

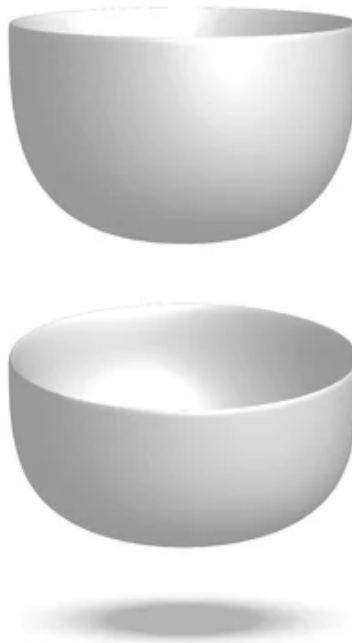


· UVIC HUMANITIES ·

— ENRICH · INSPIRE · PROVOKE · ENGAGE —

PHIL311 (Spring 2022)

Existentialist Thinkers & Thought



Instructor: Dr. Chris Goto-Jones (he/him/his) (chrisgotojones@uvic.ca)

Teaching Assistant: n/a

Office Hours: Mondays 12:30-13:20 and Thursdays 12.30-13.20 (booking link is on brightspace)

Class Information: Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday 12.30-13.20 (on Zoom)

Course Website: Through Brightspace. <http://bright.uvic.ca>

*Readings available through the course website – all available electronically when on campus network.
Links to academic support and other services available through course site.*

If you notice any accessibility issues with respect to this class, please let me know. If they are within my power, I will do my best to solve them. In general, though, I would also encourage any students who might benefit from their services to register with the Centre for Accessible Learning (www.uvic.ca/services/cal/), where accommodations and other support can be sought.

Course Description

This course is an exploration of Existentialism and Existentialist thinkers with an emphasis on figures who are less commonly located at the centre of this important philosophical tradition. Rather than focussing on Husserl, Heidegger, and Sartre, this course is interested in some of the way that the Existentialist tradition responded to and developed upon their work, taking it into new and vibrant directions. Hence, the course starts with the (very challenging) work of Emmanuel Levinas, whose concern was partially to navigate a new path between Husserl and Heidegger, focussing on ethics as the foundation of the philosophical endeavour. In that part of the course, which starts us in 1930s France, we will sample Levinas and also review some of the core ideas from Husserl and Heidegger. Broadening the field, in the next section we'll consider Nishitani Keiji, one of the most influential and interesting philosophers of modern Japan, who was a friend of Heidegger and who contributes an innovative synthesis of Existentialism and Buddhism as Existentialism spreads into Asia in the mid-twentieth century. Thereafter, moving into the 1950s and 60s in England, in the work of Iris Murdoch, we'll explore some of the ways in which Existentialism disrupts and enriches the language and expression of philosophy, particularly through its use of literature, leading towards notions that Existentialism should be a vehicle for self-transformation. Here we touch into the intersection between Existentialism and Mysticism. And then finally, we'll look at a contemporary phenomenologist who lives and works in the Pacific Northwest, David Abram, whose work explicitly engages with the question of a form of more-than-human existentialism in the context of the natural world. This is where Existentialism intersects with contemporary movements such as eco-philosophy.

By the end of this course, you can expect to:

- Understand the foundational concepts of Existentialism;
- Understand how those foundational concepts have been changed and developed by different representatives of the field;
- Recognise how different approaches to language and communication can transform the potentials of philosophical inquiry;
- Recognise how the Existential tradition has spread around the world and developed in creative engagement with different philosophical traditions;
- Understand the significance of phenomenology as a methodological adjunct of Existentialism;
- Demonstrate sensitivity and awareness of the ethical issues that arise from intercultural encounters, such as in the encounter between Existentialism and Buddhism.

Course materials

Given the diversity of the material, there is no single textbook for this course. All of the readings are available electronically through UVic libraries – links will be provided in brightspace.

Additional materials, including text excerpts and alternative readings will be provided through brightspace. Each week will include two sessions dedicated to the specified reading; the third

session will be in a more ‘existentialist’ format, exploring an extract from a piece of fiction in the existential tradition, so that we not only experience existentialism in its most analytic forms but also in its creative modes.

Course Logistics

This will be a hybrid a/*synchronous* online course. This means that the classes will be held in real-time online via **Zoom**. You can expect the first session in each week (on Tuesdays) to be (more-or-less) in lecture format, and you can expect the second session in each week (on Wednesdays) to be more discussion-drive, with the content based on the previous session. For convenience and ease of access, the sessions on Tuesdays will be recorded and made available for the class to review on **Brightspace**. These recordings will remain available throughout the course so that you can refer to them as needed. Hence, if you are unable to attend the Tuesday class on time due to illness, you can still access the material. *Real-time attendance on Tuesdays is recommended*. In some weeks we may have guest teachers from other universities, in which case I hope you will all attend the Tuesday sessions out of respect for their freely-given time. Wednesday classes will not be recorded or repeated. *Real-time participation on Wednesdays is strongly encouraged and will be recognized in your participation grade for this course* – if you are sick or have other good reason to miss the class, please let me know *in advance of the class* (or as soon as possible thereafter), and this may count as an excused absence.

You can expect sessions on Fridays to take a more ‘existentialist’ format. Rather than further analyzing the set-text for that week, the talk on Fridays will usually be based on exploring an extract from a piece of existentialist fiction. The idea of this session is to encourage participation in another mode of learning and inquiry. Friday sessions will usually be recorded and posted to brightspace, but attendance will be beneficial.

Academic Integrity

Everything you will be evaluated on in this course will be fully open book and untimed. You are welcome to talk about the course material as much as you like with anyone you like, but all answers to assignments have to be your own written work. This means that you are not allowed to provide answers for someone else, or *vice versa* or even *versa vice*. If you are ever unsure about what constitutes a violation of academic integrity, more information is provided on the University Calendar:

<http://web.uvic.ca/calendar/undergrad/info/regulations/academic-integrity.html>

Communication and Office Hours

Email is my preferred method of communication, as opposed to *Brightspace* messages or forum posts, especially for any official requests. If you ask me a question over email, you can expect a reply within about 1 working day. If you don’t hear back from me within that time frame, feel free to try again in case your message went astray. When you do address me (over email or otherwise), please do so as Chris, because that’s my name. If you feel more comfortable with titles, then

please use either Professor (Prof.) Goto-Jones or Dr. Goto-Jones. No 'sir' or 'mr,' for various reasons, thanks! If you are ever nervous about sending me an email, or asking a question, feel free to include a funny anecdote, cartoon, or a picture of your pet with your request. This will not affect whether or not I will be able to help you with your request, but it will be much more fun for us all.

Finally, my pronouns are he/him. If you think I am unlikely to know the name you would prefer to be called, or the pronouns I ought to use for you (through the entry that I will see for you through your Brightspace/UVic registration), please don't hesitate to make me aware.

My default platform for office hours will be Zoom, Mondays and Thursdays 12:30-13:20 am, but if that does not work for you, please feel free to email me in advance to suggest an alternative time and/or platform. Office hours will require pre-booking via Calendly (see brightspace for link). If you don't make an appointment, you are welcome to sit in the Zoom waiting room until I become free, but please keep in mind that all the slots might already be booked. All relevant links will be posted on Brightspace.

Evaluation

You are expected to maintain high standards of respect and academic integrity throughout this course. Discussion is essential to learning in this course, and it relies upon an atmosphere of trust. Everyone present should feel safe to express their views, which also means that everyone present is responsible for ensuring that they exercise academic freedom (rather than merely freedom of speech), treating each other respectfully and supportively.

- Continuous Assessment/Participation: 20%

In this course, your participation will be evidenced by attending class (especially on Wednesdays) and by submitting weekly 'reflections.' These 'reflections' will be short (approx. 100-200 word) responses to excerpts of text drawn from the weekly reading (or from a text adjacent to the reading). The prompt will be provided during or after class on Wednesday and will be due by 11.59pm on the following Tuesday. The purpose is to demonstrate thoughtfulness and reflection rather than to test your mastery of the material.

Everyone will begin the course with a participation grade of zero. For each successful 'reflection' (marked pass/fail) you will receive 1 point. For each recorded attendance in class (on Wednesdays) you will receive 1 point. If you complete all reflections and attend all Wednesdays, you will have accumulated enough points for the full 20% participation grade. Excused absences and extenuating circumstances may be taken into account.

- **Midterm assignment: 30% -- deadline: Sunday 20 February, 23:59**

The midterm assignment will be open-book format. You will receive a list of questions in week 3. From that list, you will answer two questions with 500-750 words each (ie. you will write a total of 1000-1500 words for the midterm). The questions will pertain to the first 6 weeks of material.

Your work will be assessed on: its relevance to the themes and materials of the course; its accurate use of sources; its coherence, sophistication and persuasiveness; the convincingness and effectiveness of your argument and writing. Personal reflection and engagement is encouraged.

• Final assignment: 50% -- deadline: Tuesday 12 April, 23:59

The final assignment will be open-book format. You will receive a list of potential topics in week 8. From that list, you can select one question, which you will address in a more extended and sophisticated manner than in the midterm. I will expect 1500-2000 words. The questions will pertain to material covered during the whole course. If there is a specific topic on which you'd like to write that isn't included amongst the suggested questions, please speak with me (Chris) to get approval for your topic before starting work on it.

Your work will be assessed on: its relevance to the themes and materials of the course; its accurate use of sources; its coherence, sophistication and persuasiveness; the convincingness and effectiveness of your argument and writing. Personal reflection and engagement is encouraged.

