



Existentialist Metaphysics
FALL 2009

PHIL 235
MWF 3:30-4:30

Professor Diane Michelfelder
Office: MAIN 110
Office hours: Wed. 2:20-3:20, Friday 11-12
and by appointment
Phone: 696-6197
E-mail: michelfelder@macalester.edu

Course Description

“All living is one's own living, feeling oneself live, knowing oneself to be existing, where knowing does not imply intellectual knowledge or any special wisdom but is that surprising presence which one's life has for every one of us” (José Ortega y Gasset). For those thinkers whose work is associated with the philosophical tradition of existentialism, the understanding of human existence represents a singular gateway to the understanding of being, the general object of the study of metaphysics. But just what does it mean to exist? In this course, we will reflectively consider responses to this and other questions that play a key role within existentialist metaphysics. Typically, readings will be drawn from works by philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and José Ortega y Gasset. While there is no prerequisite for this course, some familiarity with the history of European philosophy would be helpful.

Learning goals

The learning goals for this course are organized around three themes: substance, skills, and self-awareness.

With respect to substance, this course is designed to help you acquire a critical understanding of: (a) fundamental questions, concepts, perspectives, and thematic developments within the philosophical movement known as existentialism, particularly as these evolved in the work of those philosophers whose books we will be taking up in class, and (b) how existentialist metaphysics fits within the tradition of European philosophy, both as a questioning of this tradition and its continuation.

The design of this course is also intended to give you a way of developing key skills associated with philosophy in particular and the liberal arts in general. By the end of this semester, you should be better able to: (a) read difficult philosophical writing with an inquisitive and thoughtful mind; (b) analyze and evaluate philosophical accounts; (c) lead and contribute to philosophical discussions, and (d) construct and defend your own philosophical positions and present them persuasively, both orally and in writing.

Self-awareness as a philosophical learning goal has its roots in Socrates' dictum that "the unexamined life is not worth living." I hope this course will expand your capacities for (a) reading and reflecting on other philosophical work in existentialism and the history of philosophy; (b) understanding the dimensions of what it is to be a human "self"; (c) understanding the assumptions and predispositions you bring to the consideration of philosophical questions; and (d) respecting well-reasoned philosophical positions, even when these positions may be at odds with your own.

Required Texts

Some Lessons in Metaphysics, José Ortega y Gasset, W.W. Norton, 1971.

Being and Nothingness. 2nd Edition. Jean-Paul Sartre, Routledge Classics, 2003.

Phenomenology of Perception. 2nd Edition. Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Routledge Classics, 2002.

Being and Time. Martin Heidegger. SUNY Press, 1996.

Plus readings from Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, on library reserve.

Please note that we will not be reading *all* of *Being and Nothingness*, *Phenomenology of Perception*, and *Being and Time*, but purchasing these entire works will be the most economical for you. As these are the editions/translations we will be using in class, if you have other editions/translations, you will still need to purchase the ones above.

Academic Integrity

In reviewing your work, I will adhere to the College's *Academic Integrity Policy* as published in the *Student Handbook*.

Through the gift of your attention, you also help support the integrity of the academic environment. For your own sake and for the sake of others when we are in class together please refrain from texting, tweeting, and the like.

Coursework

For this course, you will be asked to submit four papers (the last of which will be presented in class), take a midterm comprising short-answer and essay questions, and be responsible for introducing one of the readings in class.

The first three writing assignments will be reaction papers to our readings and discussions on each of the three major works in which we'll be immersed for this course. These papers should be 4-6 pages long, and should present a critical analysis of a position or line of reasoning presented in the work under consideration. *Unexcused late papers will be accepted up to one week after the due date, but you will lose half a grade (e.g. A- to B+) on the first day your paper is late, and every two days thereafter.*

The fourth paper, 12-15 pages in length, will be a term paper on a topic related to our readings and discussions. Suggestions for paper topics will be distributed in class. You will be asked to develop a draft of this paper prior to the Thanksgiving break. I'll return that draft with comments, but without a grade. You will also have the opportunity to present your paper in class, and so have the opportunity to get additional feedback on your ideas from your peers. The final draft, which is mandatory, can be turned in up to 12:30 pm on 21 December. *Unexcused late first drafts will be accepted up to one week after the due date, but you will lose half a grade on the first day your paper is later, and every two days thereafter.*

Late papers will be accepted without penalty if (a) you let me know in advance your paper will be late; and (b) you have a reason that is acceptable and confirmed in writing, either from a physician, Health Services, or the Dean of Students' Office.

In addition, you will be responsible for introducing one of the readings in class. As part of this assignment, you should distribute electronically 2-3 questions about the reading no later than the night before the class will meet. In formulating your questions, in general it would be best to think of them as open-ended prompts for the purposes of stimulating class discussion, rather than requests for clarification of the reading, although there are certainly times when those two might overlap.

