TOPICS IN PHILOSOPHY: THE MEANING OF LIFE
Philosophy 3345.001  Fall 2016
Time: Tuesday & Thursday 12:30-1:45  Location: Island Hall 164

Instructor: Dr. Glenn Tiller
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Office hours: Monday and Wednesday 1:00-3:00; Tuesday 11:00-12:00; and by appointment.

Course Description
This course is an exploration of one of the most profound philosophical issues: the meaning of life. While the general focus is philosophical, we will also draw on themes from literature, film, and religion, and findings from psychology and other sciences. The course has two basic but intertwined components. The first is divided into three general responses to the question of life’s meaning: (1) the sceptical response, which criticizes the purported intelligibility of the question ‘What is the meaning of life?’ as well as various assumptions that concern the notions of ‘meaning’, ‘value’, and ‘purpose’; (2) the theistic response, which claims that the meaning of life is to be found in the existence of a god; (3) the non-theistic alternative, which claims we must create personal meaning within a natural universe. The second component of the course examines a number of key metaphysical ideas that frame and support these responses.

Student Learning Outcomes
Successful completion of the course provides you with a broad historical overview of how philosophers have traditionally addressed the question of life’s meaning. In particular, you should achieve an understanding of the religious, the naturalistic, and the sceptical perspectives. These outcomes will be measured through in-class quizzes and tests and take-home essay assignments. By the end of the course you will be able to write philosophical essays on the various metaphysical hypothesis concerning the existence of the universe; you will also be able to write critical essays on the three general responses to life’s meaning (as listed above). Ideally, you will develop a richer, more coherent understanding of the nature of existence and the human condition. Since much of our time is spent on close textual analysis, you will also improve your reading comprehension skills and strengthen your abilities to construct logical arguments.

Required Text
2. Readings distributed in class or posted on Blackboard.

Attendance
All materials discussed in lectures and covered in the readings are the potential basis for quiz and test questions. Students are therefore expected to attend all lectures and keep up with assigned readings. A student who misses three classes without a reasonable excuse (e.g. medical) can expect to be penalized (up to a letter grade) on their final grade. If you don’t attend class, don’t expect to pass.
Requirements | Percentage of Final Mark
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1. Ten reading quizzes | Worth 10%
Description: Short quizzes held at the start of class, usually answerable in a word or sentence.

2. In class test, Sept. 29 | Worth 20%
Description: General test that will cover all materials up to and including September 27 and will take the entire period to write.

4. Essay, Nov. 1 | Worth 25%
Description: Essay topic and specific instructions to be distributed no later than October 6.

5. In class test, December 6 | Worth 20%
Description: General test with the same structure as the first test.

6. Essay, Due by the end of the exam period. | Worth 25%
Description: Essay topic and specific instructions to be distributed no later than December 1.

Grading Scale
All grades will be assigned on the standard scale: 90%-100%=A, 80%-89%=B, 70%-79%=C, 60%-69%=D, 59% and below=F.

Missed Test Policy
Students unable to write a test for a medical reason must provide a doctor’s note. If a student is unable to write a test for a similarly serious reason, documentation may be required. Make-up tests will be written at an arranged time under my supervision.

Classroom Etiquette
Philosophy is conversational. Feel free to ask any question about the material you please. If you did not understand something, you will be doing your colleagues and yourself a service if you request clarification. You are also free to argue for any philosophical position you find compelling, as long as you provide reasons for your point of view. It is inevitable that during discussions individual points of view will differ. When they do, our reaction will always be to patiently listen to the reasons offered for a particular conclusion and cooperatively evaluate those reasons.

E-etiquette
*Turn off all cell phones before entering the classroom.* A student who disrupts a lecture by using a personal electronic device will be asked to leave.

Academic Advising
The College of Liberal Arts requires that students meet with an Academic Advisor as soon as they are ready to declare a major. Degree plans are prepared in the CLA Academic Advising Center. The University uses an online Degree Audit system. Any amendment must be approved by the Department Chair and the Office of the Dean. All courses and requirements specified in the final degree plan audit must be completed before a degree will be granted. The CLA Academic Advising Office is located in Driftwood #203. For more information please call 361-825-3466 or log onto [http://www.tamucc.edu/~aac](http://www.tamucc.edu/~aac).
Disability Services
The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please call or visit Disability Services at (361) 825-5816 in Corpus Christi Hall, Room #116.

If you are a returning veteran and are experiencing cognitive and/or physical access issues in the classroom or on campus, please contact the Disability Services office for assistance at (361) 825-5816.

Grade Appeals
Students who feel they have not been held to appropriate academic standards as outlined in the class syllabus, equitable evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in the course. A student with a complaint about a grade is encouraged to first discuss the matter with the instructor. For complete details on the process of submitting a formal grade appeal, please visit the College of Liberal Arts website (http://cla.tamucc.edu/about/student-resources.html). For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Associate Dean.

The Fine Print
For all other matters concerning course withdrawal, appeal of grades, academic misconduct, etc, students are strongly advised to consult the rules outlined in the Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Student Handbook and on the web at: http://studentaffairs.tamucc.edu/.

Important Dates
August 24, Wednesday  Classes begin
August 31, Wednesday  Last day to late register or add a class
September 5, Monday  Labor day Holiday
October 3, Monday  Last day to apply for December graduation
November 11, Friday  Last day to drop a class
November 22-23, Tuesday-Wednesday  Reading Days-No Classes
November 24-25, Thursday-Friday  Thanksgiving Holidays
December 5, Monday  Last day to withdraw from the University
December 6, Tuesday  Last day of classes and
December 7, Wednesday  Reading Day
December 8-9, Thursday-Friday;  Final examinations
12-14, Monday-Wednesday
TOPICS AND READINGS
*Readings and schedule subject to change*

**Week 1 (Aug. 25):** Introduction & Course Mechanics

*No Readings*

**Week 2 (Aug. 30, Sept.1):** Life & Meaning


**Week 3 (Sept. 6, 8):** Theistic Answers


**Week 4 (Sept. 13, 15):** Naturalism


**Week 5 (Sept. 20, 22):** Pessimism and The Absurd


**Week 6 (Sept. 27, 29):** General Review & Test 1

*No Readings*

**Week 7 (Oct. 4, 6):** The Riddle of Existence

*Readings:* (1) Rescher, "On Explaining Existence"; (2) Parfit, "Why Is Reality as It Is?".

**Week 8 (Oct. 11, 13):** Immortality

*Readings:* (1) Leslie, "Immortality Defended" (chapters 1 & 2).

**Week 9 (Oct. 18, 20):** Immortality; Naturalism & Meaning

Week 10 (Oct. 25, 27): Naturalistic Spirituality I
Readings: (1) Santayana, "Preface to Realms of Being"; (2) "The Indispensable Properties of Substance".

Week 11 (Nov. 1, 3): Naturalistic Spirituality II
Readings: (1) Santayana, "The Nature of Spirit"; (2) “Belief in a Future Life”; “Ideal Immortality”.

Week 12 (Nov. 8, 10): Naturalistic Spirituality III
Readings: (1) Santayana, "Liberation".

Week 13 (Nov. 15, 17): Naturalistic Spirituality IV
No Readings: (1) Santayana, “Union”.

Week 14 (Nov. 29, Dec.1): General Review
No Readings

Week 15 (Dec. 6): Test 2
No Readings