

Existentialism

PHR-500-3 / Winter 2018-19
Phillips Academy



Instructor: Mr. Prescott
Location: Chapel 016
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Black turtlenecks, cigarette smoke, Parisian cafés: these may be some of the associations you have with Existentialism. And they are, in some cases, accurate ones. More important, though, these potentially-caricatured images can remind us of the real human concerns and sentiments of the Existentialists: the quest to live an authentic life, to break free from conformity – whether that took the shape of rigid gender norms, ossified forms of organized religion, or the oppressive totalitarianism of the Nazis. These thinkers sought to confront life – all of it – as it was lived, and to explore the implications of their findings in their own lives. We will soon learn that there is no single theme or thread that unites all the individuals in this course. Some of them lived and died before the term “Existentialism” came into regular parlance. Others rejected the term outright or sought to redefine its meaning.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS, EVALUATION, AND POLICIES

I. Required Texts (to be provided):

1. Walter Kaufmann, ed., *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (New York: Plume, 1975)
2. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980)
3. Jean-Paul Sartre, *No Exit and Three Other Plays* (Vintage, 1989)

II. Evaluation

i. Classroom Participation (30%) – Much of this class will proceed as a seminar, which means regular attendance, a careful reading of assigned work, and participation in class are all essential in order to succeed in the course. A separate handout/rubric will be distributed regarding expectations for classroom participation/discussion.

ii. Short Essays (30%) – Three different reflection-style essays will be assigned throughout the term. More specific information about the expectations for these assignments will be provided in a separate handout.

- Essay 1: Anxiety (10%) - Thursday, December 13 (In-class)
- Essay 2: No Exit (10%) - Due Tuesday, January 22

iii. Longer Essays (30%) – Two longer essays will be assigned in the second half of the term. More specific information about the expectations for these assignments will be provided in a separate handout.

- Essay 1: Despair and Film (20%) - Due Tuesday, January 29
- Essay 2: Conditions of Freedom (20%) - Due Wednesday, February 27

iv. Student Journal (10%) – Many of our class sessions will include some form of on-demand process writing (prompts, reflecting, etc.) that engages with either reading, subject matter, or central questions of the course. To that end, students should acquire a notebook in which this writing will be housed. I will periodically collect this notebook and assess it for completion.

III. Extensions – Generally speaking, I don't grant extensions. It is your responsibility to plan ahead and manage your time appropriately. The only exception is when you have three or more **major** assignments due on the same day, in which case you should follow the protocols outlined on p. 51 of the Blue Book under "Workload & Assignments".

IV. Late Work – All written assignments are due at the beginning of class. Any work handed in after this point will be counted as late and will receive a lower grade as a result. Please note that problems with technology are **not** an excuse for lateness. Anticipate that the printer will break, that files will be lost, or that your computer will die!

V. Revisions – If you are interested in revising one of your essays, I would encourage you to meet with me soon after feedback is returned to discuss the prospect of doing so. Please note that all revisions must be substantial; it is not sufficient simply to plug in my feedback.

VI. Absences - Regular attendance is essential! That said, I realize that this course is not your only commitment this term, just as I realize that circumstances inevitably arise that are outside of your control. First and foremost, I ask that you communicate with me (the earlier the better). Regarding **Personal Time**, I ask that you follow the procedures outlined on pp. 54-55 of the Blue Book. Finally, in the event that you are sick on the day that an assignment is due (with an excused absence from the Health Center), said assignment will be due at the beginning of the next class meeting.

VII. E-mail – I will respond to all e-mail within 24 hours. However, please note that any e-mail sent after 8:00 PM will not receive a response until the following morning, so please plan ahead!

VIII. Religious Observances – You may wish to take part in religious observances that conflict with our class meetings. If this is the case, you should contact Ms. Ralston (gralston@andover.edu) in the Office of Spiritual Life in order for your absence to be excused.

IX. Disabilities – Students with learning, physical, or psychiatric disabilities who may require disability-related classroom accommodations should reach out to the Academic Skills Center (lwarner@andover.edu) for appropriate documentation.

