

PHIL381 Existentialism and Phenomenology
Department of Philosophy, St. Francis Xavier University
Course Outline

Classroom & Times:

Instructor: Doug Al-Maini

Office & Office Hours: NH 717; see schedule online

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Course Description:

This course is designed as a critical evaluation of 19th and early 20th-century philosophical movements from continental Europe. We shall begin by examining the works of Nietzsche and Brentano; they form the historical antecedents to the bulk of this course. Nietzsche's *Twilight of the Idols* gives preliminary thought to topics that will become important to both phenomenology and existentialism, and this text will be returned to at various points in the semester as those topics come forward in the work of other philosophers; Brentano's *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* reintroduces to modern Western philosophy the intentionality thesis that serves as the backbone of phenomenology. With that foundation in place, we can move on to look at phenomenology and existentialism proper in the works of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and De Beauvoir. We shall look at their analysis of questions such as: What is the relationship between the part and the whole? How does mind experience the world? What counts as a proper description of experience? Should we do philosophy like an empirical science? Is existence itself a category? What is human freedom? A minor theme of this course will be the philosophical analysis of art; almost all of these thinkers had something important to say about art and our experience of it, and assessing how well they captured what the artwork is and how it is experienced will be a question to be returned to at various points in the class.

Schedule:

Week	Primary Readings	Bakewell
1 (Sept 4)	Nietzsche, <i>Twilight of the Idols</i>	
2 (Sept 11)	Nietzsche, <i>Twilight of the Idols</i>	
3 (Sept 18)	Brentano, <i>The Distinction Between the Mental and Physical</i>	
4 (Sept 25)	Brentano's later metaphysics	
5 (Oct 2)	Merleau-Ponty, Preface to <i>The Phenomenology of Perception</i>	Ch. 2
6 (Oct 9)	Husserl, <i>3rd Logical Investigation</i>	Ch. 10
7 (Oct 16)	Heidegger, <i>Being and Time</i> (Introduction, Ch. 1)	Ch. 3
8 (Oct 23)	Heidegger, <i>What is Metaphysics?</i>	
9 (Oct 30)	Heidegger, <i>Building, Dwelling, Thinking</i>	Ch. 4, 8
10 (Nov 6)	Sartre, <i>Existentialism is a Humanism, Nausea</i>	Ch. 5
11 (Nov 13)	Sartre, <i>Existentialism is a Humanism, Nausea</i>	Ch. 6
12 (Nov 20)	Sartre, <i>No Exit</i>	
13 (Nov 27)	Sartre, <i>Existentialism is a Humanism, Nausea</i>	Ch. 9, 14

Required Texts:

The Twilight of the Idols Friedrich Nietzsche, Penguin Classics.

Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings ed. David Farrell Krell

Nausea Jean Paul Sartre

Existentialism is a Humanism Jean Paul Sartre

Assignments:

Students will be assessed via a short essay, a longer (final) essay, and a final exam.

A: Short Essay (Outline due Oct 9; paper due Oct 23): Write an essay answering one of the following questions. The response should be at least 4 pages in length and will be worth 25% of the final grade.

1) “Are the parts of an object more real, just as real, or less real than the whole object?”

In answering this question, students are to give their own opinion on the matter, but they must make use of Brentano’s philosophical investigation of the relationship between parts and wholes.

2) “Is the *natural attitude* distinct from the *phenomenological attitude*?”

In answering this question, students are to put forward arguments both for and against separating the two attitudes, and then decide between those arguments.

B: Long Essay (Outline due Nov 13; paper due Nov 27): Write an essay answering the following question. The essay should be at least 10 pages in length and will be worth 40% of the final grade.

Explain why Roquentin’s experience with the Chestnut tree is fundamentally an existentialist encounter and not a phenomenological one.

C: Final Exam: The final exam will consist in a series of take home short essays testing you on your knowledge of the various readings and topics covered in the course, and is worth 35%.

Technical Considerations for Written Assignments:

1) All written assignments must be typed (black ink, please) and double-spaced on pages with at most 1 inch margins. Please use “Times New Roman” 12 point font and do not justify the right margin. No extra line spaces between paragraphs. Indent the first line of a paragraph. Printing on both sides of a sheet of paper is quite acceptable.

2) Please no title pages. Also no “Works Cited” or “Bibliography” pages referring to one work; do bibliographic references in a footnote if you must. Please no enormously large-fonted things like titles, names, dates, course numbers, student numbers, phone numbers, or due dates that take up half a page of space. Your title, name, and student number at the top of the first page is quite sufficient. Please visibly number any multiple-page assignments. If for some reason you must hand in the assignment to the office, please include my name at the top of the assignment as well.

3) No duo-tangs, folders, binders, or paperclips. Loose sheets are acceptable.

4) Under no circumstances will emailed assignments be accepted. Please hand in your assignments at the start of class on the day they are due.

5) The final page of this outline is the evaluation form that will be used in the assessment of your writing. This evaluation form provides the clearest explanation of my requirements for an essay. Please, study it carefully before you write your work.

6) The late policy is a deduction of 3% per day that the assignment is handed in late. This course outline lets you know when assignments are due, and you have been given plenty of time to complete them. Consequently last minute excuses for not completing assignments on time will be met with marked skepticism, not to say cynicism.

7) Many of the above requirements are arbitrary demands on my part, but they really do facilitate the assessment of your work. Please follow them! Failure to follow these guidelines will impact your mark for organization.

8) Plagiarism is completely unacceptable. If you make use of an idea that is not of your own devising, you must cite the source of that idea. Failure to properly cite sources may result from removal from the course and expulsion from the school. Students are obliged to keep a copy of their assignments.

9) Students are required to keep a copy of their own written work for safe keeping.

EVALUATION FORM
(Late assignments will receive no comments)

Style:

Grammar: Are the sentences understandable? Are there any spelling mistakes? Is the diction clear and concise? Can the thought behind each sentence easily be grasped?

/10

Organization: Do the ideas logically follow each other, or were they haphazardly strewn together? Do the ideas flow from each other, with explicit premises deductively producing conclusions? Are the arguments connected at all, showing a chain of reasoning?

/10

Content:

Thesis: Do the assignment give an answer to a question or problem put forward? Is the answer more than a simple “yes” or “no”? Is the answer insightful, being an interpretive idea itself? Is the thesis explicitly stated?

/10

Arguments: Are there arguments presented in the paper? Are the arguments interesting or banal? Are the arguments incisive or superficial? Do the arguments explicitly outline broad premises that act as guides to understanding and reveal the unquestioned perspectives adopted in the paper?

/30

Originality: Does the student provide input into the conceptual debates the text engages in? Is there evidence of insight on the student’s part into the topic? Are there any new ideas being explored in the assignment? Is the student able to go beyond ideas raised in class discussion?

/20

Evaluation: Does the student give a fair summation of the ideas contained in the texts used? Does the use of these ideas meaningfully contribute to the thesis of the essay, or is the use of material a mere addenda to the main arguments of the paper?

/20

TOTAL /100