PHST-4112: Levinas
Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology

Spring 2020
Friday, 12:40-3:30 PM
DSPT 2

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Course Description and Objectives:

Emmanuel Levinas is without doubt one of the most influential philosophical figures in continental philosophy in the last century. A student and translator of Edmund Husserl, Levinas’s early work had a decisive impact on the reception of phenomenology in France. In 1961, Levinas published his first magnum opus, *Totalité et infini: essai sur l’extériorité* ["Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority"], providing a singular new description and interpretation of the event of encountering another person, while simultaneously revolutionizing phenomenology. In 1974, Levinas publishes his second magnum opus, *Autrement qu’être ou au-delà de l’essence* ["Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence"], which reconceives his conception of the relation with other as radical responsibility (substitution) rather than exteriority. From the 1950’s onward, Levinas also published a number of essays on Jewish thought and readings of the Talmud.

This course, an advanced seminar for M.A. and Ph.D. students, will constitute a survey of the thought of Emmanuel Levinas and include detailed readings of his most important works. The course will begin with a review of phenomenology and foundational phenomenological concepts before proceeding to examine Levinas’s essays on Judaism and his two great masterworks, *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*. Thus, while a certain familiarity with the history of philosophy on the part of the student is presumed, no prior coursework in phenomenology is required.
By the end of the semester, students will have gained an appreciation and comprehension of various aspects of Levinas’s thought, including the main contours of his interpretation of Judaism; his appropriation and critique of the philosophies of Husserl, Heidegger, and Hegel; his account of ethics as a response to violence (particularly the *shoah*) and its roots in the totalizing, anonymous, and impersonal discourse of western metaphysics; and fundamental concepts of his ethical philosophy, such as alterity, the face, transcendence, fecundity, atheism, the saying and the said, substitution, and the third.

**Course Requirements:**

As an advanced seminar course, this class will focus primarily on the discussion of assigned texts, although the instructor will provide background material in lecture form from time to time. Students will be expected to carefully prepare assigned readings in order to actively participate in the conversation and raise thoughtful questions in class. Each week a student will be asked to lead the class discussion by introducing a particular text and raising several substantive questions for discussion. Presentations and the careful preparation of assigned readings are meant to foster student capacities for self-direction and collaborative learning (DSPT Institutional Goals A3 and B1). Because this class is structured as a seminar, attendance and participation in the discussion is essential. Absences of any kind will *significantly* affect a student’s final grade. Students with disabilities or whose first language is not English are encouraged to speak with the instructor about any special needs they might have.

Students will be evaluated according to the quality of their class participation and leadership of class discussions, and a final research paper of 15-20 pages. These assignments are designed to help students develop their own critical thinking on Levinas’s thought and issues surrounding the encounter between the same and the other. They also offer students the opportunity to show their growth in the DSPT’s institutional goals of integrative thinking, self-direction, collaborative learning, and leadership (Institutional Goals A1-3 and B1). All sources in the final research paper should be cited using proper “Turabian” format (see Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. Ninth Edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018). Students should conscientiously avoid plagiarism, and are
asked to consult the DSPT Student Handbook for the DSPT’s policies regarding academic honesty. A paper proposal consisting of a description of the student’s thesis, the methodology to be used, and the significance of the project, along with a preliminary bibliography of a minimum of 10 sources in Turabian format, should be submitted by April 17, and will be factored into the final grade for the research paper. The final research paper is due no later than May 22, 2019. Late papers will be accepted, but will be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade (e.g., from an A to A-) for each day past the date due.

Grading: Weekly Class Participation: 25%
  Class Presentations and Discussion Leadership: 25%
  Final Research Paper: 50%

Assigned Texts:


Weekly reading assignments will be taken from these assigned texts, as well as from readings posted on Moodle (http://moodle.gtu.edu).
Course Schedule:

2/7: Introduction to the Course  
What is Phenomenology?  
Dan Zahavi, “Phenomenology”  
Selections from Robert Sokolowski, Introduction to Phenomenology

2/14: Levinas as a Jewish Thinker  
*Difficult Freedom*, pp. 3-23, 30-38, 50-58, 142-48, 151-53; 159-66 (56 pgs.)  
Optional: Catherine Chalier, “Levinas and the Talmud”

