

## The Continuing Relevance of *The Structure of Behavior*

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Final version published in *International Philosophical Quarterly* 44, no.3 (2004)

Abstract: With the advent of new technology and imaging techniques that measure brain activity, and with the development of the computer as a model for human thinking, it is not surprising to find many authors currently addressing issues regarding brain function and the mind/body problem. What is perhaps surprising, and what is certainly remarkable, given the absence of these techniques and the modern computer at the time, is that Merleau-Ponty addresses these same issues with a rigor and insight that equals, and in some cases perhaps even exceeds, most current philosophical studies. It is the contention of the present essay that Merleau-Ponty's frequently ignored early work, *The Structure of Behavior*, contains a wealth of analysis that is still relevant to current biological and neurophysiological studies, and to the philosophical consequences that are frequently drawn from them. Moreover, Merleau-Ponty not only critically addresses theories that attempt to understand human behavior as the linear calculation of discrete physiological events, he also critically addresses theories that would explain human behavior simply by appealing to abstract conceptual analysis. We will see that he develops a theory of emergent materialism that focuses on the human body as a concrete organic whole that can be neither reduced to linear physical events nor to abstract conceptual relations. The understanding of the human being requires a theory that recognizes the human body as an original whole, that is, that recognizes a body that intimately integrates mind and matter. It is this theory that Merleau-Ponty first articulates in *The Structure of Behavior*. It is the main themes of this theory that I will attempt to reveal here.

Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*<sup>1</sup> is widely recognized as a philosophical work of considerable significance and as his most fully developed articulation of his theory of lived embodiment. His posthumous *The Visible and the Invisible*<sup>2</sup> is widely recognized as making significant and original contributions to ontological discussions, to the understanding of the relationship between perception and language, and to the field of philosophy generally. Yet his early *The Structure of Behavior*<sup>3</sup> receives less attention and seems frequently to even be ignored. A recent rereading of this text has convinced me that this inattention is wholly unwarranted. Even though the text lacks the fluidity of both the later works, Merleau-Ponty's philosophical acuity is already clearly present in the early work and so are many of the major insights that open the way to a unique philosophy of embodiment that he will spend the rest of his professional life developing, sometimes significantly. Yet as significant as the later developments are, they would not be what they are without the arguments that first appear, and sometimes *only* appear, in *The Structure of Behavior*. It is therefore to this work that I will turn in an effort to bring these

seminal arguments, and, in some incidences, their relationship to the later works, to greater clarity and awareness. This is my first goal.

My second goal will be to draw attention to various points of contact between this work and more recent discussions by Anglo-American philosophers of the philosophy of mind, specifically of the mind/body problem. Reading the anthology *Mind and Cognition*<sup>4</sup> I was struck to see so many Anglo-American authors, with the advantage of new imaging techniques and the modern computer, making arguments similar to those made by Merleau-Ponty, if not in detail at least in their general outcome, and that, in some sense at least, Anglo-American philosophy seems to be moving in the direction of Merleau-Ponty's thought. I will attempt to make this case at the end of the essay, only after a carefully attempted exposition of Merleau-Ponty's early work, and only briefly, in an effort to encourage increased dialogue between philosophy's Continental and Anglo-American traditions.

*The Structure of Behavior* begins with and devotes much attention to the analysis of the then (and probably still) prevalent scientific reduction of human behavior to material conditions alone. More specifically, the text begins with what Merleau-Ponty refers to as the classical conception of reflex behavior, the thesis that behavior can be built out of isolated data or stimuli that travel along separate pre-established pathways. He vigorously disagrees with this thesis and will appeal to available research studies to make his case against it. He first argues that it has been shown that perceptual receptors are attuned to the rhythm or form of the stimuli and not to isolated sense data. To cite just one example, a variety of responses can be elicited from a laboratory animal, in this case a cat, depending on the form of the stimuli. For instance, the cat's ear flattens out if it is bent but responds to tickling with a series of twitches. In total five different responses are obtained depending upon the form of the excitation. (SB 11) Merleau-Ponty's later *Phenomenology of Perception* also makes a strong case that the simplest element of perception is a form or a structure, a figure on a background, since the notion of an isolated datum is the product of analysis and abstraction and is not found anywhere in perception. (PhP 3-4)

