

Sartre (Prospective Syllabus)

Course Description

We shall examine the early philosophical thought of the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, the leading proponent of twentieth-century French existentialism. His thought raises provocative and illuminating insights into questions such as “what is the self?” and “what is freedom?” The course will take us from Sartre’s background in phenomenology up to his concern for social matters. We will consider whether it is really true that “Hell is other people” or that “Man is a useless passion”. In addition to such existential concerns, the course will highlight how Sartre’s thought is also relevant for grappling with several traditional philosophical problems. Although this course will focus on his philosophical writings, they are essential for understanding Sartre’s wide-ranging views, e.g., on literature, art, psychology, and politics, and students will have the opportunity to write papers on Sartre’s thought in relation to such topics.

Required Texts

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *The Transcendence of the Ego*. Translated and Annotated with an Introduction by Forrest Williams and Robert Kirkpatrick. New York: Hill and Wang, 1960 [1936].
Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*. Translated and with an introduction by Hazel E. Barnes. New York: Washington Square Press, 1992 [1943].

Recommended Texts

Detmer, David. *Sartre Explained: From Bad Faith to Authenticity*. Chicago and LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 2008.
Gardner, Sebastian. *Sartre’s Being and Nothingness: A Reader’s Guide*. London: Continuum, 2009.

Schedule of Readings [each “*” corresponds to 1-2 class sessions]

Unit 1: Sartre’s Project, its Background, and its Motivations

The Background of Husserlian Phenomenology

* Sartre, “A Fundamental Idea of Husserl’s Phenomenology: Intentionality”; Husserl, *Ideas I*, §§27-36, 41-46, 47-50, 55

Recommended: “Existentialism is a Humanism”

Sartre’s Phenomenology of Perception and Imagination

* *The Imagination*, pp. 3-8; *The Imaginary*, pp. 3-16, 179-194

From Imagination to Freedom

* “Cartesian Freedom”

Unit 2: Sartre’s Conception of the Phenomenological Subject

Sartre against Husserl’s Transcendental Ego

* TE pp. 31-42

The Cogito and Non-Positional Consciousness

* TE pp. 43-54

The "Self-Love Theory" and the Constitution of the Ego

* TE pp. pp. 54-91

Return to the Cogito

* TE pp. 91-106

Recommended: "Consciousness of Self and Knowledge of Self"

Unit 2 Paper Prompts:

* What is Sartre's thesis in "Cartesian Freedom"? What support does he give for this thesis? Is his case convincing?

* Despite Husserl's status as the founder of phenomenology, Sartre thinks that Husserl's positing of the transcendental ego is inconsistent with phenomenology. Why? Is Sartre's own position more consistent with the phenomenological method?

* What is Sartre's account of dreaming in his work *The Imaginary*, and how does he use this account to respond to skeptical doubts (primarily that of Descartes) about our knowledge of the external world? Evaluate whether Sartre's account of dreaming satisfactory on its own, as well as whether it succeeds in dispelling the skeptical doubts.

Unit 3: Sartre's Ontology

Sartre's Dualist Ontology

* BN Introduction: **Skim:** i. The Phenomenon; and, ii. The Phenomenon of Being and the Being of the Phenomenon; iii. The Pre-Reflective Cogito and the Being of the Percipere; and, iv. The Being of the Percipi"); **Read:** v. The Ontological Proof; and, vi. Being-in-Itself

Nothingness and Being-for-Itself

* BN I.1. The Origin of Negation: i. The Question; ii. Negations; iii. The Dialectical Concept of Nothingness; and, iv. The Phenomenological Concept of Nothingness

* BN I.1. The Origin of Negation: v. The Origin of Nothingness

Bad Faith

* BN I.2 Bad Faith: i. Bad Faith and Falsehood

* BN I.2 Bad Faith: ii. Patterns of Bad Faith

* BN I.2 Bad Faith: iii. The "Faith" of Bad Faith

Immediate Structures of the For-Itself

* BN 2.1 Immediate Structures: i. Presence to Self; ii. The Facticity of the For-Itself; and, iii.

Immediate Structures: iii. The For-Itself and the Being of Value

* BN 2.1 Immediate Structures: iv. The For-Itself and the Being of Possibilities; and, v. The Self and the Circuit of Selfness

Reflection and Knowledge

* BN 2.2 Temporality: iii. Original Temporality and Psychic Temporality: Reflection

Transcendence

* BN 2.3 Transcendence: Introduction; i. Knowledge as a Type of Relation between the For-Itself and the In-Itself; and, ii. Determination as Negation; and, v. Knowledge

Unit 3 Paper Prompts:

* What exactly is Sartre's "ontological proof"? What does it aim to show, and what are the steps of the argument?

- * What are Sartre's objections to existing accounts of the origin of negation? What is his own account, and how does he support it?
- * Concerning bad faith, why does Sartre think that Freud cannot account for this phenomenon? How does he account for this phenomenon?
- * What is going on with Sartre's discussion of temporality? What's at issue, and what is Sartre's view of temporality?

Unit 4: The Problem of Others

The Problem of Other Minds

- * BN 3.1 The Existence of Others: i. The Problem; and, ii. The Reef of Solipsism
- * BN 3.1 The Existence of Others: iv. The Look

Is Hell Other People?

- * BN 3.3 Concrete Relations with Others (**Selections to be Determined**)
- * *Saint Genet*, pp. 31-34

Unit 5: Situated Freedom and the Choice of an Original Project

Freedom in Situation

- * BN 4.1 Being and Doing: i. Freedom: The First Condition of Action (**Selections to be Determined**)
- * BN 4.1 Being and Doing: ii. Freedom and Facticity: The Situation through "C. My Environment"
- * BN 4.1 Being and Doing: iii. Freedom and Responsibility

Existential Psychoanalysis

- * BN 4.2 Doing and Having: i. Existential Psychoanalysis

From Existentialism to Social Philosophy and Marxism

- * *Search for a Method*, pp. 140-150

Recommended: "Materialism and Revolution"

Possible Term Paper Prompts

- * Summarize A. J. Ayer's review of *Being and Nothingness*. Then, focus on 2-3 of Ayer's objections and evaluate whether those objections are correct, misunderstandings, or something that Sartre could respond to successfully.
- * Summarize Alvin Plantinga's critique of Sartre in "An Existentialist's Ethics". Evaluate whether Plantinga's criticisms hit their mark, or whether Sartre could respond successfully to them.
- * In his discussion of existential psychoanalysis, Sartre describes the need for a "psychoanalysis of things". What exactly is this discipline, and what is its point? Would such a psychoanalysis of things avoid the charges Sartre levels against Freudian psychoanalysis?
- * What does Sartre ultimately mean by "freedom"? Why does he hold that freedom must be *situated* in order for it genuinely to count as freedom?
- * Although Sartre's characterization of being-for-itself begins with Descartes' cogito, he later argues that not only consciousness but also the human body are being-for-itself. How does the body count as being-for-itself, given Sartre's ontology?

* Sartre's depiction in *Being and Nothingness* of our concrete relations with others seems to commit him to the view, expressed in the play "No Exit", that "Hell is other people". But in an interview concerning the play, Sartre said that he himself does not hold that view and that healthy relationships with others are possible. Given what Sartre says in *Being and Nothingness*, is there really any genuine possibility of conflict-free relations with others?