

Philosophers > Existentialism



Jean-Paul
Sartre
1905–1980



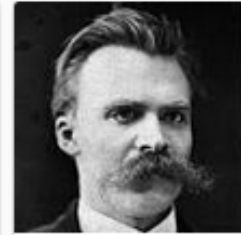
Søren
Kierkegaard
1813–1855



Albert Camus
1913–1960



Martin
Heidegger
1889–1976



Friedrich
Nietzsche
1844–1900



Hannah Arendt 1906-1975



Simone de Beauvoir 1908-1986

GE 20430-01 / PHIL 20202-01 – Existentialist Themes

Spring 2019, TTH, 12:30 - 1:45 p.m., O'Shaughnessy 109

Professor Robert E. Norton
Office Hours: MW 2:00-3:00
Office: 301 Decio Faculty Hall
E-mail: rnorton@nd.edu

Course description

Existentialism was perhaps the most well-known and influential philosophical and cultural movement in the 20th century. Although its roots extend well into the 19th century and can certainly be traced back to Antiquity, its major exponents lived and worked through one of the most violent and convulsive times of the modern era: two devastating world wars, mass genocide and the advent of the atomic bomb, all of which exerted a profound impact on their thought.

While there is no consistent set of doctrines or unified methodology to existentialist thinking, there is a number of common themes and problems, particularly revolving around the issues of freedom, death, the existence of god, subjectivity, alienation, and the contemporary threat of nihilism. Here is one expression of some of the issues confronted by those whom we consider “existentialists”:

From the Ancient Greeks we inherit the idea that the self is a "rational," "thinking," or "cognitive" being defined by an inherent purpose or telos. According to this conception, the drama of human life is played out in a thinking being's appraisal of its beliefs. Knowledge, not will -- truth, not passion -- assume center stage here. Against this "intellectualist" view of the self, existentialists emphasize another strand of Western civilization: our "Judeo-Christian" inheritance. Accordingly they emphasize the role of choice, decisions or "volition" in human life. For the existentialists, the drama of human life is less a matter of truth than will. Accordingly, they view desire, emotions, choice and chance in a decidedly more favorable light than traditional intellectualist philosophers.

In this class we will take up these issues by reading and examining key existentialist philosophical texts addressing, or at least raising, these themes, and consider some corresponding works of literary and filmic art in which they are dramatically enacted.

Course requirements

Students will write two papers over the course of the semester. The first paper (4-5 pages, due on **March 19**) will concentrate on the analysis and critique of a specific argument based on a specific reasoning. The second paper (8-10 pages, due on **April 30**) will be comparative in character. Paper topics will be chosen in consultation with me 3 weeks before the papers are due. The first paper will count for 20%, the second for 30% of the grade. In addition, students will take three written exams: a short pre-midterm test (**Feb. 21**, 20 minutes), a short post-midterm test (**Mar. 28**, 20 minutes) and a final exam (2 hours). The two tests will each count for 5%, the final exam for 30% of the grade. Attendance and participation in class will count for 10% of the grade. Participation includes making **at least ten posts** on the daily blog in Sakai for the course.

Students must familiarize themselves with the Honor Code on the University's website and pledge to observe its provisions in all written and oral work, including oral presentations, quizzes and exams, and drafts and final versions of essays.

Required Texts

Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*
 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from the Underground*
 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*
 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*
 Jean-Paul Sartre *No Exit*
 Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*
 Albert Camus, *The Stranger*
 Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*

Jean-Paul Sartre *Existentialism is a Humanism*
 Simone de Beauvoir *Ethics of Ambiguity*
 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*

Films

Ingmar Bergman, *The Seventh Seal*
 Ingmar Berman, *Wild Strawberries*

Schedule

Week 1

Tuesday, Jan. 15

Introduction

Thursday, Jan. 17

Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 1-59

Week 2

Tuesday, Jan. 22

Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 59-109

Thursday, Jan. 24

Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from the Underground*, First Half (1-39)

Week 3

Tuesday, Jan. 29

Dostoevsky *Notes from the Underground*, Second Half (39-91)

Thursday, Jan. 31

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Preface, § 1-4, 1-2, 11, 12, 14,
 26-27, 37, 50, 56,58, 76, 108-112, 115, 122, 124, 125, 132, 143

Week 4

Tuesday, Feb. 5

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §276, 283, 285-291, 295, 299,
302, 307, 319, 328, 335, 343, 344-345, 347, 349, 354, 356, 357, 371, 374, 375, 377, 382, 383

Thursday, Feb. 7

Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Introduction, 21-64

Week 5

Tuesday, Feb. 12

Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 169-219

Thursday, Feb. 14

Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 279-311

Week 6

Tuesday, Feb. 19

NO CLASS

Tuesday, Feb. 21

NO CLASS -- ***Pre Mid-Term Test***

Week 7

Tuesday, Feb. 26

Jean-Paul Sartre, *No Exit*, 1st half

Thursday, Feb. 28

Jean-Paul Sartre, *No Exit*, 2nd half

Week 8

Tuesday, Mar. 5

Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 1st half

Thursday, Mar. 7

Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 2nd half

March 9-17 Spring Break

Week 9

Tuesday, Mar. 19

Albert Camus, *The Stranger* Part One

Thursday, Mar. 21

Albert Camus, *The Stranger* Part Two

Week 10

Tuesday, Mar. 26

Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*

Thursday, Mar. 28

Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*

Post Mid-Term Test

Week 11

Tuesday, Apr. 2

Jean-Paul Sartre *Existentialism is a Humanism* 17-54

Thursday, Apr. 4

Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Discussion and Commentary on *The Stranger*, 54-98

Week 12

Tuesday, Apr. 9

Simone de Beauvoir *Ethics of Ambiguity* 1, 5-84

Thursday, Apr. 11

Simone de Beauvoir *Ethics of Ambiguity* 2, 84-173

Week 13

Tuesday, Apr. 16

Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, I, 1-78

Thursday, Apr. 18

Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, III, Labor, 79-135

Week 14

Tuesday, Apr. 23

Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, V, 175-247

Thursday, Apr. 25

Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, VI, 248-end

Week 15

Tuesday, Apr. 30

Concluding Discussion