COURSE DESCRIPTION

In the trial that led to his death, Socrates declared that “the unexamined life is not worth living,” a dictum that existentialist thinkers from Kierkegaard to Sartre placed at the center of their philosophies. While existentialism is a complex “movement,” most existentialists stress the irreducibility and uniqueness of the individual, who must make and remake him/herself through free and authentic choices and actions in the face of uncertainty and finitude. In a “postmodern age” which is deeply skeptical of essences and grand narratives, particularly emancipatory ones, and which celebrates shallow and even virtual identities, is existentialism still relevant? Drawing from the writings of key figures in the movement as well as “applications” in popular culture and media, this course explores the sources and development of existentialism and, in particular, its tense relation to institutional religion, theology, and faith, with the ultimate aim of assessing the current relevance of existentialist concerns and approaches.

OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the historical development of existentialism and discuss its impact on literature, psychology, philosophy, popular culture, and religious studies.

2. To encourage critical thinking among students by debating issues connected with the existence of God, the problem of evil, free will, authenticity, and responsibility.

3. To use the small seminar setting to sharpen students’ expository writing skills as well as their ability to articulate and defend their own analytical perspectives.

REQUIREMENTS

1. **Three Take-Home Exams**: Each exam will contain two or three essay-questions addressing key issues raised in the readings, class discussions, and lectures for each of the course sections. I will hand out exams about a week before they are due. Each of the first two exams is worth 20%, and the third exam, which will be cumulative, will constitute 30% of your final grade.

2. **A Film Review** (5-6 pp.): Undergraduate students will analyze a film, novel, or a TV program, drawing explicitly from themes found in the readings, class discussions, and lectures. The issue of plagiarism and/or cheating is especially relevant for this assignment. See “Rules” below. The assignment is worth 20% of the final grade. Students enrolled for graduate credit (REL 5937) will write a final research paper in lieu of this review. This final paper will be 15-20 pages in length. Students are encouraged to discuss paper topics with the instructor early in the semester.

3. **Attendance, Active Participation, and Quizzes**: Students are expected to attend class regularly and punctually and to participate actively in class discussion. Active and informed participation demands that
students read the material carefully before coming to class. The instructor reserves the right to give quizzes at any time during the course. Attendance, participation, and quizzes represent of 10% your final grade.

4. Students enrolled for graduate credit will read 2 additional books (to be selected in consultation with the instructor) and will meet with the instructor outside normal class time to discuss each of these books (for a total of two 1 ½ hour meetings).

RULES

1. Plagiarism or cheating: Students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. On the issue of plagiarism and cheating, I operate under a zero tolerance policy. Students caught plagiarizing or cheating will automatically receive a grade of zero on the assignment in question and will fail the course. In addition, they will be reported to the appropriate university authorities. Please keep in mind that plagiarism does not consist only in copying verbatim someone else's material and presenting it as if it were yours. It also includes taking ideas (even paraphrased!) from an author without according him/her proper recognition (through a footnote, for instance). Other forms of cheating (particularly downloading material from the Internet and presenting as if it were yours) will also be subject to the same action. See http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/honestybrochure.htm & www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/academic.htm for more information on UF policies.

2. Incompletes are strongly discouraged and will be given only when students who have finished most of the assignments satisfactorily cannot complete the final requirements due to unforeseen events. If this is the case, students must arrange for the incomplete before the end of the semester.

3. Make-up quizzes and exams will only be given to students who can present proper, legitimate written documentation (in the form of a medical excuse or a funeral notice, for example) to justify their inability to take a quiz or an exam during the scheduled time.

4. Late assignments will be marked down half a grade (from A to A-, for example) for each day they are late, unless the student can present proper, legitimate written documentation to justify the tardiness. Late assignments will not be accepted a week after the deadline. In that case, the student will receive a 0 (zero) in the assignment.

5. Grading Scale: A: 100-95; A-: 94-90; B+: 89-87; B: 86-84; B-: 83-80; C+: 79-77; C: 76-74; C-: 73-70; D+: 69-67; D: 66-64; D-: 63-60; E: <60. Please keep in mind that a C- will not be a qualifying grade for major, minor, Gen Ed, Gordon Rule or College Basic Distribution credit.

6. Given that religion is often a very personal and potentially contentious topic, we expect students to treat each other with civility and respect. I hope that our debates will be lively and that people will feel free to express their opinions and disagree with each other. However, these opinions and disagreements have to be presented in a manner that is appropriate to an academic setting.

7. Students engaging in any sort of disruptive behavior, including passing notes, reading a newspaper, playing computers games, checking their e-mail, or chatting while lectures and class discussions are taking place, will be asked to leave the classroom. They will be counted as absent for that particular day. Please turn phones and pagers off during class.
8. **Please make sure to arrive to class on time.** I dislike being interrupted once class has started.

9. **Students with Disabilities.** Students requesting classroom accommodation or special consideration must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student, who must then give this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation or special consideration.

