

PHIL 375 Existentialism

Summer 2021: July 12th - August 9th

Mon-Tue-Thu-Fri 11:05 to 13:25

Location: via Zoom

Instructor: Azadeh Radbooei

azadeh.radbooei@mcgill.ca

Office hours: By appointment

Course Description

This course is an introduction to Existentialism.

Existentialism must be understood in its two aspects: **First**, a sense which has percolated into pop philosophy and ordinary language in the form of expressions such as “existential crisis” and “existential angst”. This aspect refers to a grasp of fundamental structures of human existence which may be experienced as *affects*. **Second** is the properly epistemological and metaphysical task of existentialism. Our authors tackle questions such as Reality, Knowledge, Time and Freedom in the lineage of a philosophical tradition going back to the ancient Greeks. **The two aspects**, of course, cannot be separated: the specificity of existentialism relies precisely in that it derives its discussion of traditional philosophical questions from human *experience*, understood in a strong sense. In the famous words of Sartre, “existence precedes essence”.

The course will also aim to place Existentialism within the History of Philosophy. It is not accidental that this movement arose when it did. More specifically, it can be understood as a response to Modern Philosophy’s erection of the autonomous rational subject, and its separation of the theoretical and the practical domains of human experience. This is why the very first class will be dedicated to a thematic overview of Kant.

There are no official pre-requisites for PHIL 375, but any course in philosophy, and especially in Modern philosophy would be an asset.

Course Format

We will try, as much as possible, to recreate the rhythm of a real classroom. To this effect, the entire 2 ½ hour course will be conducted **live on Zoom**. This will allow you to ask questions during the lectures, to which you will receive immediate answers. It will also facilitate group activities and exercises, which will be scattered throughout the session. You will receive invitations to our Zoom meetings via your McGill email. Please try to arrange for a satisfactory internet connection.

The lectures will be recorded and made available on MyCourses; however, and even though presence is not mandatory, I do expect all of you to be **present** with your camera turned on (inasmuch as possible). This is mainly because the group discussions (which will not be recorded) constitute a crucial element towards succeeding the course.

Required Course Material

All required (and optional) texts will be posted on MyCourses.

We will discuss 3 main authors: Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Heidegger.

Kierkegaard, Soren. *The Concept of Anxiety...* Transl. Reidar Thomte. Princeton University Press, 2013.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morality and Other Writings*. Transl. Carol Diethe. Edit. Keith Ansell-Pearson. Cambridge U. Press, 2017

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Transl. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. Harper & Row Publishers, 1962.

Course Requirements

1. Reading

Readings must be done in advance. These are difficult texts which must be read a number of times in order to be even partially understood. Ideally students would read the texts once prior to the lecture, and once after the lecture. A detailed reading schedule will be posted on MyCourses.

2. Online Discussion (20%)

You are required to submit 1 question and 1 reply per week, for a total of 8 submissions. The questions need to be submitted by **6pm every Wednesday** and the replies, by **6pm every Friday** (Montreal time).

Each week I will allocate some time during the lecture for addressing some of the more common/pertinent questions.

The questions cannot be as simple as : “What does the ‘will to power’ mean for Nietzsche?” Instead, you need to articulate a problem, something in the following form:

Heidegger defines Dasein as “a being for whom the meaning of Being is an issue”.
But elsewhere, he defines Dasein as “Being-there”, as the kind of being whose existence is situated in a context. What is the relation between these 2 definitions?

And ideally you would add a hypothesis, for ex.:

Could it be that it is *because* Dasein does not have a pre-determined essence, that the meaning of Being becomes an issue for it...?

3. Short Paper (30%)

You will write 1 short paper, due **Friday, July 23rd (11pm Montreal time)**, 30%. The short paper (700 words maximum) will allow you to engage with our authors as early as possible and will prepare you for the final paper.

You are expected to carefully read the feedback provided, and to apply it to the final paper.

4. Take home Exam (50%)

Final Paper, due August 9th, 1600 words maximum. Detailed instructions will be posted on MyCourses.

Grading Criteria

An essay will be graded according to its relevance to the topic, organization of presentation, accuracy of interpretation, clarity of expression, rigor of argumentation, and originality of ideas.

I will not take off marks from 100%. Rather, I work from a **B** (~72.5%) and see if the essay deserves more or less. Therefore, it is not my job to convince you that it deserves less; rather, it is your job to convince me, with your essay alone (i.e., not with subsequent explanation), that it deserves more. The following gives you a general sense of the meaning of each grade:

- “**A**” indicates a substantial grasp of the material, which means that you not only understand it accurately but can also flesh out its nuances, implications and difficulties with the help of a conceptual framework that both makes sense for the author and shows your original reflection.
- “**B**” reflects an above-average comprehension of the material without any serious misinterpretation; a “**B**” work, however, tends toward accurate summary rather than independent analysis. In other words, it tends to give a superficial reading rather than entering the philosophical architecture of the author, figuring out the issue at bottom, and working from within it.
- “**C**” suggests struggle with the material that manages an average, basic comprehension of it but is flawed by significant misunderstandings or errors.
- “**D**” means only a rudimentary comprehension of part of the material with most of the material being misunderstood. This category also includes unnecessarily lengthy and rambling works as well as those failing to adopt a critical stance, i.e., arguing in a partisan, ideological or thoughtless manner.
- “**F**” means that the paper either totally misses the topic or exhibits no understanding of the material.

Late Policy

Late submissions without an extension will be penalized by 5% every 24-hour period beyond the deadline.

N.B. No late submissions will be accepted for the Online Discussions.

If you need an extension, be sure to meet both of the following requirements: (a) inform the instructor by email **before the official deadline**; (b) present a note from a doctor, an OSD officer or a family member, specifying the situation—this proof may come in after the deadline. We will then set up a reasonable schedule for you to complete the assignment.

Academic integrity & Student rights

McGill University values academic integrity. All students must, therefore, understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in **English or in French** any written work that is to be graded.

Student well-being is a priority for the University. All of our health and wellness resources have been integrated into a single Student Wellness Hub, your one-stop shop for everything related to your physical and mental health. If you need to access services or get more information, visit the Virtual Hub at www.mcgill.ca/wellness-hub or drop by the Brown Student Services Building (downtown) or Centennial Centre (Macdonald Campus). Within your faculty, you can also connect with your Local Wellness Advisor (to make an appointment, visit www.mcgill.ca/lwa).

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the Instructor and/or the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.