

Phil 311: Phenomenology and Existentialism

Fall 2007 Syllabus

Instructor: Dr. Anthony Beavers

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Hours: M&F 10:00-11:50; 1:00-1:50

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W 1:00-1:50; 3:00-4:50

Time & Place: MWF 12:00-12:50 in KC 125

Th 5:00-5:50

Course Description

This course will examine some key moments in "existential philosophy." We will begin with three foundational thinkers from the nineteenth century, Søren Kierkegaard, Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche, particularly with their ideas on the construction of the social arena and what it means to be an individual within it. We will then continue with a reading of Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis* and two twentieth-century, French "existentialist" authors, Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre, before engaging Martin Heidegger's 1947 apologetic, the "Letter on Humanism." Finally, we will examine a few short essays by the late twentieth-century, Jewish philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas.

To tie these thinkers together, this course will aspire to demonstrate existentialism by focusing on two interrelated concerns for existentialists, the possibility of an existential ethics and the relationship between the individual and society. Dostoyevsky once wrote that "If God is dead, then everything is permitted" thereby suggesting that without an absolute, there can be no ethics. Nonetheless, existentialists have tried to develop one in a variety of ways. By and large, these attempts focus on the unfolding of human existence and human freedom in the context of interpersonal relationships. This course will follow this lead and examine human existence in a relational context by contrasting it against the institutionalized structures that make up the society within which the individual is lost.

The ultimate goal of the course will be to make cogent the anti-rational critique of existential philosophers that emerges with (or against) the positivistic tendencies of science and theory in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It will also provide a general background for phenomenology and existentialism to serve as a context for further research.

Required Texts (listed in the order we will read them)

- 1) Kierkegaard, Søren. *Fear and Trembling / Repetition*. Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983.
- 2) Fromm, Erich. *Marx's Concept of Man*. NY: Continuum, 2004.
- 3) Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. NY: Vintage Books, 1966.
- 4) Kafka, Franz. *The Metamorphosis*. Trans. Stanley Corngold. NY: W. W. Norton, 1996.
- 5) Camus, Albert. *The Stranger*. Trans. Matthew Ward. NY: Vintage Books, 1988.
- 6) Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. Trans. Carol Macomber. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007.
- 7) Heidegger, Martin. *Basic Writings*. Ed. David Farrell Krell. 2nd Edition. NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993.

Note on the Reading

From the undergraduate perspective, the texts in this course range from the deceptively simple to the insanely incomprehensible. However, part of improving one's reading skill and learning new ideas requires a willingness to be confused, especially if the ideas that one encounters are vastly different from those the reader already holds. The instructor is aware of the difficulty. So, no complaints, please. But do expect to be confused, for most definitely, you will be.

Assignments

Students are asked to come to class prepared, participate in class discussion, write two, five-page, "reaction papers," and a five-page, "insight essay." They are also asked to take two exams, a midterm and a comprehensive final.

Grading

- 30% - Reaction Papers – 15% each
- 15% - Insight Essay (12/10)
- 15% - Midterm Exam (10/19)
- 20% - Final Exam (12/14)
- 20% - Course Participation

General Paper Guidelines

All papers for this class should be longer than four pages and no longer than five. They should be double-spaced in Times New Roman 12 point font with one inch margins on all sides and page numbers at the bottom center. Format your papers in the MLA style, according to the 6th edition. Be sure to include a title. Staple papers in the top, left corner. Submit them to Turnitin.com and provide me with a copy in print.

Reaction Paper Guidelines

Reaction papers must focus on some aspect of the thought of Kierkegaard, Marx, Nietzsche, Kafka, Camus, Sartre, or Heidegger that is relevant to the overall themes of the course. You may choose two from the list. But, keep in mind that reaction papers are due one week after the last class during which the thinker in question is covered. Late papers will be penalized a part letter grade for each day they are late.

Insight Essay Guidelines

Students are required to write an essay responding to the following question: *If you could choose a single insight to represent what you learned in this course this semester, what would it be? Present this insight and explain it in such a way that an uninitiated reader can understand and appreciate it.* Insight essays are due at the beginning of the last class meeting. Late essays will not be accepted.

The following remarks concerning the content of the essays may help clarify the insight question:

1. An insight is an idea, and, as such, it can (and should) be articulated in a sentence. "My insight is that . . ." It is not a feeling. It is not a state of being, like having an open mind. It is not a directive, such as "always question everything." It may involve these. Sample insights include: "It is important to have an open mind because . . ." and "It is important to question everything because . . .," though both of these are used far too frequently for me to take them seriously.

