

PHIL 1106-001
Varieties of Existentialism
Lewis Gordon
Tuesdays and Thursdays
9:30 AM – 10:45 AM
Storrs Hall 002
lewis.gordon@uconn.edu
Office Hours: Tuesdays 1 pm till 2:30 pm

Freedom and Angst, joy and suffering, affirmation and despair, life and decadence—these and other dimensions of the human condition will be explored in this course through the writings of philosophers of existence in a variety of intellectual traditions such as Christianity; Judaism; Islam; Zen Buddhism; Occidental atheism; Africana thought; modern scientism; and more. From the canonical to the iconoclastic, we will see what these authors have to say on what it means to be human and to make a choice in the modern and postmodern worlds.

Texts

S. Kierkegaard, *“Fear and Trembling” and Repetition*. Princeton University Press. ISBN-10: 0691020264
S. Aurobindo, *The Future Evolution of Man: The Divine Life Upon Earth*. Lotus Press. ISBN-10: 0940985551
K. Jaspers, *Philosophy of Existence*. University of Pennsylvania Press. ISBN-10: 0812210107
A. Shariati, *Man and Islam*. Islamic Publications International. ISBN-10: 1889999393
J-P Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*. Washington Square Press. ISBN-10: 0671867806
S. De Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. ISBN-10: 080650160X
K. Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*. University of California. ISBN-10: 0520049462
L. Gordon, *Existential Africana*. Routledge. ISBN-10: 0415926440

Evaluation: two take-home examinations. The first is worth 30 percent of your grade. The second is 50 percent of your grade. The remaining 20 percent is from attendance and class participation.

Weeks Assignments

1 Handout syllabus, outline of course, and discussion of administration of the course.
Introduction: What is Philosophy? What is existential philosophy? What does it mean to talk about existential philosophy in a comparative context? *Recommended:* Lewis R. Gordon, “Existentialism from a Global Perspective”: <http://lewisrgordon.com/sketches/existentialism-from-a-global.html>
Thursday, January 23rd, Benton Museum: *Making the Movement Move* reception: <http://www.art.uconn.edu/?p=1856>

Part I: Religious Existential Philosophy

2 Kierkegaard’s critique of idealism and transcendental formalism. Reading: *Fear and Trembling* (Exordium)I and Problema I
3 Problematizing the relationship between the universal and the Absolute; on the theological suspension of the ethical and existential paradoxes. Reading: *Fear and Trembling* (remainder)

- 4 Sri Aurobindo and the concept of spiritual evolution. Reading: *The Future Evolution of Man* (entirety—might extend into week 5). Featured speaker on the February 12th: Julia Suárez-Krabbe, Roskilde University: <http://ruc-dk.academia.edu/JuliaKrabbe>
- 5 Getting the self out of the way: Simone Weil on affliction, decreation, and the emptying of the ego. Readings: The Simone Weil Reader, “God of Love and Affliction” and selections on prayer, patience, and decreation (**on huskynct**)
- 6 Problems of existence and responsibility in Islam. Reading: Ali Shariati, *Man and Islam* (entirety)
- 7 Living with reality greater than ourselves and the demands of truth and science: Karl Jaspers on science, philosophy, and religion. Reading: *Philosophy of Existence*.

Part II: Atheism and Transvaluation of Values

- 8 Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*, introduction, and Part I.
Mid-term take-home paper assigned March 11, 2013 and due March 14, 2011 at 12 PM by email attachment to the account: lewisrgordon@gmail.com. Event: *The Long Civil Rights movement*, March 13, 2014 at 5 PM, Benton Museum: <http://www.art.uconn.edu/?p=1856n>

No class March 18th and 20th (spring recess)

- 9 Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*, Part III, Part IV, and conclusion and Embodiment, living with others, and the spirit of seriousness. Featured speaker for March 27th: Teodros Kiros, Berkeley School of Music: <http://www.berkeley.edu/people/teodros-kiros>
- 10 Ethical challenges—Simone de Beauvoir. Reading: *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (entirety)
- 11 Nihilism and nihility East and West—Nishitani’s Zen Buddhist existential phenomenology. Reading: *Religion and Nothingness* (entirety)

Part III: Living Existential Philosophy from the Global South

- 12 Africana existential philosophy. Reading: *Existencia Africana*
- 13 Concluding discussion. Take-home papers due May 6, 2014 at 12 PM by email attachment to the account: lewrgordon@gmail.com