

PHENOMENOLOGY AND EXISTENTIALIST THOUGHT

Description

Since the Ancient Greeks, the Western tradition has articulated the self in terms of its “rational” or “cognitive” abilities. According to this conception, the drama of human life plays itself out around the centrality of knowledge rather than will, truth rather than passion. In different ways, this “intellectualist” view of the self is espoused by the two dominant conceptual schemes of 19th century philosophy: Hegelian idealism, on the one hand, and the various versions of scientific reductionism, promoted by positivism, on the other.

During the 20th century, phenomenology and existentialism express the most radical reaction to these traditional approaches. A new cognitive value is attributed to moods, beliefs, and states of consciousness as well as to some spheres of human interaction such as authenticity, temporality, and intentionality. However, while phenomenology seeks to understand these states as a window onto the universal “structure” of human experience, existentialism aims at giving metaphysical legitimacy to the concrete and finite angle of individual “existence.” This is why, particularly in the Anglo-American context, existentialism is interpreted as an exploration in the subjective implications of individualism. The icon of this interpretation is the solitary individual confronting questions that are both distinctively human and irreducibly personal.

Throughout the course, we shall challenge this premise: namely, that existentialism promotes human life as essentially isolated and private. Our working hypothesis shall be that existentialists such as Heidegger and Sartre, and predecessors of existentialism such as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, were concerned less with individuality than with the *quality* of our ethical relations to others.

We shall compare how different thinkers and writers understand the role of emotions, desires, and choices in interpersonal relations. Along the way, we shall survey their efforts to re-think the oppositional structure upon which the Western philosophical lineage is erected and examine the role played by traditional dichotomies such as body and mind, rationality and irrationality, feeling and reason.

Texts¹

Existentialism: Basic Writings, Hackett, 2nd Edition

Heidegger, *Being and Time*, SUNY Press

Camus, *The Stranger*, Vintage

Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Vintage

Beckett, *Endgame and Act Without Words*, Grove Press

Requirements²

Philosophy is a demanding discipline and this is a demanding class, which will need your full dedication. Listed below are the reading and viewing assignments for the course. Each one of them should be prepared thoroughly before class. Should you miss a class for a justified reason, I expect you to get notes from a classmate and still complete the reading assignment for that day. All your written work has to be submitted by Blackboard, in a Word format (virus free!), and in hard copy at the Philosophy Department's office (Rocky 209). On every one of your written pieces I expect to find a header with your name, the class in which you are enrolled, the type of assignment as named in the Syllabus, and page numbers. Look at the sample paper template on Blackboard for how I expect your papers. For every day late a paper is handed in, ½ of a grade point will be subtracted (i.e., an A will become an A-). Extensions may be asked and obtained in advance only for medical, family reasons, or multiple overlapping deadlines.

¹ The films that we shall discuss in class are on available on reserve. However, I encourage you to attend the all-class viewings planned for each of them at the times, places, and days listed in this syllabus.

² Academic accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please, schedule an appointment with the Instructor early in the semester to discuss any accommodations that may be needed for the course. All accommodations must be approved through the Office of Disability and Support Services (ext. 7584) as indicated in the accommodation letter.

Reading, Viewing, and Written Assignments

<i>August</i>	31 Introduction and Background
<i>September</i>	5 Kierkegaard, excerpts from <i>Fear and Trembling</i> , in <i>Existentialism. Basic Writings</i> Preface, “A Panegyric Upon Abraham” & “Problemata”: Preliminary Expectoration,” 26-55
	7 Kierkegaard, <i>Fear and Trembling</i> , “Problem 1” & “Problem 2,” 55-77
	12 Kierkegaard, excerpts from <i>The Sickness Onto Death</i> , 78-84 Kierkegaard, <i>Concluding Unscientific Postscript</i> , 85-92
	13 Make Up Class, 6-7:30 pm Nietzsche, excerpts from <i>The Gay Science</i> , in <i>Existentialism. Basic Writings</i> , 123-171
	Nietzsche, <i>The Twilight of the Idols</i> , 172-181
	14 Response Paper On Kierkegaard Due
	19 Nietzsche, <i>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</i> , Prologue and excerpts from Part I (Blackboard)
	20 Film viewing of Sam Mendes, <i>American Beauty</i> , 6-8 pm, Rockefeller 210
	21 Nietzsche continued
	26 Nietzsche and <i>American Beauty</i>

	28 Husserl, "Pure Phenomenology" (Blackboard) Report on Nietzsche and <i>American Beauty</i> Due
<i>October</i>	3 Excerpts from <i>Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology</i> (Blackboard)
	5 Heidegger, <i>Being and Time</i> , § ³ 1-19, 42-45
	10 Heidegger, <i>Being and Time</i> , § 53-75
	12 Heidegger, <i>Being and Time</i> , § 123-130
OCTOBER BREAK	
	24 Heidegger, <i>Being and Time</i> , § 134-148
	26 Heidegger, <i>Being and Time</i> , § 181-192
	31 Heidegger, <i>Being and Time</i> , § 236-267 Response Paper on Heidegger
<i>November</i>	2 Heidegger, <i>Being and Time</i> , § 268-280
	5 Film viewing of Akira Kurosawa <i>Ikiru</i> , 6-8pm, Rockefeller 212
	7 Heidegger and <i>Ikiru</i>
	9 Sartre "The Wall," in <i>The Wall and Other Stories</i>

³ These symbols (§) refer to the marginal pagination appended to *Being and Time*'s original edition. They have not changed in any successive editions or translations.

	14	Sartre, excerpts from <i>Being and Nothingness</i> , in <i>Existentialism. Basic Writings</i> , 309-362 Take-Home Exam Distributed
	16	Sartre, excerpts from <i>Being and Nothingness</i> , in <i>Existentialism. Basic Writings</i> , continued
	21	Class Canceled Take-Home Exam Due
Thanksgiving Break		
	28	Camus, <i>The Myth of Sisyphus</i>
	30	Camus, <i>The Stranger</i>
December	5	Beckett, <i>Endgame</i>
	7	Conclusion Final Paper Proposal Due
	14	Final Paper Due