

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA  
FALL 1997

Philosophy 525  
SEMINAR IN PHENOMENOLOGY

THEME:  
**CONSTRUCTIONISM  
AND  
PHENOMENOLOGY**

The aim of this year's Seminar in Phenomenology is to provide a thorough critical examination of the idea, currently almost totally dominant in the academic and intellectual worlds of Western Culture, that the familiar world human beings deal with in their life and experience is, somehow, a construct or a product of--i.e. depends for its existence and nature upon--the mind or life of human beings, taken individually or corporately, or some "transcendental" being that is, roughly, mindlike or lifelike. We will look at some of the major historical and current forms of Constructionism (Constructivism), and then we shall develop a critical response. This development will have two stages: (1) An examination of the fundamental elements of Husserlian Phenomenology and of how they were perverted by the presumed 'Phenomenology' of Heidegger and others; and (2) an application of the principles of Husserlian Phenomenology to current varieties of Constructionism.

The formal requirements of the seminar are attendance on the sessions and regular participation in the discussions, and a philosophical essay on a major issue in Constructionism. The precise topic of the essay must be agreed upon with the Instructor, and a first draft must be turned in by November 26, to be rewritten under supervision by December 17, 1997.

Texts:

Berger and Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality  
Derrida, Speech and Phenomena  
Husserl, The Idea of Phenomenology

Husserl, Ideas (vol I)  
 Hume, Hume Selections, ed. C. W. Hendel  
 Kant, The Philosophy of Kant, ed. Friedrich (Mod. Library ed.)  
 Putnam, Representation and Reality  
 Putnam, Renewing Philosophy  
 Searle, The Construction of Social Reality  
 Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition

& Various Handouts

Schedule:

Note: In reading we are focussing explicitly upon the issue of construction, not on a general interpretation of the particular author's overall thought. Certain specific pages will be indicated each week to be concentrated on in the sections assigned.

1st Week (Aug 27) -- Comments on the basic issue and one the varieties of 'construction'. Discussions of passages from Descartes, Locke, and Hume: psychological constructionism.

**<TRY TO HAVE READ BERGER AND LUCKMANN BY OCT. 1 AS ESSENTIAL BACKGROUND FOR WHAT FOLLOWS THAT DATE.>**

2nd Week (Sept 3) -- Continued discussion of Hume. Begin discussion of Kant on transcendental constructionism.  
 Read The Philosophy of Kant, xxxii-liv, 25-127.

3rd Week (Sept 10) -- Continued discussion of Kant.  
 Transcendental constructionism in the moral realm.  
 Read 128-229, 288-291.

4th Week (Sept 17) -- Continued discussion of Kant.  
 Transcendental construction in 'Judgment' (teleological and aesthetic) in Kant's special sense. Remarks on the 'Transcendental' in German Post-Kantian Idealism. The emergence of history as a philosophical principle, and the re-emergence of science. Nietzsche and Mach. The Absolutist ('Idealist') alternative (Bradley) and the sense of Crisis and philosophical desperation. The failure of "representationalism" in its classic form.  
 Read 295-357 in Kant, glance at 387-402.

Brief selections from Nietzsche and Mach will be provided.

5th Week (Sept 24) -- The two main 'Realist' (non-constructionist) reactions:

1. 'Logical' constructions (Russell, Carnap)  
Lost to the incursion of language (Ludwig der Zweite and Kuhn/Feyerabend). Here an almost lecture to be given.
2. Phenomenological Description (Husserl)  
The Husserlian sense of "construction."  
Read: A few handout pages from Russell and Carnap; Husserl, The Idea of Phenomenology (handout) Ideas, chaps. 2, 3,

6th Week (Oct 1) -- Husserlian Phenomenology, Continued.

Read: Ideas, chaps. 4 & 5.

7th Week (Oct 8) -- Husserlian Phenomenology, Continued.

The correct understanding of "Construction" and "Sense History" in Husserl's Thought. The Crisis of European Sciences.

Read: Ideas, chaps. 9, 11 & 12.

8th Week (Oct 15) -- The Emergence of De-Construction from Husserl's descriptive analysis of consciousness and its objects. Comment on Heidegger. Derrida.

Read: Derrida, Speech and Phenomena

9th Week (Oct 22) -- Continue on Derrida, Speech and Phenomena

10th Week (Oct 29) -- Continue on Derrida, Speech and Phenomena

Read also Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition

11th Week (Nov 5) -- Complete Derrida/Lyotard. The Contemporary American Attempt at "the same ole thang."

Readings in Putnam: Against "metaphysical realism"  
Putnam, Representation and Realism, pp. 171, & 108-120. Read as much of Putnam,

Renewing Philosophy as you can during the following week.

**<NO CLASS ON NOV. 12TH--MOVED TO DEC. 8TH, MONDAY, 5-7:30 PM>**

12th Week (Nov 19) -- Continue on Contemporary American

Constructionism (Putnam)

Read: Putnam

13th Week (Nov 26) -- Finish discussion of Putnam's "Internal Realism," and take up Searle's attempt at an "External Realism." Can it possibly succeed?

Read Searle, The Construction of Social Reality

14th Week (Dec 3) -- Continue on Searle's attempt at a 'breakout'. What, in his terminology, can it possibly mean to "have access...in perception.... <to> objects and states of affairs in the world." (p. 172 etc.) The limitations on his "transcendental argument" (p. 194) and why he cannot "demonstrate that external realism is true." (194ff) Searle's high hopes and why he ends with a whimper, not a bang. The glory and misery of Wittgenstein.

15th Week (Dec 8) -- Review, sum up. The end of Constructionism. How to construct a table. How to construct a sexual category. What can make what?

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For our Dec. 3rd meeting try to have studied Chapters 5 and 6 of Searle, The Construction of Social Reality, rather closely. Read quickly through 1-4, and then go back to passages in them as you need while studying 5 and 6.

Try to work out an understanding of the 1st sentence on p. 127: "...the structure of human institutions is a structure of constitutive rules."

On constitutive rules and institutions, see pp. 27-28 etc.

Also try to work out an understanding of his thesis of the background, p. 129.

Since Searle is concerned to do ontology (see p. 7), we will want to understand his ontology of rules. Does he have one? The ontological analysis and status of rules, and of "governing" as in "language etc. is rule governed behavior," will surely be central to his account of "construction."

This will be basic to answering his "hardest of all" problems, stated on p. 29: "How do we make the connection between the fundamental ontology of conscious biological beasts like ourselves and the apparatus of social facts and human institutions?"

What is a rule (ontologically), a fact, a structure?