

PHIL 101: The Meaning of Life

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Who am I? What are we, as human beings? Why am I here? What should I do — in some particular circumstances, or with my life in general? What is my place in the universe? Does what I do matter? What *does* matter, and why?

These are some of the questions we will discuss in Philosophy 101: The Meaning of Life. This course will provide students with a loosely historical overview of a number of well-known philosophers' struggles with questions of identity, human nature, meaning, and value. In the process, students will hone their critical thinking and interpretive skills, and gain an understanding and appreciation for the variety of philosophical views on the subject while considering and refining their own sense of "the meaning of life."

Course Texts:

Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*

Sartre, *Existentialism Is A Humanism*

DeBeauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*

Fromm, *To Have or To Be*

Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*

Wolf, *Meaning of Life and Why it Matters*

Assignments:

- Three Exams:
 - Exam #1 — 20%
 - Exam #2 — 20%
 - Exam #3 — 25%
- Reading quizzes — 1 pt each, 25% total
- Attendance — 10%

Attendance & Make-Ups

Attendance at lecture is required. Students are permitted up to three “freebie” absences, where they may miss class without providing documentation or a reason for their absence. After three absences, each subsequent absence negatively impacts the student’s final grade.

Reading quizzes may *not* be made up. Exams may only be made up under extreme extenuating circumstances for which the student is able to provide documentation, preferably *before* the exam date if possible. Students should be advised that any make-up exams may be different in content from the regular version of the exam.

Disability Accommodations

Students with a disability or medical restriction who are requesting a classroom accommodation should contact the Disabled Student Services at 562-985-5401 or visit Brotman Hall, Suite 270 during 8AM-5PM weekday hours. Disabled Student Services will work with the student to identify a reasonable accommodation in partnership with appropriate academic offices and medical providers. Students are encouraged to reach out to DSS as soon as possible, and to bring the relevant paperwork to the professor at the beginning of the semester.

Withdrawal

Students are expected to be aware of and act in accordance with university withdrawal policies. Those students who do not attend class meetings or complete assigned coursework will be assigned an F for the course unless they withdraw in a timely manner.

Plagiarism, Cheating, and Academic Dishonesty:

In short: don’t do it. Make sure you are aware of what “plagiarism” is. Basically, it involves presenting someone else’s ideas as your own. This includes cases in which you are clearly “ripping off” someone else’s paper, book, or website, but it also includes cases in which you repeat something an author said or something your instructor said without properly attributing it (i.e., putting quotes around it and giving a citation for it), or

presenting an idea you got from an outside source “in your own words” without attribution. If you have any questions at all about what constitutes plagiarism, please do not hesitate to ask. Students found to be plagiarizing or cheating on any portion of any assignment will *at least* receive a 0 for that assignment, and possibly fail the course. Please familiarize yourself with CSULB’s policies on plagiarism and cheating here: <http://catalog.csulb.edu/content.php?catoid=2&navoid=30#cheating-and-plagiarism>

