

EXISTENTIALISM IN LITERATURE & FILM

Course Description

In the modern era, a tradition of philosophers and artists began to question the meaning-giving status of social custom, and eventually of rationality and religion. How can we go on when the ground is shaken and disappears? The breakdown of rational and religious authority raises the threat of nihilism, the total absence of meaning or value. It also calls for a new kind of thinking, a new vocabulary and an alternative to rational argumentation to find meaning independently of God or reason. This course follows the development of existentialism from its religious beginnings in Pascal and Kierkegaard, through Dostoyevsky's masterpiece *The Brothers Karamazov* and Nietzsche's atheistic affirmation of life, and into the 20th century.

Lecture & Film Schedule

M July 8: Introduction: What is Existentialism?

Reading: Pascal, selections from *Pensées* (tr. Krailsheimer, #6, 12, 25, 68, 149, 228, 418-9, 808; Dolphin edition #100, 136, 139, 198-9, 352, 411, 585)

Tu July 9: Moral and Aesthetic Freedom

Reading: Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, §II, 4:441-5, and *Critique of Judgment*, §§1-7

W July 10: The Knight of Faith

Reading: Kierkegaard, *Fear & Trembling*, Preamble from the Heart, Problemata I & II

Th July 11: Life-Defining Commitment

Reading: reread Kierkegaard
Film Screening: *Hiroshima Mon Amour*

M July 15: Existential Characters

Discussion of Kierkegaard and film

First 3-page paper due

Tu July 16: Extreme Situations

Reading: *The Brothers Karamazov*, Books I & II

W July 17: Passionate Insects

Reading: *The Brothers Karamazov*, Book III

Th July 18: Tearing Open

Reading: *The Brothers Karamazov*, Book IV

M July 22: Can We Handle Freedom?

Reading: *The Brothers Karamazov*, Book V

Tu July 23: Existentialized Christianity

Reading: *The Brothers Karamazov*, Book VI

W July 24: Active Love

Reading: *The Brothers Karamazov*, Book VII

Th July 25: Crisis

Reading: *The Brothers Karamazov*, Book VIII

M July 29: Writing workshop

No new reading

7-page paper due

Tu July 30: No class

Rewrite of 7-page paper due

W July 31: **Earthly Life**

Reading: *The Brothers Karamazov*, Books IX-X

Th August 1: **Demons**

Reading: *The Brothers Karamazov*, Book XI

M August 5: **The Truth Comes Out?**

Reading: *The Brothers Karamazov*, Book XII and Epilogue

Tu August 6: **The Death of God**

Reading: Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Preface to Second Edition #1-4; #1, 2, 4, 26, 37, 39, 108, 109, 110, 122, 124, 125, 132, 143, 279, 283, 289, 290, 291, 295, 302, 303, 307, 319, 320, 328, 334, 335, 343, 344, 347, 349, 357 (bottom of p. 307 only), 358 (p. 310 only), 371, 374, 375, 377 (p. 340 only), 382.

W August 7: **Nihilism**

Reading: Nietzsche, selections from *Twilight of the Idols* (“The Problem of Socrates” and “Morality as Anti-Nature”) and *The Will to Power* (#12; 2-3, 13-15, 22)

Th August 8: **Free Spirits**

Film screening: *Breathless*

M August 12: **Yes to Life**

Reading: Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (reread); *Antichrist* #2, 7, 19, 29, 31-39, 54, 57, p.202.

Tu August 13: **Existentialism as Humanism**

Reading: Sartre, “Existentialism” and “Existentialist Psychoanalysis”

W August 14: **Review**

Second 3-page paper due

Th August 15: **Final Exam**

Required Books: Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (Dover)
Kierkegaard, *Fear & Trembling* (Penguin)
Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (Vintage)
Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions* (Kensington)

Requirements: (1) Up to 300 pages of reading each week
(2) Participation in weekly discussion sections (10%)
(3) Three in-class reading quizzes (10% total)
(4) Two 3-page papers (15% each)
(5) 7-page paper (25%)
(6) Final exam (25%)

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