

PH 248: EXISTENTIALISM
BOSTON UNIVERSITY, DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
SPRING 2018

INSTRUCTOR: Walter Hopp

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Room 513

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OFFICE HOURS: Wednesdays from 10-11:30 and Fridays from 11-12:30.

TEACHING FELLOWS:

Jordan Kokot (jdkokot@bu.edu)

Susan Kennedy (skenn@bu.edu)

WHEN AND WHERE: MWF from 9:05-9:55 in EPC 209.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The central philosophical and literary figures commonly regarded as existentialists are a diverse bunch, but are united in their skepticism concerning the power of traditional philosophical or scientific analysis to render human thought and action intelligible, the value they place on individual authenticity, and the importance they assign to emotionally exceptional states of mind for the full disclosure of human (and even non-human) reality. In this course we will examine works by Kierkegaard, Dostoevski, Nietzsche, Kafka, Sartre, and de Beauvoir. We will be especially concerned with what these thinkers have to say about the condition of modern humanity, the ability of science to explain human action, the authority of moral laws, the importance of individual “authenticity,” and the “absurdity” of human life, either with or without God.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*.

Walter Kaufmann (ed.), *Existentialism from Dostoevski to Sartre*.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil (Cambridge University Press)*.

Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*.

Jean-Paul Sartre, *No Exit + Three Other Plays*.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- (1) Participation and Attendance: 10%
- (2) Two group presentations: 10% each
- (3) Four short papers: 5% each
- (4) One midterm exam (due 3/2): 25%
- (5) One final exam (due 5/9): 25%

HOW TO SUCCEED IN THIS COURSE

- (1) Be sure to read everything carefully, and preferably more than once.
- (2) Come to class prepared with thoughtful assessments of and questions about the readings. Be prepared to share them with the class.
- (3) Come to office hours. This counts towards your participation grade.
- (4) Begin working on written assignments early.

- (5) If you require accommodations (e.g. a note-taker, extra time on assignments) please have Disability Services submit a letter on your behalf: <http://www.bu.edu/disability/index.html>.

CLASS AND UNIVERSITY POLICIES

- (1) **MAINTAINING A POSITIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT:** Each of us has a responsibility to come to class prepared and willing to discuss the assigned material, to pay attention throughout each class period, and to treat one another respectfully.
- (2) **ATTENDANCE AND ABSENCES:** Attendance will be taken at most class meetings. Three unexcused absences will result in a loss of 30% of the participation and attendance grade, and an additional 10% will be deducted for each subsequent unexcused absence. Please note that absences for religious observances will be excused, though students may be required to make up missed work: <http://www.bu.edu/ctl/university-policies/policy-on-religious-observance/>
- (3) **ASSIGNMENT COMPLETION AND LATE WORK:** Assignments should be submitted on the course website (learn.bu.edu). Assignments will be docked one third of one letter grade for each day they are late.
- (4) **ACADEMIC CONDUCT STATEMENT:** You are expected to adhere to the standards of academic honesty described here: <http://www.bu.edu/academics/policies/academic-conduct-code/>. The consequences for academic dishonesty range from failure of an assignment to failure of the course. Please bear in mind that I try to make my expectations for this course reasonable. You are not expected to produce genuinely novel arguments or philosophical conclusions. If you consult an outside source and find that it contains something worth repeating, cite it. It is impressive enough that you can conduct independent research and comprehend demanding material without assistance.
- (5) **ELECTRONIC DEVICES:** Unless otherwise noted, electronic devices are not permitted during class.

ACADEMIC HONESTY:

You are expected to adhere to the standards of academic honesty as described here:

<http://www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code/>. Please bear in mind that I try to make my expectations for this course reasonable. This means, among other things, that I do not expect you to produce truly novel philosophical arguments or conclusions—though you might—any more than your other professors expect you to make novel contributions to physics or biology. If you consult an outside source and find that it contains something worth repeating, please cite it. It is impressive enough that you can conduct independent research and comprehend demanding material without assistance.

SCHEDULE OF LECTURES, READINGS, AND ASSIGNMENTS

- This schedule is subject to change.

Week 1 (1/19)

Introduction to Class

Week 2 (1/22-1/26)

Kierkegaard, Excerpts, in Kaufmann, pp. 94-120.

Week 3 (1/29-2/1)

Dostoevski, *Notes from the Underground*, in Kaufmann, pp. 52-82.

Dostoevski, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Chapter 35, “Rebellion.” http://www.online-literature.com/dostoevsky/brothers_karamazov/

Week 4 (2/4-2/8)

Dostoevski, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Chapter 36, "The Grand Inquisitor."
Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Part 1.

Week 5 (2/11-2/15)

Nietzsche, BGE, Parts 1, 2, and 4.

Week 6 (2/20-2/23)

Nietzsche, BGE, Parts 5, 7, and 9.

- Note that we meet on Tuesday, 2/20 this week.

Week 7 (2/26-3/2)

Finish Nietzsche

Kafka, "The Metamorphosis," available here:

http://www.planetpdf.com/planetpdf/pdfs/free_ebooks/The_Metamorphosis_T.pdf

Spring Recess!**Week 8 (3/12-3/16)**

Readings: *Being and Nothingness* (BN), pp. 11-17, 21-44, 56-85.

Week 9 (3/19-3/23)

Sartre, BN, pp. 86-116.

Week 10 (3/26-3/30)

Sartre, BN, pp. 559-588, 594-599, 613-629, 637-640, 707-711.

Week 11 (4/2-4/6)

Sartre, BN pp. 301-303, 340-62, 471-82.

Sartre, *No Exit*.

Week 12 (4/9-4/13)

Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism," in Kaufmann.

Week 13 (4/16-4/20)

de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Chapter I.

Week 14 (4/23-4/27)

de Beauvoir, TEA, Chapters II, III.

Week 15 (4/30-5/2)

de Beauvoir, TEA, Chapter III.

Wednesday, 5/9: Final Exams Due!