

PHIL 1004: Meaning of Life

Summer 2022

Distance Learning (online and asynchronous)

Instructor: Andrew Evans, evans3ah@mail.uc.edu

Office Hours: By appointment, video chat and phone calls are an option

Course Description:

This course is about the question: What is the meaning of life? We begin by exploring why that is a question at all. Why is it something we should be worried about? We then move on to trying to answer the question. We explore happiness, pleasure, achievement, knowledge, connections with others, and virtue as possible answers to the question. In the end I want you to be able to ask this question yourself and have some personal answers to it.

Learning Goals:

By the end of this course, you will be able to...

- Explain the readings' answers to what the meaning of life is
- Write a clear explanation of a philosophical argument
- Give your own philosophical argument and respond to objections
- Explore your own answer(s) to what the meaning of life is

Required Book:

Please obtain a copy of Thomas Hurka (2011) *The Best Things in Life: A Guide to What Really Matters*, ISBN: 9780195331424. This should be available at the UC bookstore or any other online bookseller.

Grade Scale:

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| A 93%-100% | B 83%-86.5% | C 73%-76.5% | D 63%-66.5% |
| A- 90%-92.5% | B- 80%-82.5% | C- 70%-72.5% | D- 60-62.5% |
| B+ 87%-89.5% | C+ 77%-79.5% | D+ 67%-69.5% | F 0%-59.5% |

Point Distribution:

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| Writing Assignment 1 | 15 points |
| Writing Assignment 2 | 20 points |
| Writing Assignment 3 | 25 points |
| Discussion Boards | 30 points total (5 points per week) |
| Personal Reflection | 10 points |
| Total | 100 points |

Writing Assignments 1-3:

In the first writing assignment (2-3 pages) you will be expected to reconstruct a philosophical argument. In the second writing assignment (3-5 pages) you will be expected to reconstruct a philosophical argument and provide your own philosophical argument. In the third writing assignment (4-6 pages) you will be expected to reconstruct a philosophical argument, provide your own philosophical argument, and respond to objections. More information will be available on the Writing Assignments prompts. All Writing Assignments will be turned in on Canvas.

Discussion Boards:

Each week you will be expected to contribute to the discussion board on Canvas. For each week's discussion board, you will need to make three posts. Two posts will be something I ask you to do in the prompt (each of these are worth 2 points). One post will be responding to a classmate's posts (this post will be worth 1 point). So, for each week's discussion board you can get a total of five points. To get full credit for each post you must post at least three sentences per post and completely respond to what I am asking you to do in the prompt.

Each discussion board prompt will be different, so no two weeks are the same. Some things you may be asked to do include discuss the readings or videos, give your opinion on a topic, reflect upon a question, try an activity and write a reflection, or write a creative response. I will be looking to you for feedback about what sorts of discussion board prompts are most effective and enjoyable.

Personal Reflection:

Towards the end of the semester, you will complete an assignment in which you reflect on the questions and answers you have encountered in class, and on your own personal answer(s) to the question of the meaning of life. This assignment is informal and is meant to be a space for you to look back and summarize what you have learned and how your views have changed (or stayed the same). More information will be available on the Personal Reflection prompt. The Personal Reflection will be turned in on Canvas.

General Late Work Policy:

Writing Assignments 1-3 can be turned in up to three days late. If turned in late they will automatically be docked 10%. After three days past the due date, Writing Assignments cannot be turned in. Discussion Boards and the Personal Reflection cannot be turned in late.

Exceptional and Extreme Circumstances:

Regarding any late work, if you are having trouble turning things in on time, please talk with me. Exceptions can always be made for illness, an emergency, or some other extenuating circumstance. Talk with me about it and we will come to a solution.

Academic Misconduct:

Do not plagiarize or cheat in any way. Follow the university's policies on academic misconduct, which are linked below. If I discover that you have broken the university's policies on academic

misconduct, I am required to report it. Punishments range from failing the assignment to expulsion from the university.

[Academic Misconduct](#)

Inclusion:

It is my goal to make this class a safe space for people of all ages, races, national origins, ancestries, political affiliations, disability statuses, medical conditions, gender identities, gender expressions, sexes, sexual orientations, marital statuses, veteran statuses, and other forms of difference. Discrimination will not be tolerated. Especially when participating in the discussion boards, everyone should make sure to be respectful. Please let me know via email if there are any inclusion-related considerations that I should be aware of (e.g. pronouns or if you use a name that is not listed in Canvas).

Accessibility Resources:

Regarding accessibility, I will do everything I can to ensure that accommodations will be made when needed.

