

EXISTENTIAL PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy 311
Fall, 2007

Dr. Joel R. Smith
Skidmore College

A study of the central ideas and values of existential philosophy as found in the literary and philosophical writings of such thinkers as Kafka, Camus, Sartre, Kierkegaard, Buber, and Nietzsche.

- Texts:**
1. Elie Wiesel, Night (New York: Bantam Books, 1982).
 2. Leo Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Ilych and Other Stories, tr. Rosemary Edmonds (New York: Penguin Books, 1960).
 3. Franz Kafka, The Metamorphosis, tr. Stanley Corngold (New York: Bantam Books, 1972).
 4. Albert Camus, The Stranger, tr. Matthew Ward (New York: Random House Vintage Books, 1989).
 5. Soren Kierkegaard, Either/Or: A Fragment of Life, tr. Alastair Hannay (New York: Penguin Books, 1992).
 6. Soren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling: Dialectical Lyric by Johannes de silentio, tr. Alastair Hannay (New York: Penguin Books, 1985).
 7. Soren Kierkegaard, The Sickness unto Death, tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983).
 8. Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, tr. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House Vintage Books, 1966).
 9. [optional] Jean-Paul Sartre, Existentialism and Human Emotions, tr. Bernard Frechtman & Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library/Citadel Press, 1957).
 10. [optional] Martin Buber, I and Thou, tr. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970).
 11. [optional] Albert Camus, The Plague, tr. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Random House Vintage Books, 1972).

BOUNDARY SITUATIONS: WAKING UP TO DESPAIR

- Sep 5: (a) Wiesel, Night;
(b) Gill/Sherman, "from The Fabric of Existentialism"
(handout).
- 7: Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Ilych.
- 12: Kafka, The Metamorphosis.
- 14: (a) Camus, The Stranger;

(b) Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus & An Absurd Reasoning (handout).

KIERKEGAARD ON THE AESTHETIC, THE ETHICAL, AND THE RELIGIOUS

19: Either/Or: A Fragment of Life edited by Victor Eremita:
Preface (27-37)--Diapsalmata (39-57)--Crop Rotation (223-241).

21: Either/Or: The Seducer's Diary (247-312).

**26: Essay on Kafka due at the start of class; discuss topic in class.

28: Either/Or: The Seducer's Diary (312-376).

Oct 3: Either/Or: The Aesthetic Validity of Marriage (383-391, 412-415, 424-429, 432-435, 440-474).

5: Either/Or: Equilibrium between Aesthetic & Ethical (474-510).

10: Either/Or: Equilibrium between Aesthetic & Ethical (510-556).

12: Either/Or: Equilibrium between Aesthetic & Ethical (556-590);
Last Word -- The Edifying in the Thought that
Against God We Are Always in the Wrong (591-609).

17: (a) Abraham/Isaac story from Genesis (handout);

(b) Fear and Trembling: A Dialectical Lyric by Johannes de
silentio: Preface--Attunement--Speech in Praise of Abraham--
Is there a teleological suspension of the ethical? (41-95).

19: Study Day (no class).

24: Fear and Trembling: Is there an absolute duty to God?--Was it
ethically defensible of Abraham to conceal his purpose from
Sarah,
from Eleazar, from Isaac? (96-147).

26: The Sickness unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition
for Upbuilding and Awakening by Anti-Climacus: Despair is the
Sickness unto Death (1-42).

31: (a) The Sickness unto Death: Despair Defined by
Consciousness (42-

(b) May, "To Be or Not to Be." (handout)
74)

Nov 2: The Sickness unto Death: Despair is Sin (77-131).

7: "Truth is Subjectivity" from Concluding Unscientific Postscript
to Philosophical Fragments by Johannes Climacus (handout).

Optional: CAMUS, SARTRE, AND BUBER ON AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIP

Optional extra discussions outside of class:

- (a) Camus, The Plague (all).
- (b) Sartre, Existentialism and Human Emotions (9-59 **only**).
- (c) Buber, I and Thou (all).

