

PHI 8119: Phenomenology and Existentialism

Fall 2017

Thursdays, 3-6 p.m., 440 JORG

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*****Phenomenology, Language and Being*****

Course Description:

This course will pursue two main questions: (1) how does phenomenology, which proceeds by way of a description of experience, lead us to an account of being which transcends experience? And (2) how ought we to understand the relation between language—by which we give a philosophical account of being—and being? We will answer these questions by reading from Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* and his *Structure of Behavior*, and from essays by Heidegger on language. Guided by phenomenology's critique of dominant scientific and philosophical prejudices, we will work to reconceive the nature of inanimate being, animate being, mind and human embodiment (revealing, incidentally, how phenomenology both fits with, and has something to contribute to current research in dynamic systems). At the same time, our investigation of the prelinguistic meaning-enactment present in animal behaviour and its important difference from the functioning of language and human experience, will lead us to insight into Heidegger's claim that "language is the house of being." We will consider how language is not so much an instrument that we use, as a power that exceeds us; and we will see how language might on the one hand open us up to and reveal being which outstrips us, while, on the other hand, occluding being.

Texts:

The following texts are available at the Ryerson University Bookstore. Please be certain to purchase the translations that I have listed here.

REQUIRED

- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Donald Landes. Routledge, 2012.
- Merleau-Ponty. *Structure of Behavior*. Trans. Alden L. Fisher. Duquesne University Press.
- Heidegger, Martin. *On the Way to Language*. Harper Collins.

RECOMMENDED:

- For those new to phenomenology:
 - Luijpen and Koren. *A First Introduction to Existential Phenomenology*. Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press, 1969. [emphasis on post-Husserlian phenomenologists]
- For those wanting to improve their writing:
 - Elbow, Peter, *Writing without Teachers*, Oxford University Press [on the process of excellent writing]
 - Strunk and White, *Elements of Style*, Allyn & Bacon [on essential grammatical issues]
 - Baker, Sheridan, *The Practical Stylist*, Longman [on structural issues]

Assignments and Grade Breakdown:

Details about the assignments are located below syllabus, after the reading schedule, and will be discussed in class.

- 10% **Participation**
For constructive contributions to class discussions—contributions, that is, that respond responsibly and helpfully to the conversation underway.
- 20% **Two Digestion Sessions**

In trios, you will lead a one hour discussion on the material we covered in the previous week. Sign up in advance for the weeks you will do. Leading discussion will involve restating key ideas and the lines of reasoning that support them, and raising further questions or exploring implications. See the section after the Reading Schedule, below, for more details. Each presentation is worth 10%, and will be graded based on your actual presentation, and the written reflections you each give of the preparatory meeting. You cannot do a digestion session on the same topic for which you are submitting a reflection paper or a reflection paragraph.

- 20% **Two Reflection Papers**
Two short papers, approximately one page single-spaced. Worth 10% each. See below for details. Sign up in advance for the weeks in which you will submit these papers; you must choose weeks for which you are NOT doing either a Reflection paragraph, or a Digestion Session. Each paper must be submitted by email before we discuss the text in question in class, by Wednesday at midnight.
- 10% **Two Reflection Paragraphs**
In 300 words or less, you will summarize a key claim from the text, clarify its meaning and/or the reasoning behind it, and raise a question about it or point out an interesting implication. See below for details. Sign up in advance for the two weeks in which you will submit these paragraphs; you must choose weeks for which you are NOT doing either a Reflection Paper, or a Digestion Session. Each paragraph must be submitted to the shared discussion forum before we discuss the text in question in class, by Wednesday at midnight. Each paragraph is worth 5%.
- 5% **Final Paper Proposal**
See below for details. Due *as soon as you have a paper idea*, December 4 at the latest.
- 35% **Final Paper with Abstract**
You have the choice between writing (1) a 12 page (conference length) paper, or (2) a longer paper, up to 20 pages. The paper must be accompanied by an abstract (250 words). See below for details. Due December 15.