The University of Cincinnati is committed to providing all students with equal access to learning opportunities. Accessibility Resources (formerly Disability Services) is the official campus office that works to arrange for reasonable accommodations for students with an identified physical, psychological or cognitive disability (learning, ADD/ADHD, psychological, visual, hearing, physical, cognitive, medical condition, etc.) Students are encouraged to contact Accessibility Resources to arrange for a confidential meeting to discuss services and accommodations. Contact should be initiated as soon as possible to allow adequate time for accommodations to be arranged.

[Accessibility Network](#)
[Accessibility Resources](#)

Other Helpful Resources:

[Campus Life and Academic Support](#)
[Academic Writing Center](#)
[Counseling and Psychological Services](#)
[University Health Services](#)
[University COVID-19 Information](#)
[Gender Equity and Inclusion \(Title IX\) website](#)
[Women Helping Women](#)
[LGBTQ Center](#)
[UC Public Safety](#)

Technology and Canvas:

This class is totally online so you will need access to the internet. We will be using Canvas for this class. Please regularly check the Canvas page. Also, make sure you change your settings so that you get Canvas notifications and emails.

Communication:

The best way to communicate with me is email. My email address is: evans3ah@mail.uc.edu. I am usually able to respond to an email within 48 hours. Please feel free to email me with any questions or concerns you have. I am also available to meet via video chat or by telephone. If you email me, we can arrange an appointment.

Difficult Content:

Given that the focus of this course is the meaning of life, some difficult concepts will be discussed including death, suicide, meaninglessness, psychological suffering, and possibly others. I recognize that these topics could be triggering, challenging, or upsetting. Please take care of yourself throughout the semester. If there is something that you think would be difficult for you to read or view, then it is okay to skip it. Just let me know that you need to skip it and we can come to some other arrangement. If a particular reading, video, or other piece of course material seems like it would be potentially triggering or upsetting, I will do my best to warn you ahead of time. If you have any thoughts or questions about any of this please feel free to talk with me about it.

Please Note:

I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus. If I do so, I will always give you notice ahead of time.

Schedule:

| Week | Required Readings, Videos, and Assignments |
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| Week 1: May 9-May 15 | Read: Syllabus Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus" Taylor, "The Meaning of Life" Nagel, "The Absurd" Watch: The Myth of Sisyphus video David Foster Wallace, This is Water video Lecture videos Philosophical Writing video Due Sunday May 15 by 11:59pm: Week 1 Discussion Board |
| Week 2: May 16-May 22 | Read: Wolf, "The Meanings of Lives" Wisdom, "The Meanings of the Questions of Life" Weston Bloch-Schulman, "Questions about Questions" Wong, "Meaningfulness and Identities" |

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| | <p>Watch: Lecture videos</p> <p>Due Sunday May 22 by 11:59pm: Week 2 Discussion Board Writing Assignment 1</p> |
| <p>Week 3: May 23-May 29</p> | <p>Read: Hurka, <i>The Best Things in Life</i>, Introduction and Chapters 1-3 Nozick, “The Experience Machine”</p> <p>Watch: Hedonism and the Experience Machine video Lecture videos Writing an Argument video</p> <p>Due Sunday May 29 by 11:59pm: Week 3 Discussion Board</p> |
| <p>Week 4: May 30-June 5</p> | <p>Read: Nhất Hạnh, <i>No Mud, No Lotus</i>, Chapters 1, 2, 5, 6, and Excerpts from Practices for Happiness</p> <p>Watch: What is the meaning of life, the universe and everything? video Why do people have to suffer? video How to dwell happily in the present moment video Lecture videos</p> <p>Due Sunday June 5 by 11:59pm: Week 4 Discussion Board Writing Assignment 2</p> |
| <p>Week 5: June 6-June 12</p> | <p>Read: Hurka, <i>The Best Things in Life</i>, Chapters 4-7</p> <p>Watch: There’s more to life than being happy video What makes a good life? Lessons from the longest study of happiness video Lecture videos</p> <p>Due Sunday June 12 by 11:59pm: Week 5 Discussion Board</p> |
| <p>Week 6:</p> | <p>Read:</p> |

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| <p>June 13-June 19</p> | <p>Hurka, <i>The Best Things in Life</i>, Chapter 8 Steiner, “Top five regrets of the dying” from <i>The Guardian</i></p> <p>Watch: My Dinner with Andre movie What dying patients taught this doctor about the fear of death video Lecture videos</p> <p>Due Sunday June 19 by 11:59pm: Week 6 Discussion Board Writing Assignment 3</p> |
| <p>Week 7: June 20-22</p> | <p>Due Wednesday June 22 by 11:59pm: Personal Reflection</p> |