

# Introduction to Philosophy — PHIL 1010

## The Meaning of Life

Spring 2023

**Professor:** Yanssel Garcia

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Class times: Tuesdays and Thursdays; 2:30 p.m. to 3:45 p.m.

Classroom: Allwine Hall — Room 302

Office hours: Tue, 12:15 p.m. to 2:15 p.m. (Room: ASH 200C)

### Course Description

We all find ourselves at one point or another wondering what everything adds up to. This sentiment manifests itself as different questions: ‘why am I here?’, ‘what’s my purpose?’, ‘how can I lead a fulfilling life?’, or, perhaps most relevantly, ‘what is the meaning of life?’. Such questions are usually pondered for a brief moment, after which we realize the sheer enormity of what we’re asking and just how impossible finding an answer seems to be, and so we return to the demands of daily life.

Now that you’re in college, these questions are of the essence. Where will you go from here? Which skills should you develop? Which major should you choose? What should you pursue? Money? Fulfillment? Happiness? What does it mean to be happy or fulfilled? In this course, we’re going to set all else aside and dedicate real effort to coming to grips with these questions. Our focus will be on developing our ability to think about what we’re asking and acquiring the tools necessary to assess the responses on offer and evaluate their viability. To be clear, the questions we’ll be asking certainly have answers, though we have yet to figure out precisely what they are. Our task will be to engage in the search for the truth. By the end, you will have a greater understanding of what it is you want to know about your existence and how best to pursue that which is most meaningful.

### Course Objective

The objective of this course is to help students learn how to carefully read and analyze texts, ask meaningful questions, formulate novel thoughts, articulate their thoughts with clarity, and get a better understanding of their beliefs. By the end of the course, students will be able to apply these skills in determining how they would like to lead their lives.

## Grading, Assignments, and Policies

Here's the grade breakdown for the course:

Discussions: 10%

Writing Assignment 1: 5%

Writing Assignment 2: 20%

Writing Assignment 3: 30%

Final Exam: 35%

### **Attendance**

Attendance in this course is mandatory. Sometimes, life gets in the way and unforeseen circumstances can make attending class impossible. In these instances, be sure to let me know what the emergency is and that you won't be able to attend. Failing to attend writing workshops will result in a 5% grade deduction on the relevant writing assignment.

### **Discussions**

Every week, you will be expected to contribute to the posted discussion board. Your contributions are graded on a pass/fail basis. I will offer you greater detail in class.

### **Writing Assignments and Comments**

You will be provided three 1000-word writing assignments throughout the semester. In these assignments, you will be asked to reconstruct, in detail, the arguments laid out by your authors. Furthermore, you will be expected to evaluate said arguments. I'll be grading based on the degree of accuracy of your reconstruction and the incisiveness of your criticism in addition to the effort and care that you put into the assignment. I normally provide thorough commentary on all writing assignments; however, I will provide no commentary on the assignments of students who fail to retrieve their prior assignments.

### **Final Exam**

The final exam will be a comprehensive test of your understanding of the material we have covered throughout the course. It is worth a sizeable chunk of your grade, so I strongly recommend that you study for it. There will, of course, be a study session.

### **Submitting Assignments**

All assignments will be submitted via Canvas.

## **Lateness Policy**

Assignments that are submitted in late will suffer a penalty of five points per day. Thus, if the work you submit deserves 48 out of 50 points, it shall receive 43 out of 50 points if late by one day, 38 out of 50 points if late by two, etc. Please submit things on time.

## **Office Hours and Email Policy**

You don't need an appointment to come to my office hours; you're always welcome. You're also generally welcome to email me whenever you'd like with any questions you may have. I'll do my best to respond in a timely manner; it almost always takes me under 24 hours to respond. That being said, if I haven't gotten back to you, don't be afraid to email me again. Seriously, it's not a bother at all, and it's possible that your first email just got buried.

## **Course Materials**

There is no textbook for this course. I will be providing you with digital copies of your assigned readings, and you'll also be asked to watch films and videos. You may have to rent some of the required movies, though this should be far cheaper than the usual textbook. Do let me know (in a timely manner) if you struggle to find anything. You need to have worked through your assigned materials by the day we're discussing them, not after.

## **Accessibility Services**

Reasonable accommodations are provided for students who are registered with Accessibility Services Center (ASC) and make their requests sufficiently in advance. For more information, contact ASC (Location: HK 104, Phone: (402) 554-2872, Email: [unoaccessibility@unomaha.edu](mailto:unoaccessibility@unomaha.edu).)

