

Eugene Lang College
New School for Social Research
Spring 1997

Dennis McEnnerney
Home Phone: (914) 591-6931
Office: 445 Lang; Phone: x 3794
email: mcennerd@newschool.edu

First-Year Seminar 6010:

EXISTENTIALISM AND THE PROBLEM OF DEMOCRACY IN FRANCE

Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:50 am - 12:30 pm

Course Description

This course will investigate the uneasy relationship between existentialism and liberal democracy, by means of philosophic and historical inquiry. The seminar will begin with a general examination of two pillars of modern democracy, universal moral rights and the electoral marketplace. Then the course will trace the origins and development of existentialism in twentieth-century France, highlighting how existential thinkers responded to the weakness, collapse, and rebuilding of French democracy between approximately 1936 and 1955. Finally, the seminar will attempt to assess the moral and political implications of existentialism for liberal democratic thought and practice in general.

Course meetings will consist largely of discussion, supplemented by occasional short lectures introducing the readings. Students who enroll in this course should plan to read carefully; to attend class consistently and punctually; and to participate in the discussions regularly. As to the readings: most are seminal and provocative, some are long and difficult, and all will require work in order to ferret out their deeper meanings. Students will be expected to have read the assignments before class and to be prepared to take part in discussion in a civil manner. When possible, the readings themselves should be brought to class for use in the discussions. From time to time, students may be assigned a role in preparing or leading class discussion. Attendance will be noted, and participation graded. More than three absences, without a valid medical or other excuse, will result in a grade penalty. Please also note: this entire syllabus is subject to revision at the instructor's discretion.

Written Requirements

Course requirements include the following, in addition to the above. Students should plan to write two short papers, an in-class midterm, and a take-home final examination. There may also be a number of short, in-class writing assignments. Papers are to be typewritten, double-spaced, and annotated in accordance with accepted norms of scholarship. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Find out what plagiarism is and avoid it. Late work will be downgraded one step per day tardy. No papers will be accepted, without prior approval, if submitted more than one week late. For more information on the assignments, grading policy, and office hours, see the last page of this syllabus.

Required Readings

The following books contain most of the required readings, which are primary works almost exclusively. They are or will soon be available for purchase at Posman Books, 1 University Place. Please use the assigned edition if possible.

Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 3rd ed., trans. J. Ellington (Hackett, 1993)
Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, trans. L. Alexander (New Directions, 1959)
Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon*, trans. D. Hardy (Bantam Books, 1984)
Richard Vinen, *France: 1934-70* (St. Martin's, 1996)
Marc Bloch, *Strange Defeat: A Statement of Evidence Written in 1940*, trans. G. Hopkins (Norton, 1968)
Jean-Paul Sartre, *No Exit and Three Other Plays* (Vintage International, 1989)
Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. B. Frechtman (Citadel, 1962)
Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, trans. A. Bower (Vintage International, 1991)

In addition, Posman will stock the following readings, which are suggested for purchase: Simone de Beauvoir, *The Mandarins* (Norton, 1991); and Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Harvard, 1992). One copy of each book above has been placed on reserve at Fogelman Library. Photocopies of additional readings marked by asterisks on the following schedule have also placed on reserve at Fogelman.

SCHEDULE OF COURSE MEETINGS, READINGS, AND ASSIGNMENTS

* Indicates photocopied readings on reserve at Fogelman Library

Tues., 21 Jan. Introduction: On Existentialism and Modern Democratic Order
*Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, sections 44, 202-203, pp. 53-55, 106-109.

1. ELEMENTS OF LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

Thurs., 23 Jan. On Autonomy and Moral Right
*Alasdair MacIntyre, "Kant," in *A Short History of Ethics*, pp. 190-98.
Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Preface and 1st Section, pp. 1-17.

Tues., 28 Jan. Reason and Universal Law
Kant, 2nd & 3rd Sections, pp. 19-62.

Thurs., 30 Jan. Democratic Doctrines
*Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, chs. 20-21, pp. 234-68.

Tues., 4 Feb. On Party Competition and Electoral Order
*Schumpeter, chs. 22-23, pp. 269-302.
FIRST PAPER TOPICS DISTRIBUTED

2. THE EMERGENCE OF EXISTENTIAL ACTION IN FRANCE

Thurs., 6 Feb. Interwar France and Some Problems of Democracy [lecture]
Recommended: Richard Vinen, *France: 1934-70*, pp. TBA.

Tues., 11 Feb. Self in Doubt?
Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, pp. 1-94
MEET WITH WRITING TUTOR DURING THIS WEEK

Thurs., 13 Feb. Beyond Reason: The "Order" of Phenomenology
Sartre, *Nausea*, pp. 94-178.

Tues., 18 Feb. Party Competition of a New Type
Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon*, pp. 1-98.
FIRST PAPER DUE AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS

Thurs., 20 Feb. Democracy in Doubt: The Rise of Totalitarian States
Koestler, pp. 98-216.

