

PHIL 117: EXISTENTIALISM (Fall 2011)

Class Meetings: TR 1:30-2:45pm, MND 1024
Instructor: Dr. Christina Bellon
Office Hours: M&W 10-11:30; and by appointment.
Contact: MND 3030, 278.4759, www.csus.edu/indiv/b/bellonc; via SacCT email. Please keep all course related communications within SacCT.

A Note on Availability:

Other than during scheduled office hours, communication will be answered generally within one working day. After 5pm M-F or on the weekend, do not expect a response until the next business day.

CATALOGUE DESCRIPTION

A study of the problems of the existing individual, or inner-most self, especially the problem of choice in the context of radical freedom and finitude. Particular attention will be paid to the philosophical writings of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre, and de Beauvoir. Some themes will be examined through the literary works of these and other philosophers, such as Camus, and Dostoevsky. (3 units.)

Pre-requisite: Passing score on the Writing Proficiency Exam or successful completion of ENGL 109M/W (absolutely no exceptions).

GENERAL EDUCATION CRITERIA

This course satisfies General Education Requirements for Advanced Study Writing Intensive. *Students are required to write not less than 5,000 words of clear and logical prose.*

This course also satisfies General Education Requirements Area C4: Further Studies in the Arts and Humanities in the following ways:

1. By (i) detailed and focused study of Existentialism as one major philosophical approach to the problems of living under the conditions of advanced, complex social life; and (ii) by doing so through the study of philosophical texts (some written under conditions of extreme adversity), as well as literary texts (poetry, plays, and prose); this course *furtheres the development of an understanding of and an appreciation for the diversity of the human community and condition, and focuses on ideas and values of various cultures and traditions as expressed in their literatures, philosophies or religions.*

2. As Existentialism is a modern approach to some of the most important questions of life, it draws from human experience in its breadth and diversity to explore, understand, and confront the human condition. Its roots in 19th Century European Idealism and its confrontation with global war, genocide, violence, colonialism, and social fragmentation in the 20th Century, this approach is well suited to facilitating the exploration of the breadth and diversity of the human condition. Existentialism begins inquiry from the embodied individual and leads to contemplation of the self in the wealth or poverty of its circumstances. More specifically, we will study: (i) the works of religious Existentialists, who defend the immediacy and necessity of God in meaningful human existence, as well as atheistic Existentialists, who deny any higher authority other than the individual herself; (ii) the contributions of Existentialism to feminism and race studies, by focusing our attention on the body and on the construction of individuals' choices by the uncontrollable (frustratingly and despairingly so) environment in which the individual finds herself. In this and other ways, this course also *presents the contributions and perspectives of women, persons from various ethnic, socio-economic, and religious groups, gays and lesbians, and persons with disabilities.*

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

ASPIRATION/OBJECTIVE	PRACTICAL GOALS	ASSESSMENT TOOLS
Develop competence in philosophical, especially existential, analysis, language and literature, including the historical origins and transformations of Existentialist philosophy.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Accurately describe and distinguish between a variety of philosophical concepts; 2. Express one's own critical judgements in a cogent and clear fashion; 3. Engage in cogent and respectful discussion of difficult and sometimes controversial issues; 4. Analyse specific arguments for consistency and credibility (including one's own); 5. Apply processes of critical analysis to texts. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pre and Post course open-ended question/assessment. 2. Content in each of: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. short essays b. on-line discussion c. discussion questions 3. Semester long Problem-Based Learning Project on the Meaning of Life.
Develop written communication skills, especially as those are associated with expository and argumentative writing.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Writing competently in concise, precise and well developed logical style; 2. Expression of a point of view through the formulation of a coherent and consistent argument; 3. Presentation of an exposition of text in a coherent manner to an audience of peers. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Quality of the form (essay structure, logic) and mechanics (syntax, grammar) of each of: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. short essays b. on-line discussion 2. Substance, structure, and delivery of the semester long Problem-Based Learning Project.

Develop an appreciation of the diversity of the human condition, as this is formulated in diverse historical and cultural contexts and by a diversity of individuals.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Accurately describe and distinguish the central elements of the existential approach against its historical and cultural context. 2. Demonstrate comprehension of the cultural values and historical developments which contribute to the development of existentialism. 	Discussion of the variations in existentialism, especially as these are informed by culture and historical events, through: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. written assignments b. on-line discussion c. class participation
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TEXTS

Robert Solomon (ed), *Existentialism, 2nd Edition* (Oxford University Press, 2005).
 Supplemental Readings available on SacCT.

