

Introduction to Existentialism

PHIL2120, 3.0 M

W 2027

Course Information

Course Instructor: Cael Cohen, PhD
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Phone/Text: 647-880-1237
Office Hours & Location: Monday &
Wednesday, 9:30 am – 11:00 am, South
Ross Building, Room 414G

Time & Days: Monday & Wednesday, 14:30
Location: Founders College (FC), Room 106
Course eClass site:
<https://eclass.yorku.ca/course/view.php?id=156136>

Tutorials, Labs and TA Contact Information

None. No tutorials, labs or Teaching Assistants in the course.

Land Acknowledgment

First Nations peoples have lived on this part of Turtle Island for millennia, stewarding the land, the water and all that contributes to life in this region. Today, the culture and presence of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples enrich the lands and people of this territory.

More than two centuries ago, the Mississauga people welcomed settlers to this territory, providing sustenance and engaging in trade and commerce. Between 1781 and 1820, eight treaties were signed between the Crown and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, who opened their territory to settlement. Today, York University's Keele Campus is located on Toronto Purchase Treaty, No. 13 lands and is situated on the traditional territory of the Huron-Wendat and Haudenosaunee.

Treaty history is foundational, and it is our collective responsibility to honour the land, as we honour and respect those who have gone before us, those who are here and those who have yet to come. We are grateful for the opportunity to be learning, working and thriving on this land, and we commit to learn the truth and be active in the process of reconciliation. ([York University's Keele Campus Land Acknowledgment](#))

Course Overview

Course Calendar Description

An introduction to some central themes of Existentialism such as the individual, being, the absurd, freedom, moral choice. These themes are explored in the work of philosophers such as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Camus, Sartre, deBeauvoir.

Expanded Course Description

Who am I? How should I live? What is the meaning of human existence? How can I live a meaningful life in a world filled with uncertainty? How should I respond to anxiety, loneliness, freedom, suffering, and the knowledge that one day we will die? Am I free to define who I become, or is my life shaped by forces beyond our control?

These are some of the most profound and surprisingly practical questions explored by Existentialism. More than a philosophical movement, Existentialism challenges us to think deeply about what it means to be human and to confront the responsibilities and possibilities that come with our freedom.

This course introduces students to the major ideas and thinkers of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Existentialism. As modern science, industrialization, and faith in reason transformed society, philosophers such as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Camus, Sartre, de Beauvoir (and others) questioned whether traditional philosophy had lost sight of the lived experience of being human. They argued that philosophy should not simply explain the world but help us navigate the challenges of choice, authenticity, identity, despair, hope, and the search for meaning in a world that offers no easy answers. Throughout the semester, we will critically examine classic existentialist texts in addition to later developments in Feminist, Indigenous, and Black Existentialism.

Whether you are encountering the philosophy of Existentialism for the first time or looking to deepen your understanding of the human condition and what it means to be a human being, this course will challenge you to think critically, question your assumptions, and engage with ideas that remain as provocative and relevant today as when they were first written.

Pre-Requisites: None.

Course Credit Exclusions (CCE): None.

Course Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Please see the far-right column of the “Weekly Course Schedule” beginning on page 8 of this course outline.

Course Organization

This course is delivered in-person through two 80-minute in-person lectures each week for 13 weeks. While styled as lectures, our class sessions are designed as active, multi-modal learning environments rather than passive presentations.

Each session will typically integrate:

- Chunked, interactive mini lectures framed around PowerPoint slides, primary text analysis, and core philosophical concepts and arguments.
- Selected video excerpts, film clips, and poetry/spoken word performances used to illustrate abstract existential concepts in concrete terms.
- Guest Speakers will facilitate weeks 10, 11, and 12 classes. They are scholars and practitioners who will share specialized perspectives on the specific traditions of Black and Indigenous existential philosophies, and poetry and spoken word as expressions of Existentialism.
- Class Discussions in the form of open-floor and small-group discussions in the classroom during lecture time where students critically engage with the week's core questions, concepts and arguments, and process the heavy emotional and ethical themes of the material.
- Some short, written reflection exercises, close-reading breakdowns, and synthesis prompts may be completed on paper during class time to consolidate understanding and promote engagement.

Attendance & Participation Expectations:

Existentialism is not merely an abstract academic subject. It is a philosophy of concrete, lived experience and active engagement. Because our 80-minute sessions rely heavily on live discussion, collaborative paper exercises, and shared dialogue, regular physical attendance and active participation are vital.

