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PHL 102L.01: Introduction to Existentialism

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Existentialism

Tuesday/Thursday, 9:30-10:50 a.m., ED 312

This course will introduce you to some central themes and figures of what has come to be known as “existentialism.” Against the backdrop of the rise of science, the industrialization of modern society and the Enlightenment’s celebration of reason, a number of nineteenth- and twentieth-century thinkers became increasingly dissatisfied with the manner in which philosophy had come to be practiced and the way that it was written. Philosophy seemed too impersonal, too rationalistic, and too much in awe of science. To attend to the human situation and to address the challenges of living an authentic human life in a world seemingly stripped of all external sources of meaning and value (a world in which Nietzsche famously declared that “God is dead”), something else was needed: new ways of writing philosophy, a rethinking of the significance of reason and its relation to the emotions, and a new emphasis on the concrete individual human being and the different modes in which the individual exists in the world. Over the course of the semester, we will critically examine the writings of several of these existential thinkers (Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Nietzsche, and Camus) and try to arrive at a more general assessment of this philosophical approach.

This course satisfies the general education requirement for Group V: Literary and Artistic Studies. Upon completion of this course, you should be able to:

- (1) Analyze works of art with respect to structure and significance within literary and artistic traditions, including emergent movements and forms;
- (2) Develop coherent arguments that critique these works from a variety of approaches, such as historical, aesthetic, cultural, psychological, political, and philosophical.

Course Requirements

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1. Attendance/Participation | 10% |
| 2. Exam #1 (Tuesday, February 22) | 25% |
| 3. Exam #2 (Tuesday, April 5) | 25% |
| 4. Exam #3 (Wednesday, May 11, 8-10 a.m.) | 40% |

Moodle

This course has a Moodle page (<https://moodle.umt.edu>). For more information on how to access Moodle, login and then select Moodle 101 for Students (<https://moodle.umt.edu/enrol/index.php?id=979>).

Email

Any email that I send to the class will be sent to your university email address via Moodle. It is your responsibility to check your email on a regular basis.

Office Hours

Due to the risks of COVID-19, my office hours this semester will normally be offered remotely using Zoom. My normal office hours are Tuesdays, 2-4 p.m., and Wednesdays 12-3 p.m. If these times are not convenient, I am happy to make an appointment with you for another time.

Note: I hold office hours on Zoom, but will not be live on Zoom on my scheduled days unless someone has reserved a time slot ahead of time to meet with me.

To sign up for a time slot, please use this link: <https://paul-3.youcanbook.me/>

The day of our meeting, please use this link: <https://umontana.zoom.us/j/99875262121>

Readings

Books

These six books are required and can be purchased at the UM bookstore. It may also be worth checking the prices at www.amazon.com or www.bookfinder.com. They are on four-hour reserve in Mansfield Library.

1. Albert Camus, *The Stranger*, trans. Matthew Ward (Vintage, 1989 [1942]; ISBN 9780679720201)
2. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (Vintage, 1994 [1864]; ISBN 9780679734529)
3. Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Alastair Hannay (Penguin, 1986 [1843]; ISBN 9780140444490)
4. Gordon Marino, *The Existentialist's Survival Guide* (HarperOne, 2019, reprint ed.; ISBN 9780062436009)
5. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Maudemarie Clark and Alan J. Swensen (Hackett, 1998 [1887]; ISBN 9780872202832)
6. Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (Vintage, 2012, reprint ed. [1886]; ISBN 9780307951335)

The bookstore sells new and used physical copies of books, occasionally allows you to rent books (returnable at the end of the semester), and sometimes has digital copies of books. I personally prefer physical books that I can hold in my hand, write in, etc.

Here is the link to the UM Bookstore:

<https://montanabookstore.bncollege.com/shop/montana-bookstore/page/find-textbooks>.

Additional Required Readings

I will make available additional required readings on the class Moodle page.

Accommodation for Disabilities

Whenever possible, and in accordance with civil rights laws, the University of Montana will attempt to provide reasonable modifications to courses for students with disabilities who request and require them. Please feel free to set up a time with me to discuss any modifications to this course you may require. For more information, contact the Office for Disability Equity (<https://www.umt.edu/disability>).

Attendance, Participation, Class Etiquette

Attendance and Participation: Your attendance and participation are crucial for the success of this class and will play a significant role in determining whether or not our time together proves to be intellectually fulfilling. As many of you probably know, it is a university requirement that you attend all class meetings for courses in which you are enrolled (See “Class Attendance/Absence Policy,” <http://catalog.umt.edu/academics/policies-procedures>). In my experience, students also get the most out of those classes that they regularly attend. In this course I will take attendance. Everyone may miss three classes, no questions asked (and no justifications/explanations required). After that, each absence will reduce your attendance/participation grade by 10% (that is, 1% of your final grade). If you have to miss a class, it is your responsibility to hand in ahead of time any work that is due and to obtain any new assignments that are handed out.

