

PHIL 336

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Office:
Office Hours:

Horizon Hall 6273
Tue: 2:00-3:00
Wed: 12:30-2:00
(or by appointment)

Where to find information about this course: all course information including the syllabus, assignments, and any additional announcements or changes to the schedule will be posted on the Blackboard site for this course.

You should also check your GMU email regularly for class announcements.

Department webpage: <http://philosophy.gmu.edu/>

Guide for Writing in Philosophy: <http://philosophy.gmu.edu/undergraduate/writing-standards>

COURSE SYLLABUS

This course examines three different varieties of existentialism in order to understand the philosophical idea behind existentialism. Rather than a movement, Existentialism can be identified as a loose collection of thinkers who cannot be said to agree in terms of either philosophical content or method. However, each in their own way is responding to the crisis of modern philosophy. We will use the philosophy of Descartes as a frame and Sartre's maxim 'existence precedes essence' as a guiding thread for the course. The thinkers we will be reading fall into three broad and sometimes overlapping categories: phenomenological existentialism (Sartre, and Fanon), religious existentialism (Kierkegaard and Buber) and absurd existentialism (Unamuno and Camus) and. The phenomenological existentialists recognize the limitations of Cartesian subjectivity but attempt to salvage as much as possible from Descartes's modernist project. Kierkegaard and Buber develop relational ontologies in place of the Descartes' subject-object dualism. Camus and Unamuno reject the rationalist project outright in favor of an irrational humanism. Throughout the course we will attempt to situate existentialism as historically dependent upon modernity and look at what it means to be a human subject or person in this context.

REQUIRED TEXTS

There are FIVE texts you should acquire for the course:

Buber, Martin, *I and Thou*, Ronald Gregor Smith (trans), Scribner, 2000
ISBN-13: 9780743201339

Camus, Albert, *The Myth of Sisyphus, and other essays*, J. O'Brien (trans), Knopf, 2018
ISBN-13: 9780525564454

Kierkegaard, Soren, *The Sickness Unto Death*, A. Hannay (trans), Penguin, 1989
ISBN-13: 9780140445336

Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Being and Nothingness*, S Richmond (trans), Washington Square Press, 2018
ISBN-13: 9781982105457

Unamuno, Miguel, de, *Tragic Sense of Life*, J.E. Crawford Flitch (trans), Dover, 1954
ISBN-13: 9780486202570

Texts to be posted on Blackboard as pdf and to be printed as part of your portfolio:

- Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism"
- Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, selections
- Unamuno, *The Agony of Christianity* (selections)

I may post additional short texts to Blackboard as the semester progresses.

Readings on BB: Beginning in Week TWO we will be making use of texts printed from Blackboard. Unless you have copies of the original source material (i.e. books in the proper translation and edition), **you will be responsible for printing off each of the readings listed above so that you have a paper copy to work with in class.**

Please note: this is a course requirement. We will be doing close work with the texts both in class and for assignments. In addition, **all laptops, phones and other electronic devices (e.g. toasters) must be turned off during class time**, so you must have a paper copy of each class reading with you.

Printing costs should not exceed \$6 (in total), based on the JC print costs of 10c per page. A proportion of your participation grade will be attached to producing your own portfolio of readings (see section on participation below). Checklists for the portfolio will be distributed at the first class.

Course Reading Expectations

The schedule of readings is given below. I will expect you to have done the set reading before the relevant class. This means reading through the set text or texts *at least* once; going back and re-reading either the whole text, or the passages that seem especially important/difficult/puzzling/interesting to you; and writing down your thoughts and questions on the text (I recommend keeping a notebook just for your reading notes for this course that you can bring to class as a reminder of what you want to ask or comment on).

If you don't have questions, you're not reading properly! If you do the reading in advance, you will get a lot more out of classes, because you will have a lot more to put in.

