

Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (PHIL 564)
Wednesday 2:30 - 5:30, 107 Willard Building

ID: 035655
Fall 2017

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Office Hours: Mondays 2:00 - 3:00 pm, Thursdays 2:00 - 4:00 pm, and by appointment, 129A Sparks Building
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

The core of our course will be a complete reading of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, the work for which he was best known during his lifetime and that established him as the leading phenomenologist of his generation. Here Merleau-Ponty develops his distinctive interpretation of phenomenology's method in conversation with Gestalt theory and research in psychology and neurology. Framing his inquiry with a parallel critique of empiricism and intellectualism for their unquestioned commitment to a ready-made, objective world, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the essentially embodied, expressive, and historical aspects of perceptual experience across a wide range of existential dimensions, including sexuality, language, space, nature, intersubjectivity, time, and freedom. We will situate *Phenomenology of Perception* in the wider context of Merleau-Ponty's oeuvre, his relationship with major interlocutors (e.g., Husserl, Bergson, Scheler, Heidegger, Sartre), and the critical reception of his thought by Foucault, Levinas, and Derrida, among others. *Phenomenology of Perception* is often read today either as a rejection of transcendental philosophy in favor of a "naturalized" phenomenology, on the one hand, or as still too wedded to subjectivist and correlationist tendencies of phenomenological idealism, on the other. Against these interpretations, our reading will follow a network of sub-themes running through this text: radical reflection's debt to the prereflective, experience as a transcendental field, the anonymous and prepersonal time of the body, and the immemorial past of nature. These offer rich resources for thinking about the human place in nature that resist reduction either to naturalism or to correlationist subjectivity.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Students who successfully complete this course are expected to have gained the ability to:

- Articulate a detailed understanding of Merleau-Ponty's overall philosophical project, method, and major concepts as these are developed in his masterpiece, *Phenomenology of Perception*
- Produce and evaluate close-readings of Merleau-Ponty's text to clarify, deepen comprehension of, and critically assess his methods, arguments, and philosophical position
- Situate Merleau-Ponty's thought in the context of the phenomenological tradition and in relation to contemporary interlocutors and subsequent critics
- Present and assess interpretations of Merleau-Ponty's work in light of contemporary philosophical themes and developments
- Demonstrate advanced conceptual thinking, reading, and writing skills appropriate to the study of major texts of contemporary philosophy
- Produce high-quality, original scholarly research appropriate to graduate-level study in philosophy

COURSE MATERIALS:

You are expected to bring assigned texts to class. You are also encouraged to consult original language texts whenever possible. The following texts are available at the campus bookstore. All other reading selections will be posted on Canvas.

- Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald Landes (Routledge, 2012)
- Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Gallimard, 1945; 2013 printing).

Please note that multiple editions of both the English and the French text are widely available, and that these editions often differ markedly in content as well as pagination. You are strongly encouraged to obtain the current editions of the text to ensure that we are all on the same page, literally as well as figuratively.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. participation	10%
2. presentation of secondary article	10%
3. term paper prospectus & annotated bibliography	20%
4. final term paper, 12-14 pages	60%

- Participation/attendance: You are expected to participate actively in this course, which includes attending every class, reading all assigned material prior to class, and participating productively and professionally in class discussions. The quality and quantity of your participation in the class discussion will be evaluated in assigning 10% of your final grade. Absences from class will negatively affect your participation grade.
- Presentation of secondary article: Each student will sign up to present to the class a secondary article relevant to the course theme. All members of the class are expected to read these articles prior to the presentation. Each student will select her or his own article to present, preferably a peer-reviewed journal article or book chapter. Your selection should have my approval prior to distribution. Please provide me with an electronic copy of your article for posting on Canvas at least one week in advance of your class presentation. After presenting the article (in 5-10 minutes), plan to lead a discussion on the topic for an additional 5-10 minutes (15 minutes maximum). Your presentation and handling of discussion will be the basis for 10% of your final course grade.
- Term paper prospectus & bibliography: You will submit, in the 15th week, a prospectus of your final paper with two components: (1) a 2-3 page detailed description of the topic and outline of your proposed argument (comparable to a proposal for a conference presentation); and (2) an annotated bibliography of at least five peer-reviewed secondary texts you intend to consult. Each annotation should be around one double-spaced page and include a summary of the article as well as an indication of its relevance for your project. Please submit your prospectus and bibliography electronically in a standard format (.doc, .pdf). Your prospectus must receive my approval in order for your final term paper to be accepted. The prospectus will be worth 20% of your final course grade.
- Final term paper: Final term papers will be treated as the final examination for the course and are due one week after the last class meeting. These papers should explore in detail a specific independently-chosen topic or theme related to the course and must include (a) examination of at least five scholarly secondary sources in addition to primary texts, and (b) the development of your own original position or critical response. Term papers should be 12-14 double-spaced pages (typical conference length) and must be proof-read and use a standard system of citation (preferably Chicago style). Please submit essays electronically in a standard format (.doc, .pdf). If you anticipate the need for an extension, please discuss arrangements for this with me well in advance. Otherwise, papers received after the deadline will be penalized at my discretion. Your term paper will count for 60% of your final course grade.

