

**St. Jerome's University in the University of Waterloo
Department of Philosophy**

Syllabus

Fall Term 2018

Course: PHIL 120J: The Meaning of Life: Section 001

Instructor: Professor Nikolaj Zunic

Class Times: 10:00 am – 11:20 am on Mondays and Wednesdays

Class Location: SJ1 3016

Office: SH 2003

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Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays: 9:30 – 10:00 am and 4:00 – 4:30 pm;
and by appointment: please e-mail the instructor.

Required Texts

E. F. Schumacher, *A Guide for the Perplexed*. Harper Perennial, 2015.

Jean Vanier, *Made for Happiness: Discovering the Meaning of Life with Aristotle*. Translated by Kathryn Spink. Toronto: Anansi, 2001.

Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*. Toronto: Anansi, 1991.

Seneca, *Dialogues and Essays*. Translated by John Davie. Oxford University Press, 2007.

Arthur Schopenhauer, *Essays and Aphorisms*. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. Penguin Books, 1970.

Peter Kreeft, *Three Philosophies of Life*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989.

Josef Pieper, *In Tune with the World: A Theory of Festivity*. Translated by Richard and Clara Winston. South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 1999.

Readings in Course Reserves*

John Haldane, "The Search for Meaning", from *Seeking Meaning and Making Sense*.

Gabriel Marcel, "My Life", from *The Mystery of Being. I: Reflection and Mystery*.

Max Scheler, “The Meaning of Suffering”, from *Max Scheler (1874-1928). Centennial Essays*.

Martin Heidegger, “The First Form of Boredom: Becoming Bored by Something”, from *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*.

*These chapter excerpts can be accessed on-line through the University of Waterloo library website at <https://www.reserves.uwaterloo.ca/ares/ares.dll> or through the Learn site by clicking on “Course Reserves” and then selecting the appropriate course, in this case PHIL 120J-001.

Course Description

In popular culture the discipline of philosophy is often described as being about nothing more than the question of the meaning of life. Although a widespread stereotype, there is nonetheless much truth to this suggestion. This course will deal principally with this concept of the meaning of life and attempt to give it some philosophical articulation.

The idea of the meaning of life deals with the intelligibility of existence, particularly the existence of living beings, such as human beings. By “intelligibility” is meant the possibility of coming to understand and know what life is about. Thus the human mind or intellect is squarely involved in this endeavor. But the notion of “meaning” is a loaded one which requires much reflection to plumb its depths. It connotes significance, importance, purpose, and value. There is also the issue of what we mean when we speak about the meaning of life, for example, whether we are referring to our own individual lives or about life in general. Philosophers also address the problem of the coherence of such an idea, that is, whether it makes any intelligible sense to inquire into the meaning of something called life as such. This is why the philosopher’s chief task is one of thinking the problem through to its logical conclusions.

In this course we will address the question about the meaning of life from a variety of perspectives. First, we will compare and contrast ancient Greek and Roman philosophical views with more modern and contemporary views. In this way there will be a fruitful dialectical exchange occurring between different historical standpoints. Second, we will be studying the views of different thinkers in the philosophical tradition in order to gain a more comprehensive view of this question. And third, we will be attempting to integrate these ideas into our own lives as we try to make sense of the journey of life that each of us is on.

There will be seven major themes or topics in this course.

1. The course will begin with a study of E. F. Schumacher’s influential book *A Guide for the Perplexed*. In this book Schumacher provides a very useful and insightful “philosophical map” of life. This book will lay the groundwork for the course as a whole and will introduce many of the key concepts that we will discuss later on.
2. The second part deals with Aristotle’s vision of life as a pursuit of happiness. I have chosen to read a study of Aristotle’s ethics by the renowned Canadian philosopher and humanitarian Jean Vanier because his contemporary interpretation of Aristotle can help us to see better how Aristotle’s ethics can be relevant today. Many seminal ideas will be discussed in this first section: the nature of desire; happiness as the goal of life; the concept of virtue; the tension between the practical and theoretical life; the importance of friendship and community.

