

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

Classroom & Times: NH 346; Tuesdays & Thursdays 2:15-3:30

Instructor: Doug Al-Maini

Office & Office Hours: NH 717; Mon 2-3, Wed 1-2, Thu 12-1, Fri 9-11

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**Course Description:**

This course is designed as a critical evaluation of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>-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 writings embody an idealization of existentialism, and this text will be returned to at various points in the semester as different themes in existentialism come forward; 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 Merleau-Ponty. 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 are "The Things Themselves"? 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:**

<b>Week</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Readings</b>
1 (Jan 6)	Proto- Existentialism	Nietzsche, <i>Twilight of the Idols: The Problem of Socrates</i> , 'Reason' in <i>Philosophy</i> , <i>Morality as Anti-Nature</i>
2 (Jan 13)	Nihilism	Nietzsche, <i>Twilight: The Four Great Errors</i> , <i>The 'Improvers'</i> , <i>What the Germans Lack</i>
3 (Jan 20)	The Intentionality Thesis	Brentano, <i>The Distinction Between Mental and Physical</i>
4 (Jan 27)	Substance and Accident	Brentano, <i>The Theory of Categories</i>
5 (Feb 3)	The Category of Existence	Meinong, <i>The Theory of Objects</i>
6 (Feb 10)	Phenomenology	Husserl, <i>Phenomenology (Encyclopedia article)</i>
7 (Feb 17)	Mereology	Husserl, <i>3<sup>rd</sup> Logical Investigation</i>
8 (Mar 3)	Dasein	Heidegger, <i>History of the Concept of Time: Main Part, First Division, Chapter 2, 3, sections 18-19.</i>
9 (Mar 10)	Heidegger's Existentialism	Heidegger, <i>Time: Main Part, First Division, Chapter 4, sections 27-30</i>
10 (Mar 17)	Being-Towards-Death	Heidegger, <i>Time: Main Part, First Division, Chapter 4, Section 31, Main Part, Second Division.</i>
11 (Mar 24)	Existentialism	Sartre, <i>No Exit</i>
12 (Mar 31)	Phenomenology of Perception	Merleau-Ponty, <i>The Phenomenology of Perception: The Body as Object and Mechanistic Physiology.</i>

**Required Texts:**

*The Twilight of the Idols* Friedrich Nietzsche, Penguin Classics.

*Realism and the Background of Phenomenology* ed. Roderick Chisolm, Ridgeview Publishing Company.

*History of the Concept of Time* Martin Heidegger, Trans. Theodore Kisiel, Indiana University Press.

**Assignments:**

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

**A: Short Essay (Outline due Feb 11; paper due Feb 20):** Write an essay answering the following question. The response should be at least 4 pages in length and will be worth 25% of the final grade.

“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.

**B: Long Essay (Proposal due Mar 11; paper due April 3):** Give a phenomenological analysis of some important experience human consciousness goes through. Be sure to check your proposal for the subject of this project with the instructor. The analysis should be at least 7 pages in length and will be worth 40% of the final grade.

**C: Final Exam:** The final exam will consist in a series of 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