



**BISLA**  
**Katalin Nun Stewart**

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Office Hours: by appointment

Spring Semester 2023  
Tuesdays 10:40-12:00  
and Thursdays 9:00-10:30  
Learning Lab

ECTS Credits: 5  
Lessons per week: 2x90 min  
Language: English  
Form of study: Lectures and classroom discussions  
Prerequisites: None

## **Syllabus**

### **Existentialism in Philosophy, Literature, and Drama**

#### **Course Description**

Born in the fires of the two World Wars, existentialism was a major movement in 20<sup>th</sup> century thought. While known primarily as a philosophical school, it spread into numerous other cultural areas. The existentialists rejected abstract thinking and tried to bring their philosophical reflections to the level of the individual in the real world. This meant that they rejected certain aspects of traditional philosophical writing and turned to alternative genres, such as novels, short stories, drama, and art to express their ideas.

In this course we will read some of the classic texts of this philosophical tradition. The course is divided into two parts. The first is dedicated to examining the roots of existentialism in the thought of thinkers and writers from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the second part we will turn to the works of the existentialists proper of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The course will explore themes such as human freedom, responsibility, meaning, despair, and anxiety. It is interdisciplinary and will include readings and discussions relevant for philosophy, literature, and religion. We will treat, among others, the following questions: Are there any absolute values or truths? Are humans immortal? What is the connection between immortality and meaning? What is the proper disposition towards death? What is the meaning of human existence? Is life worth living? Is there a transcendent meaning in the universe?

#### **Course Objectives**

The class will help to develop important skills such as reading primary source texts, formulating and defending one's opinion both in writing and orally, and critical thinking and reasoning. The course is interdisciplinary, and the readings come from the fields of literature, religion, philosophy, and drama.

This course can be seen as complementing and supplementing the following BISLA course: Western Civilization II: The Modern World.

### **Course Requirements and Evaluation**

The course assessment will consist of the following:

- 30% One in-class written Midterm exam
- 30% One in-class written Final exam
- 30% Three in-class Quizzes (each worth of 10%)
- 10% Class participation

The exams and the quizzes are mandatory assignments. Dates of the assignments are announced in the Syllabus, so please be sure to come to class. I only accept absentiae in exceptional and well-documented cases. Assignments that are not written will be considered as failed.

### **Grading System**

- A – excellent: 100-93%
- B – very good: 92-84%
- C – good: 83-74%
- D – satisfactory: 73-63%
- E – sufficient: 62-51%
- Fx – fail: 50-0%

### **Participation**

The course consists primarily of readings and in-class discussion. The readings build on one another, and so it is imperative to keep up with them. The class discussion will be dedicated to coming to a better understanding of the texts. For this reason, attendance is mandatory. In accordance with BISLA policy, only four unexcused absences per term will be accepted.

### **Computer and Cell Phone Policy**

You may use your computers and tablets in class to take notes or to read the texts, but during the class period it is not permitted to use Wi-Fi or to access the internet. Please turn off your cell phones during class. No surfing or texting during class is permitted.

### **Academic Integrity**

In accordance with BISLA's rules for academic ethics, there will be a no tolerance policy towards cheating and plagiarism. The submission of any paper which is not your own work and that does not honestly state the sources used will be regarded as plagiarized. Plagiarism is a serious offense and will result in a failing grade for the course.

