**ENGL 4399: Senior Seminar: Existentialism, or, The Projects of Our Lives**

**Spring 2014**

**Instructor:** Professor Kevin Porter

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**Office Hours:** TR 2:00 p.m.-3:00 p.m., and by appointment

**Section Information:** ENGL 4399-002

**Place and Time of Class Meetings:** PH 311 TR 11:00 a.m.-12:20 p.m.

**Course Description**

According to Walter Kaufmann, “Existentialism is not a philosophy but a label for several widely different revolts against traditional philosophy”; although embodying “a timeless sensibility that can be discerned here and there in past,” it has only since the mid-nineteenth century “hardened into a sustained protest and preoccupation.” Kaufmann believes that the core of existentialism is comprised of “[t]he refusal to belong to any school of thought, the repudiation of the adequacy of any body of beliefs whatever, and especially of systems, and a marked dissatisfaction with traditional philosophy as superficial, academic, and remote from life.” But when all schools of thought are overthrown, what remains for the individual confronted with the sensation of being “abandoned” in a possibly meaningless world and plagued with the manifold problems that attend daily life, if not doubt intensifying into anxiety and then anxiety intensifying into dread? Maybe, for those strong enough and honest enough to weather the maelstrom intact, what remains is precisely nothing (or *no-thing*) at all but the seemingly paradoxical freedom and necessity to think and act—not in ways that confirm for ourselves that what we *are* (our “existence”) is what we *must be* (our “essence,” whether determined by God, nature, or society), but in ways that unsettle what we *have been*—because what we *always* *are,* from birth until death, is a *continuing, future-oriented project* constituted by successive choices for which we alone are responsible. As Jean-Paul Sartre once wrote, rather than our essence preceding our existence, our existence precedes our essence: “Man is not only that which he conceives himself to be, but that which he wills himself to be, and since he conceives of himself only after he exists, just as he wills himself to be after being thrown into existence, man is nothing other than what he makes of himself.” The goal of this course will be to consider, then, what “existentialism” has meant, what it means now, and, perhaps most importantly, what it might yet mean for each of us in the ongoing projects that are our lives; to do so, we will engage in exploratory study of the varied existentialisms—both philosophical and literary—of, among others, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Kafka, Heidegger, Sartre, Camus, and Beauvoir.

**Student Learning Outcomes**

Students should be able to:

* employ proper grammar, punctuation, spelling in writing
* employ standard MLA or APA guidelines for formatting assignments and citations
* write with clarity to communicate effectively with scholars interested in critical theory
* respond critically to course material, using synthesis and analysis
* assimilate existing information to formulate new ideas
* express ideas or arguments in oral form
* develop active listening skills including paraphrasing and synthesizing ideas expressed in class
* develop methods and strategies for analyzing and interpreting texts
* evaluate an oral, visual, or written argument for sound or faulty (fallacious) reasoning
* compare and contrast major themes, issues, or topics in more than one text
* respond critically to the writing of others in primary and secondary sources
* create and edit documents using word processing or other computer programs
* explain the major themes and/or philosophical tenets of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Kafka, Heidegger, Sartre, Camus, and Beauvoir

**Required Textbooks and Other Course Materials**

* Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. 1947. Trans. Bernard Frechtman. New York: Citadel, 2000. [ISBN: 978-0806501604]
* Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*. 1942. Trans. Justin O’Brien. New York: Vintage, 1991. [ISBN: 978-0679733737]
* Kafka, Franz. *The Trial*. 1925. Trans. Mike Mitchell. New York: Oxford UP, 2009. [ISBN: 978-0199238293]
* Kaufmann, Walter, ed. *Existentialism: From Dostoevsky to Sartre*. 1956. New York: Plume, 1975. [ISBN: 978-0452009301]
* Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One*. 1883-85. Trans. R. J. Hollingdale. New York: Penguin Classics, 1961. [ISBN: 978-0140441185]
* Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Twilight of the Idols and The Antichrist*. 1889/1895. Trans. R. J. Hollingdale. New York: Penguin Classics, 1990. [ISBN: 978-0140445145]
* Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Nausea*. 1938. Trans. Lloyd Alexander. New York: New Directions, 2007. [IBSN: 978-0811217002]

**Major Assignments**

The major assignments for 4399 are as follows: two discussion facilitations (approximately 30 minutes each); two position papers (approximately 3-4 pages each); and a course project (approximately 20-25 pages). A separate handout describes these assignments. *Unless other arrangements are made, the position papers and course projects are to be submitted to me via email attachment (preferably in MS Word). Late assignments will be penalized at a rate of -10% per half hour.*

**Grading Policy**

Your course grade will be calculated as follows:

Discussion Facilitation #1 5%

Discussion Facilitation #2 10%

Position Paper #1 20%

Position Paper #2 25%

Course Project 40%

*A grade of “Incomplete” will be assigned only under documented cases of extreme medical, family, or personal emergency; in all cases, the incomplete must be resolved by the start of the next 15-week semester or else the grade will be changed automatically to an “F.”*

**Attendance Policy**

This is a senior-level course; consequently, attendance is mandatory, and active participation is expected. You are allowed **four** absences without penalty; each subsequent absence will result in **a 1% deduction from your final course grade**. A sign-in sheet will be distributed at the start of class: if you are in the classroom by the time the sheet makes its way back to me, you are counted presented; if you arrive by 11:30 a.m., you will be allowed to sign the sheet but counted as late (half-absence); if you arrive later than 11:30 a.m., you will be counted as absent.

**Schedule of Assignments**

1/14 Introduction to the course

1/16 Kierkegaard, “The First Existentialist,” Preface and Sections 1 through 5 [found in Kaufmann, *Existentialism*, pp. 83-105]

1/21 Kierkegaard, “The First Existentialist,” Sections 6 and 7 [found in Kaufmann, *Existentialism*, pp. 105-120]

1/23 Rilke, “The Notes of Malte Laurids Brigge” [found in Kaufmann, *Existentialism*, pp. 134-141]

Ortega, “Man Has No Nature” [found in Kaufmann, *Existentialism*, pp. 152-157]

1/28 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “Zarathustra’s Prologue” through “Of the New Idol,” pp. 39-78

1/30 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “Of the Flies of the Market-place” through “Of the Bestowing Virtue,” pp. 78-104

2/4 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “The Child with the Mirror” through “The Funeral Song,” pp. 107-136

2/6 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “Of Self-Overcoming” through “The Stillest Hour,” pp. 136-169

2/11 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “The Wanderer” through “The Home-Coming,” pp. 173-205

2/13 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “Of the Three Evil Things” through “The Seven Seals,” pp. 205-247

2/18 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “The Honey Offering” through “The Last Supper,” pp. 251-296

2/20 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “Of the Higher Man” through “The Sign,” pp. 296-336

2/25 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “Foreword” through “What the Germans Lack,” pp. 31-77

2/27 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “Expeditions of an Untimely Man” through “The Hammer Speaks,” pp. 78-122

3/4 Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, sections 1 through 38, pp. 123-162

3/6 Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, sections 39 through 62, pp. 163-199

3/12 Spring break

3/14 Spring break

3/18 Heidegger, “What Is Metaphysics?” (excluding the “Postscript”) [found in Kaufmann, *Existentialism*, pp. 242-257]

3/20 Heidegger, the “Postscript” to “What Is Metaphysics?” [found in Kaufmann, *Existentialism*, pp. 257-264]

3/25 Kafka, *The Trial*, “The Arrest” through “The First Hearing,” pp. 5-39

3/27 Kafka, *The Trial*, “In the Empty Conference Hall · The Student · The Offices” through “The Lawyer · The Factory-Owner · The

Painter,” pp. 40-118

4/1 Kafka, *The Trial*, “Block, the Corn Merchant · The Dismissal of the Lawyer” through “The End,” pp. 119-165

4/3 Sartre, *Nausea*, “Editor’s Note” through “Tuesday,” pp. 1-103

4/8 Sartre, *Nausea*, “Wednesday” through “One Hour Later,” pp. 103-178

4/10 Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, “An Absurd Reasoning”

4/15 Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, “The Absurd Man”

4/17 Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, “Absurd Creation”

4/22 Sartre, “Existentialism Is a Humanism” [found in Kaufmann, *Existentialism*, pp. 345-369]

4/24 Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, “Ambiguity and Freedom”

4/29 Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, “Personal Freedom and Others”

5/1 Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, “The Positive Aspect of Ambiguity” and “Conclusion”

**The course project must be emailed to me no later than 1:00 p.m. on Monday, May 5th.**

**Miscellaneous Policies**

**Classroom Decorum:** I treat students with utmost respect and courtesy; when teaching, conferencing, and grading, you and your work will have my full attention. In return, I ask the same from all of you: Please turn off and put away all cell phones, pagers, books from other classes, etc. You may use a laptop to take notes during class, so long as you are mindful enough not to disturb the students around you.

**Subject Librarian:** Rafia Mirza is the Reference and Instruction Librarian for English, History, and Communication. She is available to answer questions about how to access and use the resources provided by the library; and she is also happy to meet with students for a one-on-one research consultations. She may be contacted at rafia@uta.edu or 817-272-7428.

