Existentialism

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REQUIRED TEXTS:
- Martin Heidegger, Being and Time.
- Martin Heidegger, Basic Writings.
- Emmanuel Levinas, Time and the Other.
- Emmanuel Levinas, Totality and Infinity.
- Leo Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Ilych.

TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS: (subject to change)

I. Heidegger: from Existence to the Openness of Being

W. S. 5  The Question of Being and the Idea of Phenomenology (Being and Time (BT) "Introduction" #1-8, pp. 19-66 - especially #1-4)

M. S. 10 Being-in-the-World (BT, from Div. I, Ch. I & II, #9, 12-13, pp. 67-71, 78-90)


M. S. 17 Finish Being-with-others; begin the Basic Structure of Existence (BT, from Div. I, Ch. V, #28-35 & 38, pp. 169-214 & 219-224)

W. S. 19 Finish the Basic Structure of Existence; begin Existence and Care (BT, from Div. I, Ch. VI, #40, 41, 43C, 44C, pp. 228-241, 254-256, 269-270)

M. S. 24 Finish Existence and Care; begin Being-towards-Death and Authenticity (BT, from Div. II, Ch. I, #46-47, 50-53; pp. 279-285, 293-311; Also read Tolstoy's The Death of Ivan Ilych)

W. S. 26 Finish Being-towards-Death; Existence and Guilt (BT, finish from Div. II, Ch. II, #54, 56-58, 60; 312-315, 317-335, 341-348)

M. O. 1 Existence and Time (BT, from Div. II, Ch. III, # 62 & 65; 352-358 & 370-380)

W. O. 3 Existence and Truth (Basic Writings (BW), "On the Essence of Truth")

M. O. 8 Finish Existence and Truth; begin Being and Human Existence (BW, Finish "Letter on Humanism")

W. O. 10 Finish Being and Human Existence (Exam on Heidegger to be distributed)

Th. O. 11 - F. O. 12 Fall Break

II. Levinas: From Existence to the Other

M. O. 15 Solitude and Existence (Time and the Other (TO), Part I)

W. O. 17 Enjoyment and the Light of the World; begin Death and Alterity (TO Part II; begin Part III) (Exam on Heidegger due)
Finish Death and Alterity (TO, Finish Part III; look back over Tolstoy's The Death of Ivan Ilych)

The Other: Love and Fecundity (TO, Part IV)

Finish the Other: Love and Fecundity

Metaphysics and Infinity (Totality and Infinity (TI), First 5 paragraphs of Preface and Section I, A, 1-2 & 5, pp. 33-40 & 48-52)

Ethics and the Face: Discourse (TI, Section III, Part B & Section I, Part B, #s 3 & 5 and Part C, #s 1, 2 & 3, part d - for today, focus on pp. 194-212, 64-70 & 72-77)

Ethics and the Face, Cont: Reason (TI, same as above, focus for today on pp. 82-90, 93-98 & 209-212)

Ethics and the Face, Cont: Language and Gift (TI, same as above, focus for today on pp. 72-77, 93-98, 197-201, 204-209, 215-219)

Ethics and the Face, Cont: Heidegger and the Other (TI, same as above; Also read from Section I, Part A, #4, "Metaphysics Precedes Ontology," pp. 42-48 and Levinas's "Heidegger, Gagarin and Us," to be distributed)

Ethics and the Face, Cont: The Other and the Others (TI, same as above, focus for today on pp. 212-214; Also read from Section III, Part C, #5, "The Truth of the Will," pp. 240-247)

(PAPER PROPOSALS DUE)

Beyond the Face: Levinas and Family Values (TI, Section IV, pp. 254-285)

A-dieu/To-God: Time, Ethics, and Religion (TI, "The Metaphysical and the Human," pp. 77-79 and from TO, "Diachrony and Representation," pp. 97-120. Also briefly look back over Levinas's comments on Descartes in TI, pp. 210-212)

(Exam on Levinas to be distributed)

(Student Paper Presentations)

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(Exam on Levinas Due (my office))

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1) Attendance: Read all assigned texts and attend class. If you need to miss a class you should discuss it with me ahead of time. Excessive absence will be taken into account in your grade.

