

CARLETON UNIVERSITY

PHIL 1200: THE MEANING OF LIFE

Course Syllabus
Winter Term
2018

Professor
Ken Ferguson

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Office Hours:
TBA

Class Time
Wed/Friday
10:05-11:25

Location: TBD

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

Midterm: There will be a midterm exam which will be worth 30% of the final grade. It will have the following form: one week before the date of the midterm a list of questions on topics central to the material covered will be distributed to students; the instructor will then select a number of these questions for students to answer on the midterm.

Term Paper: Students will be required to write a term paper worth 30% of the final grade. The paper will be about 6 – 8 pages in length (1500 – 2000 words). It will not be a research paper that requires library or Internet sources, but will consist of a critical discussion of some topic or issue central to the course. A list of topics, along with instructions and guidelines for writing the paper, will be available early in the term.

Final Examination: There will be a final exam, worth 40% of the final grade, scheduled during the examination period. It will have the same format as the midterm.

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) The meaning of life consists of the pursuit of projects of worth and value
- 9) The meaning or life is to develop your potential as a human being
- 10) Deconstructing the Issue – the question 'what is the meaning of life?' has no meaning

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 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. Classes follow a Monday schedule. 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. Classes follow a Friday schedule. 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 www.carleton.ca/philosophy 520-2110
Registrar's Office:	300 Tory www.carleton.ca/registrar 520-3500
Academic Advising Centre:	302 Tory www.carleton.ca/academicadvising 520-7850
Writing Services:	4 th Floor, Library http://www.carleton.ca/csas/writing-services/ 520-3822
MacOdrum Library	http://www.library.carleton.ca/ 520-2735