

EXISTENTIALISM

Instructor: Howard Curzer

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PHIL 5308

Spring 2024

Hours: TR 2:00-3:30

REQUIRED TEXTS\

- *Existentialism: Basic Writings*, 2nd edition, ed. by Charles Guignon and Derk Pereboom (Hackett) ISBN 978-0872205956.
- Material in Dropbox folder:

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.

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

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 (e.g. the difference between a B+ and an A-). Officially approved trips and religious holidays are the only excused absences. All absences for other reasons after the first 5 will be penalized. Students with long-term problems should discuss exceptions with me. Advice: Do not use up your absences casually; save them for emergencies.
- Class **participation** is required. Each student has a responsibility to contribute to the learning project. Advice: When I write you a letter of recommendation, 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 **four 10–15-page papers**. Each of these papers will be worth 25% 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.

HELP

- If you must **leave during class**, please tell me before the class begins and sit near the door. Attendance will sometimes be taken in the middle of class.
- If you were **unable to attend class**, please do not ask me what we covered in class. Borrow another student's notes, instead.
- 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.
- Texas Tech policies concerning academic honesty, special accommodations for students with disabilities, student absences for observance of religious holy days, and COVID-19: <https://www.depts.ttu.edu/tlpdc/RequiredSyllabusStatements.php>
- Texas Tech policies concerning discrimination, harassment, sexual violence, civility, plagiarism, LGBTQIA, and food insecurity: <https://www.depts.ttu.edu/tlpdc/RecommendedSyllabusStatements.php>

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

WEEKLY READING

Week	Dates	Reading	Topics / Assignments
1	1/11	p. xiii-xxxviii OPTIONAL	introduction, historical background
Kierkegaard			
2	1/16, 1/18	p. 1-17, Either/Or (dropbox)	aesthetic sphere, ethical sphere
3	1/23, 1/25	p. 26-66	knight of faith / HOMEWORK
4	1/30, 2/1	p. 78-92	religious sphere
Hegel			
5	2/6, 2/8	Hegel: MasterSlave Solomon: MasterSlave (dropbox)	master-slave / PAPER
Nietzsche			
6	2/13, 2/15	p. 93-118, 145-146, 151-152, Nietzsche 1 and 2 (dropbox)	slave morality, will to power, overman
7	2/20, 2/22	p. 129-136, 149, 154-155	critique of religion / HOMEWORK
8	2/27, 2/29	p. 137-144, 147-148	death of God, eternal return
9	3/5, 3/7	p. 155-161	genealogies, PAPER
	3/12, 3/14		Spring Break
Heidegger			
10	3/19, 3/21	p. 183-254	question of being / HOMEWORK
11	3/26, 3/28	p. 183-254	Dasein's being, authenticity
12	4/2, 4/4	p. 183-254	death, temporality / PAPER
Sartre			
13	4/9, 4/11	p. 255-275	
14	4/16, 4/18	p. 290-308	humanism of existentialism
15	4/23, 4/25	p. 309-317, 324(mid-page)-362	nothingness, bad faith, authenticity, consciousness, freedom
16	4/30		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*)