

Syllabus

COURSE: EXISTENTIALISM

DATE: Spring 2013

COURSE #: PHIL/RELS 4320

INSTRUCTOR: Dr. Martie Reineke

TIME: T/H 2:00 p.m.

PHONE: 273-6233

OFFICE HOURS: T 3:30-4:30 pm, H 11-12 pm.

Other hours by appt.

OFFICE: Baker 151

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WEB SITE: <http://www.uni.edu/reineke>

Books:

From University Book and Supply:

Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, Washington Square Press, 1993, **ISBN-10:** 0671867806 □ **ISBN-13:** 978-0671867805

Simone de Beauvoir, *She Came to Stay*, W.W. Norton Press, 1954, **ISBN-10:** 0393318842

ISBN-13: 978-0393318845

Simone De Beauvoir *Ethics of Ambiguity*. Citadel (June 1, 2000) **ISBN-10:** 080650160X

On reserve:

Jean-Paul Sartre, *Black Orpheus*, Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1963.

On Web:

Jean-Paul Sartre, "Preface to Franz Fanon's "Wretched of the Earth:"

<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/sartre/1961/preface.htm>

ESSAYS: (In packet from University Book and Supply)

"Jean-Paul Sartre" from *Modern Movements in European Philosophy*, by Richard Kearney, Manchester University Press, 1986, 51-72, 73-90.

"No Exit" from *No Exit and Three Other Plays* by Jean-Paul Sartre, Vintage Books, 1955, 1-47.

"A Victory" by Jean-Paul Sartre In *Colonialism and NeoColonialism* by Jean-Paul Sartre. Routledge, 2001, 65-77.

"The Fact of Blackness" and "The Negro and Hegel" in *Black Skin, White Masks* by Franz Fanon, pp. 109-140; 216-232.

Jean-Paul Sartre, "Preface to Franz Fanon's "Wretched of the Earth:"

"Two Unpublished Chapters from *She Came To Stay*," in *Simone de Beauvoir: Philosophical Writings* ed. Margaret A. Simons U. of Illinois Press, 2009, pp. 31-75

"The Body in its Sexual Being," "Other People and the Human World," and "Freedom," from *Phenomenology of Perception*, by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Routledge, 1962, 154-173, 346-365, 434-456.

COURSE PHILOSOPHY:

Students from every major are welcome in this course because Existentialism has been important to intellectual reflection outside of the discipline of philosophy. However, this is not a course for every UNI student. In order to succeed in this course, STUDENTS NEED TO BE STRONG READERS AND STRONG WRITERS. Some of the texts we read are more typically assigned to graduate than to undergraduate students; students may need to read them several times. Aside from homework, all graded units in the course are essays. Students need to have the ability to write essays that draw on close readings of the assigned texts (i.e., you cannot write a successful essay drawing only on class notes) and offer a critical analysis. Indeed, this course places critical thinking skills at the center. In doing so, the professor is committed to the pedagogical values listed below.

- Critical thinking is a learnable skill. A professor and her or his students collaborate as resources for each other in learning this skill. We are all learners.
- Problems, questions, and issues serve as the source of motivation for learners in this class.
- The goals, methods, and evaluative components of this course emphasize using content rather than simply acquiring it.
- Learning is strengthened when students formulate and justify their ideas in writing.
- Learning is strengthened when students exercise sophisticated skills in observing the environment around them. With its focus on the world of everyday life, Existentialism is an ideal course in which to exercise this pedagogical value.
- Learning is strengthened when students exchange information and resources with each other rather than work in isolation from each other or sit passively listening to me talk.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Students in this course will:

- ❖ Develop advanced skills in reading, comprehending, critically analyzing, and evaluating representative texts and major themes associated with the philosophy of Existentialism. What is each author saying? Do the various points fit together? What is still unclear? Jot down your questions as you read the texts and be prepared to share them in the next class period. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each thinker's argument? To what do you react positively? Why? To what do you react negatively? Why? What elements of the argument are insightful? What elements are problematic?
- ❖ Enhance your understanding of how philosophers think. Throughout the semester, you will be introduced to "tools" of analysis of central importance to philosophers. As you grow in awareness of

these tools and take preliminary steps toward using these tools in your own reflections you will begin philosophizing yourselves.

