

Existentialism

Kent State University Course Syllabus

PHIL 31030/001/16317 Spring 2024
TR: 3:45-5:00 pm Location: BOW 220
Instructor: Dr. Matthew Coate
Office: BOW 320 F
Office hours: M 12:30-4:30 pm
 TR 5:00-5:30 pm (or by appointment)

Contact: mcoate@kent.edu (330) 672-3965

Course Description:

Official Course Description:

Examination of the themes of existentialism, which include absurdity, freedom, and the individual's relationship to the world. Philosophers studied may include Sartre, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Camus, de Beauvoir, Ortega y Gasset, Marcel, and Tillich.

Course Description for PHIL 31010/001/16317 Spring 2024:

The term "existentialism" was coined in the 1940's by the French philosopher and playwright Gabriel Marcel, to refer to a new line of thinking, manifest in French philosophy and literature at the time, which was greatly influenced by the 19th century Danish thinker Søren Kierkegaard. Eventually, the term stuck, and began to be used to refer the thought of Kierkegaard himself, as well as any later thinkers or works of philosophy and literature that have been markedly influenced by Kierkegaard's work or that deal with the same basic themes. Existentialism reached the height of its popularity in the aftermath of the Second World War, and for a time was downright fashionable; yet it remains an important philosophical tradition, whose influence can be seen in fine art, literature, theater, as well as psychology and therapy.

In this course, we'll read a variety of essays and literary works written by a number of different authors, but will be focusing on the philosophical works of Kierkegaard, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Simone de Beauvoir, and on short stories written by the Czech writer Franz Kafka. Students will have to complete weekly writing assignments as well as a term paper and final exam.

Course objectives:

- To learn about the major themes and ideas of the Existentialist thinkers and writers whose works we'll be reading over the course of the semester, and, crucially, to demonstrate an understanding of these works (primarily through our final exam);
- To develop the ability to provide an accurate explication of the works in question, and to cogently respond to them and to the ideas they present (primarily, through our term paper and weekly writing assignments); and
- To increase our own understanding of Existentialist thought and, through an engagement with this thinking, our own capacities for critical self-reflection.

Course requirements:

Required texts:

- Søren Kierkegaard, *The Essential Kierkegaard*, edited by Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton University Press, ISBN-13: 9780691019406);
- Franz Kafka, *Complete Stories*, edited by Nahum Glatzer (Schocken Books, ISBN-13: 9780805210552);
- Jean-Paul Sartre, *Basic Writings*, edited by Stephen Priest (Routledge, ISBN-13: 9780415213684); and
- Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (Open Road Media, ISBN:13 9781480442801).

Grading:

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----|
| □ Term Paper | 40% |
| □ Weekly Writing Assignments | 30% |
| □ Final exam | 30% |

Exams:

A comprehensive final exam will be given at the end of the semester. This will be worth 30% of your final grade.

Written Essays:

One paper of 2000-2500 words (8-12 double-spaced pages) will be required from each student. At the end of week 10, each student will have to complete and submit a topic paper form, and will then have to turn in the completed paper by the end of week 13. After receiving a grade and my comments on the paper, each student can optionally submit a revised version before the end of the semester, if that student desires to attempt to earn a higher grade for this assignment. The term paper will be worth 40% of the final class grade.

Weekly Writing Assignments:

Beginning with week 2, each student will have to turn in a roughly 250-word (or one-page long) summary for that week's reading on the Sunday before the start of the week. If there is more than one reading for that week, students must choose which of the readings to summarize. Thoughtful summaries will receive full credit, while less than adequate ones will receive only half credit for that week's work. Each of these assignments will count for 2% of the final grade, for a total of 30% of the final class grade overall.

University services and policies:

Enrollment and registration statement:

The official registration deadline for self-adding this course is 1/22/24. University policy requires all students to be officially registered in each class they are attending. Students who are not officially registered for a course by published deadlines should not be attending classes and will not receive credit or a grade for the course. Each student must confirm enrollment by checking his/her class schedule (using Student Tools in FlashLine) prior to the deadline indicated. Registration errors must be corrected prior to the deadline.

