

PHILOSOPHY 100

The Meaning of Life
First Year Seminar
Fall 2002

As soon as man does not take
his existence for granted,
but beholds it as
something unfathomably mysterious,
thought begins.

Albert Schweitzer



Welcome to Philosophy 100

Welcome to the adventure of wondering about the meaning of life. As with any adventure, this one brings with it the promise of excitement and the exhilaration of confronting unexplored territory. But it also involves risk. Questions can be painful, and answers are not always easy. If you have not yet asked all your questions or found all your answers, come...

We will question our assumptions about what is significant in our lives. We will look at the lenses that shape our own thinking and behavior. We will strive for understanding of the diverse cultural viewpoints and experiences that shape the opinions and actions of others. Come with the courage to look inside yourself and the willingness to listen to the voices of those around you.

Come with open mind...

Dr. Marlene P. Soulsby
Library 14
msoulsby@psu.edu
963-2668

Course Texts:

Constructing a Life Philosophy
Things Fall Apart, Chinua Achebe
American Beauty
Man's Search for Meaning, Frankl
The Stranger, Camus
The New York Times

Great minds discuss ideas.
Average minds discuss events.
Small minds discuss people.
Eleanor Roosevelt

*The growth of the human mind
is still high adventure,
in many ways
the highest adventure on earth.*
Norman Cousins

I reserve the right to make adjustments to this syllabus if necessary in order to meet the objectives of this course.

Assessment

In this course you will be encouraged to examine and challenge yourself, your fellow classmates, your teacher, and the texts you read. You will practice the skills of active reading and critical thinking; you will have the opportunity to analyze and evaluate different perspectives in order to help you develop your own point of view. You will be able to demonstrate and share your insights in several ways—through your participation in discussion, writing, examination, and completion of assigned work.

<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Activity</i>
20	Reading quizzes, (lowest 2 dropped)
20	Midterm essay Exam
20	Assignments, including attendance at events
10	Exploration and Reflection Journal
10	Discussion/participation (Student centered discussion facilitator/ small group and large group self evaluation.)
20	Final: Electronic Portfolio

- **Reading quizzes**

Preparation for class is very important. Announced or unannounced **reading quizzes** cannot be made up. If you are absent for that day or have not done the reading, you will forfeit the number of possible points. It will be possible to bank bonus points.

- **Assignments** that are collected will earn the maximum number of points if they are handed in on time and are done satisfactorily. For each day that an assignment is late one point will be deducted until it is no longer possible to earn points. In other words, it will not be possible to try and complete all assignments in one frantic surge of energy at the end of the semester.

It is important to take advantage of the numerous events offered at the campus both at noon and in the evening. **Attendance at one evening event and two noon events is required.** More can earn bonus points.

- **Exploration and reflection journal:**

Bring the journal to class everyday! Single entries or the entire journals may be collected at any time. You will need a 3-hole folder for your journal. No notebooks, please!!!!

This will be a working journal in which you prepare for class by writing a response to the exploration questions contained in the daily plan and by writing your thoughts and reflections after a discussion. This journal should be kept separate from any notebook you use for notes taken during class. Class notes are not acceptable entries in the journal. The journals are not evaluated on their content but rather on

- whether they are complete and up to date (Exploration questions must be done on the day they are assigned.)
- whether they are indicative of a conscientious effort

Use a separate page for each entry. Indicate date at the top of the page. Each exploration entry should be ***1 written page.***

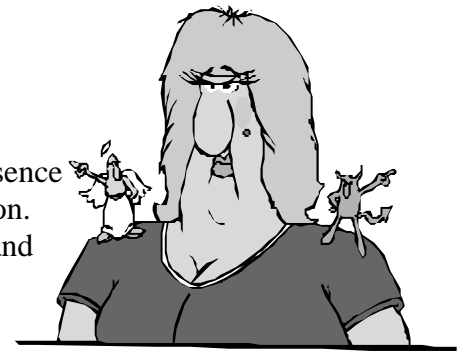
- **Discussion:**

Much of this class will involve student centered discussion in both small and large group settings. Your evaluation grade will be determined in consultation with me using input from other group members and yourself. We will work from an individual goal plan in which you identify your strengths and weaknesses and work towards improvement of your discussion skills.

