

FALL 2013

# PHIL 117: EXISTENTIALISM

## COURSE INFORMATION

Class Meetings: TR 1:30-2:45pm, SHS 143  
Instructor: Prof. Christina Bellon  
Office Hours: MW 11:00-12:00 in MND 3000; and by appointment.  
Contact: MND 3000, 278-4759, [www.csus.edu/indiv/b/bellonc](http://www.csus.edu/indiv/b/bellonc).

**Please keep all course related communications within Blackboard Messaging.**

**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 (Absolutely no exceptions.): You must have GVAR certification before Fall 2009; or WPJ score of 80 or above; or 3-unit placement in ENGL 109M/W; or 4-unit placement in ENGL 109M/W + co-enrollment in ENGL 109X; or WPJ score 70/71 + co-enrollment in ENGL 109X.**

## 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. This course furthers 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 by
  - a. 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,
  - b. doing so through the study of philosophical texts (some written under conditions of extreme adversity), as well as literary texts (poetry, plays, and prose).
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 19<sup>th</sup> Century European Idealism and its confrontation with global war, genocide, violence, colonialism, and social fragmentation in the 20<sup>th</sup> 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:

- a. 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;
- b. 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.*

## REQUIRED TEXTS

Robert Solomon (ed), *Existentialism, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

ISBN: 9780195174632

Amazon, <http://www.amazon.com/dp/0195174631>

Oxford University Press,

<http://www.oup.com/us/catalog/he/?queryField=keyword&query=9780195174632+&&viewVeritySearchResults=true&ss=relevancy>

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

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"> <li>1. Accurately describe and distinguish between a variety of philosophical concepts;</li> <li>2. Express one's own critical judgements in a cogent and clear fashion;</li> <li>3. Engage in cogent and respectful discussion of difficult and sometimes controversial issues;</li> <li>4. Analyse specific arguments for consistency and credibility (including one's own);</li> <li>5. Apply processes of critical analysis to texts.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Content in each of:                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Interpretive Exercises</li> <li>b. On-line discussion</li> <li>c. In-class Discussion</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. Semester Essay Project</li> </ol>
Develop written communication skills, especially as those are associated with expository and argumentative writing.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Writing competently in concise, precise and well developed logical style;</li> <li>2. Expression of a point of view through the formulation of a coherent and consistent argument;</li> <li>3. Presentation of an exposition of text in a coherent manner to an audience of peers.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Quality of the form (essay structure, logic) and mechanics (syntax, grammar) of each of the Essay Project.</li> </ol>

ASPIRATION/OBJECTIVE	PRACTICAL GOALS	ASSESSMENT TOOLS
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.	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"> <li>a. written assignments</li> <li>b. on-line discussion</li> <li>c. in-class participation</li> </ol>

## EVALUATION

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

***ALL assignments and essays are administered within Blackboard. Print or hand submitted copies will not be accepted, except for work assigned and completed in class. All assignments must be completed in the appropriate assignment or assessment area in Blackboard.***

## GRADING SCALE

**A** Outstanding (96pts and above)

**A-** Very Good (90-95pts)

**B** Range Satisfactory (80-89pts)

**C** Range Minimally Satisfactory (70-79pts)

**D** Range Poor (60-69pts)

**F** Unacceptable (below 60pts)

This is based upon a 100 pt scale with 1pt = 1%

## TECHNOLOGY COMPONENT

Please note, this course includes a significant Blackboard component. Essay assignments can be found there, as well as required group discussion, and general calendar and class notification options. Technical problems must be addressed to the ITC Help Line @ 278-7337.

## A NOTE ON PARTICIPATION

As this is an upper division course, 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.

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### ESSAY PROJECT (60PTS)

For this course, you will write one substantive essay on an assigned topic. You will write the essay in four stages, each of which will be commented upon by the instructor and revised by you before submitting the next stage (see the weekly schedule for due dates).

*You must submit all components of the essay (drafts, revisions, and final submission) for grading to complete the course. Failure to do so will result in a grade of F for the course.*

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### ON-LINE DISCUSSION (20PTS)

Every student will be required to contribute at least 12 times to the on-line discussion in the discussion boards area of Blackboard, including at least three times to each of the four discussion topics. 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).*

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### BONUS OPPORTUNITIES

Throughout the semester, students will have the opportunity to earn bonus points by attending specified events and writing an analysis of it. Details and Instructions can be found in the Bonus Opportunities area of the Blackboard course content. Students can earn up to a maximum of 5 bonus points in this way.

