

**The Meaning of Life, Phil 1200A**  
Carleton University, Philosophy Department, Fall 2017  
Minto Centre 2000  
Tuesdays & Thursdays 10:00 – 11:30 pm

Instructor: Aleksandra Subic  
Department of Philosophy  
Paterson Hall, Room 3A38  
Office hours: Thursday 12:00 – 2:00 pm  
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### **Course Description**

We have all, on occasion, wondered about the meaning of life, and in this course we will embrace that wonder and examine the question of the meaning of life from a variety of perspectives. Some of these perspectives (spiritual/religious) offer a hopeful and comforting view that finds the meaning of human life intimately connected to some conception of the divine. Other perspectives, while moving away from the supernatural explanations to purely naturalistic accounts of the meaning and value of human existence, still offer positive alternatives. And moving still further away, to the other end of the philosophical spectrum, we will find the pessimist and nihilist accounts that simply deny any meaning of life. While we engage the answers to this question offered by the philosophical and religious tradition, we will also take note of the difference in the ways that the question itself has been understood. We will examine the question of legitimacy and the meaning of the question itself, and attempt to clarify what precisely we are actually asking when we pose the question of what, if anything, makes life meaningful.

### **Class Attendance and Learning Objectives**

Class attendance is mandatory and I strongly urge you not to miss any lectures, unless absolutely necessary for medical or other legitimate reasons. The material we will cover in class will be drawn from the textbook I have assigned for this course, and from the selection of philosophical and other writings that will be available to you online. The lectures are designed to make this material accessible, to help you gain greater understanding of the philosophical perspectives on this particular issue, and to provide you with tools necessary to analyse and evaluate them critically. For this reason, it is essential that you come to class. And, because your evaluation will be based, in part, on your knowledge and command of the information that will be given only in my lectures, I strongly encourage you to attend them all.

## Evaluation

Evaluation in this class consist of two in-class tests and the final/term paper. In-class tests are each worth 30% of your final grade. First test will be held on October 12<sup>th</sup>, and second on November 21<sup>st</sup>. These tests will gage your progress in the class, both in terms of your understanding of the material we cover in lectures, and in terms of your ability to engage this material critically. They are also designed to be completed within an hour, but you will all have hour and a half, the full length of the class, to work on your answers, so please use this time to your advantage. This is to address the need for extra time for some students with disabilities and others who may require additional time. The final/term paper is worth 40% of your final grade and is due on the last day of the official examination period. The topics will be announced later in the semester. If you are interested in writing your final paper on the topic of your own, make sure to discuss this with me and get your topic approved well in advance, before the beginning of examination period.

It is my experience that some students, even after studying very hard, perform poorly on an exam. It is either because of some personal crisis at the time of examination, or just because this type of examination (writing exams in class) does not play to their academic strengths. So, I would like to offer all of you a chance to better your final grade in case you are not happy with the results of your in-class tests and feel that the grade you received does not reflect your knowledge and level of preparedness. Giving you extra work to boost your grade would be just that, extra work, for both you and the TAs, so instead of an extra assignment I offer you a choice to lower the percentage of one of the tests from 30% to 20% (one that received a lower mark), and boost the percentage of your final paper from 40% to 50%.

## Important Note

I will hold office hours twice a week and I recommend that you come and see me if you have any trouble with the course material, any questions that I did not have time and opportunity to address in class, or if you need some help and guidance preparing for your exams and the final paper. I especially encourage those of you who decide to take the option of boosting the percentage of the final paper to come and talk to me, even bring a draft of your paper, since this paper will be worth half of your final grade.

