



# **PSK 507**

# **Experimental Existential Psychology**

**Spring 2022**

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**Mondays, 18.00 - 20.50 | G-408**

Web Page:	<a href="http://www.kokdemir.info/courses/psk507">http://www.kokdemir.info/courses/psk507</a>
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# PSK 507

## Experimental Existential Psychology

### The Aim of PSK 507

One of the leading names in the field of psychotherapy, Irvin Yalom, in his book *Existential Psychotherapy* (see reference list), states the importance of people's confrontation with their different anxieties and states that these concerns are existential. According to Yalom, these anxieties (angst), which we can classify as **isolation, freedom, meaning and death**, are the basic building blocks of our self. The main purpose of this course is not only to inform students about these concerns and academic studies related to them, but also to take them and the lecturer on a co-existential journey. Unlike journeys in our daily lives, the goal in this journey is not to arrive anywhere, but the journey itself, without fear of getting lost. As Bilbo Baggins, one of the hobbits in *Middle-earth*, often reminds us: *"Not all those who wander are lost."*

Not only scientific research, but also literature (e.g., fantastic literature such as Tolkien's *Middle-earth*) will be at the center of this course. Putting a non-existent world at the center of an existential lesson can most politely be described as "unorthodox". Some scientists may find such an approach far from serious. However, I think that a mental game (or a mental experiment) described by Einstein as "Gedankenexperimenten" will be useful for us to understand existence and nothingness, which seems to be a rather abstract concept. Another alternative to Tolkien's *Middle-Earth* was the *Seven Kingdoms* of George R. R. Martin's *Game of Thrones*. Much thought was given to which one was better to choose for the journey, and in the end, with the advice of ancient scholars, *Middle-earth* was decided. Among the many reasons for this, one of the most important was that Tolkien, as a faithful writer, handled the motifs such as good, evil and God better in his books. Because, in the literature of existentialism, there are those who establish their own theory outside the figure of God such as Sartre, Camus, Yalom, as well as very faithful existentialists such as Kierkegaard, and *Middle Earth* is a world big enough to include them all and at least be fair in this respect... and of course the Elves, A world without dwarves, and above all without Hobbits, is really boring.

PSK 507 Experimental Existential Psychology is a 14-week course designed to discuss both theoretical and empirical aspects of existential concerns such as isolation, freedom, meaning, and death. It not only discusses the discourses of writers and scientists with strong arguments such as Sartre, Camus, Kafka, Dostoevsky, Freud, May, Frankl, Yalom, but also from experimental studies conducted under the umbrella of experimental existential psychology, which has dominated the field of social psychology for the last 30 years. These studies give us an idea of how existence, which seems to be a rather abstract concept, can be measured. Of course, art and literature will also show themselves every week as the natural allies of such a course, and expect the attendees to be interested in it.

At the end of the 14th week, we expect the participants (including the lecturer of the course) to acquire general theoretical, methodological and historical information about the subject, as well as to change their selves (at least the desire for change). Existential psychology or existentialism is the state of being in life as it is called. This situation is subject to minor changes with each new day, even if we are not aware of it. But if these changes are also fueled by awareness, then they become noticeable changes. The purpose of this course is to remind you again of your freedom to raise your awareness to create noticeable change. Remember how much changed even Sam Gamgee, who accompanied Frodo in *Middle - Earth*. Why shouldn't we change?

### Main Themes Which Will be Covered in PSK507

**PART I:** Eigenwelt | The Self, Identity, Morality, and Free Will

**PART II:** Mitwelt | Isolation and Connection

**PART III:** Umwelt | The World of Things

**PART IV:** Überwelt | Death and Beliefs about Afterlife



**PSK 507**  
**Tentative Lecture Plan**

**Week 01:** Existence and Encounter

**Week 02:** The History of Self

**Week 03:** I Exist, Therefore I am

**Week 04:** I am Them, They are not Me

**Week 05:** Happy Death

**Week 06:** L'etranger

**Week 07:** Existential Boredom

**Week 08:** You're Nothing John Snown

**Week 09:** You're Nothing J. P. Sartre

**Week 10:** We're Nothing, Ms. 42

**Week 11:** La Nausée

**Week 12:** About Death I

**Week 13:** About Death II

**Week 14:** Why do We Exist?





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### Assessment and Grading

#### Participation (10%)

In principle, the lecturer of the course did not take attendance in any of his classes for years, and did not reflect the attendance or absenteeism in the grade. However, because this lesson is essentially a journey, it is essential that everyone walks at the same pace as everyone else. Of course, we can take a rest from time to time or use our freedom to lag behind a bit. Everyone has the right to use this freedom 3 times. However, if you abuse this right and leave the rest alone on this journey (for example, if you do not come to class 4 times or 12 hours), we will unfortunately have to send you off to the F2 realm of Mordor.