EVALUATION

Students will be evaluated by several means. These will include a series of short in-class interpretive essays, substantive essays, a semester long Meaning of Life project, and on-line discussions. The course is graded on the basis of 100pts (1pt = 1%).

ALL assignments and essays are administered within SacCT. Print or hand submitted copies will not be accepted. All assignments must be completed in the appropriate assignment or assessment area in SacCT.

Grading Scale

A Outstanding (96pts and above) B Range Satisfactory (75-89pts) D Range Poor (50-59pts)	A- Very Good (90-95pts) C Range Minimally Satisfactory (60-74pts) F Unacceptable (below 50pts)
This is based upon a 100 pt scale with 1pt = 1%	

Technology Component

Please note this course includes a significant SacCT component. Essay assignments can be found there, as well as required group discussion, and general calendar and class notification options. You will need a saLink account to participate in this component of the course. Technical problems must be addressed to the SacLink Help Line @ 278-7337.

A Note on Participation

As this is an upper division class, it should be taken as an opportunity for you to enhance your communication skills. I strongly encourage you to come regularly, do the readings ahead of time, and participate in class discussions and activities. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of every class.

Interpretive Exercises (20pts)

At least ten times during the semester, you will be given a question at the beginning of class which will prompt you to reflect on some aspect of the assigned reading. This might require you to read a select passage from the text – ALWAYS bring your text to class!

You will have approximately ten minutes in class to write and submit a one page (250 word) reflection. These prompts will serve to focus discussion for the class period. If more than ten opportunities are provided, your grade for this component of the course will consist of your best ten scores.

These submissions will be graded as excellent (A: 2.0), good (B: 1.75), satisfactory (C: 1.5), unsatisfactory (D: 1.0) on a two-point scale. Failure to submit a response during the class period assigned will result in a zero grade (F: 0). No make-ups, no late submissions.

Short Essays (15pts each x 2 = 30pts)

You will be required to write and submit two formal essays, each of which will consist of a 1200-1500 word (double spaced, normal font & margins) explication and analysis of the issue identified in the essay assignment for each course segment. *You must submit both essays for grading to complete the course. Failure to do so will result in a grade of F for the course.*

Meaning of Life Project (30pts)

This component of the course consists of a substantive philosophical response to the central question of meaning (What meaning does my life/living have?), written as a formal essay, 1500-2000 words in length, and comprised of the product of your reflection on this issue over the course of the whole semester and in light of the breadth and complexity of the course material (20pts). This project will also involve the prior submission of an outline and proposal, for review and comment, which will serve as the basis for your analysis of meaning. This proposal carries no formal grade value, but will be returned with a letter grade indicator reflecting the quality of the proposed essay. See project guide for further information and guidance.

You must complete each part of this assignment as directed in the Project Guide. Failure to do so will be considered as a failure to complete the requirements of the course and a grade of F will be issued for the course.

On-Line Discussion (20pts)

Every student will be required to contribute at least 12 times to the on-line discussion, including at least thrice (three times) to each of the four course sections. Each student is also expected to read and follow the discussions of their class-mates. Contributions may consist of:

- (i) asking philosophical questions which probe the reading and engage in further explication and analysis of the text,
- (ii) responding thoughtfully to someone else's question,
- (iii) suggesting connections between this reading and other course material,

- (iv) bring current events and other empirical facts/evidence to bear on the reading.

All of this must be conducted in the effort to better understand the texts and to further our appreciation of the material's strengths and weaknesses. Polemics, ideological shortcuts, and other rather thoughtless and unscholarly contributions will not satisfy this requirement and should be resisted. Proper on-line etiquette is expected; violations will not be tolerated.

Each student must have made a total of 12 contributions to on-line discussion by the end of semester (with at least three postings to each of the four course sections). Further, *each student must have read at least ¾ (three-quarters) of the available contributions of their fellows to qualify for a satisfactory grade of C- or better (regardless of how many submissions they have made).*

COURSE POLICIES AND ETIQUETTE

Attendance

Regular attendance is expected from all class participants. Disruptions, rudeness and private discussions, including cell phone disruptions, will not be tolerated. This means while in class, you should be focused on classroom activities and material. Sleeping, using a cell phone, reading a newspaper, doing assignments for other classes, or otherwise engaging in disruptive or disrespectful behavior will be met with a loss of ½pt (per incidence) from the final course grade. **All cellular devices and iPods/music players must be turned off during class unless being used explicitly for class activities.**

