

PHL 204-203: PHILOSOPHY & EXISTENTIAL THEMES

DePaul University: Lincoln Park Campus
Autumn Quarter
Meets: T/R 2:40-4:10
Clifton: Room 135

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Office: 2352 N Clifton Ave, Suite 150
Hours: T/R 12:00-1:00pm
(or by appointment)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Whether it appears in literary, performative, or philosophical circles, “existentialism” distinguishes itself by virtue of both the nuanced critique it offers of the [largely Western] tradition that predates it, and by an abiding concern for what may be called its themes. Some examples include but are not limited to: freedom, mortality, absurdity, responsibility, feeling, suffering, meaning, value, defiance, and joy. As a critique of absolutism and thereby the attempt of any definition to wholly capture an essence, existentialism itself defies classification. Historically those who have been afforded a place under its banner have both accepted with pride and refused to be included. One wonders, then, whether what we call “existentialism” refuses expression in a unified form and instead, of necessity, proliferates through its many facets and faces.

Paying homage to this proliferation of images that cuts across traditional disciplinary boundaries, we’ll explore both literary and philosophical forms of existentialism. Through close and careful analysis of assigned texts, that is to say from tight focus on primary source material, we hope to open up a larger vista or a landscape that one could properly call “existential”.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course aims to introduce students first to some of the ways in which what is loosely called an “existential theme” can be expressed through both literary and philosophical media; and second—and perhaps most importantly—to the ways in which the tools specific to philosophical practice can be deployed to deepen our reflections on existential themes. To this end, the course will be driven by critical reflection and thinking, respectful collective discourse, and the goal of improving written expression of idea complexes. Thus students are advised to be aware that this is a **writing intensive course**, and evaluation of your written work will comprise the majority of your overall grade. Finally, we shall strive at every turn to demonstrate how and why existential considerations are equally as relevant today as at the time of their respective historical inceptions.

To meet these objectives, students will be required to read a number of primary texts, paying careful attention to the language used and the arguments made. In order to

maintain fidelity to the text, the readings will be short but dense and complex, and will often demand that the student not only read, but also **reread** for further depth of understanding. Class lectures will serve to situate, explicate, and clarify the readings. Students will be called upon regularly to aid in textual analysis and critique. Therefore, you must develop your own critical reading practice and come to class fully prepared to engage in collective reflection and discussion.

REQUIRED READING

You are **required** to have a print copy of the following texts:

- Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*. Translated by Justin O'Brien. New York: Vintage International, 1991.
- Camus, Albert. *The Stranger*. Translated by Matthew Ward. New York: Vintage International, 1989.
- Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *Notes from the Underground*. Translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky. New York: Vintage Classics, 1994.
- Kafka, Franz. "The Judgment". In *The Metamorphosis and Other Stories*. Translated by Willa and Edwin Muir, 49-66. New York: Schocken, 1975.

The following texts will be made available to you on Desire2Learn. You are expected to print each text and bring it to class on the date for which it is assigned (see Course Schedule, below):

- De Beauvoir, Simone. "Ambiguity". In *Ethics of Ambiguity. Basic Writings of Existentialism*, edited by Gordon Marino. Modern Library Edition. New York: Random House, 2004.
- Heidegger, Martin. "What Is Metaphysics?" In *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)*. Translated & Edited by David Farrell Krell, 89-110. Harper Perennial Modern Thought Edition. London: Harper Collins, 2008.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. "Book Three" (excerpts). *The Gay Science*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann, 167-220. New York: Vintage Books, 1974.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. "The Three Metamorphoses". In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. *The Portable Nietzsche*, edited by Walter Kaufmann, 138-141. New York: Viking, 1982
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Twilight of the Idols* (excerpts). Translated by Walter Kaufmann. In *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, edited by Walter Kaufmann, 167-473. Modern Library Edition. New York: Random House, 2000.
- Sartre, Jean Paul. *Being and Nothingness* (excerpts). Translated by Hazel E. Barnes. New York: Washington Square Press, 1984.
- Silentio, Johannes (alias for Søren Kierkegaard). "Problemata I: Is There a Teleological Suspension of the Ethical?" In *Fear and Trembling. Philosophic Classics: From Plato to Derrida*, edited by Forrest E. Baird and Walter Kaufmann, 963-975. 5th Edition. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2000.

