

HONORS 304-T, EXISTENTIAL GROUP
FALL 2004, M W 1:00-2:15, UH 204
MICHAEL RUSSELL, PROFESSOR

Office: My office is H 312-B. Official office hours are Mondays and Wednesdays, 12:30-1:00 and 2:30 to 3:00. Appointments are strongly recommended, as if I don't know you are coming I may well be off having coffee or may have scheduled a meeting elsewhere. Office phone: (714) 278-2752. Cell phone: (714) 624-5055. Web page: <http://jmichaelrussell.org> Email: jmrussell@fullerton.edu.

Course description: This course is an adaptation of Philosophy 324, Existential Group, offered to students in the 2003-2004 Honors Program. It is an investigation into how themes in the writings of existentialist philosophy and literature pertain to the life styles, actions, and feelings of the class participants.

Existential philosophy and literature is well known for advancing ideas that are provocative, often challenging for their obscurity, sometimes gloomy, sometimes irreverent, impassioned, iconoclastic, disturbing, but, in any case, important in their personal application. Common themes included freedom and anxiety about being free, questions of meaning, views about death, authenticity, absurdity, relations with others. In this course our focus will be on the personal applicability of these and related themes. Secondly, your job will be to try to understand the ideas of some famous thinkers. Primarily, your job will be to think and write and talk openly about how these ideas, as you understand them, apply, concretely, to you.

General Education: This course fulfills General Education area IV, Lifelong Learning. According to the University Catalog, the overall goal of General Education is "to enhance students' awareness of themselves ... drawing on multiple points of view ... [and to] acquire knowledge of diverse disciplinary and cultural perspectives...." Area IV "provides the opportunity for students to integrate the elements of their university experience..." This particular course seeks to promote lifelong habits of reflectivity, emotional openness, by making personal application of ideas that have real bearing on how we conduct our lives.

Course expectations: Since many of our readings are somewhat obscure, some lectures will be necessary. However, typically a class meeting will have the format of an unstructured interactive group, where participants are encouraged to address topics emotionally important to them in their personal lives, linking these, when possible, to themes in the readings. There will be an expectation of candor, openness to discussing matters of intimacy, past and present, outside and within the group. Students will be required to synthesize these ingredients --- reading, my input, and group interaction -- into (near-) papers. These will be graded on writing quality, insightful utilization of ideas, and willingness to enter into the spirit of applying these things in honest personal introspection. In addition to

grades on written work the instructor will consider over-all intelligent contribution to the class and group interaction.

This may turn out to be your favorite course ever. Some have felt that way about it. However, it is very important for you to take very, very seriously the idea that you will be expected to interact and “self-disclose” on a really very personal level. Please don’t underestimate the degree to which real emotional openness and vulnerability is an expectation of the course. If you don’t care to do that sort of thing you will inhibit others who are more willing to actively share their struggles.

Kaufmann, Walter, Existentialism From Dostoevsky to Sartre (Meridian, ISBN 0452009308)

Camus, Albert, The Stranger (Random, ISBN 06797 20200)

Kafka, Franz, Metamorphosis and Other Stories (Dover, ISBN 0486290301)

MacLeish, Archibald, J.B. (HM, ISBN 3095083632)

Camus, Albert, The Fall (Random, ISBN 067920227)

The Book of Job (from The Bible) <http://www.genesis.net.au/~bible/kjv/job/>

Tolstoy, Leo, The Death Of Ivan Illych (Random, ISBN 05532103510)

Reading assignments and schedule are subject to change.

Weeks 1 and 2: Reading: Sartre's essay "Existentialism Is A Humanism" (in Kaufmann), perhaps other selections from Sartre, perhaps articles about Sartre by the instructor.

Weeks 2 and 3, Dostoevsky, Notes From Underground (in Kaufmann)

Week 4. Tolstoy, The Death Of Ivan Illych

Week 5. Kafka, The Metamorphoses & Other Stories, "Metamorphosis"

Week 6, Kafka, The Trial

Week 7, Sartre, "No Exit" (in Kaufmann)

Week 7, instructor's materials on Sartre

Week 8, Camus, The Stranger

Week 9, Camus, The Fall

Week 10, The Book of Job

Week 11, MacLeish, J.B.

Week 12, Nietzsche selections

Week 13, Heidegger selections

Week 14, open

Week 15, Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus"