



PHIL 1200: The Meaning of Life

0.5 credit. An introduction to concerns expressed by the perennial philosophical question, “What is the meaning of life?” Students will be familiarized with the major philosophical approaches to life’s meaning through a consideration of various contemporary and late modern works in the philosophy of life.

Late Summer 2019
Mondays & Wednesdays,
6:05—8:55 p.m.
238 Tory Building

Dr. David Matheson
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Office hours:
Tuesdays & Thursdays,
5:00—6:00 p.m.

Overview & 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. These tools include an enhanced awareness of the various existing perspectives and a well-developed ability to assess 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. These 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. (2017). *The meaning of life: A reader (fourth 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

You will be expected to complete two in-class tests in the course. The first test, on July 15, will be worth 40% of your overall grade. The second test, on August 7, will be worth 60% of your overall grade. Both tests will consist of a number of short-answer questions and a few brief-essay questions, aimed at gauging your understanding of the various perspectives presented in class and giving you the opportunity to assess the merits of those perspectives.

There is no final examination for this course.

Schedule

Although we will cover all the perspectives and readings listed in the following schedule (in the order in which they are presented), the schedule is nevertheless tentative because we may fall behind or jump ahead, date-wise. Some perspectives and readings may take more time to discuss than anticipated, others less.

July 3	<i>Introduction & nihilist perspectives</i>	Schopenhauer, “On the Sufferings of the World” • Gowans, “The Buddha’s Message” • Nagel, “The Absurd”
July 8	<i>Supernaturalist perspectives</i>	Tolstoy, “My Confession” • Fackenheim, “Judaism and the Meaning of Life”
July 10		Quinn, “The Meaning of Life According to Christianity” • Nozick, “Philosophy and the Meaning of Life”
July 15		Test 1
July 17	<i>Naturalist perspectives</i>	Nietzsche, <i>Thus Spake Zarathustra</i> (Sections 1—6) • Camus, “The Myth of Sisyphus”
July 22		Schlick, “On the Meaning of Life” • Baier, “The Meaning of Life” • Feinberg, “Absurd Self-fulfillment”
July 24		Taylor, “The Meaning of Life” (textbook) • Taylor, “The Meaning of Life” (<i>Philosophy Now</i>)
July 29		Wolf, “Meaning in Life”
July 31		Metz, “Précis of <i>Meaning in Life</i> ”
August 5		<i>No class—statutory holiday</i>
August 7		Test 2
August 12	<i>Conclusion & review</i>	

Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies (Summer 19)

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 on the first page: student name and number; course name and number; instructor's name.
- 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.

Evaluation:

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

Deferrals for Term Work:

If students are unable to complete term work because of illness or other circumstances beyond their control, they should contact their course instructor no later than *three working days* of the due date. Normally, any deferred term work will be completed by the last day of the term. Term work cannot be deferred by the Registrar.

Deferrals for Final Examinations:

Students are expected to be available for the duration of a course including the examination period. Occasionally, students encounter circumstances beyond their control where they may not be able to write a final examination or submit a take-home examination. Examples of this would be a serious illness or the death of a family member. If you miss a final examination and/or fail to submit a take-home examination by the due date, you may apply for a deferral no later than *three working days* after the original due date (as per the University Regulations in [Section 2.4, 2.5 and 2.5.1 of the Undergraduate Calendar](#)). Visit the [Registrar's Office](#) for further 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 12.0, or [Academic Integrity < Carleton University](#)

Academic Accommodation:

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term:

- *Pregnancy or 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.
- *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 test or exam requiring accommodation. After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with your professor to ensure accommodation arrangements are made.

Important Dates:

May 6	Classes start.	July 1	Statutory holiday, University closed.
May 13	Last day for registration and course changes for <u>early</u> summer courses.	July 2	Late summer courses begin and full summer courses resume.
May 17	Last day for registration and course changes for <u>full</u> summer courses.	July 9	Last day for registration and course changes for late summer courses.
May 20	Statutory holiday, University closed.	July 22	Last day to withdraw from late summer courses with a full fee adjustment. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.
May 24	Last day for a full fee adjustment when withdrawing from <u>early</u> and <u>full</u> summer courses. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.	Aug. 5	Civic holiday, University closed
June 11	Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade for <u>early</u> summer courses before the official examination period.	Aug. 7	Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade for <u>late</u> or <u>full</u> summer courses before the official examination period.
June 18	Last day for <u>early</u> summer classes.	Aug. 14	Last day of late and full summer term classes. Classes follow a Monday schedule.
	Last day for handing in term work.		Last day for handing in term work.
June 21-27	Final examinations.		Last day for academic withdrawal from late summer and full summer courses.
June 27	Take-home examinations for early summer courses are due.	Aug. 17-23	Final examinations.
		Aug. 23	Take-home examinations for late or full summer courses are due.

Useful Contacts:

Department of Philosophy: 3A35 Paterson Hall – (613) 520-2110
www.carleton.ca/philosophy

Registrar's Office: 300 Tory Building – (613) 520-3500
www.carleton.ca/registrar