

## Phil 371: Existentialism and Self-Awareness

MWF 2:00-2:50 ABIV 205 Spring 2008 Neisser

Since we do not succeed in fleeing it, let us try to look the truth in the face. – *Simone de Beauvoir*

Office: ABIV 403

Email: jun001@shsu.edu

Hours: MW 3:15-4:45 & by appointment

Phone: x4-377

This course is a study based on the existentialist movement of the 19th and 20th centuries, focusing on the nature and experience of the self. Readings will be both philosophical and literary. Topics include freedom, the search for meaning, death, anxiety, authenticity, ambiguity, and the absurd.

Course Objectives (1): Students will display familiarity with a major historical current of thought, known as *existentialism*, about the self and self-awareness. (2): Students will display the results of their investigation into some the conceptual issues raised by existentialism about meaning. (3) Students will display their engagement with these issues on a personal or 'existential' level.

**Texts:** In addition to several handouts, there are four required books, listed below.

*Existentialism: Basic Writings* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)

*The Ethics of Ambiguity*

Guignon & Pereboom, Eds.

Beauvoir (Frechtman, Trans.)

*Notes from Underground*

*The Plague*

Dostoevsky (Katz, Ed.)

Camus (Gilbert, Trans)

### **Grading:**

Exams: **84%** There will be **four** take home exams, **each** worth **21%** of the overall grade.

Preparation and Participation: **16%** The material in this course cannot be passively absorbed. You must take an active role in learning it. In particular, you must prepare for class in order to get the most out of the lectures and discussions. Simply looking over the reading will *not* be sufficient. In order to help you engage the material more actively, I have created a template for structured reading notes called *The Reactor*.

Reactors: In order to receive full preparation credit, you must complete the *Reactor* assignment on time and according to the directions **16** times. That is, **each Reactor** is worth **1%** of the **overall** grade. *The Reactor* will be graded simply on a completion basis. Late or unsatisfactory submissions will not receive credit. Details about the assignment will be provided in class and on our Blackboard site.

Attendance: If you have **six** unexcused absences, **you will lose one letter grade overall.** An additional letter grade will be assessed for each **two** additional unexcused absences. So, if you have eight absences, you cannot earn better than a C in this course. It is **your responsibility** to keep track of the number of times you have missed class. I will not provide a running tab for you.

### **Schedule:**

1/16: Introduction

## **Kierkegaard**

1/18: Diagnosis of an existential illness

Read: *The Sickness unto Death* excerpt in G&P pp. 78-84

Also: The 'background' on Hegel, G&P p.19

1/21: MLK Day. No Class

1/23: Becoming subjective

Read: *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* excerpt in G&P pp. 85-92

1/25: Expectoration on the Knight of Faith

Read: *Fear & Trembling* excerpt in G&P pp. 26-28, 35-55

1/28: The teleological suspension of the ethical

Read: *Fear & Trembling* excerpt in G&P pp. 55-77

1/30: Review & Discussion

## **Nietzsche**

2/1: Tragedy, nihilism, and the last man

Read: *The Birth of Tragedy* excerpt in G&P pp. 119-122

*The Gay Science* excerpt in G&P pp. 123-142

2/4: Will to Power and overcoming oneself

Read: *The Gay Science* excerpt in G&P pp. 142-161

2/6: Eternal Return, *amor fati*, and Superman

Read: *The Gay Science* excerpt in G&P pp. 161-171

*Twilight of the Idols* excerpt in G&P pp. 180-181

2/8: Review & Discussion

**Exam One assigned**

## **Dostoevsky**

2/11: A sick man

Read: *Notes from Underground* pp.3-42

2/13: Adventures of a sick man

Read: *Notes from Underground* pp.42-91

**Exam One Due**

2/15: Anti-hero?