3. The third part looks at Charles Taylor's views on the modern turn towards and emphasis on the authenticity of the self. We will examine the chief tenets of the modern approach to life which include individualism, subjectivism, and the many problems that attend to these currents.
4. The fourth part will return to an older model of life as espoused by the Roman philosopher Seneca. The focus here will be on the philosophy of Stoicism. We will discuss topics ranging from the natural law and the brevity of life to suicide, death and the importance of inculcating a spirit of tranquillity in one's mind.
5. The fifth part will confront the negative dimension of life, as experienced in suffering. The modern German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer promoted a philosophy of pessimism and greatly emphasized the role that suffering plays in life. We will discuss his basic doctrines of the will and representation as well as the Eastern religious background of his thought in Hinduism. One experience that we will focus on is that of boredom. Schopenhauer singles out this mood as pivotal to our suffering in the world, but we will avail ourselves of the thought of Martin Heidegger, a twentieth-century thinker, who masterfully exposes three different kinds of boredom that afflict human beings.
6. The sixth part focusses on the idea of a religious interpretation of life. We will focus principally on three Biblical books which lie at the basis of Peter Kreeft's excellent overview entitled *Three Philosophies of Life*. The three archetypal philosophies will be that of vanity, represented by the book of *Ecclesiastes*, suffering, represented by the book of *Job*, and love, represented by the book of *The Song of Songs*.
7. The final part of the course will look at Josef Pieper's theory of festivity. This is a view of life which examines the human being's place in and relation to the world. Furthermore, it addresses the modern tendency to put work (gainful employment) at the centre of human life and to minimize, if not eliminate entirely, the transcendent nature of the human being's vocation in this world. Hence we will discuss the idea of celebration, time and the holiday, and once again, what life is really all about.

Format of the Course

This is a lecture course and as such the professor will discuss the material contained in the readings and will expand on the subject-matter in his lectures. However, students are strongly encouraged to ask questions and to participate in class.

***Students are responsible for both the readings and the lecture material.**

Objectives

- To examine *philosophically* the concept of the meaning of life.
- To compare and contrast ancient and modern conceptions of life.
- To learn about different worldviews and ethical systems.
- To evaluate critically different arguments about the meaning of life.
- To deepen one's understanding of the meaning and purpose of one's own life.
- To develop skills in philosophical reflection.

Schedule

The following is a schedule of the classes for this course. The readings which will be discussed each week are listed. Students are strongly advised to read the prescribed material so that the lectures are more readily understood and pertinent questions may be posed.

Note: This is a tentative schedule and is subject to change.

WEEK 1: A Philosophical Map of Life

Sept. 10 and 12

Topics: Introduction; the Levels of Being; *Adaequatio*

Readings: John Haldane, "The Search for Meaning" (Course Reserves)
E. F. Schumacher, *A Guide for the Perplexed*, Chapters 1-5

WEEK 2: A Philosophical Map of Life (continued)

Sept. 17 and 19

Topics: The Four Fields of Knowledge; the problem of scientism

Readings: E. F. Schumacher, *A Guide for the Perplexed*, Chapters 6-10

WEEK 3: Happiness as the Goal of Life

Sept. 24 and 26

Topics: Desire; Ends vs. Purposes; the Good; Happiness; Pleasure; Friendship

Readings: Jean Vanier, *Made for Happiness*, Chapters 1-2

WEEK 4: Happiness as the Goal of Life (continued)