- **Final, Electronic Portfolio:** Work on the final will continue throughout the semester with an assessment check at mid-term. It will include a personal statement indicating how the readings and discussions influenced your thinking about the meaning of life.

Attendance:

Success in this class relies on regular attendance. If you cannot attend a class, it is your responsibility to contact me via e-mail or telephone on the day of the absence with a valid excuse. If you have more than 3 unexcused absences 5 points per absence will be deducted from the assignment portion of your grade evaluation. After 7 absences you cannot receive a passing grade for this course and should drop before the late drop deadline).



Classroom courtesy:

- Please be on time for class. It can happen to any of us that we have a difficulty that will make us late for class. If it happens on a regular basis, it indicates lack of respect for fellow students, for me, and for our endeavors here. Be sure to set your alarm early enough to get to class on time.
- Please do not leave the classroom for a casual reason. Situations do occur which may require you to leave the room. Remember, however, that when you leave, attention is diverted away from the work at hand. If you must leave early, let me know ahead of time, and arrange to take a seat close to the door.
- I encourage a comfortable atmosphere in the classroom where people feel free to express their ideas, however, private conversations indicate lack of respect for the person who is talking.
- All opinions and points of view are welcome. To ensure an open and productive exchange, it is vital that we listen and respond to each other with respect.





Disability: The Pennsylvania State University is committed to providing access to a quality education for all students, including those with documented disabilities. If a student has a disability and wants to request an accommodation for a course, it is the responsibility of the student to first obtain a University accommodation letter confirming the disability and suggesting appropriate remedies. This letter can be obtained from the Penn State Office for Disability Services or the campus Disability Contact Liaisons.


The contact person for physical disabilities at Penn State Worthington Scranton is Mary Brown (SLC 12, 963.2681, mhb9@psu.edu); for all other disabilities see Marisa Yarnes (SLC 11, 963.2686, mxy16@psu.edu). It is encouraged that students request their accommodation needs early in the semester, and once identified, a reasonable accommodation will be implemented in a timely manner. Students may also access the web site for the Office of Disability Services at University Park: www.lions.psu.edu/ods/.

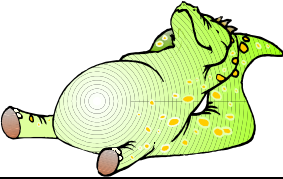
PHILOSOPHY 100


The Meaning of Life

The material for this course is interdisciplinary and multi-cultural. Items have been selected to give you a wide range of perspectives about topics related to what gives our lives meaning. They will provide food for thought and a stimulus for discussion. In class we will not strive to find “right” answers or to state quick opinions, but rather to ask probing questions and to explore a variety of viewpoints. Our goal will be to create an experience together that encourages searching and thinking and trying out different ideas.

Class	Assigned Reading	Class Preparation
1		Introduction: Asking the questions Getting to know each other. The syllabus
2	Examining the question: What is the meaning of human existence?	<i>Journal exploration entry # 1</i> <i>After answering the questionnaire, write a summary of what your answers reveal about you. It is not important to compose a polished essay but rather to write your thoughts as they occur to you.</i> <i>Socrates said, “An unexamined life is not worth living.” What does this statement mean to you? Using the questionnaire as a guide, look for aspects of your life that you would like to examine. Write why these are of interest to you.</i>
3	Scavenger Hunt <i>Constructing a Life Philosophy: pp. 26-31</i> Plato, "Are We Living in a Cave" pp.25-29 	<i>Journal exploration entry # 2</i> <i>Plato tells us that we are living in a cave. It is a powerful and disturbing metaphor. Of course, we might refuse to believe that because we think of ourselves as fairly enlightened and aware of what we’re doing. Could we have become comfortable with a way of thinking and living that is like being in a cave? If given the choice, would we even want to leave?</i> <i>Write a page of your thoughts about what it means to you to be living in a “cave.”</i>
4	<i>Constructing a Life Philosophy: Keen & Fox,</i> "Discovering Our Personal Myth" pp. 32-37	<i>Journal exploration entry #3</i> <i>Keen asks us to think about the myths or lenses that filter our views of ourselves, others and the world we live in. Write a page exploring your personal myth. How is your myth shaped by your family, age, race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, socio-economic status, religion, etc.</i>
5-6	<i>identity...</i> Poetry: “Common Ground” Judith Ortiz Cofer “How I learned to Speak Italian” Helen Barolini “Theme for English B” Langston Hughes	<i>Journal exploration entry # 4</i> <i>What stereotypes might people have about you based on your age, race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, socio-economic class, appearance, clothing, religion, etc.? How much of the stereotype is accurate?</i>