Moreover, Merleau-Ponty also makes the case, here in the earlier work, that there is general agreement among researchers that no stimuli can be considered in isolation *within the organism*, that all stimuli must be considered along with the multiple conditions within the organism, within its intra-organic state. First, the reflex is influenced by a number of “chemical, secretory and vegetative conditions powerful enough to cancel, sometimes even reverse the expected effect of a certain stimulus.” (SB 17) Secondly, within humans at least, “cerebral and cerebellar influences...probably intervene in all reflexes.” (SB 18) Yet, Merleau-Ponty cautions, even though there is general agreement on these points, there is significant disagreement about the nature of the intervention of higher brain functions. Some, to save the classical thesis of isolated and linear pathways, argue that the brain functions as a central switching station, as a linear inhibitor of incoming stimuli. Merleau-Ponty counters saying that research results necessarily lead “to the idea of the innervation of the whole” organism (SB 32), that chemical reactions affect the vegetative elements, which in turn influence still other elements and functions, which in turn influence the original functions, and so on. In addition, it has been found that reactions to nerve excitations vary widely depending upon the condition of the humoral state and that damage to certain higher brain functions can dramatically influence blood pressure--all of this reveals both the dialectical character of the relationships between elements and functions of the organism (where each influences all the others simultaneously) *and* a movement up and down a hierarchical scale within the organism itself. (SB 17-18) Thus, Merleau-Ponty concludes, the brain “reorganizes behavior, to elevate it to a higher level of adaptation and life, and is not merely the association [or inhibitor] of pre-established devices [and separate linear pathways of input].” (SB 21; See also PhP 7ff)

Following the Gestalt psychologists, Merleau-Ponty continues to deepen his argument that the human organism must be understood as a gestalt whole and not as a mere aggregate of isolated, linear circuits. Here he first appeals to the structures of physics, which reveal adjustments, the movement of parts, to reduce tension and restore equilibrium within the structure and between the

structure and its surroundings. The air within a soap bubble, for example, is distributed to maintain equilibrium with the atmospheric pressure being exerted from the outside. In addition, physiological processes, he goes on to say, behave in a way that express some similarity to physical actions, particularly that of fluids. If the main pathway for the flow of water is blocked, the fluid will take other pathways. In the same way, a reflex response in a living organism can take other routes, and these routes can vary over time. The response does not have to follow a pre-established pathway. Moreover, in the living organism a constant function can be maintained by variable means. (SB 37-38) This is displayed even in the behavior of the lowly dung beetle, which will attempt to use the remaining portion of a partially severed limb only if the irregularity of the terrain requires it. The original lost function is “replaced” only under certain vital circumstances, thus revealing that the process is variable, and that the classical thesis of separate pre-established pathways with fixed, preprogrammed responses is highly implausible. (SB 39-40) Merleau-Ponty continues with the claim that anatomical structure itself tends to follow the global functioning of the organism. In experiments, for example, where the nerve fibers that regulate the external and internal eye movements in a monkey are reversed, following the classical thesis of separate and pre-established pathways, one would expect a reversal of functions, yet it is discovered that function remains the same. (SB 38) Thus, again, constant functions are maintained by variable means. And finally, the human organism also displays similar adjustments, for redistributions can be employed within the organism in order to maintain certain favored states of equilibrium, within the organism, and between the organism and its environment.

“[I]t is known that the reflex movements of our eyes are most often made in accordance with the contours of the objects perceived and, finally, that the eye always places itself in such a way that it receives the richest possible stimulation from the object looked at. Everything takes place as if a law of the maximum regulated the movement of our eyes, as if at each moment these movements were what they should be in order to realize certain situations of preferred equilibrium toward which the forces which are at work in the sensible sector tend.” (SB 36) (See also PhP250)<sup>5</sup>

A subject placed in a darkened room, for instance, will immediately turn toward an abruptly introduced light source. The angle of the head and eyes are quickly adjusted so that the light strikes the functional center within each eye, reducing tension, restoring equilibrium, and maximizing the clarity of vision. (SB 36) Not only does this display favored equilibriums of the organism but it also reveals that the sensory and motor functions intimately work together, not as separate afferent and efferent pathways but as a single system, for they influence each other simultaneously. (SB 36ff)

Merleau-Ponty, of course, distinguishes between the blind mechanisms of nature, the vital functions of a living organism, and the conscious behavior of humans. Since the beetle can maintain a favored equilibrium by variable means, its nerve functions cannot be reduced to the merely mechanical reactions of physics. However, since animal behavior is relatively limited by the biological structure of its species, it cannot be understood as possessing the freedom of behavior normally associated with human experience. A frog strikes repeatedly at a piece of bait with its tongue in spite of the glass pane that separates the two and prevents success. A dog with an amputated limb quickly adjusts its gait to move about with some ease, while the dog whose leg has been tied bites and struggles against the binding, without ever adopting a new form of movement. Humans can adapt immediately to the tied or incapacitated limb, thus revealing that the structural movements of things, animals, and humans can clearly be distinguished. (SB 104ff)

