

Phil 211: Existential-phenomenology and the relational self

Spring term, 2018

Office: 161 Susan Campbell Hall
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Office hours: Wednesday 2:00-4:00
Class Schedule: MW 12:00-13:50 in Fenton

Course Description

This course will serve as an introduction to existential-phenomenology, focusing on topics such as freedom, bad-faith, and identity in their relation to oppression, illness, and healing/coping. The overall aim of the course will be to – via rigorous analyses of texts important to the existential-phenomenological tradition (Sartre, de Beauvoir, Fanon, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty) – challenge our preconceptions of freedom and selfhood. We will use the insights gained from this to criticize the idealization of masculinity and whiteness in society and the existential-phenomenological tradition itself, and to put pressure on the assumption that a “normal” self is an autonomous and healthy individual.

Learning Goals and Expectations

- Students will be exposed to – and gain an understanding of – key topics in existential-phenomenology
- Students will be encouraged to use existential-phenomenology as a tool to challenge and resist racism, colonialism, and sexism.
- Students will be introduced to existential-phenomenological theories of selfhood in their relation to illness and healing. This existential-phenomenological thematizing of illness and health will challenge our assumptions regarding the “normal” and the “pathological,” which are detrimental to healing and to coping.
- Students will further develop their writing, reading and thinking skills.
- Students will develop their critical thinking skills.

Organization of Classroom and Readings

Classes will incorporate both presentation of material by me, and discussion. The balance and relation of these components will vary (we might start with discussion or end with it, or move in and out of it). For each class, a reading is assigned and it is expected that you read and study it before class so that you are prepared to think about it and questions arising from it. Discussion and lecture presumes that you are familiar with the text.

Course Requirements

(1) *Readings* (see reading list below). During class, I will presuppose your familiarity with the readings. Take notes on readings, **bring the relevant texts to class**, and come with questions. All readings are available on Canvas, or I will provide the link on the syllabus.

(2) *Attendance*. I do not give out grades directly based on attendance. However, I am aware of your attendance patterns. And, we are studying difficult texts, which means that engaging with the reading material in class is crucial for your understanding it. Students who skip class tend to receive a D or fail the class (due to not understanding the texts and not participating).

(3) *Participation* (see rubric below). Class discussion will provide you with the space to try out and experiment with new and old ideas, and work through the assigned reading. I expect you to come to class prepared to contribute to discussion. Note that participation is not the same as simply being present in class. Nor is participation a substitute for attendance: you will neither learn more nor sound smart by skipping often, and then dominating the class when you return. Participation will be worth 15% of your final grade.

(4) *Question of Consideration (QFC)*. Throughout the term, you are responsible for writing eight “Questions for Consideration” on the assigned readings. An explanation of this assignment can be found on Canvas, and we will also go over it on the first day of class. Questions for Consideration will make up 20% of your final grade.

(5) *Papers*. Over the term, you will write three 4-5 page papers. These papers will make up 60% of your final grade (20% each). See paper writing guidelines on Canvas.

(6) *Quality of Failure*. To understand this assignment, see: www.insidehighered.com/views/2012/08/21/essay-importance-teaching-failure. In this course, I want to encourage engaging with philosophy as an activity in which you dare to think, and therefore risk failure, as well as to encourage learning from self-conscious reflection on one’s own failures. For this assignment, keep a journal throughout the class and, when you notice a particular failure that you run into and think is significant, productive, etc., add an entry that: a) records the date; b) describes/narrates the failure and your process of coming to notice it; c) records your reflections on the failure, e.g., points about what’s behind it, what you were missing, what you can learn from it, how you work, etc. At the end of the term, write a one page (double spaced) reflective essay synthesizing these points and what you learned from them. Assign yourself a letter grade assessing the quality of failure in the course (how well you did risking, catching, assessing and learning from failures). This reflective essay will be worth 5% of your final grade.

Grading

Paper assignments

A = Excellent. No mistakes, well-written, distinctive in some way or other, and making an attempt to offer an original argument.

B = Good. No significant mistakes, well-written, but not distinctive in any way.

C = Okay. Some errors, but a basic grasp of the material.

D = Poor. Several errors. A tenuous grasp of the material.