Late Assignments

All essay assignments are due at the beginning of class on the day listed in the course schedule. Late assignments will be penalized at a rate of 10% per calendar day (not merely class period) beginning with the due date. After three days, acceptance of the assignment is at the instructor's discretion. If you know you will not be able to meet a due date, it is your responsibility to consult with the instructor before the assignment is due. It is your responsibility to know the due dates and to plan accordingly. Leaving an assignment until the day or two prior is risky and makes you more vulnerable than you already are to factors and events in the universe beyond your control! **No extensions, no exceptions.**

When submitting any assignment in SacCT, ALWAYS check its status to ensure it was submitted. Do not merely hit "submit" and leave. It is your responsibility to ensure your assignment was submitted accurately and timely. Do not wait for the instructor to ask you about it or for a "0" to appear in your grade column!

Plagiarism and Cheating

Plagiarism is a serious academic offence and will not be tolerated in this class. Assignments in which plagiarism is found will at the least be graded at 0 (not just an F). ALL incidents of plagiarism will be reported both to the Department Chair and to the Judicial Officer in the

Office of Student Affairs for possible further administrative sanction. ***It is your responsibility to know and comply with the University's Academic Honesty Policy***
<http://www.csus.edu/umannual/student/UMA00150.htm>.

Disability Accommodation

If you have a documented disability (visible or invisible) and require accommodation or assistance with assignments, tests, attendance, note taking, etc., please see the instructor by the end of the third week of classes so that arrangements can be made. Failure to notify and consult with the instructor by this date may impede my ability to offer you the necessary accommodation and assistance in a timely fashion. Also be sure to consult with the Services to Students with Disabilities (Lassen Hall) to see what other campus services and accommodation options are available for you.

WEEKLY COURSE OUTLINE

Au 30 Course introduction.

I/ 18th & 19th Century Idealism and the Philosophical Roots of Existentialism

Se 1 **Introduction to Philosophical Methods and Existential Philosophy**

Read: Solomon, "Introduction," pp xi-xx.

Se 6-8 **Kant, Modern Philosophy and the Ontological Turn**

Read: Exchange between Kant and von Herbert, PDF in SacCT.

Read: Solomon: Kierkegaard, "The Present Age," 3-6, and "Concerning the Dedication to the Individual," 32-3; Sartre, "Marxism and Existentialism," 262-9; Rilke, "Notebooks," 154-5; Unamuno, "The Tragic Sense of Life," 156-60; Merleau-Ponty, "Freedom," 284-5; Roth, "The Human Stain," 374-5.

II/ Existence, Individuality and God

Se 13-15 **Dostoevsky** Read: "Grand Inquisitor," pp 37- 64.

Se 20 Special Session – Annual Fall Ethics Symposium – Class meets in Ballroom.

Se 22 **Kierkegaard's Method** Read: Solomon : 6-17.

Se 27-29 **Kierkegaard on Subjectivity and Anxiety** Read: Solomon: 17-33.

Oc 4-6 **Nietzsche: Conscious Spirit** Read: Solomon, 65-78.

Oc 11-13 **Nietzsche: Subjective Truth** Read: Solomon, 79-101.

Oc 17 (Mon) ☺ Essay #1 On God/Individuality Due @ noon.

III/ Being, Freedom, Death

Oc 18-20 **Heidegger: Da-sein and Thrownness** Read: Solomon, 116-131.

Oc 25-27 **Heidegger: Freedom, Anxiety and Death** Read: Solomon, 132-152.

Oc 31 (Mon) ☺ Meaning of Life Proposal Due @ noon.

IV/ Absurdity, Nausea, Nothingness, Angst, and Freedom

No 1-3 **Camus : Suicide & Authenticity** Read: Solomon 183-202.

No 8-17 **Sartre's Humanism** Read: Solomon 203-70.
No 22-De 1 **de Beauvoir on Freedom, Conflict and Morality** Read: Solomon 291-306.
No 24-25 **CAMPUS CLOSED – THANKSGIVING BREAK**
De 5 (Mon) 😊 **Essay #2 On Freedom Due @ noon**
De 6-8 **Wrapping Up!**

De 15 (Thurs) 😊 **Meaning of Life Essay – Due @ noon.**
This is a time certain deadline. *Late submissions will not be accepted!*

No Final Exam.

ORIGINAL