**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This course explores the rise of existential philosophy and theories of the absurd in world literature and the arts. Our survey features works that address the meaninglessness of existence and the responsibilities that consequently fall on our shoulders in the wake of that proposition. How do we live meaningfully with the full knowledge of our mortality? What do our most debilitating flaws reveal about the human condition? Why do we adhere to social convention, and what do those “manners” reveal about our public morality? What is the nature of faith, and do we require faith to give our lives purpose? How do we retain a sense of our own agency and ability to act, without limiting those same capacities in others? Tentative readings will include Léo Tolstoy’s *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, Franz Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis*, Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *Notes from the Underground*, Albert Camus’ *The Stranger*, Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, and selected philosophical readings by Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Soren Kierkegaard. We will also consider a handful of media texts, including the films *Taxi Driver*, *Ikiru*, and selected episodes of the AMC drama series *Mad Men*.