Note: Materials have been carefully selected for ease of use, because the specific translation(s) are up to par, and in consideration of overall affordability. Please see me if

you have any issues acquiring these texts. You are otherwise expected to have the text in class for reference on the day(s) it is assigned.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

I. Attendance, Attentiveness & Participation (Worth 15% of Final Grade)

A. Attendance: Attendance is determined based on the following criteria: whether you are here, on time, with the assigned reading. A sign-in sheet will be circulated at the start of class. If you arrive late to class you will be offered the opportunity to sign in at its conclusion. In addition, I will occasionally take reading attendance. If you do not have your text in class, you will be marked late. Be aware that two instances of tardiness, whether from arriving late, leaving early, or failing to bring your copy of the assigned text to class, will count as one absence. Two absences are permitted, excused or unexcused, for whatever reason. Absences in excess of two without a documented, legitimate excuse (emergency, medical, family, athletic, etc.) will negatively affect your overall grade. Absences in excess of four insure that the best you can do is pass the course. Please do not test me on this policy.

B. Attentiveness: While attendance is crucial to your success in the course, attentiveness is equally so. It is not enough to show up and shut down. This means arriving well rested, ready to contribute to the discussion, and in the proper mindset to absorb and respectfully respond to the contributions of your fellow classmates. Following along in the text, actively listening to what others are saying, and taking notes during lectures and discussion are visible aspects of attentiveness that I will record to determine this component of your grade.

C. Participation: Having arrived on time, with your text, attentive and ready to contribute, you are now in a position to participate. You should plan to participate in every class session. Note that participation is not the same thing as vocalization. I expect the classroom to be an atmosphere where the free and vital exchange of ideas is encouraged through active contribution. Active contribution means:

1) Thoughtful and respectful vocalization (for example: responding thoughtfully to a peer, requesting clarification, or offering insight into a problem under discussion). If you feel uncomfortable speaking up in class or would like to discuss strategies for participating, please approach me. At any time throughout the quarter, you may write a one-page reading response in order to make up points for participation. This may be especially helpful in making up participation points lost to absence or tardiness.

2) Making space for others to speak by taking a step back. While we often assume that everyone shares the same ability to vocalize, each of us comes to the table with different levels of comfort, readiness, and even urgency. Take a moment to assess yourself and consider where you stand in this respect.

II. Reading Quizzes (Worth 10% of Final Grade)

Four pop reading quizzes will be administered throughout the quarter. Quizzes missed due to absence cannot be made up, but to accommodate illness and/or absence, your best three of four will count toward your final grade.

III. Journal Entries (Worth 15% of Final Grade)

Journal entries are less formal than your papers (to follow) and more formal than a reading response (should you elect at any time to submit one to boost your participation grade). While a reading response is expressive of a feeling toward a certain text or a general impression thereof, a journal entry should be constructed as a five-paragraph exegetical essay, i.e., a short essay that puts forward your critical interpretation of a chosen text. You may respond to any reading **in advance** of the due date for the Journal Entry (see Course Schedule below), and the passage you select to interpret should be 1-2 pages in length.

You are required to read your chosen passage carefully and closely in order to assess its meaning. To do so successfully, you will want to obtain a sense of the context around your selected passage, as well as a sense of what is at stake in the larger argument of the overall text. Your ultimate choice as to the meaning of the passage will constitute your thesis, and from there you should construct a short (not to exceed two double-spaced pages), but tightly composed, persuasive essay in which you argue for the adoption of your interpretation. Please identify your chosen passage as either the title or subtitle of your entry.

These journal entries are meant to give you a platform for your formal papers (the arguments you forward in the responses will be useful to you in the formal paper assignments), and to give you an opportunity to improve your writing skills continuously throughout the quarter.

