



PHIL3052

Social and Existential Questions

Session 1, In person-scheduled-weekday, North Ryde 2024

Department of Philosophy

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General Information

Unit convenor and teaching staff

Convenor, Lecturer, and Tutor

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By appointment

Lecturer and Tutor

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Credit points

10

Prerequisites

130cp at 1000 level or above

Corequisites

Co-badged status

Unit description

This unit brings a philosophical lens to some of the great social and existential challenges of our times. We examine some of the key sources of existential meaning in human life, such as: personal freedom, identity, work, and a sense of belonging. We look at some of the prevailing ways in which these sources are currently threatened in contemporary society. The unit also considers some concrete ethical and political options for dealing with these challenges. Some examples of questions that may be explored in the unit include: What is the meaning we look for in our lives? Is spiritual belief an important or even a necessary element of human life? How does work fit in our idea of a good life? How can we live well together given our different gender, cultural and ethnic identities?

Important Academic Dates

Information about important academic dates including deadlines for withdrawing from units are available at <https://www.mq.edu.au/study/calendar-of-dates>

Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this unit, you will be able to:

ULO1: explain the history and meaning of concepts in existentialist and social philosophy.

ULO2: analyse arguments in the relevant literature.

ULO3: apply existentialist and social-philosophy approaches in broader social, cultural, and political debates.

ULO4: investigate and theorise ideas clearly, cogently, and convincingly through critical analysis and philosophical discussion.

General Assessment Information

Submission of Assessments

All assessment pieces are to be submitted via Turnitin portals that will be made available the unit's iLearn site. Written assessment pieces will be run through the Turnitin software system which detects unoriginal work.

Special Consideration Extensions and Penalties

All work must be submitted on time unless an extension has been granted. Requests for extensions must be made in writing and will only be considered on serious grounds. Extensions will not be given unless good reasons and appropriate evidence (e.g., medical certificates, counsellor's letters) are presented at the earliest opportunity. Please note that work due concurrently in other subjects is NOT an exceptional circumstance and does not constitute a legitimate reason for an extension.

Late Assessment Penalty

Unless a Special Consideration request has been submitted and approved, a 5% penalty (of the total possible mark) will be applied each day a written assessment is not submitted, up until the 7th day (including weekends). After the 7th day, a mark of, 0 (zero) will be awarded even if the assessment is submitted. Submission time for all written assessments is set at 11.55pm. A 1-hour grace period is provided to students who experience a technical issue.

This late penalty will apply to non-timed sensitive assessment (incl essays, reports, posters, portfolios, journals, recordings etc). Late submission of time sensitive tasks (such as tests/ exams, performance assessments/presentations, scheduled practical assessments/labs etc) will only be addressed by the unit convenor in a Special consideration application. Special Consideration outcome may result in a new question or topic.

Special Consideration Policy

The University classifies a disruption warranting special consideration as serious and

unavoidable if it:

- could not have reasonably been anticipated, avoided or guarded against by the student; and
- was beyond the student's control; and caused substantial disruption to the student's capacity for effective study and/or completion of required work; and
- occurred during an event critical study period and was at least three (3) consecutive days duration, and / or
- prevented completion of a final examination.

Students with a pre-existing disability/health condition or prolonged adverse circumstances may be eligible for ongoing assistance and support. Such support is governed by other policies and may be sought and coordinated through Campus Wellbeing and Support Services.

How to submit a Special Consideration Notification

A Special Consideration Notification must be completed and submitted online through www.ask.mq.edu.au within five (5) working days of the commencement of the disruption.

Applying for Special Consideration: 1. Log in at ask.mq 2. Click 'Special Consideration' from the 'Submit' menu on the left 3. Fill in the required fields as prompted. Once you have completed filling out the information, please click on 'Submit'.

