

Phil 132/232 , Existentialism
Autumn 2005
MWF 11:00-11:50
Off. Hrs.: Th, 1-3

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Existentialism

The central themes of existentialist philosophy include some of the most persistent unsettled questions of European culture in the last two centuries: what constitutes authentic individuality? what is our relation to the divine? how can one live a meaningful life? what is the significance of death? Existentialism is not, however, merely a collection of loosely related themes. Its characteristic issues arose from a central preoccupation with the traditional problem of human freedom, and from this perspective, they fit together into a unified philosophical program.

The existentialist tradition we will trace in this course does not rest content with the traditional conception of human freedom as absolute spontaneity, or freedom from causal determination. Following suggestions of Rousseau and Kant, these thinkers replaced the traditional conception with the idea that freedom is a matter of self-definition. For the existentialists, to be free is to do what one wants--or at least what one's *true self* wants--and the crucial questions about freedom therefore concern what one really wants, and ultimately, who one really is. The opposite of freedom in this sense is not determinism, then, but alienation. An unfree person is one who acts in a way that detaches her from her true self and its genuine desires, thereby compromising the integrity of her self. Because of this context, questions of authenticity and the identity of the self become paramount for the existentialists.

We will pursue these issues of freedom and authenticity from the origins of this conception of freedom in Rousseau, through the beginning of existentialism in nineteenth century thinkers like Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, down to twentieth century French existentialism. In addition to elaborating the more traditional theological and philosophical aspects of the problem of freedom, these later French thinkers (Sartre, Beauvoir, Camus) broadened the conceptions of freedom and individuality descended from Rousseau, exploring their social and political consequences in the light of twentieth century phenomena such as fascism and feminism. At the end of the course, we will look at the continuing legacy of the existentialist tradition in some contemporary work on questions of individual and group identity.

The grade for the course will be based on one take home essay (2-4 pp.), two analytical and interpretive papers (4-6 pp.), and a final exam. The initial essay will count for roughly 10% of the final grade, and each of the papers and the final for 30%. (Graduate students will have separate written requirements, and should consult the instructor.) Attendance in lecture and in meetings of discussion sections is expected, and will be given serious weight in fixing the final grade. Satisfactory completion of all these requirements and a passing grade on the final exam are *required* to receive a passing

grade for the course. The due dates for the papers are listed on the attached syllabus, as are the required and recommended readings for each class meeting. In addition to those readings, as part of preparation for the final exam, students must read one novel or play from the attached list of works which treat themes relevant to the assigned readings. One of the questions on the exam will ask for a discussion of how the philosophical ideas explored during the course figure in, or are illuminated by, that work. (Students may choose a work not on the list, with approval of the instructor.)

The required books for the course, along with a course reader, can be obtained at the **Stanford Bookstore**. The required books are the following:

Required Books:

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile; or On Education*

Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*

On the Genealogy of Morals

Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*

The Ethics of Ambiguity

Albert Camus, *The Plague*

Additional readings from Nietzsche as listed on the syllabus, along with Sartre's lecture "Existentialism is a Humanism," Akeel Bilgrami's paper "What is a Muslim? Fundamental Commitment and Cultural Identity," and a recent essay by Michael Specter, will be made available in a course reader, which will also be obtainable from the **Stanford Bookstore**. Students who already own copies of Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil* and *Twilight of the Idols* will not need to obtain the additional Nietzsche readings from the course pack. Sartre's essay appears in various collections, but is most easily available in Walter Kaufmann's edited collection *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*. Copies of the materials from the course pack, including the essays by Sartre, Bilgrami, and Specter will be placed on reserve in Tanner Philosophy Library and in Meyer Library during the second week of the term for students who already own the Nietzsche and Sartre texts, and do not wish to purchase the course reader.

Syllabus

M, 26 Sept.: Introduction

Required Reading: Immanuel Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" (xerox, provided).

W, 28 Sept.: Rousseau's Conception of Freedom

Required Reading: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, Bk I, pp. 33-43; Bk IV, pp. 211-19.

F, 30 Sept.: Pity, History, and Emile's Autonomy

Required Reading: Rousseau, *Emile*, IV, pp. 219-255.

M, 3 Oct.: Freedom and Reason: The Savoyard Vicar

Required Reading: Rousseau, *Emile*, IV, 252-313.

W, 5 Oct.: "If I were a rich man...": Jean-Jacques on the Good Life

Required Reading: Rousseau, *Emile*, IV, 344-55.

Recommended Reading: Rousseau, *Emile*, IV, 313-344.

F, 7 Oct.: Religion and Authentic Individuality

Required Reading: Soren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, pp. 1-42.

M, 10 Oct.: Despair and Consciousness

Required Reading: Kierkegaard, *Sickness*, pp. 42-74.

W, 12 Oct.: Despair and Sin

Required Reading: Kierkegaard, *Sickness*, pp. 75-104.

F, 14 Oct.: Sin, Individuality, and the Relation to God

Required Reading: Kierkegaard, *Sickness*, pp. 105-31.

M, 17 Oct.: Nietzsche's conception of freedom

Required Reading: Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, secs. 18, 19, 21, 188, 212-13, 227-30; *Twilight of the Idols*, "Morality as Anti-Nature," secs. 1-6, "The Four Great Errors," secs. 7-8, "Skirmishes of an Untimely Man," secs. 38, 41 (course reader); and *The Gay Science*, secs., 98, 107, 117, 143, 270, 335, 343-7, 356.