Grading rubric for essays:

A (90% or above) = Excellent. No mistakes, well-written, and distinctive in some way or other.

B (80% or above) = Good. No significant mistakes, well-written, but not distinctive in any way.

C (70% or above) = Okay. Some errors, but a basic grasp of the material.

D (60% or above) = Poor. Significant errors. A tenuous grasp of the material.

F (below 60%) = Failing. Problematic on all fronts indicating either no real grasp of the material or a lack of appropriate effort.

- Course Grading Scale: Final course grades will be assigned according to the following scale. Grades will not be adjusted to fit a standard distribution curve, nor will "close" grades be rounded to a higher grade.

A 93% and above

A- 90% or higher but below 93%

B+ 87% or higher but below 90%

B 83% or higher but below 87%

B- 80% or higher but below 83%

C+ 77% or higher but below 80%

C	73% or higher but below 77%
C-	70% or higher but below 73%
D	60% or higher but below 70%
F	below 60%

COURSE POLICIES & UNIVERSITY STATEMENTS

- Incompletes and extensions will be given only in the event of documented illness or emergencies.
- Retaining copies of all returned work: Please retain the original copy of all work returned to you during the term until the final course grade has been posted. In the event of any question concerning whether grades have been accurately recorded, it is your responsibility to provide these original copies as documentation.
- Computers and other electronic equipment: Use of electronic equipment, including cell phones, tablets, and laptop computers, is prohibited during this class. Exceptions to the prohibition of tablets/laptops may be requested from the instructor and will be granted only for legitimate academic reasons. Use of computers for academic reasons will be monitored throughout the term, and failure to restrict their use to this function will result in the revocation of any computer privileges.
- Inclement Weather: It is generally expected that class will meet unless the University is officially closed for inclement weather. If, however, it becomes necessary to cancel class while the University remains open, this will be announced on Canvas and through the Canvas email system.
- Academic Integrity: Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest, and responsible manner. Academic integrity is a basic guiding principle for all academic activity at The Pennsylvania State University, and all members of the University community are expected to act in accordance with this principle. Consistent with this expectation, the University's Code of Conduct states that all students should act with personal integrity; respect other students' dignity, rights, and property; and help create and maintain an environment in which all can succeed through the fruits of their efforts.

Academic integrity includes a commitment by all members of the University community not to engage in or tolerate acts of falsification, misrepresentation, or deception. Such acts of dishonesty violate the fundamental ethical principles of the University community and compromise the worth of work completed by others.

Please review and familiarize yourself with the Code of Conduct and Academic Integrity policies. In accordance with these policies, violations of academic integrity will be met with disciplinary action consistent with the offense, ranging from a warning to failure of the course.

- University Code of Conduct: <http://studentaffairs.psu.edu/conduct/codeofconduct/>
- University Academic Integrity Policy: <http://undergrad.psu.edu/aappm/G-9-academic-integrity.html>
- College of Liberal Arts Academic Integrity Policy: <http://www.la.psu.edu/current-students/student-services/academic-integrity>

- Disability Accommodation: Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. Every Penn State campus has an office for students with disabilities. Student Disability Resources (SDR) website provides contact information for every Penn State campus (<http://equity.psu.edu/student-disability-resources/disability-coordinator>). For further information, please visit Student Disability Resources website (<http://equity.psu.edu/student-disability-resources/>).

In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, you must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation. See documentation guidelines at <http://equity.psu.edu/student-disability-resources/guidelines>. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus disability services office will provide you with an accommodation letter. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early as possible. You must follow this process for every semester that you request accommodations.

