



LIECHTENSTEIN INSTITUTE
ON SELF-DETERMINATION
AT PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

Reading Nietzsche in Jerusalem: Existentialism & Nationalism

LISD seminar, Spring 2015

Uriel Abulof

If I am not for myself, who is for me?
And being for my own self, what am I?
And if not now, when?
Hillel the Elder, *Pirke Avot* I.14

What sets us apart, and bring us together, as humans? Is there meaning to our life, and death? Are we free? Once leading our quest for wisdom, such questions are rarely asked in contemporary academia. This LISD seminar seeks to bring existentialism back to the fore, and examines how it shapes modern politics, taking Zionism as a comparable case.

Our challenge is threefold. First, we aim to grasp existentialism, an age-old movement that probes the mortal human's search for meaning in a meaningless universe. Ascending in the wake of World War II, existentialism then descended in both media and academia, its key features deemed disturbing. A philosophy of concrete lived experience, existentialism flies in the face of dispassionate scholarship. Heralding personal, authentic choice, existentialism modeled itself a lighthouse, not an ivory tower. Stressing meaning-seeking agency—rather than material rationality, unconscious emotions, social identities, and innate biology—existentialism defies the presumptions of many economists, psychologists, sociologists and socio-biologists. Disagreements among leading existentialists precluded the construction of a clear-cut and coherent “ism.” Finally, many saw the existential call to fuse philosophy and art as too audacious. Against the backdrop of such concerns, our seminar seeks to hone the lens of existentialism into a microscope that can examine the details of individual life, a telescope to observe social dynamics and a kaleidoscope to enrich our innermost insights.

Second, we aim to probe the relevance of existentialism to politics. While existentialism figures very little in political science, the concerns of existentialism are also its key assets in the study of politics. Attentive to changes in our socio-political world, existentialism reveals human as mortal and moral agents, free to choose their political path. That existentialism writ-large became the common ground for such a diverse group of thinkers as Arendt, Buber, Camus, Dostoevsky, Heidegger, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Sartre, both attests to its vitality and to its potential relevance to many, perhaps most, people and their politics. Unlike many contemporary philosophies, it is not necessarily western or liberal. It can speak to both Greenpeace supporters and ISIS activists. Finally, existentialist art, especially literature, makes it more accessible to social actors beyond the confines of seminars in philosophy. It directly addresses—and challenges—this world.

Third, in charting the merits and limitations of “political existentialism,” our seminar seeks to examine its relevance to nationalism and to the case of Zionism in comparative perspective. If nationalism is but one existential project, how does it relate to others? Since existentialism underscores the individual’s sense of morality and quest for moral meaning, can the same be said of nations? Can the nation construct and construe a “public conscience” to guide its politics? The case of Zionism is especially illuminating, with numerous inroads, both personal and ideational. Ecclesiastes (Koheleth), the first known existentialist, is Jewish (supposedly King Solomon). Key existentialists such as Nietzsche and Camus have exerted a vast influence on Zionists, early and late; some, such as Kafka and Buber, were attracted to Zionism; others, Arendt for example, opposed it. Existentialist insights can likewise teach us much about Zionism: its emergence, immersion in existential fears, search for a moral ground, and ongoing debate with its existential alternatives (e.g. Diaspora).

This is an ambitious seminar, and in the limited time we have, we cannot attain complete answers. But we can try to better understand existentialism, its politics, and its resonance with nationalism and Zionism. To this end, the list below presents twelve themes around which we shall conduct our weekly meetings, each with two key readings, both fiction and philosophy. All items are accessible in the library, or online, and I will also send you brief excerpts before each meeting. We shall also watch a few films (or segments thereof) from the following list. The syllabus concludes with a bibliography for additional reading. On Zionism and comparable cases, we will also draw on my forthcoming book, *The Mortality and Morality of Nations* (Cambridge University Press).

Much depends on you, the seminar participants. Think of works of art and philosophy that have helped you become who you are today. Feel free to suggest them as reading material and share your thoughts about them. The outline and reading below are just anchors, not set in stone, and are ultimately open to our own, free, choice.

The seminar is open to all Princeton students and faculty.

It runs weekly, Tuesdays 6pm, at 012 Bendheim Hall. For details, see lisd.princeton.edu.

Attending the first meeting (February 3) does not require registration.

However, since space is limited, early registration for the whole seminar will be given priority
(please RSVP to matheney@princeton.edu).

