INTRODUCTION TO EXISTENTIAL PHENOMENOLOGY  FALL 2013

Course  410W-01  Times  MWF 10-10.50
Instructor  Professor Roger Brooke, Ph.D., ABPP  Office hours  M, W, F, 9-9.50
Venue  Canevan 306

Introduction

The general aim of this course is to introduce you to the main themes of existential phenomenological psychology. It is an approach to thinking about people and doing psychology that is consistent with the way we understand ourselves. In other words, a phenomenological psychologist is concerned with understanding human experience and behavior in a way that enriches and deepens our human experience as well as informs our intellectual understanding of psychological phenomena. A phenomenological understanding is primarily descriptive and does not violate the integrity of our ordinary, but primary, human experience.

An existential phenomenologist asks not only the phenomenological question of what a psychological phenomenon is, or means, but also what it might tell us about being human. We shall continually ask this deeper, self-reflective question through the course.

To be phenomenological in psychology is easier said than done. That is because our cultural heritage has had a way of systematically obscuring the foundations of our own experience, so that we now tend to say things about our experience and behavior—about people—that are self-contradictory and do indeed violate our immediately given, human knowledge. Two themes in our cultural heritage are particularly relevant for understanding how our habits of thought tend to get in the way of accurately describing our experience.

First is philosophical dualism, which emerged in the Renaissance under the impact of Galilean science, and was philosophically developed in the seventeenth century by Rene Descartes. Cartesian dualism, as it is known, was a philosophical position about the nature of reality, yet it has come to define for us the basic categories through which we tend to organize our knowledge. We take these categories so much for granted now that we no longer see them as cultural, let alone as philosophical impositions on experience. These categories include the following oppositions, or dualisms: experience-behavior, inner-outer, mind-body, mental-physical, subjective impression - objective fact, secular-religious, etc. So, our task as budding phenomenological psychologists is to try to talk and write about psychological phenomena in a way that does not too quickly categorize what we are talking about in terms of those dualisms. Rather, we want to describe psychological phenomena in terms that remain faithful to the way those phenomena are actually lived and experienced.

The second trend in our cultural heritage, which has tended to obscure the foundations of our experience, is the development of technology, especially in medicine. The successes of technology and medicine have meant that many of us have come to distrust what is,
phenomenologically, our more primary experience and knowledge of ourselves. Instead, we tend to regard any unusual experience, including our own, in medical terms. How often do you hear people say, "I've got depression" (or "panic disorder" or "schizophrenia" or "alcohol/sex/gambling addiction")? *Patients sometimes say to me, “I've got anxiety and panic disorder, but I used to have depression as well.”* To the extent that we think like this, we think of ourselves as victims of our genes and biochemistry: a neurochemical cocktail wrapped in skin, like a burrito. When we speak like this we sever our experience from the contexts in which our experience finds its meaning. We think of our experience and its meaning as though it merely reflected a medical fact. The we are only one logical step away from requiring a pharmaceutical solution to all our difficulties. Indeed, multibillion dollar industries depend on this. In this context, a phenomenological psychology serves to recollect (collect back) the forgotten ground of our experience, and to develop psychological thinking in a way that is consistent with this ground. This ground lies in the meaningful contexts in which our experience is situated.

We shall consistently question the above assaults on our experience: the legacy of Descartes and the reductionist perspective of medicine. My hope is that, in this way, you will start to practice psychology phenomenologically, returning to the phenomena themselves for the answers to your psychological questions. We shall be concerned with careful and disciplined description rather than hypothetical, causal explanation, with the meaning of experience and behavior rather than with the measurement of predefined variables.

With regard to other schools of thought in psychology, we shall consider some of their possible contributions critically, reinterpreting what is helpful in terms that are consistent with the ground of human experience as this is expressed phenomenologically. This foundational approach to psychology, both critical and integrative towards the rest of the field, was the express goal of the founder of our Psychology Department, Father Adrian van Kaam, which he set out systematically in his great book, *Existential foundations of psychology* (Duquesne University Press, 1966).

