Key Concepts in Phenomenology (Intentionality, Embodiment, Empathy, Intersubjectivity)

The Tang Chun-I Visiting Professor Chinese University of Hong Kong 2019

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Class schedule:
27 Sept (Fri): Intentionality 2:30pm-5:15pm (SWH LT2).
4 Oct (Fri): Embodiment 2:30pm-5:15pm (SWH LT2)
8 Oct (Tue): Empathy 6:30pm-9:15pm (LSK202)
18 Oct (Fri): Intersubjectivity 2:30pm-5:15pm (SWH LT2)

Required reading

Course Description:
This course offers an advanced critical introduction to key concepts to phenomenology, one of the most important movements of twentieth-century European philosophy, through readings of selected classical texts and discussing selected problems. This module will trace the key phenomenological themes intentionality, consciousness, embodiment, empathy and personhood through several key thinkers: Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Edith Stein, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Ludwig Binswanger, Aron Gurwitsch, Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi. The course will have both a historical and a contemporary orientation with an emphasis on reading selections from primary sources in English translation in order to understand the central phenomenological concepts.

1. **Friday 27th September 2019. Lecture One. Intentionality. 2:30pm-5:15pm (SWH LT2).**

   Intentionality is the claim that all conscious experiences are defined by their object-directedness. Franz Brentano re-introduced the notion of intentionality into philosophy as a way to define mental phenomena and distinguish them from physical phenomena. Edmund Husserl seized on the concept of intentionality as the key problem of phenomenology. Conscious life is intentional, it is meaning-directed. But there are many
problems. Do all conscious phenomena display intentionality? Are all genuinely intentional phenomena conscious? Does the intentionality of consciousness rely on a relation to existing object or is it entirely independent of the existence of that which is intended? Both phenomenologists and analytical philosophers have engaged separately with these questions but recently these questions have again become the focus of shared investigations.

**Required Readings**
- Brentano, Franz. ‘The Distinction Between Mental and Physical Phenomena’, *Phenomenology Reader*, pp. 32-56.

**Further Reading**

**Further Reading**
- Dermot Moran, “Our Germans are Better Than Their Germans”: Continental and Analytic Approaches to Intentionality Reconsidered,” *Philosophical Topics* Vol. 27 No. 2 (Fall 1999), pp. 77–106.

2. **Friday 4th October 2019. Lecture Two: Embodiment. 2:30pm-5:15pm (SWH LT2)**

In this lecture I will discuss the phenomenology of embodiment and also of agency focusing primarily on Husserl and Merleau-Ponty (Heidegger neglected the body). Phenomenology maintains that all conscious experience is embodied in an organic, active, lived body (*Leib*) and embedded in a social world. Contrary to Descartes, phenomenology maintains consciousness and thought cannot be separated from the body. All experience is incarnate. The phenomenology of embodiment --a term Husserl himself employs--begins by distinguishing the physical body (*Körper*) from the animate lived body (*Leib*). As physical, the human body belongs to nature and is subject to the laws of gravitation, impact, and so on. As the organ of my will, however, the living body is what Husserl’s terms ‘I-body’ (*Ichleib*) in his *Logical Investigations* (V § 4). The body is experienced as a centre of agency, of what Husserl calls ‘I can’ (*ich kann*), the capacity for self-movement and for initiating actions rather than just passively responding to the world. According to Husserl, there is an *intertwining* *‘Verflectung’* between *Leib* and *Körper*. This deep ‘circularity’ within the body is called ‘flesh’ (*la chair*) by Merleau-Ponty. Flesh, according to Merleau-Ponty’s late account in *The Visible and the Invisible* (*‘VI’*), is essentially characterized by ‘reversibility’ (*réversibilité*), ‘the finger of the glove that is turned inside out’ (*VI*, p. 263; 311) and ‘doubling’—‘the doubling up of my body into inside and outside’ (*VI*, p. 264; 311). This reversibility is prefigured in the single subject but also describes the relations between subjects. Subjects touch each other in, e.g., a handshake. Merleau-Ponty calls this ‘intercorporeality’ *intercorporealité, VI*, p. 142; 184). The world, for him, is actually an ‘intercorporeal being’; my body ‘couples’ with the ‘flesh of the world’ (*VI*, p. 144; 187).
It is for this reason that Merleau-Ponty concludes that the world is ‘universal flesh’ (VI, p. 137; 179), ‘a texture that returns to itself and conforms to itself’ (VI, p. 146; 190). Intertwining, furthermore, belongs to the very essence of human symbolic activity. For Merleau-Ponty, for instance, this intertwining captures the being of art, especially painting, which is both an embodied activity of brush strokes and a produced visual meaning sense.

