

# **LIFE, DEATH, AND MEANING**

FHS 10, Section 5

Fall 2011

M/W 1:15 p.m.; KRV 167

Professor Amy Kind

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Office Hours:

M/W 10:30 – 11:45 a.m.

*or by appointment*

## **The FHS Program**

As the CMC catalog explains, the FHS program consists of a body of specially crafted courses designed to give first-year CMC students an introduction to some of the questions fundamental to individuals in their relationship to society. Each section of FHS is unique, exploring topics and texts within the professor's areas of expertise and interest, and each section has its own flavor and style. Despite the thematic differences between sections, all FHS courses aim to provide students with the analytical skills necessary to engage critically with issues, texts, and arguments and to express their ideas clearly, both orally and in writing. As such, these classes will be participatory and writing-intensive. They are meant to allow for a variety of opinions based on reasoned argumentation and grounded in the reading and interpretation of texts. Although these courses are not intended to be introductions to any of the particular disciplines in the humanities, different sections of FHS might nonetheless tend more toward the philosophical, the political, the historical, or some other approach reflecting the professor's expertise. The course materials typically include a diversity of media, among which are readings, music, film, and the various visual arts.

## **Course Description: Life, Death, and Meaning**

The Sisyphus of myth was condemned to an eternal punishment of rolling a stone up a hill, only to have that stone roll back down so that he was forced to begin his task anew. While Sisyphus's fate thereby epitomizes meaninglessness, many writers have thought that we are no better off than Sisyphus. Do our lives have meaning, or are we no better off than Sisyphus? If we're doomed to meaninglessness, what kind of attitude should we take to our existence? And regardless, how should we view death? Given my own background as a philosopher, this course will approach these issues largely from a philosophical perspective, although our readings will be drawn from different disciplinary sources and various media. Our class will be almost entirely discussion-based.

## **Course Texts**

There are five required texts for the course, all of which should be available for purchase at Huntley bookstore: *The Meaning of Life*, E. D. Klemke and Steven Cahn, eds.; *Philosophy and Death: Introductory Readings*, Samantha Brennan and Robert J. Stainton, eds.; *This Lovely Life*, Vicki

Forman; *Meaning in Life and Why it Matters*, Susan Wolf; and *Dialogues Concerning Personal Identity and Immortality*, John Perry. There are also several films that you will be expected to watch on your own (even if you have seen them before). All are available to rent via Amazon or iTunes.

## **Course Requirements**

### ***Papers***

There are three required writing assignments for the course. More information on each paper will be distributed approximately 10 days in advance of the paper deadline. The first two papers, each worth 15% of your course grade, will be approximately 1500 words on an assigned topic. The first is due to Sakai by Fri., Sept. 23 at 5 p.m.; the second is due to Sakai by Sun., Oct. 9 at 5 p.m. The third paper, worth 20% of your course grade, will be approximately 2000 words on an assigned topic. It will be due Sun., Nov. 6 by 5 p.m. You are entitled to **one** 24-hour extension (which will be granted automatically upon request) to be used on any of the papers. You do not need to provide any reason for the extension, but you must let me know that you are using it sometime before the paper deadline.

### ***In-Class Exam***

There will be one in-class exam held on Wed., Nov. 23. It will be worth 15% of your course grade.

### ***Presentation***

At the end of the semester, each student will have to give a 20-minute presentation on a topic of your own choosing relating to our course of study. This will be worth 25% of your course grade. The presentations will take place during our last two class meetings and also during our regularly scheduled exam slot (Wed., Dec. 14 at 2 p.m.).

### ***Attendance and Participation***

Attendance in class is required. We will be starting promptly at 1:15 p.m., and I expect you to be punctual. Barring exceptional circumstances, you should not be absent from class more than two times over the course of the semester. However, it is not enough merely to attend; you must also come to class having read and thought carefully about the assigned readings so that you are prepared to take an active part in our discussions. In general, you should be consistently and thoughtfully participating in our class discussions. By “thoughtful” I mean to remind you that it is quality, and not mere quantity, that matters when it comes to class participation. On occasion, I may ask for student volunteers to start our discussion, and this is also a factor related to class participation. Class participation counts for 10% of your course grade. If you are shy and find it difficult to contribute to our class discussions, please come talk to me in office hours.

