

Existentialism (PHIL 3670)
Christopher R. Myers (cmyers18@fordham.edu)
Fordham University, Fall 2025
[HERE]: Tues. & Fri. 10:00am-11:15am
Office Hours (Collins Rm. 121): Tues. & Wed. 4:00pm-5:00pm & by appt.



In this course we will study some of the core themes of existentialist philosophy as well as some of the figures most closely associated with existentialism. We will begin by examining some of the writings which helped establish existentialism as a school of thought within France during the 1940's and 1950's. We will then move to examine the philosophical beginnings of this school in the 19th century, focusing in particular on the writings of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger (among others). We will finish with a deeper glimpse at the role of existentialism in 20th century literature and culture.

Course description:

The aim of our course is to examine some of the core themes of existentialist philosophy, including death, absurdity, anxiety, facticity, authenticity, the creation of meaning, bad faith, and otherness. What connects these themes is their fundamental importance for the meaning and nature of human existence. As we will see, however, these themes are very complex and near-impossible to describe without simplifying the depth of human existence. In order to achieve a better understanding of these themes, we will study some of the writers and philosophers most closely associated with existentialist philosophy, including Sartre, Beauvoir, Camus, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Dostoyevsky, Heidegger. Although the term 'existentialism' was not formalized until after many of these writers were dead, we will see that the themes of existentialist philosophy have a long history and can be traced back to radical transformations of society during the 19th and 20th centuries.

Required texts:

- Kierkegaard, Soren. *[Fear and Trembling](#)*, trans. Alastair Hannay. London: Penguin Classics, 1986.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *[Beyond Good and Evil](#)*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale. London: Penguin Classics, 2003.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *[Existentialism is a Humanism](#)*, trans. Carol Macomber. Yale University Press, 2007.

Course requirements:

[1] Attendance/participation	10%
[2] Coursework (on Perusall)	25%
[3] Class Presentations	15%
[4] Literature Review	20%
[5] Final Paper Assignment	30%

[1] Attendance/participation:

I will take attendance at the beginning of each class. You are allowed two unexcused absences before I must start taking points away from your overall attendance/participation grade. I will excuse an absence for a religious holiday, a serious illness, a death in your immediate family, or your participation in a university-sponsored holiday. To get an absence excused, you must send me a formal, written explanation *before* the class in question.

Your attendance grade is also dependent on (a) your active participation during class time, and (b) your bringing all required reading materials to class (either by physical copy or computer access). Concerning class participation: our in-person class meetings will be devoted *entirely (100%)* to discussion about the assigned readings, and this means that your active participation during class time is absolutely essential. My expectation is that you will not only maintain strong attendance throughout the semester, but also contribute your thoughts during class discussions and act respectfully toward your classmates. Listen thoughtfully, keep an open mind, and contribute what you think. Philosophy is most worthwhile when it is enlivened by discussion and exchange.

[2] Coursework (on Perusall):

For all of our assigned readings this semester, you must complete an online Perusall assignment (via our course Blackboard page). Perusall allows students to collaboratively make annotations and comments on a reading. Everyone in the class is required to post at least *three* comments on our reading(s) in advance of every class meeting, and these comments can be posted directly onto the reading itself or in response to one of your classmates' previous comments. Your grade on these assignments will be based on completion. At the same time, I reserve the right to take off points for inaccuracy or irrelevance.

The deadline for all coursework on Perusall is 9:00am on the day of the class in question. No late coursework will be accepted as the purpose of these assignments is to create conversation about the readings in advance of our discussions in class.

[3] Class Presentation:

This semester each of you is required to do one in-class presentation. Your presentation will take place immediately after our warm-up discussion, and should run for 10-20 minutes (not including discussion time afterward).

The purpose of these class presentations is to provide an overview of the day's assigned reading, clarify the key points of our author's argument/reasoning, and raise at least three discussion questions that you think deserve attention. Your presentation can be delivered via PowerPoint, Prezi, or simply the whiteboard (I have no preference). However you choose to deliver it, your presentation should consist in an overview, summary, and analysis of the assigned reading, and then a set of concluding thoughts alongside your proposed discussion questions.

You will be graded on the accuracy of your presentation, the quality of your delivery, and your ability to answer questions from the class. Please consult our class' 'Guide for Class Presentations' handout for more detailed information and requirements. Additionally, consult our class' 'Guide for Class Presentations' handout for your presentation date (I have assigned the presentations randomly across the semester). You may exchange the date of your assigned presentation with another student in the class, provided both parties agree and you let me know at least a week in advance.

[4] Literature Review

To explore the wide landscape of existentialist literature, everyone in the class will select one book from a list I will provide, write a short review of this book (which relates this book to the central themes and ideas of our course), and deliver a presentation on this book at the end of the semester. The purpose of the assignment is to broaden your understanding of existentialism and to practice your skills at summary and exposition. You must sign up for a book with me, and you are responsible for finding your own copy of the book you select.

