

UBC's Point Grey Campus is located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the xwməθkwəyəm (Musqueam) people. The land it is situated on has always been a place of learning for the Musqueam people, who for millennia have passed on in their culture, history, and traditions from one generation to the next on this site.

Course Title, Time, and Location	Course Code Number	Credit Value
Existentialism Tues and Thurs 1-4 pm, BUCH A 203	PHIL 385A 001	3 credits

Course Instructor	Contact Details	Office Location	Office Hours
Dr. Willow Verkerk	willow.verkerk@ubc.ca	BUCH E 158	By appointment, Monday, Tuesday 4-5 pm in person or on Zoom

#### OTHER INSTRUCTIONAL STAFF

TBA

#### COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines the tradition of Existentialism by looking to both its foundations and its innovations. Although Heidegger is often assumed to be the father of Existentialism, its legacy can be traced back further to Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, and to Hegel before them. Most well-known through Sartre's statement that "existence precedes essence," the existentialist movement flourished during the twentieth century in France with thinkers such as Sartre, Beauvoir, and Fanon. It continues to have relevance today, structuring our every-day discourses about identity, the meaning of life, and interpersonal relationships. By engaging with European philosophy and literature, from Hegel through to Camus, this course provides a comprehensive introduction to the philosophy of human existence. This is a lecture style course with class discussion. It has no prerequisites.

#### LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Students are expected to read the materials before class and come prepared to take part in class and small group discussion.

The textbook is available through the bookstore:

Gordon Marino, *Basic Writings of Existentialism*, New York: Modern Library, 2004, hereafter BW (\$20).

The schedule includes all the readings. Those not found in the textbook will be available through the Library Online Course Reserves (LOCR), through an online link provided, or under Modules on the Canvas course page.

ASSESSMENTS OF LEARNING

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Take Home Exam (1500 words) 30% due July 26.

Final Essay (3000 words) 60% due August 18.

Participation 10% (participation in class and weekly questions posted online in the Discussions tab on Canvas).

Assignments are submitted on Canvas.

SCHEDULE: TUESDAYS AND THURSDAYS 1-4 PM

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**Tuesday July 5: Introduction: What is the Meaning of Existentialism?**

Existentialism according to Jean-Paul Sartre

READ: Sartre, "Existentialism" in *Existentialism and Human Emotions* (BW, pages 337-367).

**Thursday July 7: The Roots of Existentialism: Hegel and Nietzsche**

READ: I. Hegel, "Lordship and Bondage," Paragraphs 178-196 in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*.

<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/phindex.htm>

LISTEN: Robert Stern on Hegel's Dialectic

<https://philosophybites.com/2010/04/robert-stern-on-hegel-on-dialectic.html>

READ: II. Nietzsche, "The Madman," s. 125 in *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, New York: Vintage, 1974 (LOCR).

**Tuesday July 12: The Singularity of Existence: Soren Kierkegaard**

READ: Kierkegaard, "Problema I" and "Problema II," in *Fear and Trembling* (BW, pages 3-39).

LISTEN: BBC In Our Times Kierkegaard

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b009fycc>

Optional further listening: Clare Carlisle on Kierkegaard

<https://philosophybites.com/kierkegaard/>

**Thursday July 14: Becoming Human: Friedrich Nietzsche**

READ: Nietzsche, "Second Essay. 'Guilt,' 'Bad Conscience' and the Like" in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (BW, pages 107-109; 145-187).

LISTEN: Christopher Janaway on Nietzsche and Morality

<https://philosophybites.com/2008/09/christopher-jan.html>

**Tuesday July 19: The Paradox of Freedom: Fyodor Dostoevsky**

READ: Dostoevsky, "Part I: Underground," in *Notes from the Underground* (BW, pages 189-230).

*Take Home Exam posted July 19*

**Thursday July 21: The Question of Being: Martin Heidegger**

READ: Heidegger, "The Possible Being-A-Whole of Dasein and Being-Toward-Death" (sections 46-53) in *Being and Time* (BW, pages 295-336).

