

Philosophy 1193.10: Introduction to Existentialism

Fall 2014

Office Hours: Phillips Hall 510A, M 2:30-3:30, F 1:00-2:00 and by appointment 3.0 Credits

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Department of Philosophy

Course Description

This course will serve as a general introduction to existentialism. The primary focus of the course will be to engage the core existentialist themes of freedom, subjectivity, death, and ethics as they were developed in Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries. In order to provide a comprehensive introduction to existentialism, we will cover the two areas within the movement itself that Sartre referred to as “atheistic” and “religious” existentialism. Moreover, to understand the range of existentialism and the significance it had in various disciplines, we will read technical philosophical works, short stories, novels, and plays, and watch films that address core existentialist themes. In this respect, the course will also question and analyze the different forms that the treatment of existentialist themes has taken, and will devote particular attention to the relation between philosophy and literature. Finally, the course will emphasize the ability for students to develop their own ideas and arguments through an interpretation of the various texts and films that we cover and to present them in class discussions as well as in well-thought out essays.

Required Texts

Søren Kierkegaard. *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*. Edition: First Edition. ISBN: 0691020280. Publisher: Princeton University Press.

Ivan Turgenev. *Fathers and Children*. Edition: Norton Critical Edition, Edition 2. ISBN: 0393927970. Publisher: Norton, W.W. & Company, Inc.

Fyodor Dostoevsky. *Notes from Underground*. Edition: Norton Critical Edition, Edition 2. ISBN: 0393976122. Publisher: Norton, W.W. & Company, Inc.

Albert Camus. *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*. Edition: 1, Vintage International Edition. ISBN - 13: 9780679733737. Publisher: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.

Samuel Beckett. *Waiting for Godot: A Tragicomedy in Two Acts*. Edition: Paperback. ISBN: 978-0-8021-4442-3. Publisher: Grove/Atlantic Inc.

Franz Kafka. *The Metamorphosis*. Edition: Norton Critical Edition, New Edition. ISBN: 0393967972. Publisher: Norton, W.W. & Company, Inc.

Simone de Beauvoir. *A Very Easy Death*. ISBN: 0-394-72899-8. Publisher: Pantheon Books.
James Joyce. *Dubliners*. Edition: Norton Critical Edition, Edition 1. ISBN: 0393978516.
Publisher: Norton, W.W. & Company, Inc.

Jean-Paul Sartre. *No Exit and Three Other Plays*. ISBN: 0-679-72516-4. Publisher: Vintage Books.

Jean-Paul Sartre. *Existentialism is a Humanism*. ISBN: 978-0-300-11546-8. Publisher: Yale University.

Films

In addition to the required readings for the course, we will also watch the following three films: *Wild Strawberries*, *The Seventh Seal*, and *Cleo From 5-7*. The films will be available on Blackboard.

Learning Outcomes

After having completed this course, students should be able to:

1. Recognize the core themes of existentialism and their historical development
2. Take several different positions with respect to a single issue
3. Develop and maintain an argument
4. Analyze and critique philosophical arguments based on a close reading of the text
5. Interpret themes presented in various literary forms

Course Requirements

Writing Assignments

Students will be required to complete two short one-page essays, as well as one longer 4-6 page final paper. With regard to the short writing assignments, students will be asked to respond to one question from a list of three which I will provide. The final paper will be more in depth. I will provide a list of several questions pertaining to the material we have discussed over the course of the semester and students must respond to one of them. With regard to both the short essays and the final paper, students also have the option of developing their own paper topics. If a student wishes to write on his or her own topic, he or she must meet with me to have it approved.

Exams

Students will take one take-home, mid-term exam over the course of the semester. Students will have to answer two questions from a list of five that I will hand out. Each answer must be two pages long.

Quizzes

Both scheduled and pop quizzes will be given over the course of the semester. They will be short-answer.

Attendance and Participation

Class attendance and participation are very important parts of a philosophy course. I will take attendance at the beginning of every class. Students are expected to actively participate in class by making substantial contributions to class discussions.

Grading

1. Mid-Term Exam: 25%
2. Quizzes: 15%
3. Short Essays: 20%
4. Final Paper: 25%
5. Class Attendance and Participation: 15%

Late Work

Work will be accepted after the due date if the student was unable to hand in the assignment as a result of a medical or family emergency, or if the deadline conflicts with a religious holiday. In all other cases, it is necessary to provide me with proper documentation or the pertinent information two weeks before the scheduled due date of the assignment.