TAKE HOME ESSAY DUE: TUESDAY, 18 OCTOBER, 5:00 P.M.

W, 19 Oct.: Freedom and Eternal Recurrence

Required Reading: Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, sections 108-9, 123-5, 233, 276-7, 289-90, 299, 304, 321, 324, and 340-2; *Ecce Homo* (included in the same volume with the *Genealogy of Morals*), Preface, and Frontispiece (pp. 217-21).

F, 21 Oct.: Noble Values and Slave Values

Required Reading: Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, Preface, and First Essay, pp. 13-56.

M, 24 Oct.: *Ressentiment* and the Structure of the Soul

Required Reading: Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, First Essay, pp. 23-56.

W, 26 Oct.: Guilt and Bad Conscience

Required Reading: Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, Second Essay, pp. 57-96

F, 28 Oct.: The Ascetic Ideal

Required Reading: Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, Third Essay, pp. 97-163.

Recommended Reading: Specter, "The Long Ride" (course reader).

M, 31 Oct.: Asceticism, the Will to Knowledge, and the Experiment of Living

Required Reading: Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, Third Essay, pp. 97-163; *Gay Science*, 110.

W, 2 Nov.: Sartre's Conception of Existentialism

Required Reading: Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, (course reader).

FIRST ANALYTICAL PAPER DUE: THURSDAY, 3 NOVEMBER, 5:00 P.M.

F, 4 Nov.: Bad Faith and Self-dissociation

Required reading: *Being and Nothingness*, Part I, ch. 2, pp. 86-116.

M, W, and F, 7, 9, and 11 Nov.: Sartre's Conception of Freedom

Required reading: *Being and Nothingness*, Part IV, ch. 1, pp. 559-711.

M, 14 Nov.: Ambiguity and Freedom

Required Reading: Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, pp. 7-34.

W, 16 Nov.: Freedom and Others

Required Reading: Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, pp. 35-73.

F, 18 Nov.: Freedom and Oppression

Required Reading: Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, pp. 74-115.

WEEK OF 21 NOV.: NO CLASS, HAPPY THANKSGIVING!

M, 28 Nov.: Ethics and Ambiguity

Required Reading: Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, pp. 115-54.

W, 30 Nov.: The Double Bind, Otherness, and the Situation of Women

Required Reading: Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, "Introduction," "The Married Woman," and "Conclusion," pp. xix-xxxvi, 425-83, and 716-732.

SECOND ANALYTICAL PAPER DUE: THURSDAY, 1 DECEMBER, 5:00 P.M.

F, 2 Dec.: The Dilemma of Plague: Happiness and Love versus Virtue and Heroism

Required Reading: Albert Camus, *The Plague*, Parts I-II (pp. 1-164).

M, 27 Nov.: Freedom under conditions of captivity

Required Reading: Albert Camus, *The Plague*, Parts III-V (pp. 165-308).

W, 29 Nov.: The Legacy of Existentialism: Questions of Individual and Group Identity

Required Reading: Akeel Bilgrami, "What is a Muslim?" (course reader).

F, 1 Dec.: Conclusion

Recommended Reading: Specter, "The Long Ride" (course reader).

Literature Recommended for Parallel Reading in Phil 132/232, Existentialism
(See above description of final examination)

Autumn, 2002 -- Prof. R. Lanier Anderson

Achebe, Chinua, *Things Fall Apart*
Beauvoir, Simone de, *All Men are Mortal*
-----, *All Said and Done*
-----, *The Blood of Others*
-----, *The Coming of Age*
-----, *Force of Circumstance*
-----, *The Mandarins*
-----, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*
-----, *The Prime of Life*
-----, *She Came to Stay*
-----, *A Very Easy Death*
-----, *The Woman Destroyed*
Calvino, Italo, *The Baron in the Trees*
-----, *The Non-existent Knight and The Cloven Viscount*
Camus, Albert, *The Stranger*
DeLillo, Don, *End Zone*
Dostoevsky, Fyodor, *Notes from Underground*
-----, *Crime and Punishment*
-----, *The Brothers Karamazov*
Ellison, Ralph, *Invisible Man*
Faulkner, William, *Absalom, Absalom!*
Foer, Jonathan Safran, *Everything is Illuminated*
Hong Kingston, Maxine, *The Woman Warrior*
Ionesco, Eugene, *Rhinoceros*
Ishiguro, Kazuo, *The Remains of the Day*
Kafka, Franz, *The Metamorphosis*
-----, *The Trial*
Kundera, Milan, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*
-----, *Immortality*
Lorde, Audre, *Zami: a New Spelling of My Name*
Mann, Thomas, *The Magic Mountain*
Morrison, Toni, *Song of Solomon*
-----, *Beloved*
Nabokov, Vladimir, *Invitation of a Small Evening*
Ng, Fae Myenne, *Bone*
Proust, Marcel, *Remembrance of Things Past*
Queneau, Raymond, *The Bark Tree*
Rilke, Rainer Maria, *Letters to a Young Poet*
Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Nausea*
-----, *The Wall*
-----, *No Exit*
-----, *The Flies*

-----, *The Respectful Prostitute*
-----, *Dirty Hands*
---- , *The Condemned of Altona*
-----, *The Age of Reason, The Reprieve, Troubled Sleep*
Spiegelmann, Art, *Maus*
Stendhal, *The Red and the Black*
-----, *The Charterhouse of Parma*
Tolstoy, Leo, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*
Walker, Alice, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*