIPATION (10%)

You will be given a mark of 0-5 on your attendance at the tutorials. You are allowed 2 unexcused absences from the tutorials; beyond that, each absence will deduct one point from the maximum 5 points. (So, if you miss 7 or more tutorial sessions without an excuse, you will obtain a zero for attendance.) Excuses should be presented in advance and your tutorial leader will determine their validity. Attendance will be taken by your tutorial leader. You will also be given a mark of 0-5 on participation in tutorials, which will be assessed by your tutorial leader. In addition, I will take note of students who come to see me during office hours and will factor this into your participation grade. I urge students to make use of my office hours, particularly to discuss issues related to the course content. Your tutorial attendance and participation marks will be added up to yield a mark out of 10.

NB: You cannot pass this course without fulfilling all course requirements: Quiz, Essays, Final Exam, and Tutorial Attendance and Participation. In addition, you are strongly urged to attend all lectures. Even though lecture slides will be posted afterwards they will be schematic and will not include everything covered during the lecture.

TUTORIALS & TUTORIAL LEADERS

The tutorial leaders (teaching assistants) for this course will be leading the tutorial discussions and are primarily responsible for grading all assignments and assessing your tutorial participation. They are all recent PhDs or PhD candidates in Philosophy and have had extensive experience teaching philosophy courses. You can reach them by email at the addresses below:

TUTR 01	T	10:30	ACW 304	Jamie Robertson	jkrob@yorku.ca
TUTR 02	T	11:30	SC 211	Olivia Sultanescu	osultane@yorku.ca
TUTR 03	T	11:30	R S122	Marnina Norys	mnorys@yorku.ca
TUTR 04	R	10:30	ACW 304	Jamie Robertson	jkrob@yorku.ca
TUTR 05	R	11:30	CB 120	Olivia Sultanescu	osultane@yorku.ca
TUTR 06	R	11:30	DB 0013	Marnina Norys	mnorys@yorku.ca
TUTR 07	T	10:30	R S174	Marnina Norys	mnorys@yorku.ca
TUTR 08	R	10:30	VH 3006	Marnina Norys	mnorys@yorku.ca

MOODLE & EMAIL

All registered students will be automatically added to the course's Moodle site, so please make sure that you can access Moodle and if you have any problems, please contact technical support (askit@yorku.ca). All required texts for this course will be accessible via Moodle, so it's crucial that you be able to access it as soon as possible. Important announcements concerning the course and course policies will also be posted on Moodle, so you are responsible for checking the Moodle site on a regular basis. I will also post all lecture slides on Moodle (but only *after* they have been presented in class).

Email is a good way of communicating with me and with your tutorial leaders. But if you have a substantive question about course content, I strongly recommend that you arrange to discuss it in a face-to-face meeting during office hours rather than try to resolve it over email. It's generally difficult to answer philosophical questions adequately in an email message. Please note that I will only respond to emails if you identify yourself by **including your complete name** (both first and last names) in the body of the message! Call me old-fashioned, but I will not respond to emails that look like this:

"Hey, when's the final exam? L8r ☺"

POLICY ON USE OF ELECTRONIC DEVICES

As long as it's not disruptive to those around you, I'm willing to let you use laptops, tablets, and other electronic devices in the lectures to take notes or to look up passages in the readings (in case you decide not to print them out and prefer to read them on a screen). But I would strongly encourage you to *turn your wifi off or put your device in airplane mode*. That way, there will be fewer distractions from incoming emails and other notifications and you can concentrate on following the lecture. There has been some recent research that suggests that Internet use among students in university classes is correlated with worse performance. As the researchers put it: "nonacademic Internet use was common among students who brought laptops to class and was inversely related to class performance. This relationship was upheld after we accounted for motivation, interest, and intelligence. Classroom-related Internet use was not associated with a benefit to classroom performance."¹ Other research even suggests that taking notes longhand (using pen and paper, the old-fashioned way) is more conducive to learning than taking notes on a laptop computer.² But since I tend to take notes mostly on a laptop, I can't very well discourage it in others. However, if I find that people are doing things other than taking notes and looking up the readings on their devices, I may have to revise this policy of tolerating the use of electronic devices. Needless to say, you should also keep your cellphones turned off or silent during lectures. Cellphones should be used for text messaging only in the case of emergency. You should also ask your tutorial leaders for guidance on their policy about the use of electronic devices in tutorials.