WATCH: film excerpt of *Heidegger: Only A God Can Save Us* by Jeffrey van Davis

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RuJvwyREoJo&t=11s>

\* Take Home Exam due July 26 \*

**Tuesday July 26: Embodiment and Intersubjectivity: Maurice Merleau-Ponty**

READ: I. "The Spatiality of One's Own Body and Motricity," in *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes, Routledge, 2021, pages 100-109 (last sentence ends: "quite simply, he is his body and his body is the power for a certain world.") (LOCR)

II. "Others and the Human World," in *Phenomenology of Perception*, pages 361-383 (LOCR).

LISTEN: Katherine Morris on Merleau-Ponty

<https://philosophybites.com/2016/03/katherine-morris-on-merleau-ponty-on-the-body.html>

Optional further listening: Merleau-Ponty - The World of Perception and the World of Science

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uf9TtYdxy3A>

**Thursday July 28: Being and Nothingness: Jean-Paul Sartre**

READ: Sartre Selections from "Self-Negation" and "The Encounter with the Other," in *Being and Nothingness* (BW, pages 369-409).

LISTEN: Sebastian Gardner on Sartre and Bad Faith

<https://philosophybites.com/2009/02/sebastian-gardner-on-jeanpaul-sartre-on-bad-faith.html>

*Essay Topics and Essay Writing Guidelines posted July 28*

**Tuesday August 2: Existence and Sexual Difference: Simone de Beauvoir**

READ: I. "Ambiguity and Freedom" in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*

<https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/de-beauvoir/ambiguity/ch01.htm>

II. "Introduction" and "Conclusion," in *The Second Sex*

<http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/de-beauvoir/2nd-sex/index.htm>

LISTEN: Interview with Beauvoir

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SFRTI\\_9CbFU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SFRTI_9CbFU)

**Thursday August 4: The Phallogentric Status of Sex: Luce Irigaray**

READ: Irigaray, "The Sex Which is Not One," in *The Sex Which is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter, New York: Cornell Uni Press, pages 23-33 (LOCR).

LISTEN: Interview with Irigaray:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=msyTCN6Yytw>

**Tuesday August 9: Being Human First: Frantz Fanon's Critique of Racialized Identity**

READ: Fanon, "Introduction" and Chapter 1; Chapter 5; "The Black Man and Hegel" and "Conclusion" in *Black Skin White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox, New York: Grove Press, 2008, pages xi-23; 89-119; 191-206 (LOCR).

WATCH: film *Fanon, yesterday, today* by Mezine, Hassane (LOCR)

**Thursday August 11: Living with the Absurd: Albert Camus**

READ: Camus, "An Absurd Reasoning," in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (BW, pages 437-492).

WATCH: *Is life meaningless? And other absurd questions* by Nina Medvinskaya  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vPtzpjC7TF4>

*\*Final Essay due August 18\**

#### LEARNING OUTCOMES

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During the course, students will learn the key concepts of these existentialist philosophers. They will learn how to talk and think critically about the arguments and ideas. The take home exam provides an opportunity to demonstrate understanding of the concepts studied to date. The final paper is an exercise in critical thinking to explore and deepen understanding of one or more of the thinkers studied during the course. By the end of the semester, students will be familiar with the tradition of Existentialism and its central themes.

#### UNIVERSITY POLICIES AND SUPPORT

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UBC provides resources to support student learning and to maintain healthy lifestyles but recognizes that sometimes crises arise and so there are additional resources to access including those for survivors of sexual violence. UBC values respect for the person and ideas of all members of the academic community. Harassment and discrimination are not tolerated nor is suppression of academic freedom. UBC provides appropriate accommodation for students with disabilities and for religious observances. UBC values academic honesty and students are expected to acknowledge the ideas generated by others and to uphold the highest academic standards in all their actions. Details of the policies and how to access support are available on [the UBC Senate website](#).

International students:

Plagiarism:

Plagiarism, which is intellectual theft, occurs where an individual submits or presents the oral or written work of another person as his or her own. Scholarship quite properly rests upon examining and referring to the thoughts and writings of others. However, when another person's words (i.e. phrases, sentences, or paragraphs), ideas, or entire works are used, the author must be acknowledged in the text, in footnotes, in endnotes, or in another accepted form of academic citation. Where direct quotations are made, they must be clearly delineated (for example, within quotation marks or separately indented). Failure to provide proper attribution is plagiarism because it represents someone else's work as one's own. Plagiarism should not occur in submitted drafts or final works. A student who seeks assistance from a tutor or other scholastic aids must ensure that the work submitted is the student's own. Students are responsible for ensuring that any work submitted does not constitute plagiarism. Students who are in any doubt as to what constitutes plagiarism should consult their instructor before handing in any assignments. A link about Academic misconduct is below

<http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/Vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,54,111,959>

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Audio recordings of the class are allowed (video recordings and photographs are not permitted).