

EXISTENTIAL PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy 311
Fall, 2011

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: (The three texts marked ** are not available in the Skidmore bookstore, so purchase them on-line.)

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 Is a Humanism, tr. Carol Macomber (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).
8. Tolstoy, Leo, The Death of Ivan Ilych and Other Stories, tr. Rosemary Edmonds (New York: Penguin Books, 1960).
- **9. Wiesel, Elie, Night, tr. Marion Wiesel (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006).
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 8: (a) Wiesel, Night; Study Guide due;
(b) Gill/Sherman, "from The Fabric of Existentialism" (handout);
(c) Sartre, Existentialism Is a Humanism (17-72 **only**).
- 13: Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Ilych. DF1.1
15: Kafka, The Metamorphosis. DF1.2
20: Camus, The Stranger; DF1.3
[optional] Sartre, A Commentary on *The Stranger*.

DF1.4 DF1.5

- 22: Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus & An Absurd Reasoning (handout).
**23 (Friday): Essay on Kafka due by 4:00 p.m. sharp in Ladd 217.
An email version will not be accepted unless you have prior permission.

KIERKEGAARD ON THE AESTHETIC, THE ETHICAL, AND THE RELIGIOUS

- 27: Either/Or: A Fragment of Life edited by Victor Eremita:DF1.6DF1.7
Preface (27-37)--Diapsalmata (39-57)--Crop Rotation (223-241).
29: Either/Or: The Seducer's Diary (247-312). DF1.8
- Oct 4: Either/Or: The Seducer's Diary (312-376). DF1.9
6: Either/Or: The Aesthetic Validity of Marriage (383-391, 412-415, 424-429, 432-435, 440-474). DF1.10
- 11: Either/Or: Equilibrium between Aesthetic & Ethical (477-511). DF2.1 DF2.2
13: Either/Or: Equilibrium between Aesthetic & Ethical (511-556). DF2.3 DF2.4
- 18: 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).
20: (a) Abraham/Isaac story from Genesis (handout); DF2.5 DF2.6
(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? DF2.7
- 25: 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). DF2.8
27: The Sickness unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for
Upbuilding and Awakening by Anti-Climacus: Despair is the
Sickness unto Death (1-42). DF2.9

Optional: CAMUS AND BUBER ON AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIP

Optional extra discussions on Friday, October 28 in Ladd 106 as follows:

- (a) Camus, The Plague (all): 2:30-3:15;
(b) Buber, I and Thou (all): 3:30-4:15.
- DF2.10
- Nov 1: (a) The Sickness unto Death: Despair Defined by Consciousness (42-74) DF3.1 DF3.2
(b) May, "To Be or Not to Be." (handout) DF3.3
3: The Sickness unto Death: Despair is Sin (77-131). DF3.3
- 8: "Truth is Subjectivity" from Concluding Unscientific Postscript to
Philosophical Fragments by Johannes Climacus (handout). DF3.4

NIETZSCHE ON THE FREE SPIRIT BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL

- 10: Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil: On the Prejudices of Philosophers (2-32). DF3.5
- 15: Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil: The Free Spirit (33-56). DF3.6
- 17: Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil: What Is Religious (57-76). DF3.7
- **22: Essay on Kierkegaard due at beginning of class. (An email version will **not** be accepted unless you have prior permission.) Discuss Kierkegaard essay in class. (Don't even think about missing this class.)
- 24: Thanksgiving break.
- 29: Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil: Natural History of Morals (95-118)
- Dec 1: Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil: Our Virtues (143-170). DF3.9
- 6: (a) Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil: What Is Noble (199-237);
(b) Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil: Epigrams (77-94). DF3.10
- 8: Conclusion to the course.
- **14 (Wednesday): Essay due at 10:00 a.m. sharp in Ladd 217. An email version will not be accepted unless you have prior permission.

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, religious holidays, or family emergencies. Even one unexcused absence will severely damage your grade. (Don't even think about missing class on November 22.) 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 electronic devices are 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 to three 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 a minimum of 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 (SG): Brief written assignments on the readings will be assigned regularly. These will be graded pass/fail. They will be due at the beginning of class, and late study guides will receive no credit or only partial credit. They must be typed with the SG questions attached as a cover sheet to your answers. Please give page numbers for all answers.

Discussion Focus (DF): Three times during the semester I will ask you and a partner to focus our discussion on a particular issue that catches your eye in that day's reading: something you think is especially insightful or problematic or needs clarification. You are not to summarize anything in the reading. Identify at least one passage in class and raise an issue about it for the class--question it or criticize it or defend it or elaborate on it or apply it. You and your partner must meet at least once outside of class to prepare. (These are marked DF# above.)

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 23 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.

(3) Two major essays (60%) will be due, one on Kierkegaard on November 22, the other 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 10 pages long. I will provide detailed written instructions later.

Optional Reading

Optional discussions of two optional readings (Camus and Buber) are listed for Friday, October 28. Reading and discussing either or both will help your course grade. Note that to be eligible for a grade of A or A- in the course, you must read and discuss at least one of them.

Office Hours

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

	Monday: 4:00- 5:00
	Tuesday: 2:00- 3:00
(other times	Wednesday: 4:00- 5:00
by appointment)	Thursday: 2:00- 3:00
	Friday: 11:15-12:15

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

Learning Goals

This course introduces selected philosophical and literary expressions of the European tradition of existential philosophy with the following goals:

- (1) study selected primary works by the following European existential thinkers of the 19th and 20th centuries: Buber, Camus, Kafka, Kierkegaard, May, Nietzsche, Sartre, and Tolstoy;
- (2) compare literary and analytical expressions of existential philosophy, exploring why existential philosophers use literary modes of expression so much;
- (3) compare atheistic (Camus, Nietzsche, Sartre) and religious (Buber, Kierkegaard) existential thinkers, wondering how both can be existential;
- (4) explore the three spheres of existence developed by Soren Kierkegaard, the father of modern European existential philosophy;
- (5) critically evaluate the existential critique of mainstream Western philosophy;
- (6) discuss the relationship of existential philosophy to literature, psychology, and religion;
- (7) develop subtle reading, writing, imaginative, and critical skills, including critical evaluation, by discussing readings in class and by writing essays about them;
- (8) develop productive and enjoyable working relationships in class and outside of class with others in the seminar (including me!);
- (9) explore your own philosophy of life;
- (10) have fun even as we discuss such themes as alienation, anxiety, despair, forlornness, guilt, and death!

