This course will be delivered remotely.

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Office hours: Mondays 16:00-18:00 (by phone or Zoom)

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McGill University is located on unceded Indigenous land. This land has long served as a site of meeting and exchange among Indigenous peoples, including the traditional territory of the Kanien'kehà:ka, one of the founding nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. We acknowledge the painful history of dispossession and colonialism and commit our work to assist in the success of present and future generations. Making this acknowledgement does not exculpate us institutionally; rather, it intensifies the need to actively support Indigenous peoples in their struggles for decolonization.

Format of Remote Delivery

- **Audio Podcasts:** Lectures are recorded and posted on MyCourses in the form of audio podcasts (which can be downloaded). From time to time, there will be accompanying diagrams referenced in the podcasts, but on the whole I recommend that you listen to the podcasts while being off internet and even off-screen. The point is to give you a break from Zoom and video, and to allow you to focus on the ideas. Listen while taking notes, or while taking a walk. Podcasts will vary in length depending on the subject-matter.

- **Live Zoom Q&A Sessions held every two weeks with Prof. Al-Saji** (non-mandatory attendance): These sessions will take place at the time of the class on Mondays, 12:35–1:25 PM, approximately every two weeks (see schedule below). Each Q&A session focuses on podcasts from the current and previous week. If participants accept to be recorded, sessions will be recorded and posted on MyCourses for those unable to attend.

- **Submission of questions on MyCourses:** Submit at least two audio questions on MyCourses discussion threads: one in the first half of term and the other in the second half. These questions contribute towards your participation grade (instructions below).

- **One weekly (in-person) conference with a TA** (non-mandatory attendance): You will have a choice of conference slots, at least one of which will be offered at the time of the class on Thursdays 12:35–1:25 PM. You should sign up for one conference session on Minerva. Conferences begin September 16th.

- Zoom discussion sessions with a TA will be scheduled at regular intervals during term (schedule TBA; sessions will not be recorded).

- Please check the announcements on MyCourses regularly, as this will be our primary mode of communication.

Course Description

The topic of this course is existential philosophy. Existentialism is the general name given to a philosophical movement that arose in Europe in the 1930s and included several thinkers principally in France, but also in Germany. Although not all of these thinkers always accepted the label
“existentialist,” they all sought in their philosophies to reconceptualize the nature of human existence. More precisely, they are joined in the belief that human existence cannot be defined by a pre-determined essence.

Although the term “existentialism” is also sometimes used to describe a popular cultural phenomenon that arose in the middle of the 20th century, this course will be concerned with the philosophical sense of existentialism. In particular, existential philosophers (e.g. Sartre and Beauvoir) distinguished sharply between their writings and the existentialist fashion of the times, which they saw as seeking to profit from the popularity of their writings by repeating key terms (such as “anguish” or “bad faith”) but emptied of their philosophical sense. Existentialism is thus not simply a matter of personal reflection or a style of life, but a philosophical approach to human existence that presents a certain number of concepts or themes.

The existential themes discussed in this course are: the intentional structure of consciousness (Husserl and Sartre); the function and nature of emotion (Sartre); what anxiety reveals about human existence (Sartre); bad faith (Sartre); the structure of intersubjective relations (Sartre, Beauvoir and Fanon); human freedom, responsibility, and choice (Sartre, Beauvoir and Fanon); the social constitution of the self and of the sense of one’s own body (Beauvoir and Fanon); the critique of essentialism (Sartre and Beauvoir); structures of oppression and how they are lived in experience (Beauvoir and Fanon); the absurdity or groundlessness of human existence and the definition of this existence as perpetual becoming (all).

This course is organized according to three aims: (i) To acquaint students with the immediate philosophical background of existentialism, seen in the movement called “phenomenology”. The intentional theory of consciousness, developed by Edmund Husserl and appropriated by Sartre in his description of human emotion, will provide the basis for understanding the other existential concepts in the course. (ii) To acquaint students with the major themes of existential philosophy, in its principal French strand. This will be done by means of a close study of one of the most systematically developed versions of French existentialism, the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre. (iii) To present students with a sense of the critical diversity of existential positions. To this end, we will study contrasting approaches to existentialism—seen in the feminist philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir and in the anticolonial and anti-racist philosophy of Frantz Fanon. The general purpose of the course is therefore not to present a survey of all so-called existentialisms, but to allow students to arrive at an understanding of what constitutes existential philosophy by means of a study of some of its most important expressions.