2/21: Levinas on Contemporary and Historical Judaism  
*Difficult Freedom*, pp. 172-215, 221-25, 228-41 (60 pgs.)  
Optional: Peperzak, “Judaism According to Levinas”

2/28: Levinas and Heidegger  
Dorothea Frede, “The Question of Being: Heidegger’s Project” (30 pgs.)  
Levinas, “Is Ontology Fundamental?” from *Basic Philosophical Writings* (10 pgs.)  
*Totality and Infinity*, Preface (10 pgs.)  
Optional: Taminiaux, “The Presence of *Being and Time* in *Totality and Infinity*” and  
Peperzak, “On Levinas’s Criticism of Heidegger”

3/6: The Other and the Reduction to the Same  
*Totality and Infinity*, I (A-D) (72 pgs.)

3/13: No Class
3/20: The Transcendence of the Other

*Totality and Infinity, II (A-E) (75 pgs.)*

Optional: Cohen, “Transcendence and Salvation in Levinas’s *Time and the Other* and

*Totality and Infinity*

3/27: No Class (Reading Week)

4/3: The Face-to-Face

*Totality and Infinity, III (A-C) (60 pgs.)*

4/10: No Class (Good Friday)

4/17: Fecundity and Filiality

*Totality and Infinity, IV (A-G, Conclusions) (53 pgs.)*

Paul Moyaert, “The Phenomenology of Eros: A Reading of *Totality and Infinity* IV.B”

4/24: Derrida’s Critique of Levinas’ *Totality and Infinity*

“Violence and Metaphysics” (75 pgs.)

5/1: Levinas on Time and Discourse

*Otherwise than Being, I-II (59 pgs.)*

Optional: Peperzak, “Through Being to the Anarchy of Transcendence” and

Waldenfels, “Levinas on the Saying and the Said”

5/8: Levinas on Radical Responsibility

*Otherwise than Being, III-IV (68 pgs.)*

Optional: Bernasconi, “What is the Question to Which ‘Substitution’ Is the Answer?”

5/15: Levinas—Conclusions

*Otherwise than Being, V-VI (55 pgs.)*
5/22: Final Research Paper Due by 5 PM

N.B.: The instructor reserves the right to revise the course syllabus as the need arises.

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Additional Resources

The following is a list of supplemental and suggested readings. They are by no means required reading for the course, but may be of some interest to students wishing to do additional research on various aspects of Levinas’s thought.

Primary Sources


Phaenomenologica 54. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974.]


Montpellier, France: Fata Morgana, 1972.]


Montpellier, France: Fata Morgana, 1976.]


Paris, France: France Culture, 1982.]


Montpellier, France: Fata Morgana, 1987.]


Montpellier, France: Fata Morgana, 1995."

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Secondary Sources


----. “Adieu, à dieu, a-Dieu.” In Ethics as First Philosophy: The Significance of Emmanuel Levinas 

Drabinski, John. Sensibility and Singularity: The Problem of Phenomenology in Levinas. Albany, 

Dudiak, Jeffrey. The Intrigue of Ethics: A Study of the Idea of Discourse in the Thought of 

Hart, James G. “‘We,’ Representation, and War-Resistance: Some Para-Husserlian 
Considerations.” In Phenomenology, Interpretation, and Community, ed. Lenore Langsdorf, et 

Horowitz, Asher and Gad Horowitz, eds. Difficult Justice: Commentaries on Levinas and Politics. 
Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006.

Janicaud, Dominique. The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology. Translated by Bernard G. 
Prusak. In Phenomenology and the “Theological Turn”: The French Debate. New York: 

Jonkers, Peter and Ruud Welton, eds. God in France: Eight Contemporary French Thinkers on 

Katz, Claire Elise. Levinas, Judaism, and the Feminine: The Silent Footsteps of Rebecca. 

Kosky, Jeffrey L. Levinas and the Philosophy of Religion. Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: 

----. “Contemporary Encounters with Apophatic Theology: The Case of Emmanuel Levinas.” 
Journal of Cultural and Religious Theory 1, no. 3 (Fall 2000).

Mensch, James L. Levinas’s Existential Analytic: A Commentary on Totality and Infinity. 

----. Hiddenness and Alterity: Philosophical and Literary Sightings of the Unseen. Pittsburgh, PA: 

----. Ethics and Selfhood: Alterity and the Phenomenology of Obligation. Albany, NY: State 


----. *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas.* West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1993.