In addition, for each of our class meetings you should arrive with a well formulated question about the reading prepared to share with the class. On occasion group and/or class discussion will be structured around one of your (randomly selected) questions about the reading. This will be part of the participation grade (see below)

Questions and Problems:

If you have a question about the course, or a problem with a class or assignment, please do one or more of the following:

- ask in class (often others will have the same question/concern, so this will help everyone)
- email me with a question or query
- make use of office hours

I will respond to emails as soon as I reasonably can, though as a general rule I will not answer emails in the late evening or between Saturday morning and Sunday evening. This means you need to plan ahead – *please don't leave questions about assignments or reading until the last minute!*

COURSEWORK AND GRADING

Basic breakdown:

1. Attendance:	0%
2. Participation:	5%
3. Worksheets x 2	10% each
4. Short Papers x 2	15% each
5. Sartre Essay	20%
6. Final Exam	25%

1) Attendance:

There are no points for showing up. However, showing up has value for all other aspects of assessment and you should not expect to do well on the course if you miss classes. **In addition, points can be lost for not showing up:** we only have 28 class meetings on the material of the course; every absence after the second will result in a 10% penalty in the participation grade. Hence, 12 absences would result in a 100% reduction of the participation grade. Regarding the penalty, extenuating circumstances will be considered in line with University policies but cannot make up for the effect that an absence has in understanding the material.

ALSO, this is not a distance learning course and so, in order to pass the course, **you must attend at least 15 classes**

2) Participation:

Class discussion is an essential feature of the course and participation will regularly be invited. Please come prepared to discuss the material as assigned and be ready to take part in classroom activities. This means both reading and thinking about the texts in advance of the class meeting as well as preparing a question for discussion for each class (see above in reading expectations). Participation is distinct from both presence and mere talk. Additional tasks such as quizzes or Discussion Board fora may be assigned.

Portfolio of readings: as noted above, from Week 2 onwards you are responsible for printing off the set readings for each class as required (all of these readings will be available on BB). A checklist of the required readings will be provided in class 1. As having a paper copy of the text to work with in class is essential, 20% of your participation grade will be dependent on producing your own portfolio of course readings. Once you have printed off the readings for the course, you should ask another member of the class to check your portfolio is complete, sign off the check list for you, and hand it to me. **This must be completed by the end of class on Monday January 22ND (week 2).**

3) Worksheets:

There will be two comprehension worksheets on our readings of Kierkegaard and Buber. The worksheets will involve 5-6 short answer questions to be completed outside class. Answers are expected to be text-based and explicative. For dates see course outline below.

4) Short Papers:

There will be two short papers assigned: one on the work of Camus and one on the work of Fanon. The papers should be 4-5 pages in length and address the specifics of an assigned prompt.

6) Sartre Essay

There will be an essay assigned on the work of Sartre. The papers should be 6-8 pages in length and address the specifics of an assigned prompt.

7) Final Exam

There will be a partially seen comprehensive final exam on **May 1st**. Information about the form and details of the exam will be announced later in the term.

NB: I answer content and formal questions about papers in advance of the due date but under normal circumstances I will not read drafts of papers --- this is a matter of volume and fairness; I may, however, propose to you as an individual that you should submit a draft. Office hours (see above) are a good time to meet to discuss your ideas and pose questions.

*) Plagiarism

This is a major violation of trust and academic integrity. Do not present others' work as your own. Passive Plagiarism (failing to cite sources) is as bad as Active Plagiarism (downloading an essay off the internet). The basic assumption for each piece of written work is that you composed this yourself. **For acceptable citation models, see**

Purdue University Online Writing Lab (Purdue OWL), “Research and Citation”:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/>

Also, work submitted for this course must be uniquely created for this course. If I suspect plagiarism I will inform you and the university administration in writing. **NB: I reserve the right to conduct an oral examination on any piece of work and I may choose to set a written component in exam conditions as required.**

The Honor Code: "All George Mason University students have agreed to abide by the letter and the spirit of the Honor Code. You can find a copy of the Honor Code at academicintegrity.gmu.edu. All violations of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Committee for review."

Submitting Written Work and Getting Feedback

All written assignments must be submitted on the Blackboard site for this course by the relevant deadline (see course schedule below). There will be a clearly marked section on Blackboard for each assignment.

One paper copy must also be handed in at class or they can be handed in at the **6th floor Horizon Hall reception desk**, clearly marked with the **my name, your name** and the **course title (PHIL 336)**. The reception desk team will put these in my mail tray. Papers will be read and graded in batches. In order to be considered part of the first batch, the paper copy should normally be handed in by 3pm on the day of the deadline.