## Course Readings

- Klemke, E.D. & S. M. Cahn, eds. (2008). *The meaning of life: A reader (third edition)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Selection of philosophical texts available on the cuLearn

## Reading Schedule

- September 7, Introduction (no readings)
- September 12 & 14, Tolstoy: *My Confession*
- September 19, Pojaman: *Religion Gives Meaning to Life* & September 21, Fackenheim: *Judaism and the Meaning of Life*
- September 26, Quin: *The Meaning of Life According to Christianity* & September 28, Metz: *Could God's Purpose Be the Source of Life's Meaning*
- October 3, Schopenhauer: *On the Suffering of the World*, October 5 & Nagel: *The Absurd*
- October 10, Pritchard: *Absurdity, Angst and the Meaning of Life* & **October 12, First in-class test**
- October 17, Camus: *The Myth of Sisyphus* & October 19, Wittgenstein: Selection from *Lectures on Religious Belief, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*
- **October 23-27, Fall break**
- October 31 & November 2, Nietzsche: Selection from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Gay Science, Human All Too Human, Beyond Good and Evil, Antichrist*
- November 7 & 9, Taylor: *The Meaning of Life*
- November 14 & 16, Nietzsche & Hesse: Selection from various works
- **November 21, Second in-class test**, November 23, Sartre: Selection from various works
- November 28, Wolf: *Meaning of Life* & Kekes: *The Meaning of Life*
- December 5 & 7, Review

## Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies (Fall/Winter 2017-18)

### 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 Final Exams:

If you miss a final examination (formally scheduled or take-home) because of circumstances beyond your control, you may apply for a deferral. You must apply within 3 working days after the scheduled date of your formally scheduled exam or within 3 working days after the due date of a take-home exam. Visit the Registrar's Office for more information:

<http://calendar.carleton.ca/undergrad/regulations/academicregulationsoftheuniversity/acadregsuniv2/#2.5>

### 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. <https://carleton.ca/registrar/academic-integrity/>

### 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](mailto: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:

Sept. 6	Classes start.
Sept. 19	Last day for registration and course changes for Fall term and Fall/Winter (two-term) courses.
Sept. 30	Last day for entire fee adjustment when withdrawing from Fall term or two-term courses.
Oct. 9	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Oct. 23-27	Fall Break – no classes.
Nov. 24	Last day for summative or final examinations in Fall term courses before the official examination period.
Dec. 8	Last day of Fall term classes. <b>Classes follow a Monday schedule.</b> Last day for academic withdrawal from Fall term courses. 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 a Fall term course.
Dec. 10-22	Final examinations for Fall term courses and mid-term examinations in two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.
Dec. 22	All take-home examinations are due.
Jan. 8	Classes begin.
Jan. 19	Last day for registration and course changes in the Winter term.
Jan. 31	Last day for a full fee adjustment when withdrawing from Winter term courses or from the Winter portion of two-term courses.
Feb. 19	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Feb. 19-23	Winter Break – no classes.
Mar. 27	Last day for summative or final examinations in Winter term or two-term courses before the official examination period.
Mar. 30	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Apr. 11	Last day of two-term and Winter term classes. <b>Classes follow a Friday schedule.</b> Last day for academic withdrawal from Fall/Winter and Winter courses. Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for two-term and for Winter term courses.
Apr. 14-26	Final examinations for Winter term and two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.
Apr. 26	All take home examinations are due on this day.

### Addresses:

Department of Philosophy:	3A35 Paterson Hall <a href="http://www.carleton.ca/philosophy">www.carleton.ca/philosophy</a> 520-2110
Registrar's Office:	300 Tory <a href="http://www.carleton.ca/registrar">www.carleton.ca/registrar</a> 520-3500
Academic Advising Centre:	302 Tory <a href="http://www.carleton.ca/academicadvising">www.carleton.ca/academicadvising</a> 520-7850
Writing Services:	4 <sup>th</sup> Floor, Library <a href="http://www.carleton.ca/csas/writing-services/">http://www.carleton.ca/csas/writing-services/</a> 520-3822
MacOdrum Library	<a href="http://www.library.carleton.ca/">http://www.library.carleton.ca/</a> 520-2735