**Objectives**
I would summarize the above introduction in terms of these specific learning objectives. By the end of the course:

1. Students will understand the main themes of existential phenomenological psychology.
2. Students will understand what is meant by the term, Cartesian dualism, and will understand the significance of this in organizing the way we understand ourselves.
3. Students will understand and be able to write about the ambiguously natural and human structure of human embodiment.
4. Students will understand the strength and limitations of the medical model of psychopathology.
5. Students will gain experience in practicing phenomenological psychology, describing some phenomena of psychological life (taken from the cases in Yalom's *Love's executioner*) in a way that is rigorous and descriptively close to lived experience.
You might notice that these objectives are consistent with the learning objectives of the Department of Psychology in general. Thus, students will
- Understand the fundamental concepts and approaches of psychology as a natural science and as a human science;
- Think critically and creatively about psychology and life as a whole;
- Communicate effectively in writing and class seminars;
- Think critically regarding the ethical obligations of psychology, in this case, a phenomenological psychology;
- Be better prepared for graduate study or for a life that expects your graduation skills, such as effective intellectual, research, and communication skills.

The assessment of these objectives is detailed below.

Course structure

With a few exceptions, on Monday we shall discuss one of Yalom’s cases. The purpose is not to learn about therapy but to ask what each case tells us about being human or about some phenomenon that the case story reveals. That is, we shall be actually doing existential phenomenology. On Wednesday we shall discuss the theme of the week at a more conceptual level, and also talk about the readings. On Friday we shall review the theme of the week, especially in terms of the course objectives.

Attendance is compulsory. Without regular attendance you will miss the essential process of learning existential phenomenology and equally essential class discussions. If you expect to miss a class, let me know so that I can make appropriate allowances.

There are two short papers and a longer term paper. Copies of these papers are sent to me as email attachments electronically.

When no short papers are required, it is important that you do the readings anyway and come prepared for class discussion. If unprepared you will be deemed absent for that class.

There will also be five spot quizzes through the semester on the readings for the particular class seminar. These quizzes cannot be made up later. Perfect attendance has a bonus of 10%.

Readings

The following books are required reading:


In addition, you will be required to read a number of papers throughout the semester. These, listed below, will be available on Blackboard.
Recommended articles are marked with an asterisk *. These readings are not required for successful completion of the course. However, students looking for an A are expected to integrate these recommended readings into their essays (see Grading Guidelines below).

Assessment and Grades

Grading Guidelines are attached with this syllabus. There are five short papers and a final term paper. There will also be five spot quizzes on the readings for that day. Spot quizzes cannot be made up. The relative grade values are:

- Two short papers (2x15%) 30% These papers should be 4-6 pages 12 font, 1½ space.
- Spot quizzes (5x4%) 20%
- Attendance 10% (Present at all quizzes; papers on time)
- Term paper 30% This paper should be ±12 pages 12 font, 1½ space.
- Final exam 10%
- TOTAL 100%
- There will be several extra credit possibilities, making your possible total more than 100%.
- Class participation will move grades up for students close to a higher grade.

Grade scale as percentage:
A 94 A- 90 B+ 85 B 80 B- 75
C+ 70 C 65 D 60 F <60

The Term Paper

The term paper pulls together the central themes of the course. Answer ONE of the following two is the questions.

1. Discuss the concept, being-in-the-world, and its relevance for psychology in understanding at least THREE of the following areas of human experience:
   a) a disabling head injury (you may include late life dementias)
   b) body image and sexuality
   c) psychological difficulties such as anxiety, depression, or eating disorders (pick one example)
   d) the upright posture
   When introducing the concept, being-in-the-world, it is important to elaborate briefly on the various dimensions of its structure, with a more developed elaboration of temporality and embodiment. Then use this introduction (2-3 pages) to address the specific questions.

