

EXISTENTIALISM

Fall 2026

Assignment #1

Kierkegaard & Dostoevsky

Due Tuesday, October 6

All papers must be properly word processed or typed with 1" margins on the top, sides and bottom. Use double-spacing and no larger than 12pt font. Turn in by uploading to Lamakū as a pdf file. Use the following format to title your file: lastname Phil 360 #1. Do not use AI to do this assignment. I want to see evidence that you have read and thoughtfully reflected upon the relevant texts.

Write a 4-5 page response to one of the following:

1. What is it about the story of Abraham that compels Kierkegaard to write this “Panegyric Upon Abraham” in *Fear and Trembling*? What is the point of the contrast Kierkegaard draws between the “tragic hero,” as illustrated in the story of Agamemnon, and the “knight of faith,” as illustrated in the story of Abraham? How does he use the example of a person who falls in love to illustrate the three stages leading up to the knight of faith? What is your reaction to this contrast between the tragic hero and the knight of faith?
2. What are the three forms of despair Kierkegaard distinguishes in *The Sickness Unto Death*? How does this experience of despair lead to authentic existence for Kierkegaard? What is your reaction to Kierkegaard’s thinking regarding authentic existence?
3. What does Kierkegaard mean by subjective truth and why does he regard it as more valuable than objective truth when it comes to the question of ethical or religious knowledge? How is it then, for Kierkegaard, that “truth can become untruth?” What implications does this have for the style of philosophical discourse?
4. Why might Dostoevsky’s *Notes from Underground* be regarded as an overture for Existentialism? What is it about the underground man’s reflection that calls into question Socrates’s confidence in reason and optimism in knowing oneself? What is it about the underground man’s reflections that ties together both Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and the later Existentialists? What is your reaction to Dostoevsky’s “Underground Man”?
5. Why does the Inquisitor in Dostoevsky’s story “The Grand Inquisitor” think that Christ misunderstood human nature in responding to the three temptations in the desert? Why does the Inquisitor say that “nothing has ever been more unendurable to man and human society than freedom”? What is the burden of freedom expressed by the Inquisitor? Who is right about human nature, the Inquisitor or Christ as portrayed in this story? What is the point of this story?

Rubric

1) Writing 20%

Grammar and spelling, composition and style. Your essay should be well organized. There should be an introduction, development of a theme, and a conclusion.

2) Philosophical Content 50%

The essay should reflect an adequate understanding of the texts. Your exposition of the text should include *at least two quotations* from the primary text material. All quotes should be properly marked within the text and must include a reference to the text cited.

3) Commentary 30%

Your own thoughtful reflections on the topic