**PHIL 4070 – EXISTENTIALISM**  UCCS Fall 2022 Raphael Sassower Wednesdays 1:40 – 4:20

Unlike other traditional philosophical movements or schools of thought in the history of ideas, existentialism stands out as a cultural phenomenon the manifestations of which transcend academic boundaries. With this in mind, our explorations and discussions will be simultaneously culturally informed and fairly personal in nature, examining the meaning of individual lives and their relationships with others. The perspectives underscored here are framed by historical precedents in the 19th century and the realities of 20th century world wars, from trench-warfare to the holocausts of Nazi Germany and the dropping of nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and by the ongoing global pandemic and its lingering effects. Along the way, we will explore the various dimensions according to which existentialism has been approached both philosophically and in other art forms. Special attention will be afforded to contemporary concerns that emanate from the pervasiveness of digital technologies.

**Course Objectives:**

*Reflecting* about your life not only as a student but also as living during a global pandemic with economic strains. *Learning* how to contextualize personal feelings and reactions within broad social conventions and moral norms. *Writing critically* about the important lessons existential thought imparts. And finally, *examining* the ways you conform to external peer-pressures as well as reject or subvert them.

**Required Books:** (all the readings can be found on Canvas; no expectation about reading the entire books listed below)

Margaret Atwood (1985), *The Handmaid’s Tale*

Simone de Beauvoir (1947), *The Ethics of Ambiguity*

Albert Camus (1947/8), *The Plague*

Michel Foucault (1978-9), *Lecture on the Birth of Biopolitics*

Sigmund Freud (1921), “Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego”

Lewis Gordon (2000), *Existentia Africana*

Martin Heidegger (1962/1927), *Being and Time*

Franz Kafka (1915), *Metamorphosis*

Soren Kierkegaard (1849), *The Sickness Unto Death*

Friedrich Nietzsche (1901), *The Will to Power*

Jean-Paul Sartre (1944), *No Exit and Three Other Plays*

**Suggested Readings:**

Simone de Beauvoir (1949), *The Second Sex*

Martin Buber (1923), *I and Thou*

Albert Camus (1942), *The Myth of Sisyphus*

Frederick Douglass (1845), *Narrative of the Life of F. Douglass, An American Slave*

W. E. B. Du Bois (1903), *The Souls of Black Folk*

Franz Fanon (1986/1952), *Black Skin, White Masks*

Viktor Frankl (1946), *Man’s Quest for Meaning*

Sigmund Freud (1930), *Civilization and Its Discontents*

Saidiya Hartman (1997), *Scenes of Subjection*

Friedrich Nietzsche (1887), *The Genealogy of Morals*

Elie Wiesel (1958), *Night*

**Requirements:**

1. Participation**:** You are expected to come prepared to ask questions or offer comments in class, having read the materials ahead of time. **(10%)**

2. Paper on the *history of existentialism*: “What questions were both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche trying to answer?” (5-7 pages; outline/draft due September 28th; paper due October 5th) **(3%+27%=30%)**

Make sure to quote from the two authors’ works and explain how their answers to their questions are (or are not) still relevant today. Structure: two pages on each author and the last page or two pages your critical assessment of the relevance of both the questions and the answers in the 20th or 21st century.

3. Paper on the *moral dimension of existentialism*: “What moral concerns arose in the 20th century that existentialists addressed?” OR “What moral concerns are present in the 21st century that existentialists should address?” (5-7 pages; outline/draft due November 2nd; paper due November 9th) **(3%+27%=30%)**

Spend two pages raising the moral dilemmas and concerns of the 20th (or 21st) century, then use some of the authors we covered in class to see how each responded to them; make sure to quote from their texts. Conclude with a critical assessment of the success or failure of their proposals.

4. Paper on the *media of existentialism*: “Compare the different media used by existentialist to deal with their topics” (5-7 pages; outline/draft due November 30th; paper due December 7th) **(3%+27%=30%)**

Given the different media covered in class (philosophical argumentation, personal confessions, theater, fiction, film, video, visual art, and therapy), please enumerate existential issues that have come up in 2022 regarding sickness and death, social distancing, isolation, constraints on personal interaction and communication, and the sense of imminent contagion. Select no more than three issues and spend a couple of pages on each with references both to the texts/media we have covered and those relevant for your analysis. This paper can be as personal as you wish it to be, but it needs to address existential issues in a critical way to reflect the relevance and limitations of existentialist thought.

**Note #1:** The topics given for the three papers are suggestive only; if you have other topics/issues you would like to write about, please consult the professor prior to submission.

**Note # 2**: No "incomplete" is awarded in this course without prior consent.

**Feedback:** Three stages: online response to outline within 24 hours of upload to Canvas; feedback by peers on the day papers are due; feedback by professor on graded papers, with an option of rewrite and resubmit.