Tentative Reading Schedule:

Date	Assigned Readings	Focus	Recommended Further Reading
The Phenomenological Project: Criticizing Prejudices in Order to Return to the Things Themselves			
Thurs. Sept. 7	<i>Phenomenology of Perception</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preface, pp.lxxi-lxxiv and pp.lxxxii-lxxxiii mid-page • Introduction, Ch.I: “Sensation” • Introduction, Ch.II: “Association” and “Projection of Memories” [~29 pages] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preface: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The phenomenological project: phenomenology as description, not analysis; ○ intentionality understood as being in the world • Ch.I: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Müller-Lyons illusion, and the claim that “the apprehension of a quality...is tied to an entire perceptual context” (8-9) ○ The experience error ○ Figure and ground ○ Indeterminacy • Ch.II: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ the boat example (pp.17-18) and how it challenges the idea that we associate stimuli that resemble each other. ○ Merleau-Ponty’s claim that “the appeal to memory presupposes what it is meant to explain, namely the articulation of the givens” (20). 	

Thurs. Sept. 14	<i>Phenomenology of Perception</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction, Ch.III: “Attention” and “Judgment” • Introduction, Ch.IV: The Phenomenal Field [~37pages] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch.III: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ pp.32-34: Against empiricism and intellectualism: attention as a creative activity ○ The object of attention as a “motive” (33) ○ The distinction between causes [naturalism], reasons [intellectualism], and motives [phenomenology] as bringing about the perception of, for instance, distance, or various illusions (see esp. pp.48-51) • Ch.IV: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Perception’s silent thesis, and science as getting carried away by this (55-57) ○ “the fundamental philosophical act would thus be to return to the lived world beneath the objective world...to awaken perception and to thwart the ruse by which perception allowed itself to be forgotten as a fact and as perception, to the benefit of the object that it delivers over to us and of the rational tradition that it establishes” (57) 	
Phenomenology’s Reconception of the Body and its Relation to the World			
Thurs. Sept. 21	<i>Phenomenology of Perception</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to Part One • Part One, Ch.I: The Body as an Object and Mechanistic Physiology [~22 pages] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From the Introduction: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How does a thing in itself show up within experience? ○ How does this lead to objective thought? ○ What is wrong with objective thought? • From Ch.I: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How the physiological account can’t quite explain the phantom limb ○ How the psychological account can’t quite explain the phantom limb ○ How taking the perspective of “being in the world” (or “existence”) allows us to understand the phantom limb ○ The habitual body vs. the actual [or “at this moment”] body ○ How we ought to understand repression (or having a complex) ○ How the body is an innate complex 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gallagher, Shaun. “Pursuing a Phantom” in <i>How the Body Shapes the Mind</i>
Tues. Oct. 3	<i>Phenomenology of Perception</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part One, Ch.III: The Spatiality of One’s Own Body and Motricity [~48 pages] 	TBA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young, Iris Marion. “Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Bodily Comportment, Motility and Spatiality.” <i>Human Studies</i> 3 (1980): 137-156.
Thurs. Oct. 5	<i>Phenomenology of Perception</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part Two, Ch.I: Sensing [~39 pages] 	TBA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Merleau-Ponty, “Ch. 4: The Intertwining-The Chiasm” in <i>Visible and the Invisible</i>