The course withdrawal deadline is 4/1/24. The last day to drop without a “W” being assigned will be 1/29/24.

University Requirements:

For undergrads and philosophy majors and minors, this course may be used to satisfy upper division hours for university requirements. As a prerequisite, this class requires one previous course in philosophy, or else express departmental override.

Student Accessibility Services statement:

Kent State University is committed to inclusive and accessible education experiences for all students. University Policy 3-01.3 requires that students with disabilities be provided reasonable accommodations to ensure equal access to course content. Students with disabilities are encouraged to connect with Student Accessibility Services (SAS) as early as possible to establish accommodations. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers based on a disability (including mental health, chronic medical conditions, or injuries), please let me know immediately.

SAS can be reached at (330) 672-3391; please visit www.kent.edu/sas for more information.

Personal responsibility and academic integrity statement:

University policy 3-01.8 deals with the problem of academic dishonesty, cheating, and plagiarism. None of these will be tolerated in this class. The sanctions provided in this policy will be used to deal with any violations. If you have any questions, please read the policy at <http://www2.kent.edu/policyreg/chap3/index.cfm> and/or ask.

Please note that any instances of plagiarism will be reported and dealt with in accordance with the policies stipulated in section 3-01.8. Sanctions for a “traditionally” plagiarized assignment will, at the very least, include receiving a 0% on the plagiarized assignment, but may also include more severe consequences as the situation warrants. Sanctions for assignments plagiarized using AI text-generating apps will be more severe and will result in an automatic grade of “F” for the semester. Text-generating apps may not be used in any way for written assignments under any circumstances.

Attendance Policy:

Attendance is mandatory. Any student missing a class will receive an unexcused absence, unless they inform the professor of the absence and provide legitimate reason for it, including any relevant documentation. After 3 unexcused absences, a student will lose a full letter-grade from his or her final grade for each additional absence.

Given H.B. 353, which took effect this past Spring 2023 Semester, students need to be reasonably accommodated in regard to academic requirements, including exams and academic absences, for sincerely held religious beliefs and practices. Under this bill, it is required that students be permitted up to three days of absence per semester, without penalty, for religious holidays or to participate in organized activities conducted under the auspices of any religious or spiritual organization. To ensure compliance with H.B. 353, Kent State

University adopted a new administrative policy regarding accommodations for student religious and spiritual beliefs (3-01.14). Under current guidance, students need to submit a request in writing to the instructor within 14 days after the first day of instruction. To review the current policy, see [the relevant webpage for the Office for the Provost](#).

Electronic device policy:

Cel phones and smart phone devices may not be used in class at any time. Laptops or tablets are also prohibited, except if a student has received prior permission from me for their use in class (for note-taking or other academic purposes only, of course). If you would like to use an electronic device for such purposes, please let me know so I can give you clearance for this.

Grade scale:

A =	92-100%	4.0 per credit hour
A- =	90-92%	3.7 per credit hour
B+=	88-90%	3.3 per credit hour
B =	82-88%	3.0 per credit hour
B- =	80-82%	2.7 per credit hour
C+=	78-80%	2.3 per credit hour
C =	72-78%	2.0 per credit hour
C- =	70-72%	1.7 per credit hour
D =	68-70%	1.3 per credit hour
D+=	60-68%	1.0 per credit hour
F =	0 - 60%	0.0 per credit hour

Course schedule:

Schedule is subject to change!!! Readings are due on the day listed!

Readings marked: “Book #1” are in *The Essential Kierkegaard*;
 “Book #2” are in *Franz Kafka: Complete Stories*;
 “Book #3” are in *Sartre: Basic Writings*;
 “Book #4” are in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*; and
 “Canvas” are available on our class site.

