Philosophy Department

Kalamazoo College
1200 Academy St. Kalamazoo, MI 49006

PHI 560

Existentialism

Fall 1997

8:30 - 10:20 TR

Professor Ted Toadvine

203 Humphrey House

Course Description

We will begin with a brief historical and thematic overview of the "philosophy of existence," looking especially as those philosophers considered to be important forerunners of contemporary existentialism: Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Turning then to French existentialism, we will concentrate on its major proponent, Jean-Paul Sartre, but also examine the diversity of the "movement" as represented by his allies: Camus, Merleau-Ponty, and Beauvoir. Throughout this examination, we will seek to distill the characteristic components of a philosophy of existence: an emphasis on the particular and concrete, the revaluation of subjectivity and the correlative prioritization of subjective experience (especially of such states as anguish and despair), the crisis of human meaning in the contemporary world, and the new dialectic of finitude and transcendence. The last two weeks of the course will consider whether existentialism has a continuing contribution to make to philosophy. First we will discuss Heidegger's attack on Sartre, which ushered in existentialism's fall from grace, then turn to attempts to revive existentialism as an efficacious political and ethical philosophy, first in Gabriel Marcel's Christian existentialism and more recently in Lewis Gordon's work on racial oppression.

Requirements

Take-Home MidTerm, 1-2 page (typed) answers to 5 questions based on readings and class discussion; Term Paper Final, 10-12 pages, examining one of the figures or themes in greater detail.

Attendance and participation in discussions are expected.

Texts

Sartre, *Essays in Existentialism* (Baskin, ed.)
Nietzsche, *The Basic Writings of Nietzsche* (Kaufmann, ed.)
Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*
Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*
Heidegger, *Basic Writings* (Krell, ed.)

Reading Packet including selections from:
   Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*
   Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense*
   Marcel, *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond*

To be distributed in class: Lewis Gordon, "Identity and Liberation"

**Tentative Schedule**

**WEEK 1**
Jean Wahl, The Roots of Existentialism, in Sartre (3-28)

**WEEK 2**
Kierkegaard, selection from *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (190-258)

**WEEK 3**
Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (391-407)
*Human, All Too Human* (147)
*On the Genealogy of Morals* (460-492)

**WEEK 4**
Sartre, "The Humanism of Existentialism" (31-62)
"Freedom and Responsibility" (63-68)

**WEEK 5**
"The Desire to be God" (69-74)
"Bad Faith" (147-186) W

**EEK 6**
Camus, "An Absurd Reasoning" (3-48)
"The Myth of Sisyphus" (88-91)
Movie: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead

**WEEK 7**
Merleau-Ponty, "The Battle over Existentialism" (packet)
"The Metaphysical in Man" (packet)

**WEEK 8**
Beauvoir, "Introduction" (xv-xxxiv)
"The Independent Woman" (755-795)
"Conclusion" (796-814)
Movie: A Conversation with Simone de Beauvoir

**WEEK 9**
Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism" (193-242)

**WEEK 10**
Marcel, "What can be Expected of Philosophy?" (packet)
Gordon, "Identity and Liberation" (handout)