Existentialist Approaches to Political Violence
from Kierkegaard to Sartre
(Pols/Phil 4334)

Spring 2020
Department of Political Science and Philosophy

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Office Hours: MWTR 1-2pm
Class: Rassman, Rm 239, Thursday 2-4:50 pm


Additional texts will be supplied in PDF format on Blackboard.

Course Description
The philosophical movement known as Existentialism conjures up images of black turtle-neck clad intellectuals in French café’s arguing passionately about angst and modes of alienation, while the rhythms of jazz and be-bop hum in the background. While this image may still have a grip on the popular imagination it should be noted that existentialism began long before the fashionable philosophers of the West Bank of the River Seine in Paris took up the baton. The beginnings of an Existenz philosophy really began with the Danish theologian Søren Kierkegaard (1813-55) and continued through Nietzsche (1844-1900), Heidegger (1889-1976), to Sartre (1905-80) and Camus (1913-60) in the second half of the 20th century. Existentialism is a rich seam of philosophical thinking which has a great deal to offer those thinking about the traditional philosophical problems of knowledge, aesthetics, ethics, politics and religion.

However, in this class the main focus of attention will be on the political ideas of existentialism, especially on the existentialist notion of freedom, and the engagement of existentialists with the problem of political violence. Existentialists have been interested in the nature of violence from the outset; from Kierkegaard’s Fear and Trembling, which begins with God’s commandment to Abraham to sacrifice his son Issac, through Nietzsche's (alleged), and Heidegger’s actual involvement with the Nazi’s, and finally in the debates between Sartre and Camus over the nature of the Soviet Union and the post-colonial war in Algeria, it is clear that existentialists have long been interested in freedom and violence. In this course we will retrace their steps, and critically evaluate their contributions to this aspect of political philosophy.
The Class
This Existentialism class is not a lecture class but a seminar-type class. I will introduce the topic or theme of the class for ten minutes or so and then we will have a discussion of the texts. I will try to encourage, or foster a close reading of the texts, so student participation in this class is particularly important. From time to time I may ask students to lead or introduce the material under discussion.

Class Attendance Policy
Class attendance at ASU is mandatory and a class roll will be taken twice (with back-to-back classes). If you miss three consecutive classes the ASU registrar will be informed. If you miss more than five classes during the semester you may receive a fail for the course overall (depending on the circumstances). The only legitimate reasons for missing classes or leaving classes early are sickness or medical appointments, or a domestic emergency (i.e. ‘car trouble’ is not a domestic emergency). Exceptions to this will be reviewed on a case by case basis. The long Thursday/Tuesday afternoon class is really two classes back to back so you are required to sign in for both classes. There will be a ten minute bathroom break between the two classes.

Class Etiquette
Participation is encouraged, but boorish behavior and/or verbal bullying is unacceptable. I reserve the right to ask any student to leave the classroom. In the event that any student refuses to leave the classroom when asked campus security may be called (I have been teaching at ASU for 17 years and I have never had to do this but there is always a first time). Be respectful when you address other people (either other students or me). You may disagree with what other people say but the challenge is to show the weaknesses in one’s arguments and to build better ones. Insults do not make good arguments. In other words, you can challenge ideas but not the people who present these ideas. Don’t shout out, if you have a question or a point to make indicate that you want to speak by raising your arm, and wait to be called.

Class Prohibitions (*unless I am presented with an accommodation)
NO PHONES
NO EARBUDS
NO DIPPING
*NO LAPTOPS
NO HOT FOOD
PLEASE DON’T PASS MESSAGES
DO NOT LEAVE CLASS AFTER SIGNING IN WITHOUT PERMISSION
DO NOT ENGAGE IN DISTRACTING BEHAVIOUR

Class Preparation
Always bring your textbook to class
Bring notebook or note paper and pencil/pen
Always complete the reading assignment before class
Be prepared to listen and answer questions
Multiple Choice Tests
You will take TWO multiple choice tests worth 25% each. These tests will be on the subject matter of the previous three or four weeks of class, these are not cumulative. Each test is usually 30 multiple choice and true/false questions, and you will have 30 mins to take the test. This test is NOT designed to be open book. It is assumed that you have completed the reading assignments and attended class before taking the test. The test will open automatically on Blackboard at the specified time. Test settings will be no backtracking, one question at a time, one attempt, and random. Occasionally this test will take place in the classroom with a scantron answer key.

