Phil 439: Phenomenology

CSUN Spring, 2017

Prof. Robin M. Muller

T/R: 12:15–1:45 (Sierra Hall rm. 224)

[robin.muller@csun.edu](mailto:robin.muller@csun.edu)

Office: Sierra Tower 506

Office Hours: T/R 2:00–4:00pm *or by appointment*

A. Course Description

Phenomenology is the study of experience from the perspective of the experiencer. As phenomenologists, we will be interested both in the nature of conscious experience and in what everyday conscious experience is *like* (we call this “lived experience”). This pair of concerns situates phenomenology at the intersection of philosophy of mind and social and political philosophy. Our approach will be primarily historical. We will first discuss the emergence of phenomenology as a philosophical method in the thought of the German philosopher Edmund Husserl, showing how Husserlian phenomenology was modified by his students Heidegger, Stein, and Merleau-Ponty. We then consider (through Sartre and Fanon) how phenomenology intersects with existentialism. Finally, we will see how contemporary philosophers employ phenomenology to intervene in debates in artificial intelligence (Dreyfus), queer theory (Ahmed), and political philosophy (Guenther).

B. Course Goals and Objectives

Phenomenologists mostly ask “What is it like?” questions. In this course, we will ask:

*\* What is it like* to perceive, and how is perceiving something *real* different from *a perceptual illusion*?

*\* What is it like* to experience the world through a body? How does this challenge the assumptions of philosophers (like Descartes) who saw the mind and body as separate?

*\* What is it like* to live in a world populated by other conscious subjects? How do other people influence our sense of self?

Phenomenologists also wonder how the answers to these questions impact other philosophical concerns. In this course we will ask:

\* What can first-hand experience tell us about the possibilities for and limits of artificial intelligence? Could a computer ever think *in the way* that human beings think?

\* If our conscious experience is *embodied* experience, what difference does it make what gender, or race, or sexuality our bodies are?

\* If other people help influence our sense of self, what does the *experience* of solitary confinement do to that sense of self?

C. Required Texts

You are not required to purchase any books for this course; all course material will be made available through the course page. However, you must come *with the text* to each course meeting and failure to do so will result in penalties to your attendance grade. You may bring the text on a tablet or in hard copy. You may not use phones or computers during class time.

D. Course Schedule

1. Foundations

I.1 Basic Concepts of Phenomenology

1/24: Robert Sokolowski: “Perception of a Cube as a Paradigm of Conscious Experience,” from *Introduction to Phenomenology* [reading will be distributed in class]

1/26: Sokolowski, “An Initial Statement of What Phenomenology Is,” in *Introduction to Phenomenology.*

1/31: Sokolowski, “What Is Intentionality and Why Is It Important?” from *Introduction to Phenomenology*.

2/2: Edmund Husserl, “Pure Phenomenology, Its Method, and Its Field of Investigation,” in *The Phenomenology Reader.*

2/7–2/9: Edmund Husserl, “Noesis and Noema,” in *The Phenomenology Reader.*

I.2 Body, Meaning, and World

2/14–2/16: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Preface” to *Phenomenology of Perception.*

2/21: Merleau-Ponty, “Preface” cont’d. and “A Theory of the Body is Already a Theory of Perception,” from *Phenomenology of Perception.*

2/23–3/2: Edith Stein, “On the Problem of Empathy,” in *The Phenomenology Reader*.

\* Written Assignment 1 is due 2/28.

II. Phenomenology and Fundamental Ontology

3/7: Dermot Moran, “The Question of Being”; ‘The Nature of Dasein”; “Authenticity and Inauthenticity,” in *Introduction to Phenomenology*

3/9–3/16: Martin Heidegger, “The Worldhood of the World,” in *The Phenomenology Reader*

3/21–3/23: No Class [Spring Break]

III. Phenomenology and Subjectivity: The Existential Project

3/28–4/4: Jean-Paul Sartre, “The Encounter with the Other,” in *Basic Writings of Existentialism.*

4/6–4/11: Franz Fanon, “The Lived Experience of the Black Man,” in *Black Skin, White Masks*

\* Written Assignment 2 due 4/11

4/13: No Class: Online Test

IV. Contemporary Phenomenology: Intersections

IV.1 Phenomenology and the Problem of Artificial Intelligence

4/18–4/25: Hubert Dreyfus, “The Role of the Body in Intelligent Behavior”

IV.2 Phenomenological Queer Theory

4/27–5/2: Sarah Ahmed, “Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology”

IV.3 Phenomenological Perspectives on Incarceration

5/4–5/11: Lisa Guenther, “Person, World, and Other: A Husserlian Critique of Solitary Confinement,” chap. 2 of *Solitary Confinement*

E. Assignments and Grading

Your grade for this course will take into account your attendance; one multiple-choice test; and 3 short written assignments. It will be calculated as follows:

Attendance 10%

Online Test 20%

Writing Assignment 1 20%

Writing Assignment 2 20%

Writing Assignment 3 30%

E.1 Grading of Attendance

Your final attendance grade for the course will be calculated according to the following scale:

A (100) 0 absences

A (95) 1–2 absences

B+ (87) 3 absences

B- (80) 4 absences

C (75) 5 absences

D (60) 6 absences

F (0) 7 absences

More than 7 absences will result in failure of the course.