In addition, even though human structure is distinguishable from the structures of matter and life, Merleau-Ponty does not wish to maintain any form of vitalism and insists that the more integrated and liberated forms of behavior are still seated in the material conditions of the human body—as we will see below. Yet, he also insists that the neurological functions of the human organism cannot be understood without an appeal to the perceptual awareness of the perceiver. Appealing to the appropriate studies, he claims that if we use “...the classical conception which relates the perceptual functions of each point of the retinal to its anatomical structure,...the functional organization in hemianopsia [where the functional center of a damaged eye is shifted

to the peripheral edge] is not comprehensible. It becomes so only if the properties of each point are assigned to it, not according to established local devices but according to a flexible process of distribution..." (SB 41) In fact, "vision in the persons with hemianopsia furnishes the best examples of nerve activity directed toward functional equilibrium." (SB 40) Here half of each retina is damaged, yet the visual field is not reduced accordingly, for the eye adjusts by oscillating to present the healthy portion to the light stimuli. (SB 40-41) Moreover, a series of experiments confirms this need to appeal to the visual field. If a subject, who is placed one meter from a screen upon which is projected a series of letters, is then placed two meters from the same screen, and if this subject in both cases fixates on the same spot marked at the edge of the screen, the objective distance from this fixation point to the letters which appear in clearest focus varies only slightly with the two distances. "Thus the place of the clearest vision would not correspond to a retinal element established once and for all; it would be situated at each moment in the center of the actually perceived visual field and this latter would in no way coincide with the sector of the world which is objectively projected on the retina." (SB 41-42) Merleau-Ponty's conclusion here is clear: the part of the retina that corresponds to the clearest vision thus varies with the data of the visual field and is not pre-established or fixed.

In a subsequent chapter Merleau-Ponty proceeds to evaluate the works of Pavlov and other molar behaviorists. Pavlov follows the classical thesis of atomistic units in isolated, linear pathways, but applies it instead to behavior as a whole. In this case the brain's "central sector" would merely associate new stimuli with those already established or inherited in the organism, would construct behavior out of circuits that are separate and already established. (SB 60) Again appealing to the available research data, Merleau-Ponty reports the following. Localized brain lesions "can determine structural disorders which concern the whole of behavior." (SB 62) The brain injured Schneider, for example, can perform tasks one step at a time but cannot understand the whole. He can utter words which he understands but cannot construct them into a sentence that would be a meaningful whole. (SB 65) In addition, Schneider is incapable of maintaining

either normal sexual excitation or the manipulation of numbers “in his head,” both of which require the use of the imagination and “adaptation to the virtual.” (SB 72) This presupposes a “central sector,” in this case damaged, that recognizes forms, structures and rhythms, and that is “capable of giving certain general characteristics to behavior,” that does not simply associate individualized anatomical devices, functions or contents. (SB 67) Yet Merleau-Ponty recognizes that “function is never indifferent to the substrate by which it is achieved,” for specific disorders are quite definitely associated with certain brain functions, visual perception, for example, with the occipital region, and lost functions, even though they can be replaced, are never totally retrieved. (SB 69) However, even though local regions play an important role, the evidence suggests that they themselves are attuned to structure. “Everything happens as if [the regions of the brain] in turn were not the seat of certain anatomical devices but the terrain of the exercise of an activity of organization, applied, it is true, to a certain type of material.” “[Thus]...the regions of the brain are not specialized in the reception of certain contents, but rather in the structuration of these later.” (SB 71)

Merleau-Ponty observes that this leads to the general agreement that “...only a mixed conception of localizations...and a functional conception of parallelism can be accepted.” (SB 72) Localized surface excitations “undergo...a series of structurations which disassociate them from spatio-temporal context...and orders them according to the original dimensions of organic and human activity.” (SB 73-74) Thus the central region must be understood “as a global activity capable of conferring the same typical form...on movements that are materially different.” (SB 72) Pavlov is thus wrong to see nerve functioning as a mere collection of individual elements or pathways, with isolated stimuli. If we take into account the global functioning of the organism, just witnessed above, we must substitute “a functional or structural parallelism for this parallelism of elements or contents.” (SB 75)

*The Structure of Behavior* here proceeds to make what Merleau-Ponty regards as a more positive case that the human organism cannot be understood as a mere collection of atomistic

sense data and isolated nerve pathways but must be grasped as a structural whole, a whole within which all the parts and functions influence one another simultaneously. He does so by considering three aspects of human experience, spatial perception, chromatic perception, and the physiology of language.