Class Participation Grade
The class participation grade is worth 25%, and I will post a provisional participation grade to give you some feedback around the 8th week of the semester. The participation grade is based on class preparation i.e. reading assignments completed, as well as the quantity and QUALITY of oral presentation during the classes. Obviously, attendance is also important since one can’t participate if not present.

Final In-class Blue Book Exam
The final class exam is open book and worth the final 25% of your overall grade. In my experience the main reason students here at ASU under-perform with regard to finals is that they do not engage with course material. Papers often tend towards ‘stream of consciousness’ with few references to what has been studied. It is expected in a philosophy class, that you have learned some of the philosopher’s names and can accurately point to what ideas are associated with these philosophers and how to deploy these ideas in a coherent fashion. Higher grades will be awarded to those who can do some of this and engage with the ideas discussed during the semester.

Religious Observances
Every effort will be made to accommodate all forms of religious observance in compliance with ASU OP 10.19. Students who require additional arrangements to be made should make these known in good time in order that arrangements can be made.

Accommodations for Disability
ASU is committed to the principle that no qualified individual with a disability shall, on the basis of disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of the services, programs or activities of the university, or be subjected to discrimination by the university, as provided by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments of 2008 (ADAAA), and subsequent legislation. The Student Affairs Office is the designated campus department charged with the responsibility of reviewing and authorizing requests for reasonable accommodations based on a disability. It is the student's responsibility to initiate such a request by contacting the Student Affairs Office, Suite 112 of the Houston Harte University Center, at 325-942-2047 (phone) or 325-942-2211 (fax) or by e-mail at studentservices@angelo.edu to begin the process. The Student Affairs Office will establish the particular documentation requirements necessary for the various types of disabilities.
**Academic Honesty**
Angelo State University expects its students to maintain complete honesty and integrity in their academic pursuits. Students are responsible for understanding and complying with the University Academic Honor Code, which is contained in both print and web versions of the ASU Student Handbook. See the Current Student page on the ASU homepage (URL address http://www.angelo.edu/cola/student/) and click on the Academic Honor Code. Acts of academic dishonesty and misconduct as referenced in Angelo State University's Student Handbook will be referred to the Dean of Students.

**Title IX at Angelo State University**
Angelo State University is committed to providing and strengthening an educational, working, and living environment where students, faculty, staff, and visitors are free from sex discrimination of any kind. The University prohibits discrimination based on sex, which includes pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, and other types of Sexual Misconduct. Sexual Misconduct is a broad term encompassing all forms of gender-based harassment or discrimination including: sexual assault, sex-based discrimination, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, public indecency, interpersonal violence (domestic violence and/or dating violence), and stalking. As a faculty member, I am a Responsible Employee meaning that I am obligated by law and ASU policy to report any allegations I am notified of to the Office of Title IX Compliance. This is done in order to connect students with resources and options in addressing the allegations reported. As a student, you are encouraged to report any incidents of sexual misconduct directly to ASU’s Office of Title IX Compliance and the Director of Title IX Compliance/Title IX Coordinator. You may do so by contacting:

**Michelle Boone, J.D.**

*Director of Title IX Compliance/Title IX Coordinator*

Mayer Administration Building, Room 210

325-942-2022

michelle.boone@angelo.edu

**Course requirements**
All course requirements must be met in full for the successful completion of the course. All assigned work must be completed, both reading and written assignments. Reading assignments (see syllabus below) are not "optional," these are the heart of the course and all reading assignments must be completed in full.
Grading Scale
A 90% and over Outstanding
B 80% Very good
C 70% Satisfactory
D 60% Minimum required
F less than 60%
Students who receive an F on any assignment should come to see me during my office hours to
discuss what might have gone wrong and what can be done to improve the situation.