E.2 Online Test

There will be one test, administered via the course webpage. The test will cover the basic concepts and themes of the material covered prior to the date of the test (4/13). You will be able to use your course notes and readings to complete the test. The test will ask you to critically engage with the texts or portions of the text, and will draw on the skills exercised in course assignments 1 and 2 (Definitions and Concept Analysis, outlined below).

E.3 Written Assignments

Written Assignment 1 (Definitions) [due 2/28]: “phenomenology”; “profile”; “lived body”; “intentionality”; “phenomenological reduction”; “noesis”; “noema”; “eidetic”; “epoché”; “subjective.”

For this assignment, you are asked to define, *in your own words*, each the phenomenological concepts and terms listed above. Your definitions must be clear and concise (one or two sentences) and must offer a definition that captures the *philosophical* sense of the term.

Assignment 2 (Concept Analysis) [due 4/11]: “Being-in-the-world”; “Authenticity/Inauthenticity”; “the Look of the Other”; “the problem of Being”; “racial-epidermal schema.”

For this assignment, you are asked to define and then analyze each of the concepts listed above. A concept analysis locates the concept in the context of a philosophical position, problem, or argument and offers examples where relevant. Your concept analyses should be clear and concise (no more than a paragraph each).

Assignment 3 (Critical Engagements) [Date TBA]: Fanon, Dreyfus, Ahmed, or Guenther.

This final written assignment consists in a paper or 5–7 pages that critically engages with the work of any *one* of the thinkers listed above. It should consist in (a) a clear, concise reconstruction of the philosopher’s position or argument; (b) discussion of the relevance of significant of that position; and, where appropriate (c) critical engagement with that position.

F. Course Policies

Absences and Lateness

I do *not* distinguish excused from unexcused absences, except in extraordinary circumstances. If documentable circumstances will cause you miss class for an extended period of time, you should see me well in advance to discuss possible solutions. *Per CSUN policy, if religious observation will cause you to miss class, you may be excused, but you must let me know in the beginning of the semester.*

I will take attendance during the first few minutes of class. If you are late to class, your tardiness will be calculated in your attendance grade according to the following scale:

5 to 15 minutes late 1/2 absence

More than 15 minutes late Full absence

Leaving class early will also count as a full absence. Note that failure to come to class prepared *with a physical copy of the course reading* will have an adverse effect on your attendance grade.

Extra Credit

Extra credit may be offered at the discretion of the instructor. Any extra credit opportunities will be offered to the whole class; there will be *no* individual opportunities for extra credit.

Electronics

Unless you are using an iPad or other tablet for your course readings, all electronic devices must be turned off (not just set to vibrate!) during class time and kept in your bag. The use of laptop computers is prohibited, unless you have a documented reason for needing one in the classroom. If you use your phone or other electronic device during class time, I reserve the right to ask you to leave for the remainder of class. If you are asked to leave, you will accrue an absence for that class.

Written Work

All written work must be typed, and handed in on time. I do not accept late work except under exceptional circumstances that have been cleared with me in advance, and I do not accept work submitted via e-mail. Should circumstances prevent you from getting to class on the day an assignment is due, you should make prior arrangements to have a friend turn in your work, or to submit the work in my mailbox or via Moodle, as appropriate. Please also see the note on academic honesty, below.

Correspondence

You are welcome to e-mail me any questions you have about the course (or about philosophy more broadly) and I will do my best to respond, where appropriate, in a timely manner. Note, however, that I will not respond to e-mails if the question you’re asking is clearly answered on the syllabus. If you need to miss class for any reason, you’re under no obligation to let me know, but you should make sure you follow up with a classmate to learn what you missed; I won’t fill you in over e-mail. If you have more substantive questions or are concerned about your progress, the appropriate way to discuss these is in person, during my office hours.

Assignments and Grading

You’re responsible for keeping track of your own progress, and should be able to provide evidence if you believe my grade was calculated in error. If you have concerns or want to discuss your progress with me, I’m happy to chat with you during office hours. Please note that I do not offer extra credit assignments. However, I am more than happy to read drafts and offer feedback on your work up to a week before the assignment is due or according to a schedule announced in class.

Statement on Disabilities

If you need special accommodations (note taker, interpreter, extended time), please make sure to make me aware of these during the first weeks of the semester so that we can make the classroom experience productive. Please also reach out to the office of Disability Resources and Educational Services if you have any questions about available accommodations.

Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty is a serious offense, a violation of academic integrity, and a violation of the trust of professors and fellow students. It will not be tolerated. Violations of academic honesty include plagiarism, cheating, dishonest communication about timely assignment completion, or other violations of community trust. Plagiarism of any assignment will result in a 0 on the assignment or failure of the course and will be reported to the University. Instances of cheating or other violations of academic integrity will result in a 0 on the assignment or failure of the course and will be reported to the University.

The CSUN statement on academic honesty states:

*The maintenance of academic integrity and quality education is the responsibility of each student within this University and the CSU system. Cheating or plagiarism in connection with an academic program at a CSU campus is listed in Section 41301, Title 5, California Code of Regulations as an offense for which a student may be expelled, suspended or given a less severe disciplinary sanction. Academic dishonesty is an especially serious offense and diminishes the quality of scholarship and defrauds those who depend on the integrity of the University’s programs.*

For further information about these policies, including what constitutes plagiarism, what constitutes cheating, and what constitutes an appropriate penalty, please consult the University Catalogue.

*N.B. Although I do not anticipate it, this syllabus may be subject to revision.*