X. Technology – Although we live in an increasingly digitized world, please note that I do not allow the use of computers/tablet/phones during class unless otherwise specified.

SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS

(SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

Unit 1: The Human Condition

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 30 – INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

- No assigned readings

WEEK 1 – NOTES FROM UNDERGROUND

MONDAY, DECEMBER 3 – NOTES FROM UNDERGROUND

- Read: Fyodor Dostoevsky, “Notes from Underground,” in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Plume, 1975), pp. 52-66.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 4 – NOTES FROM UNDERGROUND

- Read: Fyodor Dostoevsky, “Notes from Underground,” in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Plume, 1975), pp. 66-82.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 6 – NO CLASS

- Note: Class will not meet today (Mr. Prescott at an administrator training workshop)

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 7 – THE TEMPTATION OF CHRIST

- Read: Matthew 4
- Due: Short Prompt

WEEK 2 – THE ANXIETY OF FREEDOM

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 11 - THE GRAND INQUISITOR

- Read: Fyodor Dostoevsky, “The Grand Inquisitor,” *The Brothers Karamazov*

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 11 - KIERKEGAARD AND THAT INDIVIDUAL

- Read: Søren Kierkegaard, “That Individual,” in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Plume, 1975), pp. 94-101.

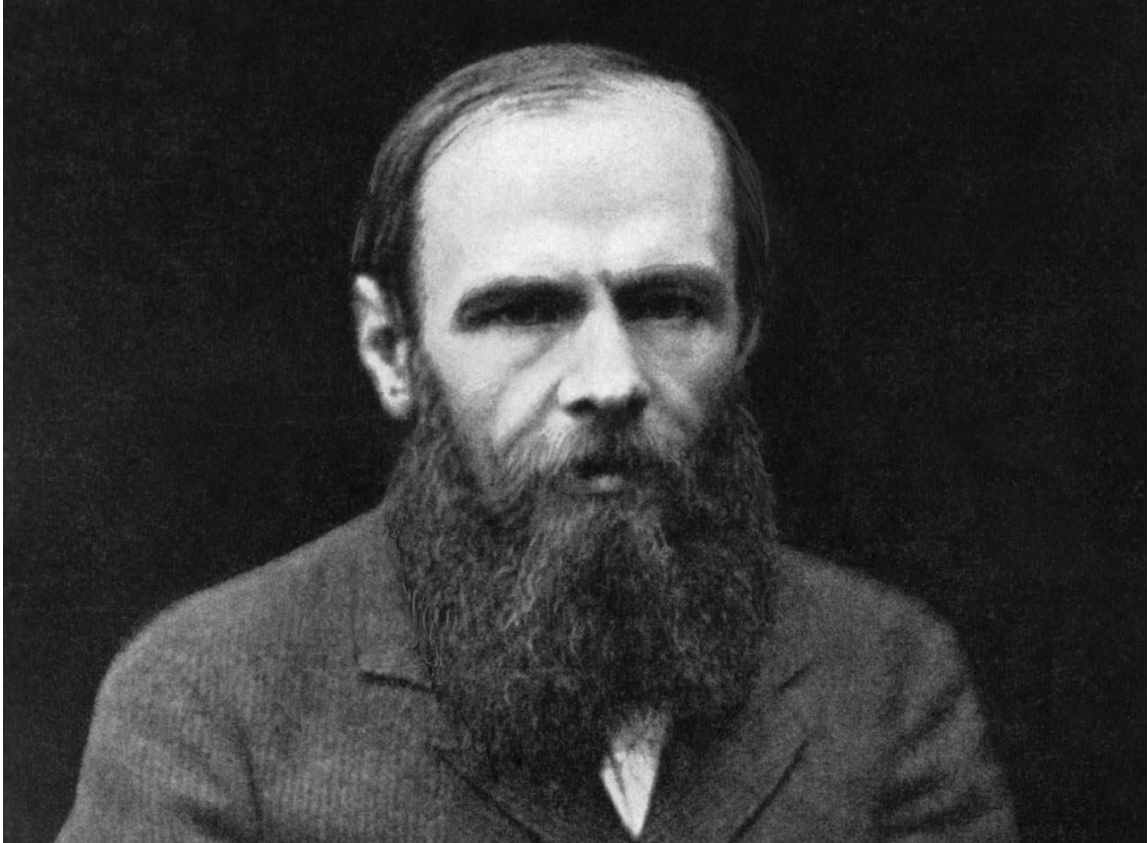
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 13 – IN-CLASS ESSAY

- Due: In-Class Essay

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 14 – RELEASE TIME

- Note: Class does not meet

HAPPY WINTER BREAK!



