

Syllabus: Existentialism

PHIL 306, Fall 2003

TR 10:00-11:45

Office Hours: TR 9-9:30; W 1-3; & by appt.

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In this class, we will study some classic works in 19th and 20th century existentialism. Beginning with philosophical and literary writings of the best known of all existentialists, Jean-Paul Sartre, we will then study works by Fyodor Dostoevsky, Simone de Beauvoir, and Albert Camus. We will then turn to existentialist writings that emerged out of the African-American experience of Frederick Douglass and Richard Wright, and conclude with a look at the Norwegian writer Knut Hamsun's *Hunger*.

TEXTS

Students are encouraged to seek used copies of these books at local bookstores or on-line; the specific edition made available at the bookstore is not required.

- Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (Yale University Press)
- Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground* (Everyman)
- Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (Citadel)
- Simone de Beauvoir, *The Blood of Others* (Random House)
- Albert Camus, *The Stranger* (Vintage)
- Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (Vintage)
- Richard Wright, *Black Boy/American Hunger* (Harper Collins)
- Knut Hamsun, *Hunger* (Noonday Press)
- Copy Packet, available from the Philosophy Department Office, D-6, for cash or check.

READING CALENDAR

Week One: August 28

- Introduction

Week Two: September 2 & 4

- Sartre, *The Humanism of Existentialism*

Week Three: September 9

- Sartre, *No Exit*
- **(No class Thursday)**

Week Four: September 16 & 18

- Sartre, *Bad Faith*

Week Five: September 23 & 25

- Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*

Week Six: September 30, October 2

- Dostoevsky, *Grand Inquisitor*

Week Seven: October 7 & 9

- Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*

Week Eight: October 14 & 16

- Beauvoir, *The Blood of Others*

Week Nine: October 21 & 23

- Camus, *The Stranger*

Week Ten: October 28 & 30

- Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*

Week Eleven: November 4 & 6

- Douglass, *Narrative*

Week Twelve: November 11 & 13

- Wright, *American Hunger*

Week Thirteen: November 18 & 20

- Gordon, *Bodies in Bad Faith*

Week Fourteen: November 25

- Kafka, *A Hunger Artist*
- **(No class Thursday)**

Week Fifteen: December 2 & 4

- Hamsun, *The Hunger*

Week Sixteen: December 9

- Conclusion

ASSIGNMENTS

- **Essays (3 at 25 points each).** Three (typed) essays of 2000 words will be due during the semester. Topics will be determined in class discussion. These will probably be due September 30, November 13, and December 16.
- **Daily Summaries & Questions (25 points).** Each student will write a one-page (approximately 350-500 word) response to the reading assigned for every class, at the discretion of the student, for a total of 20 responses by the end of the session. These must be typed, and will be collected each class. Students may be called upon to read their responses in class. In addition, each student is required to provide one question (written on a 3"x5" index card), handed to the Instructor at the beginning of each class period.
- **Attendance... is mandatory.** Every student may miss two classes (excluding the first class meeting) without penalty. The third missed class will result in a reduction of your Final Grade by ½ grade, with an additional reduction of ½ grade for each further absence. Any absences may be made up for by writing a 1000 word essay on any existentialist play or novel not listed on the syllabus (choices must be cleared in advance with the Instructor).
- **Participation... is essential to a fun, invigorating, and intellectually challenging class.** Furthermore, in-class participation will be evaluated at the end of the session by the Instructor and used to determine borderline grades.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- Gender-neutral writing in philosophy is the accepted practice recommended by the American Philosophical Association. The words “man” and “mankind” do not refer to humanity; phrases such as “everyone has a right to his own property” contain a faulty pronoun reference (substitute ‘abortion’ for ‘property’ to see why). Appropriate language use includes, for example: “humanity”, “humankind”, “her/his”, “his or her”, etc. When quoting writers who utilize non-inclusive language, leave their words in the original. Gender specific language is, of course, appropriate when referring to a gender class such as “men” or “women.” Contact the instructor if you have additional questions. I strongly encourage you to read *Guidelines for Non-Sexist Use of Language* by Virginia L. Warren, originally published in the *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* in February 1986 (Vol. 59, Number 3, pp. 471-482; it can be found at the APA web site <<http://www.apa.udel.edu/apa/publications/texts/nonsexist.html>>.
- From the *Catalog*: “The University expects students to be honest in their academic work. Academic dishonesty is viewed as an ethical issue and a violation of the principles of justice and personal responsibility inherent in the University’s ideals as expressed in its Statement of Mission and Goals. In particular, students must refrain from plagiarism [the misuse of published or unpublished works of another by claiming them as one’s own], cheating and collusion in connection with examinations and must acknowledge fully all sources and all assistance received in work submitted to the faculty for evaluation. In the event of academic dishonesty in class assignments or examinations, the instructor will normally assign an “F” with no possibility of making up the grade by means of additional work. In serious cases the instructor will normally assign an “F” for the course and will notify the Academic Honesty Committee. Specific information on the policy and procedures regarding Academic Honesty are available in the Offices of the Deans and Vice President for Academic Affairs and in the Policies section of this catalog.” *The Instructor reserves the right to require any or all students to turn in electronic copies of their assignments for on-line plagiarism evaluation.*
- I encourage all students concerned about their writing ability to contact the Writing Center in Cowell Hall, Room 227 (422-6713). Additional inquiries and training regarding study habits may be directed to the Learning Center (422-6715).
- Students with demonstrated disabilities are encouraged to speak with me as soon as possible in order to identify any ways in which your disability may be accommodated, and to contact Disability Related Services, University Center, Room 310 (422-2613).
- Students experiencing any kinds of personal and/or academic difficulties are encouraged to utilize the free services of the Counseling Center, located on the ground floor of Gillson Hall (422-6352), which can assist you with interpersonal relationship problems, family difficulties, depression, stress, sexual concerns, substance abuse, time management, self-esteem, eating problems, anxiety, and acquaintance rape. Individual, couples, and group counseling are available, as well as referrals for longer-term counseling or a more specialized approach.
- After Census Day (September 19), students who withdraw from class will receive a “W” on their transcript. If you expect to withdraw from the class, I encourage you to decide prior to that date. September 19 is also the last day to change to or from the Pass/Fail option. The final date for all withdrawals is November 7.
- **Learning Outcomes:** By the end of the session you will be able to: *Read, interpret and explain* major figures within the existentialist tradition; *identify* major themes in existentialist philosophy and literature including despair, anxiety, and freedom; *explain* the relationship between literature and philosophy.