Essential Note on Success:

The lectures and assigned primary readings form the indispensable core of this course. The material covered during in-person sessions (including guest presentations, video analysis, and class discussions) directly informs all assignments and exams. Students will not be able to pass this course without consistently attending lectures and completing the required weekly readings.

Instructor Office Hours and Communication Guidelines

The instructor holds in-person, office hours twice a week on Monday and Wednesday, 9:30 am to 11:00 am, in South Ross Building, room 414G. Please do not hesitate to contact the instructor by either telephone, text, or email at: 647-880-1237, cmcohen@yorku.ca. The instructor aims to respond within 24 hours, except on weekends.

Required Course Materials

Course Learning Material	Cost	Availability
<i>Existentialism</i> , Second Edition. Edited by Robert C. Solomon. Oxford University Press, 2005.		New or used copies are widely available. Also, available at York bookstore.
	Total \$	From approximately \$50-\$100 for used copies. \$150 for new copies.

Optional Course Materials

None.

Technical Requirements

This course is an in-person course. It is NOT online or blended. However, the eClass course website will be used to access course materials.

Need technical help? Check out the following links for information, resources and support:

- [Student Guide to eClass, Zoom and AI Tools](#)
- [Online and Zoom Meeting Etiquette](#)
- [eLearning Getting Started](#) (LA&PS eServices)
- [Student Guide to Remote and Online Learning](#)

If you need technical assistance, please consult the [University Information Technology \(UIT\) Student Services](#) webpage or email askit@yorku.ca.

Course Evaluations

Course Evaluation Chart

Assessment	Due Date	Weight %	Mode of Delivery

Assessment	Due Date	Weight %	Mode of Delivery
Mid-term Test	Week 6 Wednesday, February 10, 2027	30%	In-person during class time in usual classroom, Founders College, room 106.
Scaffolding Blueprint Assignment (for the Argumentative Essay)	Week 8 Wednesday, March 3, 2027 Before midnight	10%	Submit to eClass via a Turnitin submission link.
Argumentative Essay	Week 12 Wednesday, March 31, 2027 Before midnight	20%	Submit to eClass via a Turnitin submission link.
Final Exam	Date and time to be determined by the Registrar's Office.	40%	Written in-person during the official April 2027 exam period.
		100%	

Assessment Descriptions

Midterm Test: An in-class, in-person, midterm test worth 30% of your final mark will be held in week 6 on Wednesday, February 10, 2027 (before Reading Week). The test will take place during usual class time in the usual classroom, Founders College, room 106. The test will be closed book. The test will cover material from week 1 up to and including week 5. The test will include a mix of multiple choice and short-answer questions. You will receive both detailed written instructions and a grading rubric for the mid-term test well in advance of the test. You will also receive a detailed, guided video tour of these instructions and grading rubric infused with coaching and mentoring about how to succeed at this assignment.

Scaffolding Blueprint Assignment for the Essay: The Scaffolding Blueprint Assignment (for the Argumentative Essay) is worth 10% of your final mark and will develop your ability to carefully explain and evaluate complex philosophical ideas and arguments in simple and clear language. This assignment is essentially a detailed, high-quality essay outline that acts as the architectural blueprint for your argumentative essay. You will select from three prompts. The scaffolding assignment requires you to plan out the core elements for your Argumentative Essay, including writing a concise introduction, providing a sketch of an argument from a course reading, formulating a clear thesis statement either defending or objecting to this

argument, and providing a rough outline of your supporting reasons. This assignment is a minimum of 2 pages, double-spaced, and a maximum of 3 pages, double-spaced. You will receive both detailed written instructions and a grading rubric. You will also receive a detailed, guided video tour of these instructions and grading rubric infused with coaching and mentoring about how to succeed at this assignment.

Argumentative Essay: The Argumentative Essay will develop your ability to persuade the reader to accept a specific point of view or take a particular side on a debatable issue, while carefully explaining and evaluating complex philosophical ideas and arguments in simple and clear language. The structural components of the Argumentative Essay are: (1) Introduction that states the exact problem, defines your core terms, and lays out your thesis along with a brief roadmap of the paper; (2) Exposition that reconstructs an existential philosopher's original argument accurately and charitably using primary text evidence; (3) Your Core Argument that consists of your main conclusion and two supporting reasons (premises); (4) Objection & Rebuttal that anticipate how an opponent (or the original philosopher) would respond to your critique, and explain why your view survives that objection; and (5) Conclusion that briefly summarizes what your essay established without introducing new arguments or dramatic broad claims. The Argumentative Essay will be a minimum of 5 pages, double-spaced, and a maximum of 7 pages, double-spaced. You will receive both detailed written instructions and a grading rubric. You will also receive a detailed, guided video tour of these instructions and grading rubric infused with coaching and mentoring about how to succeed at this assignment.

Final Exam: The final exam is worth 40% of your final mark and will involve a mix of short answer and short essay questions. A portion of the final class in week 13 on Monday, April 5, 2027, will be an exam review class. You will receive both detailed written instructions and a grading rubric. You will also receive a detailed, guided video tour of these instructions and grading rubric infused with coaching and mentoring about how to succeed at this assignment.

How to Submit Assessments

The Midterm Test will be written in-person during class time in the usual classroom, Founders College, room 106. The Scaffolding Blueprint Assignment (for the Argumentative Essay) and the Argumentative Essay will be submitted to eClass via a Turnitin submission link. The Final Exam will be written in-person during the official April 2027 exam period.

Late Work Policy

Unless an extension is granted, the penalty for assignments submitted after the due date is a deduction of 3% for every day late, including weekends. If you find yourself in a tough situation where you cannot complete the work by the due date, your first move should be to contact the course instructor, and something will be figured out. Aim to do so at least 24 hours before the deadline avoid copying from the internet or using Generative AI! There is much less the instructor can do to help you out if you go that route. The instructor wants you to succeed, so please reach out if you are struggling.

How to use Citations in this Course

Resources to help with citations:

- [I need to cite and reference](#), Learning Commons
- [Drop-in Research Support](#), York U Libraries
- [Writing Centre](#)
- [Student Papers & Academic Research Kit \(SPARK\)](#)

Grading

The grading scheme for this course conforms to the 9-point system used in undergraduate programs at York University. For a full description of the York grading system, visit the York University [Academic Calendar](#).

Grade	Grade Point	Percent Range	Description
A+	9	90–100	Exceptional
A	8	80–89	Excellent
B+	7	75–79	Very Good
B	6	70–74	Good
C+	5	65–69	Competent
C	4	60–64	Fairly Competent
D+	3	55–59	Passing
D	2	50–54	Marginally Passing
E	1	40–49	Marginally Failing
F	0	0–39	Failing

Course Schedule

Important Dates

Explore York University's [Registrar's Office](#) to find a list of important dates, including class start and end dates, drop deadlines, holidays and more.

Weekly Course Schedule

Week	Readings and Activities	Assessment Due Dates	Learning Outcomes
Week 1 Jan 4 & 6, 2027	WEEK 1 – What is Existentialism? Monday, January 4: Introduction to the course. What is Existentialism? <i>Existentialism</i>, 2nd ed., R. Solomon, Introduction, pages xi-xx. Wednesday, January 6: Situating Existentialism within the Philosophical Tradition. No reading.		Define the core tenets of existential philosophy, focusing on the central premise that "existence precedes essence." Trace and situate the historical and intellectual origins of existentialism within the broader Western philosophical tradition. Identify key existential themes that will frame this course, including freedom, responsibility, alienation, absurdism, and authenticity. Articulate how existentialist thinkers shift the primary focus of philosophy from abstract universal

Week	Readings and Activities	Assessment Due Dates	Learning Outcomes
			systems to concrete, lived human experience.
Week 2 Jan 11 & 13, 2027	WEEK 2 - The Leap into Existence: Kierkegaard on Anxiety, Faith, and the Individual. How can a human being live authentically and passionately as a true self in the face of anxiety, despair, and the demand for subjective faith? <i>Existentialism</i>, 2nd ed., R. Solomon, Kierkegaard, pages 3-33. Monday, January 11: Mass Society and the Lost Individual Wednesday, January 13: Anxiety, Faith, and the Absurd		Analyze Kierkegaard's concept of "the single individual" as the fundamental unit of authentic human existence. Explain the relationship between anxiety (<i>angst</i>) and human freedom in Kierkegaardian philosophy, distinguishing existential anxiety from fear of specific objects. Differentiate between Kierkegaard's three spheres of existence: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. Evaluate the concept of the

Week	Readings and Activities	Assessment Due Dates	Learning Outcomes
			"leap of faith" and how it navigates the paradoxes of despair (sickness unto death) and the limits of objective reason. Critique the role of subjective truth in living passionately and authentically compared to objective or institutional modes of thought. Apply Kierkegaardian frameworks of despair and authenticity to contemporary questions of identity, choice, and personal responsibility.
Week 3 Jan 18 & 20, 2027	WEEK 3 - God is Dead. Now What? Nietzsche's Problem and Solution. How can human beings create ultimate meaning and affirm life in a world without God or inherent moral truths? <i>Existentialism</i>, 2nd ed., R. Solomon, Nietzsche, pages 67-101.		Interpret Nietzsche's declaration that "God is dead" as a cultural and philosophical diagnosis rather than a simple

Week	Readings and Activities	Assessment Due Dates	Learning Outcomes
	Monday, January 18: Nietzsche's Challenge to Morality. Wednesday, January 20: Master vs. Slave Morality, and the Overman.		statement of atheism. Deconstruct the threat of passive nihilism and explain how the collapse of traditional moral and metaphysical frameworks challenges life-affirmation. Examine the concept of the "<i>Übermensch</i>" (Overman/Overhuman) as a proposed response to nihilism through self-overcoming and the active creation of new values. Contrast master morality with slave morality to evaluate Nietzsche's critique of traditional Judeo-Christian ethics. Critique the ideas of the Will to

Week	Readings and Activities	Assessment Due Dates	Learning Outcomes
			Power and the Eternal Recurrence as existential tests for affirming one's life unconditionally. Synthesize Nietzschean strategies for value creation with contemporary challenges of meaning-making in a secularized world.
Week 4 Jan 25 & 27, 2027	WEEK 4 - Dostoevsky's Paradox: Burden of Freedom or Living in the Matrix. Can human beings maintain moral meaning and genuine freedom without God, or are we destined either to collapse into destructive nihilism or surrender to a comfortable, engineered illusion over a painful, chaotic reality? Monday, January 25: The Red Pill Rebel, the Underground Man as the Glitch in the System. <i>Existentialism</i>, 2nd ed., R. Solomon, Dostoevsky, "Notes from Underground," pages 38-47. Wednesday, January 27: The Grand Inquisitor as the Architect of the Matrix, the Blue Pill Mandate.		Analyze Dostoevsky's critique of rationalism and utilitarianism through the voice of the Underground Man in <i>Notes from Underground</i>. Evaluate the conflict between human freedom and social engineering, comparing the Underground Man's desire for

Week	Readings and Activities	Assessment Due Dates	Learning Outcomes
	<i>Existentialism</i>, 2nd ed., R. Solomon, Dostoevsky, "The Grand Inquisitor," pages 48-64.		radical autonomy with modern concepts of systematic control (e.g., in the film, "<i>The Matrix</i>"). Examine "The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor" from <i>The Brothers Karamazov</i> to contrast the psychological burden of absolute freedom with the security of total authority. Distinguish between active, destructive nihilism and authentic moral freedom in the absence of absolute divine foundation. Critique the idea of irrational action as an assertion of free will against deterministic systems and hyper-rational social models.

Week	Readings and Activities	Assessment Due Dates	Learning Outcomes
			Synthesize Dostoevsky's existential psychological insights with contemporary ethical debates surrounding comfort, agency, and truth versus pleasing illusions.
Week 5 Feb 1 & 3, 2027	WEEK 5 – Being, Time, and the Ground of Human Existence: Heidegger and the Question of Being. What is the meaning of Being? How do human beings experience existence? Does acknowledging our ultimate mortality paralyze us, or is it the prerequisite for living an authentic life? Monday, February 1: Dasein, Being-in-the-world, "The They," falling, inauthenticity vs. authenticity. <i>Existentialism</i>, 2nd ed., R. Solomon, Heidegger, pages 117-138. Wednesday, February 3: Being-towards-death, Anxiety vs. Fear, Nothingness, and Resoluteness. <i>Existentialism</i>, 2nd ed., R. Solomon, Heidegger, pages 139-152.		Define Martin Heidegger's concept of <i>Dasein</i> as a distinct mode of human "Being-in-the-world" rather than a traditional subject-object entity. Deconstruct the influence of "The They" and "falling" on everyday, inauthentic existence. Distinguish between fear as a response to specific world entities and existential anxiety

Week	Readings and Activities	Assessment Due Dates	Learning Outcomes
			(<i>Angst</i>) as an encounter with the groundlessness of Nothingness. Analyze “Being-towards-death” (<i>Sein-zum-Tode</i>) as an essential structure for confronting mortality and grasping the finitude of human existence. Evaluate the role of “Resoluteness” in transitioning from inauthentic conformity to an authentic, self-chosen life. Evaluate how temporal awareness and mortality shape human agency and decision-making in Heidegger’s existential ontology.
Week 6	WEEK 6 – Condemned to be Free: Sartre’s No-Excuses Philosophy		Explain and deconstruct