Co-sponsored by the Department of Near Eastern Studies

Themes & Basic Reading

- I. Meaning
Ecclesiastes (Koheleth), *The Bible*
Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942)
- II. Death
J.D. Salinger, *A Perfect Day for Bananafish* (1948)
Stephen King, *All That You Love Will Be Carried Away* (2001)
- III. God
Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* and *The Sickness Unto Death* (1843)
Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884).
- IV. Individuality
Miguel De Cervantes, *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha* (1605).
Paul Auster, *City of Glass* (1985).
- V. Authenticity
Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1891)
Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (1927)
- VI. Good & Evil
Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886); *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887)
Mark Twain, *The Mysterious Stranger* (1900)
- VII. Reflection
Albert Camus, *The Stranger* (1942)
Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963)
- VIII. Freedom
Fyodor Dostoevsky, “Grand Inquisitor” from *Brothers Karamazov* (1880)
Paul Auster, *The Music of Chance* (1990)
- IX. Autonomy
Henry David Thoreau, *Resistance to Civil Government* (1849)
Franz Kafka, “Before the Law” from *The Trial* (1915); and *In the Penal Colony* (1919)
- X. Truth & Efficacy
George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949)
Vaclav Havel, *The Power of the Powerless* (1978)

XI. Responsibility
Plato, Socrates's *Dialogue with Crito* (399 BC)
Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism* (1946)

XII. Solidarity
Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (1923)
Albert Camus, *The Rebel* (1951)

Films

Ingmar Bergman, *Wild Strawberries* (1957), *The Seventh Seal* (1957)
Stanley Kubrick, *Paths of Glory* (1957), *A Clockwork Orange* (1971)
Agnès Varda, *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1962)
Milos Forman, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975)
Andrei Tarkovsky, *Stalker* (1979)
Terry Jones, *Monty Python's The Meaning of Life* (1983)
Wolfgang Petersen, *The Neverending Story* (1984)
Woody Allen, *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (1989), *Deconstructing Harry* (1997)
James Toback, *The Big Bang* (1990), *Two Girls and a Guy* (1998)
Assi Dayan, *Life According to Agfa* (1992), *Dr. Pomerantz* (2013)
Richard Linklater, *Before Sunrise* (1995), *Waking Life* (2001)
Adam Curtis, *Century of the Self* (2002)
Patrick Shen and Peter Shen, *Flight From Death: The Quest for Immortality* (2003)
David O. Russell, *I ♥ Huckabees* (2004)
Michel Gondry, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004)
Alfonso Cuarón, *Children of Men* (2006)
Sophie Fiennes and Slavov Zizek, *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema* (2006)
Kenneth Lonergan, *Margaret* (2011)
Werner Herzog, *Into the Abyss* (2011)
Marco Bellocchio, *Dormant Beauty* (2014)
Ari Folman, *The Congress* (2014)

Bibliography

Textbooks & Anthologies

- Crowell, Steven Galt, ed. (2012) *The Cambridge Companion to Existentialism*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Flynn, Thomas R. (2006) *Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Joseph, Felicity, Ashley Woodward, and Jack Reynolds, eds. (2011) *The Continuum Companion to Existentialism*. New York: Continuum.
- Kaufmann, Walter Arnold, ed. (1960) *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*. New York: Meridian Books.
- Luper, Steven (2000) *Existing: An Introduction to Existential Thought*. Mountain View, Calif.: Mayfield Pub.
- Marino, Gordon Daniel, ed. (2004) *Basic Writings of Existentialism, Modern Library Classics*. New York: Modern Library.
- Solomon, Robert C. (1987) *From Hegel to Existentialism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Solomon, Robert C., ed. (2005) *Existentialism*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Tymieniecka, Anna-Teresa, ed. (2010) *Phenomenology and Existentialism in the Twentieth Century (Book I, Ii, Iii)*. New York: Springer.

Thinkers

- Benhabib, Seyla, ed. (2010) *Politics in Dark Times: Encounters with Hannah Arendt*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Carveth, Donald L. (2004) The Melancholic Existentialism of Ernest Becker. *Free Associations* 11 (59):422-429.
- Craib, Ian (1976) *Existentialism and Sociology: A Study of Jean-Paul Sartre*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Friedman, Maurice. (2011) "Buber, Heschel, and Heidegger: Two Jewish Existentialists Confront a Great German Existentialist." *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 51 (1):129-134.
- Jaspers, Karl (1971) *Philosophy of Existence*. Works in Continental Philosophy. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul, and Stephen Priest (2001) *Jean-Paul Sartre: Basic Writings*. New York: Routledge.
- Solomon, Robert C. (2006) *Dark Feelings, Grim Thoughts: Experience and Reflection in Camus and Sartre*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Unamuno, Miguel De, Anthony Kerrigan, and Martin Nozick (1977) *The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and Nations*. Selected Works of Miguel De Unamuno. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Meaning

Frankl, Viktor E. (1984 [1946]) *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy*. 3rd ed. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Holt, Jim (2012) *Why Does the World Exist?: An Existential Detective Story*. New York: Liveright Pub. Corp.