## COURSE POLICIES AND ETIQUETTE

### EXPECTATIONS

#### 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.**

#### DIVERSITY AND RESPECT

CSUS attracts a diverse population of students, faculty and staff with a wide range of cultural norms, lifestyles, beliefs and backgrounds. Opinions may vary on many issues, but students and faculty in this class will be expected to converse and debate in a respectful and tolerant manner.

This class will only be rich if everyone feels free to express her/his views and personal understanding of the course material. Because this is a philosophy class, and philosophy prompts us to think in ways that may be unfamiliar, let us all be mindful and respectful of each other's opinions. Everyone has a responsibility to make the classroom environment a place where we can respectfully agree to disagree, and perhaps even settle some long unsettled questions.

#### LATE ASSIGNMENTS

All assignments are due at the date and time specified in the assignment. Late assignments will be penalized at a rate of 10% per calendar day (not merely class period) beginning with the due date. After three late 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. **When submitting any assignment in Blackboard, 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!**

**No extensions, no exceptions.** 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!

#### PLAGIARISM/CHEATING

Plagiarism and cheating are serious academic offences which will not be tolerated in this class. Assignments in which plagiarism or other forms of cheating are found will at the least be graded at 0 (not just an F). ALL incidents of cheating and 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/AcademicHonestyPolicyandProcedures.htm>

## REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION

Every effort has been made to ensure this course is designed to maximize opportunities for student success across the diversity of the student body. However, it may be the case that some elements of the course will require modification to ensure equal opportunity for students with documented disabilities to succeed. Students who have a documented disability (visible or invisible) and require accommodation or assistance with assignments, tests, attendance, note taking, etc., must see the instructor by the ***end of the third week of semester*** to allow arrangements to be made. Failure to notify and consult with the instructor by this date might impede her ability to offer you the necessary accommodation and assistance in a timely fashion. Also be sure to consult with the Services for Students with Disabilities (Lassen Hall) to see what other campus services and accommodation options are available for you. All information shared with the instructor will remain confidential.

## WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Week	Topic	Readings and Assignments
Se 3	Introduction to Philosophical Methods and Existential Philosophy	Read: Solomon, "Introduction," pp xi-xx. <b>Due Opening Homework – Available on Blackboard, bring to class.</b>
<b>Unit 1: 18<sup>th</sup> &amp; 19<sup>th</sup> Century Idealism and the Philosophical Roots of Existentialism</b>		
Se 5-12	Kant, Hegel, and the Ontological Turn	Read: Exchange between Kant and von Herbert; Kant on Metaphysics and Ethics; Hegel, On the Other, Master and Slave; all as PDF in Blackboard. 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.
<b>Unit 2: Early Explorations in Existence, Individuality, and Faith</b>		
Se 17-19	Dostoevsky	Read: Solomon, "Notebooks from the Underground" and "Grand Inquisitor," pp 37- 64.
Se 24-Oc 3	Kierkegaard	Read: Solomon, pp 6-33.
Oc 8-17	Nietzsche	Read: Solomon, pp 65-101 <b>DUE Oc 15 inclass: Stage 1: Selected Topic Option and Explication of the Problem</b>
<b>Unit 3: Ontological Turn Completed: Being, Freedom, Death</b>		
Oc 22-29	Heidegger: Da-sein and Thrownness	Read: Solomon, pp 116-131
Oc 31-No 7	Heidegger: Freedom, Anxiety & Death	Read: Solomon, pp 132-152 <b>DUE No 5 inclass: Stage 2: Thesis Statement</b>
<b>Unit 4: Post-WWII Reflections on Life, Freedom, and Conflict</b>		
No 12-14	Camus: Authenticity & the Absurd	Read: Solomon, pp 183-202
No 19-26	Sartre: Freedom, Nausea, Others	Read: Solomon, pp 203-270 <b>DUE No 26 inclass: Stage 3: Argument with Objection-Rebuttal</b>
<b>No 28-31 Thanksgiving Break – Campus Closed</b>		

<b>Week</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Readings and Assignments</b>
De 3-5	deBeauvoir: Freedom & Morality	Read: Solomon, pp 291-306
De 10-12	Wrapping Up	
De 16-20 Exam Week – No classes. <b>Stage 4: Revised Final Version of Essays due Thursday, De 19 at noon, Time Certain.</b> <b>Final Discussion Topic closes.</b>		