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Phil 177A: Existentialism
(Tentative)

Description

Existentialism is one of the most prominent intellectual movements of the twentieth century. Its impact extends beyond philosophy, shaping literature, film, psychology, anthropology, feminism, ethics, and political theory, among other disciplines. This course examines the key problems to which existentialism responds, with a focus on the central concepts and arguments advanced by existentialist thinkers. In particular, we will develop a careful understanding of existentialist views on authenticity, freedom, existence, essence, and truth.

We begin with key precursors such as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, before focusing on two of its most important figures, namely, Jean-Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger. If time permits, we will also include other important voices such as Simone de Beauvoir and Frantz Fanon. Throughout the course we will explore each of these authors in depth and discuss how their theories connect to one another.

Here are a few of the guiding questions:

- What is the relationship between existence and essence?
- What does it mean to be *authentic*?
- Do life and death have inherent meaning?
- Is there objective truth?
- What is required to have *freedom* in this world?
- How does mortality affect our actions?

Through close reading and critical analysis of primary existentialist texts, we will evaluate classic answers to these and other fundamental questions in existentialist philosophy. Our goal is to gain a solid understanding of key existentialist views. Discussing these topics will also prompt further questions about the meaning of life, truth, and the objectivity of science. In addition to lectures and texts, we will complement our study of existentialism by watching films and documentaries, reading short literary works, analyzing poetry, and engaging in other related activities.

Readings

Main text: Guignon, C. & Pereboom, D. (eds.) 2001. *Existentialism: Basic Writings* (2nd edition). Hackett.

Kaufmann, Walter. *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*. New York: Meridian Books, 1957. (can be found online)

Other readings will be provided

Learning Outcomes

- To develop sustained analytical responses to the central themes of the course.
- To engage in critical discussion and dialogue with peers about the views covered.
- To synthesize ideas from different readings in order to grasp broader philosophical concepts.
- To write essays that demonstrate working knowledge of the course material and to analyze that material in a clear, systematic, original, and well-developed manner.

Assignments & Grading

Philosophical texts are invariably complicated; thus, it significantly helps with understanding to come to class with questions and thoughts in advance. For this reason, it is required and extremely important that you do the reading before the class meets.

Assignment	Grade Portion	Due Date
Paper 1 (3-4)	30%	Before Ninth Lecture
Paper 2 (3-5)	40%	TBD
Participation	30%	Weekly responses and regular attendance
Total	100%	

Attendance & Participation: Regular attendance and active participation in discussions and classroom activities are essential parts of the class. Excellent

participation can happen in multiple ways and does not require getting things right all of the time or speaking for its own sake.

The participation grade will be assigned based on attendance* (10%) and oral (10%) and written participation (10%) in class and on the course discussion section for a total of 30% of your final grade.

Participation policy in detail:

Participation counts for 30% of the final grade. Think of them as 30 points.

Grading participation starts in week 2. So each week counts for 6 points.

There are two ways to get the full 6 points:

(i) Attend all lectures and sections (2 points), answer one short question (submit to BruinLearn) (2 points), and participate in class (2 points).

(ii) Contact Alonso to ask for permission to miss the section/lecture. If permission is granted, then you answer three short questions on a pass/fail basis (submit to BruinLearn).

Two jokers: You are allowed to miss up to two sessions (either lecture or section in total) without your absence impacting your final grade. Contact Alonso if you plan to use a Joker.

Paper Extensions: Your papers are to be submitted on the date and time specified in class. Should circumstances outside your control make this impossible, you must request an extension from your TA at least 24 hrs before the deadline. This can be done via email before the due date. In case of an emergency, please let us know as soon as possible.

Late Submission: For all assignments, late papers submitted without contacting me 24 hours before the deadline will be subject to a penalty of one third of a letter grade. You will be excused from this penalty only if I have explicitly notified you in writing (e.g., by email) that you are exempt.

Office Hours: Office hours are a good time to ask questions you might not have formulated in lecture, or to discuss certain details, problems, possible alternatives to what we've discussed in lecture and sections, and more.

Respectful Language: Please be mindful of how we communicate with each other. Any language that is discriminatory or abusive will not be tolerated. At all times, I ask that we approach sensitive topics with sensitivity and communicate in ways that show respect for divergent views.

Learning Accommodations: Your success in this course is my primary goal. Should you need accommodations, please let me know early on, either in person or through email. I will provide any accommodations you require, as directed by you and in conjunction with the Center for Accessible Education. For more information, visit <http://www.cae.ucla.edu/>.

Recording & Electronic Devices: Sections may be recorded for your use during the quarter. You are not to record on your own devices without explicit consent. Students with learning accommodations should disregard this policy and follow their accommodations.

Sending Emails: Emails must be sent professionally and respectfully in the following fashion to promote promptly responses:

- Subject “Phil 177A - Last name; brief description of subject”
- Greeting (e.g., Hello, Alonso); body; signature
- Emails with questions that are answered by the syllabus will receive a “Refer to syllabus” response or none at all.

Plagiarism: The unacknowledged use of others’ words or ideas constitutes plagiarism, and this violates the University’s code of academic conduct, whether intentional or not. Any instance of plagiarism will be immediately reported to the university administration, and you will be subject to whatever consequences they determine. For more info: <http://guides.library.ucla.edu/citing/plagiarism/avoid>.

Schedule

Week 1: Existentialism - The Basics and the Precursors

Lecture 1

- What is Existentialism ?
 - Aho, *Existentialism* (excerpts)
 - Guignon & Pereboom, *Existentialism: Basic Writings* (excerpts)

Lecture 2

- Kierkegaard: the first existentialist

- *Fear & Trembling*
 - Preface
 - Problemata: Preliminary Expectoration
 - Problem I

Week 2: Kierkegaard & Nietzsche

Lecture 3

- Kierkegaard continuation
 - *Fear & Trembling*
 - Problem II
 - *The Sickness unto Death* (excerpts)

Lecture 4

- Kierkegaard continuation
 - *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*
- Nietzsche
 - *The Gay Science* (excerpts)
 - *Twilight of the Idols* (excerpts)

Week 3: Nietzsche & Heidegger

Lecture 5

- Nietzsche *continuation*
- Heidegger - *Being and Time*
 - Introduction
 - Chapter 1
 - Chapter 2

Lecture 6

- Heidegger - *Being and Time*
 - Division One: Analysis of Dasein
 - Chapter 1-3

Week 4: Heidegger

Lecture 7

- Heidegger - *Being and Time*
 - Division One: Analysis of Dasein
 - Chapter 4-6
 - Division Two: Dasein and Temporality
 - Chapter 1

- Paper 1 prompts provided to students

Lecture 8

- Heidegger- *Being and Time*
 - Division Two: Dasein and Temporality *continuation*
 - Chapter 1-3

Week 5 Heidegger and Sartre

Lecture 9

- Heidegger- *Being and Time*
 - Division Two: Dasein and Temporality *continuation*
- Review and discussion of Heidegger
- Paper 1 is due

Lecture 10

- Sartre
 - *Existentialism is a Humanism* (excerpts)
 - *Being and Nothingness* (excerpts)

Week 6: Sartre

Lecture 11

- Sartre
 - *Being and Nothingness* - *continuation* (excerpts)

Lecture 12

- Review Session for Final Paper
- Paper 2 prompts given