

Existentialism

PHIL 181 – Spring 2024

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:30am-10:50am

Cognitive Science Building (CSB) Room 001

INSTRUCTORS

Professor:

Clinton Tolley

ctolley@ucsd.edu

Office Hours:

Tuesdays 2:15-3:45pm

(sign-up on Canvas)

Teaching Assistant:

Mika Smith

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Office Hours:

Mondays 9-10am

(sign-up on Canvas)

Teaching Assistant:

Noam Tiran

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Office Hours:

Thurs 11am-12pm

(sign-up on Canvas)

CANVAS SITE

<https://canvas.ucsd.edu/courses/55744>

READINGS

all readings will be made available electronically as pdfs on our Canvas site

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will serve as an introduction to the basic themes and texts of existentialism as a philosophical movement that emerged out from within the ‘modern’ (and self-styledly ‘Enlightened’) philosophies of the 17th-19th centuries in and around Europe, and then came into its own in the early and mid 20th century, alongside of the experience of all-encompassing global warfare (the ‘world wars’) and the confrontation with the (increasingly real) possibility that humanity would come to its historical end by annihilating itself (and seemingly even willingly so).

We will introduce and discuss topics that help frame the core ideas of existentialism, including: existence (of course), contrasted due to its concreteness with both ‘essence’ and ‘being’, but also related internally to non-being, ‘nothingness’; the ground or root of all existence, as divine (perfect), or as absurd (nonsensical), or both; human existence in particular, and its relation to what people have thought constituted the essence of being human (eg, reason, freedom), and also its non-being or non-existence (eg, death); the feeling (and cause) of the anxiety pervasive in human existence; the oscillations between a sharp sense of isolation and aloneness, and an inescapable togetherness with others; the possibility and value of novelty, creativity, imagination; the meaning and/or meaninglessness of life; despair, boredom – and a few others besides.

We will read and form interpretations of (selections from) some of the writings by authors that have been seen as some of the most central to the existentialist tradition as it has taken root around the world, including: Blaise Pascal, Soren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone De Beauvoir, Emilio Uranga, Frantz Fanon, and Iris Murdoch. Throughout the term we will also talk about how existentialist themes show up in art and culture during the past few centuries.

REQUIREMENTS

1. *Weekly questionnaires* (40%)

On Monday of each week, there will be a questionnaire posted on the course's Canvas page (under 'Quizzes'), to be completed on Canvas by the **end of Friday** (midnight) of the same week. The form of these questions will be multiple-choice, true/false, matching, and fill-in-the-blank. The topics of the questions will be drawn from both the assigned readings and the lectures from the current week, and answering them will be a straightforward affair for anyone who attends lectures and completes all the readings.

* Extra credit: During finals week there will be an optional extra-credit questionnaire, due Friday, March 22nd, 5pm.

2. *Weekly online commentary posts* (10%) & *comments* (5%)

(A) Posts: By **end of Thursday** (midnight) of each week, you will need to contribute a 200-word post to our Canvas discussion forum. Your post should include:

- (1) page- and/or section-number references to a 1-2 page stretch of our readings that is most of interest to you;
- (2) a quote of one sentence (or two) of particular interest to you from this stretch of text,
- (3) an explanation in your own words of the main idea of the sentence, and how you think it fits into the particular stretch of text, and the reading more generally,
- (4) some of your thoughts and opinions about the subject-matter in question, and
- (5) at least one question about the sentence you've chosen.

(B) Comments: Before the **end of Friday** (midnight), you will also need to post one 100-word (minimum) comment on someone else's post.

* Extra credit: Each week you can earn another 0.25% toward your grade by responding a second time to posts and comments made by others (50-word minimum; once per week; up to an additional 2.5%).

3. *Weekly in-class worksheets* (10%)

Each week during one of the meetings there will be one short closed-book hand-written assignment distributed, completed, and discussed in class.

4. *Three medium-length essays* (30%)

By end of Friday of Weeks 4 and 7, and by the end of the day of our scheduled final exam (Tues June 11), you will be required to turn in a 800-word essay in which you critically and argumentatively engage with at least two of the authors we have covered (and at most three) in the relevant unit on a particular topic; each essay should include a short presentation of the views of our authors on a topic, and then your own argument for or against their positions on the topic. Your essays will be submitted electronically via Canvas/ Turnitin.com (see note C below). The word-count for your essay should be placed at the end.