Oct. 1 and 3

Topics: Virtues; Truth; Life as Growth

Readings: Jean Vanier, *Made for Happiness*, Chapters 3-5

WEEK 5: **The Modern Ethics of Authenticity**

Oct. 8 **THANKSGIVING DAY – No Class**

Oct. 10 **FALL BREAK – No Class**

Oct. 12 **Make-Up Day for Oct. 10**

***Please note that we do exceptionally have class on this Friday.**

ESSAY #1 DUE

Topics: Authenticity; the Post-metaphysical world; the Ionian Fallacy

Readings: Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*, Chapters I-V

WEEK 6: **The Modern Ethics of Authenticity (continued)**

Oct. 15

Oct. 17 **TEST #1**

Topics: Values; The Great Disembedding; The Affirmation of Ordinary Life

Readings: Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*, Chapters VI-X

WEEK 7: **Who am I?**

Oct. 22 and 24

Topics: Personal Identity; Primary vs. Secondary Reflection; Problem vs. Mystery; Disposability vs Indisposability; Being vs. Having; Hope; Sacrifice

Readings: Gabriel Marcel, “My Life” (Course Reserves)

WEEK 8: **Stoicism**

Oct. 29 and 31

Topics: Nature and Natural Law; Fortune; Providence; Virtue and Vice; Happiness

Readings: Seneca, “On Providence” and “On the Happy Life”

WEEK 9: **Stoicism (continued)**

Nov. 5 Regular Class

Nov. 7 **Class Cancelled – Professor is away at a conference**

Topics: Peace of Mind; Boredom; Suicide; the Shortness of Life

Readings: Seneca, “On the Tranquillity of the Mind” and “On the Shortness of Life”

WEEK 10: **The Philosophy of Pessimism**

Nov. 12 and 14

Topics: Suffering; The Will vs. Representation; Suicide; Boredom

Readings: Arthur Schopenhauer, “On the Suffering of the World”; “On the Antithesis of the Thing in Itself and Appearance”; “On Affirmation and Denial of the Will to Live”; “On the Indestructibility of our Essential Being by Death”; “On Suicide”; “On the Vanity of Existence”

 Max Scheler, “The Meaning of Suffering” (Course Reserves)

 Martin Heidegger on the 3 kinds of boredom. Read the excerpt entitled “The First Form of Boredom: Becoming Bored by something” in the electronic course reserves

WEEK 11: **Biblical Philosophies of Life**

Nov. 19 **TEST #2**

Nov. 21

Topics: Life as Vanity (*Ecclesiastes*); Life as Suffering (*Job*); Life as Love (*The Song of Songs*)

Readings: Peter Kreeft, *Three Philosophies of Life*

WEEK 12: **Life as Work and Festivity**

Nov. 26 and 28

Topics: Work vs. Leisure; Festivity; Joy and Love; The Sacred and the Profane

Readings: Josef Pieper, *In Tune with the World*

WEEK 13:	LAST DAY OF CLASSES
Dec. 3	<u>Major Essay is Due</u>
Topic:	Review of the term. Discussion of Final Exam.

Assignments

1. **Tests:** There will be two in-class tests based on the content of the readings and lectures. The first test will be based on Schumacher, Vanier/Aristotle and Taylor; the second test will be based on Seneca and Schopenhauer. The principal focus of these tests will be your comprehension of the concepts that are discussed in this course. However, you will also be assessed on your ability to think philosophically. Each test will be 60 minutes in duration.
2. **Short Essay:** This is a short essay which will explore some aspect of the Schumacher's concept of life or the Aristotelian conception of the virtuous life. The length of the essay will be between 4 – 6 double-spaced pages. Detailed instructions will be distributed in class.
3. **Major Essay:** This will be a rigorous and reflective investigation of a prominent theme or idea from the course. The length of this essay will be 6 – 9 double-spaced pages and will be due on the last day of class. Detailed instructions will be distributed in class.
4. **Final Examination:** A comprehensive examination that will assess your understanding of the ideas and doctrines studied in the course as well as your ability to think philosophically on a range of issues which will take place during the normal university exam period.

