

Instructor: Kevin Patton  
Course: PHIL 1010  
Day: Mon / Wed  
Time: 1130 - 1245  
Location: ASH 384

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# Meaning of Life

“My desire and wish is that the things I start with should be so obvious that you wonder why I spend my time stating them. This is what I aim at because the point of philosophy is to start with something so simple as not to seem worth stating, and to end with something so paradoxical that no one will believe it.”

Bertrand Russell from *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism* 1918.

## Course Overview

We all find ourselves at one point or another wondering what everything adds up to. This sentiment manifests itself as different questions: 'why are we here?', 'what's my purpose?', 'how can I lead a fulfilling life?', or, perhaps most relevantly, 'what is the meaning of life?'. Now that you're in college, these questions are of the essence. Where will you go from here? Which skills should you develop? Which major should you choose? What should you pursue? Love? Family? Friendship? Education? Career? Fame? Fortune? Religious devotion? Service to others? Fulfillment? Happiness? What does it mean to be happy or fulfilled? In this course, we're going to set all else aside and dedicate real effort to coming to grips with these questions. Our focus will be on developing our ability to think about what we're asking and acquiring the tools necessary to assess the responses on offer.

## Required Materials

*All materials will be supplied by Kevin via the website and / or email.*

# Course Information

**Preparation:** This course may be very challenging for you if you are not accustomed to reasoning in a rigorous fashion. If this is true of you, then you will only do well in this class if you dedicate much of your outside-of-class-time to practicing and mastering the relevant topics covered. Also, the only dumb questions are the ones you don't ask. If you are confused about something, then there is a high likelihood that someone else is too!

**Attendance:** Attendance is required. There are no make-ups for exams unless your absence is due to a **documented** illness or an emergency.

**Website:** All course material, including the textbook, will be available exclusively on my website. I do **not** use other services. The site URL is: <https://kevinjpatton.com>

**Distribution:** This course helps to satisfy the Humanities and Fine Arts General Education course requirement used by UNO. The Humanities & Fine Arts courses seek to help students understand, analyze, and explore the human condition. Studying Humanities & Fine Arts contributes to personal growth and well-being, as well as to living in, and contributing to various communities. Passing this class means that you will be able to demonstrate an understanding of the theories, methods, and concepts used to comprehend and respond to the human condition; to recognize, articulate, and explore how various humanists/artists have responded to the human condition; to comprehend and evaluate how humanistic/artistic expression contributes to individual and/or socio-cultural understanding, growth, and well-being; and use relevant critical, analytic, creative, speculative and/or reflective methods. More information can be found at:

<https://www.unomaha.edu/general-education/approved-courses/humanities-and-fine-arts.php>

# Evaluation

## Grading Scale

A+	96.7 - 100%	C+	76.7 - 79.9%
A	93.3 - 96.6%	C	73.3 - 76.6%
A-	90 - 93.2%	C-	70 - 73.2%
B+	86.7 - 89.9	D+	66.7 - 69.9
B	83.3 - 86.6%	D	63.3 - 66.6%
B-	80 - 83.2%	D-	60 - 63.2%

F  
Below 60%

**Exam 1:** 25%  
**Exam 2:** 25%  
**Participation:** 10%  
**Final Project:** 30%  
**Something Else:** 10%

**Exams:** The use of books and notes **will not** be permitted. However, certain kinds of information will be provided on an exam should you need it, and you will be told ahead of time what you are and what you are not required to memorize. Exams may not be rescheduled unless you have documentation of a serious illness or an emergency. A make-up exam is not guaranteed to be at the same level of difficulty as the original exam.

**Participation:** There will be a method introduced to document your participation in the class. You are required to ask a question / offer your perspective 15x throughout the semester. As an example, if you had an issue with the reading and came to class with a specific and terrific question about it, that would count as one of your 15. In order to track this, I will jot names down each class for all who participate. You may gain at most two instances of participation per class.

**Final Paper:** A final paper will be due by the end of the semester. In general, such papers require you to properly explain a position / argument, followed by a sustained critique of the position / argument. There will be a rubric, followed by guidelines for the paper as we get closer to the end of the semester. In addition to the paper, there will be a short but corresponding presentation that you will give the class at the end of the semester.

# Policies

- **Academic Integrity:** The penalty for academic dishonesty (e.g., collaborating on problem sets, cheating on exams) will be failure of the course and the case's being forwarded to Student Judicial Affairs for possible disciplinary action. Make yourself familiar with UNO's Student Code of Conduct, available [online](#). **In this course, the normal penalty for any violation of the code is an "F" for the semester.** Violations may have additional consequences including expulsion from the university. Don't plagiarize – it just isn't worth it.
- **University Policies:** I respect and uphold university policies and regulations pertaining to the observation of religious holidays; assistance available to physically handicapped, visually and/or hearing impaired students; plagiarism; sexual harassment; and racial or ethnic discrimination. All students are advised to become familiar with the respective university regulations and are encouraged to bring any questions or concerns to the attention of the instructor.
- **ADA:** In compliance with University policy and equal access laws, I am available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that may be required for students with disabilities. Students are encouraged to register with Student Disability Services to verify their eligibility for appropriate accommodations.
- **Misc.:** Please turn off cell phones, beeping watches, and other gadgets that make noise before entering our classroom. Absolutely no texting is permitted during class. I will subtract up to five points from your participation grade each and every time your phone rings or I see you texting during class.

## Further Resources

- **Jargon:** It's important to be on top of the technical terms used by philosophers. Please ask for clarification of terms in class. You can also consult Jim Pryor's online "[Philosophical Terms and Methods](#)." This is less important in this class than in more 'normal' philosophy classes, but it may help.
- **Reference:** The [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) is an excellent online resource, though entries can be lengthy. The [Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) has shorter entries, but it is not as scholarly.
- I may post some additional readings on my website if the assigned reading does not explain something with sufficient clarity.

# Assignment Calendar

8/21 Introduction  
8/23 Nagel - Ch 1  
8/28 Nagel - Ch 2  
8/30 Nagel - Ch 3  
9/4 Labor Day  
9/6 Meaning - Ch 21 + Supplemental  
9/11 Meaning - Ch 32 + Supplemental  
9/13 Review Day  
9/18 Exam 1 😊  
9/20 Frankl: 1 - 15  
9/25 Frankl: 16 - 40  
9/27 Frankl: 41 - 79  
10/2 Frankl: 80 - 115  
10/4 Taylor: The Meaning of Life  
10/9 Wolf: The Meanings of Lives  
10/11 Bailey: Frankl and Meaning  
10/16 Fall Break  
10/18 Craig - The Absurdity of Life without God  
10/23 Cottingham - The Meaning of Life and Transcendence  
10/25 Dahl - Morality and Meaning  
10/30 Interview Assignment Due by 11:59PM  
11/1 Foot - Free Will  
11/6 Jackson - Physicalism  
11/8 Fischer - Free Will and MR  
11/13 Brogaard and Smith  
11/15 Hinduism / Buddhism  
11/20 No Class  
11/22 No Class  
11/27 Transhumanism - Ch 1  
11/29 Transhumanism - Ch 23  
12/4  
12/6  
12/11 Final Exams  
12/13 Final Exams