	<p>“Green Chile” Jimmy Santiago Baca</p> <p>“Sure You Can Ask Me a Personal Question” Diane Burns</p> <p>“Elderly Lady Crossing on Green” Wyatt Prunty</p>	
5	<p>“White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” Peggy McIntosh</p>	<p><i>Journal exploration entry # 5</i></p> <p><i>What unearned advantages or privileges do you have because of your age, race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, socio-economic class, appearance, etc.?</i></p>
6	<p>“The Independent Woman (and Other Lies)” Katie Roiphe</p>	<p><i>Journal exploration entry #6:</i></p> <p><i>How much of who you are is a result of your gender? What benefits or privileges do you have as a result of your gender? What disadvantages do you have in today’s society?</i></p>
7	<p>"Money is Life's Present Guide" Jacob Needleman,</p> 	<p><i>Journal entry # 7:</i></p> <p><i>In what ways does money affect choices that you make in your life?</i></p>
8	<p>Artistic representations of class:</p>	<p><i>Journal exploration entry # 8:</i></p> <p><i>How would you distinguish low-, middle-, and upper-class? What advantages and disadvantages do you have because of your class background?</i></p>
9	<p>Beauty....</p> <p>Visual representations of physical beauty from various cultures and time periods.</p> <p>Poetry: Mirikitani “Recipe” (for round eyes) Ruth Fainlight, “Flower Feet”</p>	<p><i>Journal exploration entry # 9:</i></p> <p><i>What are stereotypical characteristics of beauty in our culture today? If you could change something about your appearance what would it be? Why would you want to make the change? What do you find beautiful about yourself?</i></p>
10	<p><i>American Beauty: The Shooting Script</i></p>	<p><i>Journal exploration entry # 10</i></p> <p><i>What do you think is the American dream of the good life? What would be the good life for you?</i></p>

11	<i>Things Fall Apart</i> Chinua Achebe	<i>Journal exploration entry # 11:</i> <i>What ideas or attitudes about African culture have you encountered? What comes to your mind when you read the words, “the Dark Continent?” Write about your responses to the culture that is presented to you in this novel. How do they seek meaningful lives in ways other than yours?</i>
12	<i>Things Fall Apart</i> Chinua Achebe	<i>Journal exploration entry # 12:</i> <i>Write about your responses to the European missionary culture that is presented in this novel.</i>
13	<i>Constructing a Life Philosophy, pp75-76</i> Choose one article from chapter 3: How do Religions Give Life Meaning?	Web Hunt <i>Journal exploration entry #13:</i> <i>Do you believe in God? What about a life after this one? Examine why you hold the beliefs that you do? If you had been born at a different time or place could you just as easily hold different beliefs?</i>
14	Discussion on belief systems and how these give meaning to life	<i>You deserve a break today.</i> 
15		Midterm essay exam
16	Other ways of looking: Film: Bill Moyers on China and “chi”	<i>Journal exploration entry # 14</i> <i>Write about a time when you were sick. Describe what was wrong and what means you used to get better. Think about why you used those means to affect a healing. To what extent do the culture and time period in which you live influence your thinking?</i>
17	Zen and the way of . . .	<i>Journal exploration entry # 15</i> <i>What is the sound of one hand clapping?</i>
18	Prejudice... “Meet the Bunkers” Norman Lear <i>Constructing a Life Philosophy, Katz</i> “The Holocaust Proves that Ordinary People Can Do Great Evil.” pp. 170-175	<i>Journal exploration entry # 16</i> <i>Do you think that you could have given refuge to Jews during the Holocaust? Could you have helped them escape? Could you have seen them as the source of your country’s troubles? Could you have been glad to be rid of them? Could you have turned them in? Could you have worked in an office that kept records on Jews? Could you have worked on a train that transported Jews to one of the camps? Could you have been one of the guards at a camp? Could you have put the gas pellets in the fake showers? How can you be sure of your answers?</i>
19	<i>Race, ethnicity and discrimination...</i> Film: A Class Divided Visual images of race. Julio Marzán “Ethnic Poetry”	<i>Journal entry #17</i> <i>What do you understand discrimination to be? Have you ever experienced discrimination yourself or through another person or in a work of fiction or film? Write about your feelings.</i>

