

CARLETON UNIVERSITY

PHIL 1200: The Meaning of Life

Course Syllabus
Summer Term
2012

Professor
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Office Hours:
Tue/Thu
5:00-5:50 PM

Class Time

Tues/Thurs:
6:05 – 8:55

Location:
2202 Canal Bldg

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The aim of this course is to explore a number of questions about the meaning of life and related issues: Does life have any meaning or purpose, and, if it didn't, would this matter? Does the meaning of life depend on the existence of God and an afterlife? Should we fear death? Is there such a thing as the good life, and, if so, what is it? Does the question "Does life have meaning?" itself have any clear meaning? What is it, if anything, that makes life valuable or worthwhile?

In addressing these and other questions, we will examine a number of different approaches that have been defended by philosophers, writers and other reflective people, both in the past and the present, including theism, nihilism, existentialism, hedonism, stoicism, Buddhism and others. We will subject their answers to careful critical scrutiny and do our best to develop our own original approaches to the issues.

REQUIRED TEXT

The Meaning of Life: A Reader, 3rd edition, edited by E.D. Klemke and Steven M. Cahn (Oxford: Oxford University Press) Available in University Bookstore.

In addition to this text, many of our required readings will be taken from online sources. (The web addresses for these readings are provided below in the outline of topics and readings.)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Exams: There will be two major in-class exams. One will be held about the middle of the course, the second will be held in our final class. The exam on which students do best will be worth 40% of the overall grade, the other will be worth 30%. The format for these exams will be as follows: a week or so before the date of the exams students will be given a list of topics; the instructor will then select a number of these topics for students to describe, explain or evaluate on the exams.

Term Paper: Students will be required to write an essay of approximately 5-7 pages in length (1200-1500 words), which will be worth 30% of the overall grade. This will be a discussion paper, not a research paper, in which students will be required to analyze and evaluate a major issue discussed in the course. A list of topics for students to choose from will be posted on Web CT early in the course.

Optional Participation Grade: students will be given the option of having 10% of their grade determined by participation in class discussions. For those who choose this option, each exam will be worth 30%.

CLASS FORMAT

The emphasis in the course will be on reasoning, analysis and critical evaluation. Readings will be assigned for each class, and students will be expected to have read them. The role of the Instructor will be to guide students through the readings, to ensure that discussions remain focused on relevant and important issues, and to illustrate the processes of interpretation, analysis and criticism by repeated example in class.

WEB CT

Students must ensure that they have access to the Web CT for this course, as course notes as well as other information and material will be posted on it. (If you do not know how to access it, please contact the Instructor.)

SHORT LIST OF TOPICS/ISSUES

(For a more detailed list of topics and readings, see the course syllabus posted on Web CT.)

- 1) Introduction
- 2) Nihilism: life has no meaning or purpose
- 3) The Transcendent Approach – the meaning of life depends God's plan
- 4) Death: Is it a good thing or a bad thing?
- 5) Existentialism: we create our own meaning
- 6) Deconstructing the Issue – The question 'What is the meaning of life?' has no clear meaning
- 7) Hedonism: what makes life worthwhile is pleasure
- 8) Stoicism and Buddhism – the key to happiness is inner peace
- 9) Happiness as Self-Development
- 10) Doing Good – the meaning of life is to make the world a better place
- 11) Projects of worth – the meaning of life comes from projects of value
- 12) Transcendental Naturalism – true happiness is living in harmony with nature
- 13) Conclusion – final thoughts about the issue and suggestions for further work

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/acadre gsuniv14.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 <http://www2.carleton.ca/equity/accommodation/>

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 <http://www2.carleton.ca/equity/accommodation/>

Students with disabilities requiring academic accommodations in this course must register with the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) for a formal evaluation of disability-related needs. Documented disabilities could include but are not limited to mobility/physical impairments, specific Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/psychological disabilities, sensory disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and chronic medical conditions. Registered PMC students are required to contact the PMC, 613-520-6608, 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

only require accommodations for your formally scheduled exam(s) in this course, please submit your request for accommodations to PMC by the deadlines published on the PMC website: <http://www2.carleton.ca/pmc/new-and-current-students/dates-and-deadlines/>

Important Dates:

May 7	Early and full summer classes begin.
May 14	Last day for registration and course changes for early summer courses.
May 18	Last day for registration and course changes for full summer courses.
May 21	Statutory holiday – university closed.
May 31	Last day to withdraw from early summer courses with full fee adjustment.
June 8	Last day to withdraw from full summer courses with a full fee adjustment. Last day to submit to the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities, formal Examination Accommodation Forms for June examinations.
June 11-21	Fall/winter and winter term deferred final examinations will be held.
June 12	Last day for tests or examinations in courses below the 4000-level before the final examination period.
June 19	Last day of early summer classes for non-Engineering students. Last day for academic withdrawal from early summer courses. Last day for handing in term assignments, subject to any earlier course deadline.
June 22-27	Early summer examinations will be held.
June 30	Final deadline for summer term fee payment.
July 2	Statutory holiday – university closed.
July 3	Late summer classes begin. Full summer classes resume.
July 10	Last day for registration and course changes for late summer courses.
July 20	Last day for withdrawal from late summer courses with full fee adjustment.
July 27	Last day to submit to the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities, formal Examination Accommodation Forms for August examinations.
August 6	Statutory holiday – university closed.
August 8	Last day for tests or examinations in courses below the 4000-level before the final examination period.
August 15	Last day for late summer and full summer classes. Last day for handing in term assignments, subject to any earlier course deadline. Last day for academic withdrawal from late summer and full summer courses and any other courses that end this term.
August 18-23	Summer examinations will be held.
Sept. 28-29	Summer term deferred final examinations will be held.
Sept. 30	Last day for receipt of applications for review of final grades for summer term courses.

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:	4 th Floor, Library www.carleton.ca/wts 520-6632
MacOdrum Library	http://www.library.carleton.ca/ 520-2735