

Essay Three
HMXP102
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Central Question, this section: What is the relationship between the human self and the natural order?

Central Question, this section: What meaning, if any, does human existence have?

To sum up the accounts of human nature encountered in sections III and IV of this course, we can speak of a “modernist” perspective and a “theological” perspective.

The modernist perspective is informed by contemporary science and is expressed by our biologists, Ridley, Wilson, and Orr, and by the existentialist philosopher, Camus, the writer Conrad, and the film-maker Coppola. On this view, we see that the influence of our biology on our nature is significant: much of what we are is a product of our biological origins. This perspective reveals a human nature that can be savage and either caught up in physical urges or radically divorced from them. The overall meaning or purpose of human life, from this point of view, is difficult to see, though the individual may act to endow his or her life with meaning.

From a theological point of view, human being is or can be imbued with an element of the sacred or divine. According to Moore, the sacred can be found or created in ordinary, everyday acts or events. Tillich suggests that the sacred is the object of our “ultimate concern”, and can have many symbols. These acts and beliefs appear to endow the individual human life with meaning or purpose. If they do not confer objective meaning on all of human existence, they may provide such meaning, at a subjective level, as is possible.

Your task in this essay is to state and defend a claim about the meaning of human life, as informed by the above two perspectives. Is human life ultimately without meaning or significance? Do our individual acts or beliefs have the capacity to make our lives meaningful? A complete essay will include the following:

- A clear statement of the meaning of human life (thesis);
- Statement and explanation of the view on the meaning of human life of one or more of the following: Ridley, Wilson, Orr, Conrad, or Coppola;
- Statement and explanation of the view on the meaning of human life of one or more of the following: Camus,¹ Moore, and Tillich;
- A clear demonstration of the relationship between (2) and (3), as you see it (support for your thesis).

Requirements:

- Maximum 1500 words; include a word-count on your essay.
- Please double space your essay.
- Include a works cited page and use proper in-text citation.
- Due Monday, Dec. 5 at noon: submit to Turnitin.com and bring me a hard copy – KINARD 323.

¹ Note that while Camus is a “modernist”, his discussion is directed primarily towards the question of the meaning of human life in this context, rather than on our biological nature.