¹ Ravizza, S. M., Uitvlugt, M. G., & Fenn, K. M. (2017). Logged in and zoned out: How laptop internet use relates to classroom learning. *Psychological science*, 28(2), 171-180..

² Mueller, P. A., & Oppenheimer, D. M. (2014). The pen is mightier than the keyboard: Advantages of longhand over laptop note taking. *Psychological science*, 25(6), 1159-1168.

Readings and Reading Schedule

There is no textbook for this course; all required texts will be made available as electronic files on Moodle. You should download copies of these texts as soon as possible and either print them out or save them in electronic format. *It is essential to do the reading for each lecture in advance of the lecture in which that reading will be discussed.*

Thurs Jan 4	Introduction to the Course
I. LIFE	
Tues Jan 9	Plato, <i>Socrates' Apology</i>
Thurs Jan 11	Plato, <i>Socrates' Apology</i>
Tues Jan 16	Plato, <i>Crito</i>
Thurs Jan 18	Plato, <i>Crito</i>
Tues Jan 23	Epicurus, <i>Letter to Menoeceus</i>
Thurs Jan 25	Abu Bakr al-Razi, <i>The Philosophical Life</i>
Tues Jan 30	Michel de Montaigne, <i>That to Study Philosophy Is to Learn to Die</i>
Thurs Feb 1	Michel de Montaigne, <i>That to Study Philosophy Is to Learn to Die</i>
Tues Feb 6	IN-CLASS QUIZ
II. MEANING	
Thurs Feb 8	Leo Tolstoy, "My Confession" (excerpts)
Tues Feb 13	Richard Taylor, "The Meaning of Life"
Thurs Feb 15	Susan Wolf, "Meaning in Life and Why It Matters"
Tues Feb 20 Thurs Feb 22	NO CLASS – READING WEEK
Mon Feb 26	FIRST ESSAY DUE
Tues Feb 27	Thomas Nagel, "The Absurd"

Thurs Mar 1	Berit Brogaard & Barry Smith, "On Luck, Responsibility, and the Meaning of Life"
Tues Mar 6	No new reading
III. DEATH	
Thurs Mar 8	Thomas Nagel, "Death"
Tues Mar 13	Stephen Rosenbaum, "How to Be Dead and Not Care"
Thurs Mar 15	George Pitcher, "The Misfortunes of the Dead"
Tues Mar 20	Bernard Williams, "The Makropoulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality"
Thurs Mar 22	John Martin Fischer, "Why Immortality Is Not So Bad"
Mon Mar 26	SECOND ESSAY DUE
Tues Mar 27	Lisa Bortolotti and Yujin Nagasawa, "Immortality without Boredom"
Thurs Mar 29	Samuel Scheffler, "The Afterlife"
Tues Apr 3	Susan Wolf, "The Significance of Doomsday"
Thurs Apr 5	No new reading
Date to be announced	FINAL EXAM

Academic Honesty

All students are expected to abide strictly by standards of academic honesty. Please familiarize yourselves with the University Senate policy on academic dishonesty: <http://secretariat-policies.info.yorku.ca/policies/academic-honesty-senate-policy-on/> If you have any questions concerning what constitutes cheating or plagiarism, please consult with me or with your tutorial leader.

Accessibility

Students with health-related, learning, physical, psychiatric, or sensory disabilities who require reasonable accommodations in teaching style or evaluation methods should discuss their concerns with me *as soon as possible* so that appropriate arrangements can be made.