

SEMINAR: MERLEAU-PONTY'S PHENOMENOLOGY OF PERCEPTION

Tuesday 14:35-17:25, Leacock 927

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Office hours: Tuesday 17:30-19:00 and Thursday 19:00-19:30 (and by appt.)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course involves an intensive study of the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961). We will read together Merleau-Ponty's most important early work, the *Phenomenology of Perception* (published in 1945 and recently re-translated into English). One of the key texts of 20th century phenomenology and continental philosophy, the *Phenomenology of Perception* has led to a reconsideration not only of the role of embodiment in experience, but also of how bodies are conceived. More than simply presenting a theory of perception, the phenomenological study of perception allows Merleau-Ponty to uncover the primary, pre-reflective and embodied level at which we live and the implicit ties that bind us to the world. The *Phenomenology of Perception* is hence also a phenomenology of subjectivity, with its roots in the lived body, and a phenomenology of world, as sensible, spatial, natural, and intersubjective world.

We will work through as much of the *Phenomenology of Perception* as the semester allows, with the aim of acquiring both an understanding of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and a critical grasp of the problems this phenomenology encounters.

Prerequisite: PHIL 474/475 or written permission of the instructor.

Seminars are open only to graduate students and final year Philosophy Majors, Honours and Joint Honours students, except by written permission of the Department.

REQUIRED TEXT:

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Donald Landes. Routledge, 2012. **NEW TRANSLATION. (Available at Paragraphe Bookstore)**

Since part of the aim of this seminar is to read through the new translation of the *Phenomenology of Perception* (philosophically superior to the previous translation), please make sure you have the correct edition.

If you are able to read French, the French text is: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Gallimard, 1945).

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADES

- (1) **PRESENTATION / QUESTION** **20%**
 Each student is required to either give one **oral presentation** or submit one **written question** during the term. There are two possible formats to this assignment: (a) Presentation of a reading, or part of a reading, or (b) question on a reading. Generally, it is expected that graduate students will choose (a) and undergraduates (b), although this can vary depending on the number of students enrolled in the course. **(See details below.)**
- (2) **TERM PAPER** **50%**
 The term paper should be approximately **12 pages** in length (for undergraduates), **18-20 pages** in length (for graduate students). *The topic of this paper is to be designed by you, in consultation with the instructors.* (It is recommended that you begin work on this paper early, since you may need to consult some secondary sources for the purpose.) ***Due date to be announced.***
- (3) **TERM PAPER PROPOSAL** **10%**
 You should submit a paper proposal in which you describe your topic, justify its relevance, and list the sources you will be using in developing it. Proposals should be **max. 300 words. DUE APRIL 2nd in class.**
- (4) **ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION** **20%**

Participation

You should complete all assigned readings before coming to class and be prepared to participate *thoughtfully and actively* in class discussion. This means reading *closely* the texts assigned for each week. It also means engaging seriously with the presentations and questions of your fellow students.

Oral participation should be thoughtful, respectful of others, and constructively critical, as well as on-going.

Guidelines for Presentations/Questions

(a) PRESENTATION: The presentation should be aimed at providing a deeper understanding and analysis of that week's reading (or, when the reading is extensive, of what you think is the most significant part of the reading). The presentation should aim (i) to teach the material to the class, and (ii) to raise question(s) about the reading, including critical questions, which can motivate discussion. **It is recommended that the presentation be organized around a central theme, concept or structure that you develop from the reading** (please avoid linear summaries).

Students should meet with the instructor on the Thursday prior to their presentation with an outline of their proposed presentation. If two students are presenting on the same week, you will be expected to coordinate your presentations and to collaborate during class. Each presentation should be max. **30 minutes** in length.

(b) QUESTION: The question should take up *one specific problem, concept or theme* in the week's reading. The aim is not to give an exhaustive interpretation of the reading; rather it is to interrogate as precisely and attentively as possible one issue in the reading that you think is significant.

