

CARLETON UNIVERSITY

PHIL 1200: THE MEANING OF LIFE

Course Syllabus
Summer Term
2018

Professor
Ken Ferguson

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3A54 Paterson

Office Hours:
TBA

Class Time

Mon/Wed
6:05-8:55 PM

Location: TBA

COURSE SUMMARY

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 it 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, or the best way to live one's life, and, if so, what is it? Does the question "Does life have meaning?" itself have any clear meaning? What is it that makes life valuable or worthwhile?

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

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Tests: There will be two in-class tests. One will be held about the middle of the course, the second will be held at the end of the course. The test on which students do best will be worth 40% of the overall grade, the other will be worth 30%. The format for these tests will be as follows: a week or two before the date of the test students will be given a list of questions; the instructor will then select several of these for students to answer.

Discussion Essay: Students will 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. It will involve analyzing and evaluating some issue central to the course. A list of topics for students to choose from will be posted on CuLearn early in the course.

Optional Participation Grade: Students will be given the option of having 20% of their grade determined by participation in class discussions. For those who choose this option, each exam will be worth 30% and the term paper 20%.

ACCESS TO CULEARN

Students must ensure that they have access to CuLearn, as class lectures and other material will be posted on it.

REQUIRED TEXT

The Meaning of Life: A Reader, 4th edition, edited by E.D. Klemke and Steven M. Cahn (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

In addition to this text, some required readings will be taken from online sources. (The web addresses for these readings are provided in the list of Topics and Readings on CuLearn.)

CLASS FORMAT

The emphasis in the course will be on reasoning, analysis and critical evaluation. 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 analysis and criticism by repeated example in class. Although attendance will not be taken, students are fully responsible for material missed due to absence.

SHORT LIST OF TOPICS/ISSUES

(For more details, see the list of Topics and Readings posted on CuLearn.)

- 1) Nihilism – Life has no meaning or purpose and so is not worth living
- 2) The religious approach – The meaning of life is dependent on God
- 3) Existentialism – We must create our own meaning
- 4) Death: is it a bad thing or a good thing?
- 5) Pleasure is what gives value to life
- 6) Stoicism and Buddhism – To achieve happiness we must control our desires
- 7) The meaning and purpose of life is to promote the good
- 8) Meaningful lives involve the pursuit of projects of worth and value
- 9) Meaningfulness in life is a function of social interaction and social context
- 10) Deconstructing the Issue – the question 'what is the meaning of life?' has no meaning

Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies
Summer 2018

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.

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 Deadlines:

Please review important dates and deadlines that pertain to summer courses here: <https://carleton.ca/registrar/registration/dates-and-deadlines/>

Useful Contacts:

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

Academic Advising Centre: 302 Tory
613-520-7850
www.carleton.ca/academicadvising

Writing Services: 4th Floor, Library
613-520-3822
<http://www.carleton.ca/csas/writing-services/>