This course is part of the **Compass Curriculum**. The Compass Curriculum is the signature undergraduate education program at UCCS for all majors and all colleges. This program endeavors to provide you with the tools for professional and personal success that you will need when you graduate. The program includes skills that employers say that they want students to have from their education (critical thinking, oral and written communication, ethics, innovation, problem-solving, understanding inclusiveness, and sustainability).

**Explore courses** help you learn about:

* Specific methods of producing and discussing knowledge.
* Connections between this area of study and other disciplines.
* Thinking critically and creatively at the level required of a university student.
* Core ethical principles and responsible research methods of this discipline.

Essential Learning Outcomes:

* Gather, critically analyze and evaluate quantitative information within relevant disciplinary contexts
* Gather, critically analyze and evaluate qualitative information within relevant disciplinary contexts
* Apply and integrate knowledge from a range of disciplines, including interdisciplinary or cross-disciplinary research
* Demonstrate the core ethical principles and responsible methods of your discipline

**Writing Intensive courses** help you learn how to:

* Approach writing as a process.
* Revise your written work based on feedback.
* Provide useful feedback to your classmates about their written work.
* Refine your critical and analytical writing skills.

*Essential Learning Outcomes:*

* Gather, critically analyze, and evaluate quantitative information within relevant disciplinary contexts.
* Gather, critically analyze, and evaluate qualitative information within relevant disciplinary contexts.
* Apply and integrate knowledge from a range of disciplines, including interdisciplinary or cross-disciplinary research.
* Communicate through reading and/or writing to receive, comprehend, and convey information.
* Demonstrate the core ethical principles and responsible methods of your discipline.

**SYLLABUS:**

(This syllabus is subject to changes)

August 24: **Introduction**: Background and Outline; what does “existentialism” mean or stand for? Historical Antecedents: *Job*, Socrates' *Apology*, Augustine's *Confessions*, and Descartes' *Meditations* – the relationships between the individual and society; “The American Dream” (early 20th century): identity, identification, and power relations.

August 31: **21st Century Realities:** *Angst* in the Digital Age (surveillance, privacy, and hybrid realities: cyborgs in the virtual world (“Ex Machina”); social media (“Black Mirror”), and the quest for Transhumanism in the therapeutic sense (natural/artificial evolution) to personal life-extension and immortality; political-economic inequalities; religion and spirituality; faith and hope under unbearable personal and social conditions.

September 7**: Promises and Perils of Modernism and the Enlightenment**: the Age of Reason: from superstition to logic, rationality, and certainty; the Quest for Order: explanatory and predictive models; identity and pseudospeciation (Hegel and DuBois on cultural constructions of “fictitious unities” and “false binaries”); Marx’s “alienation.”

September 14: **19th Century Trajectories**: Read Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death* (Introduction and Chapter 1)**;** religious existentialism post-Reformation and the certainty of divine (hierarchical) authority; the notion of “leap of faith” in response to the rationality of choice.

September 21: **Philosophy**: Read Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (Preface and Chapter 1) **;** secular existentialism and the defiance of norms; Darwin’s *The Origins of the Species* 1859 and randomness.

September 28: **Being and Biopower**: Read Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Chapter 1) AND Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics* (Lecture 9, Course Summary): on the “Question of Being” and *Dasein*; the “economic” construction of human life and conduct, State discipline and control, and the Neoliberal turn in the American context.

*Outline/draft due for first paper*

October 5: **Yom Kippur**—no class

*First paper due*

October 12: **20th Century Morality**: Read Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (Chapter 1 and Conclusion) OR Sartre, “Dirty Hands”; technoscientific war machines and logic of destruction (Zygmunt Bauman) during the Two World Wars, the Cold War, and settler-colonial conduct in the Ages of Imperialism (spheres of influence); inevitable complicity and the logic of risk-benefit assessments under conditions of war, occupation, and police-state apparatus.

October 19: **Personal Ethics and Relationships**: Read Kafka, *The Metamorphosis;* (OR Buber, *I and Thou*); personal crises of identity and the responsibility to others; personal relationships and their precarious status; intimacy and mediated contact; instrumental logic and the logic of social networks.

October 26: **Feminism**: Read Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale* (OR Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*)*;* questions of identity and the social construction of gender; what factors come into play in gender-based relationships, self-realization, and control over reproduction rights? from fiction to the real in the post-*Roe v. Wade* American context.

November 2: **Race in America**: Read Gordon, *Existentia Africana,* Ch. 1; slavery and discrimination; conditioning the “other” and pseudospeciation, “us vs. them,” “black vs. white,” “good vs. evil”; (OR watch James Baldwin, “I am not your Negro”); from Hegel’s “master-slave” relationship to the new “Jim Crow” laws: the criminalization of race, racialized incarceration, and police brutality.

*Outline/draft due for second paper*

November 9: **Literature**: Read Camus, *The Plague* (OR *The Stranger* OR *The Fall*); the futility of life, how to think of death, and human indifference; social conventions, moral norms, and free will; from fictionalized plagues to the realities of the Covid-19 pandemic.

