



PHIL 1200: The Meaning of Life
Winter 2014
Tuesdays & Thursdays, 1:05-2:25 p.m.
Kailash Mital Theatre (Theatre A), Southam Hall

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

The question of life's meaning is one of the most important and enduring of philosophical questions. The primary objective of this course is to inspire you to reflect on 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 a supernatural realm beyond 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 the natural realm of 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 spoke Zarathustra*, trans. T. 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 in class, February 13) 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 March 20 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 winter term's examination period, April 26.

Calendar

Jan 7 & 9	<i>Nihilist perspectives</i>	Introduction Schopenhauer, On the sufferings of the world
Jan 14 & 16		Nagel, The absurd
Jan 21 & 23	<i>Transcendentalist perspectives</i>	Tolstoy, My confession Pojman, Religion gives meaning to life
Jan 28 & 30		Fackenheim, Judaism and the meaning of life Horban, Writing a philosophy paper
Feb 4 & 6		Quinn, The meaning of life according to Christianity
Feb 11 & 13	Midterm essay (Feb 13)	Nozick, Philosophy and the meaning of life
Feb 18 & 20 (winter break)		
Feb 25 & 27	<i>Immanentist perspectives</i>	Baier, The meaning of life

Mar 4 & 6		Camus, The myth of Sisyphus Taylor, The meaning of life
Mar 11 & 13		Feinberg, Absurd self-fulfillment
Mar 18 & 20	Test (Mar 20)	Wolf, Meaning in life
Mar 25 & 27		Schlick, On the meaning of life
Apr 1 & 3		Nietzsche, from <i>Thus spoke Zarathustra</i>
Apr 8		Nietzsche, from <i>Thus spoke Zarathustra</i> (cont'd)
Apr 11-26 (examination period)	Final essay (Apr 26)	

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 below.

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 www4.carleton.ca/calendars//ugrad/current/regulations/acadregsuniv14.html#14.3)

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 me 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: www2.carleton.ca/equity/

Religious obligation: write to me 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: 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 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*) at 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 www2.carleton.ca/equity/

Important Dates

- Sept. 5 Classes start (after Orientation events).
- Sept. 18 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. 11 University Day – no undergraduate classes.
- Oct. 14 Thanksgiving Day – university closed.
- Oct. 28–Nov. 1 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. 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 No classes or examinations take place. Review classes may be held, but no new material may be introduced.
- Dec. 11-22 Final examinations for Fall courses, mid-terms for Fall/Winter courses.
- Dec. 22 Take-home exams are due.
- Jan. 6 Winter term classes begin.
- Jan. 17 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. 17-21 Winter Break, classes suspended.
- Mar. 25 Last day for tests or examinations in courses below 4000-level before the Final Examination period.
- Apr. 8 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. 8 Last day to withdraw from Fall/Winter and Winter term courses (academic purposes only).
- Apr. 9-10 No classes or examinations take place. Review classes may be held, but no new material may be introduced.
- Apr. 11-26 Final Examinations. Exams will not be held Apr. 18-20.
- Apr. 18 Good Friday—university closed.
- Apr. 26 Take-home exams are due.

Addresses

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
4th Floor, Library
www1.carleton.ca/sasc/writing-tutorial-service/
520-6632

MacOdrum Library
www.library.carleton.ca/
520-273