- ❖ Explore a variety of learning outcomes that contribute to the development of the described intellectual skills and gain facility in using these processes. These will include:
 - Reading and comprehending challenging texts.
 - Engaging in effective oral and written communication.
 - Preparing descriptive and reflective accounts.
 - Problem-solving.
 - Analyzing, evaluating, and constructing arguments:

MAJOR THEMES OF THE COURSE:

The essence of Existentialism is well encapsulated in the following scene: Sartre, Beauvoir, and Aron are sitting at a bar discussing Husserl's philosophy and its merits. As Beauvoir recalls the scene, "Aron points to his glass: 'You see, my dear fellow, if you are a phenomenologist, you can talk about this cocktail and make philosophy out of it.'" Sartre, Beauvoir, and Merleau-Ponty, among others, took this observation and ran with it. Because of their efforts over the course of their lifetimes, we can rightly say that one is an existentialist when one "talks about a cocktail and makes a philosophy out of it."

The enduring appeal of Existentialism and its unique contribution as a philosophy rests in its sustained focus on everyday life. Because everyday life is its focus, the scope of Existentialism is enormous. No first course in Existentialism can "cover" all of its many concerns and dimensions. In this class, drawing primarily on scholarly reflections on Existentialism that have emerged in the last decade, we will look at the following themes.

- *Philosophical reflection is situated in the world.* No one can take a universal or God-like point of view on the world. Nor is classical metaphysics, in which the world is subject to perfect rationalization through the arrangement of concepts, possible. Existentialism offers instead a lived metaphysics or a metaphysics of the concrete. As Merleau-Ponty suggests, existential philosophy assigns itself the task "not of explaining the world or of discovering its conditions of possibility, but rather of formulating an experience of the world." After all, humans are "metaphysical in their very being, in their loves, in their hates, in their individual and collective history." Building on this stance, existentialist philosophers include art and literature in the purview of philosophy and contribute to the arts with their own novels and plays. They also take a profound interest in politics and make extensive contributions to political philosophy, especially to writings about Marxism and colonialism.
- *Human existence is a question to itself.* Perhaps the most notable of the contributions of Existentialism to philosophy, are the existentialists' reflections on the nature of human existence. Taking up the contributions of Marx and Hegel, they attend also to psychoanalysis (Freud and Lacan), and probe the possibilities of phenomenology (Husserl). In various ways, the existentialist philosophers explore the temporality of human existence (humans are unfolding events), the contradictions of human existence (humans are split, alienated, thrown, and empty), and the potential of human existence (humans create themselves in their choices and actions).
- *The human body is an important subject for philosophical reflection.* More than the philosophers that came before them and perhaps more persuasively than members of any other school of thought, excepting psychoanalytic theorists, the existentialist philosophers interrogate the body. What is the relation of the body to perceptions and to consciousness? What are the possible relations between a person and her/his body, between multiple persons and bodies, between

bodies and other bodies? Moreover, existentialist philosophers do not inquire about the generalized human body. Instead, they focus on bodies as actually lived by subjects; bodies that grow, have sex, laugh, cry, become disabled, age, and die. Their comments are astute, challenging, engaging, and timelessly thought provoking.

- *The existence of the other is a problem to be resolved.* For many of the existentialist philosophers, questions about the body emerge in tandem with questions about the existence of human others. How do I get outside myself to be with others? Will others always be alien to me, alternately perceived by me to be a mystery or a threat? Am I capable of really knowing, loving, and understanding others? Influenced by Marx, Freud, and Lacan, among others, the existentialist philosophers substantively engage the most pressing of questions about others in their time: Given widespread anti-Semitism, what of Jews who are others to Christians? Given French colonialism on the African continent, what of blacks, Muslims, and Arabs who are the others of the white, Christian French who occupy their countries? What of women who are others of men? What of homosexuals who are others of heterosexuals? These questions remain timely.
- *What is freedom and what are the possibilities of humans acting freely?* Existentialist philosophers look closely at freedom, trying to understand how freedom is possible given everything they believe to be the case about human situatedness, human embodiment, and each human's problematic relations between itself and others. At times, the existentialist philosophers seem wholly perplexed by the challenges that these categories of reflection pose to traditional ways of thinking about human responsibility, agency, and freedom. At other times, they advance groundbreaking ethical theories that, in emphasizing reciprocity of selves in relation to others, can be seen to have laid the groundwork for poststructuralist reflections on ethics advanced during the past decade.

MAJOR FIGURES OF THE COURSE:

Existentialist philosophers are many. They include Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Camu, Fanon, Sartre, Beauvoir, Merleau-Ponty, and Heidegger. My preference in teaching is to focus deeply rather than broadly on major philosophical thinkers. I find that the conversations in which we engage are richer, more informed, and more significant if we talk intensely for several weeks about the writings of a single philosopher than if we dabble lightly in the works of several. For that reason, in this course, we are going to focus primarily on the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre. We are going to attend closely to philosophical conversations in which he engaged with Beauvoir, Fanon, and Merleau-Ponty. These conversations highlight the themes of the course, enabling us to perceive their significance. Most important, over fifty years after these conversations began, they remain compelling. Perhaps because these conversations and the themes they address speak to our time so acutely, they have been the conversations and themes that have been of most interest to a significant number of philosophers in the past decade who have written about Existentialism.

