PHIL 3009 // FRIT/GSD 3656
Existentialism: Nietzsche

Tues/Thurs 2:30 - 3:45 pm | Blegen 435

Instructor:

Dr. Philip Bold (he/him)
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Office hours: Tuesdays 4 - 5:50 pm

Course Description:

This course will provide a comprehensive survey of major themes in the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. Themes covered will include the origins and value of art, morality, and religion, nihilism and the affirmation of life, the will to power, the value of truth, and the life-sustaining value of illusion. We will discuss Nietzsche's provocative claims, such as that "God is dead," that Judeo-Christian morality is a hindrance to human flourishing, and that the traditional notion of human freedom is a fiction invented to justify vengeance, punishment, and the exercise of power over others, but that a different kind of freedom, grounded in self-mastery, might nonetheless be possible.

We will study texts throughout Nietzsche's philosophical career, including *The Birth of Tragedy*, *Untimely Meditations*, *Human, All Too Human*, *The Gay Science*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *The Genealogy of Morality*, and *Twilight of the Idols*.

Although students will be encouraged throughout to interpret Nietzsche as charitably as possible and to make a real effort to understand his challenging ideas, we will not read Nietzsche's texts uncritically. Indeed, our engagement with his provocations and the formulation of our own philosophical ideas in response will be necessary and inevitable. Although this will be a course about Nietzsche, it will also be a course about ourselves.

We will supplement our discussions of Nietzsche with a selection of films highlighting important Nietzschean themes, though not necessarily pronouncing Nietzschean doctrines. The films studied will include Julie Taymor's film production of Stravinsky's opera *Oedipus Rex*, Lars von Trier's *Melancholia*, P. T. Anderson's *There Will Be Blood*, and Jim Jarmusch's *Dead Man*.

Nietzsche has been known to offend, and students should be warned that he is just as likely to offend us. The spirit of this course, however, is to take on these provocations constructively and with an open mind, but never uncritically.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

Students in the course **can identify, define, and solve problems.**

Addressing the outcome
In this course, students will engage with some of the central philosophical problems raised by

Friedrich Nietzsche's work. Through a close study of Nietzsche's writings, students will explore how these problems can be clearly formulated and examine Nietzsche's responses to them. Students will also critically assess these responses and develop their own informed positions.

Assessment of learning related to the outcome
This learning outcome will be assessed through written exams, in-class philosophical reflection assignments, critical interview assignments, and lively participation in class discussion. These assignments will require students to identify and explain philosophical problems and arguments, critically evaluate Nietzsche's responses to them, and develop and defend their own philosophical positions.

Required Texts:

All students are required to purchase the following textbook, which is available in our bookstore.

- ***The Nietzsche Reader***
  Edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson, and Duncan Large

Course Requirements

1. In-class Written Exam 1 — 15%
2. In-class Written Exam 2 — 20%
3. In-class Written Exam 3 — 20%
4. Critical Interview 1 — 10%
5. Critical Interview 2 — 10%
6. Participation — 25%
   a. Attendance
   b. In-class writing assignments
   c. Contributions to discussion

Exam Dates and Deadlines:

Exam 1	Tues Oct 6
Critical Interview 1	Thurs Oct 22
Exam 2	Thurs Nov 12
Critical Interview 2	Thurs Dec 3
Exam 3	Tues Dec 15

Description of Requirements

In-class Written Exams (15%, 20%, 20%): The structure and content of each exam will be announced at least one week in advance. Exam formats may vary throughout the semester. Likely components include quotation identification and analysis, critical engagement with Nietzsche's ideas, and essays addressing central philosophical questions discussed in class.

Points will be deducted for work that is illegible or otherwise difficult for your instructor to read. Please write clearly and legibly. Practice writing by hand outside of class if needed.

Students are required to complete their exams on the dates they are proctored. Makeup exams will be provided for excused absences in accordance with University policy. Students should notify the instructor of an absence in advance whenever possible, or as soon as reasonably possible in the case of an emergency. Students who miss an exam without an excused absence may be permitted to take a makeup exam at the instructor's discretion, with a 15-point deduction.