Please note:

- The **date of submission** will be taken from when you upload the work on Blackboard. If there is a system problem that means you can't upload the work, email me to let me know and attach a copy of your work.
- Once a paper copy is submitted, you can expect feedback/comments and notice of your grade. For paper copies submitted on the due date, I make every effort to mark and return this work within 2 weeks. Paper copies submitted after the due date but before the end of the semester go to the end of the grading queue and will be returned as soon as possible. If no paper copy is submitted by the end of the semester a grade will still be entered but you will not get feedback/comments on your work.
- For worksheets, the primary form of feedback is general comments on the worksheet itself. Some personalized comments will be written onto your specific work
- For papers, I give feedback via discussion of your work at a one on one meeting. These will usually be scheduled for the weeks immediately following the deadline.

Extensions can be arranged in exceptional circumstances if you have a good reason for submitting work late but you must let me know (by email is fine). Extensions cannot be given beyond the last day of the exam period. **Whenever possible it is much better to try to arrange an extension with me in advance.** This will make things less stressful for all concerned: you will be able to plan your assignments more effectively; I will be able to plan my grading and give better (less rushed) feedback.

COVID

This classroom is a mask-friendly zone. Anyone can wear or not wear a mask without question. I will sometimes wear a mask due to my own possible exposure risk or in anticipation of coming into contact immune-compromised family members. I encourage you to think about your own reasons for wearing or not wearing a mask

Commitment to Diversity

There are many occasions when there are two sides to an issue. There are some that do not admit of two sides: Black Lives Matter. Anti-racism is a default position for this class. I will work toward this from an acknowledged position of privilege; others should work from their own positionality in good faith. Thus, *diversity* will not be used as a cover for abuse.

In keeping with the general ethos of the University, this class seeks to create a learning environment that fosters respect for people across differences. We welcome and value individuals and their differences, including gender expression and identity, race, economic status, sex, sexuality, ethnicity, national origin, first language, religion, age and ability. We encourage all members of the learning environment to engage with the material personally, but to also be open to exploring and learning from experiences different than their own.

NB This does not mean not being critical: respecting others' views means taking them seriously, and taking them seriously means thinking about their strengths and weaknesses, asking questions, and offering constructive criticisms or alternative viewpoints where appropriate. It also means thinking about where the views of others challenge our own, and being open to what they have to teach us. Valuing diversity is not just an attitude – it is a matter of developing an active practice. Amongst other things, this practice involves:

- learning to listen to other perspectives;
- being open to criticism of one's own views;
- being willing to evaluate different positions while being unsure where one stands;
- having good reasons for one's views, but being willing to change one's mind;
- not rushing to judgment;
- basing critical comments or questions on as good an understanding of another person (or text or theory) as one can manage;
- *and* being willing to accept that there will always be things one cannot see or understand;
- learning to express criticisms and differences of opinion in ways that are not personal or hurtful and that leave space for other voices.

Never be afraid to ask a question or to risk saying something that might be wrong – that is how we learn. But equally, never be afraid to listen to the questions and answers of others, and to let their views challenge and change how you think.

Names and Pronouns

Gender identity and pronoun use: If you wish, please share your name and gender pronouns with me and how best to address you in class and via email. I can be referred to by '*he/him*' or '*they*' and you may address me as "Kurt" or "Dr. Brandhorst" in email and verbally.

Disability Accommodations

Disability Services at George Mason University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students by upholding the laws that ensure equal treatment of people with disabilities. If you are seeking accommodations for this class, please first visit <http://ds.gmu.edu/> for detailed information about the Disability Services registration process. Then please discuss your approved accommodations with me. Disability Services is located in Student Union Building I (SUB I), Suite 2500. Email: ods@gmu.edu | Phone: (703) 993-2474

Sexual Misconduct and Interpersonal Violence

George Mason University is committed to providing a learning, living and working environment that is free from discrimination and a campus that is free of sexual misconduct and other acts of interpersonal violence in order to promote community well-being and student success. We encourage students and employees who believe that they have been sexually harassed, sexually assaulted or subjected to sexual or interpersonal misconduct to seek assistance and support. [University Policy 1202: Sexual Harassment and Misconduct](#) speaks to the specifics of Mason's process, the resources, and the options available to students and employees.

Confidential student resources are available on campus at the Student Support and Advocacy Center (<http://ssac.gmu.edu/>), Counseling and Psychological Services (<http://caps.gmu.edu/>), and Student Health Services (<http://shs.gmu.edu/>).

