The meaning of life
PHIL 1200A

Late Summer Term 2010
(July 5-Aug 24)
Wed & Thu 6:05-8:55 p.m.
Mackenzie Building 4494

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Office hours: Wed & Thu 5:00-6:00 p.m.

Description & objective

What makes for a meaningful life is one of the most important and enduring philosophical questions. The objective of this course is to inspire you to reflect thoughtfully about your own answer to the question by familiarizing you with a range of relevant philosophical views. We will begin by considering a line of thought—“the nihilist’s worry”—that challenges the very possibility of a meaningful life. We will then consider “transcendentalist” responses to the nihilist’s worry that tie the meaning of life to something outside of it, before going on to look at alternative, “immanentist” responses that tie the meaning of life to what lies within it.

Readings & text

All readings, listed below in the order we will consider them (see Calendar section), come 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.

Evaluation

Reflection journal. (15% of overall grade.) Throughout the later summer term, you will be expected to make regular, brief entries in a personal journal, reflecting on the readings and lectures of each week. Your journal will be collected the day after the end of term classes (August 13), and evaluated in the light of the extent to which it reflects regular class attendance and attention to the material discussed. (Warning: copying entries from another student’s journal will be easily detected, and constitutes plagiarism—see Policies, below. Don’t do it.)

Midterm examination. (35% of overall grade.) Halfway through the later summer term (July 29), there will be an in-class midterm examination, consisting of a brief essay or two and/or some short-answer questions.

Final essay. (50% of overall grade.) In lieu of a sit-down, written final examination, you will also be expected to write a final essay (approximately six to seven pages, or 2,000 words in length) on an assigned topic. The essay will be due on the final day of the late summer term’s examination period, August 24.

Calendar

| Week 1 (July 7 & 8) | Introduction
| The nihilist’s worry | Tolstoy, My confession
| Camus, The myth of Sisyphus
| Schopenhauer, On the sufferings of the world |
| Week 2 (July 14 & 15) | The nihilist’s worry (cont’d)
| Transcendentalist responses | Nagel, The absurd
| Pojman, Religion gives meaning to life
| Fackenheim, Judaism and the meaning of life |
| Week 3 (July 21 & 22) | Transcendentalist responses
| (cont’d) | Quinn, The meaning of life according to Christianity |
Week 4 (July 28 & 29)  | Transcendentalist responses (cont’d)  | Baier, The meaning of life  
| Immanentist responses  | Taylor, The meaning of life  
| Midterm exam, July 29  |  |

Week 5 (Aug 4 & 5)  | Immanentist responses (cont’d)  | Feinberg, Absurd self-fulfillment  
|  | Klemke, Living without appeal: An affirmative philosophy of life  
|  | Wolf, Meaning in life  

Week 6 (Aug 11 & 12)  | Immanentist responses (cont’d)  | Russell, A free man’s worship  
| Reflection journal due, Aug 13  | Schlick, On the meaning of life  

Examination period (Aug 19-24)  | Final essay due, Aug 24  |  

### Policies

**Assignments: Reflection journals & final essays**

Unless specifically told otherwise by their instructors, students:

- must not use a plastic or cardboard cover or paper clips
- must staple the paper
- 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.
- No assignments will be accepted after the last day for handing in term work.
- 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 p.m. 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, page 56 or http://www.carleton.ca/cu0809uc/regulations/acadregsuniv14.html#14.3](http://www.carleton.ca/cu0809uc/regulations/acadregsuniv14.html#14.3)

**Academic accommodation**

For students with disabilities: Students with disabilities requiring academic accommodations in this course must register with the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities for a formal evaluation of disability-related needs. Registered PMC students are required to contact the centre, 520-6608, every term to ensure that I receive your letter of accommodation, no later than two weeks before the first assignment is due or the first in-
class test/midterm requiring accommodations. If you require accommodations for your formally scheduled exam(s) in this course, please submit your request for accommodations to PMC by June 11, 2010 for early summer term (June exams), and by July 30, 2010 for late and full summer term (August exams).

For religious observance: Students requesting academic accommodation on the basis of religious observance should make a formal, written request to their instructors for alternate dates and/or means of satisfying academic requirements. Such requests should be made during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist, but no later than two weeks before the compulsory academic event. Accommodation is to be worked out directly and on an individual basis between the student and the instructor(s) involved. Instructors will make accommodations in a way that avoids academic disadvantage to the student. Students or instructors who have questions or want to confirm accommodation eligibility of a religious event or practice may refer to the Equity Services website www.carleton.ca/equity/holy_days/ for a list of holy days and Carleton’s Academic Accommodation policies.

For pregnancy: Pregnant students requiring academic accommodations are encouraged to contact an Equity Advisor in Equity Services to complete a letter of accommodation. The student must then make an appointment to discuss her needs with the instructor at least two weeks prior to the first academic event in which it is anticipated the accommodation will be required.

Important dates

May 21  Last day for registration and course changes for early summer and full summer courses.
May 24  Statutory holiday, university closed.
May 31  Last day for a fee adjustment when withdrawing from early summer courses (financial withdrawal).
Jun 11  Last day to withdraw from early summer courses (academic withdrawal).
Jun 11  Last day for a fee adjustment when withdrawing from full summer courses (financial withdrawal).
Jun 11  Last day to submit to the Paul Menton Centre, for Students with Disabilities, formal examination accommodation for June examinations.
Jun 21  Last day of classes for early summer. Last day for handing in term assignments, subject to any earlier course deadline.
Jun 24-28  Early summer final examinations will be held.
Jun 30  Final deadline for summer term fee payment.
Jul 1  Statutory holiday, university closed.
Jul 5  Late summer courses begin and full summer courses resume. Late registration charges take effect at 12:00 a.m. for students registering only in late summer courses.
Jul 16  Last day for registration and course changes for late summer courses.
Jul 23  Last day for a fee adjustment when withdrawing from late summer courses (financial withdrawal).
Jul 30  Last day to withdraw from full summer and late summer courses (academic withdrawal).
Jul 30  Last day to submit to the Paul Menton Centre, for Students with Disabilities, formal examination accommodation for August examinations.
Aug 2  Civic holiday, university closed.
Aug 16  Last day of classes. Last day for handing in term assignments, subject to any earlier course deadline.
Aug 19-24  Final examinations in full summer and late summer courses will be held.
Sep 30  Last day for receipt of final grades in summer term courses.
Oct 1-2  Summer deferrals.

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/sac, 520-7850
Paul Menton Centre: 500 University Centre, www.carleton.ca/pmc, 520-6608
MacOdrum Library: www.library.carleton.ca, 520-2735