****Note:** Doing optional work may help any grade. To be eligible for a grade of A or A- in the course, you must read and discuss at least one of the above optional readings.**

NIETZSCHE ON THE FREE SPIRIT BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL

9: Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil: On the Prejudices of Philosophers (2-32).

14: Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil: The Free Spirit (33-56)

16: Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil: What Is Religious (57-76).

****20:** Essay on Kierkegaard due in Ladd 217 before you leave for break (by 4:30 p.m. on Tuesday, November 20 at the latest). An email Version will not be accepted unless you have special permission from me **in advance**).

21 Thanksgiving

23 break

28: Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil: Natural History of Morals(95-118)

30: Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil: Our Virtues (143-170).

Dec 5: (a) Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil: What Is Noble (199-237);
(b) Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil: Epigrams (77-94).

7: Conclusion to the course.

****17 (Monday):** Essay due at 10:00 a.m. sharp in Ladd 217.

Course Requirements:

(1) **Participation** (20%). Participation will count 20% of your final course grade. Participation in discussion is essential to your learning in this course, so I urge you to participate fully and actively in our class discussions. **ATTENDANCE IS REQUIRED AT ALL CLASSES.** Missing even one class will severely damage your grade. The following guidelines express my expectations about participation:

A or A- = attend all classes and make useful contributions to discussion in every class.

B+ or B = attend all classes and make regular contributions.

B- = attend all classes but seldom speak.

C, D, or F = one or more absences no matter how much you talk.

Please don't arrive in class late. Please do not leave the room during class unless it is absolutely necessary. (Leaving class unnecessarily is rude and distracts me and other students. It also suggests a lack of concentration or lack of interest on your part.) Please be sure that your cell phone or pager is turned off.

Since learning during class depends directly on the reading and writing assignments, all assignments must be completed on time. Your understanding of class discussions, and the quality of class discussion itself, depend on how well you have prepared the reading assignments, so read the assignments carefully and critically. Take notes or outline the readings so you are well prepared for class discussion.

The Skidmore College guideline is that students should study two hours outside of class for every hour of class time. Note that this course earns four, not three, credits. So this course involves considerable more work than a three credit course. Compared to a three credit course, this course has an additional 30 minutes for each class, and also an additional hour of work outside of class for each class. Since each class is 1 hour and 50 minutes long, I expect you to spend about 3 1/2 hours preparing for each of our classes, and I have assigned work based on that expectation. I suggest that you work out a study schedule that sets aside a regular study period to prepare for each class. Use the full study time--if you finish the reading quickly, go back to reflect on the reading more deeply by re-reading, by underlining, by taking notes, etc.

Study guides (brief written assignments on the readings) will be assigned about once per week. These will be graded pass/fail. They will be due at the beginning of class, and late study guides will not be accepted for credit.

Class attendance, participation in discussion, and study guides will count 20% of your final course grade.

(2) **One short essay** (20%) on Kafka will be due at the beginning of class on September 26 and will count 20% of your final course grade. It must be typed (double-spaced) and should be about five pages long. I will provide detailed instructions later.

(3) **Two major essays** (60%) will be due, one on Kierkegaard on November 20, the other (probably on Nietzsche) on December 17. Each essay will count 30% of your final course grade. Each essay must be typed (double-spaced). Each should be a minimum of 8 pages and a maximum of 10 pages long. I will provide detailed written instructions later.

Optional reading: Three optional readings are listed at the bottom of page 2. You must read and discuss at least one these to be eligible for a grade of A or A- in the course. Doing optional work may help any grade.

I will be delighted to talk with you outside of class. Make an appointment to see me or come by during my office hours:

Office hours:	Monday:	4:30-5:30
	Tuesday:	2:30-3:30
	Wednesday:	2:30-3:30
	Thursday	2:30-3:30 (other times by
	Friday:	2:30-3:30 appointment)

Office: Ladd 217 Email: jsmith@skidmore.edu
Office phone: 580-5407 (please don't call me at home)