In exceptional circumstances where a makeup exam must be completed electronically, the

student's work will be submitted to Pangram for AI detection. If Pangram detects AI usage, the student will be asked to complete the exam again in their own words. If Pangram detects AI usage again, the student will fail the exam.

Critical Interviews (10%, 10%): Students will conduct an interview with someone who is not enrolled in the course. During the interview, students will explain a central concept or direct quotation from Nietzsche and elicit the interviewee's response. Students will then critically engage with that response and conduct a philosophical discussion with the interviewee. Students must submit a recording of the interview.

Participation (25%): Participation grades will be based on students' attendance, the quality of their writing during in-class reflection assignments, and their contributions to class discussion. Students are expected to be lively participants in class discussions and to come prepared, having completed the assigned readings and taken notes on what they found most interesting, objectionable, puzzling, or otherwise worthy of discussion.

Electronic devices are not permitted in class unless the student has received special permission from the University and the instructor has been formally notified. You must bring a notebook and writing utensil to every lecture and discussion section.

Course Schedule

Note: The following schedule is subject to change. Students must complete readings or film viewings prior to class. Follow the Canvas page for updates to readings, links to films, and access to reading assignments not included in our textbook.

Below I use the acronym *TNR* for *The Nietzsche Reader*.

Introduction

Tues Sep 8

- Course Syllabus
- Foreword to *Ecce Homo* [***TNR*, pp. 500-502**]
- Optional: General Introduction [***TNR*, pp. xviii-xl**]

Philosophical Background

Thurs Sep 10

- Introduction to Part I "Beginnings" [***TNR*, pp. 3-11**]
- The Dark Philosophy of Schopenhauer [**video available on Canvas**]
- Introduction to Part II "Early Writings" [***TNR*, pp. 33-41**]

Early Writings

Tues Sep 15

- Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*, by Julie Taymor [**film shown in class**]
- Recommended: Get a head start on reading *The Birth of Tragedy*

Thurs Sep 17

- Introduction to Part II "Early Writings" [***TNR*, pp, 33-41**]
- *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*, only through section 7 [***TNR*, pp. 42-61**]

Tues Sep 22

- *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*, only through section 18 [***TNR*, pp. 62-79**]

Thurs Sep 24

- *Melancholia*, by Lars von Trier [**film available on Canvas**]

Tues Sep 29

- "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense" [***TNR*, pp. 114-123**]

Thurs Oct 1

- "On the Utility and Liability of History for Life" [***TNR*, pp. 124-141**]

Tues Oct 6

- IN-CLASS WRITTEN EXAM 1

The Middle Period

Thurs Oct 8

- Introduction to Part III "The Middle Period" [***TNR*, pp. 153-160**]
- *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, only through section 107 [***TNR*, pp. 161-178**]

Tues Oct 13

- *Human, All Too Human*, through section 636 [***TNR*, pp. 161-190**]

Thurs Oct 15

- *The Gay Science*, Book III [***TNR*, pp. 219-226**]
- *The Gay Science*, Book V, only through section 355 [***TNR*, pp. 362-369**]

Tues Oct 20

- *The Gay Science*, Book IV [***TNR*, pp. 226-237**]
- Alexander Nehamas, "The Eternal Recurrence" [**reading available on Canvas**]

Later Writings: 1886-1887

Thurs Oct 22

- Julian Young, "Nietzsche and Women" [**reading available on Canvas**]
- CRITICAL INTERVIEW 1 DUE BY MIDNIGHT

Tues Oct 27

- Part V Introduction "1886-1887" [***TNR*, pp. 297-310**]
- *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, Preface and Section 1 [***TNR*, pp. 311-324**]

Thurs Oct 29

- *There Will be Blood*, by P.T. Anderson [**film available on Canvas**]

Tues Nov 3

- *The Genealogy of Morality: A Polemic*, Preface and First Essay [***TNR*, pp. 390-408**]

Thurs Nov 5

- *The Genealogy of Morality*, Second Essay [***TNR*, pp. 408-424**]