Questions must be submitted electronically (by email to the instructor) by 12 PM on the MONDAY prior to class. If time (and class size) permits, one student may be called on to summarize his/her question in class (10 minutes) as a means to facilitating discussion.

Questions must be clearly formulated and elaborated in light of the text we are reading. They should aim to motivate discussion. **Questions should be about 300 words.** Some hints:

- (1) Ask *one* question (this can have related sub-questions, but you should avoid multiple unrelated questions).
- (2) Explain your question *clearly*. Since the question may be used to motivate discussion, others should be able to understand it. Try not to assume background that others will not share.
- (3) Make sure this is a *real* question, i.e., that there is something at stake in what you are asking. *Avoid simple textual clarification questions.* Your question should try to locate an important issue in the reading that calls for discussion.
- (4) The question need not have only one answer. Indeed, it is better if the question does not have a simple answer but rather calls for multiple interpretations and positions.

PRESENTATIONS and QUESTIONS will begin the week of February 19th or 26th depending on class size.

POLICY ON EXTENSIONS FOR WRITTEN WORK

No extensions will be granted without an appropriate medical note. Late work will be penalized at the rate of one letter grade per calendar day past the due date. For instance, a paper that is evaluated as a B, if one day late, will be assigned a B-, and if two days late, will receive a C+.

McGILL UNIVERSITY VALUES ACADEMIC INTEGRITY. THEREFORE ALL STUDENTS MUST UNDERSTAND THE MEANING AND CONSEQUENCES OF CHEATING, PLAGIARISM AND OTHER ACADEMIC OFFENCES UNDER THE CODE OF STUDENT CONDUCT AND DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

Instructor generated course materials are protected by law and may not be copied or distributed in any form or in any medium without explicit permission of the instructor.

Schedule of Readings:

- January 8 Introduction.
- January 15 *PhP*, "Preface" (pp. lxx-lxxxv)
PhP, Introduction, Chapter 1 ("Sensation" pp. 3-12)
PhP, Introduction, Chapter 2 ("Association' and the 'Projection of Memories'" pp. 13-27)
- 22 *PhP*, Introduction, Chapter 3 ("Attention' and 'Judgment'" pp. 28-51)
PhP, Introduction, Chapter 4 ("The Phenomenal Field" pp. 52-65)
- 29 *PhP*, Part I, Introduction (pp. 69-74) [SUPPLEMENTARY]
PhP, Part I, Chapter 1 ("The Body as an Object and Mechanistic Physiology pp.75-91)
PhP, Part I, Chapter 2 ("The Experience of the Body and Classical Psychology" pp. 92-99)
- February 5 *PhP*, Part I, Chapter 3, selection ("The Spatiality of One's Own Body and Motricity" pp. 100-115 and pp. 131-148)
- 12 *PhP*, Part I, Chapter 4 ("The Synthesis of One's Own Body" pp. 149-155)
PhP, Part I, Chapter 5 ("The Body as a Sexed Being" pp. 156-178)
- 19 *PhP*, Part I, Chapter 6 ("The Body as Expression, and Speech" pp. 179-205)
- 26 *PhP*, Part II, Introduction (pp. 209-213) [SUPPLEMENTARY]
PhP, Part II, Chapter 1 ("Sensing" pp. 214-252)
- March 5 No class. Reading Week.
- March 12 *PhP*, Part II, Chapter 2, selection ("Space" pp. 253-279 and pp. 293-311)
- 19 *PhP*, Part II, Chapter 3, selection ("The Thing and the Natural World" pp. 318-327 and pp. 331-349).
[SUPPLEMENTARY, if time permits, pp. 352-360]
- 26 *PhP*, Part II, Chapter 4 ("Others and the Human World" pp. 361-383)
- April 2 *PhP*, Part III, Chapter 1 ("The *Cogito*" pp. 387-431)
TERM PAPER PROPOSAL DUE.
- 9 *PhP*, Part III, Chapter 3 ("Freedom" pp. 458-483)

Last week: TERM PAPERS DUE (date to be announced)