As a faculty member, I am designated as a "Non-Confidential Employee," and must report all disclosures of sexual assault, sexual harassment, interpersonal violence, stalking, sexual exploitation, complicity, and retaliation to

Mason's Title IX Coordinator per University Policy 1202. If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact one of Mason's confidential resources, such as Student Support and Advocacy Center (SSAC) at 703-993-3686 or Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at 703-993-2380. You may also seek assistance or support measures from Mason's Title IX Coordinator by calling 703-993-8730, or emailing titleix@gmu.edu.

Student Support & Further Resources

For a general list of student support resources on campus, see the following webpage:

<https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/knowledge-center/knowning-mason-students/student-support-resources-on-campus/>

Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS): (703) 993-2380; <https://caps.gmu.edu>

Mason Student Services Center (for registration and academic records; enrollment; financial aid, billing and student accounts): SUB 1, ground floor.

Office of Disability Services: If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me within the first 2 weeks of the semester and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) to ensure you receive the required support: (703) 993-2472; ods@gmu.edu All academic accommodations must be arranged through ODS: <https://ds.gmu.edu>

Student Support and Advocacy Center (provides advice on financial difficulties, personal crisis, interpersonal violence, sexual health and much more): <https://ssac.gmu.edu>

University Careers Service: <https://careers.gmu.edu>

Writing Center: <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/>

COURSE OUTLINE

NB: The reading schedule is subject to change

WEEK ONE

Reading: Course Syllabus

Jan 17: INTRODUCTION

WEEK TWO

Reading: Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism" (pdf on Blackboard)

Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, pp. 35-44

[Descartes, *Meds 1 & 2*]

Jan 22: Sartre: Existentialism: a first look

Jan 24: Kierkegaard: Life, Death & Self

WEEK THREE

Reading: Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, pp. 44-97

[Descartes, *Med 3*]

Jan 29: Despair

Jan 31: More Despair

WEEK FOUR

Reading: Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, pp. 98-120

[Descartes, *Med 4*]

Feb 5: Despair as Sin

Feb 7: God and Despair

WEEK FIVE

Reading: Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, pp. 120-133

[Descartes, *Med 4*]

Buber, *I and Thou*, pp. 19-29

[Descartes, *Med 2*]

Feb 12: Kierkegaard: Socratic Sin vs. Affirmative Sin

Kierkegaard Worksheet Assigned

Feb 14: Buber: The Vocative

WEEK SIX

Reading: Buber, *I and Thou*, pp.29-74

Feb 19: Relation

Feb 21: The World of It

Kierkegaard Worksheet Due

WEEK SEVEN

Reading: Buber, *I and Thou*, pp. 77-112

Feb 26: Challenges to Thou

Feb 28: The Eternal Thou

Buber Worksheet Assigned

SPRING BREAK

WEEK EIGHT

Reading: Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, pp. 1-65

Mar 11: Absurdity

Mar 13: Absurdity and Reason

Buber Worksheet Due

WEEK NINE

Reading: Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, pp. 66-93 & 119-123

Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 569-585

Mar 18: Absurd Types

Camus Paper Assigned

Mar 20: Sartre: Freedom and Acting

WEEK TEN

Reading: Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 594-599, 602-611, 622-639

Mar 25: Freedom and Will

Mar 27: Freedom and Responsibility

Camus Paper Due

WEEK ELEVEN

Reading: Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 340-368

Apr 1: The Look

Apr 3: Others

WEEK TWELVE

Reading: Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 86-90, 96-103
Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks* (pdf on Blackboard)

Apr 8: Sartre: Bad Faith
Sartre Paper Assigned

Apr 10: Fanon & Black Experience

WEEK THIRTEEN

Reading: Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks* (pdf on Blackboard)

Apr 15: Fanon & Phenomenology

Apr 17: Fanon & Sartre
Sartre Paper Due

WEEK FOURTEEN

Reading: Unamuno, *Tragic Sense of Life*, pp. 1-57

Apr 22: Being Human

Apr 24: Immortality

WEEK FIFTEEN

Reading: Unamuno, *The Agony of Christianity* (pdf on Blackboard)
Unamuno, *Tragic Sense of Life*, pp. 106-131

Apr 29: Agony and Despair

FINAL EXAM: WEDNESDAY MAY 1ST