



PHI 250:
The Meaning of Life
with Dr. Sarah Vincent



Course Description

The advertised course description is as follows: “What is the meaning of life? Is there any real point in anything we do? Are we just thrown into the world and forced to make our way through until, eventually, we die? This course will confront such questions. In doing so, we will consider various views about what might give life meaning, as well as discuss related topics like the nature of personal happiness, our obligations to others (especially future generations), and whether death is bad for us. Readings will be heavily interdisciplinary – including philosophical, psychological, and literary texts.”

To elaborate on the general description above, we will begin this course by identifying the problem: why is finding the meaning of life so hard but also so important? From there, we’ll evaluate three philosophical positions, each of which posits a different answer to our central question: what is the meaning of life? With this foundation sketched, we’ll move into more specific, but related questions: What is happiness? What should we want for or do on behalf of future generations? Is death bad?

Structure-wise, for every reading, there will be a class session dedicated to lecture/exposition, followed by another focused on discussion/evaluation. After some class-wide interaction on discussion/evaluation days, students will work together to complete in-class question/response activities. I find that most students truly benefit from this ‘I do, we do, you do’ approach to our time together; I hope you too will find the structure helpful.