

# PHIL115-002: The Meaning of Life

(Updated November 21<sup>st</sup>)

Mon-Fri.: 10:00-10:50 am, LL 221

University of Central Washington, Ellensburg, Fall Quarter, 2008

**Instructor: Dr. William Michael Kallfelz**

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**Note to the Student:** Toward the end of the first week of the quarter (classes beginning September 24<sup>th</sup>) or the beginning of second week (September 29<sup>th</sup>) materials (including assignments, additional readings, in pdf or doc format, notes, announcements, and ppt slides) will be made available on **Blackboard**. I will be circulating the announcement via email. *It is therefore important to check your email address specified in the Safari System frequently!*

## Course Overview & Statement of Purpose

This course approaches the fundamental question(s) concerning whether or not life may have a “meaning.” If so, what may it be? And if not, why? Such questions will be addressed from a disciplined philosophical perspective. In exploring such questions within such a framework, the student will be introduced to the basics of philosophical analysis focused upon such questions of “meaning” vis-à-vis human life.

No philosophical prerequisite material or ability is assumed or expected from the student, other than an openness for rational reflection and inquiry. This would entail some critical thinking and analysis, i.e. a willingness to critically examine basic presuppositions and entertain others. As in most philosophical activity, the goal is not so much arriving at fixed “answers”, but instead to develop a systematic framework for disciplined dialectic and critical inquiry: In other words, to acquire methods for systematically *questioning* in a coherent and consistent way.

## Student Learning Objectives

In the light of the above Statement of Purpose and Course Overview, the student learning objectives include:

1. Acquiring the objective content of the assigned readings, which will be assessed through short quizzes, a short expository focus paper (due before the middle of the quarter), and in the final examination.
2. Based on point 1. above, acquiring the skills necessary for *informed* critical reflection on the reading assignments and on general discussion questions, exemplified and assessed through writing assignments: An analytical paper (assigned after the middle of the quarter) as well as essay questions in the final exam.

3. Based on points 1. and 2. above, acquiring the appropriate skills for philosophical inquiry particular to the nature and level of this course, assessed through *participation in the discussion periods* and attendance.

### **Course Assignments & Grading Policy:**

You are expected to attend class regularly, to carefully study assigned readings, and to complete all assignments:

#### ***Focus Papers***

- **Expository Focus paper 1 (2-3 pages)**: assigned **October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2008 & due October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2008** (25% of grade)
- **Analytical Focus paper 2 (3-5 pages)** assigned **October 24<sup>th</sup>, 2008 & due November 24<sup>th</sup>, 2008** (40% of grade)

#### ***Exams***

- Six short (5 minutes) quizzes (four T/F questions, based on previously assigned reading for that day) at **unannounced days @ 9:00am sharp**. Lowest two quiz scores will be dropped (**10% of grade**)
- Final exam, (**25% of grade**)

**Mon-Fri @ 10:00am Wednesday, Dec 10 8:00 am-10:00am**

(Check Safari: <http://www.cwu.edu/~regi/schedules/0809FinalCal.pdf> for any possible updates or changes). Link for the Fall Academic Calendar: <http://www.cwu.edu/~regi/schedules/Fall2008AcadCal.pdf>

#### ***Participation***

- In addition to the above written assignments, with their respective percentage of the grade, note that your participation (namely in the form of the quality of your questions posed during discussion days) will be taken into consideration, if your final grade is borderline (i.e. within 1-2% of the next grade up).

#### ***Final Grade Scale***

Your final grade will depend on the percentage you earn of the total points possible in the class: **A:** 89.5%-100.0%; **B:** 79.5.0% -89.4% ; **C:** 69.5% - 79.4%; **D:** 59.5%-69.4%; **F:**< 59.5%

#### ***Incomplete Grade and Late Policy***

- An "I" grade shall only be awarded, based on the discretion of the instructor. Subject to this discretion, the student must have **satisfactorily** completed a **sufficient** portion of the course by the end of the term. For further details, see p. 30, *CWU Catalog for the Academic Year 2008-2009*.
- Assignments submitted late will receive a penalty of one letter grade (10%) per school day late.

#### ***Make-Up Policy***

If you will be (or have been) absent for an exam or a class in which an assignment is due, you will need to provide a university-approved justification for your absence in order to be allowed to take a make-up exam or quiz, or to hand in the assignment late.

