

Modern Masters: Jean-Paul Sartre
Fall 2010 L366-TH.01

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Thursday, 1-3:45, Bunting 460
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Purpose and Goals

The course offers the chance for as full immersion as possible in Sartre's thought, art, and style. Equal emphasis is placed on the early individualist phase of Sartre's existentialism and on the later phase in which Sartre attempted to carve out a theory of society, of groups in history. In addition to understanding basic Sartrean concepts we will also focus on the way in which Sartre poses and answers *the biographer's question*: what can we know of a person's life and how can we explain how that person becomes who he or she is (or plays at being)? For us as for Sartre a central concept will be freedom, and we will try to test this conception of freedom against reasonable objections and counter-arguments.

Toward the end of the course the biographical stance, the attitude we take when trying to understand the life of another, will turn into an autobiographical stance, as each of us writes an existential autobiographical sketch.

Sartre never wrote an Ethics but much of his thought can be interpreted as pointing toward this unwritten Ethics. We shall try to do justice to the moral philosopher's conceptions of responsibility, anguish, flight, and "bad faith" as well as to Sartre's ontology (the study of what is, of being), his concepts of being, contingency, absurdity, being-in-itself and being-for-itself.

Structure of the Course

Class work will be divided between mini-lectures and discussion led by the instructor and presentations and questions led by students (two students a week). Not only must these seminar leaders have important themes and questions to engage us in discussion, but everyone is responsible for taking the class presentations somewhere, that is, giving honest and thoughtful responses to our colleagues. That can only be done if all are committed to reading (reading carefully) the assigned texts, some of which will be extremely demanding, and some of which will, one hopes, be entertaining. The best in intellectual life is both, demanding and entertaining.

Requirements

- A 5-page mid-term essay. 25% of grade
- A 6-page "existential" autobiographical sketch in which you give an account and an analysis of how you came to a kind of art-making that is significant for you; an attempt to connect your life and your art. 25%
- Lead class discussion of a particular section of assigned reading. 25%
- Thoughtful participation in class discussions and in-class work. 25%

Texts

The following required books are available at the College Bookstore:
Sartre, *Essays in Existentialism*, Wade Baskin editor
Sartre, *Nausea*, New Directions

....., *No Exit and Three Other Plays*, Vintage
....., *The Words*, Vintage
....., *Baudelaire*, New Directions

Recommended

Sartre, *Black Orpheus*

All other readings marked by a ** will be provided to you either as a handout, on Blackboard, or on reserve at the Decker Library.

Some interesting works on Sartre or responses to his philosophy

The Cambridge Companion to Sartre, edited by Christina Howells

Arthur C. Danto, *Jean-Paul Sartre*

John Gerassi, *Talking With Sartre*

Frederic Jameson, *The Origins of Sartre's Style*

Bernard-Henri Levi, *Sartre Philosopher of the Twentieth Century*

Claude Levi-Strauss "History and Dialectic" in *The Savage Mind*

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Sartre and Ultra-Bolshevism" in *Adventures of the Dialectic*

Iris Murdoch, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*

For early trenchant criticism of Sartre's politics see writings of Albert Camus (the polemics following publication of Camus' *The Rebel*) and Raymond Aron

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory. All excused absences must be verified. The instructor reserves the right to fail any student who has accrued more than two unexcused absences. In the case of extended illness or other legitimate absences that may keep the student from attending a class for more than three meetings, students must contact the associate dean of student development in the Division of Student Affairs.

If you miss a class, you are responsible for the assigned reading due on that day as well as for the assignment due for the next week.

Plagiarism Statement and Policy

Plagiarism is using someone else's words or ideas without acknowledgment. It is a serious breach of academic integrity and is grounds for failure of an assignment or failure of the course. Repeat offenses will be referred to Academic Affairs with a recommendation for suspension or dismissal from MICA.

To be responsible when summarizing, paraphrasing, or quoting, include a citation like:

Henri Michaux quipped "If Christ had not been crucified, he would not have had a hundred disciples in Europe." (Michaux, p. 33)

Be sure to cite the source in parentheses and then give the source in a Works Cited at the end of your paper. Follow standard guidelines such as those given in the *MLA* or the *Chicago Manual*

of Style. Familiarize yourself with these guidelines in Diana Hacker's *A Pocket Style Manual*, and always check with your instructor before turning in questionable work.

