Philosophy Department

EXISTENTIALISM
SUMMER, 1996

PROFESSOR: Chris Latiolais
Humphrey House #202 Phone # 337-7076
Office Hours: 1) Mon. 9:00 - 10:00 2) Tue. 3:00 - 5:00 3) By Appointment.

EXTENDED COURSE DESCRIPTION:
THE QUESTION OF AUTHENTIC INTERSUBJECTIVITY

In this course, we will examine the works of several "existentialist" philosophers: Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger and Sartre. These philosophers attempt to unseat traditional, "teleological" and "cognitivist" conceptions of human subjectivity. From the Ancient Greeks we inherit the idea that the self is a "rational," "thinking," or "cognitive" being defined by an inherent purpose or telos. According to this conception, the drama of human life is played out in a thinking being's appraisal of its beliefs. Knowledge, not will -- truth, not passion -- assume center stage here. Against this "intellectualist" view of the self, existentialists emphasize another strand of Western civilization: our "Judeo-Christian" inheritance. Accordingly they emphasize the role of choice, decisions or "volition" in human life. For the existentialists, the drama of human life is less a matter of truth than will. Accordingly, they view desire, emotions, choice and chance in a decidedly more favorable light than traditional intellectualist philosophers.

Existentialism is generally associated -- particularly in the minds of North-American readers -- with the image of a solitary individual confronting questions of a distinctively personal nature. Against the wide-spread enthusiasm for existentialism as promoting "individualism" or the idea that human life is essentially isolated or private, I will argue that the existentialist we read are concerned less with "individuality" than with the quality of our ethical relations to others. Throughout the course, we will be concerned with how such philosophers conceptualize our "bonds" with others.

We will compare and contrast how such philosophers view the role of emotion, desire and choice in interpersonal relations. More specifically, we will survey their efforts to reconstellate traditional philosophical dichotomies between thought/being, body/mind, rationality/irrationality and feeling/reason.

TEXTS:
3. Husserl, Edmund Cartesian Meditations (Excerpts)

SECONDARY LITERATURE:
1. Dreyfus, Hubert: Being In The World: A Commentary on Division One of Being and Time.

FILMS:
1. Babette's Feast.
2. The Hairdresser's Husband.
3. The Conversation.
4. Ikuru (To Live).
6. The Passenger.

COURSE GOALS:
To introduce students to existentialism as a critique of traditional Western philosophy (See detailed course description).

EVALUATION:
Students will be evaluated on the basis of class participation, fidelity to an academic journal, two midterm examinations and a final paper.

Class Participation, seminar presentations and discussion=40%
Midterm examinations 2 @ 15% each=30%
Journal (required though ungraded)=10%
Final Paper 10-15 pages=20%

POLICIES:
Open, respectful and critical discussion is the life-blood of this course. Journals prepare participants for classroom deliberation, and the final paper offers students the opportunity to respond in depth to a single topic. Journals will be collected every three weeks, and the final paper is due on the day scheduled for the final examination. 3 unexcused absences will result in a full grade reduction.

SCHEDULE OF READING

HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION: EXISTENTIALISM AS A CRITIQUE OF TRADITIONAL WESTERN PHILOSOPHY.

WEEK ONE
MON, JUNE 17TH: COURSE MECHANICS

WED, JUNE 19TH: THE VOLUNTARIST CRITIQUE OF INTELLECTUALISM & THE EXISTENTIALISM ETHIC OF AUTHENTIC INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS:
2. Handout.

KIERKEGAARD'S ANALYSIS OF DEFINING RELATIONS: LOVE OF ANOTHER AS ANALOGY FOR FAITH

FRI, JUNE 21ST: THE DEMANDS OF PSEUDONYMOUS AUTHORSHIP UPON THE READER:

WEEK TWO
MON, JUNE 24TH: JOHANNES DE SILENTIO'S ADMIRATION OF ABRAHAM.

WED, JUNE 26TH: KNIGHTS OF FAITH; KNIGHTS OF RESIGNATION.
1. FILM #1: Babette's Feast.

WEEK THREE
MON, JULY 1ST: THE TELEOLOGICAL SUSPENSION OF THE ETHICAL & RELIGIOUS ABSOLUTION.
1. Discussion of Babette's Feast.
2. "Problem 1" & "Problem 2" (Guignon, pp. 48-70).

WED, JULY 3RD: ANTI-CLIMACUS'S DEFINITION OF THE SELF AND JOHANNES CLIMACUS'S CONCEPT OF SUBJECTIVE TRUTH.
1. Sickness Unto Death (Guignon, pp. 70-77).
2. Concluding Unscientific Postscript (Guignon, pp. 77-85).
3. FILM #2: The Hairdresser's Husband (Evening film).
4. Midterm Assignment #1.

NIETZSCHE'S EARLY DUALISM AND HIS LATER CONCEPT OF THE WILL TO POWER:

WEEK FOUR
MON, JULY 8TH: THE APOLLONIAN AND DIONYSIAN
1. Discussion of The Hairdresser's Husband.
3. The Birth of Tragedy (Guignon pp. 111-115).

WED, JULY 10TH: THE OVERMAN
1. The Gay Science (Guignon, pp. 115-164).
2. Twilight of the Idols (Guignon, pp. 164-175).

HEIDEGGER'S CONCEPT OF BEING IN THE WORLD: CARE, CONSCIENCE AND AUTHENTICITY

WEEK FIVE
MON, JULY 15TH: THE EXPERIENCE OF DISRUPTION REVEALS OUR SITUATION.
1. FILM #3: The Conversation.
2. Handout.

WED, JULY 17TH: HEIDEGGER'S CRITIQUE OF TRANSCENDENTAL REFLECTION.
1. Heidegger Introduction (Guignon, pp. 175-203).
2. Being and Time (Guignon, pp. 203-247).

WEEK SIX
MON, JULY 22ND: HEIDEGGER'S CRITIQUE OF MODERN PHILOSOPHY.
1. Being and Time (Continued).
2. Olafson, "Inside and Outside" & "Perception as Presence."
3. Discussion of The Conversation.

WED, JULY 24TH: HEIDEGGER'S CONCEPT OF AUTHENTICITY.
1. Olafson, "Presence and Absence" & "Individuation."
2. FILM #4: Ikuru.

WEEK SEVEN

Existentialism Syllabus http://kzoo.edu/phil/existential.html
MON, JULY 29TH: HEIDEGGER'S ACCOUNT OF THE "CONCRETE SITUATION."
1. Olafson, "Polarity and Agency," "Bodies" & "The entity each of us is."

WED, 31ST: KEEPING TRACK OF TIME.
1. FILM #5: Nobody's Fool.
2. Midterm Assignment #2.

WEEK EIGHT
MON, AUG. 5TH: KEEPING TRACK OF TIME (CONT).
1. Discussion of Nobody's Fool.

WED, AUG. 7TH: FACTICITY AND FREEDOM: SARTRE'S INTERPRETATION OF Being and Time.
1. FILM #6: The Passenger.

WEEK NINE
MON, AUG. 12TH: SARTRE'S CONCEPT OF EXISTENTIALISM.
2. The Humanism of Existentialism (Guignon, pp. 268-287).
3. Discussion of The Passenger.

WED, AUG. 14TH: BAD FAITH, FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY.
1. Discussion of The Passenger.

WEEK TEN
MON, AUG. 19TH: REVIEW

WED, AUG. 21ST: COURSE EVALUATIONS

FINALS WEEK

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