

EXISTENTIALISM

Philosophy 159
NN 204

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Course Description:

Existentialism perhaps more than any other movement in philosophy has captured and continues to hold sway over the public imagination. Rooted in philosophy, it became something of an aesthetic movement in the mid- to late twentieth century (stereotypically associated with black berets, smoky cafes, unnerving plays, works of art, literature, film and music). In some ways it resurrected aspects of ancient philosophy, placing a premium on working out a meaningful way to live that coherently unites one's intellectual and passionate lives. While there is no consistent set of doctrines or unified methodology to existentialist philosophy, there are a number of common themes and problems, particularly revolving around the issues of freedom and the contemporary threat of nihilism. In this class we'll not only examine key existentialist texts addressing these themes, but also leaven our content with some of the corresponding artistic productions.

Course Goals

- Understand existential philosophy in the context of traditional philosophy.
- Explore and recognize existentialism in literature, film, music, and mostly in philosophy.
- Increase your ability to logically analyze and make arguments.
- Improve your ability to write analytically – well enough, in fact, to impress those who sneeringly think of existentialism as nothing more than an intentional, aesthetic obfuscation.

Required Texts

- *Pensees* by Blaise Pascal, Trans. Roger Ariew
- *Fear and Trembling* by Soren Kierkegaard (Penguin)
- *Sickness Unto Death* by Soren Kierkegaard (Penguin)
- *The Gay Science* by Friedrich Nietzsche, Trans. Walter Kaufman
- *The Grand Inquisitor* by Fyodor Dostoevsky, Ed. Charles Guignon
- *The Plague, The Fall, Exile and the Kingdom, and Other Essays* by Albert Camus (Everyman's Library)
- *Jean-Paul Sartre: Basic Writings* Ed. Stephen Priest
- *The Ethics of Ambiguity* by Simone de Beauvoir

Recommended Texts:

- A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism (Blackwell)
- The Cambridge Companion to Existentialism

Assignments & Grading

There will be no quizzes, midterms or final. You will be graded on three categories:

1. *Participation*: Philosophy in general and existentialism in particular is a matter of engagement. Consequently, I expect you to engage. Not only is it important to keep up with the readings, but your participation in class needs to reflect that you have done so. You can miss three classes for any reason; each class you miss thereafter will lower your grade one step. I will also take class participation into account when making up your final grade, and reserve the right to adjust your grade accordingly.
 - a. *Small groups*: Additionally, you will be required to meet in small groups each week for at least one half hour to discuss the course content and related subjects. You will need to keep a journal log of these meetings, recording the date, time, participants, and one sentence on the topics discussed. This log will be handed in at the end along with your final papers.
 - b. *Letters*: Additionally, there will be a short letter assignment in the first unit.
2. *Short papers*: Throughout the semester you will write short papers (~500-800 words), posting the papers on Blackboard. You will also be required to respond (in at least 200 words) to 3 of your peers' papers for each assignment. These papers will take two forms:
 - a. *5 Argument papers*: You will be required to philosophically explicate and analyze arguments in the philosophers we read. I will allow you to choose which arguments to analyze, but have marked due dates in the syllabus. These papers

can be handed in at any time prior to the due date. See handout for more information.

- b. *Museum & movie responses*: You will be required to attend the local museum of modern art and write a response paper to one or more works of art, relating the art to our course readings. I will also screen 5 films during the course of the semester, and you must attend and write a response for at least 3 of these films.
3. *Term paper*: You will write a 2500 word term paper that will take the place of the final. This paper must reflect a sophisticated grasp of the relevant course texts but will be primarily an argumentative paper. I will pass out possible topics, but students are encouraged to come up with their own topics. You will be required to submit an outline and then meet with me at least once prior to turning in the paper. More details will be given later.

Here is the overall breakdown:

Participation:	25%
Argument papers:	25%
Museum & film responses:	20%
Term paper:	30%

Course Policies:

1. **All assignments are due at 11:59pm** on the listed date. Late assignments are automatically reduced to a B (or an equivalent point reduction) and late comments will not be counted. Note: because submissions are electronic, I can tell if your submission is even 1 minute late. I recommend you set a personal deadline of one 10:59pm.
2. My intentions are to make this a tech-savvy course, but one that respects the need for face to face, unconnected discussion. Consequently, **ALL ELECTRONICS ARE STRICTLY PROHIBITED IN CLASS**, unless I call for them. This includes using your laptop to take notes. **THIS ALSO INCLUDES USING YOUR SMART PHONE UNDER THE TABLE.** You are welcome, however, to bring your laptop/pad with the readings on it, and when I ask students to turn to the text you may open up an electronic version.
3. Eating and drinking are welcome, but **YOU MAY NOT HAVE DISPOSABLE FOOD PACKAGING OR DRINK CONTAINERS IN CLASS.**
4. In the happy event of a campus closure (e.g., on account of snow) or other cancellation, we will still have class. During such events I will put a Lecture Capture up on Blackboard which you can view at your own convenience and then submit written feedback on the course blog.

Academic Integrity

I care a great deal about increasing your intellectual capacities and general knowledge base and am concerned overall with helping you to flourish as a human being. That means I also care very much about your academic integrity and very little about how the grade you receive in this one class impacts your future. Hence I won't hesitate to fail students caught plagiarizing on their papers and will not tolerate dishonesty in any form. I highly encourage students to review Georgetown's Honor System policies (found at

<http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/honor/system/>), and want you to note that plagiarism can be unintentional. We will discuss this more in class. If you have any questions please visit with me or the Writing Center.

