PHIL 3304 EXISTENTIALISM SPRING 2022

Class	
Recordings	
Instructor	Howard Curzer
Email	howard.curzer@ttu.edu
Office Hours	TTR 2:00-3:30 and by appointment
Office Link	
TA	
Email	
Office Hours	
Office Link	

REQUIRED TEXTS

- *Existentialist Philosophy*, 2nd edition, ed. by N. Oaklander (Pearson) ISBN 978-0133738612. This book is out of print. Nevertheless, it is widely available.

RECOMMENDED TEXTS

- R. Solomon, *From Rationalism to Existentialism* (Rowman) ISBN 9780742512412
- J. Webber, *The Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre* (Routledge) ISBN 9780415848589
- H. Dreyfus, *Being in the World* (MIT) ISBN 9780262540568
- L. Mackey, *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet* (Penn) ISBN 9780812210422
- A. Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Harvard) ISBN 9780674624269

COURSE DESCRIPTION

- What unites the existentialists is not their individual philosophies, but the nature of the problems that they set out to explore. We will discuss the following themes:
- **Primacy of Individuals**: Traditional philosophy, modern science, and the industrial revolution have reduced people to an abstraction. Existentialists maintain that the truths of human existence cannot be known through detached observation and contemplation, but must be inwardly appropriated through the experience of personal involvement growing out of one's own passionate concern.
- **Critique of Reason**: If reason is but part of human nature, rational fulfillment alone is not enough for a complete and authentic life. Moreover, the investigation of reality cannot be left to logic and reason alone.
- **Authenticity**: The inauthentic person never acquires a distinctive individual identity, but simply plays a part, acts out an assigned role, unquestioningly follows a pattern of behavior given by society. The authentic person seeks self-awareness and chooses to actualize a true self, discovered through introspection.
- **Boundary Situations**: Suddenly there comes a moment when a direct awakening is inescapable. Inauthenticities and illusions are exposed. Typical boundary situations

include chance, choice, guilt, and especially death. Typical responses include alienation, nothingness, and dread.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- In this course students will come to understand what five existentialist philosophers (Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, De Beauvoir, and Sartre) say about the four themes described above. In other words, the students will be able to complete the following chart.

	Primacy of Individuals	Critique of Reason	Authenticity	Boundary Situations
Kierkegaard				
Nietzsche				
Heidegger				
De Beauvoir				
Sartre				

REQUIREMENTS

- Enormous amounts of delightful, but difficult **reading** will be assigned each week. Try to get the reading for each week done before the week begins. Advice: Read everything twice. Get the big picture first and the details on the second reading.
- Class **attendance** is required. After the first 5 absences, students will be penalized 3.33% of their final grade for each absence. (This is 1/3 of a letter grade the difference between a B+ and an A- for example.) Officially approved trips and religious holidays are the only excused absences. All absences for other reasons after the first 5 will be penalized, even if they are due to hospitalization, incarceration, or death of family members. (Students with long-term problems should discuss exceptions with me.) Is my absence policy too severe? The course will meet on 43 occasions, but I won't take attendance for the first three meetings. Thus, a student may miss one of every 8 days without penalty, but after that the penalty is very great. This is a generous version of the policy of "paid time off" used by many businesses. Employees who miss work once every 8 days are generally fired. Advice: Do not use up your absences casually; save them for emergencies.
- Class **participation** is required. Each member of the class has a responsibility to the others to contribute to the learning project. Advice: When I write you a letter of recommendation, or even just report on you at a department meeting, do you want me to state that you typically have nothing useful to say in class? Impress me; come to every class armed with interesting comments and questions.
- Each student will submit **three 1-page homework assignments** designed to improve reading and writing skills. Each of these homework assignments will be worth 7% of the final grade. Late submissions will be accepted without penalty.
- Each student will submit **four 5–7-page papers**. Each of these papers will be worth 20% of the final grade. Late submissions will be accepted. After the first 5 late days throughout the semester (not 5 days per paper), papers will be penalized 1/3 letter grade for every day late (including weekend days). Advice: Your first thoughts are unlikely to be your best thoughts; start early and write at least two drafts. Don't be late.
- This will be an online class taught via Zoom. Students will keep their **video on** unless they have permission from me to turn their video off. Permission will be granted automatically,

no questions asked. Zoom classes work better when students are visible to each other and to me, but some students have good reasons to keep their video off. My policy makes "video on" the default, but allows students with good reasons to opt out upon request. Students whose video is off without permission will be considered absent.

- **Disruptive, distracting, or offensive behavior** will not be tolerated. (e.g. social media, emailing, gaming, and web-surfing during class are unacceptable.) Cell phones should be put in silent mode during class. Civility in spoken and written discourse is required. Repeated violations will result in dismissal from the course.
- If you were **unable to attend class**, please do not ask me what we covered in class. A recording of the class will be available for viewing.

HELP

- General free **learning support** is available from the Writing Center: http://uwc.ttu.edu/ and the Learning Center: https://www.depts.ttu.edu/soar/LC/.
- Many students feel extremely overwhelmed, depressed, anxious, enraged, and/or confused at some points in their college career. There is no shame in seeking professional help. Free **psychological support** is available from the Student Counseling Center: http://www.depts.ttu.edu/scc/.
- Accurate, sophisticated **information** about philosophical topics is available from the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: http://plato.stanford.edu/. Avoid CliffsNotes, Monarch Notes, Spark Notes, and so on. These are filled with inaccuracies.
- My class is open to **guests.** In particular, since childcare is sometimes an issue, **children** (including babies) are welcome. Please don't overdo it, and try to minimize disruption of the class.
- Hunger on campus is an issue these days. TTU has taken some steps to address the problem: https://www.depts.ttu.edu/dos/foodpantry.php.