### **Proscribed Behavior & Classroom Courtesy**

Disruptive behavior of any kind will not be tolerated. Such behavior includes, but is not limited to, overt and covert behavior violating CWU's policy on diversity, as well as meeting any item(s) constituting sexual harassment. For further details, please consult the Appendices of *CWU Catalog for the Academic Year 2008-2009*. Other forms of proscribed behavior would violate the norms of courtesy, as judged by the discretion of the instructor. Aside from obvious norms, such as refraining from unruly behavior (whether in the form of verbal outbursts or other) such norms of courtesy would also include:

- Refraining from “grandstanding” and/or “sermonizing” during discussion sections. Remember that oral participation in philosophy entails *well-thought out* questions posed in a rational framework. If necessary, write your question down and/or rehearse it silently before sharing it in class. Make an effort to be succinct, clear, and concise. (Note: If you prefer, you may also email questions for discussion section. More details concerning email policy shall be posted in the **Announcements** section of the Blackboard site for this course).
- Refraining from private conversation and/or other forms for communication among peers both inside and outside of class during lectures or discussion days.
- **Switching cell phones off during class.**
- Avoiding eating and drinking in class. If you *must*, do so noiselessly and with utmost discretion.

Failure to comply with *any* of the above standards may result in your physical removal from class; whether by explicit request from the instructor or by escort from Campus Security (for serious violations thereof), in addition to further disciplinary measures as set forth by the policies stated in the Appendices of *CWU Catalog for the Academic Year 2008-2009*.

### **Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty**

There are four types of academic dishonesty: cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, and plagiarism. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes dishonesty of these four types. For further information, please consult the policies stated in the Appendices of *CWU Catalog for the Academic Year 2008-2009*. Incidents of academic dishonesty are taken very seriously, and will be forwarded to the office of judicial programs any cases of it that come to attention.

### **Special Accommodations/Disabilities**

Students with disabilities who wish to arrange for academic adjustments in this class are encouraged to provide me with a copy of their Confirmation of Eligibility of Academic Adjustments and meet with me as soon as possible to discuss their needs and the manner in which their accommodations will be delivered.

### Course Textbook

- **(Required)** John Perry, Michael Bratman, John M Fischer, eds. *Introduction to Philosophy: Classical and Contemporary Readings* (4<sup>th</sup> edn), Oxford U Press, 2007. ISBN-13: 978-0-19-516924-9 **Abbreviate: PBF**

**Note that the above text is a source or anthology, and as the title suggests, serves equally well for an Introductory Philosophy course (e.g. PHIL101). In addition from selected readings from this textbook, other articles and sections from books will be made available in the form of photocopied handouts, Blackboard postings, library e-Reserves, and books in the library's Reserve shelf. Such selections will come from the following:**

Phillipe Aries, *Western Attitudes Toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present*, (trns. Patricia Ranum), Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973.

Roy Baumeister, *Meanings of Life*, NY: The Guilford Press, 1991.

Karl Britton, *Philosophy and the Meaning of Life*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge U Press, 1969.

Erwin Chagraff, *Serious Questions: An ABC of Skeptical Reflections*, Stuttgart, Germany: Birhaeuser, 1986.

Benedetto Croce, *The Conduct of Life*, (trns. Arhur Livingston). NY: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1924.

Jeffery R. DiLeo, *From Socrates to Cinema: An Introduction to Philosophy*, McGraw-Hill, 2007.

Terry Eagleton, *The Meaning of Life: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Rudolf Eucken, *The Problem of Human Life* (trns. Williston Hough), NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1924.

Oswald Hanfling, *The Quest for Meaning*, NY: Basil Blackwell, 1987.

Peter Koestenbaum, *The Vitality of Death: Essays in Existential Psychology and Philosophy*, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Co., 1971

E.D. Klemke & Steven Cahn, eds., *The Meaning of Life: A Reader*, NY & Oxford: Oxford U. Press, 2008.

Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge U. Press, 1979.

S. J. Odell, "Life is Not Absurd," *Metaphilosophy*, vol. 14, nos. 3 & 4, Jul/Oct. 1983.

W Kim Rogers, *Reason and Life: An Introduction to an Ecological Approach in Philosophy*, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2003.

Linnel Secomb, *Philosophy and Love: From Plato to Popular Culture*, Bloomington: IU Press, 2007.