ABOVE: FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY



ABOVE: JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

Unit 2: The (Many) Forms of Despair

FRIDAY, JANUARY 4 – KAFKA AND THE MESSENGERS

- Note: No assigned readings

WEEK 3 – THE SICKNESS UNTO DEATH

TUESDAY, JANUARY 8 – EXISTENTIALISM IS A HUMANISM

- Read: John-Paul Sartre, “The Humanism of Existentialism,” in *Philosophy: A Literary and Conceptual Approach*, ed. Burton F. Porter, pp. 481-491.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 10 – WHAT IS DESPAIR?

- Read: Søren Kierkegaard, “A: Despair Is the Sickness Unto Death,” *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 13-21.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 11 – THE UNIVERSALITY OF DESPAIR

- Read: Søren Kierkegaard, “B: The Universality of This Sickness (Despair),” *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 22-28.

WEEK 4 – DESPAIR IN SARTRE’S HELL

TUESDAY, JANUARY 15 – THE FORMS OF DESPAIR

- Read: Søren Kierkegaard, “C: The Forms of This Sickness (Despair),” *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), selections.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 17 – NO EXIT

- Read: Jean-Paul Sartre, “No Exit,” in *No Exit and Three Other Plays* (New York: Vintage International, 1989), entire.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 18 – HELL IS OTHER PEOPLE

- Note: No assigned readings



ABOVE: SØREN KIERKEGAARD



ABOVE: KIRSTEN DUNST IN “MELANCHOLIA” (2011)

WEEK 5 – EXISTENTIALISM AND FILM

MONDAY, JANUARY 21 – MLK DAY (NO CLASS)