- Counseling and Psychological Services: Many students at Penn State face personal challenges or have psychological needs that may interfere with their academic progress, social development, or emotional wellbeing. The university

offers a variety of confidential services to help you through difficult times, including individual and group counseling, crisis intervention, consultations, online chats, and mental health screenings. These services are provided by staff who welcome all students and embrace a philosophy respectful of clients' cultural and religious backgrounds, and sensitive to differences in race, ability, gender identity and sexual orientation.

- Counseling and Psychological Services at University Park (CAPS): 814-863-0395, <http://studentaffairs.psu.edu/counseling/>
- Counseling and Psychological Services at Commonwealth Campuses <http://senate.psu.edu/faculty/counseling-services-at-commonwealth-campuses/>
- Penn State Crisis Line (24 hours/7 days/week): 877-229-6400
- Crisis Text Line (24 hours/7 days/week): Text LIONS to 741741
- Educational Equity and Reporting Bias: Penn State takes great pride to foster a diverse and inclusive environment for students, faculty, and staff. Acts of intolerance, discrimination, or harassment due to age, ancestry, color, disability, gender, gender identity, national origin, race, religious belief, sexual orientation, or veteran status are not tolerated and can be reported through Educational Equity via the Report Bias webpage: <http://equity.psu.edu/reportbias/>

TENTATIVE ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE *(subject to alteration as the course proceeds)*

Week 1 August 23	Introduction to the course Preface, lxx-lxxxv (English)/7-22 (French)
Week 2 August 30	Introduction: Classical Prejudices and the Return to Phenomena I. Sensation, 3-12/25-35 II. "Association" and the "Projection of Memories," 13-27/36-49 III. "Attention" and "Judgment," 28-51/50-77 IV. The Phenomenal Field, 52-65/78-91
Week 3 September 6	IV. The Phenomenal Field, 52-65/78-91 (continued)
Week 4 September 13	Part I: The Body Introduction to Part One, 69-74/95-100 I. The Body as an Object and Mechanistic Physiology, 75-91/101-118 II. The Experience of the Body and Classical Psychology, 92-99/119-126 III. The Spatiality of One's Own Body and Motricity, 100-148/127-183
Week 5 September 20	IV. The Synthesis of One's Own Body, 149-155/184-190 V. The Body as a Sexed Being, 156-178/191-212 VI. The Body as Expression, and Speech, 179-205/213-241
Week 6 September 27	Part II: The Perceived World Introduction to Part Two, 209-213/245-249 I. Sensing, 214-252/251-289

Week 7 October 4	II. Space, 253-311/290-351
Week 8 October 11	III. The Thing and the Natural World, 312-360/352-402
Week 9 October 18	VI. Others and the Human World, 361-383/403-424
Week 10 October 25	Part III: Being-for-Itself and Being-in-the-World I. The Cogito, 387-431/427-470
Week 11 November 1	II. Temporality, 432-457/471-496
Week 12 November 8	III. Freedom, 458-483/497-521
Week 13 November 15	Merleau-Ponty's Ontology after <i>Phenomenology of Perception</i> Merleau-Ponty, "The Philosopher and his Shadow," in <i>Signs</i> , 159-181 Merleau-Ponty, "The Intertwining—The Chiasm," in <i>The Visible and the Invisible</i> , 130-155
Week 14 November 22	[Thanksgiving Holiday: No Class]
Week 15 November 29	Term Paper Prospectus & Bibliography Due: Wednesday, 11/29 Merleau-Ponty's Reception Levinas, "On Intersubjectivity: Notes on Merleau-Ponty," <i>Outside the Subject</i> , 96-103 Levinas, "In Memory of Alphonse de Waelhens," <i>Outside the Subject</i> , 104-115 Derrida, "Tangent III," in <i>On Touching</i> , 183-215
Week 16 December 6	Foucault, "Theatrum Philosophicum," in <i>Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology</i> , 343-196 Butler, "Sexual Ideology and Phenomenological Description," in <i>The Thinking Muse</i> , 85-100 Harmon, "The Style of Things," in <i>Guerrilla Metaphysics</i> , 45-58 Meillassoux, "Ancestrality" & "Ptolemy's Revenge," in <i>After Finitude</i> , 1-27, 112-128
Wednesday, December 13	Final Term Papers Due by 5 pm