

EXISTENTIALISM (FALL 2016)

T & TR 11:00AM - 12:20PM

[Taught at University of Alberta, Canada]

Course Description

This course offers an introduction to the background and main themes of existentialist philosophy. We will read influential texts by such authors as Jean-Paul Sartre, Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Simone de Beauvoir, Frantz Fanon and L.A. Paul. We will examine what these philosophers have had to say concerning the issue of selfhood, self-making and self-choosing, and its relation to the meaning or truth of human existence. Themes such as freedom, responsibility, anxiety, authenticity, and bad faith will be central to our discussion. Furthermore, we will evaluate their views on selfhood in terms of their implications for these philosophers' understanding of community.

Required Readings

Jean- Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions* (New York: Citadel Press, 1957, 1985), pp. 9-51 (ISBN 0806509023)

Søren Kierkegaard, "Fear and Trembling" from *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, ed. Howard Hong & Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 1-67. (ISBN 0691020264)

Excerpts from the following books will be posted on e-class.

Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*
Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*
Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*
Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*
Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*
L.A. Paul, *Transformative Experience*
Simone de Beauvoir, *Second Sex*
Simone de Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*
Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

Supplementary Reading

Kristin Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims?" *Feminist Media Studies* 10.4 2010 (on e-class)

Course Requirements

Weekly Take Home Questions (THQs)	28% (4% each)
Term Paper	30%
Creative Project	12%
Final Exam	30%

Attendance and Participation

Even though there is no official grade assigned for attendance and participation, please do not forget that much of the value you will get from this class will come from your interaction with your classmates and myself. Regular attendance and active participation is important to the class dynamic and to your learning process.

Weekly Take-Home Questions (THQs) (28% [4% each])

During the term you will be asked to write 8 short responses to questions assigned about the reading(s) prior to the lecture covering that reading/those readings. You can choose either of two options: (1) You can submit 7 THQs and your grade will be based on them or (2) You can submit more than 7 THQs, and 7 of the THQs you got the highest grades on will count towards your grade. The THQs will be posted on e-class a week in advance. Your responses should be between 300 and 400 words and must be typed. The

due dates for the THQs are marked in the schedule below. The THQs must be submitted in person, at the beginning of the class, to receive a grade. After the lecture starts, namely after 11: 00AM, you can no longer hand them in. There is absolutely no possibility of extension or make-ups. You should keep them for exam review and in case I make a mistake calculating your final THQ-grade.

Some Tips on THQs

- Think of them as very short papers and give them a very clear structure. Cut out anything irrelevant. These are very short pieces of writing and you cannot afford to ramble. You should be able to look at every sentence you wrote, even every word, and say what it is doing to further your explanation or argument.
- Don't waste words simply explaining everything in the readings. The questions are asking specific things about the readings. Read them carefully, answer directly to the question and avoid irrelevant details.
- You are not only being asked to explain certain issues concerning the reading but also to evaluate the positions of the philosophers. Evaluating and giving your insights about philosophical positions requires careful and charitable engagement with the readings. So do not underestimate the philosophers we will be reading and avoid creating strawperson out of them and attacking trivialized versions of their positions.
- Write as clearly as possible. Avoid jargon, long words, and convoluted sentences. Don't try to sound sophisticated or 'philosophical': convey what you have to say as explicitly and unambiguously as you can. Keep sentences and paragraphs relatively short.
- Be sure to proof-read your final draft: missing words, misspellings, and poor syntax all serve to undermine the reader's confidence.

Term Paper (30%)

You will write 2000-2500 words on a question from a list of topics as assigned by the instructor. The topics will be posted on e-class on November 1, and the paper is due at the beginning of class on November 22. Papers that are handed in late will be docked 5% per day. Papers will not be accepted more than 5 days after the deadline. So please make sure to hand the assignments in on time. All the above tips on THQs are also relevant for the term paper. You are encouraged to come to the office hours to discuss drafts of your paper with me.

