



The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Syllabus

Comparative Existentialisms: From Sartre to Soloveitchik - 14870

Last update 20-01-2023

HU Credits: 4

Degree/Cycle: 2nd degree (Master)

Responsible Department: Jewish Thought

Academic year: 0

Semester: 2nd Semester

Teaching Languages: English

Campus: Mt. Scopus

Course/Module Coordinator: Arnold Davidson

Coordinator Email: fiorentina@uchicago.edu

Coordinator Office Hours: Micha Danziger

Teaching Staff:

Prof Arnold Ira Davidson

Course/Module description:

After one of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's lectures, a member of the audience approached Rabbi Soloveitchik and asked him: "Are you an existentialist"? The Rav is reported to have replied: "Yes, I am an existentialist of the King David variety". This course will examine different versions of existentialism. We will begin with an overview of existentialist thought and then read several classics of existentialism: Jean-Paul Sartre's "Existentialism is a Humanism" is considered the manifesto of philosophical existentialism; the reading of Sartre's manifesto will be followed by some of Sartre's early essays as well as by a selection of Simone de Beauvoir's essays on existentialism; Soren Kierkegaard's "Fear and Trembling" is at the center of theological existentialism. (Other major thinkers frequently associated with existentialism include Friedrich Nietzsche, Gabriel Marcel, Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger). We will study existentialism not primarily as a doctrine, but as an orientation in the world, a set of attitudes, a way of life (to use Pierre Hadot's expression) that gives one's existence a form and texture, and thus helps to shape and guide our concrete, individual situations. This course will pay particular attention to the varieties of existentialism in their historical, cultural, and philosophical/theological context. Some attention will be given to existentialism in psychology and literature, but the emphasis will be on the philosophical and theological uses of existentialism.

We will focus on different aspects of existentialism found in contemporary Jewish philosophy. How have distinctively Jewish perspectives been expressed in existential terms and themes? We will concentrate on three authors---Martin Buber, Abraham Joshua Heschel and Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik. Each of these authors has taken certain features of Jewish thought and practice and explicitly related them to, and reframed them in terms of, the history of existentialist thought. How does the specific existentialist emphasis on the concreteness of human existence, with its focus on particularity and individuality, manifest itself in contemporary Jewish thought? How do these thinkers elaborate a social philosophy that is compatible with existentialism? Is there an existentialist spirituality? How does existentialism affect our relation to ourselves, to others, and to the world? What are the virtues and limits of Jewish existentialism?

Course/Module aims:

To study a number of Jewish 'existentialist' philosophers and to examine how their work introduces a Jewish perspective in the history of existentialist thought.

Learning outcomes - On successful completion of this module, students should be able to:

Students will understand the significance of existentialism as a philosophical movement and be able to see how Jewish philosophy interacted with and contributed to this movement.

Attendance requirements(%):

100

Teaching arrangement and method of instruction: Close reading of the texts and seminar discussion.

Course/Module Content:

See description above.

Required Reading:

Week 1

Thomas R. Flynn, "Existentialism. A Very Short Introduction," Preface, pp. 1-23, 24-37, 45-50, 63-67, 72-80, 81-91, 98-103 Pierre Hadot, "Philosophy as a Way of Life" in "Philosophy as a Way of Life," Edited by Arnold I. Davidson

Week 2

Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism"

"A More Precise Characterization of Existentialism" in "The Writings of Jean-Paul Sartre, Volume 2, Selected Prose" "Cartesian Freedom" in "Literary and Philosophical Essays"

Week 3

Simone de Beauvoir, "Jean-Paul Sartre" in "Philosophical Writings"

"Literature and Metaphysics" in "Philosophical Writings"

"Introduction to an Ethics of Ambiguity" in "Philosophical Writings"

"What is Existentialism?" in "Philosophical Writings"

Week 4

Soren Kierkegaard, "Fear and Trembling" (Translation by Bruce H. Kirmmse), pp. 1-64

Week 5

Soren Kierkegaard, "Fear and Trembling" (Translation by Bruce H. Kirmmse), pp. 65-149

Week 6

Martin Buber, "Interpreting Hasidism" in "The New Hasidism," Edited by Arthur Green and Ariel Evan Mayse

"The Way of Men, According to the Teachings of Hasidism" in "Hasidism and Modern Man," Edited by David Biale

"The History of the Dialogical Principle" in "Between Man and Man"

Week 7

Martin Buber, "The Question of the Single One," pp. 58-76 in "Between Man and Man"

"What is Man?," pp. 191-193, 236-244 in "Between Man and Man"

"Distance and Relation" in "The Knowledge of Man"

"Elements of the Interhuman" in "The Knowledge of Man"

"Appendix. Dialogue of Martin Buber and Carl R. Rogers" in "The Knowledge of Man"

Week 8

Abraham Joshua Heschel, "Introduction" in "The Prophets," Volume I "The Theory of Pathos" in "The Prophets," Volume 2

"Religion of Sympathy" in "The Prophets," Volume 2

"Conclusion" in "The Prophets," Volume 2

"Hasidism as a New Approach to Torah," in "The New Hasidism," Edited by Arthur Green and Ariel Evan Mayse

"Dissent" in "The New Hasidism," Edited by Arthur Green and Ariel Evan Mayse

Week 9

Abraham Joshua Heschel, "Jewish Theology" in "Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity"

"Depth Theology" in "The Insecurity of Freedom"

"A Passion for Truth," Introduction, Chapter II ("The Kotzker and Kierkegaard") and Chapter 3 ("The Power of the Will")

Week 10

Abraham Joshua Heschel, "Who is Man?"

Week 11

Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "The Lonely Man of Faith" (Maggid Books Edition)

Week 12

Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "The Power of Confession" in "On Repentance" (Compiled by Pinchas H. Peli)

"Majesty and Humility" in "Tradition"

Additional Reading Material:

Course/Module evaluation:

End of year written/oral examination 0 %

Presentation 20 %

Participation in Tutorials 10 %

Project work 0 %

Assignments 0 %

Reports 0 %

Research project 70 %

Quizzes 0 %

Other 0 %

Additional information:

מידע נוסף / הערות

Students needing academic accommodations based on a disability should contact the Center for Diagnosis and Support of Students with Learning Disabilities, or the Office for Students with Disabilities, as early as possible, to discuss and coordinate accommodations, based on relevant documentation. For further information, please visit the site of the Dean of Students Office. Additional information