## Texts

### Mandatory Readings and Materials

- Jean Paul [1796], "Speech of the Dead Christ Down from the Universe, That: There is no God" from *The Death of an Angel and Other Pieces*, trans. by A. Kenny, London: Black and Armstrong; Dresden and Leipzig: Chr. Arnold 1939, pp. 59-72.
- Jean Paul [1809], "Annihilation" from *The Death of an Angel and Other Pieces*, trans. by A. Kenny, London: Black and Armstrong; Dresden and Leipzig: Chr. Arnold 1939, pp. 129-145.
- Jean Paul [1799], "The New Year's Night of an Unhappy Man" from *The Death of an Angel and Other Pieces*, trans. by A. Kenny, London: Black and Armstrong; Dresden and Leipzig: Chr. Arnold 1939, pp. 11-14.
- Jean Paul [1820], "The Atheist" from *The Death of an Angel and Other Pieces*, trans. by A. Kenny, London: Black and Armstrong; Dresden and Leipzig: Chr. Arnold 1939, pp. 176-177.
- Jean Paul [1820], "Dream of the Universe" from *The Death of an Angel and Other Pieces*, trans. by A. Kenny, London: Black and Armstrong; Dresden and Leipzig: Chr. Arnold 1939, pp. 185-194.
- Klingemann [1804], *The Nightwatches of Bonaventura*, trans. by Gerald Gillespie, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press 2014.
- William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, "Tomorrow" soliloquy (Act 5, Scene 5)  
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/56964/speech-tomorrow-and-tomorrow-and-tomorrow>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dBpGgB1NTYg>
- William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, "To be or not to be" soliloquy (Act 3, Scene 1)  
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/56965/speech-to-be-or-not-to-be-that-is-the-question>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SjuZq-8PUw0>
- William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, "The Gravediggers Scene" (Act 5, Scene 1)  
<http://shakespeare.mit.edu/hamlet/hamlet.5.1.html>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dBpGgB1NTYg>
- Søren Kierkegaard [1843], *Either/Or*, Part 1, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1987.
- Søren Kierkegaard [1845], *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1993.
- Fyodor Dostoevsky [1864], *Notes from Underground, White Nights, The Dream of a Ridiculous Man and selections from The House of the Dead*, trans. by Andrew R. MacAndrew, New York and Toronto: New American Library 1962.
- Dostoevsky [1880], *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, Fyodor New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux 1992 (excerpts).
- Friedrich Nietzsche [1901], *The Will to Power*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann and by R.J. Hollingdale, New York: Vintage 1967.
- Albert Camus [1942], *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. by Justin O'Brien, New York: Alfred A. Knopf 1955.
- Albert Camus [1942], *The Stranger*, trans. by Stuart Gilbert, New York: Vintage Books 1946.
- Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Flies* [1943], in his *No Exit and Three Other Plays*, New York: Vintage 1989, pp. 47-124.
- Simone de Beauvoir [1945], *The Useless Mouths* in "*The Useless Mouths*" and *Other Literary Writings*, ed. by Margaret A. Simons and Marybeth Timmermann, Urbana: University of Illinois Press 2012.
- Maurice Merleau-Ponty [1945], "The War has Taken Place" (1945) and "The Battle over Existentialism" [1945], in *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1964, pp. 139-152 and pp. 71-82.

