

EXISTENTIALISM

INSTRUCTOR: Dr. E. Hande Tuna

EMAIL: ehtuna@ucsc.edu

CLASS MEETINGS: T / Th 9:50 am - 11:25 am, Merrill Acad 130

OFFICE HOURS: F 1:00 pm, or by appointment, Cowell Annex 110

René Magritte, *The Human Condition*
(*La condition humaine*), 1933



We would like to begin by acknowledging that the land on which we gather is the traditional and unceded territory of the Uypi Tribe of the Awaswas Nation. Today these lands are represented by the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band who are the descendants of the Awaswas and Mutsun Nations whose ancestors were taken to Mission Santa Cruz and Mission San Juan Bautista during Spanish colonization of the Central Coast. Today the Amah Mutsun are working hard to fulfill their obligation to the Creator to care for and steward Mother Earth and all living things through relearning efforts and the Amah Mutsun Land Trust.

Course description and objectives

Continental philosophy used to refer exclusively to a body of philosophical movements and schools that emerged in continental Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries. Today, its scope is much broader and expands into different geographies. In this course, you will be introduced to continental philosophy through an examination of one of its most influential movements: **existentialism**. Today existentialist thought continues to be influential in different areas of philosophy, such as moral psychology, feminist philosophy, critical race theory, and in different traditions of philosophy (the analytic tradition as well as the continental tradition). In this course, we will be focusing on classical existentialism. We will be examining writings of self-identified existentialists of the 20th century who were key figures in establishing existentialism not only as a philosophical movement but also as a broader cultural movement, as well as writings of 19th-century precursors of the movement. We will cover selected writings of Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Frantz Fanon, on the one hand, and texts by Søren Kierkegaard and

Friedrich Nietzsche, on the other, with an eye to determining what is distinctive about existentialism.

You will develop an understanding of these philosophers' views on selfhood, self-making and self-choosing and their relation to the meaning or truth of human existence. You will not only be able to identify their central theses and the thought processes used to arrive at these theses, but will also develop philosophical abilities and gain the background knowledge required to compare and contrast their positions. In particular, we will investigate their views on selfhood in terms of the implications they have for these philosophers' understanding of community. Themes such as freedom, responsibility, anxiety, authenticity, and bad faith will be central to our discussion. As you become familiar with these concepts, you will be expected to evaluate their relevance for understanding your own experiences.

A solid grasp of existentialism would not be complete without an understanding of its cultural impact. Existentialism was

influential in shaping some of the most prominent 20th century literary and artistic practices. As such, you are more than encouraged to track down these influences to gain deeper insights. As a place to start, please check the list of literary, cinematic, and visual works on existentialist themes on Canvas. Engaging with such works is also crucial particularly in appreciating the fact that philosophical thought can be expressed in different mediums. You will also have a chance to try this yourself with the creative project.

Throughout the quarter, while learning about existentialist philosophy, you will be progressively developing the following skill-set:

- ▶ Ability to read moderately difficult philosophical texts closely;
- ▶ Ability to ask good critical questions about a philosophical text;
- ▶ Ability to unpack complex philosophical positions and to construct step-by-step arguments in their defense, or to raise strong and charitable objections;
- ▶ Ability to represent and communicate complex ideas in short, succinct, accessible pieces of writing.

VIVRE
SA VIEun film de
JEAN-LUC
GODARDPRIX SPÉCIAL DU JURY
ET PRIX DE LA CRITIQUE
AU FESTIVAL DE VENISEFILMS DE LA PLÉIADE
95 Champs-Elysées-17, 3-64

Is *Vivre Sa Vie* an affirmation of Sartrean existentialism or a subtle criticism? Are we free and absolutely responsible for our actions? Or is it a pipe dream in a capitalistic world where freedom is only a good sale pitch?

Readings and movies

Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Carol Macomber (trans.), New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 2007. (ISBN 0300115466)

Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/ Repetition*, Howard Hong & Edna Hong (ed. & trans.), Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1983. (ISBN 0691020264)

These books are available for purchase at the Bay Tree Bookstore. Selections from the following books are posted on Canvas:

Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*
 Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*
 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*
 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*
 Simone de Beauvoir, *Second Sex*
 Simone de Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*
 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

Movies

Jean-Luc Godard, *Vivre sa vie: film en douze tableaux* (*To Live Her Life: A Film in Twelve Scenes*) - Available on [Kanopy](#)

Carl Theodor Dreyer, *Ordet* (*The Word*)

Expectations and evaluation

Reading, watching and reflective responses (RRs)	30%
Attendance and active participation	15%
Essay	20%
Creative project	10%
Final Exam	25%

See the folder "Evaluation" in Files on Canvas for grading rubrics and advise on philosophical writing.

Reading, watching and reflective responses (RRs) (30% [5% each]):

Reading philosophical texts is a skill that you will be cultivating in this course. Assigned readings are not long but they demand attention. To offer some guidance, reflective reading questions will be provided. You will write short reflective responses (300-400 words, typed) addressing these questions **prior** to the lecture. Writing these responses will not only help you to understand the lecture and to retain the material but will also prepare you for contributing to classroom discussions. These goals are only attainable if you do the reading and the writing before class. There is no point in doing them after class. Hence, **no late submissions** of RRs are accepted. The RRs must be submitted in person, at the beginning of class, to receive a grade. After the lecture starts, namely after 9:50 am, you can no longer hand them in. Each of the 8 questions will be posted on Canvas under the 'Assignments' tab at least one week in advance. The due dates for the RRs are marked in the schedule below. On the same page, you can find **useful tips** on how to write RRs.

You can choose either of **two options: (1)** You can submit 6 RRs and your grade will be based on them or **(2)** You can submit more than 6 RRs, and 6 of your best RRs will count towards your grade. You should keep the RRs for exam review and in case I make a mistake calculating your final RR-grade.

Attendance and active participation (15%):

Philosophical skills are developed through **doing**: asking questions, articulating your position, listening to others' positions, and working through issues together. There will be a lot of opportunities for you to hone your skills as this class will include an active learning component. This means that aside from coming to class prepared, having read the text and completed the reflective writing response, and listening to the lecture, you are expected to actively participate in the class. Active learning involves participating in small group discussions; reading comprehension, writing, or problem-solving

exercises; class discussion or Q & A.	
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Indicators of successful participation include the ability to think theoretically and express theoretical ideas in an accessible way but also openness to diverse perspectives and to engaging in thoughtful conversation and sometimes respectful criticism, and quite possibly self-criticism. I try hard to make sure the classroom is a positive environment for students of all genders / sexualities and cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and this effort cannot be successful without the good faith, compassion, and generosity of all participants.

Good, B-range participation requires that you

- ▶ Show up to every class
- ▶ Take part in class and small group discussions, without dominating
- ▶ Offer contributions that relate to what is being talked about, and connect with course themes
- ▶ Show awareness of the week's readings in your contributions, and refer to them from time to time

The A-range denotes excellence. Excellent participation indicates that you

- ▶ Have a strong understanding of course readings and themes: You are not showing off about what you know, but are bringing in nuances from the week's and the quarter's readings where these help to focus and advance conversation.
- ▶ Develop a critical complex stance: You are connecting with nuances of core issues in the course and advancing your own views with an awareness of strong arguments on different sides.
- ▶ Are attuned to what others are saying and draw connections between them and course themes: your contributions show that you've listened well, and you help to clarify, focus, and move the conversation forward.

You probably merit less than B-range if you have missed classes without making prior arrangements, dominated discussions in ways that prevented others from having a say, repeatedly dragged things off topic, failed to engage with course content and themes, and so on.

Grading scale

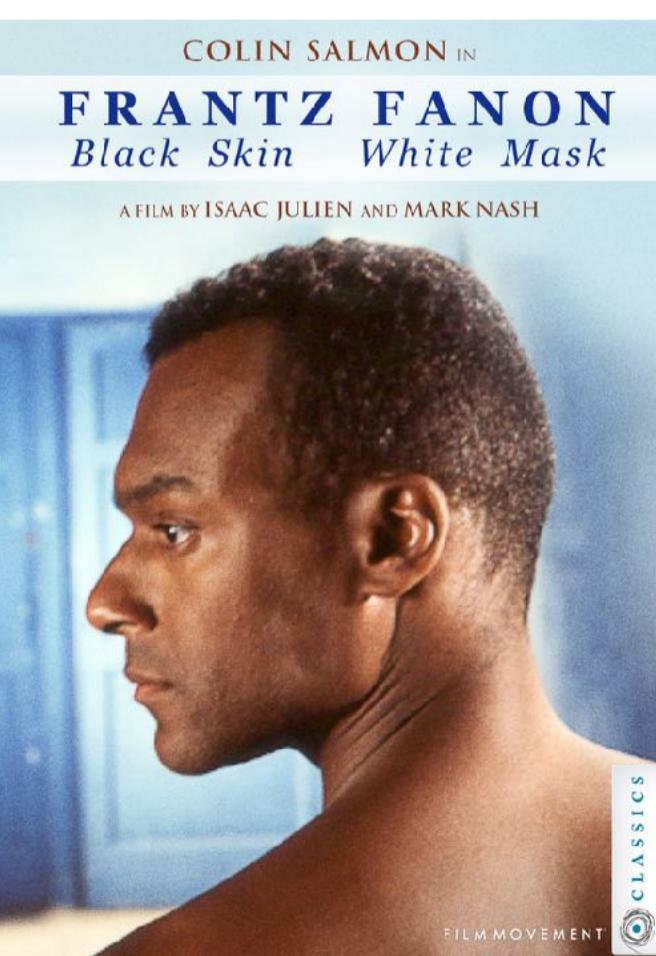
Percentage	Letter grade	Grade point value	Description
90-100	A+	4.00	
85-89	A	4.00	Excellent
80-84	A-	3.70	
77-79	B+	3.30	
74-76	B	3.00	Good
70-73	B-	2.70	
67-69	C+	2.30	
64-66	C	2.00	Adequate
60-63	C-	1.70	
55-59	D+	1.30	
50-54	D	1.00	Needs work
45-49	D-	0.70	
0-44	F	0.00	Unsatisfactory

Essay (20%): You will write 1200-1500 words on a question from a list of topics as assigned by me. The point of this exercise is to apply the skills you will be cultivating throughout the course to one assignment where you have the opportunity not only to respond to the philosophers' arguments but to construct your own. The essay topics will be posted on Canvas on **January 28**, and the essay is due at the beginning of class on **February 18**. Essays that are handed in late will be docked 5% per day. Essays will not be accepted more than 5 days after the deadline. So please make sure to hand the assignments in on time. You are encouraged to come to the office hours to discuss drafts of your essay with me.

Creative project (10%): You will be asked to engage in a creative project in response to some theme(s) covered in class. You are free to choose the medium: you can make a short video, write a poem or do spoken word, do any performance and film it, make a painting or sculpture or whatever, do a recording, write a story, an essay, or your reflections, anything that explores the existentialist themes covered in class. It does not need to be something embodying an existentialist outlook but can be critical of it as well. In this project the main objective is for the student to express philosophical thought in different mediums. Aside from the work you create, you will be required to provide a short summary of what you are trying to accomplish with your work (e.g. explain if it is an existential work, and why it is the case; were you critically engaging with some authors or artists in this work, explain how and why, etc.). This summary should not exceed 1000 words. They are due at the beginning of class on **March 12**. Projects that are handed in late will be docked 5% per day. Your grade will be based on the depth of your understanding of existentialism and how it is reflected in your work, originality and creativity.