Statement concerning the use of AI Tools/Chat GPT

You have undoubtedly heard about ChatGPT and other Generative AI tools that can be used to generate content in relation to prompts. You may find it useful and interesting to see what these tools can tell you about some of the topics we're looking at. There are many interesting and important philosophical and ethical questions arising out of artificial intelligence, which we may discuss. A few warnings are in order, though, about content generated by ChatGPT or similar tools:

- 1. It's not your work, so you can't submit it, or adapt it a bit and then submit it. This will count as a breach of the Academic Integrity Policy. This applies to any assessments.*
- 2. It's not reliable. It gets a lot of things right, but it also gets things wrong, makes up references etc, and its outputs tend to be shallow and generic.*
- 3. It doesn't count as research. We'll discuss in class what count as good sources for academic work, but using ChatGPT means you don't always have a way to trace and check the sources of the content you're using.*

A useful analogy may be to think of ChatGPT as being like a fairly informed but slightly unpredictable and unreliable acquaintance. Talking to them might be a good way to get some ideas to inspire your own thinking and research, but you can't take what they say for granted, and you can't pretend their work is your own.

This unit covers a lot of really interesting topics. We want you to engage, and we want you to

learn. You won't do that if you try to outsource your thinking.

Assessment Tasks

Name	Weighting	Hurdle	Due
Philosophical Essay	40%	No	Week 13 23:55 02/06/2024
Reflective task	35%	No	Week 7 23:55 07/04/2024
Participation	25%	No	Weekly, ongoing

Philosophical Essay

Assessment Type ¹: Essay

Indicative Time on Task ²: 35 hours

Due: **Week 13 23:55 02/06/2024**

Weighting: **40%**

An argumentative essay analysing and responding to key problems and theories from the unit.

On successful completion you will be able to:

- explain the history and meaning of concepts in existentialist and social philosophy.
- analyse arguments in the relevant literature.
- apply existentialist and social-philosophy approaches in broader social, cultural, and political debates.
- investigate and theorise ideas clearly, cogently, and convincingly through critical analysis and philosophical discussion.

Reflective task

Assessment Type ¹: Reflective Writing

Indicative Time on Task ²: 25 hours

Due: **Week 7 23:55 07/04/2024**

Weighting: **35%**

Reflective writing

On successful completion you will be able to:

- explain the history and meaning of concepts in existentialist and social philosophy.
- analyse arguments in the relevant literature.
- apply existentialist and social-philosophy approaches in broader social, cultural, and political debates.
- investigate and theorise ideas clearly, cogently, and convincingly through critical analysis and philosophical discussion.

Participation

Assessment Type ¹: Participatory task

Indicative Time on Task ²: 15 hours

Due: **Weekly, ongoing**

Weighting: **25%**

Engagement in discussion and associated activities.

On successful completion you will be able to:

- explain the history and meaning of concepts in existentialist and social philosophy.
- apply existentialist and social-philosophy approaches in broader social, cultural, and political debates.
- investigate and theorise ideas clearly, cogently, and convincingly through critical analysis and philosophical discussion.

¹ If you need help with your assignment, please contact:

- the academic teaching staff in your unit for guidance in understanding or completing this type of assessment
- the [Writing Centre](#) for academic skills support.

² Indicative time-on-task is an estimate of the time required for completion of the assessment task and is subject to individual variation

Delivery and Resources

This unit uses an iLearn website and Echo360 lecture recordings. The website contains links to the reading material, lecture notes, lecture recordings, and other learning materials such as video clips, weblinks, and images. Students will therefore require access to a computer and a good internet connection in order to access all the material and participate in the unit effectively. PHIL/PHIX3052 will be delivered using a combination of live lectures (recorded via Echo360) and tutorial discussions (in-class tutorials for 'in person scheduled' students; asynchronous online

forums for 'online flexible' students). External students will engage in these activities online via dedicated iLearn discussion forums. Lectures are organised around key texts in which fundamental concepts and arguments are introduced and explained.

Lectures

Lectures will take place on Tuesdays 2pm-3pm, 12 Second Way, Tutorial Room 301) and Thursdays 10am to 11am, 12SW (Second Way), Tutorial Room 304. All lectures will be recorded and made available via Echo360 Online Lecture Recordings shortly afterwards via the iLearn page.