**Required Readings**

- Husserl *Ideas* II § 18; and §§ 36-37.
- Husserl, *Thing and Space* §§ 46-47

**Further Reading**


3. **Tuesday 8th October 2019. Lecture Three. Empathy. 6:30pm-9:15pm (LSK202)**

This lecture will examine the phenomenological account of empathy (*Einfühlung*), or the ‘experience of the other’ (*Fremderfahrung*) as well as the nature of the ‘personalistic attitude’. The German *Sich einfühlen* is a reflexive verb that literally means ‘to feel one’s way into’. Empathy or ‘intropathy’ means one’s personal experience of another’s subjectivity, i.e. the phenomenon of feeling (or thinking) one’s way into the first-person, experiential life of another person. Empathy, as used in phenomenology refers not just to emotional engagement with other but to all cognitive and experiential states of the other subject (e.g. when I understand what someone is saying). Husserl distinguishes between my original, first-person experience of my own body, the ‘sphere of ownness’ and the experience of the other, what is not-me’. There is the phenomenological problematic of the constitution of ‘otherness’ and especially other persons. For Husserl, empathy is not any kind of inference (*Schluss*), whether deliberately and calculatively performed, or, even as
carried out unconsciously. We do not first experience the body of the other and then infer
to a state. Rather we experience the other’s state directly: we see an angry face. Empathy
is essentially connected to grasping others as persons, as beings with consciousness,
intentionality and agency. Husserl gives primacy to what he calls ‘the personalistic
attitude’.

**Required Readings**


**Further Reading**

- Dermot Moran, “The Problem of Empathy: Lipps, Scheler, Husserl and Stein,” in *Amor Amicitiae: On the
  Love that is Friendship. Essays in Medieval Thought and Beyond in Honor of the Rev. Professor James
  269–312.

4. **Friday 18 October 2019. Lecture Four. Intersubjectivity. 2:30pm-5:15pm (SWH LT2)**

Husserl understood that all transcendental subjectivity involves an intrinsic relation to
others and operates within an interlocking ‘nexus’ (*Zusammenhang*) of intersubjectivity, as
he articulates in the *Crisis* texts that had such a powerful influence on Merleau-Ponty. Husserl’s mature conception envisages transcendental subjectivities interpenetrating each
other in an *Ineinander* of mutual implication which he chose to express in terms of the
Leibnizian conception of ‘monadology’. All subjectivities cooperate together to produce
the undeniable experience of a shared, common world that is harmonious and unified.
Overview of Husserl’s conception of spirit and his account of the constitution of culture.
Husserl recognizes that humans live in a ‘life-world’ which is also a world of historicity and
tradition. He recognized the plurality of life-worlds but at the same time he rejected all
relativism in relation to culture. Furthermore, Husserl recognized the extraordinary
transformation in the life-world that was brought about by modern naturalistic science. His
later philosophy focuses on the problems connected to living in a multicultural world and
yet a world united by contemporary science and technology.

**Required readings**

  269-299.
- Husserl, “Edmund Husserl’s Letter to Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, 11 March 1935,” Translation from the German,

**Further Readings**

- Dermot Moran, “Everydayness, Historicity and the World of Science: Husserl’s Life-world
