

Philosophy 211: Existentialism

Spring 2017

TR 12-13:50

Instructor: Elizabeth Balskus

Office Hours: Tuesday & Thursday 11-11:50, 262 Susan Campbell Hall

Email: balskus@uoregon.edu



Course Description:

This course provides an introduction to the existentialist tradition in its emergence during the early 20th century. The primary objective of this course will be to gain an understanding of the basic tenets of the existentialist tradition and well as an understanding of how existentialism influenced social, political, and philosophical thinkers in the mid to late 20th century.

Course Goals:

- 1) To gain an understanding of the history of the existentialist movement and to become familiar with the central questions and concerns of existentialist thought
- 2) To understand how the existentialist movement influenced thought that came after it
- 3) To improve reading, critical thinking, and writing skills over the course of the term

Required Texts:

Some Lessons in Metaphysics, José Ortega y Gasset
Ethics of Ambiguity, Simone de Beauvoir
Black Skin, White Masks, Frantz Fanon
Invisible Man, Ralph Ellison
The Bluest Eye, Toni Morrison

ALL OTHER TEXTS WILL BE ON CANVAS

Course Assignments:

2 Response Papers (45%)

These will be short assignments (3-5 pages) that are explanatory, reflective or argumentative; depending on the question you are given. The purpose of these response papers is allow you to engage the readings more in depth on your own based off of our discussions in class. All response papers are to be submitted on Canvas. See below for deadlines.

Final Paper (25%)

The final paper will be due during finals week and will be a culmination of the work you have done throughout the term. You will be given a prompt at the beginning of Week 9, and will be expected to submit your paper by the due date to Canvas at midnight.

Attendance & Participation (30%)

Participation is the most crucial part of this course. You are expected to come to class:

1) having printed out the reading and brought it to class, 2) having read it and, 3) having written down notes and questions you may have about the material. You are expected to contribute to the discussion based on your notes, questions, and comments. You may be asked to write and submit short writing assignments in-class. Failure to participate or turn these assignments in to me may also result in a lowered participation grade.

Attendance Policy:

Since this is a discussion oriented course, you are expected to attend every class and contribute to the discussion. However, since life is filled with contingencies, you are allowed four unexcused absences with no penalty. Your fifth unexcused absence will result in a lowering of your final grade by one third of a letter grade, and from that point on, every

unexcused absence will have the same effect on your grade. Eight unexcused absences will automatically result in an F.

It is your responsibility to contact the instructor in case of emergency prior to class (unless there are special circumstances where you cannot contact prior to class). These absences can be counted as excused with the instructor's permission. If you are uncertain about what would qualify as an emergency, please contact the instructor. All emergencies must be documented, otherwise the absences will not be excused.

Late Assignments:

You will lose 10% of the credit for a given assignment for each day that you fail to submit after the deadline.

CLASS SCHEDULE:

Week One:

M: Introduction and Course Overview

Reading: Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals, III §28.

W: *Some Lessons in Metaphysics, excerpts*

Week Two:

M: *Some Lessons in Metaphysics, excerpts*

W: *Some Lessons in Metaphysics, excerpts*

Week Three:

M: *Camus, "An Absurd Reasoning," pg 3-21.*

Camus, *"The Myth of Sisyphus"*

W: Camus, *"An Absurd Reasoning,"* pg 21-48.

FIRST PAPER DUE FRIDAY AT NOON

Week Four:

M: Sartre, *"Existentialism is a Humanism"*

The Ethics of Ambiguity, excerpts

W: *The Ethics of Ambiguity, excerpts*

Week Five:

M: *The Ethics of Ambiguity, excerpts*

W: *Black Skin, White Masks, excerpts*

Week Six:

M: *Black Skin, White Masks, excerpts*

W: *"Transformation of Silence into Language and Action", Audre Lorde*

SECOND PAPER DUE FRIDAY AT NOON

Week Seven:

M: Derek Walcott, *"The Muse of History"*

W: Ellison, *The Invisible Man, excerpts*

Week Eight:

M: Ellison, *The Invisible Man, excerpts*

W: Ellison, *The Invisible Man, excerpts*

Week Nine:

M: *Where Do We Go From Here?*, excerpts

W: *Where Do We Go From Here?*, excerpts

James Baldwin, "Nothing Personal"

Week Ten:

M: *Toni Morrison, The Bluest Eye*, excerpts

W: *Toni Morrison, The Bluest Eye*, excerpts