Week	Readings and Activities	Assessment Due Dates	Learning Outcomes
Feb 8 & 10, 2027	If I am radically free to invent myself with no pre-written purpose, how will I choose to live? If human beings are not born with a pre-determined nature, how do we create who we are through our choices? <i>Existentialism</i>, 2nd ed., R. Solomon, Sartre, pages 206-270. Monday, February 8: “Existence precedes essence,” absolute radical freedom, anguish, responsibility, facticity, and nothingness. Bad Faith, self-deception, The Other, The Look, and intersubjective conflict. MIDTERM TEST ON WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2027: In-person during class time in the usual classroom, Founders College, room 106.		Sartre’s dictum “existence precedes essence,” explaining how human beings lack a predetermined purpose and must construct identity through action. Examine the relationship between radical human freedom, radical responsibility, and the resulting experience of existential anguish. Analyze the tension between “facticity” (the unchosen facts of one's situation) and “transcendence” (the ability to project oneself beyond those facts through choice). Identify instances of “Bad Faith” as

Week	Readings and Activities	Assessment Due Dates	Learning Outcomes
			mechanisms of self-deception designed to deny human freedom or escape personal responsibility. Evaluate the psychological and relational impact of “The Look” of “The Other” in shaping self-consciousness and intersubjective conflict. Apply Sartrean ethical principles to real-world dilemmas to demonstrate how individuals make authentic choices without reliance on external moral systems.
Week 7 Feb 22 & 24, 2027	WEEK 7 – Confronting an Absurd Universe: Camus’ Rebellion in an Absurd World. How should a human being live in a world and universe that is completely devoid of inherent meaning? How do we find joy and meaning in a universe that is completely silent and indifferent to our existence?		Define Camus’ concept of “the Absurd” as the fundamental conflict between the human desire for inherent meaning and the

Week	Readings and Activities	Assessment Due Dates	Learning Outcomes
	<i>Existentialism</i>, 2nd ed., R. Solomon, Camus, pages 184-202. Monday, February 22: The Stranger, The Absurd, and Philosophical vs. physical suicide. Wednesday, February 24: The Absurd Hero, Revolt, Living without Appeal and the Illusion of Innocence and “The Fall.”		silent, indifferent universe. Distinguish between physical suicide and “philosophical suicide” (evading the Absurd through leap-of-faith illusions or transcendent hopes), and authentic acceptance of the Absurd. Examine Camus' concept of “revolt” as a refusal to surrender to despair while living fully without appeal to external meaning or absolute truths. Analyze the Myth of Sisyphus as the archetype of the “Absurd Hero,” evaluating how consciousness and scorn turn a meaningless task into a victory of human dignity.

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			Critique the themes of alienation, emotional detachment, and the illusion of human innocence through the lens of Meursault in <i>The Stranger</i>. Explain and evaluate Camus' strategies for life-affirmation, joy, and freedom to address contemporary experiences of meaninglessness and existential dread.
Week 8 Mar 1 & 3, 2027	WEEK 8 – Ambiguity and Feminist Existentialism: Freedom is always lived within a concrete social reality. If a human being's existence precedes their essence, how can women achieve authentic freedom when society systematically forces them into the status of the "Other"? Monday, March 1: Simone de Beauvoir's original, theoretical foundation for feminist existentialism, a structural critique of patriarchy. <i>Existentialism</i>, 2nd ed., R. Solomon, Simone de Beauvoir, pages 292-307.		Analyze Simone de Beauvoir's central premise that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," demonstrating how social construction shapes female identity and essence.

Week	Readings and Activities	Assessment Due Dates	Learning Outcomes
	Wednesday, March 3: Hazel E. Barnes's expanded, translated, and defended humanistic existentialism in America, a refined existential ethics focusing on constructive human relationships, education, and "good faith." <i>Existentialism</i>, 2nd ed., R. Solomon, Hazel E. Barnes, pages 308-317. WRITING SCAFFOLDING FOR ESSAY DUE WEDNESDAY, MARCH 3, 2027, MIDNIGHT: Submitted to eClass via a Turnitin submission link.		Deconstruct the socio-philosophical mechanisms that cast women as "the Other" while positioning men as the absolute Subject, restricting authentic female agency. Evaluate de Beauvoir's Ethics of Ambiguity, explaining how individual freedom is inherently interdependent and requires liberation within concrete, social realities. Examine Barnes's role in translating and expanding existentialism, focusing on her humanistic framework of "good faith" in interpersonal relationships and education.