2. Write a letter to me in which you pull together what you have learned about existential phenomenology in this course. Tell me how you might take these lessons learned into your future work or life (e.g. career, family relationships). This question is deliberately open to many possibilities. My hope is that you have learned something about yourself and about being human, as well as about the goals of psychology. Support your essay with reference to the literature.
Your answer to this question might cover some of the material in the first question, above, but it is set up to give you more room if you are feeling creative.

In general I shall grade papers first with content in mind. Having come to a provisional grade, based on content, I may then adjust that score by as much as two grade levels (e.g. B to C+, or B- to B+) according to the quality of the writing and the presentation.

In order to become comfortable with existential phenomenological thinking there is no substitute for reading widely in the literature, some of which takes considerable effort. For those students who wish to major in psychology—especially for those who are considering graduate studies here at Duquesne—I would encourage you to go beyond the required readings and read the recommended (*) articles as well. As mentioned above, doing so will lift sound, competent answers to an A level.

In general, a student can expect to improve his or her grade by reading and integrating the "Recommended" readings. A student wanting a full A needs to take this option. A student scoring a B+ may obtain an A- with this "Recommended" option; a B performance on papers and exams may improve to a B+. However, I strongly recommend that students who struggle at all with academic comprehension and writing should focus on doing only the required work well. You are more likely to enjoy the material, not feel overwhelmed, and have the time to work on your academic writing skills without the pressure of hunting for extra credit. Weakly written papers will not earn an "A" grade even with evidence of "Recommended" reading. You will gain a higher grade by doing less but doing it better.

Papers in which there are numerous grammatical errors per page will not pass.

I shall be sharing the grading load with my teaching assistant, a doctoral student in psychology. Whether or not I personally have graded your paper, you are welcome to come to me for reconsideration if you think your paper has not been fairly graded.

I recommend the Writing Skills Center in College Hall for all students who are wanting to improve their skills. Let me know if English is not your first language, and I shall make appropriate accommodations and suggestions.

Tips for good English writing

You will get credit for good writing and will be penalized for writing that is poor. Some tips, in addition to those from the learning skills center:

- Subjects and verbs agree in number. (The word followed by "of" can never be the subject that agrees with the verb. "A group of students is standing in the hall" is correct.)
- Avoid split infinitives. ("To carelessly split an infinitive verb is to surely drive Dr. Brooke nuts." However, "To keep infinitive verbs carefully together is to impress Dr. Brooke immensely with one's erudition.")
Resolve the masculine pronoun conundrum. (Avoid "person ... themselves" or, worse, "... themself" or "... theirself"!)

Get your personal pronouns correct. "I" can only ever be the subject of a sentence. Therefore, "to her and I," "for him and I," "between her and I," "underneath him and I," "from her and I," are all WRONG. (For instance, you never say "He gave it to I," but "He gave it to me," so why on earth would you say "He gave it to her and I"? Grrrr....

Careful use of commas and semicolons.
Develop only one point, with appropriate clarification, per paragraph.
Have a guiding theme through the essay.
Cite your references. Use APA format, as used in this syllabus. (Tell me of any errors!).

Your own tips?

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a serious offense and may result in failure of the course as well as further disciplinary action by the University. Plagiarism includes—but is not limited to—downloading essays or passages from the web, copying other students' papers or passages of papers, and copying passages from books or articles without acknowledging those sources. (I shall be checking.)

Disabilities
Please let me know if you have a disability for which I can make appropriate accommodations.

Week

Week 1 Aug 26-30 Welcome back!