Tues Nov 10

- *The Genealogy of Morality*, Third Essay [***TNR*, pp. 424-436**]

Thurs Nov 12

- IN-CLASS WRITTEN EXAM 2

Later Writings: 1888-1889

Tues Nov 17

- Part V Introduction "1888-1889" [***TNR*, pp. 439-450**]
- *Twilight of the Idols; or, How to Philosophize with a Hammer*, only through "The Four Great Errors" [***TNR*, pp. 456-473**]

Thurs Nov 19

- *Twilight of the Idols*, through "What I Owe the Ancients" [***TNR*, pp. 473-485**]

Tues Nov 24: No class

Thurs Nov 26: No class

Thus Spoke Zarathustra

Tues Dec 1

- Part IV Introduction "Thus Spoke Zarathustra" [***TNR*, pp. 245-253**]
- *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One*, only through "Of the Thousand and One Goals" [***TNR*, pp. 254-267**]

Thurs Dec 3

- *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, only through "Of Redemption" [***TNR*, pp. 267-277**]
- CRITICAL INTERVIEW 2 DUE BY MIDNIGHT

Tues Dec 8

- *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, through "The Sign" [***TNR*, pp. 277-292**]

Thurs Dec 10

- *Dead Man*, by Jim Jarmusch [**film available on Canvas**]

Tues Dec 15

- IN-CLASS WRITTEN EXAM 3

Course Policies

1. **No Technology in Class:** Students may not use electronic devices during class unless they have received special permission from the University and the instructor has been formally notified.

2. **Late Work:** Late work will be penalized unless permission has been granted by the instructor.

3. **Makeup Exams:** See the Description of Requirements above.

4. **Grading:** Final grades will be calculated as follows.

Letter Grades are translated to the following numerical scores.

A+ = 100	**C+** = 78
A = 95	**C** = 75
A- = 92	**C-** = 72
B+ = 88	**D+** = 68
B = 85	**D** = 65
B- = 82	**F** = 50

Final letter grades will be calculated using the following scale.

97-100 = **A+**	77-79 = **C+**
93-96 = **A**	73-76 = **C**
90-92 = **A-**	70-72 = **C-**
87-89 = **B+**	67-69 = **D+**
83-86 = **B**	60-66 = **D**
80-82 = **B-**	50 = **F**

5. **Plagiarism:** Plagiarism will result in a final grade of F for the course. If you have any questions about plagiarism or how to properly cite sources, do not hesitate to ask. According to the UMN Student Conduct Code: "Plagiarism shall mean representing the words, creative work, or ideas of another person as one's own without providing proper documentation of source."

6. **Use of AI:** Unless explicitly permitted by the instructor, the use of generative AI in completing coursework is prohibited. Students are welcome to use generative AI outside of class as a study aid, for example, to explore philosophical questions, review course material, or think through philosophical problems. However, work submitted for evaluation must be the student's own.

7. **Disability Accommodations:** If you have, or think you have, a disability that may affect your performance in this course, please contact the University of Minnesota Disability Resource Center (DRC) to discuss equitable access and reasonable accommodations.

8. **Sexual Misconduct.** Sexual misconduct (sexual harassment, sexual assault, stalking, and relationship violence) includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and/or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Such behavior is prohibited in the University setting.

   Per the U of M policy on sexual harassment, *I am required to share information that I learn about possible sexual misconduct* with the campus Title IX office. Within the requirements of my job, I will be as responsive as possible to your requests for confidentiality and support. You can also, or alternately, choose to talk with a confidential resource that will not share information that they learn about sexual misconduct. Confidential resources include:

   - The Aurora Center 24hr Helpline (612-626-9111)
   - Boynton Mental Health (612-624-1444)
   - Student Counseling Services (612-624-3323)

9. **Other Useful Resources:**
    - University Policies: https://policy.umn.edu/
    - Student Writing Support: http://writing.umn.edu/sws/
    - Disability Resource Center: https://disability.umn.edu/
    - Student Counseling Center: https://counseling.umn.edu/
    - The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: https://plato.stanford.edu