

PHIL 20203 – Death and Dying
Prof. Rhoda
Third Paper – The Meaning of Life

Format: Length *at least 3 full* pages, but *no more than 5* pages. 12 pt Times Roman. 1" margins. Double-spaced throughout. (Also, no vapid introductions! Dive right into the topic.)

References: Citations should be given for any material or ideas that you derive from course texts, my PowerPoint notes, or outside sources. Place citations in the text, formatted as follows:

- (Feldman, ##) – for Feldman (where ‘##’ is replaced with the page range)
- (Cottingham, ##) – for Cottingham
- (PP, date) – for course PowerPoint notes

Don’t quote excessively. Where possible, paraphrase. Include a bibliography.

Due Date: Thursday, April 14 *by the beginning of class*. You must submit *both* a hardcopy and a digital copy (MS Word format). Email the latter to me at rhoda.1@nd.edu. Hardcopies can also be dropped off in the mailbox outside my office (Malloy 327).

Topic: What is required for an individual human life to be objectively meaningful?

Description: The idea that an individual’s life could be objectively meaningful seems threatened by the idea that death is the end of it all for that individual. Just as one might question the wisdom of investing value in an enterprise one knows is destined to fail, it seems one might also question the wisdom of investing value in a person if one knows that person is destined for annihilation. And even if an individual’s life could somehow derive an objective meaning by leaving a positive legacy behind for others, physics tells us that eventually all life in the physical universe is destined for extinction. And so, similarly, it seems one might question the wisdom of investing value in a legacy if that too is knowingly destined to come to naught.

Accordingly, one might propose the following as necessary conditions for an individual human life to be objectively meaningful:

- Continued existence after death for the individual, or at least for sentient life in general
- Knowledge of at least the possibility that one’s central life goals and projects will not ultimately come to naught

Likewise, Cottingham proposes several other necessary conditions (cf. pp. 21ff. and pp. 66ff.), including:

- That life be deliberately and autonomously pursued in pursuit of goals that the agent sees as ultimately meaningful (pp. 21–22)
- That it be a fully human life open to emotional and rational engagement with others (pp. 23ff.)
- That there be at least modest prospects of success in that endeavor (cf. pp. 66ff.)
- That this be a fundamentally *moral* cosmos, one that provides an objective and resilient normative framework for life (pp. 70–71)
- Continued growth, creativity, and adventure, with the attendant risks (p. 82)
- A religious or quasi-religious mindset, a hopeful and trusting affirmation of the fundamental goodness and wonder of things (pp. 85, 90–91)

At any rate, in considering the topic I want you (a) explain the question by saying what it is for a person’s life to be *objectively* meaningful, and (b) articulate, argue for, and defend what you think is minimally required for such to be the case. Again, you should *argue* for the necessity of each of your proposed conditions and *defend* your suggestions against likely objections.