2) Exams: There will be two exams, one on Heidegger to be distributed immediately following our study of Heidegger and one on Levinas to be distributed the last day of class and due one week later. Both of these exams will be taken ‘at home’. You will be encouraged to study together for this exam but must take it alone, books and notes closed, just as you would an ‘in class’ exam. You are required to turn in both of these on the dates announced in class. Each will be worth 25% of your grade.

3) Paper Proposal: You will need to turn in a proposal for your research paper (see part 4 below) by the date designated on the syllabus at the beginning of class. The purpose of the proposal is twofold: 1) to give me a chance to give you some feedback on your ideas before you get substantially underway, and 2) to make sure you have some idea as to what you might want to do at least a couple of weeks before it is due.

I will need to see the following information in your paper proposal: 1) a statement of your thesis, 2) an overview of the argument you plan to make to support your thesis and 3) a bibliography of the literature you plan on using explaining how you plan on using it in your paper. Though the paper proposal will not be graded (that is beside the point, it’s the final paper that should be evaluated, not your initial ideas!) they are required. If you fail to turn one in or turn in an inadequate one I will deduct up to one letter grade from the grade assigned to your final paper.

4) Final Paper: You will need to write a research paper on some issue related to the themes examined in the course. It should be at least 8 full pages in length (see “technical specifications” below for what I mean by “full pages”). Calling it a “research”
paper means it should be based not only in the readings we have undertaken and discussed in class, but also in additional readings we have not done for the course.

You will also be required to present and discuss your paper in class on one of the days scheduled for Presentations of Papers at the end of the course. Your paper will be due at the time of your presentation. You will be required to revise your paper in the light of the questions raised during class discussion of it. Your revised paper will be due one week after your presentation.

Your paper will count toward 50% of your course grade.

Content of Paper: Your paper does not need to be on a topic we have not discussed in class (though it should be on some issue or work of relevance to the existentialist tradition in philosophy) but it should extend our consideration of any topic discussed in class substantially beyond what we were able to do in class with that topic. This is where your research is important. By finding additional readings of relevance to some issue examined in class you should be able to find different perspectives or questions to bring to bear on that issue. Your additional readings could involve a piece of “secondary literature” which is concerned specifically with comment on the text you are dealing with (though also see “A Warning About the Use of Secondary Texts” below) or a work which deals with a related topic in a way you believe is relevant to a consideration of the text you are dealing with. But, in any event, it should provide another voice which helps you to deal critically with your text - to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the author’s claims. And your paper should make a substantive use of the additional literature you find. This means more than quoting from it once or twice. It means carefully elaborating and critically working with some key argument(s) advanced in the text. It should also be a scholarly piece of literature from an academic journal or book (not a magazine or newspaper article) written by someone with an advanced degree in the area being discussed. You will need to clear any literature you use through me and I’ll let you know, if you have any questions, whether a piece of literature is appropriate.

The paper should be expositional and critical. The expositional dimension of your paper should present and clarify the claim(s) made by the author(s) with which you are dealing and, especially, her/his arguments for that claim(s). It is essential in any good research paper to deal with what others have had to say about the issue you are considering and present it accurately and fairly. The critical dimension of your paper should move beyond presenting the claims others have made to responding to those claims, by critically evaluating the validity of the arguments made for that claim. In the critical dimension of your essay you should be assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the claims you are considering, with an eye toward formulating what you believe is the most reasonable position to take onto your issue. What you should be working toward is 1) the formulation of your position with respect to the issues you deal with in your paper and 2) a defense of that position on the basis of your critical assessment of the author's arguments for the claims s/he makes on that issue. Your own position should, in other words, emerge as an implication of your critical assessment of the author's work. It should not emerge from thin air without justification. The point of a critical essay is to convince other people of your position on a topic. And the only way you can do that is by showing how it responds to the strengths and weaknesses of other positions that have been adopted by building on their strengths and overcoming their weaknesses.

