



MORAVIAN COLLEGE

EXISTENTIAL PHILOSOPHY COURSE SYLLABUS Moravian College Spring 2016

PHI 297: Existential Philosophy

M/W 11:45AM-12:55PM

Classroom: PPHAC 101

Instructor: Dr. Leon Niemoczynski ("Dr. Leon")

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Office Hours: M 1:30-5:30PM and W 1-2PM, Zinzendorf 102

Course Description

An exploration of important texts in 19th and 20th century existentialism and their influence on contemporary thinking.

Course Objectives

The term 'existentialism' loosely refers to one strand of nineteenth and twentieth-century philosophy and literature which explores the loss of confidence in the Enlightenment "dream of reason." This course surveys existentialism by developing a portrait of some of its major figures: Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Sartre, Camus, and Heidegger. Attention is paid to some of the more prominent existentialist themes such as angst, anxiety, dread or despair; the loss of all orientation in life; the problem of being unable to find any certainty in meaning or truth; freedom, subjectivity; the absurd; becoming an individual; authenticity; finitude; transcendence; and ultimately death.

Course Objectives

- (a) Interpret texts by accurately and fully describing concepts and arguments.
- (b) Reason about ideas by (i) evaluating the content, structure, and strategies of philosophical works and (ii) applying concepts and arguments to contemporary issues and important life questions.
- (c) Collaborate with other students by presenting and supporting their ideas in public through class participation.
- (d) Consider how existential questions can be beneficial in developing one's self as a free person in addition to seeing the world in broader terms.

Required Text

1. *Existentialism*, 2nd edition. Edited by Robert C. Solomon. Oxford UP, 2005. ISBN: 978-0-19-517463-2.

Please note: Bringing the text (or any assigned reading to be printed out!) with you to each and every class is a requirement. Please also note that other assigned readings will be made available to students as emailed by the instructor. If requested, students should download, print, and bring to class assigned readings. Bringing assigned readings with you to class is a requirement and failing to do so will impact Class Participation grade.

Grading and Evaluation

• Discussion Questions -	20%
• Quizzes -	10%
• Three Take Home Exams -	60% (3 x 20% each)
• Existentialism Portfolio and Quotebook -	10% (2 x 5%)

1. Discussion Questions (20%): Students will be assigned discussion questions that assess the comprehension of assigned readings, class lecture, or, periodically, other course-relevant multimedia which may be assigned outside of the classroom (listening to a podcast, watching a video from home etc.) The main purpose of these questions is to assess *comprehension* of course material (whereas quizzes assess *retention* of course material) - therefore, responses to these questions should serve as excellent centerpieces for class *discussion*. With that said, responses are expected to be substantial, demonstrate comprehension, and most of all show *effort*. Students should create responses that they have carefully thought about and would be willing to read to the class and discuss. Responses should make direct use of, and reference to, any assigned material and demonstrate slow, careful, quality work that is not shallow or rushed. When completing the questions it is imperative to follow the instructions *exactly*. Finally, please note that **all discussion questions MUST be typed and stapled when turning in. Work that is not typed and stapled will NOT be accepted.** Discussion Questions are graded as a quiz would be (so out of 100 points). Whereas quizzes generally cover lecture only, Discussion Questions cover both lecture and reading assignments.

2. Quizzes (10%): Students are expected to study class notes on a daily basis. Quizzes will cover lecture only (not assigned readings). There are no make-up quizzes: missed quizzes count against you only if you have no documented excuse for the day that you missed (see attendance policy). You are only allowed to miss one quiz with a documented excuse on your first absence only. **Please note:** If you miss class and know that there will be a quiz when you return, you are responsible to get notes from a classmate and prepare yourself for the quiz before your return to class.

3. Three Take-Home Exams (60%): Students are required to take three take-home essay exams over the course of the term. For each exam the instructor will distribute a list of five possible questions. Students may then select according to their own individual choosing any three of those questions to take home and answer in short-answer essay fashion. Essay exams are to be typed, single-spaced, using Times News Roman 12 point font with standard margins. Students should use class notes, text, and handouts to guide their response to each question. **Typically responses to each question will range from the heftier side of ¾ of a page to about one full page per answer when typed single space, making for 5 pages to be turned in.** Please staple together the pages of your exam when complete, and print your name on each page. **Exams that are not stapled together or that are not single space typed will not be accepted.** To score well on this sort of exam good note-taking skills and reading the assigned texts is essential, so please read the texts as assigned and take good notes during lecture –as this is how you will be able to answer the questions. Again, rules about plagiarism apply so it is best to stick with class notes and the text when you construct your answer (the questions are specifically designed this way).

