

## Philosophy 3024: Existentialism

CRN: 86591; Hutch 209  
Fall 2016: MWF, 10:10–11am

Instructor: Ted Parent, Ph.D.

Office: Major Williams 221 (in the stairwell)

Office Hours: MW, 12:15–1:15pm, and by appointment.

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**Existentialism** is not a single doctrine as much as a collection of thematically related ideas, about the individual's confrontation with *absurdity*, re: religion, freedom, death, love, gender, race, and the value of life, among other things.

### Texts:

Solomon, Robert (Ed.) *Existentialism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Oxford UP, 2005.

-Additional readings on the course website: <http://tparent.net/phil3024.html>

### Course Assignments:

(1) Paper (max length 5 pages) on **Oct. 3<sup>rd</sup>** worth 25% of the final grade.

(2) Paper (max length 5 pages) due **Nov. 7<sup>th</sup>** worth 25% of the final grade.

(3) Final project (more details later) due **Dec. 13<sup>th</sup>** worth 35% of the final grade.

(4) Participation is worth 15% of the final grade. How much should you participate? Well, if you don't participate *at all*, don't expect to get a passing grade for participation! Yet it is possible to earn an 'A' here without talking at every chance. Indeed, *quality matters much more than quantity*. But my guess is that an 'A' for participation requires that, more often than not, you talk at least once during a session. Though note: *Visiting office hours also counts as participation*.

**No late assignments accepted**, unless you can give hard evidence of a legitimate emergency.

**NO LAPTOPS IN CLASS.** Philosophy often requires a LOT of concentration, and laptops provide too much opportunity for distraction. Relatedly, *please do not be late and remember to turn off your cell phone*.

Despite the policies in boldface, if you have special needs because of a disability (learning disability, attention deficit disorder, psychological, physical, etc.), we can certainly make different arrangements. But please talk to me as soon as possible.

The grading scale for the course is as follows (raw scores will be rounded):

Percentage	Letter Grade	G.P.A. scale
93-100	A	4.0
90-92	A-	3.75
88-89	B+	3.5
83-87	B	3.0
80-82	B-	2.75
78-79	C+	2.5

73-77	C	2.0
70-72	C-	1.75
68-69	D+	1.5
63-67	D	1.0
60-62	D-	0.75
59 and below	F	0.0

The Virginia Tech Honor Code <http://www.honorsystem.vt.edu/constitution.html> is in effect for this class.

Reading philosophy is hard. That's why I recommend reading the weekly material *twice*. But as a first reading, it is sufficient to skim the texts, just to get a sense of the main ideas. After that, read the material again *carefully*. Your earlier skimming should provide a basic "framework" that allows you to process better what you read.

During your second reading, it's best to *read with a pen and note the points of interest*. I do NOT recommend mere underlining/highlighting. Rather, it's best to read as if you were *engaged in a conversation* with the author: Raise questions, ask for clarification, and levy criticisms in the margins. This practice effectively prepares you for class discussion and the assignments.

Be forewarned that the clear majority of my feedback on your work will be critical. Of course I strive to be courteous nonetheless. Yet *please* do not take any of my criticisms personally! Loads of critical feedback is simply how academic philosophy operates. And in this class, the purpose of this is *certainly* not to belittle or discourage you, but to hone your writing/thinking skills.

Speaking of courtesy, I *insist* that discussions proceed in a respectful and well-mannered fashion. Philosophy is difficult, and no one should be made to feel stupid. Relatedly, taking an aggressive tone is inappropriate. It usually signals that the goal is to "win" a dispute, rather than to cooperate in a mutual endeavor to seek the truth. I reserve the right to tell you *to leave the session* if you violate these basic norms of courtesy.

### **Tentative Schedule**

*[\* indicates that the reading is on the course website]*

#### ***Continental Existentialism***

##### **WEEK ONE**

Aug. 22                      Intro session.  
Aug. 24, 26                Religious Absurdity Kierkegaard: read all selections, except "Truth is Subjectivity."

##### **WEEK TWO**

Aug. 29, 31                Phenomenology I \*Husserl: from *The Idea of Phenomenology*  
Sept. 2                      Heidegger: from *Being and Time*

##### **WEEK THREE**

Sept. 5                      NO CLASS (Labor Day)  
Sept. 7, 9                    Phenomenology II Heidegger (cont')

##### **WEEK FOUR**

Sept. 12, 14, 16            Moral Absurdity I Camus: from *The Stranger*, from *The Myth of Sisyphus*  
Nietzsche: read all selections, except "On Truth." Also, read the additional selections from Nietzsche posted on the course website.

##### **WEEK FIVE**

Sep. 19, 21, 23            Moral Absurdity II Nietzsche, continued.

WEEK SIX

Sept. 26, 28, 30

Phenomenology of the Absurd Sartre: from *Existentialism is a Humanism*; from *Being and Nothingness*; from *No Exit*.

WEEK SEVEN

Oct. 3, 5, 7

Feminist Existentialism I de Beauvoir: from *The Ethics of Ambiguity*; from *The Second Sex*. Also, read the additional selections from de Beauvoir posted on the course website. **Paper due Oct. 3<sup>rd</sup>**

WEEK EIGHT

Oct. 10, 12

Feminist Existentialism II Barnes: "Sartre and Feminism."

Oct. 14

NO CLASS (Fall Break)

WEEK NINE

Oct. 17, 19, 21

Black Existentialism \*Fanon: "The Fact of Blackness;" \*West: "Nihilism in Black America"

*Analytic Existentialism*

WEEK TEN

Oct. 24, 26, 28

Race and Gender: \*Haslanger: "(What) Are Gender & Race? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?"

WEEK ELEVEN

Oct. 31; Nov. 2, 4

Love \*Jenkins: "What is Love? An Incomplete Map of the Metaphysics."

WEEK TWELVE

Nov. 7, 9, 11

Deep Ignorance \*Paul: "What You Can't Expect When You're Expecting." **Paper due on Nov. 7<sup>th</sup>**

WEEK THIRTEEN:

Nov. 14, 16, 18

Hard Choices \*Chang: "Commitments, Reasons, and the Will."

WEEK FOURTEEN

Nov. 21, 23, 25

NO CLASS (Thanksgiving Break)

WEEK FIFTEEN

Nov. 28, 30; Dec. 2

Meaning in Life\*Kahane: "Our Cosmic Insignificance;" \*Brill: "Does It Matter that Nothing We Do in a Million Years Will Matter?"

WEEK SIXTEEN

Dec. 5, 7

Workshop on the final project

**Final project due at 5:25pm on Dec. 13<sup>th</sup> in Major Williams Hall 221.**