

Introduction to Existentialism (PHIL 730:268)
Fall 2020

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Office hours: by appointment

Course description: In the popular imagination, existentialism was an intellectual fashion that flourished in the cafés and boulevards of post WWII Paris featuring black turtlenecks, red wine and ennui. While there is a grain of truth in this portrait, in this course we will treat existentialism as a broader tendency that finds expression in literature and philosophy from the mid-nineteenth century until the present day. The central ideas that animates this tendency are that life is, in some sense, meaningless or absurd, that human beings thus possess a radical freedom to choose their own values, and that such choice is regulated by a demand for authenticity. In this course, we will look at how these ideas gains expression and development across a wide range of thinkers.

Assignments: There will be two exams: a midterm (45% of your final grade) and a final (45% of your final grade).

Class Discussion: This course is taking place online and asynchronously. Consequently, there will be no opportunity for traditional classroom discussion. Discussion, in some form or other, is, nevertheless, very important for doing and learning philosophy. We will, therefore, have to take advantage of one or more varieties of electronic communication at our disposal: Finding the right one will require experimentation. We will begin by using online discussion forums in Canvas and we'll fine-tune from there as needed. 10% of your final grade will be determined by the quantity and quality of your contributions to these electronic discussions.

Plagiarism: You are required to know what plagiarism is and how to avoid it. You can find the University's plagiarism policy here:

<http://nbacademicintegrity.rutgers.edu/>

If you have any questions, you must ask me.

Text: all readings will be from Dostoyevsky, *Notes from Underground*, Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (available electronically via Canvas course site) and Guignon and Pereboom, *Existentialism: Basic Writings*, available from the University Bookstore.

Schedule:

Module 1: Dostoyevsky, *Notes from Underground*

Module 2: Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*

Module 3: Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*

Module 3: Nietzsche, *The Gay Science, Twilight of the Idols*

Module 4: Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*.

Module 4: Heidegger, *Being and Time*

Module 5: Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*

Module 6: Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*