Week	Readings and Activities	Assessment Due Dates	Learning Outcomes
			Contrast abstract existential freedom (radical choice) with situated existential freedom, taking into account systemic oppression, structural patriarchy, and material constraints. Apply feminist existentialist ethics to evaluate contemporary social movements and debates surrounding gender, equity, and personal autonomy.
Week 9 Mar 8 & 10, 2027	WEEK 9 – Embodiment and Genuine Connection. How does our lived, bodily perception shape the way we inhabit, understand, and connect with the world? How do we relate to the world, by encountering others as whole, sacred beings, or by reducing them to objects for use? How can a human being find the courage to affirm life when faced with the radical anxiety of non-being? <i>Existentialism</i>, 2nd ed., R. Solomon, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, pages 273-290. Martin Buber, pages 319-329. Paul Tillich, pages 331-337.		Examine Merleau-Ponty's concept of the "lived-body" and the "body schema" to explain how consciousness is rooted in bodily perception rather than abstract cognition.

Week	Readings and Activities	Assessment Due Dates	Learning Outcomes
	Monday, March 8: The Lived-Body, the Primacy of Perception, the Body Schema, consciousness as fundamentally embodied action, and carnal intersubjectivity. Wednesday, March 10: I-it vs. I-Thou relationships and overcoming existential isolation.		Deconstruct Merleau-Ponty's theory of "carnal intersubjectivity," demonstrating how physical embodiment forms the foundation for shared human experiences and connections. Differentiate between Buber's "I-It" relationship (objectifying, functional interactions) and the "I-Thou" relationship (reciprocal, sacred encounters). Evaluate Buber's framework for overcoming existential isolation through genuine dialogical encounters with other human beings and the world. Analyze Tillich's concept of the

Week	Readings and Activities	Assessment Due Dates	Learning Outcomes
			“courage to be” as a response to the threat of non-being and the anxiety of ultimate meaninglessness. Synthesize embodied and relational existential perspectives to evaluate how physical presence and authentic connection shape contemporary human relationships.
Week 10 Mar 15 & 17, 2027	WEEK 10 – Black Existential Philosophy: Oppression and Recognition. What does it mean to be human in a world that denies your humanity? “How does it feel to be a problem?” (W.E.B. Du Bois, <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i>, 1903) Monday, March 15: Wednesday, March 17: Guest speaker TBD.		Analyze W.E.B. Du Bois’s concepts of “double-consciousness” and “the Veil” to explain the psychological and social impacts of living in a racially oppressive society. Deconstruct the existential dimension of Du Bois’s question, “How does it feel

Week	Readings and Activities	Assessment Due Dates	Learning Outcomes
			to be a problem?", focusing on how racial anti-blackness imposes an unnatural essence on Black human existence. Examine Frantz Fanon's critique of Sartrean recognition, demonstrating how colonialism and white supremacy disrupt traditional dialectics of self and Other. Evaluate the ways Black existential thinkers adapt foundational existential concepts—such as radical freedom, alienation, facticity, and authenticity—to concrete racial realities. Contrast abstract, individualistic formulations of

Week	Readings and Activities	Assessment Due Dates	Learning Outcomes
			existential freedom with Black existential perspectives grounded in collective struggle, liberation, and systemic resistance. Apply Black existential frameworks to contemporary discussions regarding racial identity, systemic oppression, and the reclamation of human agency.
Week 11 Mar 22 & 24, 2027	WEEK 11 – Experiencing Existentialism through Poetry and Spoken Word. How do poetry and spoken word performance capture the emotional, embodied reality of existential themes—such as anguish, freedom, absurdity, and isolation—where traditional academic prose falls short? Can the artistic act of writing or performing poetry serve as a vehicle for authentic self-invention, existential rebellion, and personal truth? How does voice, rhythm, and cadence bridge individual interiority with collective experience to cultivate intersubjective connection? Monday, March 22:		Analyze how poetic devices (imagery, meter, metaphor, voice) are utilized to express core existential concepts such as dread, freedom, and the absurd. Explore and witness the distinct capacity of spoken word and performance

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	Readings to be announced and posted to the eClass course site. Wednesday, March 24: Guest Speakers who will be facilitating this class are: 1. Britta Badour https://brittab.com/bio https://www.penguinrandomhouse.ca/authors/2275228/britta-badour 2. Stuart Ross https://writersunion.ca/member/stuart-ross https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stuart_Ross_(writer)		poetry to embody lived experience and carnal intersubjectivity compared to theoretical prose. Witness and explore artistic creation and poetic expression as modes of existential revolt, authenticity, and value creation. Compare some of the literary strategies of existential poets (e.g., Rainer Maria Rilke, Audre Lorde, Langston Hughes, or Fernando Pessoa) across different historical and cultural contexts. Evaluate the role of public performance in confronting existential isolation and creating shared, intersubjective

