

Term Information

Effective Term Autumn 2015

General Information

Course Bulletin Listing/Subject Area Philosophy
Fiscal Unit/Academic Org Philosophy - D0575
College/Academic Group Arts and Sciences
Level/Career Undergraduate
Course Number/Catalog 2465
Course Title Death and the Meaning of Life
Transcript Abbreviation Death, Meaning Life
Course Description Explore the question of whether there is a relation between mortality and a meaningful life.
Semester Credit Hours/Units Fixed: 3

Offering Information

Length Of Course 14 Week, 7 Week, 4 Week (May Session), 12 Week (May + Summer)
Flexibly Scheduled Course Never
Does any section of this course have a distance education component? No
Grading Basis Letter Grade
Repeatable No
Course Components Recitation, Lecture
Grade Roster Component Lecture
Credit Available by Exam No
Admission Condition Course No
Off Campus Never
Campus of Offering Columbus

Prerequisites and Exclusions

Prerequisites/Corequisites
Exclusions

Cross-Listings

Cross-Listings

Subject/CIP Code

Subject/CIP Code 38.0101
Subsidy Level Baccalaureate Course
Intended Rank Freshman, Sophomore, Junior

Requirement/Elective Designation

General Education course:
Literature

Course Details

Course goals or learning objectives/outcomes

- The primary purpose of the course is to provide students with basic philosophical tools and to help them employ these tools in exploring complex philosophical questions concerning death and the meaning of life.

Content Topic List

- The meaning of life
- Meaning or purpose in life
- The good life
- Death
- Immortality
- Absurdism

Attachments

- Philos 2465 Syllabus.docx
(Syllabus. Owner: O'Keeffe, Susan B)
- Philos 2465 GE_Proposal.docx
(GEC Course Assessment Plan. Owner: O'Keeffe, Susan B)

Comments

Workflow Information

Status	User(s)	Date/Time	Step
Submitted	O'Keeffe, Susan B	11/07/2014 08:23 AM	Submitted for Approval
Approved	Roth, Abraham Sesshu	11/07/2014 09:53 AM	Unit Approval
Approved	Heysel, Garrett Robert	11/11/2014 09:49 PM	College Approval
Pending Approval	Nolen, Dawn Vankeerbergen, Bernadette Chantal Hanlin, Deborah Kay Jenkins, Mary Ellen Bigler Hogle, Danielle Nicole	11/11/2014 09:49 PM	ASCCAO Approval

PHILOS 2465: DEATH AND THE MEANING OF LIFE

Lecture/Recitation 3 units

Course Description:

This course explores the question of whether there is a relation between mortality and a meaningful life. If we are all going to die, does that mean that our existence is ultimately meaningless, or is it possible to find meaning in life despite our mortality? Might the recognition that our days are numbered perhaps even make our lives more meaningful? These questions are among the most captivating and profound, albeit unsettling, philosophical questions one can ask, and they are central to our self-understanding as human beings. It is not surprising, then, that versions of these questions have been the subject of a large number of important works across many humanities disciplines, cultures, and historical periods. Students in this course will explore the relationship between death and the meaning of life by engaging with philosophical and literary texts from a broad range of traditions. They will also be encouraged to contribute to the age-old conversation about the relation between mortality and meaning by sharing their own reflections on a student-designed website.

Required texts and course materials:

- *Exploring the Meaning of Life: An Anthology and Guide* (ed. J. W. Seachris), Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012 [required; available in campus bookstores]
- Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays* [required; available in campus bookstores]
- Simone de Beauvoir, *All Men are Mortal* [required; available in campus bookstores]
- All other readings and course materials will be made available on Carmen and on OSU's Secured Media Library

Assignments and Grading:

- | | |
|---|--------------------|
| • Five short answer/multiple choice pop quizzes | 20% of final grade |
| • Group project: website design ¹ | 20% of final grade |
| • Two 1-page writing assignments (prompts TBA) | 20% of final grade |
| • One 5-page paper (topics TBA) | 40% of final grade |

¹ Groups of 3-5 students will design portions of a joint website intended to share resources and reflections on the course topic with the campus community and the general public. The website will contain a mix of personal reflections, arguments, book or movie reviews, and possibly even creative writing and videos, to name just a few possibilities

Weekly Topical Outline:

- Week 1 **Introduction, Course Goals, and Objectives**
Watch the Woody Allen movie *Hannah and Her Sisters*
Read *Exploring the Meaning of Life* ch. 5.1 (Tolstoy, *A Confession*)
- Week 2 **Untangling the Question**
Read *Exploring the Meaning of Life* ch. 1.2 (Thomson, “Untangling the Question”)
Read *Exploring the Meaning of Life* ch. 1.4 (Nozick, “Philosophy and the Meaning of Life”)
- Week 3 **Is Immortality Desirable?**
Read Simone de Beauvoir, *All Men are Mortal*
Read Emily Dickinson, selected poems [on Carmen]
Optional: watch the movie version of *All Men are Mortal*
- Week 4 **Is Immortality Desirable? (Cont’d)**
Read Jorge Luis Borges, “The Immortal”
Read Bernard Williams, “The Makropulos Case”
- Week 5 **Is Immortality Desirable? (Cont’d)**
Read *Exploring the Meaning of Life* ch. 5.3 (Fischer, “Why Immortality Is Not So Bad”)
Read *Exploring the Meaning of Life* ch. 5.4 (Metz, “The Immortality Requirement for Life’s Meaning”)
- Week 6 **Life as Absurd**
Read Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* [selections]
Read *Exploring the Meaning of Life* ch. 3.3 (Nagel, “The Absurd”)
- Week 7 **Life as Absurd (Cont’d)**
Read *Exploring the Meaning of Life* ch. 3.1 (Schopenhauer, *On the Vanity of Existence*)
Watch the movie adaptation of Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*
- Week 8 **Life as Absurd (Cont’d)**
Read *Exploring the Meaning of Life* ch. 2.4 (Craig, “The Absurdity of Life without God”)
Read *Exploring the Meaning of Life* ch. 2.2 (Lewis, “On Living in an Atomic Age”)
- Week 9 **Meaning without God and without Immortality**
Read Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* [selections, on Carmen]
Read Epicurus, selections from letters and other writings [on Carmen]
- Week 10 **Meaning without God and without Immortality (Cont’d)**
Read *Exploring the Meaning of Life* ch. 4.3 (Wolf, “The Meanings of Lives”)
- Week 11 **Meaning without God and without Immortality (Cont’d)**
Read *Exploring the Meaning of Life* ch. 4.4 (Audi, “Intrinsic Value and Meaningful Life”)
Read *Exploring the Meaning of Life* ch. 4.5 (Wielenberg, “God and the Meaning of Life”)

- Week 12 **Human Extinction and the Meaning of Life**
Read Scheffler, *Death and the Afterlife* [selections]
Optional: watch the movie *The Children of Men*
- Week 13 **Human Extinction and the Meaning of Life (Cont'd)**
Read *Exploring the Meaning of Life* ch. 5.5 (Trisel, “Human Extinction and the Value of Our Efforts”)
- Week 14 **Reflections and Review**

Policy about Academic Misconduct:

It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term “academic misconduct” includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct <http://studentlife.osu.edu/csc/>.

Disability Services:

Students with disabilities that have been certified by the Office for Disability Services will be appropriately accommodated and should inform the instructor as soon as possible of their needs. The Office for Disability Services is located in 150 Pomerene Hall, 1760 Neil Avenue; telephone 292-3307, TDD 292-0901; <http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu/>.

GE–Literature Proposal for PHIL 2465

‘Death and the Meaning of Life’

1 GE RATIONALE

1.1 How do the course objectives address the GE category expected learning outcomes?

The primary objectives of the course are to provide students with basic analytic tools and to help them employ these tools in exploring complex philosophical questions concerning death and the meaning of life. These basic tools are systematic thinking, critical reading, and analytical writing, that is, they coincide with the first GE expected learning outcome in the Literature category. This means that the course places emphasis on close readings of difficult literary and philosophical texts, the identification of arguments and implicit assumptions in a text, as well as careful textual analysis and interpretation. The second GE expected learning outcome for Literature is similarly central to the course objectives: through class discussion, the assigned readings, and the writing assignments, students are expected to understand and assess a number of very different perspectives on the meaning of life and its relation to mortality. Since attitudes toward death and life have a deeply personal as well as a social aspect, the course objectives align perfectly with the second expected learning outcome.

1.2 How do the readings assigned address the GE category expected learning outcomes?

Students in the course are expected to explore the course topic by reading, analyzing, and critiquing a wide variety of different texts, some literary, others straightforwardly philosophical, and yet others a combination of the two. For instance, the sample syllabus assigns poems by Emily Dickinson about death and immortality, a novel by Simone de Beauvoir, letters written by the ancient philosopher Epicurus, as well as literary essays, short stories, and scholarly articles. Encountering such a wide range of texts written in such a wide range of styles about the course topic will enable students not only to develop or hone skills in textual analysis, interpretation, and criticism, but also to acquire a much more nuanced understanding of the course topic. Moreover, the assigned readings invite reflections about personal and social attitudes toward the meaning of life across different cultures since the readings portray a great variety of such attitudes. In these ways, the course readings address both GE expected learning outcomes.

1.3 How do the topics address the GE category expected learning outcomes?

The course topics reflect the range of positions that people in different cultures and historical periods have taken on the questions whether life has a meaning and whether this meaning is in conflict with mortality. In one section of the course, for instance, we will read absurdist texts—both literary and philosophical—which argue for, or illustrate, the view that the search for meaning is futile. In another section, we will encounter the view, endorsed by some prominent ancient philosophers, that happiness or pleasure is the purpose of human existence. Yet another section of the course examines the possibility that personal immortality might make our lives meaningful, while

still another section looks at arguments that the survival of our species and culture might be sufficient for giving meaning to our existence and to our pursuits. These different approaches to the course topic reflect a variety of theories of value: they provide completely different answers to the question what can render a life valuable, or what the value of human existence might be. Here again, there is a close connection to the second GE expected learning outcome. Likewise, because these topics are quite complex and require students to grapple with very profound philosophical questions, exploring these topics involves a high level of critical thinking, careful reading, and clear writing.