Read: Frank, 'Notes from underground' pp. 213-250

2/18: Review & Discussion

## **Heidegger**

2/20: The question of Being

Read: Introduction to *Being & Time* excerpt in G&P pp. 211-219

2/22: *Dasein* as Being-in-the-World

Read: *Being & Time* excerpt in G&P pp. 219-223, 236-243

2/25: Care and Temporality revealed through the Mood of Anxiety

Read: *Being & Time* excerpt in G&P pp. 243-254

2/27: The Enframing

Read: 'The question concerning technology' Handout

2/29: Review and Discussion

**Exam Two assigned**

3/3: *Existenz* viewing, part I

3/5: *Existenz* viewing, part II

**Exam Two Due**

## **Sartre**

3/7: 'Existentialism' hits the scene

Read: 'The humanism of existentialism' in G&P pp.290-308

3/10-3/14: Spring Break

3/17: The Wall

Read: 'The Wall' handout

3/19: Negations

Read: *Being & Nothingness* excerpt in G&P pp. 308-317

3/21: Nothingness

Read: *Being & Nothingness* excerpt in G&P pp. 318-328

3/24: Good Friday. No Class

3/26: Bad Faith

Read: *Being & Nothingness* excerpt in G&P pp. 328-335

3/28: Playing at being

Read: *Being & Nothingness* excerpt in G&P pp. 335-348

3/31: Freedom and Responsibility

Read: *Being & Nothingness* excerpt in G&P pp. 348-355

4/2: Review & Discussion

**Exam Three assigned**

## **Beauvoir**

4/4: Ambiguity as freedom

Read: *The Ethics of Ambiguity* I, pp.7-34

4/7: Situated freedom and personality

Read: *The Ethics of Ambiguity* II, pp.35-73

4/9: Liberation

Read: *The Ethics of Ambiguity* III, pp. 74-96

**Exam Three Due**

4/11: Action

Read: *The Ethics of Ambiguity* III, pp. 96-115

4/14: Review and Discussion

Read: *The Ethics of Ambiguity* conclusion, pp. 156-159

## **Camus**

4/16: Absurdity and scorn

Read: 'Myth of Sisyphus' Handout

4/18: Don Juanism

Read: 'The Absurd Man' Handout

4/21: Part One

Read: *The Plague* pp.1-63

4/23: Part Two

Read: *The Plague* pp.67-164

4/25: Part Three

Read: *The Plague* pp.167-185

4/28: Part Four

Read: *The Plague* pp.189-265

4/30: Part Five

Read: *The Plague* pp.269-308

5/1: Review & Discussion

5/5: The meaning of life

**Exam Four assigned** (due at the final exam hour)

5/7: Big finish

## **Policies:**

**(1) ACADEMIC DISHONESTY:** All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain complete honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found

guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. The University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including, but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work which is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion, and the abuse of resource materials. See University Academic Policy Statement 810213.

**(2) CLASSROOM RULES OF CONDUCT:** Students are expected to assist in maintaining a classroom environment that is conducive to learning. Students therefore must refrain from behavior in the classroom that intentionally or unintentionally disrupts the learning process and, thus, impedes the mission of the university. **This means:** (1) Do not surf the web during class. (2) Cellular phones, pagers, and music players must be turned off and earphones removed before class begins. (3) Do not make offensive remarks, read the newspaper, talk at inappropriate times, use tobacco, or engage in any other form of distraction. Inappropriate behavior in the classroom will result in a directive to leave class. In accordance with university policy, students who are especially disruptive also may be reported to the Dean of Students for disciplinary action.

**(3) VISITORS IN THE CLASSROOM:** Unannounced visitors to class must present a current, official SHSU identification card to be permitted in the classroom. They must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. If the visitor is not a registered student, it is at the instructor's discretion whether or not he/she will be allowed to remain.

**(4) STUDENT ABSENCES ON RELIGIOUS HOLY DAYS:** Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. Section 51.911(a)(2) defines religious holy days as: "a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20, Tax Code...." A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence. University policy 861001 provides the procedures to be followed by the student and instructor. A student desiring to absent himself/herself from a scheduled class in order to observe (a) religious holy day(s) shall present to each instructor involved a written statement concerning the religious holy day(s). The instructor will notify the student of a reasonable timeframe in which the missed assignments and/or examinations are to be completed.

**(5) NOTICE TO PERSONS WITH A DISABILITY:** It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance are expected to visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired.

SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If the student has a disability that may affect adversely their work in this class, then he or she needs to register with the SHSU Counseling Center and to talk with the instructor about how they can best be helped. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: no accommodation can be made until the student registers with the Counseling Center. There will be no retroactive accommodations.