It is also worth nothing that you need not disagree with the author(s) you are considering in your essay. But even then you should not simply reproduce her/his work on an issue. There are always weaknesses to an author's work that need to be considered even if you are otherwise in complete agreement with an author's position. Conversely, if you disagree with your author there are always strengths to an author's work that need to be considered and taken into account in your own contrasting position.

Hints in Writing your Paper: An essay in philosophy is not that different from any other sort of essay, except you deal primarily with ideas and arguments rather than facts, characters, or plots. Rules which apply to writing any other essay apply here as well. For example,

1) When presenting your position, remember that no one is interested in what you think for its own sake. Your reader wants to know why you should accept your position as an implication of your evaluation of the position of your author. In other words, your essay should not be divided into two parts - 1) What the author believes and 2) What you believe - with no real connection between the two except, perhaps, that they both refer to the same issue. Your position should emerge as a reasoned response to the strengths and weaknesses of the claims and arguments of your author.

2) Document all references to your author's work with appropriate citations. Whenever you attribute a distinct claim or position to an author you should provide a citation to substantiate that reference. And citations should be specific, giving the specific page numbers in a text where the author’s elaboration of the position in question can be found. Quotations will also enhance your essay by allowing you to more accurately present your author's position on an issue. But your paper should be more than just a string of quotations. The essay should present your understanding (in your own words) of your author's positions, with quotations used only to illustrate and enhance the positions to which you are referring.

3
3) Make sure your writing style is clear. Don't introduce ideas without elaboration. Make sure your sentences make sense. Proofread your paper before handing it in.

A Warning about the Use of “Secondary” Texts: A secondary text is any text which presents the claims and arguments of someone else, either with an eye toward helping us understand that author’s ideas better or as a prelude to a critical assessment of that author’s ideas. Secondary texts can be very useful in helping you to understand aspects of an author’s work you are working with that you might find difficult and I would encourage you to seek out such works for this reason. But you should never rely exclusively on what a secondary text says about someone’s ideas. You should always turn back to the author whose work is being discussed to verify that what the secondary text says is correct. In particular, you should never attribute a specific claim or argument to an author and then cite a secondary source as your only reference (though you may also want to cite a secondary author whose understanding of an argument or idea has helped you with the presentation of it you are making in your paper). Any ideas attributed to an author need to be documented with a reference to that author’s own work.

Technical Specifications for your Paper: Your papers should be typewritten, double-spaced, using a standard 10 or 12 sized font, allowing you to get at least 23 lines of text per page. Your margins are to be no more than 1.25 inches on the left and right, and 1 inch on the top and bottom (default settings for Microsoft Office 2003). A paper of 8 full pages will consist of 8 pages of the sort just specified. In addition, you are to place your name and title of the paper on a separate title page that is not counted in the length of the paper. You are to use endnotes for any substantial notes (beyond very brief bibliographical citations for quotations which may be in the body of the text) that are also not to be counted in the length of the paper. Citations may be of any form as long as they are clear enough to easily lead the reader to the source of the citation. You should refrain from using headers or footers unless you can use them and still get at least 23 lines of text per page.

Guidelines for Internet Research: Anyone can publish anything at all on the internet. As such, the most prudent attitude to take toward the documents you find there is to assume they are worthless unless you have good reason to believe otherwise. For this class, there are two types of acceptable literature to use in writing your papers that you may be able to find on the internet: 1) a document that is merely an electronic version of an article published in a scholarly publication such as an academic journal. In this case, you should provide a citation to the textual publication just as you would if you had found it in the library. If the web version does not provide page numbers which correspond with the original text enabling you to cite specific pages, you should find the original text in the library or through inter-library loan. 2) Documents that have been posted by someone with expertise in the topic of the document. Say, for example, you find an essay on a topic of interest that has been posted by a scholar teaching at a University. It should be a relatively easy matter to document the author’s position at her/his institution and, in this way, document her/his expertise in the matter. Any citation of an internet reference that is not an electronic duplication of an article which has already appeared in a scholarly publication should have a brief list of the author’s credentials, sufficient to document her/his expertise in the matter. It might look something like this: “Ben Rothlisburger, “Heidegger’s Kehre,” http://www.harvard.edu/~broethlisburg/evomoral.html. Rothlisburger is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Harvard University. This is a paper he presented at the Eastern Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association, December, 2010.”

