

University of Manitoba – Department of Philosophy
Fall 2020 - PHIL 2710 – A01 - CNR 12998
Twentieth-Century European Philosophy: Existentialism
Sept. 9th – Dec 11th (lecture period)

Professor:	Simone Mahrenholz
Online-Class-Times:	Tue/Thu 2:30 pm -3:45 pm
Classroom:	Remote teaching via ZOOM
Email:	simone.mahrenholz@umanitoba.ca
Office Hours:	Wed. 11:00 a.m. -12:00 p.m. or upon request Time slots can be booked on UMLearn (Wed. Sept. 23 rd : no office hours)

Course Description

The philosophical movement called Existentialism is often associated with European thinkers such as Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre, or Camus. Its origins, however, lie also in Greek antiquity (Stoicism, Epicureanism, etc.) and in phenomenology (Hegel, Husserl), and its consequences are still very much present in contemporary philosophy, literature and film. This course will give a non-comprehensive survey, both in systematic as well as in historical respects, of a philosophical and literary movement addressing what it means to exist as a human being in the face of emotional, economic, political, social and ethical challenges. The course will focus on central ideas and arguments by authors such as Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Simone Weil. There will be plenty of opportunities in class to discuss crucial questions such as what it means to have a “self”, on what basis to ground moral values, how to make sense of our mortality, how to understand and deal with feelings such as anxiety and dread, how to live a meaningful life in the face of nihilism and uncertainty, or the challenge of being “authentic”. Several of the thinkers we discuss also reflect the difficult conditions of ‘freedom’ we are bound to live under: including the obligation to choose who we want to be and according to what moral principles we would like to act.

Course Organization

The course will take place online at the assigned class-times. It will revolve around the reading and discussion of a series of great and at times difficult texts. The reading of approximately 25-40 pages of primary text per week is required. Material is mostly from the textbook, additional texts as well as background literature will be made available electronically. It is vital that you attend class having read the assigned material and are ready to discuss it. Among the most productive responses to philosophical texts are questions. Thus, always take notes while reading: noting what is unclear or where you

disagree, and address these points in the group or in class-blog-entries. When taking notes, make sure to also write down the *source* that your quote, idea, or question originates from (text, page-number or paragraph), thus having it ready for reference during discussion, or for your blog-entries, or later for your writing-assignments. Much class-time will be devoted to discussion; the more actively you participate, the more fun, entertaining and rewarding it will be for you – which will also be reflected in your grades.

Participation in discussions and blog-entries will be evaluated primarily on the basis of continuous commitment and intellectual and personal engagement. The course aims at providing a protected space of mutual trust that encourages an open exchange of ideas and positions. ‘Mistakes’ are not something to be avoided by all means, rather they often contain the potential for growth for the whole group.

In general you are expected to:

- attend each online-class, having the assigned text and your notes ready at hand
- check your Umanitoba-email-account on a daily basis
- check the course-webpage on UMLearn regularly after class for the latest assignments
- upload weekly responses to the readings on the course-blog on UMLearn under: *communication-discussion-forum* and the current *topic* (details t.b.a)

Course Objectives

At the end of the course the students are expected to be familiar with a selection of key authors, topics, problems, and arguments of existentialist philosophy, with the technique of close reading, of analyzing the meaning of texts and of (re-)constructing philosophical arguments in speaking and writing. They are able to critically formulate questions and discuss possible positions in response. They interact attentively and in a supportive way with their classmates during discussions. And they are capable to reflect on their own existence, thoughts and emotional attunement on the basis of philosophical readings and discussions and give their reflections a voice.

Required Texts

(available at the U of M bookstore)

Gordon Marino: *Basic Writings of Existentialism*. The Modern Library, New York (2004)
 Albert Camus: *The Plague*

Additional texts will be made available electronically on UMLearn or will be available on-line.

Program

The program as well as the readings assigned for each upcoming session will be announced in class and in the assignment sheets uploaded regularly on UMLearn. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to ask me via email or during office hours.