\*\*Should you need special accommodations due to disability for anything relating to our class, please see CMC’s policy at <http://www.cmc.edu/dos/DSS/disabilitysupport.php> and also feel free to come talk to me.

### **Cell phones/Laptop policy**

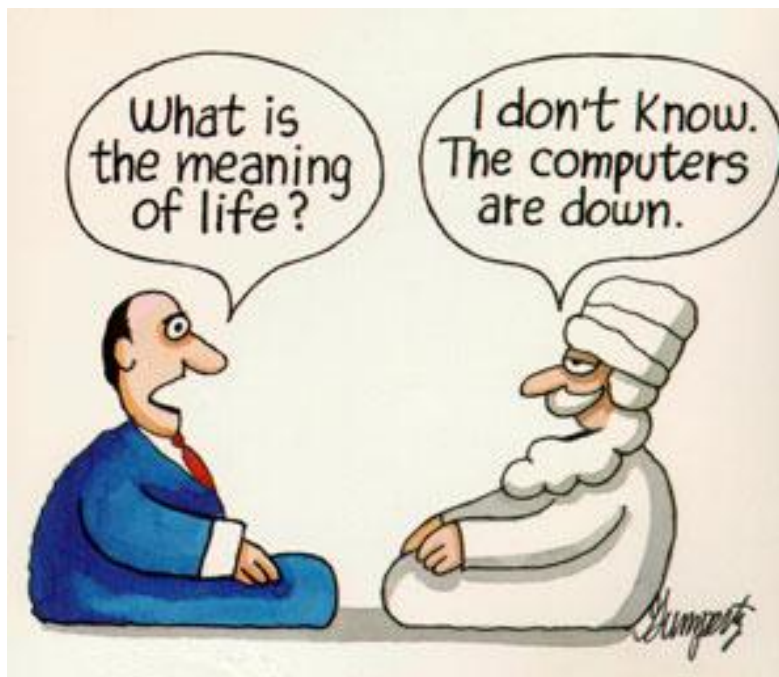
Please silence your cell phone during class and keep it stored away. If you are texting during class, I will ask you to leave. You are permitted to use your laptops in class to access course readings and/or for note-taking purposes. If I find that students are using laptops for other purposes, I will ban them in class. Violations of the cell phone/laptop policy will negatively impact your course participation grade.

### **FHS 10 and Philosophy**

Normally, to satisfy the GE in philosophy, students must take a CMC philosophy course numbered <60. However, with the approval of the Department Chair, students who take an FHS taught by a member of the CMC Department of Philosophy may satisfy their GE requirement in philosophy with any CMC philosophy class other than Phil 95 or Phil 198.

Some higher level CMC philosophy courses require one previous course in philosophy as a pre-requisite. An FHS taught by a member of the CMC Department of Philosophy will usually satisfy this pre-requisite.

Students who wish to major in Philosophy may, with the prior permission of the Department Chair, be permitted to substitute a higher-level CMC philosophy course in place of the required introductory course if they have taken an FHS taught by a member of the CMC Department of Philosophy.



## **Course Schedule**

All readings should be completed by the class period indicated. Readings marked (ML) are in the *Meaning of Life* anthology. Readings marked (P&D) are in the *Philosophy and Death* anthology. Readings marked (S) are available online at our Sakai course website. When you access a reading via Sakai, please print out a copy for yourself, and please always bring the relevant course texts with you to class.