Oct.9-13		Reading Week	
Moving Towards Ontology: Animal Being and Human Being			
Thurs. Oct. 19	<i>Structure of Behavior</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction, pp.3-5 Reflex Behavior, pp.7-51 [~ 46 pages]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Notions of structure, organization, order, function, form pp.33-43: examples of the monkey fixation reflex, the dung beetle, Trendelenburg's animal, and hemianopsia—what do these prove? 	
Thurs. Oct. 26	<i>Structure of Behavior</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structures of behavior, pp.93-128 [~35 pages]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> pp.93-104: learning cannot be explained without the notion of meaning or stimulus-for-the-organism pp.104-5: syncretic forms and instinct pp.105-6: amovable forms—the chicken example pp.112-120: amovable forms—how animal physics are different from human physics; only humans encounter the thing-structure pp.120-122: symbolic forms—the example of playing music pp.124-128: conclusion—intersubjectivity and the human penetration into being vs. the animal opening up to a milieu; behavior is a form 	
Thurs. Nov. 2	<i>Structure of Behavior</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Physical Order; The Vital Order; The Human Order, pp.129-176 [~46 pages]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TBA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Merleau-Ponty, "Others and the Human World" in <i>Phenomenology of Perception</i> [I will likely do an extracurricular class on this reading, if there is enough interest]
Expression, Language, and Being			
Thurs. Nov. 9	<i>Phenomenology of Perception</i> . <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "The Body as Expression, and Speech" (179-205) [26pp.]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The distinction between first-order (or originary, authentic, speaking) speech, and second-order (or constituted, spoken) speech "speech does not translate a ready-made thought; rather, speech accomplishes thought" (183) "The operation of expression, when successful, does not simply leave to the reader or the writer himself a reminder; it makes the signification exist as a thing at the very heart of the text, it brings it to life in an organism of words, it installs this signification in the writer or the reader like a new sense organ, and it opens a new field or a new dimension to our experience" (188) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Merleau-Ponty, <i>Phenomenology of Perception</i>, pp.422-426 (on language) Merleau-Ponty, "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence" Merleau-Ponty, "Cézanne's Doubt" Waldenfels, Bernard. "The Paradox of Expression." In <i>Chiasms: Merleau-Ponty's Notion of Flesh</i>, edited by Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor, 89-102. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000.
Thurs. Nov. 16	Heidegger, <i>Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics</i> , pp. TBA	TBA	

Thurs. Nov. 23	Heidegger, "The Nature of Language" in <i>On the Way to Language</i> , pp. TBA	TBA	
Thurs. Nov. 30	Heidegger, "The Nature of Language" in <i>On the Way to Language</i> , pp. TBA	TBA	
Dec. 4	Paper Proposal Due On or Preferably Before This Date		
Dec. 15	Final Paper Due		

Details about Assignments:

• **Digestion Sessions**

In the hopes of promoting digestion of the ideas at hand, genuinely collaborative discussion, and a sense of community, class participants will get together in trios to lead a discussion for the first hour of class. This discussion will involve recalling some key idea(s) that we studied in the previous week, and exploring questions or implications arising from that idea and the line of reasoning that supports it. Each student should sign up for two digestion sessions, ideally with different partners each time. Each trio should meet prior to their digestion session to have a conversation about the key ideas and arguments of the previous week, and to plan their session on the basis of that conversation. The session itself should involve a restatement of some key idea (or related set of ideas) and the reasoning behind them, and then an articulation of questions or implications to which these ideas or lines of reasoning give rise. The trio will then help to support and keep animated the discussion that follows. Presenters should NOT read from written notes; presenters should talk through the ideas and questions or implications. Each student will be graded based on your actual presentation, and the written reflection you each give of the preparatory meeting. The reflection should be only a paragraph, as concise as possible. While reflecting on the meeting, keep in mind that the following is what I consider to be valuable contributions to such meetings, and focus your response around these issues. You can of course add other considerations.

Valuable Contributions

Each of the students in the preparatory meeting (including yourself) can be evaluated on the basis of how well they did the following, in both the preparatory discussion, and the class digestion session:

- Showed up well prepared for the discussion, having read and thought carefully about the text, and having digested the previous week's class discussion
- Made interventions –by asking questions, clarifying what was being said, making connections, developing implications, pointing out helpful new directions for the conversation, or honestly expressing puzzlement—that helped the group talk in productive ways and develop a deeper understanding of both the text and the issues at hand.
- Listened carefully to others and recognized and responded to what they were trying to say.
- Referred to the text, in order to keep everyone answerable to the ideas in the text.
- Communicated the key ideas and arguments under discussion clearly, in order to ensure that all interlocutors were on the same page.
- Spoke in a way that helped bring out the relevance and complexity of the ideas under discussion.
- Spoke in an unpretentious, inclusive manner, aiming to understand and develop insight through communication, rather than to advance their own personal agenda
- Spoke honestly, and was able to acknowledge places where their own understanding broke down, and where they needed help

• **Reflection Papers**

On two weeks for which you are NOT leading a Digestion Session or handing in a Reflection Paragraph, you are required to submit a "Reflection Paper" by email. The Reflection Paper should be about one page, single-spaced, and

it should concern the reading that we are about to discuss in class. It should be submitted by email before midnight on the Wednesday before the relevant class.