It is a commonplace belief of neurophysiologists that the perception of a single object produces a disparity of the two images that are projected on the retinas of the left and right eyes. The classical thesis has argued that it is because of the similarity of the discrete images that they are associated. Contrarily, Merleau-Ponty argues that an experiment by Helmholtz will show that this is not the case. Merleau-Ponty summarizes this experiment.

“If a white piece of paper marked with two black dots B and A is presented on one side of a stereoscope and, on the other side, a black piece of paper with two white dots B1 and A1, which are closer together, then when the left eye fixates B and the right eye B1, dots A and A1 are seen as a single dot on a plane situated behind the plane, B-B1. In this case, however, the dot on the right retina corresponding to the one where A is projected is black like dot A itself. The dot of the left retina corresponding to the one where A1 is projected is white like A1 itself. The two dots A and A1 do not present any common qualitative characteristic. They have nothing in common except being dots on a homogeneous background. Thus it is the function, completed by a stimulus in the constellation in which it is integrated, which is determining.” (SB 77)

Merleau-Ponty obviously believes that this experiment demonstrates that it is because of the similarity of how excitations *function* within the *whole visual field* that they are associated and not because of their similarity as isolated points, for dots A and A1, which have nothing in common as individual units, one being black, the other being white, are nevertheless associated because of how they function within the visual field as a whole. (See also PhP 232)

With regard to chromatic perception Merleau-Ponty again appeals to the research data. A gray ring is placed on a background that is half green and half red. Here the ring appears gray. Yet, if a strip is placed over the ring where the green and red backgrounds come together, half the ring appears green and half appears red. The conclusion that is drawn here is that the chromatic field cannot be explained by a point-by-point association of isolated stimuli but must grasp parts as they function within the whole field. (SB 83-84) Moreover, even if the idea of the association of

discrete excitations by a pre-established anatomical device is abandoned, the appeal to coordinating circuits does not fair much better. These coordinating circuits, it is argued, associate the disparate images and thus confer upon them a common value. Yet, Merleau-Ponty appropriately asks, how is it that the coordinating centers know to associate the images. It is not because they are associated into the same circuits that they are perceived the same, as is often claimed, it is because they serve a similar function in perception that they are associated in the same circuits. (SB 79ff)

An important part of what Merleau-Ponty is saying here is that form cannot be understood as a collection of discrete parts in mechanical, strictly linear relationships. The parts of the perceptual field relate meaningfully to one another, yet these relations are not conceptual, since they are intimately tied to the contingency of experience. And not only is this type of form present in the visual fields of spatial and chromatic perception, but it is also the basic structure of language. Just as a musical note participates in and helps create a melody, a structure, a rhythmic gestalt whole, to the point that this note is often not even recognized in different melodies, so a syllable or word participates in and helps create the structural meaning of a sentence. (SB 87) The general conclusion that Merleau-Ponty draws here is that “on the condition that ‘form’ is introduced in nerve functioning a parallelism or a rigorous “isomorphism” could be maintained.” (SB 92) However, since we borrow the notion of form from the perceptual field, and since it reveals relationships that are richer and that express qualities different from the physiological, we can no longer speak of a strict parallelism between perception and physiology. (SB 92)

Merleau-Ponty proceeds to distinguish and discuss three types of behavior, which manifest three types of form or structure: syncratic, amovable and symbolic. In the first, behavior is completely pre-programmed by the biological structure of the species. To repeat an example offered above, a frog will repeatedly strike with its tongue at the bait placed before it, even though a pane of glass prevents success. In the second, behavior begins to gain some independence from the material instruments through which it is expressed and the meaning of the

stimuli are not completely pre-programmed. (SB 105) A chimpanzee's behavioral response to the stimulus of food varies depending upon the situation. If food is hung at a height out of reach, the chimpanzee will not simply jump up and down in frustration in an attempt to obtain the food. Experiments have shown that chimpanzees will use available boxes as a make-shift ladder to reach the suspended food, even though the varying of perspective is accomplished with great difficulty—since if one chimpanzee is *sitting* on a box, another will not see or use it as *ladder*. (SB 144ff) Yet with symbolic form, the third type of behavior discussed here, the type of behavior displayed by human beings, the varying of perspectives is easily accomplished. This expresses the ability of human beings to gain some distance from the specificity of contingent experience, to pause, to reflect, to compare and contrast experiences, and, in short, to be able to form general meanings. This means, as well, that signs are no longer simply signals for the pre-programmed response but act as symbols for the expression of general meanings. Moreover, what characterizes the human species is not simply this ability to use language to help create and express general cultural meanings and structures above those of nature but that the species has the ability to continually create new structures. This does not put the species outside of nature, but means that human beings can sublimate and interpret it in a wide variety of ways, in ways that must ultimately relate back to our embodied encounter with the world, as we will see.

