



Existentialism

Fall 2024

Instructor

Miguel José Paley

Email

mpaley1@fordham.edu

Hours

Tuesday & Friday 2:30am-3:45 pm

Location: Keating 114

Office Hours: Tue 4-6pm @ Collins 119

General Information

Description

This course will examine some of the main writers and themes of the existentialist tradition, including Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Dostoyevsky, Heidegger, Sartre, De Beauvoir, Camus, and more. In reading these figures we will examine issues relating to the meaning and nature of human existence. We will explore central topics like absurdity, despair, creativity, authenticity, individuality, death, existence, facticity, freedom, embodiment, selfhood, and otherness.

Expectations and Goals

- Students will gain familiarity with the main thinkers associated with existentialism and read some of their most important and most representative texts in detail.
- Students will think about and gain fluency in discussing central philosophical ideas relevant to the human condition.
- Students will learn to read texts carefully, compare the main claims of texts to each other, present an argument in writing, and be able to articulate clear positions about the material.

Required Materials (please buy *paper* copies of these books)

- Kierkegaard, Søren. *Fear and Trembling and The Sickness Unto Death*. Trans. Hong. Princeton ISBN 0-691-07247-7
- Nietzsche, Friederich *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Trans R.J. Hollingdale. Penguin. ISBN 978-0140441185
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Trans. Macquarrie & Robinson. Harper Perennial, 1962; 978-0-06-157559-4.

Optional Materials (We will only read parts of these books and they will also be available on BB)

- Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus and other essays*. Vintage, 1983; 978-0-679-73373-7.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Existentialism is a Humanism*. Yale University Press, 2007; 978-0-300-11546-8.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness*. Trans. Hazel Barnes. Washington Square Press, 1984; 978-0-671-86780-5.
- De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. Trans. Constance Borde. Vintage, 2011, ISBN 030727778X
- De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Trans. Bernard Frechtman. Citadel Press, 1976; 0-8065-0160-X
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Trans Richard Philcox. Grove Press, 2008, 9780802143006

Course Details:

Oral In-Class Participation 15%

Dialogue is essential for doing philosophy, so please be on time and be ready to participate. This means having done the required reading, being willing to present your thoughts to the class, and **respectfully** commenting on other's thoughts. *Some of this is difficult material* so you may have to read the assigned sections more than once. Suggestions on what to look out for in some texts and how to approach the reading will be on Blackboard.

Class Groups

This class will be essentially discussion-oriented and run as a seminar as much as possible. As this is sometimes hard to accomplish in a large course, each student will participate in a small group (of 4-5 students each). Each class session will begin with these groups discussing the reading and coming to a thesis about the read material to present to the class as a whole. (You may also raise questions, point to difficult passages, criticize positions, or interact with the texts in any other productive way.) You are very much encouraged (though not required) to meet outside of class as well: the idea here is to build a small learning community where you can rely on each other, discuss ideas together, maybe even workshop your papers. It is perfectly acceptable (and encouraged!) to share drafts of your papers with the rest of the group and get feedback from them.

Essay on the Self 20% Due: Oct 4 (Flexible length: ~1000-2500 words)

Describe your understanding of the self, or yourself, in terms of a personal experience in relation to texts from the course. The first part of the paper might be more of a narration: tell the story and bring out the highlights. Then relate your description to texts. How does your experience relate to specific texts in particular and philosophy in general, in your view? What is the personal or the private, in the first place? What or who are you, and how do you know what or who you are? Please remember that **this is an essay in philosophy** that combines narration and argument. You need to have a thesis, and you should argue for your thesis consistently. The aim is to persuade your reader to agree with your vision.

Essay on the Other 20% Due: Nov 8 (Flexible length: ~1000-2500 words)

Describe your understanding of the other, or others, in terms of a public experience in relation to material from the course. As with the first paper, you might tell a story to begin and then consider the main points in terms of texts or arguments. How does your experience of others or the public relate to texts, or to philosophy? What or who is the other, what or who is the public, and what is the difference between the public and the private? Again, you need to have a thesis in this paper, and you will need arguments or textual evidence to convince.

Presentation/ Discussion of a Literary Work 15%

In pairs or groups of three, you will guide the class in discussion of one “existentialist” literary work (such as Dostoevsky’s *Notes from Underground*, Camus’ *The Stranger*, Kafka’s *Penal Colony*, Rilke’s *Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, Sartre’s *Nausea*, Beauvoir’s *A Woman Destroyed* or *All Men are Mortal*). The group presentation or discussion should draw on the philosophical texts discussed in the course for a productive analysis of or interaction with the literary piece selected. In the session before the presentation, the group will suggest appropriate reading for the rest of the class (such as a summary or brief excerpt). Various formats of discussion, presentation, or debate are acceptable (consultation with the instructor is encouraged). Each group will have half a class session for the discussion of their literary work on Oct 8 (Dostoyevsky and Camus), Nov 12 (Kafka and Rilke), and Nov 22 (Sartre and De Beauvoir).

Final Project 30% open format

At the end of the semester, you will develop a final project in the format of your choosing. You could make a short film, write a piece of music, choreograph a dance, write a short story, or do whatever else you might think appropriate. Whatever you chose to do, your project should deal with a topic from our class and develop it philosophically. Your project will include a **project proposal, due Nov 22nd** (5%), a **presentation, on December 10 and 17** (13%), and a **written component** (12%) of at least 1000 words where you explain the reasoning behind your project, the argument or idea you are expressing, and how this idea is in discussion with our class readings.