You can find our list of possible book selections on Blackboard via our class' 'Guide for Book Reviews & Presentations' handout. I have selected these books with purpose and want to insist that you select from the list. However if there is some outside book that you believe is compatible with this list (and you would be more interested to present on it), you must discuss and confirm this selection with me. Additionally, you can find more detailed instructions for writing your review and delivering your presentation via our 'Guide for Book Reviews & Presentations' handout.

[5] Final Paper Assignment:

We will have one major writing assignment in this class: a final paper assignment. The purpose of this paper is to engage thoughtfully with our assigned readings as well as developing an informed position of your own. I will announce the prompt for this paper assignment at least two weeks in advance. The length of your final paper will be 7-12 pages (12 font, double-spaced), and it needs to be written in line with the requirements laid out in the prompt.

Course policies:

Late penalty policy:

For every day (weekend days included) that an assignment is late, this assignment will be penalized. If you suspect that you will not be able to turn an assignment in on time, reach out to me *at least 24 hours in advance* and we can talk about extending the deadline. I am considerably generous about extending paper deadlines - but I will not extend deadlines *immediately before the deadline*. No late coursework on Perusall will be accepted.

Technology policy:

During class time you are permitted to use a computer, laptop, or tablet. Your use of these devices is restricted to class use, however, and I expect that you will not allow these devices to divert your attention or the attention of others away from discussion.

Remember: this course revolves around active discussion and participation. If your use of electronic devices inhibits class discussion, I reserve the right to adjust our technology policy accordingly.

Academic integrity:

All students are expected to abide by the rules of academic integrity as laid out in the Fordham Handbook. This especially includes plagiarism. Any assignment that is found to have involved plagiarism will automatically receive a failing grade. Furthermore, your professors (including me) are obliged to automatically report all cases of plagiarism to the Dean. With this in mind, it's a good idea to familiarize yourself with what qualifies as plagiarism.

The Fordham Handbook defines plagiarism as follows: "Plagiarism occurs when individuals attempt to present as their own what has come from another source. Plagiarism takes place whether such theft is accidental or deliberate." In a nutshell, plagiarism involves taking credit for someone else's work in one's own writing – intentionally or unintentionally. Plagiarism might mean copying an idea or quotation exactly as it is written elsewhere (in a book, online article, Chat GPT, a newspaper, etc.), paraphrasing an idea or quotation without properly including a citation, or using an idea that is not your own without citing the author(s) of this idea. To avoid plagiarism make sure you properly cite the sources you use. If you're unsure of whether you are properly citing something, come and ask me before you submit the assignment. Stay on the safe side.

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ChatGPT and GenerativeAI policy:

ChatGPT is capable of many things, but ChatGPT is not you. Having a bot answer questions or generate essays is not the same as working out your own thoughts. This semester our class will adhere to three guidelines concerning AI technology: (1) If you use ChatGPT/GenAI in any way, you *must* cite it—that is to say, you must cite the AI technology

you used, indicate what prompt you gave it, and indicate how you revised it. (2) Uses of ChatGPT/GenAI without citation will be penalized. Submitting ChatGPT/GenAI products without citation is a violation of Fordham’s academic integrity policies—specifically, it is a form of plagiarism and outsourcing. (3) ChatGPT/GenAI are tools and they are here to stay—so we will keep our channels of communication open about their advantages and the best frameworks in which to deploy them. Additionally, we will use the reading skills we develop in this class to reflect critically *on* information that ChatGPT/GenAI provide about the history of philosophy. We will do this during class time, but you might consider doing this also in your coursework paragraphs.

Students with special needs and/or disabilities:

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 disability that may interfere with your ability to participate in the activities, classwork, or assessment of the object of this course, you may be entitled to accommodations. Please schedule a meeting to speak with someone at the Office of Disability Services (Phone number: 718-817-0655). (Locations: Lincoln Center – Lowenstein, Room 207; Rose Hill - O’Hare Hall, Lower Level).

Further study in philosophy:

For further information on majoring or minoring in philosophy, contact the Department Associate Chair for Undergraduate Studies: Professor Christina M. Gschwandtner (gschwandtner@fordham.edu).

Reading Schedule: [*Dates and pages to be determined — this is a list of planned readings*]

1. (Class introduction)
2. (Camus’ *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Selections)
3. Sartre’s “Existentialism is a Humanism”
4. Beauvoir’s “What Is Existentialism?”
5. (Schopenhauer’s *World as Will and Representation*, Chapter 46)
6. (Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*, Selections)
7. (Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*, Selections)
8. (Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*, Selections)
9. (Dostoevsky’s *Notes from Underground*, Selections)
10. (Nietzsche’s *Human All Too Human*, Selections)
11. (Nietzsche’s *Human All Too Human*, Selections)
12. (Nietzsche’s *Joyful Science*, Selections)
13. (Nietzsche’s *Joyful Science*, Selections)
14. (Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil*, Selections)
15. (Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil*, Selections)
16. (Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, Selections)
17. (Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, Selections)
18. (Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, Selections)

19. (Heidegger's "Letter on Humanism")
20. (Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, Selections)
21. (Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, Selections)
22. (Beauvoir's *Ethics of Ambiguity*, Selections)
23. (Beauvoir's *Ethics of Ambiguity*, Selections)
24. (Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, Selections)
25. (Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, Selections)