M Introduction and overview
W Yalom's "Love's executioner" Yalom: Love's executioner
Time to be a phenomenologist: What does Thelma’s story tell us about the phenomenon called love and about being human?
F What are we talking about? Reflections on language and experience in psychology

Week 2 Sep 2-6 Psychology as natural science and as phenomenological psychology

M Labor Day
W Yalom's "If rape were legal..." Yalom's case
What does Carlos’s story tell us about our relation to others, the body, terminal illness, and time?
F Natural scientific psychology Valle, King, and Halling: Intro....
*Giorgi: The idea of human science

Week 3 Sep 9-13 The historical need for phenomenological psychology

M Yalom's "Fat lady" Yalom's case
What does this story tell us about human temporality (lived time), the body, and obesity?
W  From Galileo and Descartes to being-in-the-world  No reading required
F  Review  *Romanyshyn: The despotic eye
Extra credit option. What is the origin of the “despotic eye”? How is phenomenological psychology an answer to the problem of the “despotic eye”? (See Romanyshyn’s essay.) 2 points
Submit Monday.

Week 4 Sep 16-20  The development of existential phenomenology
M  The phenomenology of grief  Yalom, “The wrong one died”
W  Origins and significance of existential psychology  May ch. 3-5
F  Phenomenology of combat trauma. Roger Brooke presentation of a phenomenological perspective on combat post traumatic stress disorder

Week 5 Sep 23-27  Psychoanalysis and phenomenology
M  Psychoanalysis and phenomenology  Craig: The human and the hidden
W  Psychoanalysis and phenomenology  *Wertz: Phenomenology of Freud.
   *Smith: Freud’s metapsychology
F  Phenomenology and psychotherapy  (RB presentation. No reading)

Monday Sept 30  Submit first paper
EITHER: a letter to an interested friend: What I am learning about existential phenomenology’s understanding of people. Choose several themes rather than touch all bases.
OR: Using Craig’s essay, The Human and the Hidden, as inspiration, write a description of the presence of soul as it is revealed in your world.
Extra credit option: 2 page paper on Wertz’s discussion of Freud. (3 points). Hand in today.

Week 6 Sep 30- Oct 4  Existentialies
M  Existential fundamentals
W  Existential fundamentals  May: chs 8-11
F  Reflections on uncertainty  Yalom: “Two smiles”
In human science

Week 7 Oct 7-10  Things and world
M  Phenomenology of things and world  Romanyshyn: Reflections of the psychological world: things (excerpt)
W  Images, things and symbols  (RB presentation)  *Heidegger: The thing
F  Metaphors, poetry, and the language of things
Extra credit: A 1-2 page description of a thing of yours that really, really things :) 1 pt

Note that up to now the course has been on e.p.’s fundamentals and the notion of being-in-the-world (-alongside-others-with-things). After one week on research principles, we shall focus on human embodiment.

Week 8 Oct 14-18  Phenomenological research and method
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Oct 21-25</th>
<th>The upright posture (and philosophical anthropology)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>The upright posture</td>
<td>Straus: The upright posture</td>
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<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Being black in the world</td>
<td>Fanon: The lived experience of the Black (Focus on the descriptive excerpts)</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>Being gendered in the world</td>
<td>Young: Throwing like a girl &amp; *Being breasted</td>
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<td>* Critical reflections by DU doctoral students, in press, The Humanistic Psychologist.</td>
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<th>Week</th>
<th>Oct 28-Nov 1</th>
<th>Flesh and speech in body and world (David Abram’s work)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>The meaning of “flesh”</td>
<td>Abram: The speech of things</td>
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<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Workshop</td>
<td>*Abram: The discourse of birds</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>Holiday</td>
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Monday Nov 3 Submit second paper