**REQUIRED READINGS**

*Books*


*Other Additional Readings (Available at the Religion Dept., 107 Anderson and on-line)*


SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS

Part I: “Know Thyself!” The Socratic Legacy

Tues. 08/23: General Introduction

Thurs. 08/25: Plato, The Trail and Death of Socrates
Read: “Euthyphro” and “Apology”

Tues. 08/30: Plato, The Trail and Death of Socrates
Read: “Crito” and Phaedo”

Part II: The Nietzschean Revolt: The Death of God and Beyond

Thurs. 09/01: Dostoevsky and the Problem of Evil
Read: “Rebellion” and “The Great Inquisitor”

Tues. 09/06: Nietzsche, “I Teach You the Overman”
Read: Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Prologue and First Part
Conard, “Thus Spake Bart”

Thurs. 09/08: Nietzsche, “Whither is God?”
Read: Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Second Part; Book V and “The Madman”
from The Gay Science,

Tues. 09/13: Nietzsche, The Eternal Return and the Will to Power
Read: Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Third and Fourth Parts and selections from The Will to Power
Fosl, “Metalica, Nietzsche, and Marx: The Immorality of Morality.”

Thurs. 09/15: Nietzsche, “Christianity as a Slave Religion”
Read: The Anti-Christ

Part III: Kierkegaard: How Can One Contemporaneous with Christ?

Tues. 09/20: Kierkegaard, The Aesthetic, the Ethical, and the Religious

Thurs. 09/22: Kierkegaard, The Knight of Faith
Read: “Fear and Trembling,” A Kierkegaard Anthology, pp. 116-134.
Drohan, “Alfred, the Dark Knight of Faith: Batman and Kierkegaard.”
Tues. 09/27:  Kierkegaard, Toward an Anthropology of Religious Existentialism

Thurs. 09/29:  Kierkegaard, To be a Christian amid Christendom
Guest Facilitator: TBA

Tues. 10/04:  Kierkegaard, “The Anti-Hegel”
Read: “Concluding Unscientific Postscript,” in A Kierkegaard Anthology, pp. 190-258

*** FIRST TAKE-HOME EXAM DUE ON 10/04 IN CLASS ***

Part IV:  Heidegger, Camus, and Sartre: The Self, Being, and Nothingness

Thurs. 10/06:  Existentialism and Literature
Read: Camus, The Stranger, Part I

Tues. 10/11:  The Concept of the Absurd
Read: Camus, The Stranger, Part II and “An Absurd Reasoning”
McMahon, “24 and the Existential Man of Revolt”

Thurs. 10/13:  Absurdity and Nihilism
Read: Gabriel Marcel’s “The Refusal of Salvation and the Exaltation of the Man of Absurdity.”
Guest Facilitator: TBA

Tues. 10/18:  Heidegger’s Analytics of Dasein
Read: Selections from Being and Time in Salomon’s Existentialism

Thurs. 10/20:  What is Existentialism?
Read: Sartre, “Existentialism and Humanism,” Chapter 2 in Basic Writings.

Tues. 10/25:  Nothingness and the Self
Read: Chapters 5-8 in Basic Writings.

Thurs. 10/27:  Sartre, Existentialist Ethics
Read: Chapters 9-10 in Basic Writings.

Tues. 11/01:  Is Existentialism Apolitical?
Read: Chapters 11-12 and 16 in Basic Writings.
Barad, “Blade Runner and Sartre: The Boundaries of Humanity”

*** SECOND TAKE-HOME EXAM DUE ON 11/01 IN CLASS***
Part V: Existentialism and Christian Theology and Ethics

Thurs. 11/03: Tillich, *The Courage to Be*
Read: Chapters One and Two, pp. 1-63

Tues. 11/08: Tillich, *The Courage to Be*
Read: Chapter Four and Five, pp. 86-154

Thurs. 11/17: Tillich, *The Courage to Be*
Read: Chapter Six, pp. 155-190

Part VI: Existentialism and Postmodernity: Is Existentialism Dead?

Tues. 11/22: Beyond Existentialism? The Critique of Subjectivism and Western Metaphysics
Read: Heidegger’s “Letter on Humanism”

*** FILM REVIEW DUE ON 11/22 IN CLASS ***

Thurs. 11/24: THANKSGIVING BREAK

Tues. 11/29: The Postructuralist and Deconstructive Critiques
Read: Derrida, “The Ends of Man”

Thurs. 12/02: Religion and/or Irreligion in the Desert of the Real
Read: Brannigan, “There is no Spoon,” and Weberman, “The Matrix Simulation and the Postmodern Age”

Tues. 12/06: After Existentialism: A Postmodern God?
Read: Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*
Taylor, “Prelude,” “Chapters 1 & 8,” “Interlude.”

*** THIRD TAKE-HOME DUE ON 12/16 AT NOON ***