## **Academic Integrity**

Plagiarism or cheating of any form will not be tolerated. All of the work you submit must be your own, and instances of academic dishonesty will result in severe penalties. UNO has an academic integrity policy and procedures available at:

<https://www.unomaha.edu/student-life/student-conduct-and-community-standards/policies/academic-integrity.php>

I ask that you please take the academic integrity policy seriously. Proceedings for cases of plagiarism are arduous, and the consequences can be as severe as expulsion from the University. It's not worth the risk. If you find yourself struggling with the material, reach out to me; I am always happy to help out.

## Part One

### Philosophy and the Meaning of Life

Jan 24th	—	Syllabus and Introduction Assigned: <i>None</i>
Jan 26th	—	The Values of Philosophy Assigned: <i>Vaughn, Writing Philosophy</i> <i>Plato, The Apology</i>
Jan 31st	—	The Philosophical Method Assigned: <i>Russell, Problems of Philosophy, Chapter 1</i> <i>McBrayer, Why Our Children Don't Think There Are Moral Facts</i>
Feb 2nd	—	Subjective Meaning in Life Assigned: <i>Taylor, The Meaning of Life</i>
Feb 7th	—	Objective Meaning in Life Assigned: <i>Wolf, The Meanings of Lives</i>
Feb 9th	—	Writing Philosophy Assigned: <i>None</i> <b>Writing Assignment #1 Assigned</b>

## Part Two

### The Good Life

Feb 14th	—	Pleasure and Desire Assigned: <i>Mill, Utilitarianism</i>
Feb 16th	—	Class Canceled <i>Snow day</i>
Feb 21st	—	Writing Workshop <i>Bring your essays to class!</i>

- Feb 23rd — The Inadequacy of Pleasure  
Assigned: *The Truman Show*  
*Nozick, The Experience Machine (excerpt)*
- Feb 28th — Moral Relativism and Tolerance  
Assigned: *Rachels, The Elements of Moral Philosophy, Chapter 2*  
**Writing Assignment #1 Due**
- Mar 2nd — How We Should Treat Others  
Assigned: *Thomson, Killing, Letting Die, and the Trolley Problem*  
*Singer, Famine, Affluence, and Morality*
- Mar 7th — Eudaimonia and the Reflective Life  
Assigned: *SEP entry on Aristotle's Ethics (Intro; 1 - 2; 5.1 - 5.3)*  
*Crash Course, Aristotle and Virtue Theory*
- Mar 9th — Eudaimonia and the Reflective Life Continued  
Assigned: *None*

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**Spring Break**  
**March 12th - March 19th**  
*Itty Bitty Break*

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- Mar 21st — Writing Review  
Assigned: *None*  
**Writing Assignment #2 Assigned**

Part Three  
The Extent of Our Freedom

- Mar 23rd — Determinism, Free Will, and Compatibilism  
Assigned: *Sider, Riddles of Existence, Chapter 6*
- Mar 28th — Determinism and Responsibility  
Assigned: *Frankfurt, Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility*

Mar 30th — Writing Workshop  
*Bring your essays to class!*

## Part Four What We Are

Apr 4th — The Existence of Souls  
Assigned: *Descartes, Meditations I, II and VI*  
*Correspondence between Descartes and Princess Elisabeth*

Apr 6th — A Physical Existence  
Assigned: *Dennett, Where Am I*  
**Writing Assignment #2 Due**

Apr 11th — Problems with Physicalism  
Assigned: *Nagel, What Is It Like to Be a Bat*  
*Jackson, Epiphenomenal Qualia*

Apr 13th — Our Persistence through Time  
Assigned: *Sider, Riddles of Existence, Chapter 1*

Apr 18th — Our Persistence through Time Continued  
Assigned: *Williams, The Self and the Future*  
*Unger, Identity, Consciousness, and Value, Chapter 1*

## Part Five Death

Apr 20th — Evaluating Death  
Assigned: *Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Illyich*  
*Nagel, Death*  
**Writing Assignment #3 Assigned**

Apr 25th — Death and Immortality  
Assigned: *Williams, Makropulos Case*  
*Shelley, The Mortal Immortal*

Apr 27th — Writing Workshop  
*Bring your essays to class!*

Part Six  
The Possibility of a Meaningless Existence

May 2nd — Life as Suffering  
Assigned: *Schopenhauer, On the Suffering of the World*  
*Tolstoy, A Confession*

May 4th — Moving Forward  
Assigned: *Star Trek Voyager Course: Oblivion*  
*Fight Club*  
*Kurzgesagt, Optimistic Nihilism*  
  
Recommended: *Camus, The Stranger*

May 9th — Final Review  
Assigned: *Everything*  
**Writing Assignment #3 Due**

May 11th — Class Canceled

**Final Exam**  
Tuesday, May 16th  
2:30 p.m.