Twentieth Century Continental Philosophy: Phenomenology

W. Froman (telephone extension: 1298; office hours: Wednesdays, 4:30 to 6:30 p.m./and by

appointment; office location: Robinson B455)

Fall 2017

This course is a study of the approach in philosophy called phenomenology, developed during the twentieth century. The aim of the course is to provide each student with an opportunity to familiarize herself or himself with the basics of this approach in philosophy, with certain of the findings of philosophers who practice phenomenology, with certain of the difficulties that develop in the course of the development of phenomenology, and with how phenomenologists have responded. Topics will include: the natural attitude, the transcendental phenomenological reduction, the life-world, the relation between the “psycho-physical ego” and the “transcendental ego,” lived space, lived time, inter-subjectivity, the relation between phenomenology and natural science, the phenomenological approach to the question concerning Being, the issue of humanism, the phenomenological approach to the question concerning language, interaction between phenomenology and the “social sciences” or “human sciences,” in particular, sociology and psychology, and interaction between phenomenology and other currents in recent continental philosophy, including existentialist philosophy, hermeneutics, and structuralism. The major contributors to phenomenology whose work we will study include:

Edmund Husserl, Alfred Schutz, Jean-Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

**Texts (in the oder in which we will study them):**

Selectionsfrom*The**Crisis**of**European**Sciences**and**Transcendental**Philosophy* by E. Husserl

“Edmund Husserl’s Transcendental Phenomenology and the Social Sciences” by A. Schutz

*The Transcendence of the Ego* by J.-P. Sartre

Selections from *Heidegger: Basic Writings* edited by D. F. Krell

“On the Phenomenology of Language” in *Signs* by M. Merleau-Ponty

**Weekly Schedule (this is approximate; changes can be made in order to meet the needs of the class):**

Week 1: Introduction

Week 2: Husserl on Galileo’s contribution to the establishment of modern natural science and the philosophical naïveté of natural science

Week 3: Husserl on how the “life-world” provides access to transcendental phenomenology

Week 4: Husserl’s development of “the transcendental phenomenological reduction”

Week 5: Conclusion of study of Husserl’s development of phenomenology; Schutz’s defense of phenomenology against challenges concerning whether “the transcendental phenomenological reduction” leads away from “pre-predicative” consciousness rather than to it, the question of inter-subjective verification, and the strength of the claim on truth made by modern natural science

Week 6: Schutz’s understanding of the pertinence of phenomenology to the social sciences; Sartre’s challenge to Husserl on the consistency of Husserl’s description of consciousness and Husserl’s understanding of “the transcendental ego”

Week 7: Sartre’s understanding of “the transcendence of the ego,” and Sartre’s understanding of the pertinence of phenomenology to existentialist philosophy

Week 8: Heidegger and a phenomenological approach to the major philosophical issue concerning the meaning of Being; Heidegger and the interaction between hermeneutics and phenomenology (the Introduction to Heidegger’s *Being and Time*)

Week 9: Heidegger’s phenomenological analysis of “being-in-the-world”

Week 10: From *Being and Time* to Heidegger’s *The Letter Concerning Humanism*: the 1930’s

Week 11: *The Letter Concerning Humanism*

Week 12: Conclusion of study of Heidegger; Merleau-Ponty, Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of the basic mode of consciousness according to Husserl, namely, perceptual consciousness, and the relation between psychology and phenomenology

Week 13: Merleau-Ponty on the crucial phenomenological question concerning language; the interaction between structuralism and phenomenology

THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 14: Conclusion of study of Merleau-Ponty; course Conclusion.

**Written Work**: There will be two sets of essay questions distributed in class. The first set will be distributed when we conclude the study of Sartre. The second set will be distributed at the end of the semester. There will be a choice of questions in each set. Students will write the essays outside of class. Students may use the texts studied in the class and class notes when writing the essays, but nothing else, either printed or electronic, and each student must work by herself or by himself. All students will write the first essays. The second set of essays will be optional. The purpose of this is to allow students to devote as much time as possible to the term paper for the course while providing students who want an additional grade an opportunity for that. All students will write a term paper. The topic is to be chosen by the student in consultation with the instructor. The paper is to be between twelve and fifteen pages in length (minimum), and is a research paper, which means it must include footnotes (or endnotes) and a bibliography. The final grade will be determined from the average of the grade for the essays (or an average of the two grades in the event that a student writes the optional essays) plus the grade on the term paper, except when the grade on the term paper is higher, in which case, that grade will count twice in the average and the other grade will count once. (So for example, if a student receives a “B-“ on the essays (or “B-“ is the average of the two grades in the event that a student writes the optional essays) and receives a “B+” on the term paper, the term grade will be “B+,” but if a student receives a “B+” on the essays (or “B+” is the average of the two grades in the event that a student writes the optional essays) and receives a “B-“ on the term paper, the term grade will be “B.” (Professors’ guidance for writing is available on the Philosophy Department Web-Site.) (The Honor Code is in effect in this course).

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Mason is an Honor Code university; please see the University Catalog for a full

description of the code and the honor committee process. The principle of academic

integrity is taken very seriously and violations are treated gravely. What does academic

integrity mean in this course? Essentially this: when you are responsible for a task, you

will perform that task. When you rely on someone else’s work in an aspect of the

performance of that task, you will give full credit in the proper, accepted form. Another

aspect of academic integrity is the free play of ideas. Vigorous discussion and debate are encouraged in this course, with the firm expectation that all aspects of the class will be conducted with civility and respect for differing ideas, perspectives, and traditions. When in doubt (of any kind) please ask for guidance and clarification.

MASON EMAIL ACCOUNTS

Students must use their MasonLIVE email account to receive important University

information, including messages related to this class. See http://masonlive.gmu.edu for more information.

OFFICE OF DISABILITY SERVICES

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 993-2474. All academic

accommodations must be arranged through the ODS. http://ods.gmu.edu

OTHER USEFUL CAMPUS RESOURCES:

WRITING CENTER: A114 Robinson Hall; (703) 993-1200; http://writingcenter.gmu.edu

UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES “Ask a Librarian”

http://library.gmu.edu/mudge/IM/IMRef.html

COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES (CAPS): (703) 993-2380;

http://caps.gmu.edu

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

The University Catalog, http://catalog.gmu.edu, is the central resource for university

policies affecting student, faculty, and staff conduct in university academic affairs. Other

policies are available at http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/. All members of the university

community are responsible for knowing and following established policies.