Prerequisites and Expectations

This course has as a prerequisite one prior course in philosophy at the introductory level. This prerequisite is waived for students who have taken philosophy courses at CEGEP, IB, or equivalent. No prior knowledge of existentialism is required. Students should, however, be prepared to read complex texts, listen to audio lectures (podcasts), and learn how to read, write and discuss philosophy. Note also that this course will present close reading of parts of the texts assigned. Students should thus expect a treatment of philosophical concepts, not of the biographies of authors.
Texts:
1. Readings posted to MyCourses.
3. If you wish to consult an original text that is in French (Sartre, Beauvoir, Fanon), see MyCourses for the French readings.

Assignments and Grades:
One essay (40%) and one take-home final examination (50%). The remaining 10% depends on your participation (see possible modalities below).

1. **One essay (40%)**: This will take the form of a five-page essay and must be chosen from a list of topics provided by the instructor. The purpose is to give you practice in writing philosophical, that is, critical and well-reasoned essays. (Guidelines for essays will be posted on MyCourses and explained in conference.)

2. **The take-home final (50%)** will include two components: I/ A short essay (5 pages) along the same lines as your first essay assignment, but with a list of topics covering the second half of the course. II/ Short-answer questions, mainly expository, aimed to test your knowledge of readings and lectures from the entire course.

3. Participation (worth 10% of your grade) will be calculated from a combination of three possible kinds of activities. It is recommended that you combine two activities, but no one activity is mandatory. The point is to allow you flexibility, but also opportunities to participate actively in the class throughout the term. An end-of-term participation report is required, however, in order to be able to track and calculate your cumulative participation grade.

   A. **Weekly conference with TA.**
   McGill aims to schedule these conferences in-person for four time slots, TBA. Masks are required, but distancing is zero. Conferences begin September 16th (please sign up on Minerva). Attendance will be taken at conferences by a method devised by your TA. Please ensure that your participation in conference is thoughtful, respectful, and responsive to your fellow students and TA, as well as active and engaged.

   B. **Live Zoom Q&A sessions (with Prof. Al-Saji) and Zoom discussions with a TA.**
   Prof. Al-Saji will hold Zoom Q&A sessions every two weeks (Mondays, 12:35–1:25 PM, see schedule); open Zoom discussion sessions will be held by a TA in the intervening weeks (TBA). Together, these mean that there will be weekly opportunities to participate in the class on Zoom. To count towards your participation, you must engage thoughtfully and actively in these Zoom sessions, with video on (accommodation available on request). To record your attendance, you must enter your name and question/comment on the Zoom chat (this will be used as a mode of record-keeping).

   C. **Audio Questions submitted on MyCourses.**
   You must submit a minimum of two questions during the term: one in the first half of term and one in the second half. (These questions contribute to about 2/10 of your participation grade.) If you want to rely on this modality to make up for other modes of participation, then you will need to submit questions on a more regular basis. Instructions:
- Listen to the podcast lectures, read the assigned text, and submit a question about that week’s lectures.
- To count, a question must be submitted by Wednesday at 5 PM on the designated Discussion thread on MyCourses. (Starting September 15th.)
- Preferred format: The question should be submitted as an audio file. (You can post the audio file directly in MyCourses by clicking on “attachment” under the text box, and then choosing “record audio.” Or you can record in a program like Audacity and upload the mp3 file to MyCourses.) In the text box, briefly cite the subject of the question and the podcast/reading it references. Written questions are allowed if you have problems recording.
- Recordings should be about 1 minute in length.
- The question should be aimed at deepening comprehension, prompting us to understand the podcasts and readings better. Avoid overly general questions and do not bring in readings/authors that we are not treating in the class.

**Participation report (mandatory):** Note that you must submit a report at the end of the term (by December 7th on MyCourses) with the list of activities you have participated in and the relevant dates. The aim of this report is for us to be able to keep track of your participation work, check it against our records, and calculate your participation grade accordingly. This record-keeping is especially crucial in order to allow flexibility in combining several activities, or switching from one to another. The list should include: date; kind of activity (A, B, or C); if conference then which timeslot and TA; if Zoom session then name of prof/TA.

