

# PHILOSOPHY 1200A: MEANING OF LIFE

CARLETON UNIVERSITY

DR. KENNETH FERGUSON

## COURSE SYLLABUS

**TERM:** Spring Term 2020  
**TIME:** N/A  
**LOCATION** N/A

**INSTRUCTOR:** Ken Ferguson  
**EMAIL:** [kenneth.ferguson@carleton.ca](mailto:kenneth.ferguson@carleton.ca)

### CATALOGUE DESCRIPTION

#### PHIL 1200 [0.5 credit]

**THE MEANING OF LIFE:** 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.

### DETAILED 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? Does it matter whether life has meaning? Is the meaning of life dependent on the existence of God and an afterlife? Would immortality be a good thing or a bad thing? Is death, as some have argued, essential to the very possibility of a meaningful life? 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, absurdism, existentialism, hedonism, stoicism, Buddhism, moralism, and many others, as well as attempts to deconstruct the entire issue of the meaning of life as confused and misguided. We will discuss the pros and cons of these different approaches and subject them to careful critical scrutiny. Students will also be encouraged to develop their own approaches to the issues.

## Online Course

This is an entirely online, or distance, course. All course lectures will be pre-recorded, and will be available for students to access online; no in-person classes will be held. The PowerPoint slides on which lectures will be based will all be posted on CuLearn, as well as all course assignments, midterms, exams, etc., and students will submit all of their required course assignments through CuLearn.

## REQUIRED TEXT

*The Meaning of Life: A Reader*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, edited by E.D. Klemke and Steven M. Cahn (Oxford: Oxford University Press). This is a well-known text that students can easily order online (and may also be available in digital form).

In addition to this text, some readings will be posted on CuLearn, while others will be available online. The web addresses for these online readings are provided in the complete list of **Topics and Readings** posted on CuLearn.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

### MIDTERM

There will be a **midterm exam** worth 30% of the overall grade, which will have the following format. One week before the midterm is due, a list of study questions on topics central to the material that has been covered will be posted on CuLearn; the instructor will then select a number of these questions for students to answer on the midterm. The questions students must answer will be posted on CuLearn on May 22 and students must then return their answers any time on May 25.

### TERM PAPER

Students will be required to write an essay of approximately 5-7 pages in length (1500-2000 words), which will be worth 30% of the overall grade. This will be a discussion paper, not a research paper, which will involve analyzing and evaluating some issue central to the course. A detailed guide for the term paper will be posted on CuLearn early in the semester that will include a list of topics for students to choose from, along with other suggestions and guidelines for writing and submitting the paper. It will be due on June 8.

### FINAL EXAMINATION

There will be a final exam scheduled during the examination period, worth 40% of the overall grade for the course grade. The format for the final will be similar to that for midterm.

**See the detailed list of Topics and Readings for the course posted on CuLearn.**

## Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies (Summer 20)

### Assignments:

Please follow your professor's instructions on how assignments will be handled electronically. There will be NO hard copies placed in the essay box this summer.

### 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 4.3 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. ([Section 10.1 of the Undergraduate Calendar Academic Regulations](#))

### 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 [EDC](#) 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](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 test or exam requiring accommodation. After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with your professor to ensure accommodation arrangements are made.
- *Survivors of Sexual Violence:* As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per [Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy](#).
- *Accommodation for Student Activities:* Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Please contact your instructor 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.

### Important Dates:

May 4	Classes start.	July 1	Statutory holiday, University closed.
May 11	Last day for registration and course changes for <u>early</u> summer courses.	July 2	Late summer courses begin and full summer courses resume.
		July 9	Last day for registration and course changes for <u>late</u> summer courses.
May 15	Last day for registration and course changes for <u>full</u> summer courses.		
		July 17	Last day to withdraw from <u>late</u> summer courses with a full fee adjustment. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.
May 18	Statutory holiday, University closed.		
May 22	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. 3	Civic holiday, University closed
		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> summer and <u>full</u> summer courses before the official examination period.
June 9	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.		
June 16	Last day for <u>early</u> summer classes.	Aug. 14	Last day of <u>late</u> and <u>full</u> summer term classes.
	Last day for handing in term work, subject to any earlier course deadline.		<b>Classes follow a Monday schedule.</b>
	Last day for academic withdrawal from <u>early</u> summer courses.		Last day for handing in term work, subject to any earlier course deadline.
June 19-25	Final examinations.		Last day for academic withdrawal from <u>late</u> summer and <u>full</u> summer courses.
June 25	Take-home examinations for <u>early</u> summer courses are due.	Aug. 17-23	Final examinations.
		Aug. 23	Take-home examinations for <u>late</u> or <u>full</u> summer courses are due.

### Useful Contacts:

Department of Philosophy:	<a href="http://www.carleton.ca/philosophy">www.carleton.ca/philosophy</a> 520-2110
Registrar's Office:	<a href="http://www.carleton.ca/registrar">www.carleton.ca/registrar</a> 520-3500
Academic Advising Centre:	<a href="http://www.carleton.ca/academicadvising">www.carleton.ca/academicadvising</a> 520-7850
Centre for Student Academic Support:	<a href="https://carleton.ca/csas/">https://carleton.ca/csas/</a> 520-3822
Student Support Services :	<a href="https://carleton.ca/academics/support/">https://carleton.ca/academics/support/</a>