Take Home Exams: Exams are “take home” exams in that students are distributed an exam and then have approximately one week to take the exam home, complete the exam, and then return it the following week. Most, if not all, **exams will be scheduled for distribution on Monday and hence will be due, to me, in class, in person, the following Monday.** Please do not submit your exam to the secretary, or slip it under my door. This will not be accepted under any circumstance. Anything else counts as a late submission unless given prior consent or written excuse, which is to the full discretion of the instructor.

****Late policy for exams:** Exams which are submitted late under circumstances as outlined above will be penalized one full letter grade for the first class period late. Exams submitted thereafter will not be accepted. For example, if an exam is distributed on Monday and is due the following Monday, yet the student does not return it until Wednesday, then that exam will drop one full letter grade. **After Wednesday I will not accept the exam.**

The third (and final) take-home exam will look like the two previous except that you will turn in the exam during finals week during the time of the scheduled Final Exam. You will have a week to complete it as well.

4. Portfolio and Quotebook (10%): Because personal reflection is a main component of this class, students will be expected to create an Existentialism Portfolio and Quotebook. Essentially this is a journal/notebook which contains your reflections on material that you encounter in the class. From time to time during class the Instructor may ask students to write a paragraph reflecting on a quote or to complete an IDEA task (What is the main Idea of the lecture; Describe that main idea; provide an Example of that idea; Apply that idea within your own personal experience). Students are encouraged to journal, add, and create personal content in their Portfolio as well so that by Midterm a 5% grade can be evaluated, and by Final a 5% grade evaluated. The portfolio is to a semester-length personalized engagement with the material that first and foremost contains responses to any in-class writing assignments but which also may contain personal reflections and additions. Be creative: decorate your Portfolio, add photos, write down thoughts with dates, and be sure that its contents reflect your personal journey with the material as we make our way through the content.

Grade Scale

96-99 = A / 95 = A / 90-94 = A-; 86-89 = B+ / 85 = B / 80-84 = B-; 76-79 = C+ / 75 = C / 70-74 = C-; 66-69 = D+ / 65 = D / 64-60 = D-; 60 and below = F

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the inclusion of someone else's words, ideas, or data presented as one's own work. When a student submits for credit work that includes the words, ideas, or data of others, the source of that information must be acknowledged through complete, accurate, and specific references and, if verbatim statements are included, through quotation marks as well. By placing his/her name on work submitted for credit, the student certifies the originality of all work not otherwise identified by appropriate acknowledgments. Please note that plagiarism covers unpublished as well as published sources. These statements apply to students who consult Wikipedia, or other online sources, and then recite information found there as if it were their own. Reciting work that is not your own without proper citation will result in a reduced grade (including "F" or zero) for the assignment. More information about the Academic Integrity Policy may be found on pages 32-38 of the Student Handbook.

Attendance Policy

Because this class meets only twice per week **two and only two** absences are permitted (technically a "week" of school). Each absence after the second absence will result in one letter grade depreciation per absence unless valid documentation is provided for the reason of the absence. Arriving late does count as an absence, as does persistent use of smartphone (see below). Please arrive to class promptly in order to avoid being marked absent.

Late Work

1. **Discussion Questions:** I will accept late assignments up to one day past due at a 50% grade reduction. I will not accept work past the second day due. If you miss the prior week's lecture it is your responsibility to get the notes for the reading so that you are able to complete the questions for your return. Please always keep a back-up electronic copy so that I can check to see if it is completed on the day that it is due.

2. **Quizzes:** Due to the fact that this course only meets twice per week, unfortunately there are no make up quizzes. Please note: If you miss class and know that there will be a quiz when you return, *you are responsible to get the notes from a classmate and prepare yourself for the quiz before your return to class*. You are only allowed to miss one quiz with a documented excuse on your first absence only. After your initial absence any further absences will result in 0's in the gradebook for missed quizzes.