**Writing Center:** The Writing Center, Room 411 in the Central Library, will assist you with any writing assignment while you are a student at UT-Arlington. You may schedule appointments by calling 817-272-2601, by following directions listed at www.uta.edu/owl/appointments, or by visiting the Writing Center. If you come to the Writing Center without an appointment, you will be helped on a first-come, first-served basis as tutors become available. Writing Center tutors are carefully chosen and trained, and they can assist you with any aspect of your writing, from understanding an assignment to revising an early draft to polishing a final draft. However, the Writing Center is not an editing service; tutors will not correct your grammar or rewrite your assignment for you, but they will help you learn to solve your grammatical and organizational problems.

**Drop Policy:** Students may drop or swap (adding and dropping a class concurrently) classes through self-service in MyMav from the beginning of the registration period through the late registration period. After the late registration period, students must see their academic advisor to drop a class or withdraw. Undeclared students must see an advisor in the University Advising Center. Drops can continue through a point two-thirds of the way through the term or session. It is the student’s responsibility to officially withdraw if they do not plan to attend after registering. **Students will not be automatically dropped for non-attendance**. Repayment of certain types of financial aid administered through the University may be required as the result of dropping classes or withdrawing. Contact the Financial Aid Office for more information.

**Americans with Disabilities Act:** The University of Texas at Arlington is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of all federal equal opportunity legislation, including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). All instructors at UT Arlington are required by law to provide “reasonable accommodations” to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of that disability. Any student requiring an accommodation for this course must provide the instructor with official documentation in the form of a letter certified by the staff in the Office for Students with Disabilities, University Hall 102. Only those students who have officially documented a need for an accommodation will have their request honored. Information regarding diagnostic criteria and policies for obtaining disability-based academic accommodations can be found at www.uta.edu/disability or by calling the Office for Students with Disabilities at 817-272-3364.

**Academic Integrity:** It is the philosophy of The University of Texas at Arlington that academic dishonesty is a completely unacceptable mode of conduct and will not be tolerated in any form. All persons involved in academic dishonesty will be disciplined in accordance with University regulations and procedures. Discipline may include suspension or expulsion from the University. According to the UT System Regents’ Rule 50101, §2.2, “Scholastic dishonesty includes but is not limited to cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts.”

**Student Support Services Available**: The University of Texas at Arlington provides a variety of resources and programs designed to help students develop academic skills, deal with personal situations, and better understand concepts and information related to their courses. These resources include tutoring, major-based learning centers, developmental education, advising and mentoring, personal counseling, and federally funded programs. For individualized referrals to resources for any reason, students may contact the Maverick Resource Hotline at 817-272-6107 or visit www.uta.edu/resources for more information.

**Electronic Communication Policy:** The University of Texas at Arlington has adopted the University “MavMail” address as the sole official means of communication with students. MavMail is used to remind students of important deadlines, advertise events and activities, and permit the University to conduct official transactions exclusively by electronic means. For example, important information concerning registration, financial aid, payment of bills, and graduation are now sent to students through the MavMail system. All students are assigned a MavMail account. ***Students are responsible for checking their MavMail regularly.*** Information about activating and using MavMail is available at http://www.uta.edu/oit/email/. There is no additional charge to students for using this account, and it remains active even after they graduate from UT Arlington. To obtain your NetID or for logon assistance, visit https://webapps.uta.edu/oit/selfservice/. If you are unable to resolve your issue from the Self-Service website, contact the Helpdesk at helpdesk@uta.edu.

**Student Feedback Survey:** At the end of each term, students enrolled in classes categorized as lecture, seminar, or laboratory will be asked to complete an online Student Feedback Survey (SFS) about the course and how it was taught. Instructions on how to access the SFS system will be sent directly to students through MavMail approximately 10 days before the end of the term. UT Arlington’s effort to solicit, gather, tabulate, and publish student feedback data is required by state law; student participation in the SFS program is voluntary.

**Final Review Week:** A period of five class days prior to the first day of final examinations in the long sessions shall be designated as Final Review Week. The purpose of this week is to allow students sufficient time to prepare for final examinations. During this week, there shall be no scheduled activities such as required field trips or performances; and no instructor shall assign any themes, research problems or exercises of similar scope that have a completion date during or following this week *unless specified in the class syllabus*. During Final Review Week, an instructor shall not give any examinations constituting 10% or more of the final grade, except makeup tests and laboratory examinations. In addition, no instructor shall give any portion of the final examination during Final Review Week. During this week, classes are held as scheduled. In addition, instructors are not required to limit content to topics that have been previously covered; they may introduce new concepts as appropriate.

**Emergency Exit Procedures:** Should we experience an emergency event that requires us to vacate the building, students should exit the room and move toward the nearest exit. When exiting the building during an emergency, one should never take an elevator but should use the stairwells. Faculty members and instructional staff will assist students in selecting the safest route for evacuation and will make arrangements to assist handicapped individuals.