Class Grading Breakdown

- Participation 15%
- Two essays 40%
- Literature Presentation 15%
- Final Project 30%

Class policies

Attendance

This course is heavily discussion-oriented, thus your attendance is absolutely imperative. Regular and punctual attendance at every session is expected. If you do have to miss a class, you are expected to get the material from a classmate. You are also encouraged (but not obliged) to come by and talk to me about the material afterwards. Excessive absence (more than 3-4 sessions) may result in failure of the course. **Repeated tardiness counts as absence. Using electronic devices in class counts as absence.**

Electronics

This class has a strict, no electronics policy. Please turn off all cell phones and other electronic devices during class and refrain from eating or other activities that cause any kind of disturbing noise in the classroom. The use of cell phones or any other digital devices during class will count as an absence for that session. If your cell phone is in your lap or on the desk, it is assumed you are using it. Please put them away for the duration of the class session. The use of laptops is not permitted. Please bring our class texts and take careful notes for discussion.

Turning in Written Work

All written assignments must be turned in on blackboard on time. Do not send papers by e-mail. Late assignments will be reduced by a letter grade per day that they are late.

Academic Honesty / Plagiarism

Plagiarism: Using any work or ideas that are not your own (this includes summarizing or quoting from a book, article, internet, or other source) without clearly indicating the author or source is considered plagiarism and will receive an automatic F for that assignment (and possibly the course). Generative AI tools are not permitted in this course. Students must rely on their own originality, creativity and critical thinking skills to complete assignments and engage with course material. **Use of ChatGPT or other language models will result in immediate failure of the class.** Please refer to the undergraduate standards of academic integrity and the University Code of Conduct.

Disability Statement

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, all students, with or without disabilities, are entitled to equal access to the programs and activities of Fordham University. If you believe that you have a disabling condition that may interfere with your ability to participate in the activities, coursework, or assessment of the object of this course, you may be entitled to accommodations. Please schedule an appointment to speak with someone at the Office of Disability Services.

Course Schedule :

Date	Reading	Assignment Due
Friday, August 30	N/A - Diagnostic and Introduction	Optional: Jaspers <i>Philosophy of Existence</i> Intro
Tuesday, September 3	Camus - The Myth of Sisyphus	Text on BB
Friday, September 6	Sartre - Existentialism is a Humanism	Text on BB
Tuesday, September 10	Kierkegaard – <i>The Sickness Unto Death</i>	pgs 1-21
Friday, September 13	Kierkegaard – <i>The Sickness Unto Death</i>	pgs 22-42
Tuesday, September 17	Kierkegaard – <i>The Sickness Unto Death</i>	pgs 42-75
Friday, September 20	Kierkegaard – <i>The Sickness Unto Death</i>	pgs 74-83, 87-100
Tuesday, September 24	Nietzsche - Thus Spoke Zarathustra	First Part
Friday, September 27	Nietzsche - Thus Spoke Zarathustra	Second Part
Tuesday, October 1	Nietzsche - Thus Spoke Zarathustra	Third Part
Friday, October 4	Discussion day 1	Paper 1: What is the Self? Who are you?
Tuesday, October 8	Existentialist Literature discussion	Dostoyevsky's <i>Notes from Underground</i> & Camus' <i>The stranger</i>
Friday, October 11	Heidegger <i>Being and time</i>	§§4-5 (pp 32-40)
Tuesday, October 15	Heidegger <i>Being and time</i>	§9 & §11-12 §§14-16 (pp. 67-71, 76-86, 91-107)
Friday, October 18	Heidegger <i>Being and time</i>	§§25-27 (pp149-168)
Tuesday, October 22	Heidegger <i>Being and time</i>	§§40-43 (pp. 228-256)
Friday, October 25	Heidegger <i>Being and time</i>	§§46-47, §§50-53 (pp 279-285, 293-311)
Tuesday, October 29	Sartre - Being and Nothingness	Part IV, Chapter 1, Section ii
Friday, November 1	Sartre - Being and Nothingness	Part IV, Chapter 1, Section iii
Friday, November 8	Discussion day 2	Paper 2: Who is the Other?
Tuesday, November 12	Existentialist Literature Discussion 2	Kafka's <i>In the Penal Colony</i> & Rilke's <i>Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge</i>
Friday, November 15	Merleau-Ponty <i>Phenomenology of Perception</i>	(Preface; "Sensation," pages 3-15; "Theory of the Body," pages 235-240)
Tuesday, November 19	De Beauvoir <i>The Second Sex</i>	"Childhood"
Friday, November 22	Fanon <i>Black Skin, White Masks</i>	Intro and Ch 5 Project Proposal Due
Tuesday, November 26	De Beauvoir <i>Ethics of Ambiguity</i>	Ch. 1
	Closed for Thanksgiving	
Tuesday, December 3	Levinas - Is ontology fundamental?	

Friday, December 6	Existentialist Literature Discussion 3	Sartre's <i>Nausea</i> & Beauvoir's <i>The Woman Destroyed</i> or <i>All Men are Mortal</i>
Tuesday, December 10	LAST DAY OF CLASSES	Presentations
Tuesday, December 17 1:30-3:30	Open Format Exam	Presentations and Written component due