Reading Schedule

abbreviations and symbols: Essays= Essays in Existentialism

**= handout, or available on Blackboard, or on reserve. The ** reading selections are either drawn from *Jean-Paul Sartre: Basic Writings*, edited by Stephen Priest, or from the primary work as noted.

September

2 Introduction

9 *The Humanism of Existentialism* in Essays pp 31-73
"Erostratus" **

16 A Philosophical and Personal Crisis
Nausea, pp 1-81

23 Crisis Resolved?

Nausea, finish the novel

30 *The Flies*, in *No Exit and Three Other Plays*

Being and Doing: freedom, freedom and responsibility (excerpt from *Being and Nothingness*),
pp 181-190, 194-197 **

October

7 Foundations of Sartre's early philosophy of existentialism: excerpts from the work *Being and Nothingness*:

"Being", pp108-124 **

"The Problem of Nothingness: the Origin of Negation", Essays: the Question , pp 77-81; Negations; 82-91; the Phenomenological Concept of Nothingness 99-107; the Origin of Nothingness (freedom and anguish) pp 107-106

October

14 The concept of Bad Faith in *Being and Nothingness*
"Bad Faith", Essays, pp147-186

Concrete Relations with Others: analysis of love, language, and masochism in *Being and Nothingness*: pp224-243 **

21 *No Exit* , in *No Exit and Three Other Plays*

28 Critique and Use of Psychoanalysis **First Essay Due**

Existential Psychoanalysis, from *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions* and from

Being and Nothingness,
pp246-257 **

Baudelaire, a case study in flight from freedom, sections to be announced

November

4 Political Engagement and Art

From *What is Literature* ,

“What is Writing,” *Essays*, pp303-331

“Why Does one Write?” pp261-277**

Account of Sartre’s feud with Albert Camus, reading to be announced

11 What Can We Know of a Person? Understanding a life as Freedom; the
Problem of Social and Historical Determination.

Sartre’s relation to Marxism.

The Project, Problem of Mediations, Progressive-Regressive Method, excerpts from
Search for a Method **

The Childhood of an Artist:

young Flaubert’s “passivity”, excerpts from *The Family Idiot***

18 Sartre’s Attempt to understand his Own Childhood: his role in “the family
comedy” and the “project” of becoming a writer.

The Words, “Reading”

25 THANKSGIVING NO CLASS

December

2 *The Words*, “Writing”

9 The Problem of Solidarity; from individual to group in an alienated society; action in
history

“collectives: series; the queue, the fused group, the genesis of the group”

from the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, pp312-330 **

Intelligibility of History: Is struggle intelligible? Social-historical totality incarnated in a
boxing match.

from *Critique of Dialectical Reason*** **Final Essay (Existential Autobiographical
Sketch) Due**

16 Specificity of Oppression and Freedom. Analyses of Colonialism, Negritude, Anti-
Semitism

From Preface to Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*

Excerpt from *Anti-Semite and Jew*

From *Black Orpheus*

Watch film Sartre By Himself

ADA Compliance Statement

Learning Resource Center ADA Compliance Statement Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss specific needs. Please contact the Learning Resource Center at 410-225-2416, in Bunting 458, to establish eligibility and coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information please refer to: <http://www.mica.edu/LRC>

Health and Safety Compliance

From the Office of Environmental Health and Safety (EHS)

It is the responsibility of faculty and students to practice health and safety guidelines relevant to their individual activities, processes, and to review MICA's Emergency Action Plan and attend EHS training. It is each faculty member's responsibility to coordinate with the EHS Office to ensure that all risks associated with their class activities are identified and to assure that their respective classroom procedures mirror the EHS and Academic Department guidelines. Each of these policies and procedures must be followed by all students and faculty. Most importantly, faculty are to act in accordance with all safety compliance, state and federal, as employees of this college and are expected to act as examples of how to create art in a way to minimize risk, and reduce harm to themselves and the environment. Faculty must identify, within each art making process, and require personal protection equipment use, by each student for each class, when applicable. Students are required to purchase personal protection equipment appropriate to their major. Those students who do not have the proper personal protection equipment will not be permitted to attend class until safe measures and personal protection is in place.