

PHIL 387: Existentialism

Winter Term 2021-22/ SGW Campus (3 credits)

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Office hours:	Thurs. 2:00-4:00pm in person or by Zoom (accessed through Moodle), and by appointment. Note: there will be no office hours during our first week of class.
	*Office hours will be held in person (I will physically be in my office if people wish to come by) and on Zoom simultaneously; this will make it possible to reduce the number of students assembled in the building. Please get in touch by email to let me know you are planning to drop in in person. If you find yourself navigating scheduling conflicts, you can also email me to schedule meetings outside of office hours.
Class schedule:	M & W 11:45am-1:00pm, H 509
TA:	TBA

Calendar description: This course acquaints the student with the fundamentals of the existentialist movement as a philosophical perspective. Philosophers considered may include Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Jaspers, Marcel, and Berdyaev.

Course description: In this reading-centered course, we will track themes which were central to thinkers branded ‘existentialists’ across texts central and adjacent to the existentialist movement. We will discuss the preoccupations which shaped this movement in a general way and will also achieve a deep understanding of the way they are particularized in the works of specific thinkers. We will examine full texts by Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Camus, and Frantz Fanon as a means of thinking about the features of human existence, the insights that can be afforded by emotions and embodiment, the nature of human being’s freedom, the source of the values which bind us, and human being’s relations with other people, whether these relations are fraught or impel forms of ethical accountability.

Required texts: Most of the texts for the course must be purchased. An electronic version of one of our readings by Jean-Paul Sartre will be available through the Moodle page for the course (our reading schedule indicates which one). The books which must be purchased are available through [Concordia Book Stop](#):

Søren Kierkegaard: *Fear and Trembling & The Sickness Unto Death* (Princeton UP, 2013).

Friedrich Nietzsche: *Beyond Good and Evil* (Cambridge UP, 2002)

Jean-Paul Sartre: *No Exit and Three Other Plays* (Penguin Random House, 1989)

Albert Camus: *The Myth of Sisyphus* (Penguin, 2005)

Simone de Beauvoir: *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (Open Road Media, 2018)

Frantz Fanon: *The Wretched of the Earth* (Grove Atlantic, 1963)

Course objectives: (1) Familiarize students with key ideas and preoccupations in existentialist discourse. (2) Encourage students to carry out a sustained reading practice as they move through several full-length works. (3) Make it possible, through the writing assignments for the course, for students to practice attending to the minute details of a work as well as the respects in which the parts of a work operate together. (5) Make it possible for students to practice rigorous exegesis as well as practice supporting theses of a philosophical nature through close readings of difficult texts. (6) Allow students to practice making intelligent and original observations about course material.

How the course will run and expectations:

Our first four lectures (Jan. 10, Jan. 12, Jan. 17 and Jan 19) will be held in real time on Zoom. You will be able to find the Zoom links for each lecture in the announcements section of the Moodle page for the course. Once we are allowed to return to campus (tentatively: after Jan. 19), we will meet in person, in the room that has been booked for us, at our scheduled times. These lectures will be recorded using Yuja; in the event that you must miss class, you will be able to access these recordings through Moodle as well. All students are expected to wear procedure masks in the classroom and to refrain from coming to class if experiencing symptoms of COVID-19. If I ever find myself having to cancel lecture because I am experiencing symptoms of the virus, I will create a replacement video lecture for the class which will be available through Moodle.

*If, due to the pandemic, we must change the mode of delivery for the course from in-person to fully online, we will use Zoom for our lectures. I'll keep you updated. Make sure to pay attention to our announcement section in Moodle for important updates.

Although there is no participation requirement for this course, I will invite questions, comments, and discussion during my lectures. The more communal the classroom is, the more lively it will be, and a convivial atmosphere will benefit everyone.

The weekly lectures will be more enriching if students complete the readings for the week in advance, and I highly encourage this practice. Since the essay assignments will ask you to focus closely on and explain the texts as a means of advancing your own original thesis about them, it will be essential to keep up with the readings. Exposure is half the battle: even if you don't understand a text immediately, it is important to stay with it and keep grappling with it, as this is the only way understanding can come. Our reading list is ambitious and it is understandable if, at times, you lack the time you need to engage rigorously with a given week's readings. If this is

the case, then still challenge yourself to look at the readings, however hastily; if any passages pop out to you while you're doing this, then take a moment to dwell on these.

