Overview
Existentialism is a philosophical movement that dominated much of European philosophy during the middle decades of the 20th century (1930s-1950s). Their ideas were heavily influenced by several 19th century authors, including Fyodor Dostoevsky, Friederich Nietzsche and Soren Kierkegaard. At the heart of their thinking lies an emphasis on the subject, the individual. What we are as individuals, how the world around us is and how we ought to behave within it – both individually and collectively, are encased within each subject. The best way to pursue ontology (what is), ethics and politics is therefore to first understand that each of these philosophical sub-disciplines are situated in subjective experience – that they all pertain to the situatedness of individuals in the world. In this class we're going to explore the dynamic thinking of these authors by tracing their thought in its historical and thematic dimensions.

Goals
I hope that this class will broaden your awareness of and increase your curiosity about the self – primarily as it finds itself in the world. Running through many existentialist thinkers is the idea that we are least comfortable when confronted with the reality (feigned as it may be) of our true self. I would like for us to enter into these disconcerting waters together, and to learn from what they have to offer. I want to use philosophy to help us better understand ourselves and the world around us.

I would also like for us to strengthen our sense of self by improving those skills about us that give us the greatest advantage in the world – our capacities to confront difficult problems head-on, and with the proper tools. I would like for us to sharpen our abilities to carefully read through difficult material, to understand and explicate the deep complexities of difficult problems, to devise and implement promising proposals, and to articulate arguments in support of them. The more we advance these skills, the more control and ground we'll have as we make our way through the world. We strengthen ourself and its place in the world by studying and thinking carefully through the uncertainties that beset it there.

Tasks
There are three ways in which I'll ask you to demonstrate your progress toward these goals. First, I would like for you to submit a summary of each week's reading at the beginning of class. This is meant to help you seek out the major claims in each reading and to begin to identify the premises given in their support. It will help you to tie the reading together before class and it will better facilitate a lively discussion in class. I imagine that 1-2 single-spaced pages, with sections denoting and discussing different topics would be appropriate.

Because much of our reading is quite difficult these summaries at times are likely to be difficult. If you are unsure about the reading, it is my hope that you can at least identify several of its most significant claims, or perhaps explain the arc that seems to run underneath much of it. There are many ways to show your attempts to understand the material that do not result in full-fledged understanding, and that is all I am looking for: evidence that you've attempted to understand the material. Sometimes this might mean identifying important quotes, or perhaps rephrasing them. It might also mean attempting to provide examples of ideas. At other times you might try to identify influences from other thinkers. It's not so much what you write, but rather that you show me that you have made a sincere and earnest effort to understand the material.

If there is strong evidence that you have worked diligently to try to understand the reading you'll get a check-plus. If it looks as though you did not quite give the reading the attention and time it requires and your summary is accordingly weak, you'll get a check. If it looks as though you rushed through the reading, have no clear ideas about its meaning, or your summary is riddled with spelling and grammatical errors you'll get a check-minus. These correspond to a 100, 80 and 50. At the end of the semester I'll average your summary scores, and this score will account for a third of your final grade.
Constructive in-class participation may have a beneficial impact on this grade (meaning that I'll bump it up a bit) whereas destructive in-class participation may have a detrimental impact (meaning that I'll lower it a bit).

Constructive participation means that you are present, prepared, and a consistent genuine contribution to the discussion. Destructive in-class participation means that you miss class, arrive late, are unprepared, do not participate in the discussion, or are disruptive or disrespectful of myself or your fellow classmates.

In addition, I am asking you to write one paper and to prepare one presentation. Your aim in the paper will be largely to defend a particular interpretation of one aspect of one of our authors. Your task, in other words, will be to convince us that a certain thinker has a certain view on some matter – what that view is exactly, that the thinker holds it, and why. (We'll talk about the details of this paper as its due-date nears.)

You will also be asked to work with another student to construct a presentation defending a particular reading of a particular author to the class. At the end of the semester I will identify seven or so controversial issues and assign each group a specific side of the controversy. In the final two weeks of the semester we will have in-class disputes where each team will present and defend its preferred reading. The audience (the rest of the class) will decide which team gave the better argument and that team will receive a bit of extra credit for doing so (something along the lines of a half a grade or so bump on your presentation grade). The average of the paper and presentation will account for the remaining third of your final grade.