Make-Up Exams

The policy for make-up exams is the same as that for late work.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

I personally support the GW Code of Academic Integrity. It states: "Academic dishonesty is defined as cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one's own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information." For the remainder of the code, see: <http://www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/code.html>

SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICES (DSS)

Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact the Disability Support Services office at 202-994-8250 in the Marvin Center, Suite 242, to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information please refer to: <http://gwired.gwu.edu/dss/>

UNIVERSITY COUNSELING CENTER (UCC) 202-994-5300

The University Counseling Center (UCC) offers 24/7 assistance and referral to address students' personal, social, career, and study skills problems. Services for students include:

- crisis and emergency mental health consultations
 - confidential assessment, counseling services (individual and small group), and referrals
- <http://gwired.gwu.edu/counsel/CounselingServices/AcademicSupportServices>

SECURITY

In the case of an emergency, if at all possible, the class should shelter in place. If the building that the class is in is affected, follow the evacuation procedures for the building. After evacuation, seek shelter.

Schedule

Week 1

8/27 Introduction

8/29 Kierkegaard – *The Sickness Unto Death*: Preface, Introduction, Part I A and B, pp. 1-28

Week 2

9/3 Kierkegaard – *The Sickness Unto Death*: Part I C, pp. 29-42

9/5 Kierkegaard – *The Sickness Unto Death*: Part I C, pp. 42-74

Week 3

9/10 Turgenev – *Fathers and Children*: Chapters I-XIV, pp. 1-61

9/12 Turgenev – *Fathers and Children*: Chapters XV-XXI, pp. 61-110

Quiz #1

Week 4

9/17 Turgenev – *Fathers and Children*: Chapters XXII-XXVIII, pp. 110-163

First Short Essay Topics Handed Out

9/19 Discussion of Film: *Wild Strawberries*

Week 5

9/24 Dostoevsky – *Notes From Underground*: Part I, pp. 3-29; Part II, pp. 29-49

First Short Essay Due

9/26 Dostoevsky – *Notes From Underground*: Part II, pp. 49-91

Week 6

10/1 Nietzsche – *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: Zarathustra's Prologue, 1-4, pp. 121-128

On the Genealogy of Morality: First Essay, pp.11-24 (online)

10/3 Nietzsche – *On the Genealogy of Morality*: First Essay, pp. 24-37 (online)

Quiz #2

Week 7

10/8 Heidegger – *Being and Time*: Division Two, Sections 46-49, pp. 279-293 (online)

Take-Home Mid-Term Handed Out

10/10 Heidegger – *Being and Time*: Division Two, Sections 50-53, pp. 293-311 (online)

Week 8

10/15 Discussion of Film: *The Seventh Seal*

10/17 Camus – *The Myth of Sisyphus*: An Absurd Reasoning, pp. 3-28

Take-Home Mid-Term Due

Week 9

10/22 Camus – *The Myth of Sisyphus: An Absurd Reasoning*, pp. 28-65; *The Myth of Sisyphus*, pp. 119-123

10/24 Beckett – *Waiting for Godot: Act I*, pp. 1-45

Week 10

10/29 Beckett – *Waiting for Godot: Act II*, pp. 47-85

10/31 Kafka – *The Metamorphosis*, pp. 3-23

Week 11

11/5 Kafka – *The Metamorphosis*, pp. 23-42

11/7 Discussion of Film: *Cleo from 5-7*

Quiz #3**Second Short Essay Topics Handed Out****Week 12**

11/12 Beauvoir – *A Very Easy Death*: pp. 9-61

11/14 Beauvoir – *A Very Easy Death*: pp. 62-106

Second Short Essay Due**Week 13**

11/19 Sartre – *No Exit*: pp. 3-46

Final Paper Topics Handed Out

11/21 Sartre – *Existentialism is a Humanism*: pp. 17-54

Week 14

11/26 **Thanksgiving Break: No Class**

11/28 **Thanksgiving Break: No Class**

Week 15

12/3 Joyce – *Dubliners: The Sisters, An Encounter, Araby*, pp. 3-25

12/5 Joyce – *Dubliners: The Dead*, pp. 151-194

Quiz #4