Course Syllabus

Course: PHL 565 Desire and Distance: Renaud Barbaras’ Reading of Merleau-Ponty
Day/Time/Location: Mondays 3:00 pm – 6:15 pm, Clifton Room 150.33
Professor: Frédéric Seyler
Office Hours: Mondays 1-2:30 pm or by appointment.
Email: fseyler@depa.ul.edu

Course Outline

Renaud Barbaras is the leading figure of contemporary phenomenology in France today. With Desire and Distance (1999, English translation 2005), Barbaras – already established as a Merleau-Ponty scholar (The Being of the Phenomenon: Merleau-Ponty’s Ontology, Engl. 2004) – breaks through toward an original phenomenology of life that will be continued systematically in Introduction à une phénoménologie de la vie (2008) as well as in the recent Dynamique de la manifestation (2013), all heavily indebted to Merleau-Ponty’s concepts of perception and embodiment.

Our seminar will thus be discussing the most recent phenomenological research and debates that are currently taking place in France, while allowing for a new and creative reading of Merleau-Ponty. We will focus on Barbaras’ Desire and Distance and include references to key aspects of Merleau-Ponty’s thought (through a parallel reading of The Being of the Phenomenon as well as through excerpts from Merleau-Ponty). At the end of the seminar, we will open the debate between Barbaras and two key figures of contemporary French philosophy: Bergson and Michel Henry, whom Barbaras explicitly discusses in two chapters.

The wide range of authors discussed by Barbaras (Merleau-Ponty, of course, but also Husserl, Bergson, Patocka, Heidegger, Henry, for instance) provides an equally wide range of possible seminar papers.

Required Reading


+ additional chapters and excerpts from other works.

Recommended Supplementary Readings


Tentative Schedule
(NB: The schedule – as well as this syllabus – is subject to possible changes. If you miss a class, please check the assignments/dates with a classmate)

JAN 8: Introduction; DD 9-29/1-18; BP 9-17/XXVII-XXXIV
JAN 15: Martin Luther King Day – University officially closed
JAN 22: DD 31-61/19-43; BP 85-134/68-111
JAN 29: DD 62-82/44-61; BP 135-165/111-139
FEB 2: DD 82-103/62-80; BP 181-234/147-203
FEB 12: DD 103-132/81-107; BP 235-262/204-228
FEB 26: DD 157-170/128-152; BP 345-368/301-320
MAR 5: Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception, Part Three (Excerpt)*
MAR 12: Bergson and Phenomenology (R. Barbaras in discussion with Bergson) and The Essence of Life: Desire or Drive? (R. Barbaras in discussion with Michel Henry); Conclusion of the seminar

Requirements

1. A final double-spaced paper (4500-6000 words) due on Monday March 19th 3 pm latest. Please forward both an electronic copy and a hardcopy by that date. No incompletes will be given for this course. Papers should follow usual article guidelines (footnotes, bibliography) and include the word-count.
2. One 10-15 minutes protocol-presentation (a summary of the preceding class and ending with a question, between 900-1200 words). The student in charge of the presentation will present her/his paper at the beginning of the next class.
3. One 10 minutes analysis-presentation (max. 1200 words and ending with a question) that analyzes a selected text-excerpt.
4. Participation: seminar participation is expected of every student.
5. Attendance: everyone is allowed one absence for the quarter. Any more than one absence will result in the lowering of the final grade one to two notches.

Grading

Final paper = 70% of the final grade

Presentations & Participation = 30%
Presentation schedule (protocol date in bold, text-analysis date normal)

JAN 8, MAR 5
JAN 22, FEB 26
JAN 29, FEB 19
FEB 2, FEB 12
FEB 12, JAN 22
FEB 19, JAN 29
FEB 26, FEB 2
MAR 5, MAR 12