Creative Project (12%)

You will be asked to engage in a creative project in response to some theme(s) covered in class. You are free to choose the medium: you can make a short video, write a poem or do spoken word, do any performance and film it, make a painting or sculpture or whatever, do a recording, write a story, an essay, or your reflections, anything that explores the existentialist themes covered in class. It does not need to be something embodying an existentialist outlook but can be critical of it as well. You will be given a list of literary, cinematic, and visual works on existentialist themes to have a look at for inspirational purposes. In this project the main objective is for the student to express philosophical thought in different mediums. Aside from the work you create, you will be required to provide a short summary of what you are trying to accomplish with your work (e.g. explain if it is an existential work, and why it is the case; were you critically engaging with some authors or artists in this work, explain how and why, etc.). This summary should not exceed 1000 words. You can submit your project at any time during the term but no later than December 6, 11: 00 AM. Your grade will be based on the depth of your understanding of existentialism and how it is reflected in your work, originality and creativity.

Final Exam (30%)

There will be a final, cumulative exam on December 12, at 9: 00AM. On the last day of class (December 6), there will be a review to prepare you for the exam.

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1	Sep 1	Introduction
WEEK 2	Sep 6-8	Self as Self-Making Sartre, “Existentialism” in <i>Existentialism and Human Emotions</i> (9-51)
WEEK 3	Sep 13-15	Creation of Value; Good and Evil Sartre, “Existentialism” in <i>Existentialism and Human Emotions</i> (9-51) Supplementary: Kristin Gilchrist, “Newsworthy Victims?” <i>Feminist Media Studies</i> 10.4 2010 THQ 1 due at the beginning of class on Sep 13
WEEK 4	Sep 20-22	Bad Faith Selections from Sartre, <i>Being and Nothingness</i> THQ 2 due at the beginning of class on Sep 20
WEEK 5	Sep 27-29	Self as self-choosing; choosing the Absolute Kierkegaard, <i>Fear and Trembling</i> (1-67) and Selection from <i>Either/Or</i> THQ 3 due at the beginning of class on Sep 27
WEEK 6	Oct 4-6	Kierkegaard, <i>Fear and Trembling</i> (1-67) THQ 4 due at the beginning of class on Oct 4
WEEK 7	Oct 11	Kierkegaard, <i>Fear and Trembling</i> (54-81)
	Oct 13	Annihilation of values; psychology of Christianity Selections from Nietzsche, <i>On the Genealogy of Morality</i> THQ 5 due at the beginning of class on Oct 13
WEEK 8	Oct 18	Selections from Nietzsche, <i>On the Genealogy of Morality</i> , cont.
	Oct 20	Creation ex nihilo Selections from Nietzsche, <i>The Gay Science</i> and <i>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</i>
WEEK 9	Oct 25	Selections from Nietzsche, <i>The Gay Science</i> and <i>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</i> , cont.
	Oct 27	Analytic existentialism and the issue of choice Selections from L.A. Paul, <i>Transformative Experience</i> THQ 6 due at the beginning of class on Oct 27
WEEK 10	Nov 1-3	Selections from L.A. Paul, <i>Transformative Experience</i> , cont. Term paper topics posted on e-class on Nov 1
WEEK 11	Nov 8-10	READING WEEK
WEEK 12	Nov 15-17	Existential feminism and ethics Selections from de Beauvoir, <i>Second Sex</i> THQ 7 due at the beginning of class on Nov 15
WEEK 13	Nov 22-24	Selections from de Beauvoir, <i>Ethics of Ambiguity</i> Term paper due at the beginning of class on Nov 22
WEEK 14	Nov 29- Dec 1	Black existentialism Selections from Fanon, <i>Black Skin, White Masks</i> THQ 8 due at the beginning of class on Nov 29
WEEK 15	Dec 6	REVIEW Last possible date to submit the Creative Project

The final exam will be at 9: 00AM on Monday, December 12.