Attending lectures will be a necessary part of this learning experience. Some of the texts we will be studying are quite difficult; I will provide the frameworks you need to make them intelligible to yourself during lectures. I will also indicate ways in which our texts and themes fit together during lecture, a practice which will hopefully help you spot some connections of your own and cook up your own original ideas about the course material (ideas you can showcase in your essays).

Assignment requirements:

First essay (2000 words/25%): topics distributed on Feb. 13th; due on Moodle by 11:59pm on Feb. 28th.

Second essay (2000 words/25%): topics distributed on March 14th; due on Moodle by 11:59pm on April 11th.

'Collection of observations' (20%): due on Moodle by 11:59pm on April 13th.

***About the 'collection of observations' assignment:** This document will assemble notes you've made for yourself about the weekly readings throughout the term. There should be at least nine numbered 'entries' (this means you don't have to write an entry every single week). Each one should be 2-5 sentences long. These entries should consist of philosophical or critical observations you've made about our readings. They must be expressed in a clear and precise way; give your reader the quick version of any background they need to get the thrust of your observation. It's okay to formulate an observation in critical question form. You will not receive a higher score on this assignment if your entries are longer than 5 sentences; in fact, you risk receiving a lower score for long, rambling reflections whose point is vague or in other ways difficult to discern. Part of the exercise involves finding ways to compress your thinking so that the philosophical core of your thought pops for the reader. I recommend making an entry immediately after you've done the readings for a given week; you can fine tune your entries at any point before you submit them on the last day of class, if you wish to. Don't wait until the last minute to create your entries. Each entry should have a title indicating the week of the course (e.g., Week 5) and part of a text (section, chapter, etc.), text, or texts it pertains to. Refer to our reading schedule to see which readings correspond to which weeks of the course.

Final essay (2500 words/30%): questions distributed April 13th; due date April 27th.

*Note that, although this course's language of instruction is English, students have the option of submitting their written work in French.

Requesting extensions and late policy: To hand in an assignment late, you must have good reasons for doing so and must negotiate a new arrangement with me in advance of the deadline; otherwise—or at least barring exceptional circumstances, which will require documentation—a late penalty will apply to your work. You will lose 3% per day late, regardless of whether these days are work days or weekend days (this means an essay that scores 85% but which is three days late will score 76% after the late penalty is applied).

Grading scheme:

Philosophy Department Statement Regarding Grades and Grade Distribution:

- 1) The Undergraduate Calendar 16.3 specifies that As, Bs, and Cs are for “outstanding,” “very good” and “satisfactory” work, respectively. The Philosophy Department interprets this to mean that: Cs are awarded for work that is adequate, yet in some way fails to completely meet all expectations and requirements; Bs are awarded for work that fully meets all expectations and requirements; As are reserved for outstanding work that exceeds expectations and requirements by, e.g., demonstrating outstanding rigour, clarity, or insight.

- 2) In 200 & 300 level courses with over 30 students, it is normally expected that: the grade average will be in the C+ to B- range; there will be no more than 25% As.

Numerical Equivalent:

A- 80-84% 3.7 GP	A 85-89% 4.0 GP	A+ 90-100% 4.3 GP
B- 70-72% 2.7 GP	B 73-76% 3.0 GP	B+ 77-79% 3.3 GP
C- 60-62% 1.7 GP	C 63-66% 2.0 GP	C+ 67-69% 2.3 GP
D- 50-52% 0.7 GP	D 53-56% 1.0 GP	D+ 57-59% 1.3 GP

I emphasize that A-range grades are reserved for work that EXCEEDS expectations and requirements. Outstanding, A-range work will be work that is grounded in a rigorous engagement with our texts and sets itself apart by advancing notably original ideas, by making unique connections between ideas, or by in other ways demonstrating keen philosophical insight.

A-range essays will be well-argued and well-composed. They will abide by proper academic citation requirements.