GRADING RUBRIC

Category	**Grade**
mastery of material	
reasoning, creativity, clarity	
Average	

MEANING OF GRADES

A	100-90	adequate essay + pizzazz		D	69-60	on the wrong track, but gets some things right
B	89-80	adequate essay		F	59-51	gets almost nothing right
C	79-70	on the right track, but with a major error		F-	50	assignment not complete

A philosopher — is a human being who constantly experiences, sees, hears, suspects, hopes, and dreams extraordinary things; who is struck by his own thoughts as from outside, as from above and below, as by his type of experiences and lightning bolts; who is perhaps himself a storm pregnant with new lightnings; a fatal human being around whom there are constant rumblings and growlings, crevices, and uncanny doings. A philosopher — alas, a being that often runs away from

itself, often is afraid of itself — but too inquisitive not to "come to" again — always back to himself. – Nietzsche, Human All Too Human, 292

COVID-19

TTU strongly recommends students adhere to CDC guidelines on COVID-19, including obtaining COVID-19 vaccinations. The COVID-19 vaccine is available at student health services by appointment. A video debunking myths about COVID-19 can be found here: https://www.ttu.edu/commitment/covid-19-vaccine/index.php

ADA STATEMENT

Any student who, because of a disability, may require special arrangements in order to meet the course requirements should contact the instructor as soon as possible to make any necessary arrangements. Students should present appropriate verification from Student Disability Services during the instructor's office hours. Please note: instructors are not allowed to provide classroom accommodations to a student until appropriate verification from Student Disability Services has been provided. For additional information, contact Student Disability Services in West Hall or call 806-742-2405.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY STATEMENT

Academic integrity is taking responsibility for one's own class and/or course work, being individually accountable, and demonstrating intellectual honesty and ethical behavior. Academic integrity is a personal choice to abide by the standards of intellectual honesty and responsibility. Because education is a shared effort to achieve learning through the exchange of ideas, students, faculty, and staff have the collective responsibility to build mutual trust and respect. Ethical behavior and independent thought are essential for the highest level of academic achievement, which then must be measured. Academic achievement includes scholarship, teaching, and learning, all of which are shared endeavors. Grades are a device used to quantify the successful accumulation of knowledge through learning. Adhering to the standards of academic integrity ensures grades are earned honestly. Academic integrity is the foundation upon which students, faculty, and staff build their educational and professional careers.

RELIGIOUS HOLY DAY STATEMENT

"Religious holy day" means a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Texas Tax Code §11.20. A student who intends to observe a religious holy day should make that intention known in writing to the instructor prior to the absence. A student who is absent from classes for the observance of a religious holy day shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment scheduled for that day within a reasonable time after the absence. A student who is excused under section 2 may not be penalized for the absence; however, the instructor may respond appropriately if the student fails to complete the assignment satisfactorily.

"It's not who you are underneath; it's what you do that defines you." – Rachel in Batman Begins

WEEKLY READING

Week	Start Date	Reading	Topics / Assignments
1	1/12	email	introduction, historical background
Kierkegaard			
2	1/19	email	aesthetic sphere, ethical sphere
3	1/24	9-20, 29-46	religious sphere, faith / HOMEWORK
4	1/31	20-26, 46-74	knight of faith
Hegel			
5	2/7	email	master/slave / PAPER
Nietzsche			
6	2/14	75-85, 98-114	death of God, will to power, overman
7	2/21	85-95, 115-134	morality, religion / HOMEWORK
8	2/28	134-143	free will, the will, the self
9	3/7	No reading	PAPER
	3/14		Spring Break
Heidegger			
10	3/21	144-149, 163-174	question of being
11	3/28	149-153, 174-180	Dasein's being / HOMEWORK
12	4/4	153-160, 180-204	death, authenticity, temporality
De Beauvoir			
13	4/11	336-339, 343-356, email	ambiguity, social construction / PAPER
Sartre			
14	4/20	310-319	existentialism is humanism
15	4/25	224-233, 266-292	bad faith, others, the look
16	5/2	205-218, 242-255	authenticity, consciousness, nothingness
	5/5		PAPER

DEFINITIONS

- *camus*, n. Call of a cam-cow.
- *de beauvoir*, n. The bedroom of a woman. "Come into my beauvoir, you tall, dark, handsome man, and I'll give you a lesson in French philosophy."
- *hegel*, n. Donut-shaped breakfast delicacy. "I'd like a toasted onion hegel, please."
- *heidegger*, n. A ponderous device for boring through thick layers of substance. "It's buried so deep we'll have to use a heidegger." (from *The Philosophical Lexicon*)
- *kierkegaard*, n. Defender of the church. (Sometimes reality is the ultimate irony.)
- *nietzsche*, 1 n. A school of martial arts, similar to Tie Chee, but featuring the use of the knee rather than the hand or foot. 2 n. The mournful call of a seagull (all too seagull) bold and free, yet alone, coming over a sea that has never yet been so open.
- *sartre*, n. A common spice used in Texas. "Please pass the sartre." (from *The Philosophical Lexicon*)