What we have just witnessed above is the presentation of qualitatively different forms of structure and behavior. These are original forms that are presented in our perceptual experience, that are not reducible to each other, even though both vital and human forms are rooted in the structures of matter.

Now that Merleau-Ponty believes he has established the original structure of matter, life, and awareness, he proceeds to discuss them in greater detail.

*Structure in Physics.* Physical structure is defined as a collection of forces in equilibrium. Here, as we saw briefly above, we find physical movement along the mechanical pathways of least resistance to reduce tension and maintain structural equilibrium. The soap bubble, already

mentioned, provides an apt example, for the air inside the bubble expands to maintain a harmony with the atmospheric pressure being exerted on the bubble's outside surface. These relationships can be expressed in their general form by mathematics. The structures of the world are taken by Merleau-Ponty to be partial wholes, for they each stand in relationships to those that surround it. Yet each gestalt structure cannot be *equally* connected to all the others, and so on ad infinitum, for in this case no laws could be formulated. The laws of physical cause and effect should thus be formulated according to "a sort of lessening—proportional to distance—of the influence exercised on a given phenomena." (SB 139-140) Yet, we may ask, do these structures exist in-themselves? And Merleau-Ponty offers an answer that certainly wants to maintain that the laws of nature are about the really existing world. They are not the mere expression of logical relations or the relationships between ideas. However, as witnessed above, natural structures are structures that are composed of a system of relations that are continually being drawn into other relations and that, moreover, continually change, albeit slowly and with stability. In addition, structures must be understood as sets of relationships that are recognized by perceptual conscious. If an observer perceives a figure drawn on a piece of paper, say, for example, the famous gestalt duck/rabbit, the lines of this drawing and their relationship to one another certainly influence how it is interpreted. Yet since it can be interpreted as either a duck or a rabbit, it is just as clear that the perceiver makes a contribution to the meaning of the lines and their configuration on the page, makes a contribution that must be taken into account if we are to understand the structures which are in fact never given totally in-themselves. The perceiver must be taken into account along with the perceived.

*Vital Structure.* Moving from physical to vital structure, Merleau-Ponty claims that there can be no sharp or significant gaps of indeterminacy between them, for we would have no means of understanding them. Yet qualitatively different structures are perceived in our external perceptions of the world. They must therefore be accounted for. Moreover, in our attempts to do so, vital structure reveals "that the parts of the world to which [living beings] react are delimited

for them by an internal norm,” a norm that “is simply an observation of a preferred attitude, statistically more frequent, which gives an observation of unity to behavior.” (SB 159) These norms are not the result of the simplicity of blind mechanisms, as with the physical structure observed above, but often reveal or express a difference in attitude on the part of the reacting organism. Flexion movements, for example, are best understood by recognizing the preparedness, attention or aggressiveness of the individual organism—and not by simply appealing to physical, physiological or anatomical structures.

*Human Structure.* How is human structure to be differentiated from the physical and especially vital structure? As we saw above, under the headings of syncratic and amovable forms, animal behavior can either be strictly determined or loosely conditioned by the biological structure of the species. Even in the latter case, the perception experienced by these animal groups is largely, if not completely, determined by the needs of each respective species. And while it is certainly true that human perception is influenced by human need, the human species, more than any other, is capable of utilizing multiple perspectives. Subsequently, what especially characterizes human behavior, because of the ability to form general meanings, exercised through the use of multiple perspectives, is its internal unity. It aims at goals in meaningful ways, in ways that cannot be understood by means of external relations of cause and effect of specific elements, nor by the internal relationships of abstract conceptual meaning, as we shall now see. For in the early chapters of *The Structure of Behavior* Merleau-Ponty relates behavior and consciousness to materialism by considering consciousness as an element of material being, yet in order to do so he discovered that the meaningful relationships of perceptual consciousness were everywhere presupposed. Must we then take sides with idealism’s conceptual construction of meaning, he asks? The last and important chapter of *The Structure of Behavior* will attempt to provide this answer. (SB 184)