Week	Readings and Activities	Assessment Due Dates	Learning Outcomes
			meaning within a community.
Week 12 Mar 29 & 31, 2027	WEEK 12 – Indigenous Existential Philosophy: Indigenous ontologies, land-based relationships, and colonial history. How do I live authentically, fulfill my responsibilities, and maintain balance within a living, relational cosmos, especially under the weight of ongoing colonial oppression? Monday, March 29: Relationality Precedes Essence vs. Existence Precedes Essence, The Land as the Anchor of Being, Colonial Dread and Existential Dispossession, and Freedom as Responsibility (Not Isolation). Wednesday, March 31: Readings to be announced and posted to the eClass course site. Wednesday, March 31: Guest Speaker will be facilitating this class to be announced. ESSAY DUE ON WEDNESDAY, MARCH 31, 2027 BEFORE MIDNIGHT: Submit to eClass via a Turnitin submission link.		Analyze Indigenous existential frameworks that ground human existence within relational, land-based ontologies rather than individualistic, human-centered paradigms. Examine how ongoing colonial history and systemic oppression disrupt relational balance, language, and ancestral connections to generate distinct forms of existential anxiety and alienation. Contrast Western notions of existential freedom (radical individual choice) with Indigenous

Week	Readings and Activities	Assessment Due Dates	Learning Outcomes
			principles of relational freedom, which define agency through responsibility to ancestors, community, and the non-human world. Evaluate the concept of living authentically (“living well” / relational balance) as a continuous practice of honoring ancestral duties and preserving cultural integrity against assimilationist pressures. Explain land-based practices and cultural reclamation as vital modes of existential resistance, decolonization, and life-affirmation.

Week	Readings and Activities	Assessment Due Dates	Learning Outcomes
			Contrast and compare Indigenous relational ethics with traditional existential concepts to expand understandings of identity, place, agency, and human purpose.
Week 13 Apr 5, 2027 Location	WEEK 13 – Debriefing of the Course & Exam Review. How might I process the psychological and emotional impacts of engaging with intense existential themes (such as despair, mortality, and groundlessness) throughout this course? What is the practical relevance of existential philosophy as an active, ongoing toolkit for navigating personal identity, ethical decision-making, and agency in daily life? What is the structural layout of the final exam? What content will be on the final exam? What is the evaluation criteria (grading rubric) for the final exam? What are some effective strategies for reviewing primary sources and synthesizing course concepts and arguments? Monday, April 5: No Reading.		Reflect on personal intellectual growth throughout the term, processing the psychological and emotional impacts of engaging with intense existential themes (such as despair, mortality, and groundlessness). Evaluate the practical relevance of existential philosophy as an active, ongoing toolkit for navigating personal identity,

Week	Readings and Activities	Assessment Due Dates	Learning Outcomes
			ethical decision-making, and agency in daily life. Identify the structural layout, core themes, and evaluation criteria of the final exam, alongside effective strategies for reviewing primary sources and synthesizing course concepts. Outline the specific formats, key theoretical topics, and expectations of the final examination to develop a targeted study plan.

Course Policies

Please review the course policies in this section. All students are expected to familiarize themselves with the following information:

- [Student Rights & Responsibilities](#)
- [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#)

Academic Integrity and Conduct

Academic integrity is a fundamental and important value of York University. To maintain a fair and honest learning environment, students are responsible for understanding and upholding standards of academic integrity in all courses and academic activities. Students are encouraged to use reliable [on-campus resources](#) that support coursework and academic honesty. To better understand the serious consequences of academic misconduct, review the [Senate Policy on Academic Conduct](#).

Recording Policy

Students do not have permission to record or distribute recordings of the lectures and class discussion.

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI)

Students are not permitted to use generative artificial intelligence (AI) in this course. Submitting any work created, in whole or part, using generative AI tools will be considered a violation of York University's [Senate Policy on Academic Conduct](#). The use of AI tools, such as Microsoft Copilot, ChatGPT, DALL-E, translation software or similar applications, to complete academic work **without the knowledge or permission of the instructor** is considered a breach under York's Academic Conduct Policy. For more information, review [AI Technology & Academic Integrity: Information for Students](#).

If you are unsure whether the use of an AI tool for your academic work is permitted:

- Carefully review the assessment guidelines
- Check for any messages from the course instructor on eClass
- Consult with the instructor before using these tools

Accessibility

York University is committed to creating a learning environment which provides equal opportunity to all members of its community. If you anticipate or experience any barriers to learning in this course, please discuss your concerns with your instructor as early as possible. For students with disabilities, contact [Student Accessibility Services](#) to coordinate academic accommodations and services. Accommodations will be communicated to course directors through a Letter of Accommodation (LOA). Requests for test and/or exam accommodations normally require three (3) weeks or 21 days before the scheduled test or exam to allow for appropriate arrangements. To learn more, visit [Accommodated Exam/Test Scheduling](#).

