

PHIL 475 – Topics in Contemporary European Philosophy
Mon & Wed 2:35-3:55
SH688 295

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Office hours: LEA 923, Wed 1:00 – 2:00 p.m. (or by appointment)

Course topic and objectives

Topic Fall 2017: Other Bodies

A major concern of phenomenologists of the early twentieth century was the so-called ‘problem of the other’. These philosophers were concerned with questions like: how do I know that the object standing in front of me is another subject like myself (Husserl)? How does the freedom of others limit my own (Sartre and Beauvoir)? What, if anything, do I owe this strange person (Levinas)? How does encountering another person change the way I see myself? The existential philosophers – especially Sartre and Beauvoir – often described the encounter with the other as one filled with shame, and antagonism. In his play, *No Exit*, Sartre famously said “Hell is other people.” Merleau-Ponty, a phenomenologist who studied and worked alongside the existentialists, took a different approach to the encounter with others. His approach is grounded in the larger framework of his embodied phenomenology. In this course, we will consider how highlighting the importance of embodiment has changed the way that continental philosophy has approached the ‘problem’ of otherness.

This course will be divided into two parts. In the first half of the course, we will juxtapose Merleau-Ponty’s embodied account of empathy with Sartre’s existentialist view. Students will read Sartre’s *No Exit*, followed by selections from Merleau-Ponty’s seminal work from the first part of his career, *The Phenomenology of Perception*. The aim of the first half of the course is to introduce students to the phenomenology of embodiment and key concepts such as the body schema, motor intentionality, communication, transcendence, and habit. At the end of the first half of the course, students will complete an exegetical midterm paper imagining Merleau-Ponty’s response to the use of virtual reality in empathy therapy.

In the second half of the course, we will consider responses to Merleau-Ponty’s account of the embodied experience of others and ourselves. Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, while deeply influential, has also been criticized for overlooking difference and ‘universalizing’ lived-experience from a white, male, ableist point of view. With this criticism in mind, we will read key texts depicting the embodied experience of race and queerness (Fanon and Ahmed), mental illness/schizophrenia (Deleuze and Guattari), and sex (Irigaray). We will also take some time to consider the way that Merleau-Ponty’s own phenomenology of embodiment changed in his later career before his untimely death (while reading Descartes) in 1961. At the end of the course, students will be asked to compare Merleau-Ponty’s views on the experience of others with the views of one other philosopher we read in the course in a longer paper.

Pre-requisites

PHIL 375 or equivalent

Evaluation

Students in this course will be evaluated in terms of class participation, a small presentation, and two written assignments.

Participation (15%)

Students are expected to attend class regularly and to participate in discussion by asking questions and raising problems.

Discussion questions (15%)

Each student will be assigned the task of leading a 5-10 minute discussion session during the course of the semester. Their job will consist in preparing one short philosophical question based on the week's assigned reading, presenting it in class, and leading a short group discussion. Students will be graded on the quality of their question, the style of presentation, and the success of the group discussion.

There will be one or two mini-presentations per class (depending on enrolment) starting on week 4 of term.

Students will sign up for their mini-presentation in the first two sessions of the term. Anyone who does not sign up will be assigned a presentation date by the instructor.

Guidelines for preparing a discussion question:

- Discussion questions should be related directly to the reading assigned for the day of the presentation. Questions ought to be philosophical and critical (i.e. they ought to be motivated by a philosophical problem rather than simply a desire for clarification). Questions should be approximately 150 words in length and should be uploaded via the assignment function to myCourses on the day of the mini presentation.

Written work

Midterm paper (30%): 5 pages, double-spaced, times new roman font (12 pt).

Due Date: Wednesday, October 17 in class

In the midterm paper, students are expected to consider the question: how would Merleau-Ponty respond to the recent New Yorker article "Are We Already Living in Virtual Reality?" by Joshua Rothman (April 2 2018)?

More specifically, students will be asked to read the article independently and to consider how Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology can account for how easy it is for us to 'inhabit' the body of another in the context of virtual reality. The goal of this paper is, first and foremost, exegetical.

Final paper (40%): 10-12 pages, double spaced, times new roman font (12 pt).