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (on-line) <http://plato.stanford.edu/contents.html>

William Wainwright, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, Oxford: OUP Press, 2005.

### Detailed Class Schedule

- Below are the details for weeks 1-2. The reading schedules shall be posted at the beginning of each week. The course is essentially structured around four lectures (Mon-Thu) followed by a discussion/review day (Fri).
- The Assigned Readings are for the topic covered in class on that day, as homework. I will take roughly 5-10 minutes to answer questions you may have on the readings in the following class period. If you have further questions, please see me during office hours, or bring them up on Fridays. **Note: (BB) refers to readings posted in Blackboard**

Topic	Date	Assigned Readings
<i>Course Introduction &amp; Philosophical Reflections on the Absurd</i>	09/24/08	Intro, pp. 1-6, Russell (9-12, in Perry, Bratman, Fischer (PBF).), Nagel (handout or pp. 21-27 in Perry, et.al.)
	09/25/08	S. Odell (1983) "Life is Not Absurd" (240-248) Leo Tolstoy (in Klemke), "My Confession," (7-16)
	9/26/08	<b>Discussion:</b> The viability of the religious/mystical response
<i>The Meaning of Life and The Examined Life</i>	9/29/08	Plato (pp. 28-43 in PBF )
	9/30/08	J. J. Smart (pp. 12-20 in PBF ), Eagleton, ch.1 (pp. 1-31)
	10/01/08	Taylor (pp. 45-62 in PBF)
	10/02/08	Wolf (pp. 62-74 in PBF), Eucken "The American View of Life," (pp. 570 -576)
	10/03/08	<b>Discussion:</b> The viability of "examination"
<i>The Meaning of Life and The Metaphysical Impulse</i>	10/06/08	Eagleton, ch.2 (pp. 1-31) (BB) Baumeister, ch.4 (pp. 58-74) (BB)
	10/07/08	Baumeister, ch.3 (pp. 28-57) (BB) David Swenson, ch2 (pp.17-26) (BB)
	10/08/08	St. Anselm, <i>Proslogion</i> , (pp. 78-79 in PBF) Brian Leftow, "The Ontological Argument" (pp. 80-96/ <b>recommended optional reading:</b> pp. 97-115)
	10/09/08	St. Thomas Aquinas, <i>Summa Theologica</i> (excerpts) (pp.80-81 in PBF), Alexander Pruss & Richard Gale,

		“Cosmological and Design Arguments,” (pp. 116-137) <b>(BB)</b>
	10/10/08	<b>Discussion:</b> The viability of the metaphysical impulse
	10/13/08	Renee Descartes, <i>Meditations (III.-V.)</i> (pp. 176-188)
	10/14/08	Blaise Pascal, <i>The Wager</i> (pp. 82- 86) Jeffrey Jordan, “Pascal’s Wagers and James’ Will to Believe: (pp. 168- 187) <b>(BB)</b>
<b><i>The Meaning of Life and The Metaphysical Impulse: Theodicy</i></b>	10/15/08	Gottfried Leibnitz, <i>God, Evil and Best of All Possible Worlds</i> , (pp. 125-127) David Hume, <i>Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion</i> (parts X – XII) (pp. 111- 125) (see page 91 for an introduction of the characters Cleathes, Philo, and Demea.)
	10/16/08	Peter van Inwagen, “The Problem of Evil”(pp. 188-217) <b>(BB)</b>
	10/17/08	<b>Discussion</b>
	10/20/08	Peter Koestenbaum, (ch. 19) “Religion and Phenomenology” (pp. 272-283, 298-305, 309-313) <b>(BB)</b> <b>Optional-recommended:</b> pp. 283-298 (section on the “Transcendental Ego”), 305-309 (Subsections on “Eros,” “Philia,” “Agape.”) <b>(BB)</b>
<b><i>The Meaning of Life: Confronting Death</i></b>	10/21/08	Phillipe Ares, (ch. IV) “Forbidden Death” (pp. 85-107) <b>(BB)</b> <b>Optional-recommended:</b> pp. 1-27 (ch. 1) “Tamed Death”
	10/22/08	Peter Koestenbaum, (ch. 1) “The Vitality of Death” (pp. 3-28) <b>(BB)</b> <b>Optional-recommended:</b> pp. 29-33 (ch. 2) “Death and Finitude” (Koestenbaum’s response to J. F. T. Bugenthal’s critique)
	10/23/08	Oswald Hanfling, ch.4, “Death,” pp. 57-85 <b>(BB)</b>
	10/24/08	<b>Discussion</b>
<b><i>The Meaning of Life: Contemplating Consciousness</i></b>	10/27/08	John Locke, <i>Some Further Considerations...</i> , (pp. 139-144 in <b>PBF</b> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> Edn) <b>(BB)</b> Bishop George Berkeley, <i>Three Dialogues...</i> , (Required: Dialogues 1, 2 pp. 145-166 <b>Optional:</b> Dialogue3: pp. 166-176 in <b>PBF</b> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> Edn) <b>(BB)</b>
	10/28/08	David Lewis, “The Nature of Mind,” 295-302 <b>PBF</b>
	10/29/08	Thomas Nagel , “What is it Like to Be Bat?,” 354-363 <b>PBF</b> <b>Optional:</b> David Lewis: “Knowing What It’s Like,” 366-367

