

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

Spring 2022
Department of Political Science and Philosophy

John Glassford, *Professor of Philosophy*

Office: Rassman Rm 217

Email: john.glassford@angelo.edu

Office Phone: 942-2262 Ext 286

Office Hours : on collaborate by appointment.

Class: Rassman, Rm 111, Thursday 2-4:50 pm

Required Texts: *Basic Writings of Existentialism*, Edited with an Introduction by Gordon Marino, Modern Library Classics, 2004.

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), de Beauvoir (1908-1986), 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 class is not a lecture class but a seminar-type discussion group. 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.

Covid Etiquette

The Texas governor has declared that mask wearing cannot be mandated so I cannot insist that you wear a mask. However, it is appropriate in a class on existentialism that we concern ourselves with the freedom of the *Other*. It is, according to existentialist precepts, the responsibility of each to do as much as we can to protect the health of the *Other* and ourselves. Given the transmissibility of covid it would be preferable if everyone wore a mask during class.

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 (especially after the break)

DO NOT ENGAGE IN DISTRACTING BEHAVIOR

NO SNOOZING or NAPPING (if you are that tired you should not be in class)

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

Papers

There are 4, 1000 word papers, worth 15%, 15%, 20%, and finally 50% respectively. The purpose of this progressive grading apportionment is to encourage students to improve with each paper, and to take feedback and comments on scripts seriously. All papers will be submitted to Blackboard.

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 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/currentstudent/>) 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 roughly four weeks work)

First Class: Introductory & Organizational

Introduction

Topics: Phenomenology
 The Existentialist Ontology

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)*, Penguin Books, 1965, PDF.

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

Friedrich Nietzsche, “Guilt,” “Bad Conscience,” and the Like,” excerpt from *On the Genealogy of Morality*, *Basic Writings of Existentialism*, Marino (Ed), pp.145-187.

Block 1

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

Reading Assignments:

Martin Heidegger, “The Possible Being-A-Whole of Da-sein and Being-Toward-Death,” excerpts from *Being and Time*, *Basic Writings of Existentialism*, Marino (Ed), pp. 299-336.

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 Unto Death,” excerpt from *The Sickness Unto Death*, *Basic Writings of Existentialism*, Marino (Ed), pp. 42-105.

Albert Camus, “An Absurd Reasoning,” an excerpt from *The Myth of Sisyphus*, *Basic Writings of Existentialism*, Marino (Ed), pp. 441-492.

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

First Paper: Friday, February 11 (midnight)

Block 2

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

Reading Assignments:

Søren Kierkegaard, “the public,” excerpt from *The Literary Review*, Penguin, 2001, PDF.

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.

Second Paper: Friday, March 11.

Block 3

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

Reading Assignments:

Martin Heidegger, “The Work and Truth,” excerpt from *The Origin of the Work of Art* (1950), Perennial Books, 2001, PDF.

Albert Camus, “Introduction,” excerpt from *The Rebel (L’Homme révolté)*, 1951), Penguin Books, 1971, PDF.

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

Jean Paul Sartre, “The Storming of the Bastille,” excerpt from *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, (1960), Verso, 2004, PDF.

R.D. Laing, “The Ghost in the Weed Garden,” excerpt from *The Divided Self*, Penguin Books, 1990, PDF.

Third Paper: Friday, April 15.

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 Paper: Tuesday, May 10.