The evaluation scheme and more in light of extraordinary circumstances: In the event of extraordinary circumstances and pursuant to the Academic Regulations, the University may modify the delivery, content, structure, forum, location and/or evaluation scheme. In the event of such extraordinary circumstances, students will be informed of the changes.

Important advice: If a special condition or circumstance in your life may or will affect your performance, please let me know about it as soon as possible. It will be treated with the strictest confidence. Please do not wait until the condition or circumstance is impending or has already happened before telling me about its impact on you. If something unanticipated occurs, bring it to my attention and we will work out a way of dealing with it.

Accessibility: I will strive to make the course as accessible and inclusive as possible. If you have accessibility needs that require academic accommodations, please meet with an advisor from the Access Centre for Students with Disabilities (ACSD) as soon as possible to set up an accommodation plan. I welcome meeting with all students to discuss their accessibility needs.

Undergraduate general assignment policies: Ensure that you keep backup copies of your work in paper and/or electronic form. This is good common sense. Don't make the mistake of typing up an assignment in a hurry on a library computer without saving it to an online account at the university or elsewhere, to a memory key, etc. Consider purchasing a small USB key that you can carry with you at all times with your work on it, or finding an online resource such as DropBox or SugarSync where you can store files. Also, develop good backup practices: turn on the timed auto-recover function in your word processor, the save backup copy function, and get in the practice of saving versions of your work under a new name when you start making drastic revisions (or use version management functions of your word processor). Also note that according to the calendar (16.3.9.2) "Students are responsible for the preservation of any material, in its entire and original form, which has been returned to them."

Academic integrity: Your academic Code of Conduct makes it very clear that plagiarism, as well as any other form of academic dishonesty, is entirely unacceptable. The Code defines plagiarism as "the presentation of the work of another person as one's own or without proper acknowledgement" (CU Undergraduate Calendar; the Code goes on to state other offences). This could be material copied word for word from books, journals, internet sites, professor's course notes, etc. It could be material that is paraphrased but closely resembles the original source. It could be the work of a fellow student, for example, an answer on a quiz, data for a lab report, a paper or assignment completed by another student. It might be a paper purchased through one of the many available sources. Plagiarism does not refer to words alone - it can also refer to copying images, graphs, tables, and ideas. "Presentation" is not limited to written work. It also includes oral presentations, computer assignments and artistic works. If you translate the work of another person into French or English and do not cite the source, this is also plagiarism. If you cite your

own work without the correct citation, this too is plagiarism. In Simple Words: DO NOT COPY, PARAPHRASE OR TRANSLATE ANYTHING FROM ANYWHERE WITHOUT SAYING FROM WHERE YOU GOT IT! DON'T FORGET TO USE QUOTATION MARKS!

Plagiarism and academic dishonesty are highly disruptive of the learning that we should be doing here. Should I detect any form of academic dishonesty, including plagiarizing from the internet, from books, journals, other students, etc., I will report it directly to the Vice-Dean of Academic Affairs. The penalties for plagiarism tend to be rather severe, and in any case undermine your learning process. So avoid it. In case of doubt as to what counts as plagiarism, ask me. Cite your sources and inspirations; this enriches your ideas by showing their roots in the thoughts of other people, and does not detract from your exposition, articulation, and development of ideas.

Note on intellectual property: Content belonging to instructors shared in online courses, including, but not limited to, online lectures, course notes, and video recordings of classes remain the intellectual property of the faculty member. It may not be distributed, published or broadcast, in whole or in part, without the express permission of the faculty member. Students are also forbidden to use their own means of recording any elements of an online class or lecture without express permission of the instructor. Any unauthorized sharing of course content may constitute a breach of the Academic Code of Conduct and/or the Code of Rights and Responsibilities. As specified in the Policy on Intellectual Property, the University does not claim any ownership of or interest in any student IP. All university members retain copyright over their work.

Note on behaviour: All individuals participating in courses are expected to be professional and constructive throughout the course, including in their communications. Concordia students are subject to the Code of Rights and Responsibilities which applies both when students are physically and virtually engaged in any University activity, including classes, seminars, meetings, etc. Students engaged in University activities must respect this Code when engaging with any members of the Concordia community, including faculty, staff, and students, whether such interactions are verbal or in writing, face to face or online/virtual. Failing to comply with the Code may result in charges and sanctions, as outlined in the Code.

