**Introduction to Existentialism: The Ethics of Authenticity (Fall 2017)**

Instructor: Ashli Anda

Class Hours: Friday 5-8 PM

Required Text: *Existentialism* (ed. Robert Solomon), *Nausea* (Jean-Paul Sartre)

Course Description

What does it mean for a human being to live a goodlife? It is commonplace for individuals to look back through the long history of traditional moral philosophy for an answer to that question. The moral tradition holds that a good life is achieved through one of the following: bringing about as much happiness in the world as possible, acting from the commands of a universal moral law, or developing a set of virtues that lead to human flourishing. Existential philosophers disagree with each of these approaches, finding traditional moral systems to be deeply flawed. According to the existentialists, all that is needed to lead a good life is to freely choose what is meaningful for us and to be *authentic*. In this course, we will learn why the existential philosophers (Camus, Kierkegaard, and Sartre, among others) reject traditional moral systems and explore their understanding of free choice and authenticity. In particular, 1) what do the existentialists say authenticity consists in?, 2) how is an authentic life necessarily a good one? and, 3) can one’s life be authentic, but also morally bad?

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

* identify or recognize the premises and conclusions of arguments and evaluate the strength of those arguments
* engage in thoughtful and rigorous philosophical debate
* synthesize feedback into their work based on critical reflection and cooperation with their peers
* compose a well-organized, argumentative paper

Method of Assessment

Participation 20%

Weekly Reflection Papers (7 total) 40%

Final Presentation (will discuss details in class) 40%

Participation

To get a satisfactory participation score, you must actively engage in class discussions in a meaningful, respectful, and encouraging way. Specifically, I will take into consideration how well you engage, listen, encourage one another, and contribute ideas to the class.

Reflection Papers

Each Friday, at the start of class, you will hand in a reflection paper not longer than three pages. Your paper must include the following three elements: (1) an exposition of the main claim of the text including the authors’ reasons or justifications in support of that claim, (2) a critical evaluation of the claim from the standpoint of disagreement, and (3) an evaluation from your own point of view.

Grading Scale

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 97-100 A+ | 87-89 B+ | 77-79 C+ | 67-69 D+ |
| 93-96 A | 83-86 B | 73-76 C | 63-66 D |
| 90-92 A- | 80-82 B- | 70-72 C- | 60-62 D- |

Below 60% = F

Grading Rubric

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| --- | --- |
| A: This is a truly outstanding, clearly organized paper, which demonstrates a thoroughgoing grasp of the material under discussion. An ‘A’ paper is clearly organized insofar as it restates or explains the points the philosopher makes, offers an interesting reflection or analysis of the text, addresses some potential objections to the argument, and tries to offer novel solutions to them. | A-: This is a very good paper, one that operates at an advanced level. The paper may have a  couple of minor interpretive mistakes or confusions (i.e., not fully fleshing out terms or concepts), or it may fail to unpack certain points sufficiently, but those issues do not take away from there being good philosophical points. |
| B+: This is a well-written paper with nothing terribly wrong. The paper may make some mistakes or have some ambiguities that must be sorted out, but overall it is a good paper. | B: This is a fairly good paper, with some notable mistakes or obscurities, but no serious  misunderstandings. The writing may not be entirely clear (i.e., the philosopher’s argument isn’t straightforwardly restated). A paper that earns a B does not seriously misrepresent the views of the philosophers under discussion. |
| B-: There are starting to be some serious problems. Perhaps the writing is quite unclear or the  paper is poorly organized. Or perhaps there are straightforward mistakes and misunderstandings of the issues under discussion, or about the positions of the philosophers under discussion. Still, there is an effort. The author has some understanding of the issues and of the relevant texts. | C+: There are more serious problems. For instance, the writing may be difficult to get through, or the paper has no discernable structure, or the author doesn't understand the text or the positions he is discussing, or the paper does not address every part of the assignment. |
| C or below: It is difficult to give a general gloss on those grades since the problems that beset  these papers are quite varied. | \*We will devote class time to going over examples of written work that will further clarify how to use this rubric and what we will be looking for in your papers. |

Tentative Reading Schedule (subject to change):

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| September 22, 2017 | Introductions, syllabus, history of philosophy |
| September 29, 2017 | Kierkegaard: Rotation Method, Teleological Suspension of the Ethical, Truth is Subjectivity |
| October 6, 2017 | Class cancelled; added an additional session to make it up (12/1/17) |
| October 13, 2017 | Nietzsche: Beyond Good and Evil, Genealogy of Morals, Twilight of the Idols, On Truth, On the Will to Power, On Eternal Recurrence |
| October 20, 2017 | Camus: The Stranger, The Myth of Sisyphus, The Fall |
| October 27, 2017 | Sartre: Existentialism is a Humanism, Patterns of Bad Faith, Being-for-Others, Freedom and Responsibility |
| November 3, 2017 | Beauvoir: The Ethics of Ambiguity |
| November 10, 2017 | Buber: I and Thou |
| November 17, 2017 | Sartre: Nausea (Day 1) |
| November 24, 2017 | Sartre: Nausea (Day 2) |
| December 1, 2017 | Unamuno: The Tragic Sense of Life  Frankl: Man’s Search for Meaning, Logotheraphy, Tragic Optimism |

Academic Integrity

Your work should be the product of your own insights. It is unacceptable to use anyone else’s work without proper citation.

Class Structure at DCC

I teach at Heartland Community College. I have taught introductory philosophy, ethics, and religion courses. Some particular qualities of my courses at those schools are as follows: the courses are made up of 15-25 students (both men and women), I can make fairly last minute syllabus/reading/assignment changes, and I am able to provide supplementary readings at any time. While this course at the Danville campus has been designed specifically for you, I have used some (not all) of the readings in other classes of ours, I adhere to same assignment policies, and use the same basic grading rubric for all of our students. At Danville, I am unable to spontaneously change the syllabus and provide supplementary materials but I will do my absolute best to provide you with interesting, philosophical material throughout the semester.