Wed., Aug. 31                    Introduction to the Course

### ***Unit One: What counts as surviving?***

Fri., Sept. 2                    Perry, *Dialogues*, "The First Night"

Mon., Sept. 5                    NO CLASS – watch *The Prestige* (2006; dir. by Christopher Nolan)

Wed., Sept. 7                    NO CLASS – watch *Source Code* (2011; dir. by Duncan Jones)

Mon., Sept. 12                  Perry, *Dialogues*, "The Second Night"

Wed., Sept. 14                  Perry, *Dialogues*, "The Third Night"

\*\*Paper #1 Assigned

### ***Unit Two: Should we fear death?***

Mon., Sept. 19                  Barry, "The Instinctual Basis of the Fear of Death" (S)

Epicurus, "Letter to Menoeceus" and "The Principal Doctrines" (P&D)

Lucretius, excerpts from *On the Nature of Things* (P&D)

Wed., Sept. 21                  Nagel, "Death" (P&D)

Paper #1 Due – Fri., Sept. 23 at 5 p.m.

Mon., Sept. 26                  Rosenbaum, "How to Be Dead and Not Care" (S)

Wed., Sept. 28                  WRITING WORKSHOP

\*\*Paper #2 Assigned

### ***Unit Three: Should we value immortality, and if so, what kind?***

Wed., Oct. 3                    Williams, "The Makropulous Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality" (P&D)

Fischer, "Why Immortality Is Not So Bad" (P&D)

Borges, "The Immortal" (S)

Mon., Oct. 5                    Lepore, "The Ice Man" (S)

Shaw, "Cryoethics: Seeking Life After Death" (S)

Barry, "Life, Death, and Meaning" (S)

Paper #2 Due – Sun., Oct. 9 at 5 p.m.

Mon., Oct. 10 Bostrom, "Why I Want to be a Posthuman When I Grow Up" (S)  
Watch *Transcendent Man* (2011; dir. by Barry Ptolemy)  
\*\*also recommended: Kurzweil, excerpts from *The Singularity is Near* (S)

Wed., Oct. 12 WRITING WORKSHOP

Mon. Oct. 17 FALL BREAK

***Unit Four: What is the meaning of life?***

Wed., Oct. 19 Taylor, "The Meaning of Life" (ML)

Mon., Oct. 24 Singer, *How Are We to Live?*, Chs. 10 -11 (S)

\*\*also recommended: Benedict/Rachels, "Is Morality Relative?" (S)

Wed., Oct. 26 Wolf, "Meaning in Life"

Wolf, "Why it Matters"

\*\*Paper #3 Assigned

Mon., Oct. 31 Tolstoy, "My Confession" (ML)

Craig, "The Absurdity of Life Without God" (S)

\*\*also recommended: Tolstoy, "Death of Ivan Ilyich" (S)

Wed., Nov. 2 Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus" (ML)

Nagel, "The Absurd" (ML)

Watch *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (2005; dir. by Garth Jennings)

\*\*also recommended: Kind, "Life, the Universe, and Absurdity"

Paper #3 Due – Sun., Nov. 6 at 5 p.m.

***Unit Four: When (if ever) is it acceptable to take someone's life?***

Mon., Nov. 7 Carr, "The Rights of the Dying," (S)

Wed., Nov. 9 Rachels, "Euthanasia" (S)

\*\*also recommended: Rachels, "Active vs. Passive Euthanasia" (P&D)

Mon., Nov. 14 Singer, "Taking Life: Euthanasia," pp. 130-147 (S)

McBride Johnson, "Unspeakable Conversations" (S)

*Million Dollar Baby* (2004; dir. by Clint Eastwood)

Wed., Nov. 16 Beauchamp, "Suicide" (S)

\*\*Presentation Assigned

Mon., Nov. 21 Exam Review Session

Wed., Nov. 23 IN CLASS EXAM

Mon., Nov. 28	Forman, <i>This Lovely Life</i> , pp. 3 - 157
Wed., Nov. 30	Forman, <i>This Lovely Life</i> , pp. 158 - 259 <b>**Open discussion with Vicki Forman</b>
Mon., Dec. 5	<u>Student Presentations</u>
Wed., Dec. 7	<u>Student Presentations</u>
Wed., Dec. 14	<u>Student Presentations</u> [2 p.m. – 5 p.m.]