Final Exam (25%): There will be a final, **cumulative** exam to assess your understanding of all course material on **March 18** at **8 am**. It will consist of short answer questions and one essay question. On **March 10**, there will be a review to prepare you for the exam.

COLIN SALMON IN
FRANTZ FANON
Black Skin White Mask
A FILM BY ISAAC JULIEN AND MARK NASH



participation in the course. I encourage all students who may benefit from learning more about DRC services to contact the DRC by phone at 831-459-2089 or by email at drc@ucsc.edu.

Note on Academic Honesty: To use others' ideas either directly or by paraphrasing them without giving proper references constitutes plagiarism. To copy text or ideas from your own previously or concurrently submitted coursework, without providing references also constitutes a case of plagiarism. I have a very strict plagiarism policy. I report each instance without any exceptions to the Academic Tribunal in order to maintain fairness to each student. Same goes with cheating in an exam. If you are under stress and not sure what to write or how to write it, come to me directly or consult other resources within the university, such as the writing center or other centers that can provide the help you need to deal with the issues that are preventing you from performing your best. The best way to avoid last minute panic is not to leave things to the last minute but be prepared. If you explain to me what you are going through, I will do my best to help you. Personal problems, the difficulty of the material or the course in general are never excuses for plagiarism. If you are unsure about what constitutes plagiarism, please feel free to talk to me.

For additional information on plagiarism, self-plagiarism, and how to avoid it, here are some additional resources:

- ▶ The [UCSC policy](#) on Academic Dishonesty

A documentary on the life and work of Fanon is available for streaming on [Kanopy](#).

- The UCSC library resources on [source citation, tutorials](#) on how to avoid plagiarism, [checklists](#) for ensuring that you have properly cited your sources

Please keep in mind that more often than not the information you find by entering an RR question or essay question into a search engine will be incorrect. The sloppiness of Sparknotes or Wikipedia or any other non-scholarly source makes it extremely easy to track violations of academic honesty. For instance, I strongly recommend against consulting Sparknotes when responding to the Kierkegaard related questions. The information is incorrect. What I am looking for is your attempt to engage with the texts themselves.

Title IX and CARE: UC Santa Cruz is committed to providing a safe learning environment that is free of all forms of gender discrimination and sexual harassment, which are explicitly prohibited under Title IX. If you have experienced any form of sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking, know that you are not alone. The Title IX Office, the Campus Advocacy, Resources & Education (CARE) office, and Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) are all resources that you can rely on for support.

Please be aware that if you tell me about a situation involving Title IX misconduct, I am required to share this information with the Title IX Coordinator. Although I have to make that notification, you will control how your case will be handled, including whether or not you wish to pursue a formal complaint. The goal is to make sure that you are aware of the range of options available to you and that you have access to the resources you need.

Confidential resources are available through CARE. Confidentiality means CARE advocates will not share any information with Title IX, the police, parents, or anyone else without explicit permission. CARE advocates are trained to support you in understanding your rights and options, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more. You can contact CARE at (831) 502-2273 or care@ucsc.edu.

<https://care.ucsc.edu/>

Slug Support: If you are facing financial challenges, food and housing insecurity, or other concerns, and you are not sure how to find the resources you need, contact [Slug Support](#) at (831) 459-4446. You can also contact Slug Support if you are concerned about a friend or peer and they will connect with that person to help them get access to the resources they need. I can also contact Slug Support on your behalf.

Basic Needs: If you are experiencing challenges related to basic needs, such as food, housing, health & wellness, or financial security, visit the [Basic Needs](#) hub for information about food pantries, accessible housing, mental health support, and financial aid options.

Student Success Centers: UC Santa Cruz has a variety of resources to support your overall success at UC Santa Cruz, ensure accessible living and learning environments, help you when you're experiencing personal or academic challenges, and support you in building community. If you do not find what you're looking for on the list at this [link](#), you are encouraged to contact a college advisor, or to go directly to Slug Support.

