

Description

“Phenomenology is the study of essences; and according to it, all problems amount to finding definitions of essences”. It is in such bare terms that Merleau-Ponty introduces, in the *Preface* of his *Phenomenology of Perception*, one of the most crucial and highly problematic issues in phenomenology, i.e. that of so called “phenomenological essentialism,” which has been widely criticized by both post-modern Continental and Analytical philosophers. According to this line of critique, phenomenology *as such*—whether due to its ontological presuppositions or its epistemological intuitionism, its defective understanding of the nature of language or its rationalistic assumptions—is defined by philosophical claims that postulate a host of ideal, universal and a priori entities such as “essences”, “eide”, “categories” etc. Such entities, it is further charged, can also be grasped “in person” by means of an allegedly specific act of direct “grasping” labeled as “essential seeing”, “eidetic intuition”, “categorical intuition” etc.

The activities of the SSPPP will be devoted to a full analysis of the meaning and the scope of such “essentialism,” its historical origins, implications and limits. This seminar will also investigate whether essentialism is in fact, as charged, a necessary component of phenomenology *as such*—as Merleau-Ponty suggests—or if it is only related to a *certain* understanding of phenomenology. The implications of such analysis do not just concern questions of ontology, but reach across the full spectrum of philosophical topics: ethics, political philosophy, epistemology and theory of science.

By offering a fresh approach to the function and status of essentialism in phenomenology, this seminar will provide a unique format for a confrontation with Analytic philosophy (for example, the anti-essentialist linguistic philosophy of Wittgenstein and nominalism of Goodman) as well as post-structuralism (Foucault’s archeology of knowledge and Derrida’s deconstruction).