EVALUATION AND CLASS PROCEDURES:

The study of philosophy works best when it is pursued as a communal, conversational effort. Class discussions will comprise a major part of this course and evaluations will reflect this focus. Units of the course are as follows:

1. Worksheets and writing exercises (3-5 points): These projects will be assigned in class. Many will be completed in class.
2. Take-home essay exams: Each will be due one class session after it is distributed in class, except for the last one, which will take the place of the final exam.
3. All exams will be submitted to Turnitin.com. The primary goal of this exercise is to assist students

in developing college-level skills in writing complex ideas in your own words. No student should be shown by Turnitin.com to have engaged in acts of direct plagiarism. However, the primary aid students will receive from Turnitin.com will be that the program flags unsuccessful efforts at paraphrasing.

4. E-mail Submissions: Course work may be submitted by e-mail only with prior permission of the professor. A paper copy **MUST** always follow an e-mail submission for which you have received prior permission.
5. NOTE: You will find it helpful to be extremely organized in collecting and maintaining a file of assignments in this course. Plan to have a loose-leaf notebook, with pockets. Save all handouts, written assignments, and class notes. You may find that you want to use them later in the semester.

POLICY ON LATE WORK:

Work other than essay exams: You are urged to remain current with assignments. If you have not completed an assignment on the day that I request that you submit it to me, you will be ineligible for points on that assignment. Students often have very good reasons for missing class (e.g., illness, car accidents, etc.). **However, late submissions will not be accepted for points because they are associated with group work in class.** If a student's very good reason for missing class leads her or him to miss more than two consecutive class sessions, the student should consult with me about compensating for the loss of worksheet points. I will work with the student to develop alternative opportunities for points so that his/her grade is not unduly impacted.

Essay exams: These projects will always be collected from students on the due date. Policies on late exams will be posted with each exam.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON ATTENDANCE:

In my years of teaching, students in my courses for the major have had virtually perfect attendance. Why do students regularly make this commitment to daily attendance?

First, students in the class experience disappointment when others in the class are missing. As the semester progresses, each of you find the presence of all the others an aspect of the course experience that means a lot to you. Because we do small group work almost daily, the absence of a person from a group is really noticed. Because students value others' presence, you come to feel that you would be letting down your classmates were you to miss class.

Second, students realize that your degree of understanding plummets when you miss class. The working assumption in the class, for students and for the professor, is that when you enter class on a given day, the reading assignment will be fairly much a mystery to you. You will have only a glimmer of what you think the text is saying. By the end of a class session, everyone will have moved forward in your understanding to the point where you have a basic sense of what is being argued in a text. Because what we do in class does make a difference in your understanding, you make a commitment to daily class attendance.

Finally, there is a third, pragmatic reason for coming regularly to class. Because I accept homework only on the day it is due, and not later, if you don't keep up with the homework assignments, your grade is substantially impacted. For example, a person who has missed a significant number of the 3-point homework assignments but gets A's on all the exams will still get a B or C in the course.

Why are the homework points so important? More than the exams, a course is the learning community we create in conversation with each other. In my experience, our conversations are stronger when we go into

them with a piece of written reflection in our hands. Because I think your written work gives such a wonderful focus for our conversations with each other (secondarily if helps me check in with you individually to confirm your progress in understanding), the written homework assignments are a key feature of the course.

THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT OF 1990 (ADA)

The ADA provides protection from illegal discrimination for qualified individuals with disabilities. Students requesting instructional accommodations due to disabilities will want to arrange for such accommodation through the Office of Disability Services. The ODS is located in 103 Student Health Center (273-2676).

ACADEMIC ETHICS:

Any documented instance of cheating will be reported to the Office of Academic Affairs and will result in a grade of "F" for the course. In this course, UNI's Academic Ethics Policies are strictly enforced. These Policies are posted in the current University Catalog of Programs and Courses. Students are responsible for knowing these policies.

Please review remaining items on this syllabus for any information that may be new to you and/or may inspire you to model exemplary professionalism in this course.