CAPS (Counseling and Psychological Services): If you are in distress, managing heightened stress and anxiety, or want to get more support and a counselor's perspective on something you're going through, [CAPS](#) provides a variety of services for your needs—including immediate crisis support, scheduled individual appointments, group counseling, and workshops led by peer advisors.

Student Health Center: In addition to providing medical and health care, the [Student Health Center](#) provides resources and information for overall wellness and sexual health at [Student Health Outreach and Promotion \(SHOP\)](#). SHOP also provides a safe, confidential, and nonjudgmental space where you can talk about and get information about alcohol and other drugs. The [COVE](#) offers a space for sober students or students questioning their relationship to alcohol and other drugs.



Giacometti at Galerie Maeght, in Paris, in 1961. Photograph by Henri Cartier-Bresson / Magnum

Sartre describes Giacometti's sculptures as "halfway between nothingness and being."

SCHEDULE

WEEK	DATE	TOPIC	WHAT TO READ AND WATCH	WHAT'S DUE
1	T 1/7	Introduction		
	TH 1/9	Self as self-making	Sartre, <i>Existentialism is a Humanism</i> (17-54)	
2	T 1/14			
	TH 1/16	Creation of value; Good and Evil		RR 1
3	T 1/21			
	TH 1/23	Bad faith	Selections from Sartre, <i>Being and Nothingness</i>	RR 2
4	T 1/28			
	TH 1/30	Self as self-choosing; choosing the Absolute	Kierkegaard, <i>Fear and Trembling</i> (1-67) and Selection from Kierkegaard's <i>Either/Or</i>	RR 3
5	T 2/4			
	TH 2/6		Dreyer, <i>Ordet</i> (The Word)	RR 4
6	T 2/11	Annihilation of values	Selections from Nietzsche, <i>On the Genealogy of Morality</i>	RR 5
	TH 2/13	Creation <i>ex nihilo</i>	Selections from Nietzsche, <i>The Gay Science</i> and <i>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</i>	
7	T 2/18		Jean-Luc Godard, <i>Vivre sa vie: film en douze tableaux</i> (<i>To Live Her Life: A Film in Twelve Scenes</i>)	Essay
	TH 2/20	Existential feminism	Selections from de Beauvoir, <i>Second Sex</i>	RR 6
8	T 2/25	Existential ethics	Selections from de Beauvoir, <i>Ethics of Ambiguity</i>	RR 7
	TH 2/27			
9	T 3/3	Black existentialism	Selections from Fanon, <i>Black Skin, White Masks</i>	RR 8
	TH 3/5			
10	T 3/10	Review		
	TH 3/12	Creative project presentations		Creative Project
	W 3/18	FINAL EXAM		

Some tips on RRs

- ▶ Think of them as very short papers and give them a very clear structure. Cut out anything irrelevant. These are very short pieces of writing and you cannot afford to ramble. You should be able to look at every sentence you wrote, even every word, and determine what work it is doing to further your explanation or argument.
- ▶ Don't waste words simply explaining everything in the readings. The questions are asking for very specific things regarding the readings. Read them carefully, answer the questions directly and avoid irrelevant details.
- ▶ You are not only being asked to explain certain issues concerning the reading but also to evaluate the positions of the philosophers. Evaluating and giving your insights about philosophical positions requires careful and charitable engagement with the readings. So do not underestimate the philosophers we will be reading and avoid creating strawperson out of them and attacking trivialized versions of their positions.
- ▶ Write as clearly as possible. Avoid jargon, long words, and convoluted sentences. Don't try to sound sophisticated or 'philosophical': convey what you have to say as explicitly and unambiguously as you can. Keep sentences and paragraphs relatively short.
- ▶ Be sure to proof-read your final draft: missing words, misspellings, and poor syntax all serve to undermine the reader's confidence.

This is Johannes from Dreyer's *Ordet*. At the beginning of the movie, he is introduced as a young son who went insane after going to the big city to study and getting caught up in reading too much Kierkegaard.

