

SYLLABUS  
**PHIL 375 | Philosophical Anthropology**

---

Spring 2010: *Phenomenology & Cognitive Science*

Dr. James K.A. Smith

Office: Hiemenga Hall 342

Phone: x66419

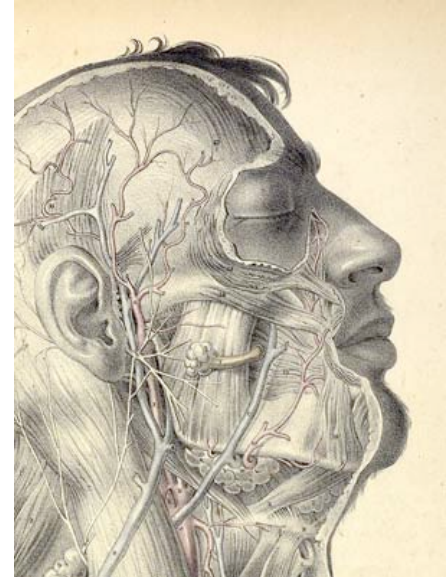
Email: [jkasmith@calvin.edu](mailto:jkasmith@calvin.edu)

Web: [www.calvin.edu/~jks4](http://www.calvin.edu/~jks4)

Office hours:

Wednesdays, 9:00-10:00am, 10:30-11:30am

Thursdays, 2:00-3:30pm



Detail of a color lithograph from *Surgical Anatomy* by Joseph Maclise (Philadelphia, 1851)

---

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

“Philosophical anthropology” is not a recognizable sub-discipline within contemporary philosophy. You won’t find anything like “The Blackwell Companion to Philosophical Anthropology.” It is perhaps best understood as Continental-speak for something like “philosophy of mind” in the phenomenological and hermeneutic traditions. But the descriptor “philosophical anthropology” might also be apt to describe “the study of human nature” that comes down to us through the Thomist and Jesuit traditions of philosophical reflection. At Calvin College, “philosophical anthropology” also points back to the “Reformational” philosophical legacy in the work of Herman Dooyeweerd and, more directly, D. H. Th. Vollenhoven.

Somewhat in contrast to emphases in analytic philosophy of mind, “philosophical anthropology” tends to emphasize questions of social context, intersubjectivity, and embodiment, and is focused on what Heidegger would describe as “being-in-the-world.” But these are differences of emphasis more than absolute alternatives, and students interested in philosophy of mind might consider philosophical anthropology as “continental” philosophy of mind.

This course aims to provide an introduction to philosophical anthropology, *not* by means of a superficial survey, but rather by considering a particular *theme* while also focusing on a particular *figure* (with the hope that this focus will nonetheless provide the student with an orientation to the field, as well as provide skills that are then “portable” to other parts of the field). For spring 2010, our seminar will focus on investigations of human nature at the intersection of *phenomenology & cognitive science*, with a special focus on the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, an heir of Heidegger and Husserl who has had a significant impact on discussions in this new, growing field. The first half of the course will provide a topical overview of the issues; the second half of the course will be a “reading seminar” devoted to Merleau-Ponty’s classic and influential study, *Phenomenology of Perception*.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

Upon successful completion of this course, students will:

- Have acquired an introductory understanding of the basic components of phenomenology as developed in the work of Husserl and Heidegger;
- Be familiar with the critical development of phenomenology in the work of Merleau-Ponty, and appreciate his impact on contemporary discussions;
- Be acquainted with emerging conversations at the intersection of phenomenology and cognitive science;
- Be familiar with research databases and scholarly journals in the field, particular the journal *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*;
- Be able to build bridge between the “analytic” and “continental” traditions in philosophy;
- Appreciate the role of embodiment, social context, and intersubjectivity in our orientation to the world, particularly in our accounts of action and agency;
- Have cultivated skills of phenomenological attention and description;
- Have an appreciation for how Christian commitments to the Incarnation and the goodness of creation entail an affirmation of embodiment and materiality, including an appreciation for the role of the body in “spiritual disciplines” and liturgical practice;
- Have a critical perspective on social scientific explanations of human behavior that fail to recognize the embodied, intersubjective nature of our being-in-the-world.