2. Insights are *somewhat* personal; what is insightful to one person may be patently obvious to another, or another might be oblivious as to why the insight is insightful. Thus, I am not concerned with what your insight is. Rather, I am concerned with your response to the last part of the assignment: “*explain [your insight] in such a way that an uninitiated reader can understand and appreciate it.*”
3. Your answer should be put in conceptual terms; I am not asking why your insight is personally important to you. These essays should not be autobiographies. Do not write about what kind of person you always were and why you are different now. Insights deal with how we *understand* the world and ourselves; though they do have an impact on who we are—what we think influences how we act—essays should focus on the conceptual level. I want to see some thinking, not emoting, asserting or opining.
4. Essays must focus on a single insight. A list of things learned in the class is inappropriate. It is unnecessary to recount the journey through the course. Also, you should not spend time explaining how your insight was formed over time. Simply state your insight in an introductory paragraph and then get to the business of explaining it. Be sure to state your insight in clear and explicit terms.

Exam Format

Both the midterm and final exams will require a response to a question in the form of an extended essay. I will select one item from a question set (to be handed out in advance) and students will respond accordingly. Fifty minutes will be allotted for the midterm exam and two hours for the final.

Policies and Rules

It would be a wonderful world, if classrooms could run without rules, but experience has repeatedly taught me that they are necessary. The following stem primarily, but not exclusively, from two sources. The first is a matter of maintaining respect for honest students with a genuine desire to know. Being fair makes it imperative that they have every opportunity to learn and that they are not lost among the students who take a class only to meet a requirement and who, as a consequence, may only be looking for the highest grade in exchange for the least amount of learning.

The second is to help me maintain my concentration in the classroom. Most of my difficulty with this latter issue derives from the fact that class lecture is a form of conversation. Once I perceive that my interlocutor is no longer listening, my priority automatically shifts from delivering a message to re-establishing contact, and I lose my train of thought. One student in a class can easily throw me off.

It is my hope that the following will respond adequately to these issues and that we will be able to conduct class at a level befitting an institution of higher learning. (In other words, we're not in high school anymore!)

Academic Honesty

All work submitted in this course must be prepared by the student expressly for this course. A student who submits work that is plagiarized, bought, borrowed from the archives of a fraternity, copied from another student, etc., *will fail the course*. (If you don't believe me, ask around.) I fully support the University's Academic Honor Code. To avoid confusion, students should keep in mind that plagiarism occurs not only when someone copies an author word for word, but also when someone uses another's ideas without giving credit, even if the ideas are paraphrased. Always document your sources!

Attendance Policy

I do not have an attendance policy *per se*. However, this course is structured in such a way that students who do not show up regularly may (will?) have trouble passing it. After all, it is difficult to participate if you're not present, and I frequently test on material that is not in the reading. (Since I do not have an attendance policy, there is no reason to send excuses for missing class, whether by email or by phone. Your reasons for missing class are private and do not concern me. Please, in other words, keep them to yourselves.)

Course Participation

Course participation grades are not automatic. They are based on oral contributions to the collective learning experience of the class as a whole in terms of asking pertinent questions, answering questions correctly or, at least, provocatively, making insightful observations, and offering other meaningful expressions of interest in the material that help encourage learning. I begin by assuming a C for each student's course participation grade and move from there. Students should realize that *it is possible to talk a lot in class and receive a low grade for course participation*.

Electronic Technology in the Classroom (Cell Phones, Laptops, Etc.)

The use of laptops, cell phones, gaming devices and other electronic contraptions is not permitted in class. Students caught using them will be asked to leave. (You can wear a watch, if you must, but please don't sit staring at it during my lectures.)

Email

I do not read my UE email at home and, as a consequence, I will only answer email from that account during my scheduled office hours. Even then, I am not apt to sustain long, academic dialogues in this forum. (For extended discussion, please come visit me in person. Office hours are posted above.) Furthermore, during office hours, I will defer to students who show up in person, and this means that I may not be able to answer your email in the short term.

Food in the Classroom

No eating in class.

Packing Up to Go

Often the most critical minutes in a class session are the last five, where conclusions are drawn and assignments are made. Please do not start to pack up your belongings before the end of class.

Stay at Home Policy

I easily lose focus when students aren't paying attention, whether because they are talking to each other, passing notes, studying for another class, etc. If you do not wish to pay attention, please take advantage of my lack of an attendance policy and stay at home. After all, you get nothing for just showing up without paying attention, and I'm probably going to dock your participation grade just the same as if you had stayed at home.

Supplemental Bibliography

The following texts address some of the topics covered by the course. They range in difficulty from the easily-comprehensible to the exceedingly-tough. While I disagree with some of them, all are worth reading. Several were used in the preparation of this course.

Derrida, Jacques. "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas." In *Writing and Difference*, 79-153. Translated by Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.

Guignon, Charles, Ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Hannay, Alastair and Gordon D. Marino, Eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Harr, Michel. *Heidegger and the Essence of Man*. Translated by William McNeill. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1993.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by Joan Stambaugh. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996.

Howells, Christina, Ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Kaufmann, Walter. *From Shakespeare to Existentialism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1959.

Kaufmann, Walter. *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*. 4th Ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974.

Kierkegaard, Søren. *Either/Or*. Two Volumes. Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987.