CAMPUS RESOURCES:

Academic Resource Center (<http://academicsupport.georgetown.edu/>): Students seeking tutoring, study tips, helps with writing, concerns over what constitutes plagiarism, or students requiring services on account of disabilities or athletic or other sponsored activity accommodation should visit ARC. In particular, all students might benefit from the academic skills workshops offered (schedule available on-line).

Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS: <http://studenthealth.georgetown.edu/mental-health>): Your mental health is just as real and important as your physical health. And just as in the normal course of things several of you will likely benefit from our medical services this semester, so also some of you will likely benefit from our psychiatric services. There is a wide range of services offered, from group to individual care, including types of care for those who cannot afford normal counseling services. Please take advantage of these as needed to maintain your optimal health.

Title IX: Rape and other forms of sexual misconduct are tragically common in our society. Please note that there are services available for students who have been exploited in any way (<http://studenthealth.georgetown.edu/crisis-counseling/sexual-assault-relationship-violence>). Also, please note that I am required by federal law to report any indication I receive of sexual misconduct to Georgetown’s Title IX coordinator. If you are looking for confidential guidance I recommend contacting Jen Schweer (Associate Director, Health Education Services, Sexual Assault Response and Prevention) at jls242@georgetown.edu or 202.687.0323.

For additional services related to health and well-being of any kind on campus, please see “GU Safety Net Contacts” under “Documents” on Blackboard.

COURSE PLAN

UNIT I: Historical Preamble		
Day 1	Crowell “Existentialism and Its Legacy” (recommended: Dreyfus “Existentialism in Film and Literature”	
Day 2	Ecclesiastes, Plato <i>Gorgias</i> , Nehamas selections from <i>The Art of Living</i>	
Day 3	Pascal <i>Pensees</i> Introduction §25, 53-76, 418-426, 525	Write your letter
Day 4	Pascal <i>Pensees</i> §140-146, 149, 228, 427-431, 913	Comment on letters
UNIT II: 19		

Day 5	Kierkegaard <i>Fear and Trembling</i> 41-82; Yeats “The Second Coming” (recommended: Hannay “Kierkegaard’s Single Individual”)	
Day 6	Kierkegaard <i>Fear and Trembling</i> 83-95 (recommended: read to the end)	Film: The Wings of the Dove
Day 7	Kierkegaard <i>Sickness Unto Death</i> 35-105	Response due
Day 8	Kierkegaard <i>Sickness Unto Death</i> 109-165	Argument 1 due
Day 9	Nietzsche “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History”	
Day 10	Nietzsche <i>The Gay Science</i> Preface §1-4, §1-2, 11, 12, 14, 26-27, 37, 50, 56,58, 76, 108-112, 115, 122, 124, 125, 132, 143; Arnold “The Cliffs of Dover”	Film: Waiting for Godot
Day 11	Nietzsche <i>The Gay Science</i> §276, 283, 285-291, 295, 299, 302, 307, 319, 328, 335, 343, 344-345, 347, 349, 354, 356, 357, 371, 374, 375, 377, 382, 383 (recommended: Schacht “After the Death of God”)	Response due
Day 12	Dostoevsky “Rebellion;” “The Grand Inquisitor;” and “Conversations and Exhortations of Father Zossima” (68-80) (recommended: Guignon’s Introduction) Hopkins “Carrion Comfort” and “I Wake and Feel”	Argument 2 due
Day 13	Dostoevsky <i>Notes From the Underground</i> Section I	
UNIT III: 20		
Day 14	Sartre “Existentialism is a Humanism” (recommended: “Sartre in the World” and the rest of “Existentialism”)	1 st
Day 15	Sartre “Freedom,” “Responsibility,” “Bad Faith”;	
Day 16	Camus selections “Myth of Sisyphus” and “The Plague”	Museum visit response due
Day 17	Camus selections “Myth of Sisyphus” and “The Plague”	
Day 18	Camus selections “Myth of Sisyphus” and “The Plague”	Argument 3 due
Day 19	Camus selections “Myth of Sisyphus” and “The Plague”; Frost “Out, out-“ and “Design”	Film: Endgame
Day 20	De Beauvoir <i>The Ethics of Ambiguity</i> 7-34	Response due
Day 21	De Beauvoir <i>The Ethics of Ambiguity</i> 35-73	
Day 22	De Beauvoir <i>The Ethics of Ambiguity</i> TBA	Argument 4 due

Day 23	Blattner “Heidegger: The Existential Analytic of Dasein”	
Day 24	Merleau-Ponty “The Cogito”	Film: The Wind that Shakes the Barley
Day 25	Hannah Arendt selections from <i>The Human Condition</i>	Response due
UNIT IV: Contemporary Sights & Sounds		
Day 26	Taylor selections from <i>The Ethics of Authenticity</i>	Argument 5 due
Day 27	Wrathall “Existential Christianity and U2”; selection of U2 lyrics	Film: Thin Red Line
Day 28	Dreyfus “Kierkegaard on the Internet”	Response due
Day 29	Haugeland, “Authentic Intentionality”	

FINAL PAPER DUE AT TIME OF SCHEDULED FINAL