PHI 191: The Meaning of Life Fall 2023

Professor Verena Erlenbusch-Anderson (she/her)

Class hours: T/Th 12:30–1:25 P.M.

Course description

Most of us have wondered at some point in our life just what the meaning of it all really is. While we're usually able to give reasons for the choices we make, it is more difficult to answer the larger question, "what is the meaning of life?" In part, this is because the questions itself is ambiguous. Is there such a thing as the meaning of life? What is worth wanting? How should we live? And what does it matter, given that it all ends at some point?

Instead of providing you with the one correct answer to these questions, this course will examine some of the most influential answers philosophers have given to these questions. The philosophers we will discuss not only teach us how to live meaningful lives but also equip us with the skills to think independently and come to good judgments about what we value and how we want to live.

Access

My goal is to make this course adaptive and flexible to ensure the course meets your needs. We will follow principles of Universal Design in Learning (UDL). This means that all required readings are available electronically and in accessible format; all videos are captioned; audio files include transcripts; alternative text is provided for all graphics. The use of technology is encouraged for the purpose of learning and building community in the classroom.

If you need accommodations beyond those covered under UDL, or beyond what is covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act, please let me know. You do not need to disclose any personal information to receive accommodations.

SU Disability Policy

Syracuse University values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. There may be aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion and full participation in this course. I invite any student to meet with me to discuss strategies and/or accommodations (academic adjustments) that may be essential to your success and to collaborate with the Center for Disability Resources (CDR) in this process.

If you would like to discuss disability-accommodations or register with CDR, please visit their website at https://disabilityresources.syr.edu. Please call (315) 443-4498 or email disabilityresources@syr.edu for more detailed information.

CDR is responsible for coordinating disability-related academic accommodations and will work with the student to develop an access plan. Since academic accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact CDR as soon as possible to begin this process.

Course readings

All readings are available electronically on Blackboard. Please bring a printed or electronic copy of the reading to class. You do not need to purchase a textbook for this course.

Original class materials (handouts, assignments, tests, etc.) and recordings of class sessions are the intellectual property of the course instructor. You may download these materials for your use in this class. However, you may not provide these materials to other parties (e.g., web sites, social media, other students) without permission. Doing so is a violation of intellectual property law and of the student code of conduct.

Assessment

Participation (100 pts.)

This course meets three times per week. Two of these meetings, on Tuesdays and Thursdays, are large lecture-style sessions which will introduce you to different perspectives on the meaning of life. You are expected to complete the reading and quiz scheduled for a session prior to that session.

Friday meetings are small seminar-style sections led by teaching assistants (TAs). Here, you will dive deeper into the readings, discuss texts and their relevance, and prepare for exams. Attendance and participation in discussion sections is required and worth a maximum of 100 points.

Reading quizzes (115 pts. / 5 pts. each)

Each week will focus on a particular theme. Before each lecture, you will familiarize yourself with these themes by completing a reading and an associated quiz. Each quiz is worth 5 points.

The deadline for quizzes is a hard deadline; no extensions will be given for this type of assignment. This is because quizzes ensure that all students have done the reading before class, thereby facilitating better understanding of the material and

allowing for informed discussion. Moreover, quizzes are low-stakes assignments, such that losing credit on a small number of occasions will not jeopardize your grade.

Exams (mid-term 40 pts; final 60 pts.)

There will be two in-class exams: a mid-term and a final exam. These exams will consist of a set of multiple choice, true/false, fill-in-the-blank, and short essay questions. Some of these questions will be familiar from reading quizzes. The mid-term exam is worth 40 points; the final exam is worth 60 points.

Grades

This course uses a "total points" grading system. The maximum number of points you can collect towards your final grade over the course of the semester is 315. To earn a grade of A, you need a minimum of 275 points. This means that it is possible to earn a high grade without completing all assignments, or by receiving enough partial credit on each assignment. This model gives you flexibility in deciding which assignments you want to complete for the grade you want to earn. You can miss a few smaller assignments (or one bigger assignment) without jeopardizing your grade.

Grade scale

A	> 275
A-	260–274
B+	250–259
B	240–249
B-	230–239
C	210–229
C-	200–209
D+	190–199
D	170–189
D-	160–169
F	< 160