Anxiety--or "Angst," as we say in English--is often conceived as a fear of something indefinite, fear without an object, fear of nothing. Why be afraid of nothing? Isn't that irrational? Oddly, the modern philosophical and literary traditions seem to be quite interested in anxiety. In post-Enlightenment modernity, anxiety becomes a privileged mode of access to the essence of the human experience, a sign of the times (or of time as such), and a principal aesthetic object, theme, and mood. Indeed, one could make the case that the aesthetics of modernism is the aesthetics of anxiety. Why does a mood of profound uncertainty—even to the point of uncertainty about the object of one's own uncertainty—become so central to the post-Enlightenment modern experience? To pursue this and related questions, we will read such texts as:

Kierkegaard's "The Concept of Anxiety: a Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin" (1844); selections from Heidegger's crucial book, "Being and Time" (1927), plus his essay "What is Metaphysics?" (1929); Freud's "Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety" (1926), and Bernhard's novel, "Beton" (1982).

Texts to be made available in German for German majors and German Graduate students, in English for interested students from other programs.