

Tentative Syllabus: PHIL 135
MR 1:25 to 2:40, Jonas Clark 104
Existentialism in Philosophy and Literature

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Office: 35 Beck (Philosophy) House (on the third floor)
Office hours: MR 10:00-11:00 and by appointment

Texts (to buy):

Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. O'Brien, Vintage, ISBN 0679733736
De Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. Frechtman, Citadel, ISBN 9780806501604
Dostoevsky, *The Karamazov Brothers*, trans. I. Avsey, Oxford, ISBN 9780199536375
Dostoevsky, *Notes from the Underground*, trans. Garnett, Dover, ISBN 9780486270531
Kafka, *The Metamorphosis and Other Stories*. Dover, ISBN 9780486290300
Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Smith, Oxford, ISBN 9780199537082
Sartre, *Nausea*, trans. Howard, New Directions, ISBN 9780811220309

Texts (to be handed out):

Nietzsche, selections from *The Gay Science*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *Beyond Good and Evil*
Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*

Movies (can be streamed on moodle)

2001: A Space Odyssey (1968) Stanley Kubrick
Blade Runner (1982) Ridley Scott
Tree of Life (2012) Terrence Malick
Solaris (1972) Andrei Tarkovsky

Course Description:

Does life have meaning or value? What role does God or religion play in coming to terms with the meaning or absurdity of life? Are there rules or standards of a meaningful life, or are we free to create our own standards of meaning or value? These are questions that we will examine in this course, through various works in the existentialist tradition, which began in the 19th century and flourished in the mid-20th.

This course thus has a dual purpose: you will leave this course better able to recognize and identify the roots of existentialism in our culture. You will also be able to articulate your answers to the questions above. The main activities for the course (and the basis for evaluation) will be class discussion, reading responses, and writing assignments.

Class Preparation and Reading Responses (20%):

I will hand out questions to accompany the readings throughout the semester. You are to think about these questions as you read the texts. We will work through the questions in class, often (but not always) in small groups at first and then opening it up to a general class discussion. Thinking about these questions and preparing responses to them are an essential part of class preparation. Twice a week—whenever reading is due, which is nearly every class day—you will write a reading response, which should be no more than a couple sentences long. The response should be a response to one of the reading questions, or, if you prefer, it can take the form of a question about the reading. *Post this response to the forum on moodle.* To allow for emergencies, forgetfulness, etc. I will drop your two lowest grades. The reading responses will be graded as follows (no in-between grades):

- A Thoughtful response, it is clear the student read and thought about the reading.
- B It is clear that the student at least looked at the book and did some of the reading.
- C Not clear that there was thoughtful reading.
- F Did not turn anything in.

Discussion and Participation (10%):

You are expected to come to class prepared and to participate in class discussions. I will record when you are absent or late and will dock your participation grade. 3x late = 1 absence. Please let me know if there is some reason you are going to miss class. It is always better to let me know. Your grade will mostly be based on your contribution to group and class discussions. Active engagement in your small group discussion as well as in the large group discussion will result in a higher participation grade. I expect you to be civil and respectful in discussion to your peers and to me, even in the midst of disagreement. Here is a ‘rubric’ to let you know how your grade will be determined (in-between grades, like A-, C+ are possible):

- A Comes to class prepared and on time, ready to discuss the texts, contributes thoughtfully to both small group and larger group discussions. Has 0-1 unexcused absences.
- B Often contributes to group discussions, but also sometimes is unprepared or uninterested in the discussions. Has 2-3 unexcused absences.
- C Rarely contributes to discussions, often is unprepared. Has 4-5 unexcused absences.
- F Anything worse than C.

Writing Assignments (45%):

Each of 3 main writing assignments will be 4-5 pages long, and each will be worth 15% of your grade. I will give you more specific instructions when I hand out the assignments. I will usually hold especially long office hours two days before the assignment is due.

