

Time: MTWF 2:20 3:10

Place: KH 104

Instructor: Emrys Westacott

Office: Kanakadea Hall

Office Hours:

MTWF 1-2 and by appt.

Coffee Hour: Friday 1:15 - 2:15 (Terra Cotta)

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Course Description

A lot of traditional philosophy deals with fairly abstract theoretical problems: e.g. How does language represent reality? What is a scientific explanation? How should we define knowledge? Existentialist philosophy and literature typically deals with issues that people confront in a more immediate way in the course of living their lives: e.g. How can I make my life meaningful? How should I view the prospect of death? How well can I understand other people?

“Existentialism” does not have a simple definition. There are a number of 19th and 20th century philosophers and writers who are commonly described as existentialists, but there is no single defining belief or characteristic that they all share. If they have anything in common, it is perhaps just this idea that philosophy should start out from and address itself to the conditions and problems of human existence as it is experienced by individuals (as opposed to concerning itself with purely theoretical problems).

In this course we will discuss various central existentialist themes and examine in detail some key existentialist texts. We will pay particular attention to the way the authors treat questions concerning individuality, consciousness, freedom, rationality, emotion, happiness, and values.

Course objectives

1. To become familiar with and gain an understanding of some of the most important texts, thinkers, and ideas associated with existentialism.
2. To understand and appreciate the place of existentialist thought in modern intellectual history.
3. To stimulate critical thinking about our own beliefs and attitudes concerning the issues raised by the material studied.
4. To improve skills in reading, analyzing, discussing and writing about philosophical and literary texts.

Texts

Leo Tolstoy, *My Confession*

The Death of Ivan Ilyich

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (photocopy)

Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*

Julian Baggini, What's it all about? Philosophy and the Meaning of Life

Additional writings of Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Jean-Paul Sartre, Samuel Beckett, Albert Camus, Franz Kafka, and others (all made available either online, as e-texts, or photocopied)

Requirements and Grading

Philosophical journal	-	ungraded
Two papers	-	20% each
Mid-term exam	-	15%
Final exam	-	25 %
Class participation	-	20%

Attendance and Participation

A good deal of class time will be spent in discussion. Such discussion is essential to the aims of the course. The grade awarded for class participation will be based on attendance, preparedness, and quality of contributions. Regular attendance is required.

Conduct in the classroom

Don'ts

Eating (although drinks, especially caffeinated drinks, are permitted)
Sleeping
Reading materials unrelated to the course
Texting
Talking when someone else is speaking
Starting to pack up ahead of time

Dos

Come to class having read the assignments
Come to class on time
If you must leave early, let me know ahead of time
In discussion, treat others with respect
Take notes when appropriate; it will help you review material later

Extra credit, Incompletes, and Withdrawals

Doing additional work for extra credit will not be an option. If you wish to improve your grade by doing additional work you can do this throughout the duration of the course by, for

instance, re-reading texts, making notes on the readings, reading other works by the authors studied, reading books and articles about these authors and their works, listening to online lectures and podcasts related to the issues covered, and so on.

Incompletes will not be given to allow students to work for higher grades. The instructor takes no responsibility for the failure of a student to drop the course on or before the last day to withdraw. If you wish to withdraw from the course you must notify me and complete the necessary paperwork. Students who stop attending class but fail to drop or withdraw from the course will receive an F.

Written work

The written work you submit will be graded according to criteria of accuracy, clarity, precision, analytic depth, originality, and stylistic correctness. Alfred University's policies on plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are explained in the [Undergraduate Academic Regulations](#). You are responsible for knowing what plagiarism is and how to avoid it.

Tutor Services/Requests

The office of Special Academic Services offers personalized help in the form of individual and group tutoring. Please contact Beth Niles at (607) 871-2148 for more information.

Students with Disabilities

Alfred University is committed to upholding and maintaining all aspects of the Federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. If you are a student with a disability and wish to request accommodations, please contact Dr. Aubrey Elmore at the Office of Special Academic Services located in Crandall Hall, or call (607) 871-2148. Any information regarding your disability will remain confidential. Many accommodations require early planning, therefore requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible. Any requests for accommodations will be reviewed in a timely manner to determine their appropriateness to this setting.