

University of Manitoba – Department of Philosophy
Fall 2011
PHIL 2710 – A01
CNR 13684

Twentieth-Century European Philosophy: Existentialism

8. September – 6. December 2011

Instructor: Dr. Simone Mahrenholz
Times: Slot 9 (Tuesdays, Thursdays 11:30 - 12:50)
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Course Description

The philosophical movement known as “existentialism” is usually associated with European thinkers such as Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre, or Camus. Its origins, however, lie in Greek antiquity, and its consequences are still very much present in contemporary philosophy, literature, arts, and psychotherapy. This course aims at giving a survey, both in systematic as well as in historical respects, of a philosophical and literary movement, that also understood itself as critique of a concept of philosophy, seen as a ‘purely objective’ science in the rationalist and positivist tradition. Whereas the Cartesian-inspired epistemic approach distinguishes neatly between inquiring subject and examined object, “existentialism” contends that the subject and its existential conditions considerably influence the act of understanding. In particular it added to the question “what can we know?” the equally crucial question: “how should we live”? This also implies: How can we mentally and emotionally survive in a situation deprived of all solid foundations? In the general aftermath of the Enlightenment and in the actual horrors of World War II, this uncomfortable condition holds true in political as well as in scientific and ethical terms. Nietzsche already had announced a “Revaluation of all Values”. His predecessor Kierkegaard had taken “Angst” (existential anguish) as a starting-point of his reflections, characterizing life as a “sickness to death”. Heidegger and Sartre subsequently focused on this existential finitude, into which man is thrown, in inferring, each in his own mode, that

humans live under the demanding conditions of “freedom”: the chance and obligation to freely chose who they want to be and according to which principles to act.

The course will focus on the main concepts, protagonists, and propositions of this movement. Needless to say that in this course we will have plenty of occasions to discuss the perennial questions of life: on how to lead it and how to make sense of it under the conditions of mortality, pain, fear. Positive subjects will also be addressed: as is the challenge to become ‘ourselves’ under the condition of “freedom”, to unfold our individual potential and to aspire to leading an un-alienated life of “authenticity”.

Program

A) From Everyday-Life to Philosophy

1. Existentialism as an Art of Living
Pierre Hadot
(Marc Aurel)
(Michel Foucault)
2. On the Genealogy of Morals
Nietzsche
3. Death, Anguish, Finitude
Kierkegaard
4. Being and Time
Heidegger

B) Philosophy and Literature

5. Freedom, Nausea and Humanism
Sartre
6. Self-Alienation / Authenticity
Camus
7. Ethics and Aesthetics: On Ambiguity
De Beauvoir

C) Existentialism in Film

8. Activism, Vainness and Beyond: Meaning and Nothingness
David O. Russell: I heart Huckabees (2004)

D) Existentialism in Religion and Psychotherapy

9. The Courage to Be
Paul Tillich
10. Existence and Logos: Existential Therapy
Viktor Frankl

Required Texts

Several texts will be distributed to you, or put on reserve, or made electronically available. - Please get yourself a copy of the following books (all paperbacks):

- Gordon Molino: *Basic Writings of Existentialism*. The Modern Library, New York (2004) (available in the University Bookstore) CDN\$ 22
- Jean-Paul Sartre: *Nausea* (La Nausée, 1938) (Transl. Lloyd Alexander, New Directions) CDN\$ 12,64 with at Amazon.ca
- Albert Camus: *The Outsider* (L'Étranger, 1942) (Transl. Joseph Laredo, Penguin Books) CDN\$ 13,36 with Amazon.ca
(Free shipping if you order both books together)

Evaluation / Grading

In this course, the reading of approximately 30-50 pages of philosophical text *per week* is required. In the exceptional case of discussing novels (Sartre and Camus) it will be more, at other times (film) it will be less.

There will be reading assignments for every meeting for the whole group. All students are expected to have read all the reading assignments for every class, and are prepared to discuss them.

You will be expected to write two in-class tests and deliver a 2500-4000 words paper at the end of the term. There is no final exam. The weighting is as follows:

Two in-class tests	20 % each
Seminar Paper (due Dec. 6)	40 %
Participation in class discussions	20 %

Grading Scale

A+: 90-100	A: 80-89	B+: 75-79	B: 70-74
C+: 65-69	C: 60-64	D: 46-59	F: 0-45

Students should acquaint themselves with the University's policy on plagiarism, cheating, exam personation, and duplicate submission (see section 8, in the University of Manitoba Undergraduate Calendar 2011-12), or: <http://crscalprod1.cc.umanitoba.ca/Catalog/ViewCatalog.aspx?pageid=viewcatalog&catalogid=60&chapterid=227&topicgroupid=4056&loaduseredits=False> .

If you are ever uncertain about the academic honesty of anything you are doing for the course, please talk to me.

Plagiarism or cheating will result in an F for the assignment, and may carry additional penalties as per university policy.

Absences must be excused, except in extra-ordinary cases, beforehand, otherwise it will result in a deduction of 3 % of the overall grade for each missed unexcused session.

More than four unexcused absences will lead to an automatic "F" in the class (cf. [section 7.1 in the University of Manitoba Undergraduate Calendar 2011-2012](#))

Withdrawal Deadline

The last date for Voluntary Withdrawal from courses in the Fall 2011 term is **November 16, 2011**. Students will receive evaluative feedback on their work before the voluntary withdrawal date.

Late Policy

Overdue papers will only be accepted with a documented medical excuse.