Any writing assignment that you turn in to me are to be polished, meaning that you have attended carefully to the structure of your writing, its grammar and spelling. Ideas should be organized into paragraphs and paragraphs should flow from one to the next. You should include section titles where needed and, for your paper, have a definite thesis and development of its support. If you are unclear what I mean by this I highly recommend that you take a look at Lewis Vaughn's Writing Philosophy: A Student's Guide to Writing Philosophy Essays and, for grammar and the like, Michael Harvey's The Nuts and Bolts of College Writing. It is up to you to determine the strength of your writing, but be forewarned that I hold high standards and that I have little tolerance for abuses of the English language. Consult the Writing Center if you need help, but do not submit to me poorly written summaries or papers.

I use the following grade scale: 92 and above = A; 87-91 = AB; 82-86 = B; 77-81 = BC; 72-76 = C; 67-71 = CD; 62-66 = D; 61 and below = F. As for papers, an A will receive a 95, an AB a 90, a B an 85, a BC an 80, C a 75, a CD a 70, D a 65 and F a 55.

**POLICIES**

I ask that you be respectful of myself and your fellow classmates. This means that you will not speak when someone else is speaking, and that your comments will be respectful of differing opinions.

I do not allow cellphones or laptops in class. Texting or surfing the web is insulting and distracting, and if I see it I'll ask you to leave class for the week.

If you miss more than 3 classes and/or are rude or obstructive to myself or other students in class you will automatically fail. Cheating, including plagiarizing from someone else's work in a paper, is also grounds for immediate failure. Any work that is submitted late will be docked half a letter-grade per day late. So a paper due on Wednesday but not turned in until Thursday will have as its highest possible grade A/B, and so on down the line.

This course has a D2L site, where you can look at the syllabus and your submitted grades. It will also have all of the online readings. The D2L site also has a Q&A section that I'll check in on once or twice a week. If you have a general course question post it here and I'll reply when I check in.

If you are struggling, have questions, or would like some clarification on anything having to do with the course please stop by my office hours. I am here to guide you but also to help. There are always ways to improve your progress through the course, and the earlier we talk about them the better. Don't allow yourself to become frustrated and, as a result, write myself or the class off. Instead, work through your frustration by talking to me, altering your efforts in some way, and succeeding.
Students with a documented disability who need accommodations must contact the Disability Services Office at 465-2841. Reasonable accommodations can be made unless they alter the essential components of the class. Contact the instructor and Disability Services Coordinator in a timely manner to formulate alternative arrangements.

**Texts**
Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from the Underground*
Frederick Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*
Matin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*
Jean-Paul Sarte, *Nausea*
Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*

**Schedule**

September 6
- Introductions
- Introductory Discussion

September 13
- Fyodor Dostoevsky - *Notes From the Underground*
  Pay particular attention to the stories in the second part (Concerning the Wet Snow), as they nicely present the themes from part I.

September 20
- Soren Kierkegaard – selections from *Fear and Trembling, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, and The Concept of Anxiety* (all online)
- Keiji Nishitani – selection from *Religion and Nothingness* (online)

September 27
- Frederick Nietzsche – *Beyond Good and Evil*
  Part One: §1-9 & §12-16; Part Two: §34-39; Part Four: §63-100

October 4
- Friedrich Nietzsche – *Beyond Good and Evil*
  Part Five: §186-188 & §202-203; Part Nine: §257-260 & §265
- Friedrich Nietzsche – selection from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (online)
- Friedrich Nietzsche - On Eternal Recurrence (online)

October 11
- Albert Camus - *The Myth of Sisyphus*: An Absurd Reasoning & The Absurd Man (1-92)
  We probably won't get through all of The Absurd Man.

October 18
- Albert Camus - *The Myth of Sisyphus*: Absurd Creation cont. & The Myth of Sisyphus
- Distribution of midterm exam at the close of class

October 25
- Martin Heidegger - “Being and Time: Introduction”
  You do not need to submit a summary for this reading. It is particularly difficult and you will have just finished your midterm exam. Instead, skim the reading and write up three to five questions regarding it. We will spend our class time attempting to answer your questions. We will also discuss terminology, Heidegger's background intention, and basic overview of his work. This is a preparatory reading.
November 1
  • Martin Heidegger - “Being and Time: Introduction”
    We'll continue with the introduction this week, and you ought to have a secure enough understanding to 
    hold a substantive discussion about Heidegger's ideas.

November 8
  • Martin Heidegger - “What is Metaphysics” (from Basic Writings)

November 15
  • Martin Heidegger - “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking” (from Basic Writings)

November 22
  • Jean-Paul Sartre – Nausea

November 29
  • Jean-Paul Sartre – Nausea cont.; “Existentialism and Humanism”

December 6
  • Simone de Beauvoir – selections from The Second Sex (online)

December 13
  • Presentations

Final Exam: Tuesday, Dec. 20, 6:00-8:00 pm