Material to be covered (changes are possible):

- Kierkegaard: *Sickness Unto Death*: What is a self?
- Heidegger: "What is Metaphysics?" On dread and anxiety
- Heidegger *Being and Time* (excerpts from textbook): The case of death
- Sartre: *Existentialism is a Humanism* (textbook) On freedom and nihilism
- Sartre: *Being and Nothingness* (textbook) On authenticity
- Camus: *The Myth of Sisyphus* (textbook) Suicide, the absurd, nihilism, meaning of life, "the absurd hero"
- Camus: *The Plague* (and its relation to his *Myth of Sisyphus*)
- Simone Weil: "Draft for a Statement of Human Obligation"

Evaluation / Grading

Regular attendance in online-class-sessions	10 %
Oral participation in class-discussions	10 %
Weekly short comments or writing assignments (1/2 - 1 page), due the evening before class on the course-blog on UMLearn under: <i>communication-discussion-forum</i> , and the current topic. Details t.b.a.	20 %
Midterm Essay/Test, due Oct. 13th , with 3 days writing time, about 4 pages)	30 %
Final Essay (about 7-8 pages) due Thursday, Nov. 28th , noon	30 %
No final exam.	

Grading Scale

A+: 93-100	A: 86-92	B+: 79-85	B: 72-78
C+: 64-71	C: 56-63	D: 51-55	F: 0-50

Letter Grade	Grade Point Value	
A+	4.5	Exceptional
A	4.0	Excellent
B+	3.5	Very Good
B	3.0	Good
C+	2.5	Satisfactory
C	2.0	Adequate
D	1.0	Marginal
F	0	Failure

MISSED DEADLINES FOR COURSEWORK

If you are unable to meet a course requirement within the given deadline due to medical circumstances, you are currently not required to submit medical notes. However, you need to inform me as soon as possible (within 48 hours) by email from your U of M email address, including your full name, student number and course number, informing me of the missed work, in order to make arrangements for extensions, deferrals, or make-up assignments.

ATTENDANCE

Regular on-line attendance is expected for all sessions.

CLASS ETIQUETTE

While on Zoom, please mute your microphone and un-mute it when you speak. Electronic devices such as phones should be kept away during class-time. Try to remain in front of the camera and not wander around during class time (else you will distract me and the group). Have your assigned reading material (or textbook) and your reading notes at hand in all class sessions.

EMAIL-ETIQUETTE

Address me directly by name and sign with your full name. Otherwise I will not respond. In the subject line of the message, include the course number and the subject of your email.

A NOTE ON RECORDING CLASSES

Unless a student has a medical reason for doing so, recording classes is prohibited.

A NOTE ON SHARING COURSE MATERIALS

Sharing of course materials provided by myself as well as assignment and exam questions is prohibited, unless otherwise stated. This means also that you are not allowed to upload the instructor's intellectual property to a note-sharing or tutoring website without explicit permission.

PLAGIARISM AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Formal written assignments such as take-home tests or essays must include the following

statement on the title page:

“In accordance with the Honor Code, I affirm that this work is my own and all content taken from other sources has been properly acknowledged.”

In cases of uncertainty, check out this webpage with helpful practical information:

<http://umanitoba.ca/student-supports/academic-supports/academic-integrity>

Plagiarism or cheating will result in an F for the assignment, and may carry additional penalties as per university policy. Students should acquaint themselves with the University’s policy on plagiarism, cheating, exam personation (hiring others to write your class-papers or tests), academic fraud, inappropriate collaboration, and duplicate submission (see link above). All of these are in violation of the Student Discipline Bylaw and will lead to serious [disciplinary action](#). Visit the [Academic Calendar](#), [Student Advocacy](#), and [Academic Integrity](#) web pages for more information and support. – If you are ever uncertain about academic honesty of anything you are doing for the course, please do not hesitate to ask me.

WITHDRAWAL DEADLINE

The last date for voluntary withdrawal is **Monday, November 23th, 2020.**

LATE POLICY

See above under missed deadlines for course work

HELP IN AN EMERGENCY

Please make use of the information on this website:

<http://umanitoba.ca/student/mentalhealth/>

If one of them is not successful or helpful, try another one. You can also talk to me confidentially during my online-office hours or make an extra appointment with me.