

Meaning in Life & Why It Matters

Philosophy 110b / Spring 2020

Professor Andreas Teuber



Introduction:

Recently Alasdair MacIntyre complained in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* that “neither the university nor philosophy is engaging the questions’ of ‘plain persons.’” Among the questions he had in mind were such questions as: “**What is the Meaning of Life?**” There have been sporadic attempts throughout the history of English-speaking philosophy to answer the question, But by the start of the last century philosophers began to lose interest and only recently, in the last decade or so, have there been stirrings of renewed interest. As Susan Wolf notices, “most people, including philosophers, tend to classify human motives as falling into one of two categories: self-interested or moral.” But much of what we do does not “comfortably fit into this scheme.” We act in ways that we hope will bring meaning to our lives.

The course will make a stab at providing some clue to what a meaningful life would look like and how it might be lived.

Class Time:

Tuesdays & Thursdays from 2:00 to 3:20 PM

Reading:

Please Note: **YOU ARE NOT REQUIRED TO BUY ANY BOOKS, TEXTBOOK OR READING PACKET FOR THIS COURSE.** All reading will be posted on the COURSE WEBSITE, including articles, essays, videos and excerpts from books. although you may want to purchase the following although each will also be available **ONLINE** on the Course Website: Susan Wolf's, **MEANING IN LIFE**, Princeton, 2010, Antoine de Saint-Exupery's **THE LITTLE PRINCE**, Mariner Books, 2000 and Terry Eagleton's **THE MEANING OF LIFE: A Very Short Introduction**, Oxford, 2014.

Reading Assignments

The course will be divided into four sections of approximately three and half weeks each. Reading assignments will be blocked out week by week and will be handed out for each section



Papers:

Four short papers are required on topics growing out of the readings and class discussions. One paper will be a credit/no credit paper. The three others will be graded. The papers should be about 5-6 pages in length. Paper topics will be available at least seven to ten (7-10) days before a paper is due. It is wise to make a copy of a paper before handing in the original. If you are working on a computer, make a back-up.

Examinations;

There will be a quiz towards the end of the Spring Semester. There will be **no other written examinations**, final, mid-term, or “other.”

Participation:

The participation requirement can be met in four ways or a combination of two or more of these ways: by (1) participating in class discussion; (2) keeping a journal in which you record your thoughts on various knotty issues that arise in the course; (3) attending optional small-group brainstorming sessions; and (4) talking with friends, other students in class, roommates, relatives, your mom and dad, uncles and aunts, brothers, sisters, and friends on Facebook about questions that arise in class about the meaning of life.

Grading:

There will be one credit/no credit paper at the start. Grading of the three remaining papers will be broken down as follows: 35% for your strongest essay, 25% for your next best effort and 20% for the one which is least successful of the three graded papers, on the presumption that you receive “credit” on the first paper. There will be three Reader Response Exercises of no more than one or two paragraphs each on a reading from the course announced in advance. The Reader Responses will count a total of 10% of the final grade. The quiz and participation requirement will each count 5%. There will also be opportunities to receive “extra credit.”

Course Assistance:

Course assistants will be assigned to this class. They will be responsible for reading and making comments on the papers. I too will read ALL the papers and be responsible for assigning a grade to each.

Office Hours:

I will hold office hours on Thursdays from 5:00 to 6:00 and by appointment. Please write ahead of time, that is, send an email, saying when and on what day you would like to meet. My office is RABB, 306. If you wish to contact me the best method is via email: teuber@brandeis.edu.

Attendance:

Although class attendance will not be taken directly into account in considering an overall grade for the course, that is, there is no designated percentage for attendance, attendance is required. You are allowed one unexcused absence. Any further absences without written pre-approval will have an impact on your final grade.

Resources to Support Academic Integrity:.

Here's a Guide to Using Resources

<http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do>

To receive the most benefit, read all seven sections of the guide. You will gain a deep appreciation for why and how sources are used in academic writing and the ethical implication of improper citation.

Accessibility and Accommodation Services:

Academic Services

<http://www.brandeis.edu/acserv/disabilities/>

offers a variety of accommodations and services to students with documented disabilities, permanent and temporary injuries, and chronic conditions. If you are a student with a disability, Brandeis will engage you in an interactive process to provide you with an equal opportunity to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from the academic activities and materials in the course. The manager of accessibility services will work with you on an individualized case-by-case basis, to provide appropriate services to ensure you have a rich and rewarding academic experience. If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and you would like to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in PHIL 110b, please see me as soon as possible.

Four-Credit Course:

This is a four-credit course (with three hours of class-time per week) Success in this 4 credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sessions, papers, reader responses, etc.).

Learning Goals:

Philosophy 110b: MEANING IN LIFE & WHY IT MATTERS aims to teach students to think better and choose smarter, to analyze controversial issues and dilemmas, to make arguments for their beliefs and respond to objections.