## COURSE TEXTS & READINGS [abbreviations used in Course Schedule below]

Shaun Gallagher & Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science* (Routledge, 2008). [GZ]

Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Beacon Press, 1969), chapter 1, “The House. From Cellar to Garret. The Significance of the Hut,” pp. 3-37.

Charles Taylor, “Overcoming Epistemology” from *Philosophical Arguments* (Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 1-19. [OE]

Charles Taylor, “Merleau-Ponty and the Epistemological Picture,” from *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*, eds. Taylor Carman and Mark B.N. Hansen (Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 26-49 [MPEP]

Hubert Dreyfus, “Overcoming the Myth of the Mental: How Philosophers Can Profit from the Phenomenology of Everyday Expertise,” *Proceedings & Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 79 (2005): 47-65. [OMM]

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (Routledge, 2002). [MP]

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Students who value learning for its own sake, who take responsibility for their work, who devote ample time to careful reading before class, who listen carefully and take conscientious notes, and who engage their peers in discussion will do well in this class. Students who are just jumping through a hoop, who are trying to do as little as possible, who lack any curiosity, who fail to attend class or engage in class discussions will *not* do well. (Please read the above again in March, and then once more in May.) With that in mind, the specific graded components are as follows:

1. Regular attendance, close reading of texts before class, thoughtful participation in class discussions, and timely submission of all assignments are considered a baseline for success in this course.

2. A mid-term exam, focused on Gallagher and Zahavi, **Thursday, March 18**. Some class time will be devoted to review discussions. [20%]

3. A final exam, focused on Merleau-Ponty, **Friday, May 14, 6:30pm**. Some class time will be devoted to review discussions. [20%]

4. A phenomenological journal kept throughout the semester, submitted three times for evaluation. As we'll learn from Merleau-Ponty, at the heart of the phenomenological "method" is *description*, which requires *attention*, which in turns requires "bracketing" certain sorts of interests and involvements in order to attend to experience—especially "mundane" experience. This sort of attention is enacted in Gaston Bachelard's marvelous phenomenological analysis of our experience of "home" in *Poetic Space* (which will be assigned to read as a model). To cultivate this sort of phenomenological attention, students are required to keep a "phenomenological journal" that is focused on a description of a regular sphere of "experience." For instance, like Bachelard, this could be a journal focused on how you inhabit your living space. Or it could be focused on your experience commuting, or the regular experience of worship (perhaps in different contexts), or work. It could be a journal focused on the experience of exercise, or the embodied rhythms of friendship, or your regular experience of creating/enjoying music. There are lots of possibilities: the requirement is that the journal have a thematic focus on a sphere of experience that is regular and "mundane," and that it be kept throughout the semester, with *at least* 1-2 entries per week (more are certainly permitted), totaling between 500-1000 words/week of informal writing. That can be a couple of longer entries, or a number of short observations. This is not a "reading" journal, but rather is meant to enact phenomenology's attention to "the things themselves." Ideally I think you'd do this in a notebook that you'd keep with you, but you can also consider keeping it in electronic format. The journals will be collected 3 times during the semester and evaluated on their regularity, effort, and phenomenological attentiveness. [20%]

5. A 5-page chapter summary and exposition of one of the assigned chapters in *The Phenomenological Mind*, in dialogue with a relevant article from the journal *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*. Further instructions will be provided in class. **Due Tuesday, March 30**. [20%]

6. A 5-6 page exposition paper that expounds and explains a select passage from Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, engaging 1 relevant secondary source. Further instructions will be provided. **Due Tuesday, May 11**. [20%]

## GRADING

Your final grade will be calculated on the basis of the above breakdown; *all assignments must be completed to receive a final grade*. Late assignments will not be accepted. Grade/percentile equivalents in the Department of Philosophy are as follows:

A 100-95	B+ 89-87	C+ 79-77	D 69-65
A- 94-90	B 86-83	C 76-73	F 64-0
	B- 82-80	C- 72-70	

Satisfactory completion of assignments constitutes C-level work; B-level work exhibits a comprehension and understanding of philosophical concepts, terms, and categories (and their relation) and well-reasoned reflection on the topics and texts; A-level work is characterized by all of the above plus a creative appropriation, understanding, and communication of philosophical ideas.

