



PHIL 1200A: The Meaning of Life
Summer 2013
Tuesdays & Thursdays 11:35 a.m.-2:25 p.m.
Loeb Building B146

Instructor information

Dr. David Matheson
 Department of Philosophy, 3A45 Paterson Hall
 613-520-2600 ext. 1928
 david_matheson@carleton.ca
 Office hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays,
 2:35-3:35 p.m.

Description & objectives

What makes for a meaningful life is one of the most important and enduring philosophical questions. The primary objective of this course is to inspire you to reflect about your own answer to the question by familiarizing you with a range of relevant philosophical perspectives.

We will begin by considering a line of thought leading to the troubling conclusion that there is no meaning of life, along with some "nihilist" perspectives that share a commitment to this conclusion. We will then consider some "transcendentalist" perspectives, which attempt to overcome nihilism by tying the meaning of life to something outside of life. In the final section of the course we will examine various "immanentist" perspectives, according to which the meaning of life is to be found, and nihilism is to be overcome, by looking within life itself.

A secondary objective of the course is to introduce you to some elementary aspects of expressing your views on such matters in a philosophical essay.

Text, readings, & lecture schemata

All but two of the assigned readings will be drawn from the following text, available at the Carleton University Bookstore:

Klemke, E.D. & S.M. Cahn, eds. (2008). *The meaning of life: A reader, 3rd ed.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

The two readings not drawn from the course text are the following, available freely from the noted on-line sources:

Horban, P. (1993). Writing a philosophy paper.
<http://www.sfu.ca/~horban/writing1.htm>

Nietzsche, F. (1891). *Thus spake Zarathustra*, trans. Thomas Common. <http://philosophy.eserver.org/nietzsche-zarathustra.txt>

Your instructor will periodically post lecture schemata on cuLearn, to help ensure that you understand the core concepts of the lectures on assigned readings. These schemata will indicate the relevant core concepts, while leaving blank the details of the lecture discussions of them.

Simply reading the lecture schemata and text will be a poor substitute for reading them in the light of the lecture discussions. *Note, then, that you cannot expect to do well in this course if you fail regularly to attend class.*

Evaluation

Midterm essay. (30% of overall grade.) You will be expected to submit a short midterm essay (due July 23) on an assigned topic. The week before the essay is due, your instructor will discuss the nature of a philosophical essay and distribute the essay topics from which you may choose. The essay should be approximately two and a half typed, double-spaced pages (*ca.* 750 words) in length, and must be submitted in hard-copy form.

Test. (30% of overall grade.) On August 6 there will be an in-class test, designed to gauge your knowledge of the various philosophical perspectives we have examined in the course up to that point. The test will involve short answer as well as multiple choice questions.

Final essay. (40% of overall grade.) In lieu of sitting a formally scheduled final examination, you will also be expected to write a final, end of term essay. The final essay should be approximately twice the length of the midterm essay. Final essay topics will be distributed in the last class. A hard copy of the essay (to be submitted to the Philosophy Department's essay drop box, Floor 3A of Paterson Hall) will be due on the last day of the later summer term's examination period, August 22.

Calendar

July 4	Introduction	
July 9	Nihilist perspectives	Schopenhauer, "On the sufferings of the world"
July 11		Nagel, "The absurd"
July 16	Transcendentalist perspectives	Tolstoy, "My confession" Pojman, "Religion gives meaning to life" Fackenheim, "Judaism and the meaning of life"
July 18		Horban, "Writing a philosophy paper" Quinn, "The meaning of life according to Christianity"
July 23	Midterm essay	Nozick, "Philosophy and the meaning of life" Baier, "The meaning of life"
July 25	Immanentist perspectives	Camus, "The myth of Sisyphus" Taylor, "The meaning of life"
July 30		Feinberg, "Absurd self-fulfillment"
August 1		Klemke, "Living without appeal" Wolf, "Meaning in life"
August 6	Test	Russell, "A free man's worship"
August 13		Schlick, "On the meaning of life"
August 15		Nietzsche, from <i>Thus spake Zarathustra</i>
August 17-22 (examination period)	Final essay	

Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies

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 in the lower right corner of the cover sheet:
 - student name
 - student number
 - course number and section
 - instructor's name
- The Philosophy Department does not accept assignments by FAX. You may send them by courier, if necessary.
- 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://www4.carleton.ca/calendars//ugrad/current/regulations/a_cadregsuniv14.html#14.3)

Academic accommodation 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 me 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 me to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the PMC website for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally-scheduled exam (if applicable).

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

Important dates

- May 6 Classes start.
- May 13 Last day for registration and course changes for early summer courses.
- May 17 Last day for registration and course changes for full summer courses.
- May 20 Statutory holiday, university closed.
- May 31 Last day for a full fee adjustment when withdrawing from early summer courses.
- June 7 Last day to withdraw from full summer courses with a full fee adjustment.
- June 18 Last day for early summer 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 courses that end on this day.
- June 18 Last day for academic withdrawal from early summer courses.
- June 21-26 Final examinations.
- July 1 Statutory holiday, university closed.
- July 3 Late summer courses begin and full summer courses resume.
- July 9 Last day for registration and course changes for late summer courses.
- July 19 Last day for entire fee adjustment when withdrawing from late summer courses.
- Aug. 5 Statutory holiday, university closed
- Aug. 15 Classes follow a Monday schedule. Last day for late and full summer 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 courses that end on this day.
- Aug. 15 Last day for academic withdrawal from late summer and full summer courses.
- Aug. 17-22 Final examinations.

Addresses

Department of Philosophy
3A46 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

Paul Menton Centre
500 University Centre
www.carleton.ca/pmc
520-6608

Writing Tutorial Service
4th Floor, Library
www.carleton.ca/wts
520-6632

MacOdrum Library
<http://www.library.carleton.ca/>
520-2735