□ week 1:			
Tuesday 1/16	Class Introduction		
Thursday 1/18	Kant <i>Groundwork...</i>	read: Canvas	
□ week 2:			
Tuesday 1/23	Hegel Background reading (on Antigone)	read: Canvas	Writing Assignment #1 Due: Sunday, 1/21
Thursday 1/25	Kierkegaard <i>Sickness Unto Death</i>	read: p. 350-361 Book #1	
□ week 3:			
Tuesday 1/30		read: p. 361-372 Book #1	Writing Assignment #2 Due: Sunday, 1/28
Thursday 2/1	<i>Either/Or, vol. II</i>	read: p. 66-75 Book #1	
□ week 4:			
Tuesday 2/6		read: p. 75-83 Book #1	Writing Assignment #3 Due: Sunday, 2/4

Thursday 2/8	<i>The Concept of Angst</i>	read: p. 138-146 Book #1	
□ week 5:			
Tuesday 2/13		read: p. 146-155 Book #1	Writing Assignment #4 Due: Sunday, 2/11
Thursday 2/15	<i>Works of Love</i>	read: p. 277-294 Book #1	
□ week 6:			
Tuesday 2/20		read: p. 294-311 Book #1	Writing Assignment #5 Due: Sunday, 2/18
Thursday 2/22	<i>Fear and Trembling</i>	read: p. 93-101 Book #1	
□ week 7:			
Tuesday 2/27	Derrida <i>The Gift of Death</i>	read: Canvas	Writing Assignment #6 Due: Sunday, 2/25
Thursday 2/29	Kafka 2 Parables	read: p. 3-5	
□ week 8:			
Tuesday 3/5	"" "The Metamorphosis"	read: p. 89-105 Book #2	Writing Assignment #7 Due: Sunday, 3/3
Thursday 3/7		read: p. 105-139 Book #2	
□ week 9:			
Tuesday 3/12	Assorted short stories	read: p. 268-277, 388, 399- 401, 427-429, 432, 444, 446-449 Book #2	Writing Assignment #8 Due: Sunday, 3/10
Thursday 3/14	Camus "The Myth of Sisyphus"	read: Canvas	
□ week 10:			
Tuesday 3/19	Sartre "Existentialism is a Humanism"	read: p. 26-45 Book #3	Writing Assignment #9 Due: Sunday, 3/17
Thursday 3/21	Heidegger <i>Basic Problems of Phenomenology</i>	read: Canvas	selection of paper topic Due: Friday, 3/22
□ week 11:			
Tuesday 3/26	No Class: Spring Break!		
Thursday 3/28	No Class: Spring Break!		
□ week 12:			
Tuesday 4/2	Sartre <i>Being and Nothingness</i>	read: p. 70-88 Book #3	Writing Assignment #10 Due: Sunday, 3/31
Thursday 4/4		continue: p. 70-88 Book #3	
□ week 13:			
Tuesday 4/9		read: p. 106-134 Book #3	Writing Assignment #11 Due: Sunday, 4/7

Thursday 4/11		read: p. 156-162 & 166-176 Book #3	Term Paper! Due: Friday 4/12
<input type="checkbox"/> week 14:			
Tuesday 4/16		read: p. 191-200 & 206-220 Book #3	Writing Assignment #12 Due: Sunday, 4/14
Thursday 4/18	De Beauvoir <i>The Ethics of Ambiguity</i>	read: p. 7-34 Book #4	
<input type="checkbox"/> week 15:			
Tuesday 4/23		read: p. 35-58 Book #4	Writing Assignment #13 Due: Sunday, 4/21
Thursday 4/25		continue: p. 35-58 Book #4	
<input type="checkbox"/> week 16:			
Tuesday 4/30		read: p. 59-73 Book #4	Writing Assignment #14 Due: Sunday, 4/28
Thursday 5/2		read: p. 129-159 Book #4	
<input type="checkbox"/> Finals week:			
Tuesday 5/7	Final Exam 7:45-10:00 am		