TUESDAY, JANUARY 22 – DESPAIR IN *No Exit*

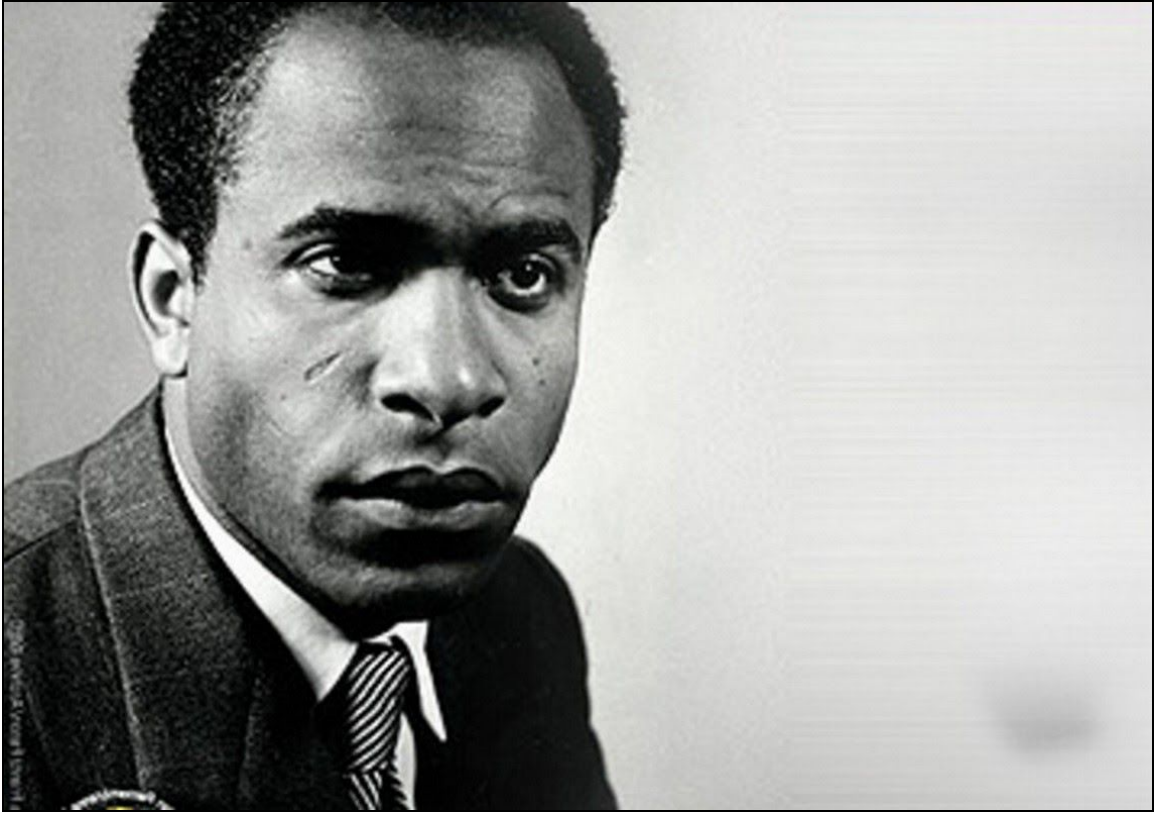
- Due: Short Essay #2

THURSDAY, JANUARY 24 – RELEASE TIME

- Note: Class will not meet today in order to provide students with time to watch a film of their choosing (a list of options can be found on Canvas)

FRIDAY, JANUARY 25 – WRITING WORKSHOP

- Due: Essay Outline



ABOVE: FRANTZ FANON



ABOVE: SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR

Unit 3: The Conditions of Freedom

WEEK 6 – MITSEIN AND CONSCIOUSNESS

TUESDAY, JANUARY 29 – INTRODUCTION TO PHENOMENOLOGY

- Due: Long Essay #1 (Film Analysis)

THURSDAY, JANUARY 31 – THE SECOND SEX: SUBJECT AND OTHER

- Read: Simone de Beauvoir, “Introduction,” in *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 1949), pp. 3-17.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 1 – EBI FRIDAY

- Note: Class does not meet

WEEK 7 – SURPASSING THE SUBJECT/OBJECT

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 4 - NO CLASS (MID-WINTER BREAK)

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 5 – NOTE: NO CLASS

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 7 – THE ESSENCE OF BLACKNESS

- Read: Frantz Fanon, “The Lived Experiences of the Black Man,” in *Black Skin, White Masks* (Pluto Press, 1952), pp. 89-118.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 8 – THE ETHICS OF AMBIGUITY

- Read: Simone de Beauvoir, “Freedom and Liberation,” in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (New York: Open Road, 1947), pp. 84-103.

WEEK 8 – EXISTENTIALISM AND INTERSUBJECTIVITY

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 12 – HEAD OF SCHOOL DAY

- Note: Class does not meet

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 14 – PHENOMENOLOGY AND INTERSUBJECTIVITY

- Read: David Abram, “Philosophy on the Way to Ecology: A Technical Introduction to the Inquiry,” in *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), pp. 31-72.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 15 – ANIMISM AND THE ALPHABET

- Read: David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), pp. 93-102, 183-188.

WEEK 9 – THE LIMITATIONS OF LANGUAGE

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 19 – LANGUAGE AND EMOTIONS

- Listen: Hanna Rosin and Alix Spiegel, “[Emotions: Part I](#),” *Invisibilia*, NPR (June 1, 2017).

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 21 – LINGUISTIC PALACES OF CRYSTAL

- Listen: Hanna Rosin and Alix Spiegel, “[Emotions: Part II](#),” *Invisibilia*, NPR (June 1, 2017).

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 22 – WRITING WORKSHOP

- Due: Journal Entry

WEEK 10 – FINALS WEEK

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 25 – CONFERENCE PERIOD

- Work on final paper

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 27 – DUE: FINAL ESSAY

- Due: Long Essay #2



ABOVE: MAURICE MERLEAU-PONTY