

**Philosophy 1100: Meaning of Life
Fall 2015**

Time: T/TH 10:30-11:30

Place: Vanier College 135

Professor: Kristin Andrews

Office: Ross 420 South

Office Hours: Thursdays 2:30-3:30 and by appointment

Email: andrewsk@yorku.ca

Teaching Assistants:

Xavier Scott xavscott@gmail.com

T	8:30-9:30	S128 Ross	Tutr 01
T	9:30-10:30	FC 104	Tutr 02

Vedrana Cetina vecky@yorku.ca

T	11:30-12:30	FC 108	Tutr 03
Th	11:30-12:30	MC 101	Tutr 06

Michael Montess mmmontess@gmail.com

Th	8:30-9:30	HNE B11	Tutr 04
Th	9:30-10:30	VH 2005	Tutr 05

Course Description:

Why are we here? What should we do given that we are here? Can I live a good life? Does life have meaning? Is life absurd? Can I give my life meaning? Should I bother worrying about my own death? About anything? We aim to confront these haunting questions.

Learning Objectives:

- To be able to identify and critically evaluate arguments and main points (theses) of a reading
- To understand different viewpoints
- To be able to write clear, yet engaging, prose. "If writers wrote as carelessly as some people talk, then adhasdh asdglaseuyt[bn[pasdlgkhasdfasdf." –Lemony Snicket
- To reflect on your own life goals and conception of a good life

Required Texts:

- *A Very Short Introduction to Happiness*, Daniel M. Haybron. Oxford University Press: 2015 **[DH]**
- *Happiness and Goodness: Philosophical Reflections on Living Well*, Steven M. Cahn and Christine Vitrano. Columbia University Press: 2015 **[C&V]**
- *Dying: What happens when we die*, Evan Thompson. Columbia University Press: 2014 (buy via Kindle or iTunes for less than \$2)
- *The Art of Loving*, Erich Fromm. Harper Perennial: 2006
- Readings on Moodle

Course Requirements

Participation: 15%

Participation includes: attendance in tutorial and class; doing the readings; taking notes on readings; taking notes in class; activity on Moodle discussion boards; journal writing; coming to office hours; asking thoughtful questions and making thoughtful comments in class; avoiding self-indulgent, overbearing, or self-congratulatory comments [see [Darrin Floen](#)]; taking on-line assessments; watching recommended videos; doing in-class writing. You will be asked to evaluate your own participation at the end of the course based on the above criteria. **DUE Dec 10.**

Short reflective writing: 5%

1-2 pages each

At the beginning of the semester, write a short essay on the question: What kind of life do you hope to live? **DUE Sept. 17**

Later in the semester, write a short essay on the question: How did your views change compared to what you wrote at the beginning of the semester? Or, if they didn't change, why do you think they didn't? **DUE Dec. 3**

4 short papers and paper re-write: 60%

~500 words each

#1 Is life meaningful, absurd, or is the meaning of life nonsensical? Based on the readings of Ayer and Nagel, address *the question* of the meaning of life. **DUE Sept. 22**

#2 What is human life really like? Are we good are bad? Address the readings by Mencius and Xunzi in light of the claims made by Darwin or deWaal. **DUE Oct. 6**

#3 Is life suffering? If so, what makes life suffering? Can suffering be overcome? If not, why not? Address some of the arguments covered in the readings for week 4 and 5. **DUE Oct. 20**

#4 Is happiness enough to give purpose to life? Why or why not? **DUE Nov. 17**

You are required to re-write one of these four papers based on comments you receive from your TA. Re-writes are due ONE WEEK after you received your paper back from your TA. Final grades for this project will be docked by 10 points if you do not turn in a re-write, or if your re-write is not revised in the face of the comments your received. When you turn in your re-write, you need to attach your original paper with your TA's comments. Note that the grade for your paper will be increased if you do this assignment properly! You might want to be strategic, and if you get a low first mark re-write the first paper. Once you have done one assignment for your TA, you will have a better idea of his or her expectations.

Final paper: 20%

~5 pages

The topic for this paper will be given later in the term. You will be required to hand in a polished and thoughtful first draft of your paper in November. Your ability to improve your paper based on the comments you receive will be a large part of your final paper grade. **DUE Dec 10.**

Moodle:

Readings and notes for this class will be posted on Moodle. The updated reading schedule for the course will be available on Moodle. You can log into the Moodle site here:

<http://www.yorku.ca/moodle/>

Please make sure you get emails sent to your York gmail account, which is the account Moodle has for you. I will send out emails in the event something terrible happens, such as discovering that nothing matters, and I have to cancel class.

Academic Integrity: Students are required to have taken the Academic Integrity tutorial available on the library web site: http://www.yorku.ca/tutorial/academic_integrity/

Any violation of academic integrity, including using words from websites without quoting it as a source or copying another student's words or ideas will be reported to the Dean's office and will become a part of the student's permanent record. This would bring shame on yourself and your family, I am told. Which might matter, if anything does.

Course Schedule

Readings must be completed before the lecture. I aim to stick to this schedule, but I might fail. Check the Moodle site for any updates to this course.

9-10 Introduction to the class

Week 1: What do we want, and can we get it?

9-15 A.J. Ayer : The claims of philosophy

9-17 Thomas Nagel: [The Absurd](#)

The Human Condition**Week 2: Human nature from ancient China**

9-22 Mencius: [Human nature is good](#)

9-24 Xunzi: Human nature is bad

Week 3: Human nature from biology

9-29 Charles Darwin: [Descent of Man Ch 3](#)

10-1 de Waal VIDEO: [Do animals have morals?](#)

Week 4: Life is suffering

10-6 Arthur Schopenhaur: [Studies in Pessimism](#)

10-8 Epictetus: [The Enchiridion](#)

Week 5: Buddhist approach to suffering

10-13 Siderits, Mark, selection from *Buddhism as Philosophy* pp. 19-22.

10-15 Rinpoche, Patrul (trans. Padmakara Translation Group), selections from *Words of My Perfect Teacher* pp. 54-59, 78-92.

The Human Pretensions

Happiness

Week 6:

10-20 DH Ch 1-2

10-22 DH Ch 3-5

Week 7:

10-27 DH 5

10-29 **NO CLASS: Fall Break**

Is happiness enough?

Week 8:

11-3 DH 6-8

11-5 Emily Esfahani Smith: There's More to Life Than Being Happy AND
"Meaning is healthier than happiness" in *The Atlantic*

Week 9:

11-10 C&V 1-12

11-12 C&V 12-24

Heading toward Death

Week 10:

11-17 Seneca: On the Shortness of Life

Maria Popova: The shortness of life: Seneca of busyness and the art of living wide rather than living long

11-19 Samantha Brennan: Feminist Philosophers turn their thoughts to death

Stephen E. Rosenbaum: How to be Dead and Not Care: A Defense of Epicurus

Week 11:

11-24 Natalie Emmons: Immortality instinct

Filiz Peach: Death, Faith, and Existentialism

11-26 Evan Thompson: Dying: What happens when we die (buy via Kindle or iTunes for less than \$2)

How to live

Week 12:

12-1 Erich Fromm: *The Art of Loving* pg. 1-76

12-3 Peter Singer: *The Most Good You Can Do* Chapter 4