DESCRIPTION:

In this course, students study the school of existentialist philosophy as a way of understanding broader themes of philosophy. Our specific concern will be with what was – for the existentialists – a central concern, the expression of philosophical insight. The students critique the underlying assumption and evaluate the effectiveness and success of each of the various forms of expression treated by existentialists as the former relate to philosophy's purposes. We concentrate on three forms of philosophical expression addressed in the course: 1) literary/aesthetic, 2) analytic/metaphysical-epistemological, and 3) political/ethical. The three modes of expression testify to the diversity in expressive forms and communicative practices in "existentialism." In examining each of the three forms, the students are introduced to at least two different employments of these forms of expression. By the end of the course, students discover that there is diversity in the views of the so-called existentialists, making "existentialism" a family-resemblance term rather than one whose instances share (a) necessary feature(s).

There is a common purpose that reverberates throughout the tradition, albeit in diverse expressions. Unlike their "mainstream" predecessors, the "existentialist" philosophers believe that each human being creates his or her own nature through freedom of choice. This freedom permeates the person's actions and perceptions. There is not an adequate set of rules one must follow in acting correctly or believing accurately; however, the person must be aware that there are wrong ways of acting and believing, ways that compromise the fundamental human freedom. Human beings are by nature free, and their purpose is to live in harmony with it.

We begin by examining the expressions and the development of the above purpose in the salient works of the fathers of existentialism (Friedrich Nietzsche and Søren Kierkegaard). They were especially taken by the importance of the literary mode of philosophical writing.

Their successors, Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre, drew on phenomenology to develop an analytic mode of expression adequate to the existentialist purpose.

The course will end by reflecting on the applications of existentialism in politics, most notably in the writings of Sartre, Frantz Fanon, and Albert Camus.

TEXTS:

- Albert Camus, Rebel.
- Franz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth.
- Charles Guigon, Existentialism: Basic Writings.
- Søren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript.
- Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals.

- Other readings essential for the course are available at iLearn (http://ilearn.sfsu.edu) in PDF form.
COURSE GOALS:

1) To learn about an influential modern philosophical movement.
2) To learn about central ethical, aesthetic, political, and metaphysical questions in the history of philosophy and their importance for the contemporary intellectual life.
3) To learn about thoughts on the range of human freedom, and our freedom’s significance for our actions and perceptions.
4) To impart to students skills in conceptual analysis and critical reasoning in class discussions and essay assignments.
5) To introduce students to various philosophical forms of text interpretation.

REQUIREMENTS:

Class attendance and participation are required and count for 20% of the grade. There will be one in-class test (the final) and one take-home short essay test (the midterm); each will count for 40% of the final grade. There will also be an optional assignment to enhance the midterm grade. I will discuss that in class after the midterm.

TEACHING ASSISTANTS:

The names and the availability of the teaching assistants will be announced in the first class and on iLearn.

WRITING ASSISTANCE:

There are two free writing assistance centers on campus. Use the links below for more information.

1-Community Access & Retention Program (CARP): http://www.sfsu.edu/%7Ecarp1
2-Learning Assistance Center (LAC): http://www.sfsu.edu/%7Elac

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:

Academic accommodation is available for students with disabilities. Please see the DISABILITY PROGRAMS AND RESOURCE CENTER (HTTP://WWW.SFSU.EDU/~DPRC) in the Student Services Building 110 and talk to the instructor as soon as possible to discuss any accommodation that you may need for the course.

PLAGIARISM:

All work submitted for the course must be your own. Plagiarism will result in disciplinary action. For more details see: http://www.sfsu.edu/~collhum/plagiarism.html.

COURSE TOPICS:

I. EXISTENTIALISM AND THE LITERARY FORM OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL WORK

• August 26, 28: Introduction to the Course
  * Primary Text: “The Legacy of Existentialism” (textbook, pp. xiii-xxxviii).

• Sept. 2, 4, 9: Introduction to Friedrich Nietzsche: The Question of Elitism & The Concept of the Higher Self;
  * Primary Texts: Selections from Schopenhauer as Educator (pp. 127-30, 156-63, 182-94, on iLearn); Bertrand Russell’s A History of Philosophy (p. 702, on iLearn); Rawls’s A Theory of Justice (p. 325, on iLearn); and Nietzsche, Selections from Thus Spoke Zarathustra (pp. 9-28, on iLearn).
  * Secondary Sources: James Conant’s “Nietzsche’s Perfectionism: A Reading of Schopenhauer as Educator” (on iLearn); and Azadpur, “Who is Nietzsche’s Zarathustra?” (on iLearn).
• Sept. 11, 16, 23: Study of Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* (the whole text).

• Sept. 18: No Class.

• Sept. 25, 30, Oct. 2: Introduction to Søren Kierkegaard: Kierkegaard’s Pseudonymous Authorship
  • Primary Texts: *The Diary of Kierkegaard* (§§126-8, 133-4, 139, 146, 148, 150-159, 163, 179, on iLearn); *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* (pp. 22-43, 121-136, on iLearn); *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*: “Appendix: An Understanding with the Reader” (pp. 617-623); “A First and Last Explanation” (pp. 625-630); and CUP Footnote on *Philosophical Fragments* (pp. 274n-277n).
  • Secondary Sources: James Conant, “Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and Nonsense” (on iLearn); Conant’s “Putting Two and Two Together: Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and the Point of View for Their Work as Authors” (on iLearn); and Pierre Hadot, “Philosophy as a Way of Life” (on iLearn).

• Oct. 7, 9: Study of Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* (pp. 21-57).

• Oct. 7: Midterm Essay Prompt Submitted.

II. EXISTENTIAL PHENOMENOLOGY

• Oct. 14, 16: Introduction to Martin Heidegger: The Existential Analytic and Authenticity
  • Primary Texts: Hubert Dreyfus, “Why Study Being and Time,” (pp. 1-9, on iLearn) and Azadpur, “To the Things Themselves” (pp. 21-37, on iLearn).

• Oct. 16: Midterm Essays Due.


• Oct. 28, 30: Introduction to Jean-Paul Sartre: Against the Spidery Mind
  • Primary Text: Sartre, “Intentionality: A Fundamental Idea of Husserl’s Phenomenology” (on iLearn).

• Nov. 4, 6: Study of Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (selections in the textbook, pp. 309-362).

• Nov. 11, No Class: Veteran's Day

III. EXISTENTIAL POLITICS

• Nov. 13, 18, 20: Introduction to Franz Fanon: An Existential Approach to Political Violence
  • Primary Text: Sartre’s preface to *The Wretched of the Earth* (pp. 7-31).
  • Viewing and Discussion of Gillo Pontecorvo’s *The Battle of Algiers*.

• Nov. 25, 27, Fall Recess

• Dec. 2, 4, 9, 11: Study of Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* [pp. 35-95] in conjunction with Albert Camus' *The Rebel* [pp. 3-11, 13-22, 246-252, 279-306].

• Tuesday, Dec. 16, 10:45-1:15: In-class Final test.