Kierkegaard, Søren. *Stages on Life's Way*. Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988.

Levinas, Emmanuel. *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*. Translated by Richard A. Cohen. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1985.

Levinas, Emmanuel. *Totality and Infinity*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1965.

Magnus, Bernd and Kathleen M. Higgins, Eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Megill, Allan. *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness*. Translated by Hazel E. Barnes. NY: Washington Square Press, 1956.

Scott, Charles E. *The Question of Ethics: Nietzsche, Foucault, Heidegger*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990.

Solomon, Robert C., and Kathleen M. Higgins, Eds. *Reading Nietzsche*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Westphal, Merold. *Kierkegaard's Critique of Reason and Society*. University Park, PA: The Penn State University Press, 1987.

Some Electronic Resources

1) *Noesis: Philosophical Research Online* indexes a fair amount of philosophy relating to the many issues discussed in this class. See <http://noesis.evansville.edu>.

2) For detailed background of key philosophical concepts relating to the course, see the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, available at <http://plato.stanford.edu>.

3) Elements of this course are heavily centered around my 1995 book, *Levinas beyond the Horizons of Cartesianism*, available with other resources at <http://faculty.evansville.edu/tb2/levinas/>.

Course Calendar (tentative)

8/29 - Course Introduction; Syllabus Review

8/31 - Background Review / Philosophical Predecessors
The Ancient Greeks – Appearance and Reality

9/3 - Background Review / Philosophical Predecessors
Descartes – Subjectivity and Introspection

9/5 - Background Review / Philosophical Predecessors
Kant – The World Is a Transcendental Illusion

9/7 - No Class

9/10 - Background Review / Philosophical Predecessors
Kant and Hegel – What Now?

9/12 - Kierkegaard, 5-14
Preface and Exordium

9/14 - Kierkegaard, 15-23
Eulogy on Abraham

9/17 - Kierkegaard, 27-40
Preliminary Expectoration

9/19 - Kierkegaard, 41-53
Preliminary Expectoration, continued

9/21 - Kierkegaard, 54-67
Is there a Teleological Suspension of the Ethical?

9/24 - Kierkegaard, 68-81
Is there an Absolute Duty to God?

9/26 - Fromm, 1-36
Historical Materialism, Consciousness, Human Nature and Society

9/28 - Fromm, 37-69
Alienation, Socialism, One Marx or Two?

10/1 - Fromm, 78-89
"Alienated Labor"

10/3 - Nietzsche, 1-32
Nietzsche's Preface, On the Prejudices of Philosophers

10/5 - Nietzsche, 35-56
The Free Spirit

10/8 - Nietzsche, 59-94
What is Religious, Epigrams and Interludes

10/10 - Nietzsche, 97-141
Natural History of Morals, We Scholars

10/12 - Nietzsche, 145-170
Our Virtues

10/15 - No Class (Fall Break)

10/17 - Nietzsche, 201-237
What is Noble

10/19 - **Midterm Exam**

10/22 - Kafka, 3-42
The Metamorphosis

10/24 - Kafka, 126-140
Straus, "Transforming Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*"

10/26 - Kafka, 140-153
Sweeney, "Competing Theories of Identity in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*"

10/29 - Kafka, 154-172
Anderson, "Sliding Down the Evolutionary Ladder? Aesthetic Autonomy in *The Metamorphosis*"

10/31 - Kafka, 195-210
Santner, "Kafka's *Metamorphosis* and the Writing of Abjection"

11/2 - Camus, 3-59
The Stranger, Part One

- 11/5 - Camus, 63-123
The Stranger, Part Two
- 11/7 - Sartre, 73-98
A Commentary on *The Stranger*

- 11/9 - Sartre, 17-54
Existentialism Is a Humanism

- 11/12 - Sartre, 54-72
Post-Lecture Discussion

- 11/14 - Heidegger, 217-265
“Letter on Humanism” – We will go very slowly through the “Letter,” paragraph by paragraph, and we will not finish it. Students should stay a few pages ahead of the lecture for the Heidegger section of this course.

- 11/16 - Heidegger
See note for 11/14

- 11/19 - Heidegger
See note for 11/14

- 11/21 - No Class (Thanksgiving Break)

- 11/23 - No Class (Thanksgiving Break)

- 11/26 - Heidegger
See note for 11/14

- 11/28 - Heidegger
See note for 11/14

- 11/30 - Heidegger
See note for 11/14

- 12/3 - Levinas (On Reserve)
“The Phenomenological Theory of Being,” 11-26.

- 12/5 - Levinas (On Reserve)
“The Phenomenological Theory of Being,” 11-26.

- 12/7 - Levinas (On Reserve)
“Ethics as First Philosophy,” 75-86.

- 12/10 - Levinas (On Reserve)
“Ethics as First Philosophy,” 75-86.

- 12/14 - **Final Exam (Comprehensive)** 12:30 – 2:30 in KC 125