Etiquette: As a courtesy to me and to your fellow students, during class please do not (1) talk to a classmate while I or others are speaking; (2) consult other reading materials (such as newspapers, crossword puzzles, etc.), surf the web, or play computer games; (3) use your cell phone.

Exams

This course has three exams (Exam #1 and Exam #2 are each worth 25% of your final grade; the Final Exam is worth 40% of your final grade):

- (1) Exam #1: Tuesday, February 22;
- (2) Exam #2: Tuesday, April 5;
- (3) Final Exam: Wednesday, May 11 (8-10 a.m.)

Missed exams cannot normally be made up.

The Art of Reading

Reading, like writing, is an art that can only be acquired through extensive and intensive practice. In general, you should plan to read each assignment for this course two times before you come to class:

- (1) Do the reading once to get a sense of the overall shape of the discussion and what the chief issues and questions seem to be;
- (2) Do the reading a second time, going more slowly and with an eye to how the different parts hang together. As Thoreau put it, “To read well, that is, to read true books in a true spirit, is a noble exercise, and one that will task the reader more than any exercise which the customs of the day esteem. It requires a training such as the athletes underwent, the steady intention

almost of the whole life to this object. Books must be read as deliberately and reservedly as they were written” (“Reading,” *Walden*).

Plagiarism/Academic Dishonesty

I will not tolerate cheating or plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty in this course. In addition to being a violation of the University of Montana Student Conduct Code (<http://www.umt.edu/student-affairs/community-standards/default.php>), cheating harms your fellow students by giving you an unfair advantage, and harms you since you thereby fail to take yourself seriously. In general, the first instance of cheating or other forms of academic dishonesty will result in a failing grade (“F”) for the course and will also be subject to University sanction.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

(Subject to change with advance notice)

ESG=The Existentialist’s Survival Guide

Week 1

T 1/18

Introduction

Marino, *ESG*, 1-33

H 1/20

Anxiety

Marino, *ESG*, 35-56

Week 2

T 1/25

Anxiety about “Nothing”

(1) Genesis 1-3 (**Moodle**)

(2) Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety* [1844], trans. Hannay, 50-55 (**Moodle**)

H 1/27

Anxiety and “Letting Go”

Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety* [1844], trans. Hannay, 187-196 (**Moodle**)

Week 3

T 2/1

Depression and Despair

Marino, *ESG*, 57-84

H 2/3

The Self as a Synthesis

Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death* [1849], trans. Hannay, 43-51 (**Moodle**)

Week 4

T 2/8

Despair as a Sickness of the SelfKierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death* [1849], trans. Hannay, 52-58 (**Moodle**)

H 2/10

DeathMarino, *ESG*, 85-105**Week 5**

T 2/15

Ignorance and Self-DeceptionTolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* [1886], 1-22

H 2/17

Life and DeathTolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* [1886], 22-53**Week 6**

T 2/22

Exam #1

H 2/24

AuthenticityMarino, *ESG*, 107-123**Week 7**

T 3/1

A World Without MeaningCamus, *The Stranger* [1942], Part One, 3-59

H 3/3

Prison and Freedom(1) Camus, *The Stranger* [1942], Part Two, 63-123(2) Camus, Preface to *The Stranger* (**Moodle**)**Week 8**

M 3/7

Film Screening: *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (FOR 301, 5:30-8 p.m.)

T 3/8

Discuss *Crimes and Misdemeanors*Lax, "Woody Allen on *Crimes and Misdemeanors*" (**Moodle**)

H 3/10

FaithMarino, *ESG*, 125-154

Week 9

T 3/15

Having Faith for *This* Life(1) Genesis 16-23:19 (**Moodle**)(2) Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* [1843], 41-56

H 3/17

The Knight of Infinite Resignation and the Knight of FaithKierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* [1843], 57-82**Week 10****Spring Break (3/21 to 3/25)****Week 11**

T 3/29

The Teleological Suspension of the Ethical(1) Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* [1843], 83-95(2) Kant, "Abraham and the Moral Law" (**Moodle**)

H 3/31

Absolute Duty(1) Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* [1843], 96-108(2) Kierkegaard, "On *Fear and Trembling*" (**Moodle**)**Week 12**

T 4/5

Exam #2

H 4/7

MoralityMarino, *ESG*, 155-194**Week 13**

T 4/12

Noble Morality and Slave MoralityNietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* [1887], 1-19

H 4/14

Ressentiment and PowerNietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* [1887], 19-33**Week 14**

T 4/19

The Sovereign IndividualNietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* [1887], 35-50

H 4/21

Punishment, Guilt, and the Inner LifeNietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* [1887], 50-66

Week 15

T 4/26

LoveMarino, *ESG*, 195-225

H 4/28

Heightened Consciousness as a SicknessDostoevsky, *Notes from Underground* [1864], 1-70**Week 16**

T 5/3

Love, Domination, PossessionDostoevsky, *Notes from Underground* [1864], 71-130

H 5/5

ConclusionMarino, *ESG*, 227-241**Week 17**

W 5/11

Final Exam (8-10 a.m., SS 356)