CELL PHONE POLICY

Your professor believes that her students have not ponied up their tuition dollars to watch their professor check her e-mail, surf the internet, and answer text messages during class; therefore, your professor summons her self-control and does not do these things while class is in session. Students in previous semesters have reported that they find their classmates' e-mailing, surfing, and texting during class to be annoying and distracting. Please respect your classmates' desire to get the most bang for their tuition bucks and don't distract them by doing such things as checking your e-mail, surfing, or texting during class. Phones should be off and out of view throughout the class hour. **Your professor will deduct homework points for any student whose electronic addiction leads him/her to look at their phone during class. No warnings will be given. In order to avoid a shock when final grades for the semester are posted, simply do not have your phone anywhere where it could be interpreted by your professor as in use.**

E-MAIL POLICIES

E-mail Accounts: It is **required** that you obtain and use your university e-mail account for this class. I will use e-mail to communicate with you periodically about changes to the syllabus, assignments, etc. As a general rule, you should check your e-mail daily for class announcements that may be sent to you from any of your professors.

E-mail Etiquette: While I encourage you to communicate with me via e-mail, it is important that you consider this communication as a formal dialogue between professor and student. Employers regularly report that one of their primary issues with recent college graduates is that they do not know how to send professional e-mails. As you work on developing this skill in this class, here are some recommendations.

- 1) Begin your e-mail with a formal address: Dr. Reineke,
- 2) Conclude your e-mail with your complete name, section number, and small group number.
- 3) If you are making a request, word it appropriately. For example, if you are asking me if you can do something, be sure the body of the e-mail includes, at a minimum, the word “please.”
- 4) Symbols and abbreviations that you use to IM with your friends are a foreign language to most professors. I should not have to ask my daughter how to translate your e-mail.
- 5) If a professor writes you as an individual (not a class mailing), you always need to respond to that email, indicating that you have received it. Etiquette in the workplace for ending an exchange of e-mails is this: the lower-ranked person always responds to the e-mail of a higher-ranked person unless the higher-ranked person specifically releases the person from that obligation with a phrase such as “no need to reply.”

Calendar

Jan. 15 - Introduction	March 12 - She Came to Stay, 1-117
Jan. 17- EP , Kearney, “Jean-Paul Sartre.”	March 14 - SCS, 118-211
Jan. 22- EP: “No Exit”	March 26 - SCS, 215-296
Jan. 24 Pt. 2- Being and Nothingness 301-315; 340-375	March 28 - SCS, 297-end.”
Jan. 29 - BN 375-424	April 2 EP Ethics of Ambiguity, pp. 7-34

Jan. 31 - BN 424-470	April 4 EP Ethics of Ambiguity, pp. 35-73– Exam assigned.
Feb. 5- BN 471-537	April 9 Exam due. Introduction to Merleau- Ponty.
Feb. 7 - BN 557-607	April 11 - EP , “The Body in its Sexual Being”
Feb. 12 - BN 607-653	April 16 EP , “The Body in its Sexual Being”
Feb. 14 - BN 654-711. Exam assigned.	April 18 EP , “Other People and the Human World”
Feb. 19 – Exam due. Intro. To Sartre and Colonialism	April 23 EP , “Other People and the Human World
Feb. 21. EP . “A Victory.”	April 25 View “Norma Rae.”
Feb. 26 – EP and Web - Sartre’s Intro. To “Wretched of the Earth.” and start (Reserve)“Black Orpheus.”	April 30 - View “Norma Rae.” EP , “Freedom.”
Feb. 28 – complete Black Orpheus.	May 2 EP , “Freedom.” Essay exam assigned.
March 5 EP - Fanon excerpts. Exam assigned.	May 8 – 1-2:50 p.m. Wednesday, Exam consultation. Exam due by noon, Dec. 16.
March 7 – Exam due. Intro. To Beauvoir.	

List of Essays for Essay Packet for Fall 2010

COURSE: EXISTENTIALISM

DATE: Fall, 2010

COURSE #640/650: 152G

INSTRUCTOR: Dr. Martie Reineke

"No Exit" from *No Exit and Three Other Plays* by Jean-Paul Sartre, Vintage Books, 1955, 1-47.

"Jean-Paul Sartre" from *Modern Movements in European Philosophy*, by Richard Kearney, Manchester University Press, 1986, 51-72.

"A Victory" by Jean-Paul Sartre. In *Colonialism and NeoColonialism* by Jean-Paul Sartre. Routledge, 2001, 65-77.

"Preface to the Wretched of the Earth" in *Colonialism and NeoColonialism* by Jean-Paul Sartre (NY: Routledge Press, 2001), pp. 136-155.

"The Fact of Blackness" and "The Negro and Hegel" in *Black Skin, White Masks* by Franz Fanon, pp. 109-140; 216-232.

"Two Unpublished Chapters from *She Came To Stay*," in *Simone de Beauvoir: Philosophical Writings* ed. Margaret A. Simons U. of Illinois Press, 2009, pp. 31-75

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Syllabus

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