Note on gender neutral language & human diversity: In addition to all the other reasons for using gender neutral language and language that attends to human diversity, there are philosophical reasons for this too. Philosophy demands that we think very carefully, clearly and rigorously about human life and ideas. To do this well, we have to attend to the diversity of human life. Otherwise we build in and reinforce prejudices that betray who we are as human beings. Using gender neutral language in your writing and speaking reminds us that human beings are diverse in gender, that not all of them are “he.” And this reminds us of further diversities of human being. There are different ways of approaching the task of keeping gender and other differences in mind, e.g., substituting “she” where “he” might have traditionally been expected, alternating systematically between the two, using “she/he,” and so on. No formal procedure is adequate to the task, for the task is improving your thinking and that of our culture

and future generations, and the form of thinking adequate to this cannot be set in advance. For helpful discussion and guidelines, Google: Warren, Virginia L. “Guidelines for the Nonsexist Use of Language.”

Note on pronouns: All course participants have the right to request which names and pronouns instructors use to refer to them. I respect this right and will do my best to satisfy any of these requests. If you want to be called by a name other than what is listed on the class list, please feel free to pass along the information to me. If I mistakenly use the wrong pronoun when referring to you, please advise me as soon as possible.

Note on sexual violence: Concordia’s [Policy Regarding Sexual Violence](#) defines sexual violence as “any violence or misconduct, physical or psychological, carried out through sexual means or by targeting sexuality. This includes, but is not limited to, sexual assault; sexual harassment; stalking; coercion; sexist, homophobic and/or transphobic jokes; indecent exposure; stealthing; voyeurism; degrading sexual imagery; recording and distribution of sexual images or video of a member of the University without their consent; cyber harassment or cyber stalking of a sexual nature or related to a person’s sexual orientation and gender identity and/or presentation.”

The Policy further defines sexual assault and harassment.

- The Philosophy Department condemns sexual violence. The Department encourages all students to report sexual violence to the Department Chair, the Dean, or to the Office of Rights and Responsibilities.
- Concordia’s [Sexual Assault Resource Centre \(SARC\)](#) is an important resource on campus for students needing support, accompaniment, resources or information about sexual violence. SARC may convene a Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) to support a survivor/victim reporting sexual violence. See the [Policy](#) for further details.
- Other resources include the [Centre for Gender Advocacy](#) and the [CSU Advocacy Centre](#).
- The Philosophy Department welcomes Concordia’s [Consensual Romantic Or Sexual Relationships Guidelines](#), which “strongly discourage[] all instructors from commencing or continuing any consensual romantic or sexual relationship with a student.”

Territorial acknowledgment:

I would like to acknowledge that Concordia University is located on unceded Indigenous lands. The Kanien’kehá:ka Nation is recognized as the custodians of the lands and waters on which we gather today. Tiohtiá:ke/Montreal is historically known as a gathering place for many First Nations. Today, it is home to a diverse population of Indigenous and other peoples. I respect the continued connections with the past, present and future in our ongoing relationships with Indigenous and other peoples within the Montreal community.

List of student services/resources:

- [Counselling and Psychological Services](#)
- [Concordia Library Citation and Style Guides](#)
- [Student Success Centre](#)
- [Health Services](#)
- [Financial Aid and Awards](#)
- [HOJO \(Off Campus Housing and Job Bank\)](#)
- [Academic Integrity](#)
- [Access Centre for Students with Disabilities](#)
- [CSU Advocacy Centre](#)
- [Dean of Students Office](#)
- [International Students Office](#)
- [Student Hub](#)
- [The Otsenhákta Student Centre](#)
- [Birks Student Service Centre](#)
- [Sexual Assault Resource Centre](#)

Reading Schedule

*Note: Our reading schedule isn't set in stone and we will be free to adjust it as the course progresses. If some topics require slightly more time to cover than our reading schedule indicates, we will allow them to spill over into subsequent weeks.

<i>Weeks</i>	<i>Readings</i>
1 Introduction to the Course & Kierkegaard <i>Jan. 10/2022</i> <i>Jan. 12/2022</i>	<p>*Lectures for the week online via Zoom. Find the links to our Zoom meetings in our 'announcement' section on Moodle.</p> <p>Introduction to the course. Start reading Kierkegaard's <i>The Sickness Unto Death</i>.</p> <p>Søren Kierkegaard: <i>The Sickness Unto Death</i>. Read: 'Introduction,' Part 1 Section I (subsections A., B., C.) and Part 1 Section II. (pages 266-84).</p>

<p>2 Kierkegaard</p> <p><i>Jan. 17/2022</i></p> <p><i>Jan. 19/2022</i></p>	<p>*Lectures for the week online via Zoom. Find the links to our Zoom meetings in our ‘announcement’ section on Moodle.</p> <p>Søren Kierkegaard: <i>The Sickness Unto Death</i>. Read: Part 1, III., section A. and part of B.: read subsection a), subsection b), and sub-subsection 1. (title: 'Despair over the earthly or over something earthly'). Read the first 5-ish paragraphs of that sub-subsection (up to the sentence "Meanwhile, time passes..."). After that, jump to sub-subsection 2. (title: 'The despair of willing despairingly to be oneself—defiance') and read the first 8-ish paragraphs (up to the sentence "So the despairing self is constantly building nothing but castles."</p> <p>Søren Kierkegaard: <i>Fear and Trembling: Dialectical Lyric</i>. Read: ‘Preface,’ ‘Prelude,’ ‘A Panegyric upon Abraham,’ ‘Problemata,’ and ‘Preliminary Expectoration’ (pages 31-106). *If you don’t have time to read all of this, it’s okay: just do what you can. We’ll be focusing on Fear and Trembling more intensely next week, so you can catch up as much as possible over the weekend.</p>
<p>3 Kierkegaard</p> <p><i>Jan. 24/2022</i></p> <p><i>Jan. 26/2022</i></p>	<p>*Lecture in-person, in our assigned room. Lectures will continue to be in-person until the end of the course. (Note: this may change: we may be required to remain online longer than anticipated, or may be required to change our mode of delivery entirely. Check our announcement section on Moodle frequently for updates.)</p> <p>Søren Kierkegaard: <i>Fear and Trembling: Dialectical Lyric</i>. Read: ‘Problem I’ and ‘Problem II’ (pages 107-51).</p> <p>Søren Kierkegaard: <i>Fear and Trembling: Dialectical Lyric</i>. Read: ‘Problem III’ and ‘Epilogue’ (pages 152-222).</p>
<p>4 Nietzsche</p> <p><i>Jan. 31/2022</i></p> <p><i>Feb. 2/2022</i></p>	<p>Friedrich Nietzsche: <i>Beyond Good and Evil</i>. Read: ‘Preface,’ ‘Part 1’ up to and including ‘Part 3’ (pages 3-57).</p> <p>Friedrich Nietzsche: <i>Beyond Good and Evil</i>. Read: ‘Part 5’ up to and including ‘Part 7’ (pages 75-130).</p>

<p>5 Finishing Nietzsche & moving on to Sartre</p> <p><i>Feb. 7/2022</i></p> <p><i>Feb. 9/2022</i></p>	<p>Friedrich Nietzsche: <i>Beyond Good and Evil</i>. Read: ‘Part 9’ (pages 151-177).</p> <p>Jean-Paul Sartre: “Chapter Three: Concrete Relations with Others” from Part Three of <i>Being and Nothingness</i>. New York; London: Washington Square. 471-533. *Electronic version available on Moodle.</p>
<p>6 Sartre & Simone de Beauvoir</p> <p><i>Feb. 13/2022</i> (Sunday)</p> <p><i>Feb. 14/2022</i></p> <p><i>Feb. 16/2022</i></p>	<p>*Essay 1 topics distributed</p> <p>Jean-Paul Sartre: “Chapter Three: Concrete Relations with Others” from Part Three of <i>Being and Nothingness</i>. New York; London: Washington Square. 534-58. *Electronic version available on Moodle.</p> <p>Jean-Paul Sartre: “No Exit.” (pages 3-46 in <i>No Exit and Three Other Plays</i>.)</p> <p>Simone de Beauvoir: <i>The Ethics of Ambiguity</i>. Read: ‘I. Ambiguity and Freedom’ and ‘II. Personal Freedom and Others’ (pages 7-73).</p>
<p>7 Simone de Beauvoir</p> <p><i>Feb. 21/2022</i></p> <p><i>Feb. 23/2022</i></p>	<p>Simone de Beauvoir: <i>The Ethics of Ambiguity</i>. Read: ‘III. The Positive Aspect of Ambiguity,’ sections 1. ‘The Aesthetic Attitude,’ 2. ‘Freedom and Liberation,’ and 3. ‘The Antinomies of Action’ (pages 74-115).</p> <p>Simone de Beauvoir: <i>The Ethics of Ambiguity</i>. Read: ‘III. The Positive Aspect of Ambiguity,’ sections 4. ‘The Present and the Future’ and 5. ‘Ambiguity,’ as well as the ‘Conclusion.’ (pages 115-59).</p>