<b>Course Schedule</b>		
<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Reading</b>
<b>Week 1</b> Febr 21	<b>I. Existentialism <i>avant la lettre</i> in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century</b> Jean Paul, "Speech of the Dead Christ Down from the Universe, That: There is no God" (1796)	pp. 59-72
Febr 23	Jean Paul, "Annihilation" (1809)	pp. 129-145
<b>Week 2</b> Febr 28	Jean Paul, "The New Year's Night of an Unhappy Man" (1799) "The Atheist" (1820) "Dream of the Universe" (1820)	pp. 11-14 pp. 176-177 pp. 185-194
<b>March 2</b>	<b>Quiz 1</b> Klingemann, <i>The Nightwatches</i> (1804) Nightwatch 1: The Dying Freethinker Nightwatch 6: Doomsday	pp. 1-5 pp. 41-48
<b>Week 3</b> March 7	Klingemann, <i>The Nightwatches</i>   Nightwatch 8: The Poet's Apotheosis Nightwatch 9: The Madhouse  Shakespeare, <i>Macbeth</i> , "Tomorrow" soliloquy (Act 5, Scene 5) Read: <a href="https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/56964/speech-tomorrow-and-tomorrow-and-tomorrow">https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/56964/speech-tomorrow-and-tomorrow-and-tomorrow</a> Watch: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dBpGgB1NTYg">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dBpGgB1NTYg</a>	pp. 57-65 pp. 67-74
March 9	Klingemann, <i>The Nightwatches</i> Nightwatch 14: The Love of Two Fools Nightwatch 16: The Bohemian Woman  Shakespeare, <i>Hamlet</i> , "To be or not to be" soliloquy (Act 3, Scene 1) Read: <a href="https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/56965/speech-to-be-or-not-to-be-that-is-the-question">https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/56965/speech-to-be-or-not-to-be-that-is-the-question</a> Watch: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SjuZq-8PUw0">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SjuZq-8PUw0</a>  Shakespeare, <i>Hamlet</i> , "The Gravediggers Scene" (Act 5, Scene 1) Read: <a href="http://shakespeare.mit.edu/hamlet/hamlet.5.1.html">http://shakespeare.mit.edu/hamlet/hamlet.5.1.html</a> Watch: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dBpGgB1NTYg">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dBpGgB1NTYg</a>	pp. 99-108 pp. 117-126
<b>Week 4</b> March 14	Kierkegaard, <i>Either/Or</i> , Part 1 (1843) "Diapsalmata"	pp. 19-43
March 16	Kierkegaard, <i>Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions</i> (1845) "At a Graveside"	pp. 71-85, pp. 96-102
<b>Week 5</b> March 21	Dostoevsky, <i>Notes from Underground</i> (1864) Part 1, I-VI	pp. 90-105

March 23	<b>Quiz 2</b> Dostoevsky, <i>Notes from Underground</i> (1864) Part 1, VII-XI	pp. 105-123
<b>Week 6</b> March 28	Dostoevsky, <i>The Brothers Karamazov</i> (1880) "Rebellion"	pp. 200-208
March 30	Nietzsche, <i>The Will to Power</i> (1901) Preface, § 1-22	pp. 3-17
<b>Week 7</b> April 4	Nietzsche, <i>The Will to Power</i> , § 570-586	pp. 307-322
April 6	<b>Midterm Exam</b>	
<b>Week 8</b>	<b>No Class: Reading Week</b>	
	<b>No Class: Reading Week</b>	

<b>Week 9</b> April 18	<b>II. Existentialism in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century</b> Camus, <i>The Myth of Sisyphus</i> (1942) [Foreword] "Absurdity and Suicide" "Absurd Walls"	p. 2 pp. 3-10 pp. 10-28
April 20	Camus, <i>The Myth of Sisyphus</i> "Philosophical Suicide"	pp. 28-50
<b>Week 10</b> April 25	Camus, <i>The Myth of Sisyphus</i> "Absurd Freedom" "The Myth of Sisyphus"	pp. 51-65 pp. 119-123
April 27	Camus, <i>The Stranger</i> (1942) Part One, I, II, III, IV	pp. 7-27
<b>Week 11</b> May 2	Camus, <i>The Stranger</i> Part One, V, VI Part Two, I, II	pp. 28-38 pp. 39-48
May 4	<b>Quiz 3</b> Camus, <i>The Stranger</i> Part Two, III, IV, V	pp. 49-70
<b>Week 12</b> May 9	Sartre, <i>The Flies</i> [1943] Act I	pp. 49-72
May 11	Sartre, <i>The Flies</i> Act II	pp. 73-106

<b>Week 13</b> May 16	Sartre, <i>The Flies</i> Act III	pp. 106-124
May 18	De Beauvoir, <i>The Useless Mouths</i> (1945) Act I	pp. 34-56
<b>Week 14</b> May 23	De Beauvoir, <i>The Useless Mouths</i> Act II	pp. 56-81
May 25	Merleau-Ponty, <i>Sense and Non- Sense</i> "The War has Taken Place" (1945)	pp. 139-152
<b>Week 15</b> May 30	Merleau-Ponty, <i>Sense and Non- Sense</i> "The Battle over Existentialism" (1945)	pp. 71-82
June 1	<b>Final Exam</b>	