	10/30/08	John R. Searle, "Minds Brains, and Programs," 341-353, <b>PBF</b>
	10/31/08	<b>Discussion</b>
<i>The Meaning of Life: Identity and Agency</i>	11/03/08	"The Paradox of Identity," 784-785, <b>PBF</b> Derek Parfit, "Personal Identity," 399-411, <b>PBF</b>
	11/04/08	Bernard Williams, "The Self and The Future," 389-398, <b>PBF</b>
	11/05/08	Peter van Inwagen, "The Powers of Rational Beings: Freedom of the Will," 428-439, <b>PBF</b> <b>Optional:</b> Roderick Chisholm, "Human Freedom and the Self," 421-427, <b>PBF</b>
	11/06/08	David Hume, "Of Liberty and Necessity," Part II (446-450), <b>Optional:</b> Part I (441-446), <b>PBF</b> Harry G. Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," 470-480, <b>PBF</b>
	11/07/08	<b>Discussion</b>
<i>The Meaning of Life: Love, Value, and Morality</i>	11/10/08	Linnell Secomb, "Sapphic and Platonic Erotics," (ch. 1) 11-23 <b>BB</b> <b>Optional:</b> Introduction, 1-9, "Sex" (Benedetto Croce), 39-45 <b>BB</b>
	11/11/08	Linnell Secomb, "Amorous Politics: Between Derrida and Nancy," (ch. 9) 142-156 <b>Optional:</b> Conclusion, 157-162 <b>BB</b>
	11/12/08	Benedetto Croce, "'Heart' and 'Reason'," 92-100, "Compassion and Justice," 101-105. <b>BB</b>
	11/13/08	J.S. Mill, "Utilitarianism," 492-508 <b>PBF</b>
	11/14/08	<b>Discussion</b>
	11/17/08	Bernard Williams, "Utilitarianism and Integrity," 519-527 <b>PBF</b>
	11/18/08	Immanuel Kant, "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals," 536-552, <b>PBF</b>
	11/19/08	Thomas Nagel, "War and Massacre," 559-570, <b>PBF</b>
	11/20/08	Aristotle, "Nichomachean Ethics," 341-353, <b>PBF</b> Thomas Nagel, "Aristotle on <i>Eudaimonea</i> ," 588-592, <b>PBF</b>
	11/21/08	<b>Discussion</b>
<i>The Meaning of Life: Beauty and Art</i>	11/24/08	Nick Zangwill, "Aesthetic Judgment," <i>Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy</i> (on-line) (2007) <b>BB</b>
	11/25/08	Allen Carlson, "Environmental Aesthetics," <i>Stanford</i>

	<i>Encyclopedia of Philosophy</i> (on-line) (2007) <b>BB</b>
12/01/08	Plato, "Art, Imitation, and Morality," in DiLeo (2007), 525-537, <b>BB</b>
12/02/08	Leo Tolstoy, "What is Art?," in DiLeo (2007), 555-564, <b>BB</b>
12/03/08	Marilyn French, "Is there a Feminist Aesthetic?," in DiLeo (2007), 584-591, <b>BB</b>
12/04/08	<b>Discussion</b>
12/05/08	<b>FINAL EXAM REVIEW SESSION</b>

- **Note: The Content of the Syllabus is liable to change, please check the Blackboard postings and other announcements for updates.**