Coursework evaluation

Your final grade for this class will be based on the following percentages:

First reaction paper	10%
Second reaction paper	15%
Third reaction paper	15%
Midterm	10%
In-class reading introduction	10%
Term paper	30%
Term paper presentation	10%

I encourage you to participate in class through raising questions, taking part in discussions, etc. In this context, it is not how often you speak but what you say that matters. Class participation can improve or detract from your grade by one-half (eg from A- to A or B+).

Schedule of Topics, Readings, Exams, and Paper Due Dates

This schedule may change at the discretion of the instructor.

Week One

9 September	Welcome and orientation to the course
11 September	José Ortega y Gasset, <i>Some Lessons in Metaphysics</i> , Lessons I-IV

Week Two

14 September	<i>Some Lessons in Metaphysics</i> , Lessons V-XIV
16 September	Introduction to Jean-Paul Sartre's <i>Being and Nothingness</i> <u>Reading:</u> <i>BN</i> , Introduction, pp. 1-23
18 September	Negation <i>BN</i> , Part I, Chapter 1, pp. 27-45

Week Three

21 September	Anguish <i>BN</i> , Part I, Chapter 1, pp. 43-69
23 September	Bad Faith <i>BN</i> , Part I, Chapter 2, pp. 70-94
25 September	The Structure of the For-itself <i>BN</i> , Part II, Chapter 1, pp. 97-119

Week Four

- 28 September The Look
BN, Part III, Chapter 1, pp. 276-326
- 30 September Freedom
BN, Part IV, Chapter 1, pp. 455-503
- 2 October Freedom and Facticity
BN, Part IV, Chapter 1, pp. 503-530, 552-57
First Reaction Paper Due

Week Five

- 5 October Freedom and Responsibility
BN, Part IV, Chapter 1, pp. 574-577
- 7 October Introduction to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*
Reading: *PP*, Introduction, Chapter 1, pp. 3-15
- 9 October Perception and Memory
PP, Introduction, Chapter 2, pp. 15-29

Week Six

- 12 October The Phenomenal Field
PP, Introduction, Chapter 3, pp. 60-74
- 14 October The Body as Object
PP, Part I, Chapter 1, pp. 77-102
- 16 October I will be attending a Scholars at Risk board meeting in New York. Class time will be used for library research that will help you get started on your term paper. Please use this time to identify the topic for your term paper, the provisional thesis that you'll be defending, along with a brief sketch of how you intend to approach your thesis, and e-mail these to me by the beginning of class on 21 October.

Week Seven

- 19 October The Spatiality of the Body
PP, Part I, Chapter 2, pp. 112-170
- 21 October The Sexuality of the Body
PP, Part I, Chapter 3, pp. 178-198
- 23 October **MIDTERM**

Week Eight

26 October Sense Experience
PP, Part II, Chapter 1, pp. 240-267

28 October Space
PP, Part II, Chapter 2, pp. 283-307, 327-347
SECOND REACTION PAPER DUE

30 October Fall Break—no class meeting

Week Nine

2 November Introduction to Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*
Reading, *BT*, Sections 1-4, pp. 1-12

4 November Da-sein. Being-in-the-World
BT, Sections 9-13, pp. 39-58

6 November The Being of Tools
BT, Sections 14-18, pp. 69-83

Week Ten

9 November The Spatiality of Da-sein
BT, Sections 22-24, pp. 94-105

11 November Da-sein and the "They"
BT, Sections 25-27, pp. 107-122

13 November Attunement. Understanding. Discourse
BT, Sections 29-31, 34, pp. 126-139; 150-156

Week Eleven

16 November Everyday Being
BT, Sections 35-38, pp. 156-168

18 November *Angst*
BT, Sections 39-40, pp. 169-178

20 November Care
BT, Sections 41-43, pp. 178-196; also pp. 208-211
THIRD REACTION PAPER DUE

Week Twelve

23 November Time
BT, Sections 79-81, pp. 373-391

25 November Work
Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*,
selections on library reserve

FIRST DRAFT OF TERM PAPER DUE

27 November Thanksgiving Holiday—no class meeting

Week Thirteen

30 November Action
Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*,
selections on library reserve

2 December First term paper presentation session

4 December Second term paper presentation session

Week Fourteen

7 December Third term paper presentation session

9 December Fourth term paper presentation session

11 December Fifth term paper presentation session

Week Fifteen

14 December End-of-semester course wrap-up

21 December 12:30 PM **DEADLINE FOR TURNING IN FINAL DRAFTS
OF TERM PAPERS**