EITHER: Describe a personal experience in which you use the writings of the past few weeks to deepen or develop further your understanding of the structure of your experience. OR: A phenomenological reflection on a phenomenon of your choice. Working in groups is recommended, although you write your final version yourselves.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Nov 3-8</th>
<th>Phenomenological approach to understanding the brain and body image</th>
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<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Phenomenology of depression</td>
<td>Yalom, “Three unopened letters”</td>
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<td>What does the story of Saul’s depression suggest about the medical model of depression? (Think carefully; don’t answer too quickly.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Human embodiment (Moss)</td>
<td>Moss: Brain, body, and world</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Human embodiment (Moss)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Nov 11-15</th>
<th>More on phenomenology and neuroscience</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>View a film on Alzheimer’s dementia</td>
<td>Brooke: Humanistic sensibilities...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Phenomenology and head injury and dementia</td>
<td>Moss (above)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*McInerney and Walker: Toward ...</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Review of phenomenology and neuroscience and psychiatry</td>
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<th>Week</th>
<th>Nov 18-22</th>
<th>Phenomenology of sexuality: Is human sexuality instinctual?</th>
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<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Case discussion</td>
<td>Yalom, “In search of the dreamer”</td>
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<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Phenomenology and sexuality</td>
<td>Becker: Intimacy and sexuality</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Review</td>
<td>*Jager: Transformation ... Passions</td>
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*Merleau-Ponty: The body in its sexual being

Extra credit option: What is passion phenomenologically, according to Jager? 1 point.
Extra credit option: On approximately two sides, write a series of short quotations from this chapter and discuss them in some way: a personal response, an extrapolation, or something, but in a way that you show that you know what M-P is getting at. You are welcome to use my marginal tips. Max 3 points. Submit at the same time as the term paper.

Friday Nov 22, 6 pm. Submit term paper

Nov 25-29 Thanksgiving break

Week 14 Dec 2-6
M Phenomenology and psychopathology
W Phenomenology and psychopathology
F Review

Yalom's "Therapeutic monogamy"
Halling and Nill: Demystifying psychopathology

Week 15 Dec 9
M Class final test. Short questions and multiple choice (10% of total)

References cited


UNDERGRADUATE GRADING GUIDELINES FOR DR. ROGER BROOKE

The guidelines are meant to orient you and me. They are not meant to be prescriptive, and I shall use my judgment in each case, being appropriately flexible as the case may be. If you want to approach a written assignment in a particularly unusual way, I suggest you discuss this with me. Evidence of poor proofing, significant grammatical errors, or sloppy presentation will automatically drop as much as two grade levels (e.g., B+ to B-).

GRADE  GUIDELINES
A  Superior presentation and integration of relevant material, including excellent usage of both required and supplementary readings. Arguments are clear and persuasive, and demonstrate insight into some of the subtleties involved in the subject matter. Writing is grammatically excellent, and there are few, if any, typographical errors.

A-  Excellent. As above, with minor weaknesses in organization, insight, or conceptualization, as long as these do not involve confusion or inconsistency. Reasonably good use of recommended readings. The paper represents a clear potential to succeed in graduate studies. (This does NOT mean that it has to be a graduate level paper, as you do not have the time or scholarship yet for that.)

B+  Very good. Competent coverage of required reading and relevant material, reasonably well organized. Supplementary readings may be covered but tend not to be well integrated. The paper is well written, with good English (leniency towards English-second-language speakers), and has been proof read, with spell check. References are properly cited. OR this may be an otherwise excellent paper with some problems in organization or some area of misunderstanding.

B  Good. Satisfactory coverage of relevant material, reasonably well organized and integrated, but lacking in scholarship, or with a superficial understanding. Minor omissions of important material. Maximum grade if there is evidence of poor proofing, significant grammatical errors, or sloppy presentation.

B-  Satisfactory. Adequate coverage of relevant material, but with some significant areas of confusion or omissions. Lack of critical insight and/or poor organization. Tendency to rote repetition of lectures and required readings.

C(+)  Minimum average grade for graduation. Significant tendency to rote repetition of required material, but with insufficient material covered or significant confusion, or misunderstanding.

D  Lowest passing grade. Just enough contact with reference material to pass, but with significant gaps or misunderstandings. Material presented in a confusing or weak way, despite evidence of having grasped a few basic ideas.

F  Major misconceptions, poor organization, significant lack of intellectual clarity or scholarship.

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