

PHIL 204  
TTH 3:30-5:10PM (03J)  
Seney Hall 208

Professor Jessica Wahman  
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Office Hours: TTH 2-3:15  
(other times by appointment)

## **19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Philosophy** **“A Romance With Experience”**

While there are many significant (and divergent!) developments in European and American philosophy over this broad period of time, one major theme that emerges in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and continues into the 20<sup>th</sup> is a particular focus on experience. In response to philosophies that prioritized epistemology (theories of knowledge) and metaphysics (theories of ultimate reality), empiricists, pragmatists, and existentialists begin to address a more full range of subjectively lived experience, including that of the individual, as an important subject matter in its own right. This course will focus on two such trends that emerged in Europe and the United States (existentialism and radical empiricism, respectively), examine their precursors in European romanticism and American transcendentalism, and consider their shortcomings by posing the question “whose experience counts?” The authors we will focus on for the course are Kierkegaard, Emerson, Nietzsche, James, Dewey, and Camus, with commentary, criticism, and/or alternate perspectives from George Santayana, W.E.B. Du Bois, Franz Fanon, Simone de Beauvoir, Iris Marion Young, and bell hooks.

### ***Required Texts***

#### Books (available in the book store):

Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays* (O’Brien translation)—Knopf Doubleday  
Emerson, *Selected Writings*—Penguin  
James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*—Dover  
Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/Repetition* (Hong translation)—Princeton University Press  
Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (Kaufmann translation)—Knopf Doubleday

#### Required essays (files or links on Blackboard):

Beauvoir (de Beauvoir), “Woman as Other”  
Dewey, “Experience and Philosophic Method” and “Existence as Precarious and Stable”  
Du Bois, reading from *The Souls of Black Folk*  
Fanon, reading from *Black Skin, White Masks*  
reading from Genesis—Abraham and Isaac  
hooks, reading from *Ain’t I a Woman?*  
Santayana, “William James” and “Dewey’s Naturalistic Metaphysics”  
Sartre, “Existentialism is a Humanism”  
Young, “Throwing Like a Girl”

You are required to bring these readings to class on the days they are assigned. This means you may need to print out the essays. Please factor print costs into your budget for course materials.

## ***Writing Assignments***

There are three major writing assignments, in which you are to analyze and reflect on our course theme as expressed in the textual material for a given segment (see dates in schedule). You will be expected to come up with your own thesis regarding the material and to focus as narrowly or broadly as you deem appropriate, given the parameters of the course and the paper length (about 4 pages). The paper should focus on material from this course and only draw on outside material insofar as it helps you explain your claim(s) about the course reading. These are **not** to be either 1) exam “answers” that merely prove you read and understood the material (you should be making connections between the material and our course theme in some way), or 2) research papers in which you simply report your discoveries about what other people think about our texts. The idea is for you to engage with the material in writing and reflect on something you take to be significant about some aspect of it. I will supply further instructions and suggestions for writing these papers as we approach the first assignment, and your thesis for your first paper will need to be approved by me (send me your thesis statement in the body of an email by February 20<sup>th</sup> before class).

## ***Classroom Policies***

**Attendance:** Your attendance is required at **all** class meetings. Any unexcused absences will result in a “0” grade on overall class participation, even if you were active in discussion on the days you were present. Philosophical inquiry is a communal enterprise; the purpose of this policy is to ensure the continuity of our community. Absences will be excused only in the case of a serious illness, dire emergency, or observation of a recognized religious holiday. Please notify me in advance of this last required absence (religious holiday), and contact me regarding illnesses or emergencies as soon as you can—before class, if at all possible. Examples of events that do NOT constitute serious illnesses or dire emergencies are: fatigue, head colds, hay fever or other non life-threatening allergies, oversleeping/alarm clock failure, travel plans for early holiday getaway, studying for tests/catching up on work for other courses, or leveling up on World of Warcraft.

**Lateness policy:** You are expected to come to class on time, as am I. It is especially important that we all be on time for the group work at the beginning of each class. I will hand around a sign-in sheet at the beginning of class, and if you are not present at that time, you will be considered “late” for that class. No more than two latenesses are permitted. After two “late” marks, if you are late to class, you will be marked as “absent” from that class (see attendance policy above).

**Class Participation:** Discussion of philosophical material is an expectation of all of us as part of a community of learners. There are two ways in which you will be expected to participate throughout the semester:

1) in pairs/small groups during the first third of the class period, in which you will jointly discuss and answer three or four questions (in writing) before we discuss the material together. These answers will be submitted to me at the end of class (either by hand, if handwritten, or emailed to me if typed on a computer). These will not be graded; they will only be marked as “done” or “not done.” “Done” refers to having actually answered the assigned questions in a thoughtful way that demonstrates familiarity with the reading (i.e., you read and tried to make sense of the material). “Not done” means the answers were either not submitted or demonstrated little to no familiarity with the reading (i.e., you didn’t read the material for class and tried to make something up). You may submit one response as a pair/group or write your answers individually after having discussed the material together; but whichever way you choose to do it, make sure you put your names on the submitted papers so I can give you credit for the work!