20	<i>Man's Search for Meaning</i> , Frankl pp. 21-75	<i>Journal entry #18</i> <i>Imagine that you are stripped of the things that typically give our lives meaning: identity, home, family, friends, jobs, money, things, status, reputation etc. How would you make your life still worth living?</i>
21	Frankl, pp. 76-115	<i>Journal entry #19</i> <i>Write on love...</i>
22	<i>Constructing a Life Philosophy</i> : Ringer, "Look out for Number One" pp. 129-134	<i>Journal entry # 20</i> <i>Write about a time when you had a conflict between what you wanted to do and what you should do. What did you choose? Why?</i>
23	<i>Constructing a Life Philosophy</i> : Robinson, "Life has no Purpose" pp. 41-45	<i>Journal entry # 21</i> <i>Assume that when you die, you die like the skunk on the road—nothing more than that. What affect would this have on how you live your life?</i>
24	Camus, <i>The Stranger</i> , Part I	Do you think Meursault is guilty? <i>Journal entry # 22: Would you like to be roommates with someone like Meursault?</i>
25	" Part I 	Make a list of as many arguments as you can think of to defend and to prosecute Meursault. <i>Journal exploration entry # 23: Imagine that you were in Meursault's shoes that day on the beach. Would you have acted differently? How? Why?</i>
26	" Part II	
27	" Part II	<i>Journal exploration entry # 24</i> <i>Through his life Meursault shows us that the things which we typically think give our lives meaning are ultimately absurd: love, marriage, belief in God etc.. What would you say to him if you could talk to him one last time in his prison cell?</i>
28	<i>Sexual identity...</i> "Better Be Ready 'Bout' Half Past Eight" Alison Baker	<i>Journal exploration entry #25</i> <i>How would your life change if you changed your sexual identity?</i>
29	Film: David Henry Hwang <i>M. Butterfly</i>	Position paper due
30	Conclusions	

Philosophy 100 as First Year Seminar PSU 008

This course is also designed to help you make the transition to university life. Beginning in the summer of 1999, all new students enrolled in four-year programs are required to take a course that has been designated as a First Year Seminar (FYS). The Worthington Scranton Campus offers a wide variety of such courses. Although the subject matter in these courses is different, they all have the same goal: to help you succeed! The extra hour gives us time to focus on developing those habits and skills which form the foundation of success. It gives us time to become familiar with available resources and opportunities. Also, by encouraging you to take an active part in Campus activities, you will promote your own personal growth and will contribute to the life of this academic community.

Your experience in this course will include

- getting to know the campus
- getting to know the university
- getting to know each other
- working collaboratively with others
- communicating effectively
- learning to plan and budget time
- dealing with stress
- using e-mail
- searching the Web
- taking advantage of library resources and information retrieval systems
- reading actively
- thinking critically
- listening
- discussing

