Many of the themes addressed in contemporary psychoanalytic theory find their origins in the phenomenological “turn” in 20th century continental philosophy. In this seminar we will examine the shift in basic assumptions regarding the nature of being (ontology) and knowing (epistemology) that led to a number of psychoanalytic innovations in theory and practice.

Each session will include a reading from an original philosophical text; secondary readings; and a reading that touches on the relevance of the perspective for psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic work. We will begin by examining Hegel’s formulation of the dialectic of desire in his chapter on “Lordship and Bondage.” This situates intersubjectivity in a split of consciousness in order to become a social subject. The examination of this split and the bridging of this split take two paths after Hegel. One path pursues the vagaries of experience, taking us into phenomenology; the second path pursues the vagaries of language, taking us into hermeneutics, the structuralism/poststructuralism of Lacan, and the practical discourse of Habermas and pragmatic philosophy (Pierce, James, Rorty, Wittgenstein).

Given our limited time, we are going to mostly take one fork in this road, looking at intersubjectivity as elaborated by existential phenomenology. Thus we move from Hegel to a study of Husserl’s phenomenological reduction. This is a method of research that begins with the radical notion that we can learn most about experience by studying experience itself rather than looking for the causes of experience. This provides a basic shift in attitude toward clinical understanding and technique. We will continue by exploring the work of Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty, each who offers a different window into intersubjective experiencing. We end with Gadamer, a hermeneutic philosopher, one representative of a tradition that we might explore later in subsequent seminars.

Throughout, we will look for connections to contemporary thinkers who have, in one way or another, been influenced by this turn of thought. This will include Jessica Benjamin’s work on recognition; the perspectival orientation of early Roy Schafer and Edgar Levenson; Don Stern’s notion of unformulated experience; Irwin Hoffman’s coconstruction; and Philip Bromberg’s ideas of multiple self-states and safe surprises. We will consider paths to greater rigor in our psychoanalytic conceptions of intersubjectivity as we think about the philosophy in relation to what we do.

Finally, we will look for tensions between different conceptual polarities: intrapsychic/interpersonal; interpretation/deconstruction; containment/collaboration. Clinical process is welcome to make the connection with our daily work.
Session 1 (March 30): G. W. F. Hegel’s Dialectics of Desire


Session: 2 (April 6): Edmund Husserl’s Phenomenological Reduction: The Epoché


2) Foehl, J. (2010). The play’s the thing: The primacy of process and the persistence of pluralism in contemporary psychoanalysis. Contemporary Psychoanalysis, 46(1), 48-86. **read only pp. 55-64**


Session 3 (April 13): Martin Heidegger’s Being-in-the-World


Session 4 (April 20): Jean-Paul Sartre’s Existential Psychoanalysis


   **read only 568-575**


Session 5 (April 27): Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s Lived Body


Session 6 (May 4): Hans Georg Gadamer’s Hermeneutic Circle


Recommended Additional Readings

Session 1: Hegel


Session 2: Husserl


Session 3: Heidegger


Session 4: Sartre


Session 5: Merleau-Ponty


Session 6: Gadamer


