The Making of the Modern Self: Existential Philosophy
University of Copenhagen Department of Theology / DIS
Spring Semester 2017
3 credits
Major Disciplines: Literature, Philosophy, Ethics

Class Meetings: Thursdays 12:00-14:30.
University of Copenhagen, South Campus, Room 6B.0.22

Course Instructors:
Anna Strelis Söderquist
Brian Söderquist

DIS Contacts:
Matt Kelley, Program Assistant, European Humanities Department

Computer policy: No computers in class. No net, no texting during class.

Course Content: Focusing on thinkers from the Existentialist tradition such as Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Copenhagen’s own Søren Kierkegaard, this course traces the development of the conception of “selfhood.” Among other things, we will observe how ethical thinking has moved from the language of duty to that of personal answerability, and how the search for meaningful personal existence has increasingly become the responsibility of the individual. The unique vocabulary of these authors appears not only in works of philosophy, theology, and psychology, but also literature and theatre, which illustrates that we understand ourselves via the stories we tell, and that these narratives are necessarily told in dialogue with “the Other,” our fellow human beings.

Readings: Completion of reading assignments as scheduled is required and is a prerequisite for participating in class discussions.

Lectures and Discussion: In general, class will be a combination of lecture and class discussion. Class participation includes attendance and contributions students make in class.

Small Papers: Three small papers (4-5 double-spaced pages) will be assigned during the course of the semester. Late papers will be penalized a half-grade for each day after the due date.

Research Paper: An analytical/interpretive paper will be due toward the end of the semester. The University of Copenhagen requires a paper of 19,200-24,000 characters including spaces for bachelor’s students, including DIS students. This is roughly equivalent to 13-14 double-spaced pages. The requirement is 28,800-36,000 characters including spaces for KU master’s students. This is roughly equivalent to 18-22 double-spaced pages. You must include a character count on the front page of your paper. (You must receive a passing grade on the research paper to receive a final grade in the course. Late papers will be penalized a half-grade for each day after the due date.)
Final Syllabus

Attendance: Class attendance is required, including classes with guest lecturers. According to KU policy, all students must be present 75% of the time to receive a grade. (For DIS students: the DIS Director of Teaching and Learning, and the Director of Student Affairs, must be notified if you are absent two times or more).

DIS Disability and Resource Statement
Any student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of a disability should immediately contact Office of Academic Support (acadsupp@dis.dk) to coordinate this. In order to receive accommodations, students should inform the instructor of approved DIS accommodations.

Plagiarism: Any student who plagiarizes will fail the course.

Course Evaluation:
Research paper: 45%
First short paper: 15%
Second short paper: 15%
Third short paper: 15%
Attendance and Participation: 10%

Course texts:

KU students: The books can be purchased at the DIS Library at Vestergade 23.

Sarah Bakewell, “Think Big, Be Free … 10 Reasons to be an Existentialist,” (2016) (on Canvas).

Detailed Course Outline

1. Thurs., Jan. 19, What is Existentialism?
Reading: “Think Big, Be Free … 10 Reasons to be an Existentialist,” by Sarah Bakewell (on Canvas; print out and bring to class).

Reading: The Concept of Anxiety, chap. 1, pp. 31-63, (Danish: SKS 4, 332-356).

Reading: The Concept of Anxiety, chaps. 4-5, pp. 134-156, 187-196 (Danish: SKS 4, 413-430, 454-461).

Thurs. Feb. 9, No class, DIS academic tours
4. Thurs. Feb. 16, Nihilism
   Reading: “Nietzsche’s Word: ‘God is Dead’” (on Canvas; print out and bring to class).

5. Thurs. Feb. 23, Camus: The Fall
   Reading: The Fall, pp. 3-92.
   First short paper due in class

   Thurs. March 2, No class, DIS academic tours

6. Thurs. March 9, Sartre: Nausea’s Anxiety.
   Reading: Nausea, pp. 7-104.

   Reading: Nausea, pp. 138-219, (pp. 104-138 optional).

   Thurs. March 23, No class, DIS academic tours

   Second short paper due in class

   Reading: Sartre, Existentialism is a Humanism, pp. 17-54.

   Thurs. April 13, No class, DIS academic tours

    Reading: de Beauvoir, The Ethics of Ambiguity, pp. 35-73.

    Reading: de Beauvoir, The Ethics of Ambiguity, pp. 129-159.
    Third short paper due in class

12. Thurs. May 4, Film & Concluding Discussion.
    Film: “L’avenir” (“Things to Come”) by philosopher and director Mia Hansen Løve
    ** film and class location TBA

The research paper is due on Tues. May 9th.
Send papers to my email
Late papers will be penalized a half-grade for each day after the due date.