PHIL 489

Wed 4-7pm, BUCH D14

**Existential Literature**

*A close study of philosophy as literature in the existentialist tradition*

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**Course Description**

This course seeks to problematize the idea that Philosophy is somehow disconnected from the larger context of life, that the existence of the philosophy somehow excludes the desires and internal life of the “philosopher”. We will look at how the intentions of a philosophy or philosopher are rooted in more than just the philosophical conversation of the time, but possibly the artistic and literary as well. Specifically, we will look at the literary and philosophical tradition of Existentialism. A reason for this is that many of its philosophers of note are themselves distinguished authors. The literary Existentialism and philosophical Existentialism seem to be in a tightly bound relationship. It seems as if the literary works of this tradition have philosophical developments embedded in them. Also, the philosophical works in this tradition make constant reference to literature, if not themselves indulging in literary methods. By looking at seminal literary works, we may have the chance to discover anew the ideas that captivated this philosophical tradition. Through our research, we may even be able to make some claims as to the foundations which inspire the creation of novel philosophy.

**Course Prerequisites**

Students require 3 credits of PHIL at the 200 level or above; or 3 upper level literature credits with any literature department.

**Course Requirements**

All grading will be done by peers. Each assignment will be graded by three other participants and you will receive the average grade of the three.

*Grading:*

Participation 10%

Creative Project 15%

Presentation 35%

Final Paper: 40%

*(Extreme lack of attendance will be subject to a review)*

*Participation:*

The participation grade is divided into four. Three quarters of the grade will come from doing all three required peer grading opportunities. The last quarter will come from perfect attendance. (extraordinary circumstances excluded).

*Creative Project:*

Each participant will create a short-story of any length to engage with major existential themes. Each participant will be given a work to interpret, and be ready to present their creative project on the day of that presentation. Suggested themes are available, but the point of this assignment is to find your own theme based on interpretations of the readings done before class, then develop it in some narrative, be it in poetry, short-story, or otherwise. Alternative art-projects will be reviewed and accepted upon requests. Such projects could include, but are not limited to, film or painting.

*Presentation:*

Each participant needs to choose a major work from the course schedule and present that work in-class in accordance with a major philosophical theme in Existentialism. A specific research question is required. Major themes include such things as the self-other relationship, alienation, the struggle for meaning, the individual, nothingness, and freedom. Other themes are encouraged, as they have a firm grounding in Existentialism as a tradition. The presenter is also required to include at least one relevant philosophical and one relevant historical text. The presentation will achieve high marks if it shows adequate research and is able to make a detailed and critical argument as to the core ideas displayed in the literary work based on that research.

The presentation can be done by one person or groups of two. Each presentation will be graded for playing a significant role in the following class discussion. The participant is required to give selected readings on connect for their presentation a week ahead of time, the aptness of those readings will be graded as well. (All posted material must agree with the “Fair Dealing Exception” in accord with copyright laws).

*Final Paper:*

A final paper will be due for each participant by the second to last class, because we need to allow students time before the end of the semester to grade the work. The main goal of the final paper is to engage a presentation given in class on a line of argument. This argument may be in-favor or against either a proposition made by the speaker, or the general point of view given in the selected works. This means that the final paper may be written primarily about either the presentation, the presented book, or the philosophical works related to the presented book.

**Course Schedule**

**(1/3)** *Class 1*, Introduction, Syllabus:

-Making a Map (Writing on the board what it is people think Existentialism is about in a word)

-Introducing the existential crisis in history, and the juxtaposition of different historical examples; showing two examples in literature from different times. (Rip van Winkle and Howl)

- Introducing myself and the syllabus

**(1/10)** *Class 2*, The Groundwork Theory of Existentialism:

- Philosophical historical background of Phenomenology and Hegelian Philosophy

- Selected passages from: (“Being & Nothingness” -Jean P Sartre) (“Being & Time” –Martin Heidegger)

- In class reading of Hegel “Master Slave Dialectic” Followed by situations in existential literature that correspond. (Radical Hegelianism) (Sartre, de Beauvoir)

**(1/17)**: Kierkegaard (*Sickness unto Death*) (group class reading)

**(1/24)**: Dostoevsky *(The Double)*

**(1/31)**: Nietzsche (*Thus Spake Zarathustra)*

**(2/7)**: Nietzsche (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*)

**(2/14)**: Herman Hesse (*Steppenwolf*)  
**(2/28)**: Simone de Beauvoir (*She Came to Stay*)

**(3/7)**: Jean Paul Sartre (*Nausea*)

**(3/14)**: Albert Camus (*The Stranger*)

**(3/21)**: Ralph Ellison (*Invisible man*)

**(3/28)**: Franz Kafka *(The Castle)*

**(4/4)**: Final Day of Grading/Movie

"If the book we are reading does not wake us, as with a fist hammering on our skulls, then why do we read it? Good God, we also would be happy if we had no books and such books that make us happy we could, if need be, write ourselves. What we must have are those books that come on us like ill fortune, like the death of one we love better than ourselves, like suicide. A book must be an ice axe to break the sea frozen inside us." - Kafka