Existentialism is usually associated with philosophy and/or literature departments. Yet there is a great deal of political import in existential thought. Its chief concern with individual responsibility and its articulation of a “counter-canon,” which include philosophical disquisitions and works of literature, make existentialism especially salient for better understanding contemporary political matters.

This course will concern itself with existentialism as it developed in the nineteenth century and grew in popularity during the twentieth century. Authors dealt with will include Nietzsche, Heidegger, Camus, Sartre, De Beauvoir, and others. We will read some of their classic writings and view their thinking in concert with a changing world. We will also analyze the different ways in which their thought has been appropriated with an eye on the politics of the twentieth century. Requirements will include an in-class presentation, two take-home examinations of approximately 15 pages each, and active class participation.

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