*Second paper due*

November 16: **Psychology**: Read Freud, “Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego” (1921); (Read also Saul McLeod’s “Id, Ego and Superego”)); from ego formation to the processes of socialization and self-censorship; the individual in relation to the group, and the role of leaders as fathers (modelled after the classical family structure).

November 23: **Thanksgiving**—no class

November 30: **Theater**: Read Sartre, “No Exit,” “The Flies,” “The Respectful prostitute”; from feeling trapped and lost to realigning personal perspectives in light of social conventions; biases, prejudices, and hypocrisies.

*Outline/draft due for third paper*

December 7: **Summary**; Final Essay due

*Third paper due*

**OFFICE HOURS:**

Columbine Hall 4059; Wednesdays 9:30-10:40 a.m., and after class; otherwise by appointment. E-mail: [rsassowe@uccs.edu](mailto:rsassowe@uccs.edu)

**Grading Scale:**

A: 100 – 95; A-: 94 – 90: B+: 89 – 87; B: 86 – 84; B-: 83 – 80; C+: 79 – 77; C: 76 – 74; C-: 73 – 70; D: 69 – 60; F: 59 – 0

**Conduct:**

We expect respectful exchange of ideas regardless of your agreement or disagreement with your classmates and the professor. We are here to learn from each other and evaluate our opinions. Listen before you speak, and respond to others the way you would like them to respond to your views.

For information on the Student Code of Conduct or the Disruptive Behavior Policy go to the Office of Judicial Affairs Website: <http://www.uccs.edu/~oja/>

**Campus Emergency Response Team**

UCCS Chief of Police: Jim Spice, phone: 255-3111, e-mail: [jspice@uccs.edu](mailto:jspice@uccs.edu)

Director of University Counseling Center: Benek Altayli, phone: 255-3265, e-mail: [zaltayli@uccs.edu](mailto:zaltayli@uccs.edu) (regarding harm to self or others)

Director of Judicial Affairs: Steve Linhart, phone: 255-4443, e-mail: slinhart@uccs.edu

## Students with Disabilities:

If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact and register with the Disability Services Office, and provide them with documentation of your disability, so they can determine what accommodations are appropriate for your situation. To avoid any delay in the receipt of accommodations, you should contact the Disability Services Office as soon as possible. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive, and that disability accommodations cannot provided until an accommodation letter has been given to me. Please contact Disability Services for more information about receiving accommodations at Main Hall room 105, 719-255-3354 or [dservice@uccs.edu](https://exchange.uccs.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=b5ce83abee0c469dbd61d63d8f9f0c9d&URL=mailto%3adservice%40uccs.edu). Ida Dilwood, Director.

## Academic Honesty and Plagiarism:

Plagiarism is a serious academic offense and will be grounds for failing a student from the course, as well as additional academic sanctions as defined in the Academic Honor Code. Plagiarism, the “use of distinctive ideas or words belonging to another person, without adequately acknowledging that person’s contribution” ranges from the improper use of such sources as internet materials to improper use of classmates’ notes. It is the students’ responsibility to become familiar with the various definitions and penalties for plagiarism. The webpage of the Department of History at UCCS includes detailed information on what constitutes and how to avoid plagiarism: <http://web.uccs.edu/history/toolbox/plagiarism.htm>

The Administrative Policy Statement for the University of Colorado System can be accessed online at <http://www.cusys.edu/~policies/Academic/misconduct.html>.

## Military Deployment and Military Service:

In order to assist students who are called to active duty the Campus has compiled a set of guidelines that include information on withdrawing from courses. General information can be accessed at: <http://www.uccs.edu/~deploy>

In part, that information states that “in order to withdraw from the course, students called to active military duty will need to obtain the proper withdrawal form from the Admissions and Records office, their academic dean’s office or the Student Success Help Center. Information about withdrawing and refund deadlines can be found in the schedule of courses. Completed forms need to be returned to the Admissions and Records office. If students are receiving veterans’ benefits or financial aid, each of those offices will need to approve the form. In addition, the form needs to be approved by the Bursar’s Office located in Main Hall on the second floor. Students will be provided a copy of the drop form to retain for their records. The date the form is receipted by Admissions and Records will determine the amount of any refund.

UCCS offers free writing support at **The Writing Center** at Columbine Hall, room 316. Students of all skill levels can benefit from working with peer writing consultants at any stage of the writing process be it brainstorming, drafting, or final editing. The Writing Center is open for 50 minute face-to-face or online appointments from 9am to 8pm Monday through Thursday and 9am to 2pm on Friday and Saturday. Appointments can be made by visiting [http://www.uccs.edu/writingcenter/](https://exchange.uccs.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=rcDgM3efPk2ezd660feEOX6anyyg5dAI2difSnbDtlQ5a7CuQZRgBFWwGIJ8APVHQGvG8D7EdNs.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.uccs.edu%2fwritingcenter%2f). Call 719-255-4336 with questions about our programming and policies.