#### Existence in One-Page (30%)

The most important names of existential theorists (Sartre, Camus, Kafka, Dostoyevsky, Beckett,...) have often conveyed what they want to convey to the reader in the form of novels or stories. You are asked to try something similar. You will have one page (300 words maximum, with Times New Roman, 12pt, 1.5 space). In this one page, you are asked to write a very short story (yes, a story) that will give us an existential theme as we read it, or, more precisely, perhaps throw our own existence in the face. You must write in Turkish. We will discuss the details in class. [Deadline: 13th week]

#### Midterm (30%)

The average of the articles you will write for the eXistential Café blog page (in English) will be evaluated as the midterm grade, and the 3 articles that deserve to be published will be evaluated as 30 points. [Deadlines: 4th, 8th, and 12th weeks]

eXistential Café: <https://existentialcafe.wordpress.com>

#### Proposals (30%)

You are asked to write an experimental research proposal for any of the main themes written above. We will discuss the details in class. [Deadline: Last Week]



# PSK 507

## Experimental Existential Psychology

### Readings

01. Atılğan, Y. (1959/2003). *Anayurt oteli*. Yapı Kredi Yayınları.
02. Atılğan, Y. (1959/2013). *Aylak adam*. Yapı Kredi Yayınları.
03. **Bakewell, S. (2016)**. *At the existentialist café: Freedom, being and apricot cocktails*. Chatto & Windus.
04. Beckett, S. (1952/2006). *Godot'yu beklerken* (Çev., U. Ün, T. Günersel). Kabalcı Yayınları.
05. Camus, A. (1938/2006). *Caligula* (Çev., A. R. Ergüven). Berfin Yayınları.
06. **Camus, A. (1971/2009)**. *Mutlu ölüm* (Çev., R. Dara). Can Yayınları.
07. **Camus, A. (1942/2009)**. *Sisifos söyleni* (Çev., T. Yücel). Can Yayınları.
08. **Camus, A. (1942/2019)**. *Yabancı* (Çev., A. Sezen). Can Yayınları.
09. Frankl, V. E., & Frankl, V. E. (2006). *Man's search for meaning (Mini book ed.)*. Beacon Press.
10. Gonçarov, I. A. (1857/2014). *Oblomov* (Çev., S.Eyüboğlu, E. Güney). Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları.
11. Greenberg, J., Koole, S. L., & Pyszczynski, T. A. (Eds.). (2004). *Handbook of experimental existential psychology*. Guilford Press.
12. Heidegger, M. (2010). *Being and time* (J. Stambaugh & D. J. Schmidt, Trans.). State University of New York Press.
13. Kafka, F. (1912/2008). *Dönüşüm* (Çev., A. Cemal). Can Yayınları.
14. Kierkegaard, S. (1843/2015). *Korku ve titreme* (Çev., İ. Yerguz). Say Yayınları.
15. Kundera, M. (1984/1999). *The unbearable lightness of being* (Trans., M. H. Heim). Faber and Faber.
16. Loe, E. (2006/2019). *Doppler* (Çev., D. Başak). Yapı Kredi Yayınları.
17. Ökten, K. H. (2010). *Ölüm kitabı: Ölüm düşüncesinin temel metinleri*. Agora Kitaplığı.
18. **Sartre, J.-P. (1938/2007)**. *Bulantı* (Çev., S. Hilâv). Can Yayınları.
19. Schopenhauer, A. (1851/2007). *Hayatın anlamı* (Çev., A. Aydoğan). Say Yayınları.
20. Solomon, R. C. (2001/2020). *Akılcılıktan varoluşçuluğa: Varoluşçular ve 19. yüzyıldaki kökleri* (Çev., R. Kuldaşlı), Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları.
21. Tolkien, J. R. R. (1954/2004). *Yüzüklerin efendisi*. (Çev. Ç.E. İpek). İstanbul: Metis.
22. Yalom, I. D. (2008). *Güneşe bakmak: Ölümle yüzleşmek* (Çev., Z. İ. Babayiğit). Kabalcı Yayınevi.
23. Yalom, I. D. (1980/1999). *Varoluşçu psikoterapi* (Çev., Z. İ. Babayiğit). Kabalcı Yayınevi.

\* Books with **bold author names** are mandatory.

- **Movies:** <https://boxd.it/5gk8C>
- **Songs:** <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/5v1YM13nhSXJRDMtwzG3bM?si=5a20737be3b84e0f>
- **Podcast:** <https://open.spotify.com/show/2qCW1jTMjcF7uguCyiaUOf>