Short Course Description

We have had a Phenomenology of the Spirit, of Perception, of Practice, of Feeling, of Sport and just about everything else. Isn’t it time we had a Phenomenology of Human Understanding!! The act of human understanding would seem to be of pivotal importance to just about everything; it is the elephant in the room. What department or school of the University does not aim at understanding? Yet who has given us a correct, articulate, clear account of the process of human understanding? All I mean by phenomenology is an accurate, precise, detailed description of the variety of acts of human understanding, as well as identifying the basic underlying structure common to all such acts.

My method will be based on self-discovery. You have understood many topics and disciplines and problems already, without knowing what ‘understanding’ explicitly is. Spontaneously children ask questions about what they experience in order to understand correctly. They do this in every culture, every country and in every age. It confers a wonderful advantage if you have an explicit knowledge of the process of understanding and thence to knowing truth and value.

We will be paying due deference to Aristotle, Hume, Kant, Husserl and Lonergan, but the course is not about studying these great philosophers. It is about becoming aware of your own mind, images and ideas, questions and answers, acts of understanding of various kinds. Nowadays the emphasis is on diversity, the uniqueness of everything, plurality and variety. There are indeed an almost infinite number of acts of understanding and things to be understood. But surprisingly there is a simple, single, structure underlying this multiplicity.

Teaching will be by way of projects, exercises, essays, presentations, discussion and dialogue. We will use Phenomenology of Human Understanding by myself as a textbook for the course. I hope to work through it chapter by chapter. Once we have the structure of human knowing under our belt, we ask the further question about, what is real? Does our knowing attain what is real and how can we be sure of that. The course will conclude with a presentation of critical realism – the real is the totality of what can be affirmed in a series of correct judgments. (This course satisfies the requirement for graduate students as a course in contemporary philosophy.)