Kegan, Robert (1982) *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Kegan, Robert (1994) *In over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Strenger, Carlo (2011) *The Fear of Insignificance: Searching for Meaning in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Tillich, Paul (2014 [1952]) *The Courage to Be*. 3rd ed. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Existential Sociology

Douglas, Jack D., and John M. Johnson, eds. (1977) *Existential Sociology*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Hayim, Gila J. (1996) *Existentialism & Sociology: The Contribution of Jean-Paul Sartre*. New Brunswick, U.S.A.: Transaction Publishers.

Kotarba, Joseph A., and Andrea Fontana, eds. (1984) *The Existential Self in Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kotarba, Joseph A., and John M. Johnson, eds. (2002) *Postmodern Existential Sociology*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

Manning, Peter K. (1973) Existential Sociology. *The Sociological Quarterly* 14 (2):200-225.

Miller, Jim (1979) *History and Human Existence: From Marx to Merleau-Ponty*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Existential Psychology

Greenberg, Jeff, Sander Leon Koole, and Thomas A. Pyszczynski (2004) *Handbook of Experimental Existential Psychology*. New York: Guilford Press.

Martin, Jack (2013) Revisiting Ernest Becker's Psychology of Human Striving. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 53 (2):131-152.

Scott, Brandon G., and Carl F. Weems (2013) Natural Disasters and Existential Concerns: A Test of Tillich's Theory of Existential Anxiety. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 53 (1):114-128.

- Shaver, Phillip R., and Mario Mikulincer, eds. (2012). *Meaning, Mortality, and Choice: The Social Psychology of Existential Concerns*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Sherman, David (2012) Between Existentialism and the Human Sciences: Solomon's Cognitive Theory of the Emotions. In *Passion, Death, and Spirituality*, edited by Kathleen Higgins and David Sherman, pp. 23-36: Springer Netherlands.
- Shumaker, David (2012) An Existential–Integrative Treatment of Anxious and Depressed Adolescents. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 52 (4):375-400.
- Steinbock, Anthony J. (2014) *Moral Emotions: Reclaiming the Evidence of the Heart*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.

Mortality

- Becker, Ernest (1973) *The Denial of Death*. New York: Free Press.
- Berman, Stevenl, Carl Weems, and Timothy Stickle (2006) Existential Anxiety in Adolescents: Prevalence, Structure, Association with Psychological Symptoms and Identity Development. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 35 (3):285-292.
- Goldenberg, Jamie L., Tom Pyszczynski, Jeff Greenberg, Sheldon Solomon, Benjamin Kluck, and Robin Cornwell (2001). "I Am Not an Animal: Mortality Salience, Disgust, and the Denial of Human Creatureliness." *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 130 (3):427-435.
- Gray, J. Glenn (1951) "The Idea of Death in Existentialism." *The Journal of Philosophy* 48 (5):113-127.
- Jonas, Hans (1992) The Burden and Blessing of Mortality. *The Hastings Center Report* 22 (1):34-40.
- Slote, Michael A. (1975) Existentialism and the Fear of Dying. *American Philosophical Quarterly* 12 (1):17-28.

Morality

- Bauman, Zygmunt (1998) What Prospects of Morality in Times of Uncertainty? *Theory, Culture & Society* 15 (1):11-22.
- Becker, Ernest (1975) *Escape from Evil*. New York: Free Press.
- Castano, Emanuele, Bernhard Leidner, Alain Bonacossa, John Nikkah, Rachel Perrulli, Bettina Spencer, and Nicholas Humphrey (2011) Ideology, Fear of Death, and Death Anxiety. *Political Psychology* 32 (4):601-621.
- Cotkin, George (2010) *Morality's Muddy Waters: Ethical Quandaries in Modern America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Jonas, Hans, and Lawrence Vogel (1996) *Mortality and Morality: A Search for the Good after Auschwitz*. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press.
- Murdoch, Iris, and Peter J. Conradi (1998) *Existentialists and Mystics : Writings on Philosophy and Literature*. New York: Allen Lane/The Penguin Press.

