

Existentialism: Phil. 3142, Fall 2012 MW 12.50-2.05. Angelica Nuzzo. anuzzo@brooklyn.cuny.edu.

I. Course Description and Objectives

The course offers an overview of the main topics and issues that characterize the philosophical movements known in the 19th and 20th century as 'existentialism' and 'phenomenology'. Our principal objective will be to follow the different ways in which philosophers have addressed issues concerning the meaning of life and death, the significance of human individuality against the power of universal reason, the place of the human subject in the world of nature and history, and the meaning of historical and individual contingency. We will read selections of works by the following authors: Hegel (*Phenomenology of Spirit*, master-slave dialectic), Kierkegaard (*Fear and Trembling*), Nietzsche, Heidegger, Dostoevsky (*Notes from Underground*), Sartre, and Buber (*I and Thou*).

Objectives of the course are learning how to read, explain, and interpret philosophical texts as well as to assess the historical transformation of philosophical ideas.

II. Required Texts

-S. Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, Princeton, 1983.
-G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, (course packet)*.
-F. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, Hackett, 1997.
-M. Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, Harper Collins, 1993.

-F. Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, NY, Vintage, 1993.
-J.P. Sartre, *Existentialism is Humanism* (course pack)
-M. Buber, *I and Thou*, ed. Kaufmann, Simon&Schuster, 1974.
*Buy course packet at Far Better Copy, Campus Rd.

III. Assignments

1. *Midterm exam* and *Final paper* (30% of final grade each). Final paper 7 pages: **due Friday Dec. 14, 2012.**

2. *Oral Presentation* (20% of final grade). You are responsible for an oral presentation on an assigned portion of the texts that we are reading. The presentation will be evaluated according to your capacity of presenting the material to the class. In your presentation you should offer a critical exposition of the material to be discussed and formulate **at least three major questions** to be investigated in the discussion. A copy of the presentation is to be turned in to me **before** class in typewritten form (2-3 pages). When you are in charge of a presentation you are expected to make yourself understandable to the whole class (**not just read mechanically from a manuscript**) and to stimulate discussion.

3. *Protocol* (10% of final grade). You are responsible for one *protocol* (or more, depending on class size) in which you will present briefly what we discussed in the previous class (1 page typewritten summary in a coherent narrative, **not an outline**). You will give a copy of the protocol to all participants and read the protocol at the beginning of class.

4. *Attendance and participation* (10% of final grade). Attendance is required with two exceptions. Coming to class late/leaving early counts as absence. In exceptional cases, if you need to come late/leave early you should previously talk to me. Active and informed participation to the class discussion is counted as an essential element for the final grade.

5. *Plagiarism* as well as any form of cheating is not tolerated. Anyone caught plagiarizing will fail the course. Ignorance of what constitutes 'plagiarism' is not an excuse.

- All assignments must be completed in order to pass the course. Once you sign up for a protocol/presentation you commit yourself for that date: failure to present results in an F for that assignment. You are responsible for keeping track of when you're supposed to give protocol/presentation, for keeping copies of your written assignments, and for checking with me about your grades.

IV. Schedule

Week 1 MW August. 27, 29: M Introduction. W Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, Problema I (pp. 54-67).

Week 2 W Sept. 5: Problema I **Presentation 1:** pp. 63-67.

Week 3 MW Sept. 10, 12: M Problema II (pp. 68-81), **Pres. 2:** 76-81; **W** Lecture on Hegel, *Phenomenology* (course packet).

Week 4 W Sept. 19: Hegel, pp. 104-106, 109-110.

Week 5 M Sept. 24: Hegel, 104-106, 109-110; Kojève (course packet) pp. 3-7. **W Pres. 3:** Kojève 3-7.

Week 6 MW Oct. 1,3: Hegel, 111-114; Kojève 8-12; Beauvoir, excerpt. **M Pres. 4:** Kojève 8-12; **W Pres. 5:** Beauvoir excerpt.