Tues., 25 Feb. Why Did France Fall to Fascism?
Vinen, *France*, pp. TBA.
Marc Bloch, *Strange Defeat: A Statement of Evidence Written in 1940*, pp. 1-24

Thurs., 27 Feb. Democracy in Defeat
Bloch, pp. 25-88. Also review Schumpeter readings.

Tues., 4 Mar. Conscience of a Liberal Democrat Reconsidered
Bloch, pp. 88-178.
REWRITES OF FIRST PAPER DUE

- Thurs., 6 Mar. Philosophical Reflections in the Dark
*Jean-Paul Sartre, selections from *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 47-70, 553-56.
- Tues., 11 Mar. Facing Up to Existential Freedom?
Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Flies* in *No Exit and Three Other Plays*, pp. 51-127.
- Thurs., 13 Mar. Midterm Examination in Class
No reading. Suggested reading over the break: Simone de Beauvoir, *The Mandarins*.
- SPRING BREAK!

3. THE EXISTENTIAL OFFENSIVE IN FRANCE

- Tues., 25 Mar. Existentialism: Moral Response or Amoral Rationalization?
*Sartre, "The Republic of Silence" and "The Liberation of Paris."
*_____, "Existentialism Is a Humanism," in Gill & Sherman, eds.,
The Fabric of Existentialism, pp. 519-533.
- Thurs., 27 Mar. NO COURSE MEETING
- Tues., 1 Apr. Facing the Other
Jean-Paul Sartre, *No Exit*, pp. 3-47.
- Thurs., 3 Apr. Restating the Problem of Being
Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, pp. 7-78.
- Tues., 8 Apr. The Existential Project
Beauvoir, *Ethics*, pp. 78-159.
- Thurs., 10 Apr. The Problem of Violence
Sartre, *Dirty Hands*, in *No Exit and Three Other Plays*, pp. 131-182.
- Tues., 15 Apr. Political Responsibility?
Sartre, *Dirty Hands*, pp. 183-248.
SECOND PAPER TOPICS DISTRIBUTED
- Thurs., 17 Apr. The Problem of Nihilism
Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, pp. 3-25, 65-80, 100-04.
- Tues., 22 Apr. True or False Rebellion?
(Passover) Albert Camus, pp. 105-111, 177-187, 226-252, 279-306.
SECOND PAPER OUTLINES DUE THIS WEEK

4. ASSESSING EXISTENTIALISM: GENERAL CRITIQUES

- Thurs., 24 Apr. Is Existentialism Morally Bankrupt?
*Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, pp. 1-22.
SECOND PAPER OUTLINES DUE THIS WEEK

Tues., 29 Apr. Has Social and Political Collapse Already Begun?
*MacIntyre, pp. 23-35.
SECOND PAPER DUE AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS

Thurs., 1 May A Defense of Expression
*Charles Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, pp. 1-69.

Tues., 6 May Political Mess, or the Moral Challenge of Politics?
*Taylor, pp. 71-121.
TAKE-HOME FINAL DISTRIBUTED

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Written Assignments

Course requirements will include two formal, typewritten essays on assigned topics. Students will be required both to submit a draft or detailed outline of the first paper to a writing tutor and to meet with that tutor during the week of 10-14 February. That first paper may be rewritten and resubmitted for an additional credit of up to 10 points. Outlines or abstracts of the second paper are to be submitted to me during the week of 21-25 April.

Discuss first paper with tutor:	during week of 10-14 February.
First paper (3-4 pages):	due Tues., 18 February.
First paper rewrite:	due Tues., 4 March.
Second paper abstracts:	due during week of 21-25 April.
Second paper (4-5 pages):	due Tues., 29 April.

In addition, there will be an in-class midterm and a take-home final examination. For the midterm and final examinations, students will be given essay questions to prepare beforehand.

Midterm examination:	Thurs., 13 March.
Take-home final exam:	due date TBA

Short, in-class writing exercises may also be administered from time to time, without warning, to insure that students keep up with the readings.

Participation

Students will be expected to participate in class discussions regularly. Grades for participation will be based upon my evaluation of students' comments. What I will look for is whether students have a basic understanding of the readings, whether they are able to follow and contribute to class discussion, how intelligent and informed their questions and comments are, and how much effort they are putting into the class.

Attendance and in-class assignments will be a significant portion of the participation grade.

Grading Policy

Grades will be assigned on an 100-point scale, and weighted in the following manner:

First paper:	15%
Midterm:	20%
Second paper:	25%
Final exam:	30%
Participation:	10%

Office Hours

I will hold regular office hours on Tuesdays in my office, Lang 455. The exact time of those office hours will be announced during the first week of class. I can also be available before or after class by appointment in my office. Notes can be left for me in my mailbox in the Lang Dean's Office, 350 Lang. If necessary, phone messages can be left for me at my home number, (914) 591-6931, between 10 am and 9:30 pm. I can also be contacted by email, although I am likely to have access to my email account only on Tuesdays and Thursdays, so don't expect me to read and respond to email messages on other days of the week.