Merleau-Ponty begins this last, summary chapter of *The Structure of Behavior* with the claim that common sense experience is not as *realistic* as is often claimed, at least in the sense that this

is usually claimed. Lived experience is certainly not realistic in sense that it perceives things as discrete units that somehow impact upon the eye, thus mechanically causing perception. Rather, perception appears to meet things where they rest—as a beam of light illuminates objects in their place. (SB 185) While it is true that the lived experience of “naïve perception” is usually aware that it perceives partial aspects or profiles of things, that the things are not fully given, this is just as usually not conceived as a subjective distortion but as a property of the things themselves. It is one of the properties, in fact, that make the thing a thing, for no real thing is perceived all at once, from all sides. The profiles of the thing are thus manifestations of it, not subjective distortions. The relation of the profile to the thing is an original relationship and cannot be explained mechanically by discrete units of matter acting upon one another or explained logically by an internal relationship of meaning. The relationship of the profiles to the thing are not external to one another, since they imply one another, yet this implication is not purely logical, not just a relationship of ideas, for the profiles follow or manifest the concrete structure of the thing. (SB 186-187) “[Things] are mediated by their perspectival appearances; but it is not a question of a logical mediation since it introduces us to their bodily reality; I grasp in a perspectival appearance...the thing itself which transcends it. A transcendence which is nevertheless open to my knowledge.” (SB 187) Thus “the perceived is grasped in an indivisible manner as ‘in-itself’ ...and as ‘for-me,’ that is, as given ‘in person’ through its momentary aspects.” (SB 186) This is the way consciousness lives in things; this is what we must understand, no matter what difficulties we face. (SB 188) “[T]he realism of naïve consciousness is an empirical realism—the assurances of an external experience...,” of an external world outside states of consciousness. (SB 188) Merleau-Ponty makes much the same point in the posthumously published *The Visible and the Invisible*. He asks: “What is...this singular virtue of the visible that makes it, held at the end of the gaze, nonetheless much more than a correlative of my vision, such that it imposes itself on me as a continuation of its own existence?” (VI 131) He proceeds to provide his answer: “It is that the look is itself incorporation of the seer into the visible—it is as flesh offered to flesh

that the visible has its aseity, and that it is mine” (VI 131 note) “It is the body and it alone, because it is a two-dimensional being, that can bring us to the things themselves” and that keeps us at a distance from them. (VI 136) As we will see momentarily, this will lead Merleau-Ponty to a unique formation of the dual aspect theory in this last great theoretical work.

Here, in the last chapter of *The Structure of Behavior*, Merleau-Ponty wants to make sense of how this “empirical realism,” the assurance of reaching the world outside of consciousness, gets lost. Common sense experience certainly realizes that it experiences the world through the body, for after all an unpleasant scene can be avoided by the turning of the head or by averting the glance, and the head must be turned toward the pleasant one to fully appreciate it. Yet this does not mean that the body is experienced as a veil that prevents a real contact with the thing, for the body itself is not yet experienced as a mere thing but still as the lived through means of access to the world. (SB 188) “The subject does not live in a world of states of consciousness or representations...He lives in the universe of experience.” (SB 189) Yet with the awareness that we do perceive through the body comes the impression that the lived through, phenomenal body is secondary, a mere appearance, and the body as an object, as known by the physiologist and anatomist, is then taken to be primary. (SB 189) The body as thing must be the necessary and sufficient condition for all acts of perception, especially since we now know that it can produce false perceptions such as hallucinations. The body is now subsequently seen as a thing among things and perception is now understood as an event interior to the body and caused by the action of external things upon it. (SB 190) This idea is an error, but it is a motivated error, for Merleau-Ponty believes he has discovered the aspects of experience that lead to its adoption. Nevertheless, it is an error that bears certain unfortunate consequences, for “instead of three inseparable terms bound together in the living unity of an experience which a pure description reveals, one finds oneself in the presence of three orders of events which are external to each other: the events of nature, the organic events and those of thought, which will explain each other.” (SB 190)

As is widely known, and as Merleau-Ponty reminds us here, Descartes rejects the idea, just described above, that the mechanical, transitive actions of things impress themselves on the body, producing an identical image within the body that is somehow witnessed by the mind. Since light is simply conceived as mechanical movement, which rebounds off the object and into the eye, for Descartes light, so conceived, is not enough to account for the identical resemblance between the thing and its perceived image. (SB 191) Scientists, psychologists and physiologists, in general terms at least, offer a resolution to this problem that is similar to Descartes' resolution. Since if perception is still to be explained by the action of things on the body, yet now without identical images, the scientist must appeal to associative devices of some sort to integrate disparate profiles, dual retinal images, and dispersed aspects of the gestalt perceptual field. As Merleau-Ponty claims, "Descartes' pineal gland plays the role of association zone of modern physics." (SB 192) Yet the associative circuits of nerve functioning cannot perform this task alone, for, as we have seen, the perception of spatial relations, chromatic values and the rhythms of the language cannot be understood as the mechanical action of units in cause and effect relationships (SB 193), nor can perceptual structures be understood purely as internal relations of conceptual meaning, associated by a detached, reflective consciousness, but can only be understood by appealing to the internal equilibrium of the concrete perceptual field, which we will see in more detail below. (SB 192)