Tutorials

Weekly tutorial classes (for all students) will be conducted commencing from Week 2. Internal students will have on-campus tutorials; external (online flexible and OUA) students will participate via online tutorial discussion forums. Week 1 will be a voluntary Introductory session where students introduce themselves to each other and we discuss any issues relevant to studying this unit. Weekly Tutorial Discussion Questions will be posted before the Tuesday lecture. Students are required to respond to the Tutorial Discussion Questions and engage each other in discussion responding to issues raised in these responses. N.B.: Weekly tutorials will begin in WEEK 2 and will continue until WEEK 13 (Week 13 will be a voluntary discussion week focusing on the film *Get Out*).

For lecture/tutorial times and classrooms please consult the MQ Timetable website: <https://publications.mq.edu.au/> This website will display up-to-date information on your classes and classroom locations.

Unit Schedule

PART I - The Question of Existence [RS]

Week 1 Introduction: What is Existentialism?

What is the 'problem of existence'? How does existentialism differ from other approaches to philosophy? What role do literature and art play in existentialist thought?

Required Reading: Stephen Crowell, 'Existentialism', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, online entry (2015): <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/existentialism/>

Week 2 - Existence, Absurdity, and Anxiety

Why the problem of existence matters. Camus on the experience of existential 'absurdity'. Heidegger on existential anxiety and what it reveals about ourselves and the world.

Required Reading: Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, chapter 1, extracts from Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, and Heidegger's 'What is Metaphysics?'

Week 3 - Mortality, Freedom, and 'Bad Faith'

What does it mean to be 'mortal'? What is existential freedom? Are we 'authentic' or do we exist in the condition of 'bad faith'?

Required Reading: extracts from Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Existentialism is a Humanism', Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*

Part II: Ethics and Politics as Existential Tasks [RS]

Week 4 - The Problem of the Other

What is the relationship between the Self and the Other? Is it possible to exist authentically in an 'inauthentic' world? What do these existential insights mean for ethical and political thinking?

Required Reading: Heidegger, "The They" (from *Being and Time*); Sartre's "being-for-other" (from *Being and Nothingness* and *No Exit*); Maurice Merleau-Ponty, extracts from *The Phenomenology of Perception*.

Week 5 - Feminist Existentialism

An existentialist approach to gender - the Self and the Other understood in relation to how gender is lived. De Beauvoir on how one 'becomes a woman'. Implications of feminist existentialism for thinking gender today.

Required Reading: Simone de Beauvoir, extracts from *The Ethics of Ambiguity* and from *The Second Sex*

Week 6 - Black existentialism

Existentialist approaches to the experience of 'race'. Fanon on the 'divided consciousness' of the black subject. Lewis Gordon's existentialist approach to the experience of 'antiblack racism', philosophy and colonialism, ethics and politics.

Required Reading: Extracts from Frantz Fanon, 'The Fact of Blackness', from *White Skin, Black Masks* (1948), pp. 82-108 [121-147]. Lewis R. Gordon, 'Fanon as Critique of European Man' and 'Existential Phenomenology and History', from *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man: An Essay on Philosophy and the Human Sciences*.

Part III - Philosophical Approaches to Race [AH]

Week 7 - Social Constructionism about Race, Deconstructed

Required Reading: Esa Diaz-Leon, 'What is Social Construction?', *European Journal of Philosophy* 23(4) (2015): 1137–52.

Week 8 - Is Race a Social Kind?

Required Reading:

Ronald Sundstrom, 'Race as a Human Kind'. *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 28 (1) (2002): 91–115.

Week 9 - Is Race a Social Status? Or, is it Phenomenological?

Required Reading: Extract from Ásta's *Categories We Live By: The Construction of Sex, Gender, Race, and Other Social Categories* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 93-108. Sara Ahmed, 'A Phenomenology of Whiteness'. *Feminist Theory* 8(2) (2007): 149–68.

Week 10 - Is Race Cultural? Or, is it Technological?

Chike Jeffers. 'Cultural Constructionism'. In *What Is Race? Four Philosophical Views* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019). Introduction of Alana Lentin's *Why Race Still Matters* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2020).

Supplementary Text: Chike Jeffers. 'Jeffers's Reply to Glasgow, Haslanger, and Spencer'. In *What Is Race? Four Philosophical Views* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

Week 11 - Replacing Race: Racialisation and Racialised Groups

Required Reading: Lawrence Blum, 'Racialized Groups: The Sociohistorical Consensus'. *The Monist* 93(2) (2010): 298–320.

