

PHL 557-301: Toward a Continental Philosophy of Science

Instructor: H. Peter Steeves

Contact Info.: 773/325-1153; psteeves@depaul.edu

Office Info.: Clifton 150.12; office hours before class and by appointment

Class Time: Mon., 6-9:15PM

Course Info.: Phenomenology stream; fulfills “Contemporary European philosophy” distribution requirement

Course Texts: The only book to buy is Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations* (trans. Dorion Cairns). Everything else is available on the DePaul library e-reserve website (password: PHL557).

Course Description: In this course we will investigate the basic question of what might constitute a Continental philosophy of science, focusing on what is meant by a “natural law,” what sort of necessity such a law indicates, and whether or not science must always proceed accompanied by a naïve realism. Because in some respects analytic philosophy has made philosophy of science its model for doing philosophy in general, we will begin by taking a brief look at analytic approaches and then move to discuss why Continental philosophy has had less to say on the topic and why Continental philosophy has often been attacked when it does comment on science. Then, starting with Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations* and *Crisis of the European Sciences* and moving to various works by Merleau-Ponty and Derrida, we will try to flesh out the foundations for a thoughtful Continental philosophy of science in partnership with phenomenology and deconstruction. Though we will question the ways in which biology, psychology, etc. are considered by many to be “different sorts” of sciences, along the way it will be helpful to have specific scientific questions and methodologies in mind, thus we will be using physics as our general touchstone, especially turning to cosmology (investigating the origin and ultimate end of the universe) as well as the laws of thermodynamics as we proceed. We are lucky, in fact, that on May 20 we will be joined by a special guest, Prof. Jesús Pando, Chair of the Department of Physics at DePaul University, who specializes in cosmology. In the end, it is hoped that we will have a broader understanding of the sort of necessity that supposedly founds a natural law and that we will have arrived at a set of questions and methodologies that could point us toward a thoughtful Continental philosophy of science.

Grading Procedure and Requirements: Your grade will be based on one final fifteen-page paper and on your class participation. This is a lecture/seminar class. It is expected that you will attend all of the classes and participate by asking questions and taking part in the discussions we will be having. There is a great deal of diverse reading to be done in this class, so you should take seriously the fact that you have no writing assignments throughout the quarter. Spend your time reading, thinking, and preparing for class. The final paper is due at 6PM on Monday, June 10. I will pass out more information about the paper around midterm in the class, and I’ll be happy to speak with each of you about your writing projects.

Schedule:

April 1	Science and Narrative	Read: Sokal
April 8	The Analytic Tradition	Read: Ayer, Popper
April 15	Phenomenology 1	Read: Husserl’s <i>Cartesian Meditations</i> 1-2
April 22	Phenomenology 2	Read: Husserl’s <i>Cartesian Meditations</i> 3-4
April 29	Science, Society, History	Read: Husserl (<i>Crisis</i>), Kuhn
May 6	Math, Geometry, Necessity	Read: Merleau-Ponty
May 13	Beyond Physics and Math	Read: Stanovich, Postman, Garrido, Goodwin, Smolin
May 20	Practicing Physics: Cosmology	Read: (tbd)
June 3	Deconstruction and “The Origin”	Read: Steeves, Derrida