1.4 How do the written assignments address the GE category expected learning outcomes?

Through the writing assignments and the website project, students add their own perspectives and reflections to the conversation about the meaning of life and actively engage with the readings and course topics in an additional way. The feedback they receive on these assignments—from the instructor, the graders, and peers—will enable them to refine their analytic writing skills. Producing good philosophical prose requires writers to choose their words extremely carefully, weigh the strength of their arguments judiciously, and structure their presentation meticulously. It also requires a nuanced grasp of the subject matter. The writing assignments are designed to build these skills, in accordance with the first GE expected learning outcome. Insofar as these assignments also require careful reflection about the meaning or value of life, they also help foster the second expected learning outcome.

1.5 How does the course aim to sharpen students' response, judgment, and evaluation skills?

The course will teach students some basic techniques from informal logic, such as identifying valid and fallacious argument forms, reconstructing the argument contained in a philosophical text, and supplying implicit premises. These techniques will improve students' ability to respond to and evaluate philosophical texts, as well as to refine and express their own views. On the literary side, these techniques can also help defend a particular interpretation of a text. Furthermore, the course aims to teach students how to engage in close readings of important passages, which is a crucial skill for studying and evaluating texts of any genre.

2 GE ASSESSMENT PLAN

The success of Philosophy 2465 in achieving the expected learning outcomes of the Literature GE area will be assessed in three interrelated ways: direct assessment through qualitative evaluation of student writing, indirect assessment through student questionnaires, and comparative assessment of student achievement across different years.

The expected level of student achievement is the following: if the course is successful, a large percentage of the students should show significant improvement in their critical thinking, reading, and analytic writing skills, measured in the ways described below. If the course succeeds in its objectives, at least 80% of the students should receive at least a B on their final papers, which

requires that they are able to interpret and evaluate a difficult text critically and express their analysis of the text clearly.

The two short writing assignments will serve as direct measures of student success since it is their purpose to test the students' critical reading, thinking, and writing skills. Because one of the writing assignments will be due early in the semester, and the second one closer to the end, these assignments will also reveal whether there has been improvement. The two writing assignments are moreover designed to prepare students for the final paper, which in turn will serve as additional evidence of student success in achieving the expected learning outcomes. More specifically, the instructor and graders will pay particular attention to whether individual students have become (a) more careful readers of the assigned texts, as evidenced by the way they engage with these texts in the writing assignments, (b) more systematic and critical thinkers, based on the arguments they present in the assignments, and (c) clearer and more careful writers. The pop quizzes will also serve as indirect measures of student success because they are meant to test how carefully the students have read the assigned texts and how well they are able to identify the most crucial features of these texts.

In addition to these direct measures, the instructor will also employ indirect measures. In addition to asking students to comment on their learning process in the official SEIs, the instructor will conduct an anonymous in-class survey. The survey will contain questions specifically about the GE expected learning outcomes, asking students to assess their progress toward these goals.

Finally, each time the course is offered, the instructor will compose and submit to the Department's Teaching Evaluation and Assessment Committee a short report summarizing overall student performance on quizzes, class projects, and writing assignments. The report will also integrate student feedback from the survey described above. These reports will be grouped by term and saved on the shared departmental drive, so that teaching effectiveness in a particular semester can be evaluated by comparison to previous years. On the basis of these comparisons, the relative emphases of different elements of the course can be adjusted in order to help more students achieve the expected learning outcomes.

3 CURRICULUM MAP

PHIL 2465 will not be required for the major, but it can be taken as an elective course as illustrated by the following curriculum map:

Each Major must include:

1. PHIL 3000: Gateway Seminar (3 credits)
2. History of Philosophy: Any Three of the following (9 credits)
 - PHIL 3210: History of Ancient Philosophy
 - PHIL 3220: History of Medieval Philosophy
 - PHIL 3230: History of 17th Century Philosophy

- PHIL 3240: History of 18th Century Philosophy
 - PHIL 3250: History of 19th Century Philosophy
 - PHIL 3261: Fundamental Concepts of Existentialism
3. Philosophical Topics (9 credits)
Required of all majors: PHIL 3300: Moral Philosophy (3 credits)
And two of the following (6 credits):
- PHIL 3530: Philosophy of Logic
 - PHIL 3600: Introduction to Philosophy of Language
 - PHIL 3650: Philosophy of Science
 - PHIL 3680: Sex and Death: Introduction to the Philosophy of Biology
 - PHIL 3700: Introduction to Metaphysics
 - PHIL 3750: Introduction to Theory of Knowledge
 - PHIL 3800: Introduction to Philosophy of Mind
 - PHIL 3810: Philosophy of Action
 - PHIL 3820: Philosophy of Perception
4. Upper Level Coursework: Any Two PHIL 5xxx courses (6 credits)
5. Elective: Any one further Philosophy course at the 2xxx [such as **PHIL 2465: Death and the Meaning of Life**], 3xxx, 4xxx, or 5xxx level (3 credits)