Grades

Grades will be given as percentile marks.

Per UVic grading rubric, the percentile mark for the course will be converted to a letter grade in the following manner:

A+ = 90 - 100, A = 85 - 89, A- = 80 - 84, B+ = 77 - 79, B = 73 - 76, B- = 70 - 72, C+ = 65 - 69, C = 60 - 64, D = 50 - 59, F = 0 - 49.

- *The A range means exceptional, outstanding and excellent performance.*
- *A grade in the B range means a very good, good and solid performance.*
- *A grade in the C+ or C range means satisfactory, or minimally satisfactory, performance.*
- *A grade of D or D- indicates merely passable or marginal performance.*
- *An F indicates unsatisfactory performance.*

The full UVic grading rubric is provided in the Appendix to this syllabus. In the instance that it differs from this text, the UVic rubric takes precedence.

SCHEDULE

Week 1: Tues 11 January – Do Existentialists really Exist?
Stephen Crowell, 'Existentialism.' Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2020 (<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/existentialism/>) This is a useful reference throughout the course, especially if you didn't take Phil211.

PART ONE: Emmanuel LEVINAS

The introduction to Levinas in the Stanford Encyclopedia is a useful reference for this part of the course. I recommend it: Bettina Bergo, 'Emmanuel Levinas,' 2019 (<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/levinas/>)

Week 2: Tuesday 18 January – Between Heidegger and Husserl 1
Bettina Bergo, 'Levinas and Husserl.' Morgan (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of Levinas*. Oxford University Press, 2019 (chapter 4)

Week 3: Tuesday 25 January – Between Heidegger and Husserl 2
Michael Fagenblat, 'Levinas and Heidegger.' Morgan (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of Levinas*. Oxford University Press, 2019 (chapter 5)

Midterm assignment questions issued

Week 4: Tuesday 1 February – Getting Out of Being
Emmanuel Levinas, 'On Escape.' Levinas, *On Escape*. Stanford University Press, 2003, pp.49-73

PART TWO: NISHITANI Keiji

Week 5: Tuesday 8 February – Existentialisms Beyond Europe
Bret Davis, 'Nothing Matters.' *The Philosopher* 109:1 (<https://www.thephilosopher1923.org/davis>)

Week 6: Tuesday 15 February – Beyond Nothingness
Yasuo Deguchi, 'Nishitani on Emptiness and Nothingness.' In Liu & Berger (eds), *Nothingness in Asian Philosophy*. Routledge, 2014 (chapter 20)

Optional:

Fred Dallmayr, 'Nothingness and *Śūnyatā*: A Comparison of Heidegger and Nishitani.' *Philosophy East and West*, 42/1 (1992), pp.37–48.
doi:10.2307/1399690

Midterm assignment due, Sunday 20 February, 23:59

Week 7: Tuesday 22 February – READING WEEK

Week 8: Tuesday 1 March – Overcoming Nihilism
Nishitani Keiji, 'Nihilism as existence' and 'The Meaning of Nihilism for Japan.'
Nishitani Keiji, *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism*. SUNY, 1990 (chapters 1 & 9)

Final assignment questions issued

PART THREE: Iris MURDOCH

Week 9: Tuesday 8 March – Philosophy and Literature
Iris Murdoch, 'Literature and Philosophy: A Conversation with Bryan Magee.' In
Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics*. Penguin 1998 (part one, pp.3-30)

Week 10: Tuesday 15 March – Existentialists and Mystics
Iris Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Good' and 'Existentialists and Mystics.' In
Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics*. Penguin 1998 (part five, pp.205-234)

PART FOUR: David ABRAM

Week 11: Tuesday 22 March – Existential Magic
David Abram, 'The Ecology of Magic.' In David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous; Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World*. Vintage, 1997 (chapter 1)

Week 12: Tuesday 29 March – Ecological Philosophy
David Abram, 'Philosophy on the Way to Ecology.' In David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous; Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World*. Vintage, 1997 (chapter 2)

Week 13: Tuesday 5 April – *Review of Themes and Ideas*

Last class Wednesday 6 April

Final assignment due, Tuesday 12 April, 23:59

Please note that all assignments for this course and all materials posted to Brightspace are the intellectual property of myself and the University of Victoria. Do not circulate this material or post it to note-sharing sites without my permission. Posting course materials to note-sharing sites or otherwise circulating course materials without the permission of your instructor violates the *Policy on Academic Integrity* (<http://web.uvic.ca/calendar/FACS/UnIn/UARe/PoAcl.html>).

