EXISTENTIALISM

Course Overview
Existentialism focuses on philosophical questions regarding human existence in light of the lack of ultimate foundations or last principles we could rely on. Existentialism raises these questions internally, i.e. with respect to how we find ourselves questioning who we are, how to understand our individuality in light of social dependency; how to make choices; how to live with others; how to overcome fears; how to find freedom and be able to affirm life in spite of its groundlessness.
This course addresses these questions by taking recourse to classical philosophical texts that don’t cease to bewilder and inspire their readers. We begin with text passages from Kierkegaard’s Fear and Trembling that raise questions concerning the limits between ethics and faith, societal norms and individual beliefs. (Kierkegaard lived 1813-1855.) Next we read Book V of Nietzsche’s Gay Science, which begins with reflections on consequences of what he calls the death of God and then probes into questions of morality and affirmation of life of the “free spirit”. (Nietzsche lived 1844-1900.) We then will discuss two main French existentialist philosophers, Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980) and Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986). We will read the section on “Bad Faith” from Sartre’s main work Being and Nothingness, which problematizes how we succumb to societal norms and, denying our freedom, live inauthentically. We then will read chapters from Beauvoir’s book The Ethics of Ambiguity, in which she discusses how each of us is both a free subject who can make choices but also an object for others, bound by physical limits, social expectations, and political powers. Lastly, we will read chapters from a much-discussed book by Franz Fanon (1925-1961), Black Skin White Masks, which lays out how existential experiences are determined by racism.
Class time will consist in introductory lectures, close reading of selected text passages, and discussions on topics and issues arising from the text.

Learning Outcomes
- Knowledge about different existential philosophers.
- Knowledge of basic concepts and questions in existentialism.
- Increased reflective capacity on issues regarding human existence.
- Increased capacity to analyze and interpret selected philosophical texts.
- Increased capacity to express philosophical questions and ideas in writing.
Course Texts

Required:
Course packages are available at the Duckstore. They contain the following texts:


Course Requirements

A) Five take-home exams, 4 pages each. 15% each = 75%
B) Attendance, participation especially in discussion sections, reading quizzes, short homework and in-class writing assignments. 25%

All written homework needs to be printed, font Times New Roman 12, double-spaced, with one inch margins!

Explanation of requirements:

A) You will get a set of questions that you need to answer. The first questions will test comprehension of the texts and you will be required to make reference to concrete text passages that you interpret closely. All quotations need to be followed by explanations of what they say. The last question will require that you relate questions arising from the readings to your own life and that you reflect on and look critically at topics and issues relating to the texts we read. Your paper needs to have **no less that 3 full pages** (about 1000 words) **with your answers**, excluding quotations, headings, etc. You may write no more than 5 pages, all included.

B) PARTICIPATION POINTS
You will get participation points for regular class attendance and attendance and participation in discussion sections, for completing in-class writing assignments and short homework assignments, and for contributing significantly to class discussions. Participation points will be added up at the end of the term and converted into grades. Frequent absences will lower your participation grade.

Course Policies

1. **Handing in an assignment late** will lower your grade. Homework that is more than a week late will not be accepted, unless this was for demonstrable (documented) reasons beyond your control.
2. In order to avoid disruptions in class you are asked to avoid exiting and entering the classroom while lectures and discussions are going on.
3. **If you miss a class** it is your responsibility to keep up with the course material. Instead of basing your journal on what was said in class, you need to summarize the assigned reading for the day you missed.
4. The uses of electronic devices like laptops, cell phones, iPods, iPads, Blackberries, etc. during class is not allowed unless you need a specific device because of a disability. If the latter is the case, please let me know.

5. Please retain the original copy of all work returned to you during the term until the final course grade has been posted. In the event of any question concerning whether grades have been accurately recorded, it is your responsibility to provide these original copies as documentation.

6. You are expected to follow the rules of academic honesty. Failure to do so will result in failure of the whole course (“F”).

   **Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is the inclusion of someone else’s product, words, ideas, or data as one’s own work. When a student submits work for credit that includes the product, words, ideas, or data of others, the source must be acknowledged by the use of complete, accurate, and specific references, such as footnotes. By placing one’s name on work submitted for credit, one certifies the originality of all work not otherwise identified by appropriate acknowledgements. Verbatim statements by others must be enclosed by quotation marks or set off from the regular text as indented extracts.

   In order to find out how to avoid plagiarism, see http://libweb.uoregon.edu/guides/plagiarism/students/

   **Fabrication:** Fabrication is the intentional use of information that the author has invented when he or she states or implies otherwise, or the falsification of research or other findings with the intent to deceive.

   **Cheating:** Cheating is an act of deception by which a student misrepresents or misleadingly demonstrates that he or she has mastered information on an academic exercise that he or she has not mastered, including the giving or receiving of unauthorized help in an academic exercise.

   **Discrimination and Sexual Harassment:** The UO is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic and dating violence and gender-based stalking. If you (or someone you know) has experienced or experiences gender-based violence (intimate partner violence, attempted or completed sexual assault, harassment, coercion, stalking, etc.), know that you are not alone. UO has staff members trained to support survivors in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more.

   Please be aware that all UO employees are required reporters. This means that if you tell me about a situation, I may have to report the information to my supervisor or the Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity. Although I have to report the situation, you will still have options about how your case will be handled, including whether or not you wish to pursue a formal complaint. Our goal is to make sure you are aware of the range of options available to you and have access to the resources you need.

   If you wish to speak to someone confidentially, you can call 541-346-SAFE, UO’s 24-hour hotline, to be connected to a confidential counselor to discuss your options. You can also visit the SAFE website at safe.uoregon.edu.

**Grade Rubric:**

- **A** = excellent. No mistakes, well written, and distinctive in some way or other.
- **B** = good. No significant mistakes, well written, but not distinctive in any way.
- **C** = OK. Some errors, but a basic grasp of the material.
- **D** = poor. Several errors. A tenuous grasp of the material.
COURSE SCHEDULE

Week One
March 28: Introduction to the course and introduction to Kierkegaard’s “Fear and Trembling.”
March 30: Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, Problema I.

Week Two
April 4: Kierkegaard. Continuation of last class and Problema II.
April 6: Kierkegaard. Problema II. [First take-home exam assignment.]

Week Three
April 11: Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, Book V. [First take-home exam due!]
April 13: Nietzsche. Continuation.

Week Four
April 18: Nietzsche. Continuation.
April 20: Nietzsche. Continuation. [Second take-home exam assignment.]

Week Five
April 25: Sartre. *Being and Nothingness*, “Bad Faith.” [Second take-home exam due!]
April 27: Sartre. Continuation.

Week Six
May 2: Sartre. Continuation.
May 4: Sartre. Continuation. [Third take-home exam assignment.]

Week Seven
May 11: Beauvoir. Continuation of last class.

Week Eight
May 18: Continuation. [Fourth take-home exam assignment.]

Week Nine
May 23: Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*. Introduction and Chapter One. [Fourth take-home exam due.]
May 25: Continuation and Chapter 5.

Week Ten
May 30: MEMORIAL DAY HOLIDAY! No class.
June 4: Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, Chapter 5. [Fifth take-home exam assignment.]

Final take-home exam due latest Wednesday, June 8 at 4pm. Add a cover page with course information and the name of Bonnie Sheehy on it. Please leave them in the appropriate box straight ahead when you enter the Philosophy Department in 211 Susan Campbell Hall. Please note that the Philosophy Department is closed 12:00-1:00pm and after 5pm.