2) by contributing to the larger class discussion during the remaining two-thirds of the period, in which we discuss your answers to the questions and also reflect more broadly on the material as it relates to our course theme.

**Cell phones and personal computers:** The use of cell phones is prohibited in class. If you want to read material and/or take notes on a laptop or tablet, that is fine, but you will be expected to disconnect your wi-fi connection during class time. Personal web surfing, emailing, tweeting, Facebook posting, etc., is both academically and socially unacceptable in a learning community.

### ***Grading Policy***

Honor Code: All work in this course comes under the regulations of Oxford College's Honor Code. Your signature on your work attests to your upholding of the Honor Code. Please read the information on plagiarism on the Library web page and always ask me if you have any questions about assignments. Please also note that none of your writing assignments are intended to be research projects, so there should be little need for you to quote outside sources in your work. Of course, if you find it absolutely necessary to do so, you must cite your work or be in violation of the Honor Code.

The general percentages that I will consider when determining your grade are as follows:

Class participation:	25%
Essays (25% each):	75%

Please note that these percentages should be considered a guideline for understanding the relative weight of each area of your involvement. When assigning grades I will take into consideration—in addition to these quantitative percentages—such qualitative factors as disintegration of effort or noted improvement.

Welcome! I look forward to working with you and to our collective engagement with these provocative ideas.

## READING/ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE<sup>1</sup>

T 1/14 Introduction to the course

### *Precursors to 20<sup>th</sup> Century Empiricism and Existentialism*

H 1/16 Genesis—Abraham and Isaac; Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*: Preface, Exordium, and Eulogy

T 1/21 *F&T*: Preliminary Expectoration

H 1/23 *F&T*: Problemas I and II

T 1/28 Emerson, “Nature”

H 1/30 Emerson, “Experience”

T 2/04 Emerson, “The Over-soul” and “Circles”

H 2/06 Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*: Introduction, sections 1-3; Preface; Book I, 1-14 & 47-56

T 2/11 *Gay Science*, Book II: 57-59, 76, 78, 79, 83-92, 106, 107

H 2/13 *Gay Science*, Book III: 109-139, 244-275

T 2/18 *Gay Science*, Book IV: 276, 283-290, 319-321, 335, 341; Book V: 343, 354, 355, 369-372, 379, 382, 383

### *American Empiricism*

H 2/20 James, “Does Consciousness Exist?”

T 2/25 James, “A World of Pure Experience”

**H 2/27 1<sup>st</sup> paper due—“Precursors” (submitted electronically)**  
(class will not meet)

T 3/04 James, “The Thing and Its Relations” and “How Two Minds Can Know One Thing”

H 3/06 James “The Place of Affectional Facts in a World of Pure Experience” and “The Essence of Humanism”

T 3/11 Spring Break

H 3/13 Spring Break

T 3/18 Dewey, “Experience and Philosophic Method”

H 3/20 Dewey, “Existence as Precarious and Stable”

T 3/25 Santayana, “William James” and “Dewey’s Naturalistic Metaphysics”

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<sup>1</sup> Readings and assignments are subject to revision as needed. You will be notified in class in advance of any changes.

## READING/ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE (cont.)

### *Existentialism/Absurdism*

- H 3/27 Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism"
- T 4/01 Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 3-31
- H 4/03 **2<sup>nd</sup> paper due—American Empiricism (submitted electronically)**  
(class will not meet)
- T 4/08 *Sisyphus*, 31-65
- H 4/10 *Sisyphus*, 93-123

### *Raced and Gendered Experience*

- T 4/15 Du Bois, reading from *The Souls of Black Folk*
- H 4/17 Fanon, reading from *Black Skin, White Masks*
- T 4/22 Beauvoir, "Woman as Other"; Young, "Throwing Like a Girl"
- H 4/24 hooks, reading from *Ain't I a Woman*

There is no scheduled in-class final exam for this course. Your final essay assignment is due on the day of course's scheduled exam, Tuesday, May 6<sup>th</sup>, by noon. The document should be emailed to me as an attachment (.doc, .docx, or .rtf only). It must be time stamped and sent in the appropriate format by noon of the due date, or you will not get credit for the assignment! If you have any questions about proper formatting or about how to send the document, please see me well in advance of the due date.