Course Grade: Your final course grade will be determined as follows: 25% for each exam and 50% for your research paper.

I use the standard college grading scale with 90-100 for A, 80-89 for B, 70-79 for C, 60-69 for D and 0-59 for F. Pluses and minuses (as in B+, B, B-) are given in the following way: minuses for a score in the bottom 3 points for that grade (e.g., 80-82 = B-), an unqualified grade for a score in the middle 4 points for that grade (e.g., 83-86 = B), pluses for a score in the top 3 points for that grade (e.g., 87-89 = B+).

5) Turning in Assignments: All assignments are to be turned in personally by the student at the time it is due. Unless prior arrangements have been made I will not accept any assignments turned in by e-mail. If circumstances prevent you from turning in an assignment personally and e-mail is the only feasible way to do it, you must contact me ahead of time and seek permission to do so. If I approve, the student her/himself is responsible for insuring that I have received it. You can verify my receipt of your assignment by looking for a reply from me informing you that I have received it. You should save this reply to verify my receipt of the assignment in case there is any question about it. If you do not receive such a reply, I did not receive it and it is the student’s responsibility to determine what the problem is and rectify it. Any student who has not successfully turned in an assignment and when informed of this exclaims, “But I e-mailed that to you!” will be immediately placed in stocks and publically humiliated for using the high tech version of “the dog ate my homework” excuse (seriously, if I claim I didn’t get it and you don’t have a copy of my e-mail verifying receipt, then the assignment was never turned in and you will not receive any credit for it).

6) Late or Missed Assignments: All work should be done by the time and date specified in class or on the syllabus. I will not give unpunaled extensions except in the case of illness or some sort of personal emergency. To inquire about an unpunaled extension for these sorts of circumstances, you should speak with me ahead of the time the work is due or, in the case of
emergencies, as soon as possible (if you have a wreck on the way to an exam, call me right after you call the police!). In the case of your research paper and take home exams, any work that is turned in late without an unpenalized extension will be penalized 10 points if it is turned in less than 1 day (to be precise, 24 hours) late, 10 more points if it is turned in more than 1 day but less than 2 days late, 10 more points if it is turned in more than 2 days but less than 3 days late, 10 more points if it is more than 3 days but less than 4 days late, 10 more points if it is more than 4 days but less than 5 days late. Work turned in more than 5 days late will receive a grade of zero. Late paper proposals will follow an analogous pattern. I will take one point off your grade for the corresponding paper for a proposal that is less than 1 day late, 2 points off for a proposal that is more than 1 day late, but less than 2 days late, etc. A proposal turned in more than 5 days late will receive a grade of zero. It is the student’s responsibility to make appropriate arrangements for turning in late papers. You should discuss your plans with me ASAP to make sure I approve of it. If you do not discuss your plans with me and, for instance, simply slip a late paper under the door of my office, I will count it as turned in on the date and time I find it in my office, not the date and time you turned it in.

7) MESSAGES: When I am not in my office, I can be contacted by e-mailing me at shendley@bsc.edu. You are also welcome to call me at my office number (4793) and leave a message, but I am much less likely to get this sort of message in a timely manner. With e-mail, you should typically get a response from me in a day and sometimes in just an hour or so.

Though you are always welcome to leave a message for me on voice mail or e-mail, this should not be used as a substitute for contacting me personally regarding any problems that may arise with meeting your course responsibilities. I will always need to discuss these sorts of problems with you, personally, as soon as possible.

8) HONOR CODE: Honor Code: The honor code applies to all work done in this course. A violation of the honor code on any work done for this class will result in a grade of F for the course.