A note on grading philosophy: all grades are *earned*, and grades are assigned for the *quality* of work, not the *quantity* of work (which is why I generally have a policy against “extra credit” assignments). Some students seem to assume that they, in effect, begin with 100% and then “lose” points through the course of the semester. But in fact, the opposite is true: you begin with 0% and need to *earn* your points throughout the semester.

## ACADEMIC ETHICS

The instructor, and Calvin College, highly value academic integrity and excellence. As such, no violation of academic integrity (e.g., plagiarism, use of sources without citation, use of internet resources without documentation) will be tolerated. (Students are responsible for consulting and understanding the College’s policy on Academic Integrity, *Calvin College Student Conduct Code*, I.13-4). Any violation of academic integrity will result in failure of the course and referral to the Dean, where the violation will be put on record.

## A NOTE ON CLASS DISCUSSIONS

I hope that our class will involve lots of discussion, questions, and conversational give-and-take. In order to facilitate that, please know that I suffer from some hearing loss: because of the pitch range that is affected, I find it particularly difficult to hear higher-pitched speakers (usually women), and I have trouble making out consonants (so words sometimes sound mumbled to me). I note this only so that you don’t feel uncomfortable if I ask you to repeat an answer or question. If I do so, I’m not “calling into question” your contribution; I’m just trying to hear it. It is particularly helpful if I can see you when speaking to me, so you might keep that in mind. Thanks!

## AND A NOTE ON LAPTOPS IN CLASS

While I recognize that there can be benefits of taking notes on one’s laptop, there are also drawbacks to having laptops present in the classroom (the clicking of keys can be annoying to neighbors, the light of the monitor can be distracting, and the fleeting presence of wi-fi presents its own temptations). With the drawbacks in mind, the default is to *not* permit laptops in class, but I will entertain requests to use them and will certainly concede any recommendations made by Student Academic Services. But please ask.

## COURSE SCHEDULE (subject to revision)

DATE	TOPICS, READINGS, ASSIGNMENTS
February 2T	Introductions
4R	Phenomenology and Philosophical Anthropology: GZ, pp. 1-12
9T	Knowledge, Action, and Being-in-the-World: Taylor, OE
11R	Orientation to Phenomenology: GZ, 19-28
16T	Orientation to Phenomenology, cont’d: MP, vii-xxiv

18R	Phenomenology and Philosophy of Mind: Dreyfus, OMM <b>[Journals collected]</b>
23T	Naturalizing Phenomenology: GZ, 28-41
25R	Consciousness and Self-consciousness: GZ, 45-66
March 2T	Perceptual Holism: GZ, 89-104
4R	Intentionality: GZ, 107-126
9T	The Embodied Mind: GZ, 129-149
11R	Action and Agency: GZ, 153-169
16T	Review and Discussion: GZ, 217-222
18R	<b>Mid-term Exam</b>
	[SPRING BREAK]
30T	An Introduction to Merleau-Ponty: Taylor, MPEP <b>Chapter Summaries Due</b>
April 1R	The Critique of Empiricism & Intellectualism: MP, 15-59
6T	Experience and Understanding: MP, 60-74 <b>[Journals collected]</b>
8R	Body and “Soul” Revisited: MP, 77-102
13T	Bodies in Space: MP, 103-170 (selections TBD)
15R	Sexy Bodies: MP, 171-198
20T	Body <i>as</i> Perception: MP, 234-282
22R	(A) Room in the World: MP, 283-347 (selections TBD)
27T	[No Class: Academic Advising]
29R	At Home in the World: MP, 348-402 (selections TBD) <b>[Journals collected]</b>
May 4T	At Home with Others: MP, 403-425
6R	A Feel for the Cogito: MP, 429-475 (selections TBD)
11T	Review and Discussion <b>Exposition Papers Due</b>

Final Exam: **Friday, May 14, 6:30pm**