F = Failing. Problematic on all fronts indicating either no real grasp of the material or lack of effort.

Participation

A = To achieve an A grade the expectations are that the student has near perfect attendance, she/he is recognized as a leader in discussion and consistently contributes to and brings the conversation to a deeper level, without dominating the discussion to such an extent that it inhibits participation by other students.

B = To achieve a B grade expectations are that the student will have very good attendance at lectures (around 95% of the time). Takes a very active role in discussion and remarks are consistently helpful and on topic.

C = To achieve a C grade expectations are that the student will have good attendance (present around 90% of the time). Participates in discussions, but not consistently.

D = To achieve a D grade expectations are that the student will only attend class around 80% of the time. Participates in discussion sporadically.

F = Student has poor attendance and/or is not a positive contributor to discussion.

Guidelines and Procedures

Important Advice: If a special condition or circumstance in your life may or will affect your performance, please let me know about it as soon as possible. *It will be treated with the strictest confidence.* Please do not wait until the condition or circumstance is impending or has already happened before telling me about its impact on you. If something unanticipated occurs, bring it to my attention and we will work out accommodations.

Technology: You may use laptops or tablets in class, but if I notice that you are using these forms of technology for something other than taking notes/doing the readings, you will no longer be able to use technology in class and may be asked to leave.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is unacceptable. If you copy someone else's work and put it forward as your own, I will know, and you will receive an F in the course. See:

<http://researchguides.uoregon.edu/citing-plagiarism>

Late Policy: Late papers will only be accepted without penalty for a legitimate (e.g., documented) reason, a reason I must be informed about *at least* 48 hours before the paper is due. Late papers will suffer a grade penalty, and after a week I will not accept them. Late QFCs will not be accepted.

Gender language and human diversity. In addition to all the other reasons for using gender inclusive language and language that attends to human diversity, there are philosophical reasons for this as well. Philosophy demands that we think very carefully, clearly and rigorously about human life and ideas. To do this well, we have to attend to the diversity of human life. Otherwise, we build and reinforce prejudices that betray who we are as human beings. Using gender inclusive language in your writing and speaking reminds us that human beings are diverse in gender, and that not all of them are "he." And this reminds us of other differences in mind, e.g., substituting "she" where "he" might have been traditionally expected, alternating systematically between the two, using "she/he," and so on. Also note that you can go beyond "she" and "he" pronouns, using "zie" instead of "he/she," or "hir" instead of him/her. For helpful discussion and guidelines, google: Warren, Virginia L. "Guidelines for the Nonsexist Use of Language." Using gender inclusive language in your papers is a requirement for this course.

Accessibility: If you have a documented disability, please contact me in advance. If you need accommodations in this class, I will work with the Accessible Education Centre to find a solution for you.

Sexual Violence: The UO is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic and dating violence and

gender-based stalking. If you (or someone you know) has experienced or experiences gender-based violence (intimate partner violence, attempted or completed sexual assault, harassment, coercion, stalking, etc.), know that you are not alone. UO has staff members trained to support survivors in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more. Please be aware that all UO employees are required reporters. This means that if you tell me about a situation, I may have to report the information to my supervisor or the Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity. Although I have to report the situation, you will still have options about how your case will be handled, including whether or not you wish to pursue a formal complaint. Our goal is to make sure you are aware of the range of options available to you and have access to the resources you need. If you wish to speak to someone confidentially, you can call 541-346-SAFE, UO's 24h hotline, to be connected to a confidential counselor to discuss your options. You can also visit the SAFE website at safe.uoregon.edu.