Due date: Monday, December 10 at 5 p.m. in LEA 923

The final paper should be an argumentative paper that addresses the question that frames the course: how do we experience different or other bodies? In this assignment, students are asked to compare Merleau-Ponty's view on the subject with that of one other thinker we discussed in class. What do you think is the heart of the disagreement between the philosophers you have chosen? Do you see any way for them to overcome their differences?

Students are encouraged to meet with the course instructor to discuss their thesis statements and the structures of their essays before they begin writing.

Late policy

Late papers will be penalized by a half-grade per day that the paper is late. In the event of an emergency, students may contact the instructor and obtain permission to submit their papers late as long as they can provide a doctor's note or other official written excuse.

Language policy

In accordance with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit all written work in English or in French.

Academic integrity

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr for more information).

The course instructor reserves the right to use Google or other web-based text-matching search engines to detect plagiarism in suspected cases.

Required reading

Required readings for this course will be available in a **course pack**. Students may purchase the course pack from the McGill bookstore at the beginning of term. Students are expected to bring relevant readings with them to every class.

Course pack readings include selections from the following texts:

Ahmed, Sarah. "The Orient and Other Others." *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, Duke UP, 2006, pp. 109-156.

Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. "The Desiring-Machines." *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, Minnesota UP, 2003, pp. 8-50.

Fanon, Frantz. "The Lived Experience of the Black Man." *Black Skin, White Masks*, translated by Richard Philcox, Grove Press, 2008, pp. 89-119.

Irigaray, Luce. *This Sex Which Is Not One*, translated by Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke, Cornell UP, 1985.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*, translated by Donald A. Landes, Routledge, 2012.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The Visible and the Invisible*, edited by Claude Lefort, translated by Alphonso Lingis, Northwestern UP, 1968.

Rothman, Joshua. "Are We Already Living in Virtual Reality?" *The New Yorker*, April 2, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/04/02/are-we-already-living-in-virtual-reality>. Accessed 8 August 2018.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. "No Exit." *No Exit and Three Other Plays*, by Jean-Paul Sartre, Vintage Books, 1989, pp. 1-46.

Students are welcome to buy full copies of texts and/or read texts in the original French. Students requiring a list of French titles should contact the instructor at the beginning of the semester. Any student who chooses to read a version of the text other than the one assigned must identify the excerpts that correspond to the required reading themselves.

N.B. Students are strongly discouraged from using the older English translation of the *Phenomenology of Perception* (Trans. Colin Smith).

Suggested reading

- Bakewell, Sarah. *At the Existentialist Café: Freedom, Being, and Apricot Cocktails*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2016.
- Butler, Judith. *Senses of the Subject*. First edition. ed., Fordham University Press, 2015.
- Freud, Sigmund. "Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. X. Translated by James Strachey. Vintage, 2001, pp. 5-149.
- Freud, Sigmund, and James Strachey. *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. Basic Books, 1975.
- Freud, Sigmund. "Psycho-Analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. XII. Translated by James Strachey. Vintage, 2001, pp. 2-82.
- Husserl, Edmund. *The Idea of Phenomenology*. Translated by Lee Hardy, Kluwer Academic, 1999.
- Leader, Darian. *What Is Madness?* Penguin, 2012.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, et al. "Eye and Mind." *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader : Philosophy and Painting*. Northwestern University Press, 1993, pp. 121-149.
- Morris, David. "The Enigma of Reversibility and the Genesis of Sense in Merleau-Ponty." *Continental Philosophy Review*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2010, pp. 141–165., doi:10.1007/s11007-010-9144-7.
- Olkowski, Dorothea, and Gail Weiss. *Feminist Interpretations of Maurice Merleau-Ponty*. Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul, and Richard Moran. *Being and Nothingness : An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*. Translated by Sarah Richmond, Routledge, 2018.
- Salamon, Gayle. "'The Place Where Life Hides Away': Merleau-Ponty, Fanon, and the Location of Bodily Being." *Differences*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2006, pp. 96–112., doi:10.1215/10407391-2006-004.
- Schreber, Daniel Paul. *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*. Translated and edited by Ida Macalpine and Richard A. Hunter. NYRB Classics, 2000.
- Sophocles, et al. *Oedipus Rex*. University of Wisconsin Press, 2011. (Or any edition)
- Zahavi, Dan. *Husserl's Phenomenology*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003.
- Zahavi, Dan. *Self-Awareness and Alterity : A Phenomenological Investigation*. Northwestern University Press, 1999.