5. *Two office hours 'check-in' meetings* (2 x 2.5% = 5%)

Each student is required to have two meetings with the instructors during the term, once during the first half (weeks 1-5), a second during the second half (weeks 6-10). The canonical scheduling time for these meetings will be during the weekly office hours; if none of our office hour slots work with your schedule, please be in touch (sooner than later!) to make alternate arrangement for a meeting. The duration of each of the meetings will be 5 minutes.

NOTE: participating in **at least one** of the one-on-one meetings is **required in order to pass** the class.

NOTES ABOUT REQUIREMENTS

A. No extensions will be granted for any assignment or exam, except in cases of genuine emergency (e.g., earthquake, flood, fire, death in the family, illness certified by a doctor). No extensions can be granted for the weekly questionnaires *at all*, due to the distribution of the correct answers shortly after the due date.

B. The UCSD Policy on Integrity of Scholarship must be observed in this course. This includes observance of the following six principles:

As a student,

1. I will not receive or provide unauthorized assistance in examinations.
2. I will not use unauthorized materials during an examination.
3. I will not use materials from sources without proper quotation, acknowledgement or citations.
4. I will not alter examinations, essays, or other assignments for regrading.
5. I will not fabricate data or references.
6. I will not use false excuses to obtain extensions of time for examinations or writing assignments.

C. Maintaining academic integrity: Though students are strongly encouraged to discuss the assignments with one another, each student must submit answers to the assignments independently of one another, written in her or his own words. Additionally, students agree that by taking this course, their mid-term examinations and final papers will be subject to submission for textual similarity review to [Turnitin.com](https://www.turnitin.com) for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted exams and papers will be included as source documents in the [Turnitin.com](https://www.turnitin.com) reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Use of the [Turnitin.com](https://www.turnitin.com) service is subject to the terms of use agreement posted on the [Turnitin.com](https://www.turnitin.com) site.

D. Any student caught cheating or plagiarizing (i) will be reported to the Academic Integrity Office, (ii) will receive a failing grade on the assignment at issue, and (iii) will be in jeopardy of failing the entire course, depending on the nature of the breach of academic integrity.

E. The use of technology (phones, tablets, computers, etc.) is to be limited to engagement with course material; all technology is prohibited during any closed-book assignment.

F. If any accommodations are needed due to a disability or for religious reasons, please notify me during the first class period or as soon as possible. Students requesting accommodations for the course due to a disability must provide a current Authorization for Accommodation (AFA) letter issued by the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) which is located in University Center 202 behind Center Hall. Students are required to present their AFA letters to Faculty (please make arrangements to contact me privately) and also to the OSD Liaison in the Philosophy Department in advance so that accommodations may be arranged.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS
 {tentative}

1. Tues Apr 2	introduction: existence and philosophy	Thurs Apr 4	Pascal, <i>Pensées</i> #164, #226-34
2. Tues Apr 9	Kierkegaard, <i>Concept of Anxiety</i> , Chs 1, 2, 5 (sel)	Thurs Apr 11	Kierkegaard, <i>Sickness unto Death</i> , Pts 1 and 2 (sel)
3. Tues Apr 16	Nietzsche, <i>The Gay Science</i> Bk 1 §1 & §4; Bk 3 §§108-25	Thurs Apr 18	Heidegger, <i>Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics</i> §§16- 20, & §37
4. Tues Apr 23	Heidegger, 'What is Metaphysics?'	Thurs Apr 25	Heidegger, <i>Being and Time</i> 1, §5, §27, §§46-47, §§51-53
		*Fri Apr 26	1 st short essay due
5. Tues Apr 30	Camus, 'Absurd Reasoning', <i>Myth of Sisyphus</i>	Thurs May 2	Camus, <i>The Stranger</i>
6. Tues May 7	Sartre, 'Existentialism is a Humanism' (sel)	Thurs May 9	Sartre, <i>No Exit</i>
7. Tues May 14	De Beauvoir, 'Existentialism and Popular Wisdom'	Thurs May 16	De Beauvoir, 'Toward an ethics of ambiguity'
		*Fri May 17	2 nd short essay due
8. Tues May 21	De Beauvoir, <i>Second Sex</i> 'Woman's Situation and Character'	Thurs May 23	De Beauvoir, <i>Second Sex</i> 'The Independent Woman'
9. Tues May 28	Uranga, 'The Ontology of Being Mexican', 'Essay on an Ontology'	Thurs Jun 6	Fanon, <i>Black Skin, White Masks</i> 'Introduction', 'The Fact of Blackness', 'Conclusion'
10. Tues Jun 4	Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'	Thurs Jun 6	Murdoch, 'Against Dryness'
11. *Tues Jun 11	3 rd short essay due	Fri Jun 13	extra-credit due 5pm