APPENDIX: UVIC GRADING RUBRIC

<https://www.uvic.ca/calendar/undergrad/index.php#/policy/S1AAgoGuV?bc=true&bcCurrent=14%20-%20Grading&bcItemtype=policies>

A primary purpose of evaluation and grading is to further effective teaching and learning. Any practices which assign a predetermined percentage of students a specific grade, that is, a certain percentage get A, another percentage get B and so on, without regard to individual achievement are prohibited.

The table below shows the official grading system used by instructors in arriving at final assessments of student performance. For letter grades authorized for use in the Faculty of Law, see the entry under that faculty.

Passing Grades			
Grade	Grade Value	Point Percentage*	Description
A+	9	90 - 100	An A+, A, or A- is earned by work which is technically superior, shows mastery of the subject matter, and in the case of an A+ offers original insight and/or goes beyond course expectations. Normally achieved by a minority of students.
A	8	85 - 89	
A-	7	80 - 84	
B+	6	77 - 79	A B+, B, or B- is earned by work that indicates a good comprehension of the course material, a good command of the skills needed to work with the course material, and the student's full engagement with the course requirements and activities. A B+ represents a more complex understanding and/or application of the course material.
B	5	73 - 76	
B-	4	70 - 72	
C+	3	65 - 69	A C+ or C is earned by work that indicates an adequate comprehension of the course material and the skills needed to work with the course material and that indicates the student has met the basic requirements for completing assigned work and/or participating in class activities.
C	2	60 - 64	
D	1	50 - 59	A D is earned by work that indicates minimal command of the course materials and/or minimal participation in class activities that is worthy of course credit toward the degree.
COM	Excluded Grade	N/A	Complete (pass). Used only for 0-unit courses and those credit courses designated by the Senate. Such courses are identified in the course listings.
CTN	Excluded Grade	N/A	Continuing . Denotes the first half of a full-year course.
Failing Grades			
Grade	Grade Value	Point Percentage*	Description
E	0	0 - 49	Conditional supplemental. Supplemental examinations are not offered by all departments and the allowable percentage may vary by program (e.g. 35-49). Students will be advised whether supplemental

Failing Grades

Grade	Grade Value	Point Percentage*	Description
			will be offered and if the percentage range varies when assessment techniques are announced at the beginning of the course.
F	0	0 - 49	F is earned by work, which after the completion of course requirements, is inadequate and unworthy of course credit towards the degree.
N	0	0 - 49	Did not write examination or complete course requirements by the end of term or session; no supplemental.
N/X	Excluded Grade	N/A	Did not complete course requirements by the end of the term; no supplemental. Used only for Co-op work terms and for courses designated by Senate. Such courses are identified in the course listings. The grade is EXCLUDED from the calculation of all grade point averages.
F/X	Excluded Grade	N/A	Unsatisfactory performance. Completed course requirements; no supplemental. Used only for Co-op work terms and for courses designated by Senate. Such courses are identified in the course listings. The grade is EXCLUDED from the calculation of all grade point averages.

Temporary Grades

Grade	Grade Point Value	Percentage*	Description
INC	N/A	N/A	Incomplete. Used only for those credit courses designated by the Senate, to be replaced with a final grade by June 1 for Winter Session courses and by October 1 for Summer Session courses. Such courses are identified in the course listings.
DEF	N/A	N/A	Deferred status granted. Used only when deferred status has been granted because of illness, an accident or family affliction. See Deferred status .
INP	N/A	N/A	In Progress. Used only for courses designated by Senate, to be replaced with a final grade by the end of the next Winter Session except for TIED courses (identified in the Calendar). In TIED courses the INP must be replaced with a final grade by the end of the subsequent term (including Summer Session) or, where a COOP Work Term, or other activity approved by the academic unit, intervenes, within eight months. If a student fails to complete the second course of a TIED course sequence, then the final grade will be N.
CIC	N/A	N/A	Co-op Interrupted Course. See General Regulations: Undergraduate Co-op .

Grade notes

Grade note	Grade Point Value	Percentage*	Description
AEG	N/A	N/A	Aegrotat. Transcript notation accompanying a letter grade, assigned where documented illness or similar affliction affected the student's performance or prevented completion of all course work.
WE	N/A	N/A	Withdrawal under extenuating circumstances. The WE registration status will replace a course registration or grade when approved by the Dean following a request for academic concession from a student. This registration status is excluded from the calculation of all grade point averages; it will appear on the official transcript.

* The grading scale for the evaluation of course achievement at the University of Victoria is a percentage scale that translates to a 9 point GPA/letter grade system. The 9 point GPA system is the sole basis for the calculation of grade point averages and academic standing. Standardized percentage ranges have been established as the basis for the assignment of letter grades. The percentage grades are displayed on the official and administrative transcripts in order to provide fine grained course assessment which will be useful to students particularly in their application to graduate studies and for external scholarships and funding. Comparative grading information (average grade [mean] for the class), along with the number of students in the class, is displayed for each course section for which percentage grades are assigned.