I will accept only hard copies at the beginning of class on the day the paper is due. (If there is some reason this is not possible, I will accept an emailed copy of the paper until you can get me the hard copy.)

With respect to extensions, etc. I think you will find that I am reasonable, as long as you are communicating with me. I am not so lenient when it comes to after-the-fact requests.

Final Paper (25%): Due the last day of class.

Honor Code:

Violations of academic integrity will not be tolerated. There are many ways to violate academic integrity, and you are responsible to know what counts as a violation of academic integrity. If you have any doubt, send me an email and I will let you know. Plagiarism can take many forms, but the most common are as follows: using another author's idea in your paper without citation, paraphrasing someone else's work without citation, inserting phrases from another person's work without quotation marks, and extensive collaboration with other students. While discussing the ideas in your paper with other students is worthwhile and I would encourage you to do this, you must write your paper on your own. When in doubt, just add a footnote, don't worry so much about the format of it: "I got this idea from Bill's comment on the forum on 9/2" is fine. Most forms of plagiarism can be avoided by simply not consulting any material for your paper except those required for the course. Do not consult sources that originate on the internet (e.g. wikipedia, blogs). For more information visit: <https://www2.clarku.edu/offices/aac/integrity.cfm>

Laptops, phones, iPads, etc.:

They are not allowed to be out in class at any time.

Grading:

All grading will be done in letter grades, and averaged like a GPA. Your final grade will be determined as follows. The only exception to this is that *if you fail to turn in one of the four major assignments, you will automatically fail the course.*

20% reading responses

10% class participation

3 x15% writing assignments

25% final paper

Extra Credit:

There will be an optional extra credit assignment, which will involve watching a movie (*2001: A Space Odyssey*) and writing a single-spaced, one page response to that movie, comparing it to the themes in Nietzsche's works. An excellent response will result in a 2/3 of a letter grade bump on the following writing assignment (from A- to A+, for instance). A mediocre, but satisfactory response will result in a 1/3 of a letter grade bump on the following assignment. No extensions will be granted for the extra credit assignment.

Unrelated to this, there will be two philosophy lectures which can be attended for extra credit, on Monday, March 13th and Thursday, April 27th. They will be in the late afternoon.

Tentative Schedule:

<i>Week of</i>	<i>Reading assignment</i>	<i>Topic</i>
Week of 1/17	Introduction and discussion	Meaning and value
Week of 1/23	Dostoevsky <i>Notes from Underground</i>	How to live?
Week of 1/30	Dostoevsky <i>Brothers Karamazov</i>	Rebellion
Week of 2/6	Dostoevsky <i>Brothers Karamazov</i>	Grand Inquisitor, Life of Zosima
Week of 2/13	<i>Brothers Karamazov, Tree of Life</i>	Nature and grace
Week of 2/20	Nietzsche	"God is dead"/last man
Writing Assignment #1 due		
Week of 2/27	Nietzsche	Will to truth
Week of 3/6 SPRING BREAK		
Week of 3/13	Nietzsche	Overcoming/Nihilism
Monday, 3/13 Lecture after class (extra credit opportunity)		
Friday, 3/17: Optional extra credit due (no extensions)		
Week of 3/20	Sartre "Existentialism"	Absurdity, Pessimism
Week of 3/27	<i>Blade Runner</i> /Sartre "Nausea"	Knowledge, human nature
Writing Assignment #2 due		
Week of 4/3	Sartre/Kafka "Metamorphosis"	Absurdity, imprisonment
Week of 4/10	Kafka/Camus "Myth of Sisyphus"	Alienation, repetition
Week of 4/17	Camus/De Beauvoir	Ambiguity and Freedom
Week of 4/24	De Beauvoir <i>Ethics, Solaris</i>	Existentialist ethics
Week of 5/1	Conclusion	
Monday 5/1 Final Paper due		
Tuesday 5/9 (by noon, emailed) Writing Assignment #3 due		