

EXISTENTIAL PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy 311
Fall, 2009

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

BOUNDARY SITUATIONS: WAKING UP TO DESPAIR

- Sep 9: (a) Wiesel, Night; Study Guide due;
(b) Gill/Sherman, "from The Fabric of Existentialism" (handout);
(c) Sartre, Existentialism and Human Emotions (9-59 **only**).
- 14: Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Ilych.
16: Kafka, The Metamorphosis.

21: Camus, The Stranger.
23: Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus & An Absurd Reasoning (handout).

**25 (Friday): Essay on Kafka due by 4:00 p.m. in Ladd 217.

KIERKEGAARD ON THE AESTHETIC, THE ETHICAL, AND THE RELIGIOUS

- 28: No class.
30: Either/Or: A Fragment of Life edited by Victor Eremita:
 Preface (27-37)--Diapsalmata (39-57)--Crop Rotation (223-241).
- Oct 5: Either/Or: The Seducer's Diary (247-312).
 7: Either/Or: The Seducer's Diary (312-376).
- 12: Either/Or: The Aesthetic Validity of Marriage (383-391, 412-415, 424-429, 432-435, 440-474).
14: Either/Or: Equilibrium between Aesthetic & Ethical (474-510).
19: Either/Or: Equilibrium between Aesthetic & Ethical (510-556).
21: 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).
- 26: (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
- 28: 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).
- Nov 2: The Sickness unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for
Upbuilding and Awakening by Anti-Climacus: Despair is the
Sickness unto Death (1-42).
4: (a) The Sickness unto Death: Despair Defined by Consciousness (42-74)
 (b) May, "To Be or Not to Be." (handout)
9: The Sickness unto Death: Despair is Sin (77-131).
11: "Truth is Subjectivity" from Concluding Unscientific Postscript to
Philosophical Fragments by Johannes Climacus (handout).

Optional: CAMUS AND BUBER ON AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIP

- Optional extra discussions will be scheduled outside of class:
 (a) Camus, The Plague (all).
 (b) Buber, I and Thou (all).

NIETZSCHE ON THE FREE SPIRIT BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL

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

- 18: Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil: The Free Spirit (33-56).
- **20 (Friday): Essay on Kierkegaard due in Ladd 217 by 12:00 noon sharp on Friday, November 20. (An email version will **not** be accepted unless you have special permission from me **in advance**.)
- 23: Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil: What Is Religious (57-76).
25: Thanksgiving break.
- 30: Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil: Natural History of Morals (95-118)
2: Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil: Our Virtues (143-170).
- Dec 7: (a) Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil: What Is Noble (199-237);
(b) Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil: Epigrams (77-94).
9: Conclusion to the course.

**14 (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** except for certified medical illness. 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 is turned off. Please don't use laptops in class.

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 may not be receive credit.

Discussion focus: For some classes, I will ask you and a partner to focus our discussion on a particular issue that catches your eye: something you think is especially insightful or problematic or needs clarification. You are not to summarize anything in the reading but should focus our discussion on at least one particular passage. You and your partner must meet at least once outside of class to prepare.

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

(2) **One short essay** (20%) on Kafka will be due at 4:00 p.m. sharp on Friday, September 25 and will count 20% of your final course grade. It must be typed (double-spaced) and about 6 pages long. I will provide detailed written instructions later. We will discuss the topic in class, so the essay will be due at the beginning of class; it can't be late.

(3) **Two major essays** (60%) will be due, one on Kierkegaard on November 20, the other (probably on Nietzsche) on December 14. Each essay will count 30% of your final course grade. Each essay must be typed (double-spaced). Each should be about 8-10 pages long. I will provide detailed written instructions later.

Optional reading: Two optional readings are listed at the bottom of page 2. Doing optional work may help any grade. You must read and discuss at least one of these to be eligible for a grade of A or A- in the course. I will schedule small group discussions outside of class on each reading.

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: 2:00- 3:00
Tuesday: 4:00- 5:00
(other times Wednesday: 2:00- 3:00
by appointment) Thursday: 4:00- 5:00
Friday: 11:00-12:00

Office: Ladd 217. Email:jsmith@skidmore.edu

Office phone: 580-5407 (please don't call me at home)