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**Policy on Email Communications:** Before sending an email, please read: [https://emailcharter.wordpress.com/](https://emailcharter.wordpress.com/) Make sure you are not asking a question whose response can be found in this syllabus. If you have a question that requires a long response, please schedule an appointment for my phone office hours. Short and to-the-point emails will be responded to more quickly. Please allow at least 72 hours for a response.

**Zoom Etiquette for Live Sessions:** Please mute your microphone while not speaking to avoid ambient noise interference. Please use the electronic hand-raising function in Zoom, so that I can see that you want to speak. Do not multi-task on your computers/phones while participating in our live session.

**Policy on Extensions:** Extensions require a medical or other compelling reason. Late work will be penalized at the rate of one letter grade per calendar day past the due date. For instance, a paper that is evaluated as a B, if one day late, will be assigned a B-, and if two days late, it will receive a C+.

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**McGILL UNIVERSITY VALUES ACADEMIC INTEGRITY. THEREFORE ALL STUDENTS MUST UNDERSTAND THE MEANING AND CONSEQUENCES OF CHEATING, PLAGIARISM AND OTHER ACADEMIC OFFENCES UNDER THE CODE OF STUDENT CONDUCT AND DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).**

In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.
Schedule
Podcast Lectures will be posted on MyCourses at least one week in advance. Tentative schedule of the live Q&A sessions with Professor Al-Saji is listed.

September 2  Introduction (Week 1): Live Zoom Session 12:35–1:25 PM to answer questions about the syllabus and the class in general. Make sure to read over the Syllabus beforehand. Also read “What is Existentialism?”

INTRODUCTION: THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL BACKDROP TO EXISTENTIAL PHILOSOPHY

September 7–9  Podcast Lecture Week 2

[OPTIONAL reading: Edmund Husserl, pp. 91–100 and 101–109. Don’t worry about the technical terms here; I will explain the concepts, and we will rely on Sartre texts in elaborating them further, but the reading itself is background and optional only.]

13–16  Podcast Week 3
Read Sartre, Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions, pp. 34–64

13  Live Q&A on Zoom

Conferences begin Thursday, September 16th. Please SIGN UP for a conference on Minerva.

EXISTENTIAL PHILOSOPHY OF JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

20–23  Podcast Week 4

27–30  Podcast Week 5

27  Live Q&A on Zoom.

October 4–7  Podcast Week 6

[4  Live Q&A on Zoom.]

11  No class. Fall break.

14  Podcast Week 7
October 18–21  
**Podcast Week 8**

Sartre, *The Philosophy of J.-P. Sartre*, “The Encounter with the Other,” pp. 188–208. And read *No Exit* (To be discussed during conferences).

18  Live Q&A on Zoom.

25–28  **Podcast Week 9**


ESSAY due October 31*. Submission on *MyCourses*.

**EXISTENTIALISM AND FEMINISM: SIMONE DE BEAUVIOR**

November 1–4  **Podcast Week 10**

Beauvoir, “Introduction to The Second Sex” (from “One Is Not Born a Woman,” pp. 6–20)

1  Live Q&A on Zoom.

8–11  **Podcast Week 11**

Beauvoir, “The Mother” (pp. 20–27) and “The Woman in Love” (pp. 20–34)

**EXISTENTIALISM AND RACISM: FRANTZ FANON**

November 15–18  **Podcast Week 12**

Fanon, “Introduction” to *Black Skin, White Masks*

Selection from Chapter 6 of *Black Skin, White Masks*, pp. 188–195. (See also the explanatory handout on *MyCourses*)

Begin Fanon, “The Fact of Blackness” [Corrected translation: “The Lived Experience of the Black”], Ch. 5 of *Black Skin, White Masks* (pp. 109–140).

15  Live Q&A on Zoom

22–25  **Podcast Week 13**

Fanon, “The Fact of Blackness” (pp. 109–140).

Nov. 29–Dec. 2  **Podcast Week 14**

Finish Fanon, “The Fact of Blackness”. And “By Way of Conclusion” from *Black Skin, White Masks* (pp. 223–232).

November 29  Live Q&A on Zoom.

December 6  Last day of term.

**TAKE-HOME FINAL due date will be set by the university (for exam period). Submission will be on MyCourses.** 

*Essay topics, guidelines, and take-home exam questions, as well as course handouts, will be posted on MyCourses. (Topics for the essay will be posted three weeks ahead of time. Take-home final questions will be posted on by December 6th.*)