Week 12 - Racial Identity and Transrace

Required Reading: Ann Morning, 'Race and Rachel Doležal'. *Contexts* 16(2) (2017): 8–11.

Recommended reading: Tina Fernandes Botts, 'In Black and White: A Hermeneutic Argument Against Transracialism.' *Res Philosophica* 95(2) (2018): 303–29. Rebecca Tuvel, 'Racial Transitions and Controversial Positions: Reply to Taylor, Gordon, Sealey, Hom, and Botts'. *Philosophy Today* 62(1) (2018): 73–88.

Week 13 - Film: *Get Out* (Peele, 2017) [AH and RS]

Class discussion and final wrap-up!

Policies and Procedures

Macquarie University policies and procedures are accessible from [Policy Central](https://policies.mq.edu.au) (<https://policies.mq.edu.au>). Students should be aware of the following policies in particular with regard to Learning and Teaching:

- [Academic Appeals Policy](#)
- [Academic Integrity Policy](#)
- [Academic Progression Policy](#)
- [Assessment Policy](#)
- [Fitness to Practice Procedure](#)
- [Assessment Procedure](#)
- [Complaints Resolution Procedure for Students and Members of the Public](#)
- [Special Consideration Policy](#)

Students seeking more policy resources can visit [Student Policies](https://students.mq.edu.au/support/study/policies) (<https://students.mq.edu.au/support/study/policies>). It is your one-stop-shop for the key policies you need to know about

throughout your undergraduate student journey.

To find other policies relating to Teaching and Learning, visit [Policy Central](https://policies.mq.edu.au) (<https://policies.mq.edu.au>) and use the [search tool](#).

Student Code of Conduct

Macquarie University students have a responsibility to be familiar with the Student Code of Conduct: <https://students.mq.edu.au/admin/other-resources/student-conduct>

Results

Results published on platform other than [eStudent](#), (eg. iLearn, Coursera etc.) or released directly by your Unit Convenor, are not confirmed as they are subject to final approval by the University. Once approved, final results will be sent to your student email address and will be made available in [eStudent](#). For more information visit ask.mq.edu.au or if you are a Global MBA student contact globalmba.support@mq.edu.au

Academic Integrity

At Macquarie, we believe [academic integrity](#) – honesty, respect, trust, responsibility, fairness and courage – is at the core of learning, teaching and research. We recognise that meeting the expectations required to complete your assessments can be challenging. So, we offer you a range of resources and services to help you reach your potential, including free [online writing and maths support](#), [academic skills development](#) and [wellbeing consultations](#).

Student Support

Macquarie University provides a range of support services for students. For details, visit <http://students.mq.edu.au/support/>

The Writing Centre

[The Writing Centre](#) provides resources to develop your English language proficiency, academic writing, and communication skills.

- [Workshops](#)
- [Chat with a WriteWISE peer writing leader](#)
- [Access StudyWISE](#)
- [Upload an assignment to Studiosity](#)
- [Complete the Academic Integrity Module](#)

The Library provides online and face to face support to help you find and use relevant information resources.

- [Subject and Research Guides](#)
- [Ask a Librarian](#)

Student Services and Support

Macquarie University offers a range of [Student Support Services](#) including:

- [IT Support](#)
- [Accessibility and disability support](#) with study
- Mental health [support](#)
- [Safety support](#) to respond to bullying, harassment, sexual harassment and sexual assault
- [Social support including information about finances, tenancy and legal issues](#)
- [Student Advocacy](#) provides independent advice on MQ policies, procedures, and processes

Student Enquiries

Got a question? Ask us via [AskMQ](#), or contact [Service Connect](#).

IT Help

For help with University computer systems and technology, visit http://www.mq.edu.au/about_us/offices_and_units/information_technology/help/.

When using the University's IT, you must adhere to the [Acceptable Use of IT Resources Policy](#). The policy applies to all who connect to the MQ network including students.

Unit information based on version 2024.04 of the [Handbook](#)