

EXISTENTIALISM & RELIGION

RELIGION 300/5

Fall 1999

MWF 11:45 - 12:40

Slocum Rm. 115

Instructor: Jeff Robbins

Office: HL #513

Office Hours: MW, 10:00-11:30 or by appointment
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When philosophy and life are intermingled, we no longer know if we look to philosophy because it is life, or if we cling to life because it is philosophy.-- Emmanuel Levinas

Beginning to think is beginning to be undermined.--Albert Camus

Existentialism's first move is to make every man aware of what he is and to make the full responsibility of his existence rest on him.--Jean-Paul Sartre

Whatever its ultimate meaning, the universe into which we have been thrown cannot satisfy our reason-let us have the courage to admit it once and for all.--Gabriel Marcel

If it were conceivable that one might be damned by obeying God and saved by disobeying him; I would nonetheless obey him.--Simone Weil

The courage to be is rooted in the God who appears when God has disappeared in the anxiety of doubt. -Paul Tillich

One might say that I am the moment of individuality, but I refuse to be a paragraph in a system--Soren Kierkegaard

It seems to me that the meaning of a person's life consists in proving to himself every minute that he's a person and not a piano key. --Fyodor Dostoyevsky

Book List:

(Available at the Orange Bookstore and at Bird Library Reserve Desk)

REQUIRED:

Hannah Arendt, *The Banality of Evil*

Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*

Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (a selection from the Stambaugh translation)

Soren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*

Jean-Paul Sartre, *Essays in Existentialism*

OPTIONAL:

Paul Tillich, *Courage to Be*

Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*
Martin Buber, *I and Thou*

Related Websites:

Existentialism in General:

<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Rhodes/8877/main.html>

<http://userzweb.lightspeed.net/~tameri/tframes.html>

<http://www.eleven38.com/aletheia/>

Arendt:

<http://www.mala.bc.ca/~mcneil/arendt.htm>

Kierkegaard:

<http://www.denmark.org/kierkegaard.html>

Heidegger:

<http://www.webcom.com/paf/ereignis.html>

Camus:

<http://www.sccs.swarthmore.edu/pwiRenl/ht/indexa.htm>

Sartre:

<http://members.aol.com/DonJohnR/Philosophy/Sartre.html>

Course Schedule

8/30 - 9/1

1. *Introducing Existentialism:*

Read Kaufmann Introduction: "Existentialism from Dostoyevsky to Sartre"

Read Walker Percy: "The Delta Factor"

Read Annie Dillard: "The Wreck of Time: Taking Our Century's Measure"

9/3 - 9/27

2. *The Responsibility of Existentialism:*

Read and Discuss Hannah Arendt

[First Response Paper Due: 9/27](#)

9/29 - 10/11

3. *What is Existentialism?:*

Read and Discuss Sartre

10/13 - 10/25

4. *From What to How:*

Read and Discuss Kierkegaard

[Second Response Paper Due: 10/25](#)

10/27 - 10/29

5. *Why Philosophy?:*

Read and Discuss Camus

11/1 - 11/19

6. *The Question of Being:*

Read and Discuss Heidegger

Third Response Paper Due: 11/15

Exam: 11/19

(No Classes: 11/22, 11/24, 11/26)

Reviews Due: 11/29

11/29 - 12/8

7. *Religion and Existentialism:*

Group Presentations on Tillich, Weil, and Buber.

Presentations: 12/1, 12/3, 12/6

Final Class: 12/8

Final Papers and all make-up work due: 12/10

Requirements:

REQUIREMENTS FOR 'C' Attend class regularly and be willing to participate in class discussion. Read assigned texts and demonstrate sufficient understanding in critical reflection papers. Complete semester project paper (5-10 pages) in consultation with the instructor.

REQUIREMENTS FOR 'B' Fulfill the requirements listed for a 'C'. Do acceptable work on mid-term exam (If you fail to do acceptable work on the mid-term, then you will be given the opportunity to take it again).

REQUIREMENTS FOR 'A' Fulfill the 'C' and 'B' requirements. Participate in an end of the semester group presentation on either Tillich, Buber, or Weil. Write a review (3-5) pages on one of the suggested [novels/plays/movies](#).

Note on the Grading System:

In this grading system all student work (reflection papers, class presentation, semester paper) will be graded either 'satisfactory' or 'unsatisfactory.' All unsatisfactory work can be repeated by the student later in the semester.

This contract system places emphasis on student responsibility, creativity, and motivation. It requires that students make an honest assessment about the time and energy that they can and will invest in the course. You need to be candid with yourself as you decide on the level at which you can work and be systematic and diligent in fulfilling your contract.

Course Objectives:

The title of the course is best thought of as a question, thus the series of questions that make up the semester schedule. As such, there are no preestablished objectives other than the basic requirement that this course be an exercise in thinking. By thinking, you will be in an ongoing and multi-layered conversation with the authors and texts we will be reading, with fellow classmates, with the instructor, and last but not least, with yourselves as you think the questions that question the nature of existence and religion. The greatest aim of the course is that we find ourselves in collaboration with one another, a collaboration that culminates in an

appreciation of the possibilities of thinking and community, as well as a greater recognition of the responsibilities of a thoughtful existence.

As a course-in-question there is a built-in element of flexibility. In other words, your presence, participation, and consideration matter not only to yourself and your grade, but even more, to the class as a whole as we together realize the peculiar promise of a university education.

Finally, as we begin to think, the objective is that we discover a world that is, but not entirely, of our own making, and a subject matter that is, but not wholly, thinkable. Existence will be rendered existential. And religion will be thought theological.