Outline of the Course
(Students should note that this is a rough estimate of what we will cover and that this plan
depends entirely upon the reading and comprehension of the class. Sometimes the class moves
faster or slower than expected. Also I reserve the right to change the reading from time to time).

The Course
(Each course block represents about four weeks work)

First Class: Introductory & Organizational
Introduction
Topics: Phenomenology
       The Existentialist Ontology
       Political Responsibility

Reading Assignments:

Robert Sokolowski, “an initial statement of what phenomenology is,” excerpt from Introduction
to Phenomenology, pp. 42-51, PDF.

Martin Heidegger, “The Phenomenological Method of Investigation,” excerpt from Being and
Time (Sein und Zeit, 1927), pp. 23-35, PDF.

Jean Paul Sartre, “Six o’Clock in the Evening,” excerpt from Nausea (La Nausée, 1938),

Fyodor Dostoevsky, “Underground,” excerpt from Notes from the Underground, in Basic
Writings of Existentialism, Marino (Ed), pp.193-230.

Block 1
Topics: The Themes of Existentialist Philosophy
Being and Authenticity
Nothingness
Despair/Anxiety and the Emotions

Reading Assignments:

Søren Kierkegaard, “Problema I & II,” excerpts from Fear and Trembling, Basic Writings of Existentialism, Marino (Ed), pp. 7-39.

Søren Kierkegaard, “A Despair Is the Sickness UntoDeath,” excerpt from The Sickness Unto Death, Basic Writings of Existentialism, Marino (Ed), pp. 42-105.


Jean-Paul Sartre, “Existentialism,” excerpt from Existentialism and Human Emotions, Basic Writings of Existentialism, Marino (Ed), pp. 341-367.

First Multiple Choice Quiz

Block 2
Topics: The Existentialist Critique of Society
The ‘public’
Bad Faith
Others
Technology

Reading Assignments:

Edmund Husserl, The Crisis of the European Sciences, Part 1, 1935, PDF
Jean Paul Sartre, “Bad Faith,” excerpt from Being and Nothingness, Basic Writings of Existentialism, Marino (Ed), pp.369-390.

Simone de Beauvoir, “Ambiguity,” an excerpt from The Ethics of Ambiguity, Basic Writings of Existentialism, Marino (Ed), pp. 413-436.

Ralph Ellison, “Prologue,” an excerpt from Invisible Man, Basic Writings of Existentialism, Marino (Ed), pp. 495-505.

Jean-Paul Sartre, “The Encounter with the Other, The Look,” excerpt from Being and Nothingness, Basic Writings of Existentialism, Marino (Ed), pp. 391-409.

Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” first published in (Vorträge and Aufsätze, 1952), PDF.

Block 3
Topics: Existentialist Engagement
Art and Literature
Protest and Commitment
Madness and Authenticity

Reading Assignments:


Friedrich Nietzsche, “Good and Evil, Good and Bad,” excerpt from On the Genealogy of Morality, Basic Writings of Existentialism, Marino (Ed), pp. 112-144.


Second Multiple Choice Quiz
Block 4
Topics: Existentialist Debates and Concluding Themes for Discussion

Kierkegaard against Christendom.
Nietzsche against the Germans/Nationalism.
Heidegger and the Nazi’s against the USSR and the USA.
Sartre and Camus on Algeria and post-colonial liberation.
De Beauvoir against Gender
Ellison against Racism
Laing against the Family

Presentation of the rubric on political violence

Final In-Class Blue Book Exam

Tuesday, May 4, 1:00-3:00 pm