The Reflection Paper should highlight some key claim in the text that is in itself interesting, that has interesting implications, that raises an interesting question, or that begs to be thought about further. Here are some examples of what your paper might do:

- Articulate a key claim made in the text in your own words (so that it is clear to us what it means and what reasoning is given in support of it), and propose how this offers new insight into some issue.
- Articulate a key claim made in the text... and articulate a question of clarification.
- Articulate a key claim made in the text ... and describe an interesting implication that it seems to have.
- Articulate a key claim made in the text ... and spell out an interesting assumption that seems to be involved.
- Articulate two claims made in the text ... and tell us how you think there is a tension between those two claims.
- Articulate a key claim made in the text ... and state how it seems to you in tension with something in your experience.
- Articulate a key claim made in the text ... point out an interesting connection between it and a claim made elsewhere (though the latter should be a claim made in a text with which your interlocutor is also clearly familiar).
- Articulate a key claim made in the text ... and propose an interesting research project based on it.

The bulk of your paper should be concerned with communicating, in your own voice and in a way that lends your reader new insight, what the text is saying—what claim it is making, and what argument is being made in support of that claim. Use quotations very sparingly, so that there is more room to develop your own voice.

- **Reflection Paragraphs**

The Reflection Paragraphs are more condensed, shorter versions of the Reflection Papers: they should articulate a key idea and its line of reasoning in your own voice; and they should point out an interesting connection, implication, tension, or question that arises from it. They should be 300 words or less. You are required to submit two of these Reflection Paragraphs, on different weeks, and on weeks for which you are NOT leading a Digestion Session or handing in a Reflection Paper. You will submit your Reflection Paragraph to the discussion board on D2L Brightspace, before midnight on the Wednesday before our Thursday class. The paragraph will concern the reading that we will be discussing in that upcoming Thursday class. These paragraphs will be available for others to read. My hope is that, by reading each others' Reflection Paragraphs, we will become more deeply attuned to the richness, complexity and significance of the text.

- **Final Paper Proposal**

Your proposal should consist of (1) an introductory paragraph, introducing the problem you intend to address, and your thesis in response to it; (2) an outline, in paragraph form, of the sections you foresee, each articulated in terms of the point or subthesis that the section will make. This proposal is due *as soon as you have a paper idea*, or Dec. 4 at the latest. [Important Note: your final paper may differ greatly from your proposal, since one's thinking can be and even should be transformed as one writes. This exercise is thus not for the sake of setting in stone your paper topic, but rather to ensure, before you write your final paper, that you have developed your chops well when it comes to articulating a problem, formulating a precise, informative and rich thesis statement, and structuring your paper.]

- **Final Paper with Abstract**

You can choose to write a conference-length paper (12 pages, double spaced) or a longer paper (up to 20 pages, also double-spaced). Your paper should be accompanied by an abstract (250 words). Due Dec. 15. An abstract should state the question that the paper is addressing, the thesis that it develops in response to that question, and the key moves in the argument for that thesis.

Policies:

Assignment Deadline Extensions:

Extensions for deadlines can usually be granted if you are facing difficult circumstances of some sort. It is crucial, however, that you contact me (by phone, on email or in person) and ask for such an extension *before the due-date arrives*. In cases where it is impossible to contact me before the deadline, you should have documentation to support your request for an extension.

Extensions will not normally be given for the Reflection Papers or Reflection Paragraphs, since these are designed to set up class discussions.

Late Policy:

Assignments handed in late will be docked 3% for each day late.

Changes to the Syllabus:

I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus—both to the time schedule and to the content—in case these are required. All changes made will be for the good of the class, and will be noted in writing (on paper or on the web site for the course).