Gestalt theory, in an attempt to move beyond the atomistic approach, thought that casual explanations could remain in tact as long as the structural elements of physics were recognized along with the mechanical actions. Merleau-Ponty offers the following response to this thesis. First of all, quantum physics itself has move away from causal toward "acausal" explanations. Secondly, what Merleau-Ponty believes he has shown throughout *The Structure of Behavior* is that there are three general levels of structure, one at the level of matter, one at the level of life, and one at the human level, and that each of these levels displays varying degrees of integration, with matter as the least integrated and human life as the most. If this is the case, then the more

integrated cannot be understood by appeal to the less integrated, for by its very nature it adds some new. A mere summation of partial effects does not help us understand the more integrated functioning of the whole, anymore than the mere addition of isolated parts allows us to grasp the more integrated visual meaning of a gestalt figure. (SB 193)

What Merleau-Ponty has considered thus far is the world of realism, the world of ready made things into which the human body and mind are inserted. What he proceeds to consider is the Cartesian view that suspends realist explanations and engages in a pure description of experience. Yet, he again reminds us, Descartes' philosophy is not a philosophy of pure consciousness. (SB 195) True, the analysis of the piece of wax reveals that the mind can grasp the intelligible structures of objects of the perceived or dreamed world, that it can grasp their geometrical form. Yet "in perception, the object 'presents' itself without having been willed. There is an existential index which distinguishes the perceived or imaginary objects from the idea and which manifests 'something' in them 'which differs from the mind,' whatever the 'other' may be in other respects. Thus the experience of a sensible presence is explained by a real presence..." SB 196) "The intellection which the *cogito* had found in the heart of perception does not exhaust its content; to the extent that perception opens out on an 'other,' to the extent that it is the experience of an existence, it arises from a primary and original notion which 'can only be understood in its own terms,' from an order of 'life' in which the distinctions of the understanding are purely and simply annulled." (SB 197) Thus Merleau-Ponty finds in Descartes the recognition of a really existing world that is present in lived through perception and that escapes intellectual representation. Merleau-Ponty, of course, follows this argument and deepens it throughout his professional career. In *Phenomenology of Perception* he argues that the existential index of perception and the perceived must be the same, for to say that I am sure of perceiving an object before me is to say that I am sure of reaching the object itself, for to perceive something *means* to reach the existent thing where it rests. (PhP 374-375) In *The Visible and the Invisible* he also claims that even though we can doubt one perception, we do so from the point of view of another

that we find more accurate or compelling. We can doubt a particular perception or the existence of a particular object, but we cannot doubt perception in general, since, again, we doubt one perception only from the point of view of another, nor can we doubt the horizon of the world, since it is the always already present background for all experiences, even those that turn out to be false. (VI 39-41) Yet, here in *The Structure of Behavior*, he also reminds us that this presence of the really existing world in perception would remain negligible “if the contrary movement by which I detach myself from the thing in order to apprehend the meaning were not already contained in them.” (SB 197-198)

Contemporary psychologists often attempt to explain the origin of meaning as an aggregate of perceptions and memories, or, more exactly, as a projection of memories into the present perception. Yet this explanation does not solve the problem, for how is it that the remembered perception first takes on a meaning, and why is this memory, and not some other, called up for this specific current perception? This whole explanation presupposes the very meaning of the current perception that it is trying to explain, for it is only from the currently meaningful perception that past memories can be recalled. Moreover “if I look steadily at an object in front of me, the psychologist will say that—external conditions remaining the same—the mental image of the object has remained the same. But it would still be necessary to analyze the act by which at each instant I recognize this image as identical in its meaning to that of the proceeding instant.” (SB 198) “The mental image of the psychologist is one thing; what the consciousness of that thing is must still be understood. The act of knowing is not of the order of events; it is a taking possession of events....” (SB 198-199), and, in the concrete acts of knowing at least, there is “both the intimacy of the objects to the subject and the presence in them of solid structures which distinguish them from appearances...” (SB 199)

Thus for Merleau-Ponty, in the most primary mode of perceptual experience, the thing offers itself as a meaning. Yet, as we have seen above, even though it must always be given to consciousness, even though the object is always given through the avenues of the body, through

perceptual consciousness, the object is given as present, as existent, thus distinguishing it from a mere appearance. (SB 199) All of this means, of course, that the body must also be seen as a phenomenon and not as a thing in-itself. Embodied perception, then, possesses two fundamental modes of awareness: it is aware that it is a thing which is part of the world and subject to its stable structures; and it is aware that all existing things, including the body itself, appear to it through perceptual consciousness. If this is true, then the analysis that understands perception as the mere effect of mechanical impact of the thing in-itself is something that is derived from this more original experience. (SB 199) This indicates Merleau-Ponty's sympathy for and yet clear distinction from idealist philosophies, for in concert with them he is aware that for anything to be present that it must be present to consciousness, yet, he is also aware that to be conscious is to be embodied, and that embodied consciousness lives primarily in the moment and primarily aims at really existing things, things that run beyond it, things that cannot be fully represented by intellectual consciousness, and that even out run perceptual consciousness itself.

