

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
Undergraduate Course Outline 2015-2016

Philosophy 2557G: Existentialism

Winter Term 2017
Tuesday 4:30-5:30
Thursday 3:30-5:30
Classroom: SSC 3026
Office hours: Wed. 1-3pm or by
appointment
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Existentialists define who we are through what we do and how we live our lives. We cannot turn to external sources such as religion, morals, or public opinion to tell us what to do, or how to find meaning. That is our task in life. This does not mean we are not responsible for others, for the environment, for ourselves. But there is no formula for how to accomplish this responsibility, which can be both terrifying and freeing. In this course we will turn to classic existentialists such as Simone de Beauvoir, Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger who raise these fundamental existential questions, along with thinkers such Hannah Arendt, Frantz Fanon and Luce Irigaray who question the relation of truth to politics, as well as the limits of freedom such as racialization or sexual difference. We explore how we find meaning in our everyday existence, which is marked by the paradox of seeming to have limitless choice at the same time as there is external pressure to succeed and conform. Ultimately we learn from these thinkers that there are no absolute truths, yet that does not mean that all truths are relative, that there is no right or wrong. Our responsibility is to find our own path in a world we share with others.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course will enable students to:

- Understand the fundamentals of the existentialist tradition
- Learn how to apply an existentialist approach
- Recognize the ways we are responsible for the decisions we make and do not make
- Develop reading, questioning and critical writing skills
- Improve oral communication skills

TEXTS

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (New York: Citadel Press, 1962, 2000),
Collection of readings.