<p>8</p> <p><i>Feb. 28/2022</i></p>	<p>*Midterm break</p> <p>*Essay 1 due on Moodle by 11:59pm</p>
<p>9</p> <p>Applying <i>The Ethics of Ambiguity</i> to Sartre's Drama</p> <p><i>March 7/2022</i></p> <p><i>March. 9/2022</i></p>	<p>Jean-Paul Sartre: "Dirty Hands." Read: 'Act I' up to and including 'Act IV' (pages 127-200 in <i>No Exit and Three Other Plays</i>).</p> <p>Jean-Paul Sartre: "Dirty Hands." Read: 'Act V' up to and including 'Act VII' (pages 200-241 in <i>No Exit and Three Other Plays</i>).</p>
<p>10</p> <p>Camus</p> <p><i>March 14/2022</i></p> <p><i>March 16/2022</i></p>	<p>*Topics for second essay distributed.</p> <p>Albert Camus: <i>The Myth of Sisyphus</i>. Read: 'An Absurd Reasoning' (pages 1-30) 31-63).</p> <p>Albert Camus: <i>The Myth of Sisyphus</i>. Read: 'An Absurd Reasoning' (pages 31-63).</p>
<p>11</p> <p>Camus</p> <p><i>March 21/2022</i></p> <p><i>March 23/2022</i></p>	<p>Albert Camus: <i>The Myth of Sisyphus</i>. Read: 'The Absurd Man' and 'The Absurd Creation' (pages 64-114).</p> <p>Albert Camus: <i>The Myth of Sisyphus</i>. Read: 'The Myth of Sisyphus' and 'Appendix' (pages 115-134).</p>
<p>12</p> <p>Fanon</p>	

<p><i>March 28/2022</i></p> <p><i>March 30/2022</i></p>	<p>Frantz Fanon: <i>The Wretched of the Earth</i>. Read: Sartre's 'Preface' (pages 7-34).</p> <p>*Second essay due on Moodle by 11:59pm.</p> <p>Frantz Fanon: <i>The Wretched of the Earth</i>. Read: 'Concerning Violence' (pages 35-94).</p>
<p>13 Fanon</p> <p><i>April 4/2022</i></p> <p><i>April 6/2022</i></p>	<p>Frantz Fanon: <i>The Wretched of the Earth</i>. Read: 'Spontaneity: Its Strength and Weakness' (pages 107-147).</p> <p>Frantz Fanon: <i>The Wretched of the Earth</i>. Read: 'The Pitfalls of National Consciousness' (pages 148-206).</p>
<p>14 Fanon and Course Conclusion</p> <p><i>April 11/2022</i></p> <p><i>April 13/2022</i></p>	<p>Frantz Fanon: <i>The Wretched of the Earth</i>. Read: 'Colonial War and Mental Disorder' and 'Conclusion' (pages 249-316).</p> <p>*Last day of class</p> <p>*Questions for Final Essay distributed.</p> <p>*'Collection of Observations' due by 11:59pm on Moodle</p> <p>Wrap up course. No new readings.</p>
<p>14 Exam Period</p> <p><i>April 18/2022</i></p>	<p>DISC deadline</p> <p>Final Essay deadline: April 27th.</p>

