Philosophy 123a: Existentialism

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 3-5pm, and by appointment

Course Description
In this course we will study French Existentialism and its reception. We will start with Sartre’s *Nausea* and continue with an in-depth reading of Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*. We will study Sartre’s accounts of consciousness, freedom, anguish, and bad faith, as well as his view of our relations to other people, such as desire, love, and sadism. As a counterpoint, we will then consider the development of existentialist thought by Simone de Beauvoir in her seminal *The Second Sex*. We will focus on her account of woman as “the other” and her critical discussion of the woman in love and the independent woman. Finally, we will read Iris Murdoch’s Platonist critique of existentialism and consider to what extent that critique offers a plausible view of existentialism in its own right.

Readings
The required texts for the course are:

Additional readings will be made available on LATTE.

Requirements
- Short paper, 3-4 pages (20%).
- Final Exam (20%).
- Final paper, 10-12 pages (40%).
- Exercises and participation (20%).

Course attendance is required and is included in the participation grade. To pass the course, students must complete all written assignments. Late papers will be penalized one third of a letter grade per day. Students must request extensions by e-mail at least one day in advance of the due date of the assignment.

Laptop Policy: Please do not use laptops or other electronic devices in class. They distract other students, you and me.
Four-Credit Course (with three hours of class-time per week)
Success in this 4 credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.).

Learning Goals
The course aims to help students approach exceedingly difficult texts, identify arguments and views, and critically evaluate them. It fosters skills of close reading, charitable yet critical interpretation, and philosophical judgment.

The course also aims to provide students with a thorough understanding of the main themes of French existentialism—in particular, the notions of freedom, anguish, consciousness, being, bad faith, and love. By the end of the course, students should be able to give an existentialist account of these notions. The course also offers students the opportunity to explore and discuss these themes in their own terms. Finally, the course aims to provide students with an understanding of the role of social justice in existentialist thought.

For more information about learning goals in philosophy classes, see the Philosophy Department’s learning goals at:
http://www.brandeis.edu/departments/philosophy/undergrad/learninggoals.html

Academic Dishonesty
Academic Dishonesty will be reported to the Department of Student Development and Conduct. Students are responsible to inform themselves about what constitutes dishonesty. If in doubt, please ask me! Here are some basic principles:

- Representing others’ words as one’s own constitutes academic dishonesty. One represents others’ words as one’s own if one uses a formulation that someone else came up with without putting it in quotation marks and attributing it to the author.
- Copying and pasting formulations found on the internet, without attributing them and citing the relevant webpage, is a particularly egregious form of academic dishonesty.
- Communicating with others during an exam about anything that pertains to the subject matter of the course also constitutes academic dishonesty.

Note that it is not dishonest to have others read your papers and give you feedback on them. The writing and formulations, however, must be your own.

More information about what constitutes academic dishonesty can be found here:
http://www.brandeis.edu/studentaffairs/srcs/index.html

Disability
If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis and need to have special accommodations for this class, please see me immediately. I am very happy to make the relevant arrangements.
Schedule of Readings and Assignments

8/30 – Introduction

9/6, 9/11, 9/13 – Sartre, Nausea.

9/18, 9/20 – Sartre, Existentialism is a Humanism.


10/2, 10/4 – Being and Nothingness, Chapter Two: “Bad Faith” (pp. 86-116).


10/13 – Short Paper Due


10/23, 10/25 – Being and Nothingness, Part Three, Chapter Two: “The Body” (pp. TBA)

10/30, 11/1 – Being and Nothingness, Part Three, Chapter Three: “Concrete Relations with Others,” parts I and II (pp. 471-484, 504-527).

11/6, 11/8 – Being and Nothingness, Part Four, Chapter One: “Being and Doing: Freedom” (pp. 559-588, 597-599).


11/20 – de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, “Conclusion.”


12/4, 12/6 – Murdoch, The Sovereignty of Good, part III.

Moran, “Iris Murdoch and Existentialism”

12/8 Second Paper Due

TBD, Final Exam