

Existentialism - Final Exam Review

The final exam will be held in KH 104 on Wed., Dec. 14th, 1:15 - 3:15

I have to be out of town that day. My colleague Bill Dibrell will administer the exam.

Anyone who needs to take it at SAS should let me know ahead of time.

You will be asked to write two essays, one of Julian Baginni's book *What's it all about?*, the other on some of the other material we have covered in the course. For both essays, you'll be given three topics and asked to write on one.

Essays are expected to show familiarity with and a good understanding of the material discussed. They should be organized, thoughtful, and decently written.

The best guide regarding what you are expected to know is the Course Schedule on the class webpage. You should have read or listened to everything that is placed under "Primary" or "Supplementary" materials. However, I won't be asking questions about secondary texts such as encyclopedia articles on Sartre. I *strongly* recommend that you use them, but they are there just to help you consolidate and deepen your understanding of the main texts we have studied, which are these:

Hemingway, "A Clean Well-lighted Place"

Tolstoy, *My Confession*,

The Death of Ivan Ilyich

Dostoyevsky, "Rebellion"

Dostoyevsky, "The Grand Inquisitor"

Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (excerpts)

Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*

Act Without Words II

Act Without Words

Sartre, "The Wall"

Portrait of the anti-Semite

Existentialism as a Humanism

Kafka, Five Parables

Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (excerpt)

Thomas Nagel, "The Absurd"

Richard Taylor, "The Meaning of Life"

Julian Baggini, *What's it all about?*

Here are some sample questions. Some of these, or questions fairly similar to them, may (or may not) come up on the exam. One of the best ways to prepare for the final

is to write practice essays using these prompts. This will consolidate your understanding, organize your thoughts, and spark ideas. Research shows that it is good to spend at least as much time writing as reading when preparing for an exam.

Sample essay questions

1. Sartre famously observed that "man is *condemned* to be free." Discuss the view of freedom that appears in works by at least three of the following authors:

Sartre
Dostoyevsky
Nietzsche
Kafka
Beckett

2. Based on the works you have studied, do you think there is (or can be) such a thing as an 'existentialist ethics'? Or is existentialism essentially an amoral (or immoral) philosophical outlook? If an existentialist can have an ethical code, what are its fundamental values?

3. "The important thing is not to be cured but to live with one's ailments" (Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*). Discuss this statement with reference to at least three of the following works:

The Myth of Sisyphus
Nietzsche's *The Gay Science*
Tolstoy's *My Confession*
Waiting for Godot

Do the works in question illustrate, support, or criticize the outlook expressed in Camus' statement?

4. Many of the works we have studied can seem to offer bleak accounts of the human condition. But perhaps this is an oversimplified view. Identify and discuss what you consider to be the more positive aspects of at least three of the following works:

Hemingway, "A clean well-lighted place"
Tolstoy's *My Confession*
Dostoyevsky's "Rebellion"
Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and his two *Act without words*
Kafka's parables

Sartre's "The Wall"

5. Explain in detail Julian Baggini's reasons for rejecting three of the following as the source of meaning in life

- Evolution
- God
- An afterlife
- Loss of self (as reported by mystics and meditators)

Do you think any of these be defended as something that provides life's meaning?

6. Two candidates for what makes life meaningful that Baggini discusses are helping others and promoting the good of the species. What does he say about them? Do you agree with him?

7. Like many other philosophers, Baggini is rather critical of the view that we should live for the moment, immersing ourselves in present pleasures. Why? Do you agree with him?

8 According to Julian Baggini, what is it all about?