Grading Scheme

ASSIGNMENT	DUE DATE – DATE SCHEDULED	VALUE
1. Short Essay	October 12, 2018	15%
2. Test #1	October 17, 2018	15%
3. Test #2	November 19, 2018	15%
4. Major Essay	December 3, 2018	25%
5. Final Examination	Scheduled during university exam period: Dec. 6-21, 2018	30%

Course Policies

1. **ATTENDANCE:** Students are expected to attend class regularly.
2. **CLASS NOTES:** It is crucial to take complete notes in class. It is the student's responsibility to record relevant and important information which is discussed in class. Students will be assessed on the lecture material which may not necessarily be contained in the readings. Furthermore, the professor's lecture notes will not be made available for copying. If you are absent from class please contact a classmate for the lecture notes.
3. **DUE DATES:** The essays are due **at the beginning of class** on the dates given above.
4. **LATENESS PENALTY:** The penalty for late assignments is 3% deducted from the grade of the paper for each weekday that the paper is late.
5. **ABSOLUTE DEADLINE:** The maximum allowable amount of time for submitting essays beyond the due date is one week.
6. **NO MAKE-UPS:** The tests must be written when they are originally administered in class. No make-up tests will be permitted. An exception to this rule will be made if a student misses a test because of a medical condition, such as an illness, or because of some other serious reason, such as a death/funeral. In such cases proper documentation must be presented to the instructor which proves that the events in question actually took place (e.g. an official document from a physician or a death certificate or a funeral notice).
7. **EXTRA HELP:** If you are having difficulties in this course and are concerned about your performance, it is your responsibility to communicate these concerns to the professor in a timely fashion. Do not wait until the course is over to contact the professor about your final grade!
8. **POLITE BEHAVIOUR:** Students are expected to be courteous and civil in their behavior both in and outside of class. Unruly and rude behavior will not be tolerated.
9. **E-MAILS:** When you communicate with the instructor by means of e-mail be sure to use proper etiquette and a formal style of writing. For example, no e-mails with the salutation "Hey!" (a very popular opening for university students). Moreover, you should write in a legible and grammatically correct manner. Any correspondence which is vulgar, informal, or replete with spelling and grammatical mistakes will not be answered.
10. **LAPTOPS, CELLPHONES, TABLETS:** It is desirable that a proper pedagogical and learning atmosphere be created in the classroom. Therefore, it is requested of all students that various technologies not be used during the class. These include laptop computers, cellphones, tablets, and other devices. Any exceptions to this rule will be made on a case by case basis. For example, if you are registered with AccessAbility Services and you require the use of a laptop to take notes, an accommodation can certainly be made for you. But please do see the professor about any such request.

If you habitually and inappropriately use your cell phone or computer in class, be prepared to have the instructor speak to you about this.

Important Information

Academic Integrity: To maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo and its Affiliated and Federated Institutions of Waterloo (AFIW) are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility.

Academic Integrity Office (UW): A resource for students and instructors.

<https://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity/>

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for their actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under the **St. Jerome’s University Policy on Student Discipline:**

https://www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/PLCY_AOM_Student-Discipline_20131122-SJUSCapproved.pdf

For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to

University of Waterloo Policy 71 - Student Discipline:

<https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat-general-counsel/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-71>

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of their university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read the **St.**

Jerome’s University Policy on Student Petitions and Grievances:

https://www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/PLCY_AOM_Student-Petitions-and-Grievances_20151211-SJUSCapproved.pdf

Appeals: A student may appeal the finding and/or penalty in a decision made under the St. Jerome’s University Policy on Student Petitions and Grievances (other than regarding a petition) or the St. Jerome’s University Policy on Student Discipline if a ground for an appeal can be established. Read the **St. Jerome’s University Policy on Student Appeals:**

https://www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/PLCY_AOM_Student-Appeals_20131122-SJUSCapproved.pdf

Note for Students with Disabilities: The AccessAbility Services office (<https://uwaterloo.ca/accessability-services/>), located on the first floor of the Needles Hall extension (1401), collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the AS office at the beginning of each academic term.