Assigned Readings (Class schedule and readings are subject to revision. I will let you know ahead of time if this happens)

Week	Topic	Assigned Readings	Notes
1 April 2/4	M: Introduction W: What is existentialism?	M: No reading W: Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism," 11 pages	
2 April 9/11	M/W: Freedom and bad faith	M: Sartre, "Bad Faith" from <i>Being and Nothingness</i> , pages 86-116 W: Sartre, "Bad Faith" from <i>Being and Nothingness</i> , pages 86-116, continued	
3 April 16/18	M/W: Situated freedom and oppression	M: Simone de Beauvoir, Introduction to <i>The Second Sex</i> , 3-17 W: Simone de Beauvoir, Introduction to <i>The Second Sex</i> , 3-17	
4 April 23/25	M/W: Situated freedom and oppression	M: Franz Fanon, <i>Black Skins, White Masks</i> , Introduction, pages 9-16; Chapter One, pages 17-40 W: Franz Fanon, <i>Black Skins, White Masks</i> , Chapter Five, pages 105-140	First paper due Sunday, April 28 by midnight
5 April 30/ May 2	M/W: Heidegger: Dasein, being-in-the world and being-with	M: Heidegger, <i>Being and Time</i> , "Exposition of the Task of a Preparatory Analysis of Dasein," pages 67-71; "The Worldhood of the World," 95-107	Heidegger's work is notoriously difficult to read. Because of this, it's key to closely read and re-read the material,

		<p>W: Heidegger, <i>Being and Time</i>, “Being-in-the-world as Being-with and Being-one’s-self. The ‘They,’” 149-168</p>	<p>to take notes and/or mark up the margins, and to recognize that – if you feel frustrated reading Heidegger – everyone else probably is as well.</p>
<p>6 May 7/9</p>	<p>M: Heidegger: existential moods (esp. anxiety)</p> <p>W: Heideggerian existentialism and trauma: coping and the relational self</p>	<p>M: Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?” pages 93-110</p> <p>W: Robert Stolorow, <i>World Affectivity, Trauma</i>, “Intro: Existential Analysis, Daseinanalysis and Post-Cartesian Psychoanalysis,” pages 1-4; “Existential Anxiety, Finitude, and Trauma,” pages 35-51; “Worlds Apart: Dissociation, Finitude, and Traumatic Temporality,” pages 53-62</p>	
<p>7 May 14/16</p>	<p>M: Existentialism and trauma: coping and the relational self</p> <p>W: Merleau-Ponty’s existential-phenomenology: the embodied self</p>	<p>M: Susan Brison, <i>Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self</i>, Introduction: “Surviving Sexual Violence,” pages 2-21; Chapter 3: “Outliving Oneself,” pages 38-66.</p> <p>W: Merleau-Ponty, <i>Phenomenology of Perception</i>, “The Spatiality of One’s Own Body and Motricity,” pages 100-127</p>	<p>Second paper due Sunday, May 20 by midnight</p>
<p>8 May 21/23</p>	<p>M: Merleau-Ponty’s existential-phenomenology: the embodied self</p> <p>W: Existential-phenomenology and illness</p>	<p>M: Merleau-Ponty, <i>Phenomenology of Perception</i>, “The Spatiality of One’s Own Body and Motricity,” pages 127-148</p> <p>W: Havi Carel, <i>Illness: The Cry of the Flesh</i>, “Introduction,” pages 1-14, “The body in illness,” pages 23-43 (book available online through library)</p>	

<p>9 May 28/30</p>	<p>Merleau-Ponty on intersubjectivity</p>	<p>M: Memorial Day: No class</p> <p>W: Merleau-Ponty, <i>Phenomenology of Perception</i>, “Others and the Human World,” pages 361-383</p>	
<p>10 June 4/6</p>	<p>The autonomous self and stigmatization</p> <p>Existential coping and the need for empathetic others</p>	<p>M: R. Crawford: “The Boundaries of the Self and the Unhealthy Other,” pages 1347-1364</p> <p>W: Havi Carel, <i>Illness: The Cry of the Flesh</i>, “The social world of illness,” pages 64-72 (book available online through library); Carla Willig, “Unlike a Rock, a Tree, a Horse or an Angel: Reflections on the Struggle for Meaning through Writing During the Process of Cancer Diagnosis”; Suleika Jaouad: “Life, Interrupted: Cancer is Awkward”: https://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/03/life-interrupted-cancer-is-awkward/</p> <p>Recommended: Elliot Kukla, “In My Chronic Illness, I Found a Deeper Meaning”: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/10/opinion/in-my-chronic-illness-i-found-a-deeper-meaning.html</p>	<p><i>Third paper due Wednesday, June 13 by midnight</i></p> <p><i>Quality of Failure due Friday, June 15 by 6:00pm</i></p>