Academic Consideration for Missed Course Work

This policy applies to course assessments worth 20% or less of your overall course grade and does not apply to exams held during the final examination period. Students may self-declare two (2) 7-day consideration periods each 12-week term and one (1) 7-day consideration period per six (6)-week term. An Attending Physician's Statement (APS) is not required for

these self-declared absences. However, an instructor may request a signed APS for the final examination period, coursework worth more than 20% of the course grade and missed work outside of the self-declared academic consideration period(s).

Students can submit their self-declaration(s) for academic consideration [using eClass](#). Students are then responsible for contacting the instructor no later than two (2) business days after the end of the consideration period(s) to arrange details of any accommodation for missed coursework. If you do not do this, you may get a zero (0) on the missed work. Where courses have built-in accommodations already established, the instructor may decline providing additional accommodations under this policy. For further details, please review the [Policy on Academic Consideration for Missed Course Work](#).

Religious Observance Accommodation

York University is committed to respecting the religious beliefs and practices of all members of the community and to making reasonable and appropriate [accommodations for days of religious significance](#). If any of the dates listed in this course outline for assignments, tests or deadlines conflict with a day of religious significance, students should contact the instructor at least two (2) weeks, or 14 days, before the relevant deadline.

If the accommodation request relates to an exam or falls within the formal examination period, students must complete and submit the [Religious Accommodation Agreement \(PDF\)](#) at least three (3) weeks, or 21 days, before the start of the exam period.

Intellectual Property

Course materials are designed for use as part of this specific course at York University and are the intellectual property of the instructor, unless otherwise stated. Third-party copyrighted materials, including book chapters, journal articles, music and videos, have either been licensed for use in this course or are used under an exception or limitation permitted by Canadian copyright law.

Students may not publish, post to an internet site, sell, or otherwise distribute any course materials or work without the instructor's express permission. Course materials should only be used by students enrolled in this course.

Copying or distributing this material, such as uploading content to a commercial third-party website, may result in a charge of misconduct under York's [Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities](#), the [Senate Policy on Academic Conduct](#), and/or legal consequences for copyright violations.

Final Examination Identification Policy

For final exams in this course, students must present a valid York University official photo identification card ([YU-card](#)) to verify their identity and sign the examination attendance roster.

Students are encouraged to prepare for exams by reviewing York's Policies on the [Conduct of Examinations](#) and the Registrar's Office [Examination Tip Sheet](#).

Turnitin

To promote academic integrity in this course, students will normally be required to submit written assignments to Turnitin through the course's eClass site for a review of textual similarity and the detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students consent to their material being included as source documents in the Turnitin reference database, where it will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of the Turnitin service are available on the [Turnitin website](#). Students may opt out of using Turnitin. Those who wish to opt out, should contact the instructor as soon as possible.

Student Support and Resources

York University offers a wide range of student support resources and services, including writing workshops, peer mentorship, wellness support and career guidance. Explore the links below to access these on-campus resources:

- [Academic Advising](#) provides support and guidance to students in making academic decisions and goals.
- [Student Accessibility Services](#) offers support and accessibility accommodations, as required.
- [Student Counselling, Health & Wellbeing](#) provides resources and counselling to support personal wellness and academic success.
- [Peer-Assisted Study Sessions \(PASS\) Program](#) and [Student Numeracy Assistance Centre at Keele \(SNACK\)](#) offer free study sessions and academic supports that enable students to collaborate and enhance their understanding of course content in select courses.
- [The Writing Centre](#) offers drop-in sessions, one-to-one appointments, a Multilingual Studio and access to an accessibility specialist.
- [Centre for Indigenous Student Services](#) provides a community space with academic, spiritual, cultural and physical support, including writing and learning skills programs.
- [ESL Open Learning Centre \(OLC\)](#) supports students in developing English language skills, including reading, writing and speaking.
- [Roadmap to Student Success](#) is a collection of timely and targeted resources to help students achieve academic, personal and professional success at different stages of their university journey.
- [Office of Student Community Relations \(OSCR\)](#) administers the [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](#) and provides critical incident and conflict resolution support.
- [goSAFE](#) is staffed by York students and provides escorted accompaniment for members of the York community to and from any on-campus locations, including the parking lots, bus stops or residences.

For a full list of academic, wellness and campus resources visit [Student Support & Resources](#).