

# PHILOSOPHY 211

## Introduction to Existentialism

Spring 2021  
TWF: 12:30-1:20  
Synchronous

Instructor: Nina Belmonte  
Office: Clearihue B326  
Zoom Office Hours: Wed. 1:30-2:30  
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### Course Description:

What does it mean to know that we “exist”, to know we will die? How does this color how we experience ourselves and our world? Does the kind of thing that we are imply anything about what we ought to be? This course will be an introduction to the ideas and literature of Existentialism through the texts of its major thinkers and literary figures. We will discuss how what we call “Existentialism” emerges from out of and in opposition to abstract claims of a human subject, claiming the absolute starting point of our particular existence. We will then explore how Existentialism works out the implications of that claim.

Readings will include selections from the philosophy of Soren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, along with some relevant short fiction.

### Texts

In the Bookstore:

Kauffman, Walter: *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*  
Kierkegaard, Sören: *Fear and Trembling*  
Nietzsche, Friedrich: *The Gay Science*

All readings will also be available on the Brightspace site.

### Assignments

Class Participation & Study Questions	20%
Mid-term	25%
Short Paper	25%
Final Term paper:	<u>30%</u>
	100%

### Grades

Percentages will convert to a letter grade according to the following scheme:

A+ = 90-100	B+ = 77-79	C+ = 65-69	D = 50-59
A = 85-89	B = 73-76	C = 60-64	F = 0-49
A- = 80-84	B- = 70-72		

### **Description of Assignments**

**Study Questions and Class Participation/Discussion:** You are expected to read and to come to class prepared. Every other week there will be short-answer questions relating to the readings to be completed and submitted to the Assignment dropbox on Brightspace. These questions are intended to help you review the course material and to help you engage in lie and online discussion.

**Midterm:** There will be a midterm, posted on a Friday and due the next Tuesday. The exam will consist of short answers and a longer essay question. The exam will be evaluated on your understanding of the material, the quality of your thought and the clarity and presentation of your essay (including spelling, punctuation and grammar).

**Short exegetical paper:** (750-1000 words): There will be one short paper required for this course. This will be an exegetical essay, intended to improve skills of critical reading and concise composition, and to prepare you for your final essay. Paper topics will be posted at least one week before the due date, but you are always free to write on a topic of your own choice, so long as you speak with me *before the due date*.

**Final Paper:** (1500-2000 words) There will be one substantial paper due at the end of the semester, giving you an opportunity to deepen your engagement with the ideas of the course and to explore a more synthetic topic. I will provide a list of possible topics, but again, you are free to choose one of your own, as long as you speak with me *in advance*. This paper should deal with at least two of the thinkers covered in the course, and include at least two secondary sources. Papers will be evaluated on your understanding of the material, the quality of your thought and the clarity and presentation of your discussion (including spelling, punctuation and grammar).

### **Policy on Late Assignments**

Limited, short-term extensions on homework and the short paper may be granted on a case by case basis, as long as *the request is made before the due date*. Appropriate accommodations will of course be made for those with an accommodation letter from the Center for Accessible Learning, but please note that such a letter is not “a blanket extension on all work, nor is it a license to submit work after the course has ended.” There can be no extensions on the midterm, for reasons of fairness, unless in an emergency, in which case the student will arrange to take a different midterm at a later date.

### **Academic Misconduct**

Academic integrity requires commitment to honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. Any action that contravenes these values, including but not limited to plagiarism, falsification, multiple submissions, or cheating *of any kind* undermines the purpose of scholarly work and violates the fundamental academic rights of members of our community. **Please read the University Calendar’s “Policy on Academic Integrity.”**

## Schedule of Classes

### Week One - A New Voice

- Jan.** 6 Introductions, Explanations, Hesitations  
8 A Voice from Underground  
Read: Dostoevsky, "Notes from the Underground" (in Kaufmann, pp. 52-82)

### Week Two – New Voice/Old Voice

- 12 A Voice from Underground  
Read: Dostoevsky, "Notes from the Underground" (cont)  
13 Cartesian Meditations  
Read: Descartes, *Meditations*, Meditation 2  
15 Discussion

### Week Three - Kierkegaard: Paradox of the Singular

- 19 *That Individual*  
Read: Sections 1 and 4 in Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, (pgs. 85-87, 94-101)  
20 *Only One*  
Read: Section 7 in Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (pgs. 114-120)  
22 Discussion

### Week Four - Kierkegaard: Ethics of the Singular

- 26 Abraham  
Read: Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, Preface, Exordium and Eulogy  
27 Knight of Faith  
Read: Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, Preliminary Expectoration  
29 Discussion

### Week Five - Nietzsche: Life, Art and Value

**\*\* Midterm Due\*\***

- Feb.** 2\* Story Break  
Read: Kafka, "The Imperial Message" in Kaufmann, pgs. 144-145  
3 Life, Art, Value  
Read: Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Preface and Sects 1-4  
5 Discussion

**Week Six - Nietzsche: The Pursuit of Knowledge and the Death of God**

- Feb** 9      Origins of Knowledge  
                 Read: Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Sects. 108-110,
- 10      The Death of God  
                 Read: *The Gay Science*, Sects. 124-125
- 12      Discussion

**Week Seven – Reading Break**

*Reading Break - February 16-19*

**Week Eight - Nietzsche: Higher Humans and the Eternal Return**

- 23      Higher Humans  
                 Read: Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Sects. 283, 290
- 24      Eternal Return  
                 Read: *The Gay Science*, Sect. 341
- 26      Discussion: Philosophers and Nazis

**Week Nine -- Heidegger: Dasein and the Nothing**

- Mar.** 2      Angst as Revelation  
                 Read: Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics?" Kaufmann, 242-257
- 3      The Nothing  
                 Read: Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics?"
- 5      Discussion

**Week Ten – Heidegger: The Call to Conscience**

**\*Short Paper Due\***

- 9\*      Non-Being: Death  
                 Read: "The Wall" in Kaufmann, pgs. 281-299
- 10      Authentic Being  
                 Read: *Being and Time* (excerpt)
- 12      Discussion

**Week Eleven - Sartre: Freedom and Responsibility**

- 16      Freedom and Responsibility  
                 Read: Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism," in Kaufmann,  
*Existentialism*, pgs. 345-369
- 17      Anguish, Abandonment & Despair  
                 Read: Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism," in Kaufmann,  
*Existentialism*, pgs. 345-369
- 19      Discussion

**Week Twelve - Sartre: Hell is Other People**

- Mar** 23 The Being of Others (Park)  
Read: Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 301-303; 340-369 (bottom)
- 24 The Being of Others (Key Hole)
- 26 Discussion

**Week Thirteen - de Beauvoir: Existential Ethics**

- 30 Ambiguity & Freedom  
Read: Simone de Beauvoir, "Ambiguity and Freedom,"  
from *The Ethics of Ambiguity*
- 31 Ambiguity & Freedom (cont)
- Apr.** 2 Discussion

**Week Fourteen – A Sisyphean Task**

- 6 Camus, "Sisyphus" in Kaufmann, 375-378
- 7 *Last Class*

**\*\* December 13<sup>th</sup> - FINAL PAPERS DUE\*\***