



PHIL 1200: The Meaning of Life

Fall 2016

Tuesdays & Thursdays 2:35—3:55 p.m.

Azrieli Theatre 101

Instructor information

Dr. David Matheson
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Office hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays 1:00—2:30 p.m.;
Fridays 3:00—4:00 p.m. (Note that my administrative
obligations as chair of the department will occasionally
require me to cancel my regularly scheduled office hours. If
you don't find me in my office during these hours, feel free
to email me for an alternative appointment.)

Description & objective

To wonder about the meaning of life is to wonder about what makes for a meaningful life—the sort of life that is not just good but outstandingly good. In this course we will explore a number of philosophical perspectives on the topic. We will explore some gloomy, “nihilist” perspectives according to which there’s really no meaning of life at all. We will explore “supernaturalist” perspectives that tie the meaning of life to a spiritual realm or divine being. And we will explore “naturalist” perspectives that tie the meaning of life to more down-to-earth things.

The objective of the course is to provide you with useful tools for sorting out your own coherent perspective on the meaning of life. The tools include an enhanced awareness of the various existing perspectives and a well-developed ability to evaluate the relative merits of those perspectives.

Attendance & lecture schemata

Nothing is more important for your performance in the course than attending the lectures and taking good notes. To assist you with the latter, I will post “lecture schemata” on cuLearn in advance of the associated lectures. The schemata are essentially just sets of incomplete lecture notes that you will be expected to fill in based on your lecture attendance.

Because this is university and you’re all adults, I don’t keep a record of lecture attendance. But don’t be misled by this into thinking that you can regularly skip lectures and still do well in the course. And be forewarned: if you do skip lectures—if you miss them for anything other than a legitimate, verifiable reason (ask me in advance if you’re genuinely unsure about what this means)—you’re on your own when it comes to filling in the relevant lecture schemata: I won’t help you fill them in after the fact.

Readings & textbook

I’ve assigned a number of course readings, corresponding to the various perspectives on the meaning of life that we will explore. You should do all of these readings, but I recommend doing each one after it’s dealt with in the lectures. This will help you make more sense of the readings, and not get bogged down in their merely peripherally important details.

Most of the readings will be drawn from the following required textbook, which is available at the University Bookstore:

Klemke, E.D. & S. M. Cahn, eds. (2008). *The meaning of life: A reader (third edition)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Three readings not in the textbook are:

- Metz, T. (2015). Précis of *Meaning in life: An analytic study*. *Journal of Philosophy of Life*, 5, i—iv.
http://www.philosophyoflife.org/jpl2015si_precis.pdf
- Nietzsche, F. ([1891] 1994). *Thus spake Zarathustra: A book for all and none* (trans. T. Common), Sections 1—6. Ames, IA: The EServer Project at Iowa State University.
<http://philosophy.eserver.org/nietzsche-zarathustra.txt>
- Taylor, R. (1999). The meaning of life. *Philosophy Now*, 24, 13—4.

The first two of these are freely available at the indicated online sources. I will make the third available on cuLearn.

Evaluation

In-class tests (2x30%=60%). There will be two in-class tests in the course. Their purpose is to ensure that you are understanding the perspectives we explore in the lectures and developing the relevant evaluative skills. The first test will be on October 13, the second on November 24.

Term paper (=40%). You will also be expected to write a term paper, approximately five double-spaced, typed pages (1,500 words) in length. I will post the paper topic options on cuLearn at the beginning of the examination period. The paper technically counts as a take-home examination, and is thus due on the final day of the examination period, December 22. I will provide you with more thorough guidelines and suggestions for writing the paper as the end of classes approaches.

Schedule

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|-----------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| Sept 8 | | Introduction (no readings) |
| Sept 13 & 15 | <i>Nihilist perspectives</i> | Schopenhauer: On the sufferings of the world |
| Sept 20 & 22 | | Nagel: The absurd |
| Sept 27 & 29 | <i>Supernaturalist perspectives</i> | Tolstoy: My confession Pojman: Religion gives meaning to life |
| Oct 4 & 6 | | Fackenheim: Judaism and the meaning of life Quinn: The meaning of life according to Christianity |
| Oct 11 | | Nozick: Philosophy and the meaning of life |
| Oct 13 | | First in-class test |
| Oct 18 & 20 | <i>Naturalist perspectives</i> | Nietzsche: <i>Thus spake Zarathustra</i> Camus: The myth of Sisyphus |
| Oct 25 & 27 | | Fall break |
| Nov 1 & 3 | | Schlick: On the meaning of life Baier: The meaning of life |
| Nov 8 & 10 | | Feinberg: Absurd self-fulfillment |
| Nov 15, 17 & 22 | | Taylor: The meaning of life (textbook) Taylor: The meaning of life (<i>Philosophy Now</i>) |
| Nov 24 | | Second in-class test |
| Nov 29 & Dec 1 | | Wolf: Meaning in life Metz: Précis of <i>Meaning in life</i> |
| Dec 6 & 8 | | Review and term paper discussion (no readings) |
| Dec 22 | | Term paper due |

Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies (2016-17)

Assignments:

Unless specifically told otherwise by their instructors, students:

- must not use a plastic or cardboard cover or paper clips
- must staple the paper (there is a stapler on the essay box)
- must include the following:
 - student name
 - student number
 - course number and section
 - instructor's name
- No assignments will be accepted after the last day for handing in term work – see dates in next column.
- Assignments handed in through the essay box (just inside the glass doors, Paterson Hall, Floor 3A) must be dropped into the box by **4:15** on a regular business day in order to be date-stamped with that day's date. Assignments handed in after 4:15 or on a non-business day will be stamped as having been handed in on the next business day.
- Students are required to keep copies of their assignments. If your paper is lost at any point, you will be considered not to have submitted it if you cannot produce a copy immediately on request.

Deferrals for Term Work:

If you miss a final examination and/or fail to submit a final assignment by the due date because of circumstances beyond your control, you may apply for a deferral of examination/assignment. For deferred examinations, you must apply within 5 working days after the scheduled date of your exam. To apply for deferral of a final assignment, you must apply within 5 working days of the last scheduled day of classes. Visit the Registrar's Office for more information.

Plagiarism:

It is the responsibility of each student to understand the meaning of 'plagiarism' as defined in the Undergraduate or Graduate Calendars, and to avoid both committing plagiarism and aiding or abetting plagiarism by other students. (Undergraduate Calendar Academic Regulations, section 14.3, or <http://calendar.carleton.ca/undergrad/regulations/academicregulationoftheuniversity/acadregsuniv14/>)

Academic Accommodation:

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows:

Pregnancy obligation: write to your professor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details visit the Equity Services website: <http://www2.carleton.ca/equity/>

Religious obligation: write to your professor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details visit the Equity Services website: <http://www2.carleton.ca/equity/>

Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: The **Paul Menton Centre** for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send your **Letter of Accommodation** at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (*if applicable*). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with your professor to ensure

accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the PMC website for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally-scheduled exam (*if applicable*) at <http://www2.carleton.ca/pmc/new-and-current-students/dates-and-deadlines/>

You can visit the Equity Services website to view the policies and to obtain more detailed information on academic accommodation at <http://www2.carleton.ca/equity/>

Important Dates:

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|------------|---|
| Sept. 7 | Classes start. |
| Sept. 20 | Last day for registration and course changes in Fall and Fall/Winter courses. |
| Sept. 30 | Last day for entire fee adjustment when withdrawing from Fall term or two-term courses. |
| Oct. 10 | Thanksgiving Day – University closed. |
| Oct. 24-28 | Fall Break – no classes. |
| Nov. 25 | Last day for tests or examinations in courses below 4000-level before the Final Examination period. |
| Dec. 9 | Last day of classes, Fall term. Classes follow a Monday schedule. |
| Dec. 9 | Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for Fall term courses. |
| Dec. 9 | Last day to withdraw from Fall term courses (academic purposes only). |
| Dec. 10-22 | Final examinations for Fall courses, mid-terms for Fall/Winter courses. Exams are normally held all seven days of the week. |
| Dec. 22 | Take-home exams are due. |
| Jan. 5 | Winter term classes begin. |
| Jan. 18 | Last day for registration and course changes in Winter term classes. |
| Jan. 31 | Last day for entire fee adjustment when withdrawing from winter courses or winter portion of two-term courses. |
| Feb. 20 | Family Day – University closed. |
| Feb. 20-24 | Winter Break, no classes. |
| Mar. 24 | Last day for tests or examinations in courses below 4000-level before the Final Examination period. |
| Apr. 7 | Last day of Fall/Winter and Winter term classes. Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for term work for Fall/Winter and Winter term courses. |
| Apr. 7 | Last day to withdraw from Fall/Winter and Winter term courses (academic purposes only). |
| Apr. 10-25 | Final Examinations. Exams are normally held all seven days of the week. |
| Apr. 14 | Good Friday – University closed. |
| Apr. 25 | Take-home exams are due. |

Addresses:

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| Department of Philosophy: | 3A35 Paterson Hall www.carleton.ca/philosophy 520-2110 |
| Registrar's Office: | 300 Tory www.carleton.ca/registrar 520-3500 |
| Student Academic Success Centre: | 302 Tory www.carleton.ca/sasc 520-7850 |
| Writing Tutorial Service: | 4 th Floor, Library http://www1.carleton.ca/sasc/writing-tutorial-service/ 520-6632 |
| MacOdrum Library | http://www.library.carleton.ca/ 520-2735 |