Autonomy and Authenticity

- Aboulafia, Mitchell (2010) *Transcendence: On Self-Determination and Cosmopolitanism*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.
- Castoriadis, Cornelius (1991) *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Fromm, Erich (1941) *Escape from Freedom*. New York: Farrar & Rinehart.
- Golomb, Jacob (1995) *In Search of Authenticity: From Kierkegaard to Camus*. Problems of Modern European Thought. London ; New York: Routledge.
- Tillich, Paul (2014 [1952]) *The Courage to Be*. 3rd ed. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Welzel, Christian (2013) *Freedom Rising: Human Empowerment and the Quest for Emancipation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Art

- Kaufmann, Walter Arnold (1980) *From Shakespeare to Existentialism: An Original Study: Essays on Shakespeare and Goethe, Hegel and Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Freud, Jaspers, Heidegger, and Toynbee*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Oberman, Warren (2004) Existentialism Meets Postmodernism in Paul Auster's *The Music of Chance*. *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 45 (2):191-206.
- Rickman, H. P. (1996) *Philosophy in Literature*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, pp. 129-172.

Political Existentialism

- Levi, Albert William (1962) The Meaning of Existentialism for Contemporary International Relations. *Ethics* 72 (4):233-251.
- Whiteside, Kerry H. (1988) *Merleau-Ponty and the Foundation of an Existential Politics*. Studies in Moral, Political, and Legal Philosophy. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Wolin, Richard (1990) Carl Schmitt, Political Existentialism, and the Total State. *Theory and Society* 19 (4):389-416.

Nationalism

- Breuilly, John, ed. (2013) *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Nationalism, Oxford Handbooks in History*. Corby: Oxford University Press.
- Brown, Michael E., Owen R. Coté, Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Steven E. Miller, eds. (2001) *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict*. Rev. ed, *International Security Readers*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Conversi, Daniele, ed. (2002) *Ethnonationalism in the Contemporary World: Walker Connor and the Study of Nationalism*. New York: Routledge.

- Delanty, Gerard, and Krishan Kumar, eds. (2006) *The Sage Handbook of Nations and Nationalism*. London: SAGE.
- Gat, Azar, and Alexander Yakobson (2013) *Nations: The Long History and Deep Roots of Political Ethnicity and Nationalism*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Herb, Guntram Henrik, and David H. Kaplan, eds. (2008) *Nations and Nationalism: A Global Historical Overview*. 4 vols. Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO.
- Hutchinson, John, and Anthony D. Smith, eds. (1994) *Nationalism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wimmer, Andreas (2013) *Waves of War: Nationalism, State Formation, and Ethnic Exclusion in the Modern World*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Cases (Zionism and beyond)*
- Barak, Oren, and Gabriel Sheffer, eds. (2009) *Existential Threats and Civil-Security Relations*. Lanham: Lexington Books.
- David, Steven R (2012) "Existential Threats to Israel: Learning from the Ancient Past." *Israel Affairs* 18 (4):503-525.
- Di-Capua, Yoav (2012) "Arab Existentialism: An Invisible Chapter in the Intellectual History of Decolonization." *The American Historical Review* 117 (4):1061-1091.
- Gibbs, Scott (2005) Islam and Islamic Extremism: An Existential Analysis. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 45 (2):156-203.
- Golomb, Jacob (2004) *Nietzsche and Zion*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Kelman, Herbert C. (1999) The Interdependence of Israeli and Palestinian National Identities: The Role of the Other in Existential Conflicts. *Journal of Social Issues* 55 (3):581-600.
- Malksoo, Maria (2006) From Existential Politics Towards Normal Politics? The Baltic States in the Enlarged Europe. *Security Dialogue* 37 (3):275-297.
- Manners, Ian (2002) *European [Security] Union: From Existential Threat to Ontological Security*. Copenhagen: Copenhagen Peace Research Institute Working Papers.
- Methmann, Chris, and Delf Rothe (2012) Politics for the Day after Tomorrow: The Logic of Apocalypse in Global Climate Politics. *Security Dialogue* 43 (4):323-344.
- Russell, Gerard (2014) *Heirs to Forgotten Kingdoms: Journeys into the Disappearing Religions of the Middle East*. New York: Basic Books.
- Sherwin, Byron L. (2009) *Faith Finding Meaning: A Theology of Judaism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.