Phenomenology Philosophy 442/542 – Spring 2019 - McClamrock

Writing assignment #2 -- Due Sunday, April 14th at noon

Do one of these if you want to. Remember, you need to do two of the three writing assignments overall, and there will be two more sets of topics given out after this. As always, these are essays, not research papers; you typically shouldn’t need to cite anything but the assigned readings. Don’t hesitate to use quotations and citations from those texts when appropriate to support your claims and interpretations. Stay off the internets; they will only confuse things more. Essays should be close to 1200 words long for students in 442, and close to 1500 words long for students in 542. And please review and follow the paper submission rules below before submitting your paper.

1. Give the best characterization of Sartre’s attack on Husserl’s making the transcendental ego formally a part of consciousness, and then give the best defense that you see as available for Husserl. Adjudicate the disagreement.

2. Give the best characterization of Sartre’s attack on Husserl’s making the transcendental ego ontologically or materially a part of consciousness, and then give the best defense that you see as available for Husserl. Adjudicate the disagreement.

3. Explain Sartre’s positive account of the ego in reflection as given in The Transcendence of the Ego so as to make clear why it is that he thinks that (a) reflection doesn’t take itself (the reflectIVE act) for an object, but takes rather the reflectED act; (b) how this bears on the distinction between thetic (or positional) and non-theitic (or non-positional) consciousness of self; and (c) why all this is taken to imply that the identity of the pre-reflective thinker (on the one hand) and the “I” in “I think X” (on the other) is (merely) transcendent, not immanent. Critically evaluate.

4. What tension is there between Sartre’s commitment to the transcendence of essence and the idea that all intentionality is purely a matter of the for-itself? Explain the tension, give a response to it for Sartre, and evaluate.

5. Why is consciousness “nothingness” for Sartre? Explain his reasons for claiming this. Then give the best objection to his position here you can, and evaluate the disagreement.

6. Explain why Sartre thinks he is putting forth the “denial of (almost) all dualisms” in the introduction to Being and Nothingness. Then, give the best criticism of the point of Sartre’s that you can, and the best rebuttal available to a defender of Sartre’s view. Evaluate.

7. I described in class three different views on what it is to have an experience of kind K: Descartes’ (it’s to have intrinsic epistemically guaranteed “K” states in your non-physical mind), Husserl’s (it’s to have “K” noemata phenomenologically given in the epistemic residue that survives bracketing), and Heidegger’s (it’s to be a taking of entities as K by our overall coping/practices/skills). Give the best reason you can for preferring one of these views over the others, the best criticism of that reason you can think of, and the best evaluation of that disagreement that you can.

8. Consider the three views in the above question on what it is to have an experience of kind K, and say what you think Sartre’s view would be on this matter. What is the biggest virtue of the Sartrean view over the others? Should it be enough to get us to favor Sartre’s view overall?

9. Explain, using examples when helpful, the idea of the Heideggerian “pre-ontological understanding of Being”. Then, discuss what problems this notion might raise for either Husserl or Sartre, and how that philosopher might try to deal with those problems. Evaluate.

10. Explain the difference between the Heideggerian notions of readiness-to-hand and presence-at-hand, including some discussion of which he sees as more basic, and why. Then, for either Husserl or Sartre, say what in their view might be in conflict with Heidegger’s view of the status of one of those as more basic. Evaluate the disagreement.

11. Explain the relationship between our “pre-ontological understanding of Being” and the ontological knowledge that comes from it. In what way are these further apart than, say, reflective and pre-reflective experience are for Husserl, and how does that affect the project of phenomenology for Heidegger?

12. Substitute topic: If you have a different topic you would like to write on that comes out of the class, you may submit the topic for approval. Any substitute topics must be submitted as a one-paragraph email to me by 8am Tuesday April 9th. If I approve the substitute topic (which would happen later that day) you may write on it instead. If not, you must write on one of these. Don’t assume I’ll approve it; the vast majority of suggested substitutes are way too broad.
Paper submission rules:

- Papers must be submitted as documents attached to e-mail addressed to me at rmcclamrock@albany.edu. These should be formatted as .docx files if possible (the native format in recent Microsoft Word); if you can’t use .docx, use .rtf (“Rich Text Format”). You need to use one of those formats. No PDFs or other file formats.

- Name the file following this format: Q1A1_Lastname_Firstname_PHI442.docx, substituting your name and the assignment/question numbers in appropriately -- e.g., assignment #1 written on question 3 from Eric Cartman should be named "Q3A2_Cartman_Eric_PHI442.docx" (replacing "442" with "542" if you're in APHI 542).

- Send the paper as an attachment to an email message. The subject line of the email should be the same as the paper file name; e.g., "Q3A1_Cartman_Eric_PHI442". The message body should not be left empty; include a line saying "Here is Eric Cartman’s assignment #1 on question #3 for PHI 442" (substituting with your own details.) You may also include a joke in the message body, but no extra credit unless it’s really, really funny.

- Please format your paper like this: Single-spaced, with your name, the assignment and question number, and any title you might give to the paper at the top of the first page (don’t use a separate title page). Please set the text font to 12pt Times-Roman, and set the left margin to 1” and the right margin to 2.5”.

- When you send papers to me, please cc: yourself to make sure everything worked OK.

- Late papers are marked down by one grade notch (e.g. B to B or B- to C+) for every hour or portion thereof I receive them after the due date and time.

- Plagiarizing (i.e. using the words or content of others as your own), will result in being failed for the course and reported to the Dean’s office. Please, cite any outside sources that influence your paper, especially (but not only) ones that you quote.