Reflection prompts for readings in Weeks 7 & 8

Week 7
Wednesday’s readings:

Read excerpt from Husserl’s ‘Idea’, pp. 452 – 456 in Pojman text and reflect on the following:

- On p. 452, Husserl writes: "Our first outlook upon life is that of natural human beings, imagining, judging, feeling, willing 'from the natural standpoint'. Let us make clear to ourselves what this means in the form of simple meditations which we can best carry on in the first person." On p. 454, Husserl describes what these meditations have revealed about the meaning or content of 'the natural standpoint'. Explain what Husserl means by 'the fact world' or 'the thesis of the natural standpoint'. Do you agree with Husserl's suggestion that engaging in first-person meditations on the content of one's consciousness is a useful tool for philosopher's? Hint: Understanding the method and goal behind Husserlian meditations on the phenomena of consciousness is notoriously difficult. So make sure and read the Solomon piece before Husserl himself.

For the Frege reading

- On p. 49, Frege draws an analogy between his invention of a purely logical, formal language ('Begriffsschrift') and the telescope. Explain this analogy. How does this analogy support his claim that the Begriffsschrift "can become a useful tool for philosophers" (p. 51). Hint: To see what Frege takes the “task of philosophy” to be, see p. 50.

Friday’s readings

Read Heidegger’s ‘The Fundamental Question of Metaphysics’ in Pojman and reflect on any one of the following:

- According to Heidegger, what is the fundamental question of metaphysics? What kinds of “moments” spawn this question and why? (p. 480) Would you say that Heidegger has accurately described an existential situation that most (all?) human beings face? If so, what is the significance of describing such situations?

- What does Heidegger mean by claim that Christian philosophy “is a round square” (p. 482)? What is his rationale for making this claim? Do you agree with Heidegger's claim and rationale?

- According to Heidegger, what can genuine philosophizing do and not do? Do you agree?

- On pp. 495-496, Heidegger describes America and Russia has the exemplars of 20th century societies manifesting an “emasculcation of spirit”. What are the characteristics of such societies, according to Heidegger? And would you agree that the U.S. manifests these characteristics?
Week 8

Monday’s reading

Read Carnap’s ‘The Elimination of Metaphysics’ in Pojman and reflect on any of the following:

- According to Carnap, what are the necessary and sufficient conditions for using a word or sentence in a cognitively meaningful way? See his discussion of ‘teavy’ and ‘toovy’. How does Heidegger’s use of language fail to meet these conditions? Do you agree with Carnap that these are the conditions for using language in such a way that it communicates knowledge or truth?
- What does Carnap mean by the claim that “[N]o god or devil can give us metaphysical knowledge” (p. 143)? What is his rationale for making this claim? Critique his claim and rationale.
- What does Carnap mean by the claim that “Metaphysicians are musicians without musical ability” (p. 147)? What is his rationale for making this claim? Critique his claim and rationale.

Friday’s reading

Read the assigned excerpts from Wittgenstein’s ‘Philosophical Investigations’. In §1-§9, Wittgenstein contrasts an Augustinian (and his own earlier) account of how words get their meaning from his later account of meaning as use within a particular language game. Reflect on the following:

- On the Augustinian account, how do words get their meaning?
- What problems or questions does Wittgenstein raise for this account?
- What does Wittgenstein mean by “language-game” (§7 & §23)
- How does Wittgenstein’s analysis of linguistic meaning differ from the logical positivists’, e.g. Carnap.