3. **Exams:** Exams which are submitted late under circumstances as outlined above will be penalized one full letter grade for the first class period late. Exams submitted thereafter will **not** be accepted. For example, if an exam is distributed on Monday and is due the following Monday, yet the student does not return it until Wednesday, then that exam will drop one full letter grade. **After Wednesday I will not accept the exam.**

Classroom Procedure

1. Text messaging or any form of cell phone use (including internetting on “smart phones”) is strictly forbidden. If the Instructor finds using smartphones during class to be a problem, the Instructor reserves the right to mark you absent for that class due to smartphone use. Please put all phones and technology away during class.
2. Because of persistent and wide-spread abuse of laptops in classrooms, student will NOT be allowed to use laptops in class. Laptop use for note-taking will require documentation as a special need at which point the screen must be visible to the Instructor at all times. (According to research even when laptops are used solely to take notes, they may still be impairing learning because their use results in shallower processing. See the study, “The Pen Is Mightier Than the Keyboard” by Mueller [Princeton University] and Oppenheimer [UCLA]: *Psychological Science*, Vol. 25 No. 6 (2014):1159-1168).
3. Regarding class participation, you are expected to be prepared for each class and be prepared according to the class participation rubric. All students are expected to fully contribute to, and participate in, their respective Group Presentations. .
4. Please refrain from private discussion or other disruptive behavior during lecture. Disruptive students are given an immediate verbal warning, if a chronic problem (“three strikes” rule) the student is asked to leave the class.
5. You are expected to have as much fun as possible. ☺

Students Requiring Special Services and Accommodations

“Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability should contact the Academic Support Center, located in the lower level of Monocacy Hall, or by calling 610-861-1401. Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the Academic Support Center.”

“If human beings are a function of what they value [Spirit, reason, autonomy, revolution and freedom], then as those values fall or are exposed the inevitable corollary follows: what Schiller called “the disenchantment of the world.” Yes, all evolves, all is in process, but where is it going? This is the anxiety that grows with the age. It is this open universe, without fixed standards, or a transcendent of history. Humans learned to defy supposed stable actualities: physical, social and moral...and Darwin claimed that the most significant advances of human species are brought about by chance or natural selection, not rational choice (Hegel, Marx.) The real powers at work are instinctual, spontaneous, and apparently brutish forces of survival (Nietzsche.) Moreover, philosophers such as Nietzsche gained attention (especially from Freud) with the doctrine that the instinctual will to survival does *not* serve conscious reason, but just the reverse, reason is a servant of the will—and so enter Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky. Thus it may be forcefully said that the nineteenth century was an opulent and hard-to-digest intellectual feast from which our own century is still taking its nourishment.” from Bruce Wilshire, *Romanticism and Evolution: The Nineteenth Century*, Introduction

COURSE OUTLINE & TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Unit One: The Death of God; The Free Spirit; Passion of the Individual

Week of 1/18: Introduction to the Class; Nietzsche: the Death of God; Nihilism; Moral Relativism and Perspectivism; Skepticism

Week of 1/25: Nietzsche: the Free Spirit; The Will to Power; Life as Art

Week of 2/1: Kierkegaard: Truth is Subjectivity; Passion and The Individual; Anxiety; The Freedom of Choice; the Leap of Faith

Week of 2/8: Camus: The Absurd and Suicide; Kafka and the Absurd; Camus *The Stranger*

Unit Two: Radical Freedom and Human Existence: Who Am I?

Week of 2/15: Camus *The Stranger*; **Test Unit One Assigned and Existentialism Portfolio and Quotebook due!**

Week of 2/22: Sartre *Existentialism is a Humanism* and *Nausea*; Nothingness and Consciousness; Sartre's phenomenology

Week of 2/29: Sartre and Being-for-Others; *No Exit*; Freedom and Responsibility, Bad Faith

Week of 3/7: *No Class for Spring Break*

Week of 3/14: Dostoevsky *Notes from Underground*

Week of 3/21: Dostoevsky *The Grand Inquisitor*; Marcel and Freedom; **Test Unit Two Assigned and Existentialism Portfolio and Quotebook due!**

Unit Three: Being-in-the World; Authenticity; Meaning and Death

Week of 3/28: **Test Unit Two**, Heidegger on being-in-the world; the Question of Being; Dasein

Week of 4/4: Heidegger on Authenticity; Being-toward-Death; Anxiety and Resoluteness

Week of 4/11: Existentialism and Literature (various from Existentialism 2nd edition text)

Week of 4/18: Existentialism and Literature (various from Existentialism 2nd edition text)

Week of 4/25: **Test Unit Three Assigned and Existentialism Portfolio and Quotebook due!**