Class/reading schedule*

Week 1

Sept 5: Syllabus + introduction to phenomenology of otherness

Week 2: Hell is other people

Reading: Sartre, Jean-Paul. "No Exit." *No Exit and Three Other Plays*, by Jean-Paul Sartre, Vintage Books, 1989, pp. 1-46.

Sept 10: Sartre's *No Exit* (1)

Sept 12: Sartre's *No Exit* (2)

Week 3: The lived body (Merleau-Ponty)

Reading: Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. "The Spatiality of One's Own Body and Motricity."
Phenomenology of Perception, translated by Donald A. Landes, Routledge, 2012, pp. 100-122.

Sept 17: Schneider and Gestalt

Sept 19: Motor intentionality

Week 4: The lived body (Merleau-Ponty)

Reading: Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. "The Spatiality of One's Own Body and Motricity."
Phenomenology of Perception, translated by Donald A. Landes, Routledge, 2012, pp. 122-148.

Sept 24: Habit

Sept 27: Body schema

Week 5: The bodily encounter with others (Merleau-Ponty)

Reading: Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. "Others and the Human World." *Phenomenology of Perception*, translated by Donald A. Landes, Routledge, 2012, pp. 361-372.

Oct 1: The child vs. the adult

Oct 3: Solving the problem of the other by overcoming dualism

Week 6: The bodily encounter with others (Merleau-Ponty)

Reading: Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. "Others and the Human World." *Phenomenology of Perception*, translated by Donald A. Landes, Routledge, 2012, pp. 372-383.

No class October 8 (Thanksgiving)

Oct 10: Communication and transcendence

Week 7: Race, orientation and the body (Fanon)

Reading: Fanon, Frantz. "The Lived Experience of the Black Man." *Black Skin, White Masks*, translated by Richard Philcox, Grove Press, 2008, pp. 89-119.

Oct 15: The lived experience of the black man

Oct 17: Bodily difference: a critique of 'universal' phenomenology

Midterm paper due October 17 in class (hard copy)

Week 8: Race, orientation and the body (Ahmed)

Reading: Ahmed, Sarah. "The Orient and Other Others." *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, Duke UP, 2006, pp. 109-156 (selections).

Oct 22: Whiteness and Habits (pp. 120-142)

Oct 24: Mixed orientations (pp. 142-156)

Week 9: The schizophrenic body (Deleuze and Guattari)

Reading: Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. "The Desiring-Machines." *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, Minnesota UP, 2003, pp. 8-22.

Oct 29: The body without organs

Oct 31: Oedipus and Marx

Week 10: The schizophrenic body (Deleuze and Guattari)

Reading: Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. "The Desiring-Machines." *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, Minnesota UP, 2003, pp.22-50.

Nov 5: Desiring machines

Nov 7: Parts and wholes

Week 11: The intertwining body (Late Merleau-Ponty)

Nov 12: Perceptual faith and the problem of the other

Reading: Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. "Reflection and Interrogation." *The Visible and the Invisible*, edited by Claude Lefort, translated by Alphonso Lingis, Northwestern UP, 1968, pp. 3-14.

Nov 14: Reversibility

Reading: Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. "The Intertwining – The Chiasm." *The Visible and the Invisible*, edited by Claude Lefort, translated by Alphonso Lingis, Northwestern UP, 1968, pp. 130-140.

Week 12: The Flesh (Late Merleau-Ponty)

Reading: Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. "The Intertwining – The Chiasm." *The Visible and the Invisible*, edited by Claude Lefort, translated by Alphonso Lingis, Northwestern UP, 1968, pp. 140-155.

Nov 19: Flesh (140-149)

Nov 21: Flesh and idea (pp. 149-end)

Week 13: The female body (Irigaray)

Reading: Irigaray, Luce. *This Sex Which Is Not One*, translated by Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke, Cornell UP, 1985, pp. 9-33.

Nov 26: The looking glass from the other side

Nov 28: The multiplicity of 'woman'

Week 14: The female body (Irigaray)

Dec 3: TBA

Dec 4 (*TUESDAY*): TBA

Final paper due Monday, December 10 at 5 p.m. in LEA 923

*The reading schedule is subject to change dependent on the needs of the class