Week 7 W Oct. 10 (conv. M): Hegel, 114-119; Kojève 12-20; Fanon, Fact of Blackness **W Pres.6:** Fanon.

Week 8 MW Oct. 15, 17: Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 3-22. **Pres.7:** *Twilight* 18-22.

Week 9: MW Oct. 22, 24: M Review; **W Midterm.**

Week 10 MW Oct. 29,31: Nietzsche, *Twilight*, pp. 23-42; **Pres.8** *Twilight*, 30-42.

Week 11 MW Nov. 5,7: Heidegger, The Question Concerning Technology, 311-341. **W Pres.9** pp. 332-341.

Week 12: MW Nov. 12,14: Dostoevsky, *Notes From the Underground* (M lecture on 1-41). **W Pres.10** *Notes* pp. 41 to end.

Week 13: MW Nov. 19,21: Sartre, *Existentialism is Humanism* (course pack); **W Pres. 11:** Sartre pp. 8-12.

Week 14: MW Nov. 26,28: Buber, *I and Thou*, I: pp. 53-60. **W Pres.12:** Buber 57-60.

Week 15: MW Dec. 3,5: Buber, *I and Thou*, pp.69-85; **W Pres.13:** Buber 80-85.

Week 16: MW Dec. 10, 12: Review and discussion of final paper topics.

All the above items are subject to change for educational reasons

On the Master-Slave Relation

Certain passages in the argument employed by Hegel in defining the relation of master to slave apply much better to the relation of man to woman. The advantage of the master, he says, comes from his affirmation of Spirit as against Life through the fact that he risks his own life; but in fact the conquered slave has known this same risk. Whereas woman is basically an existent who gives Life and does not risk *her* life, between her and the male there has been no combat. Hegel's definition would seem to apply especially well to her. He says: 'The other consciousness is the dependent consciousness for whom the essential reality is the animal type of life; that is to say, a mode of living bestowed by another entity.' But this relation is to be distinguished from the relation of subjugation because woman also aspires to and recognizes the values that are concretely attained by the male. He it is who opens up the future to which she also reaches out. In truth women have never set up female values in opposition to male values; it is man who, desirous of maintaining masculine prerogatives, has invented that divergence. Men have presumed to create a feminine domain – the kingdom of life, of immanence – only in order to lock up women therein. But it is regardless of sex that the existent seeks self-justification through transcendence – the very submission of women is proof of that statement. What they demand today is to be recognized as existents by the same right as men and not to subordinate existence to life, the human being to its animality.

An existentialist perspective has enabled us, then, to understand how the biological and economic condition of the primitive horde must have led to male supremacy. The female, to a greater extent than the male, is the prey of the species; and the human race has always sought to escape its specific destiny. The support of life became for man an activity and a project through the invention of the tool; but in maternity woman remained closely bound to her body, like an animal. It is because humanity calls itself in question in the matter of living – that is to say, values the reasons for living above mere life – that, confronting woman, man assumes mastery. Man's design is not to repeat himself in time: it is to take control of the instant and mould the future. It is male activity that in creating values has made of existence itself a value; this activity has prevailed over the confused forces of life; it has subdued Nature and Woman. We must now see how this situation has been perpetuated and how it has evolved through the ages. What place has humanity made for this portion of itself which, while included within it, is defined as the Other? What rights have been conceded to it? How have men defined it?

Questions:

1. In what sense does Beauvoir claim that Hegel's master-slave dialectic applies to the relation between the sexes?
2. What is the point of the claim: "Men have presumed to create a feminine domain – the kingdom of life, of immanence – only in order to lock up women therein."
3. Is 'sex' something that defines self-consciousness originally or is sex a construction? Is it what leads the two consciousnesses to struggle or is it rather the result of the dialectic?
4. How does Beauvoir interpret the subjection of women historically? And what conclusion do you think we should draw from this dialectic regarding the future?