Journal entries are graded on a √ (82%: meets expectations), √+ (98% exceeds expectations), √- (60%: fails to meet expectations but exhibits minimum effort for credit basis). You must type your response—in a double-spaced, 12-pt font format (with traditional margins), including *in* the document you submit your name, student ID number, and the passage you chose to evaluate (for example, Sartre: *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 86-87). Failure to comply with formatting guidelines will result in a √- assessment.

To insure that you are evaluated on your best work, only your highest-scored three of four journal assignments will count toward your final grade.

IV. Papers (Worth 60% of Final Grade)

Your formal papers should be thoughtfully constructed essays that range from 4-6 pages, but do not exceed six. You should proofread your essay before you turn it in, and try to prevent any errors in syntax, grammar, or spelling from diminishing your powers of persuasion. Before the due date of the first paper I will distribute the rubric I utilize to grade your papers so that you are well informed of my expectations.

Generally speaking, formal paper writing is a *process*: you begin by experimenting, testing hypotheses and pre-writing (and/or outlining), then take a position and argue for it, by offering evidence for your claims that allows your burgeoning theory to cohere and compel. These skills should develop over the course of the quarter, thus the final paper is more heavily weighted than the first. If you are having difficulty with your papers in any respect or at any stage of the process, I encourage you to come see me and/or seek the advice and help of the DePaul Writing Center.

All papers must be typed in twelve-point font, double-spaced, and stapled. A digital copy must be submitted to the Dropbox on D2L for time stamp and to verify that proper citations have been observed and all material claimed as original is in fact original. Nevertheless, only hard copies will be assessed (unless other agreed upon arrangements have been made **in advance**). Papers must be handed in on time, or your grade will suffer. To be fair to those who turn their papers in on time, papers will be graded down by one half of a letter grade (5 percentage points) for each late day. In addition, the student is responsible for making and retaining copies of their paper(s).

FINAL GRADE SUMMARY

1. Attendance/Attentiveness/Participation:	15%
2. Reading Quizzes	10%
3. Journal Entries	15%
4. Midterm Paper	25%
5. Final Paper	35%

CLOSING NOTES

- Technology has become a second skin in the 21st century; whether to our benefit or to our detriment is a whole other question for a whole other course. Critical thinking above all requires dedicated focus, so dialing down distractions is a must. Please turn off and stow away all cell phones at the start of class. If you are visibly on your cell phone while class is in session, you will be marked absent for the day. No excuses; no exceptions.
- If you have any questions or concerns about a grade received, feel free to bring it up. If you think the assignment requires re-evaluation, I will ask that you type up a brief explanation and re-submit the assignment for reassessment. You will never be penalized in this process. Keep in mind that you have up to one week after the assignment has been returned to appeal, and that it is ultimately your responsibility to take the initiative in this regard.

- No prior experience with philosophy is expected or required for this course. I do, however, assume that you have taken or are taking a college level composition course, know how to write an essay in English, and can read comfortably at the college level in English. If this is not the case, please see me.
- If you need English language assistance, help with writing, handling college, or dealing with personal or family issues, feel free to ask for help and/or consult the following resources:

DePaul Writing Center:

<http://condor.depaul.edu/writing/what/Writing%20Center/wc.html>

Office of Students with Disabilities:

<http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/studentwithdisabilities/highcontrast/>

PLuS (provides services for students diagnosed with learning disabilities or attention deficit disorders): <http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/csd/>

University Counseling Services (UCS, offers affordable individual, group, and couples counseling to enrolled students): <http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/ucs/>

- If you plan to communicate with me via email, please do so professionally, i.e. in complete sentences, with a proper salutation and conclusion, and at least twenty four hours in advance of when you expect a response (barring extenuating circumstances, of course). Include a comprehensible subject heading, identify what class you are in (as instructors often teach more than one class at a time), and please explain clearly what it is you are inquiring about. If you fail to comply with these guidelines, I reserve the right to not respond.
- Please do make use of my office hours to approach me with any questions, concerns, or just to drop in and talk shop. Naturally your feedback is welcome, and your questions and thoughts serve to deepen our exchange and advance the learning process. Let me reiterate that if you need clarification of or help with any of the texts or assignments, do not hesitate to ask. Please do not wait until the end of the quarter to worry about your performance in the course. I expect that everyone in the class will talk with me during office hours or by appointment at least once this quarter.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