Schedule of Readings

	Monday	Wednesday
8/27	Plato, “Republic” (selection)	Plato, “Phaedo” (selection)
9/3	[Labor Day]	Descartes, <i>Meditations</i> I & II
9/10	Descartes, <i>Meditations</i> III	Descartes, <i>Meditations</i> VI
9/17	Nietzsche, “Twilight of the Idols” (selections)	Nietzsche, “The Gay Science” (selections)
9/24	[Exam #1]	Camus, <i>The Myth of Sisyphus</i> (selections)
10/1	Sartre, <i>Existentialism is a Humanism</i> pp. 17-39	Sartre, <i>Existentialism is a Humanism</i> pp. 39-54
10/8	Merleau-Ponty, <i>Phenomenology of Perception</i> pp.100-109, 139-148	Merleau-Ponty, <i>Phenomenology of Perception</i> pp. 464-473; 478-481
10/15	DeBeauvoir, <i>Ethics of Ambiguity</i> (pp. 7-18; 23-34)	DeBeauvoir, <i>Ethics of Ambiguity</i> (pp. 35-58)
10/22	DeBeauvoir, <i>Ethics of Ambiguity</i> (pp. 58-73)	DeBeauvoir, <i>Ethics of Ambiguity</i> (78-93; 134-135)
10/29	<i>Being In The World</i> movie	<i>Being In The World</i> discussion
11/5	[Exam #2]	Fromm, <i>To Have or To Be</i> (Chapters 1 & 2)
11/13	Fromm, <i>To Have or To Be</i> (Chapter 5) [Note: This class meets on Tuesday!]	Fromm, <i>To Have or To Be</i> (Chapters 6 & 8)
	[Thanksgiving Break]	
11/26	Taylor, <i>Ethics of Authenticity</i> (Chapters 1 & 2)	Taylor, <i>Ethics of Authenticity</i> (Chapters 3-5)
12/3	Taylor, <i>Ethics of Authenticity</i> (Chapters 6-8)	Taylor, <i>Ethics of Authenticity</i> (Chapters 9 & 10)
12/10	Wolff, “Meaning in Life”	Wolff, “Why it Matters”

Classroom Etiquette

- **General Etiquette:** Do not behave in any way that distracts from or disturbs the classroom environment. This includes late arrival to and early departure from class, speaking or whispering while others are speaking, using laptops for purposes other than those related to the class (e.g. facebook), texting, cell phones ringing, etc. (You may either be on the internet or your phone, OR you may be in my class, but not both). I reserve the right to ask any student engaged in distracting behaviors to leave the classroom, and repeated interruptions may result in failure of the course.
- **Controversial Issues:** Students are expected to participate appropriately and as adults during class discussions. We are a diverse academic community, representing different faiths, lifestyles, ethnicities, sexualities, and cultures. We may occasionally discuss controversial issues in class, so it is especially important that you show tolerance and respect for your fellow classmates at all times. There is an important difference between expressing an unpopular or controversial opinion and engaging in speech or action that is harmful to your fellow students or disruptive of the learning environment. The first can provoke other students to see the issue in new and unexpected ways, or show them the merit in views that are different from their own. A diversity of opinions expressed genuinely and respectfully makes for a lively and productive academic community. The second prevents other students from being able to participate fully in class or in extracurricular discussions, and thereby harms our academic community. Students are asked to make sure that their behavior contributes to a lively and productive community by engaging with each other respectfully and in good faith. If you have any questions or concerns about this policy, please feel free to contact me to discuss them.
- **Technology:** In general students are expected to put away any technology (phones, tablets, laptops, etc.) during class time. If you have a particular reason to use a piece of technology in our classroom, please let me know in advance, and if possible, sit towards the back of the classroom. Studies show that students using laptops for non-course-related purposes during class distract not only themselves but also many of the students around them, whether they are aware of it or not.
- **Recording: Under no circumstances may a student record any portion of this course without prior authorization from the instructor.** This includes lectures, in-class assignments, discussions among students, and discussions with the instructor either in the classroom or during office hours. If you have a reason to want to record any portion of this course, you must obtain prior authorization from the instructor. Any such recordings are only permitted for personal use, and may not be reproduced or distributed to any third party, including but not limited to posting on social media.

Biographical Information:

Rebecca Harrison is a PhD candidate in the Department of Philosophy at UC Riverside. She received her MA from Georgia State University in 2012. She is currently working on a dissertation that argues for thinking of Merleau-Ponty as a certain kind of realist, and considers some interesting consequences that result. Before coming to Riverside in 2012, she lived in Atlanta, New York, Pittsburgh, and New Orleans. She likes coffee and craft beer, is a middling-at-best musician (piano, guitar, and voice) and has been vegetarian for nearly 20 years. She has two dogs and a cat, and is happy to show you pictures of them if you ask nicely. View her webpage at <https://rdharrison.org/>

**Featured Image on pg. 1: Pierre-Auguste Renoir, “Luncheon of the Boating Party,” 1881.*