****Subject to Revision At Any Time****

Week One: Jan 3/5

(T) Jan 3: Syllabus and Introduction

I. Setting the Tone

(R): Camus, *The Stranger*, Part One

Week Two: Jan 10/12

(T): Camus, *The Stranger*, Part Two

II. Philosophical Precursors to Existentialism: Tracing a Theme

(R): Kierkegaard, selections from *Fear and Trembling*, "Is There a Teleological Suspension of the Ethical?" pp. 953-957 [D2L]

Week Three: Jan 17/19

(T): Kierkegaard, selections from *Fear and Trembling*, "Is There a Teleological Suspension of the Ethical?" pp. 958-961 [D2L]; **Journal Entry (1) Due**

(R): Nietzsche: selections from *The Gay Science* and *Twilight of the Idols* [D2L]

Week Four: Jan 24/26

(T): Nietzsche continued, retrospective glance at *The Stranger*; **First Paper Assigned**

III. Peering Down the Rabbit Hole

(R): Kafka, "The Judgment"

Week Five: Jan 31/Feb 2

(T): Camus, selections from "An Absurd Reasoning"; **Journal Entry (2) Due**

(R): Dostoevsky, *Notes from the Underground*

Week Six: Feb 7/9

(T): Dostoevsky, *Notes from the Underground*; **First Paper Due**

IV. Existential Ethics?

(R): Sartre, selections from *Being and Nothingness* [D2L]

Week Seven: Feb 14/16

(T): Sartre, selections from *Being and Nothingness*; retrospective glance at Unit II; **Journal Entry (3) Due**

(R): Simone de Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, pp. 413-426 [D2L]

Week Eight: Feb 21/23

(T): Simone de Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, pp. 427-440 [D2L]

V. The Nothing and the Possibility of Affirmation

(R): Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics?" pp.93-102 [D2L]

Week Nine: Feb 28/Mar 2

(T): Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics?" pp. 102-110 [D2L]; **Final Paper Assigned; Journal Entry Four Due**

(R): Nietzsche, handout: selections on affirmation

Week Ten: Mar 7/9

(T): Conclusions on the quarter; Part One of Film

(R): [Last Day of Class]: Part Two of Film

-----**(T) Mar 14: Final Paper Due** -----

HONOR CODE PLEDGE¹

Academic and intellectual integrity are paramount virtues of higher education. They assure our ability to research, think, write, and speak freely in a world of widely diverse viewpoints, and they protect the products of our scholarly work from misappropriation. In the contemporary “digital age,” the widespread availability of information has been a tremendous democratizing force, opening up the world of scholarly productions to many who previously did not possess the means or privilege to access them. However, the digitization of information has also made it easier to reproduce the words and/or ideas of others without proper attribution.

Students in this class should think of themselves as members of a community of scholars committed to upholding and protecting the virtues of academic and intellectual integrity. The values of that community are only as strong as its community members’ promise to honor them. Consequently, students should sign the following “pledge” as their promise to their instructor, their classmates, and the larger academic community to act honorably.

As a member of this class, I pledge that I will not lie, cheat, or indulge intellectual laziness. I will afford to my fellow classmates the most generous interpretation of their arguments and positions. When there are disagreements and I become convinced that my own view is in error, I will concede as much. When I am able to demonstrate that my classmates’ positions are erroneous or wanting, I will endeavor to always allow them a graceful exit from their argument.

I furthermore pledge to do my part to create and maintain an environment in which diversity of both PERSONS and IDEAS is valued and protected. I understand that disagreement alone does not constitute disrespect, but I also pledge that I will not engage in, nor will I enable or excuse, discrimination or harassment based on (real or perceived) race, gender, age, color, sexual orientation, ability, national or ethnic origin, religious belief or socioeconomic class.

*Finally, I pledge to **actively** encourage personal, intellectual, and academic integrity in my peers and, as I am able, I pledge to intervene when it becomes evident to me that the principles of this class are being violated.*

Print Name

Signature

¹ I owe both the inspiration for and the template of this pledge to my colleague, Dr. Leigh M. Johnson.