Merleau-Ponty proceeds to make much the same point about matter, life, and human life, that is, that they are given not as independent substances or orders of reality but as three forms of meaning or signification. Yet these forms are not conceived by an independent intellect but are given in different modes of experience or perception. (SB 201) What does all this mean for the mind/body problem? It means that the orders of matter and life cannot be conceived (or perceived) apart from the order of human life and human perception. Thus there can be no question of conceiving the world as a separate physical thing that mechanically acts upon the human body, also conceived as a physical thing, which in turn acts upon a separate consciousness—and vice versa. More specifically, since the body itself has now “become an object for consciousness... , one can no longer speak of a psycho-physical parallelism.” (SB 204) “Perceptual behavior, as science studies it, is not defined in terms of nerve cells and synapses; it is not in the brain or even in the body; science has not been able to construct the ‘central sectors’

of behavior from the outside...; it can only understand it as a dialectic, the moments of which are not stimuli and movements but phenomenal objects and actions.” (SB 205)

Yet, can we speak of a psycho-physical parallelism if we consider global nerve functioning?

“No, if it is understood as the sum of the nerve events which are produced in each point of the cortex. This whole can be only the *condition of existence* of such and such a sensible scene; it accounts for the *fact that* I perceive but not for *that which* I perceive, not for the scene as such since this latter is presupposed in the complete definition of the nerve process. Everything takes place as if my perception opened out on a network of original significations. The passage of nerve influx in such and such conductors does not produce the visible scene; it does not even determine its structure in a univocal manner since it is organized according to laws of equilibrium which are neither those of a physical system nor those of the body considered as such. The somatic substrate is the passage point, the base of a dialectic.” (SB 206)

This appears, on the one hand, to shift the weight Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy toward idealism, since the material and neurophysiological conditions alone do not account for the meaning of that which is perceived. Yet, on the other, this should clearly distinguish Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy from idealism, for, as we have just seen, structure within his philosophy is not just signification or conceptual signification alone, since the body is the substrate for all more integrated and abstract forms of thought and consciousness. Signification is first perceptual, it is first formed in the body’s perceptual encounter with the world, an encounter within which form and matter are given together, within which the structure of matter is taken up, integrated, and “possessed” in the moment of awareness. (SB 206)

When studying the body and nerve functioning Merleau-Ponty finds this same adherence of meaning to existence and existence to meaning. We have witnessed above that certain regions of the brain control certain functions: the occipital lobe controls seeing, the temporal lobe controls hearing, etc. Yet we have also seen that they function in concert with the “central sector,” so much so that it is impossible to note the separate contributions of respective regions. Yet when injuries occur to certain regions of the brain, specific deficits appear. The best way to understand this, then, is to grasp the function of seeing, hearing, etc., as being integrated at a more global level, as serving the whole. Specificity gets integrated into more general structures, yet the

general structures would not exist, at least in the same way, without the contributions of the specific regions. (SB 206-208) “Thus we are dealing less with two types of localization than with an inextricable intersection of ‘horizontal’ and ‘vertical’ localization--without the body being anywhere pure thing, but also without it being anywhere pure idea”-- with specificities that are integrated and absorbed into more general relationships that would be meaningless without them. (SB 207) Idealist (and, I would add here, postmodernist) philosophies repress existence and make it into something that cannot be thought, something with which we have no contact, a thing in-itself, and thinks of everything according to homogeneous forms of thought (or, for the postmodernists, according to heterogeneous forms of language). For Merleau-Ponty, on the contrary, as we have seen him argue above, formulations can appear as new/original, and yet at the same time as preserving and integrating preceding moments into this new structure, thus creating layers of experience, layers with a history of which we are at least partially aware. The more integrated self-awareness, and with it the more integrated level of general perceptual consciousness, thus has some awareness of where it came from, of the structures that it has already traversed, or at least it can be. The more integrated level of embodied perception can become at least partially aware of its own history, that consciousness is embodied and that the body is in a world that exists prior to it and that provides the conditions for its existence. (SB 208-209) There is no doubt that Merleau-Ponty also extends this idea of an integration that has some awareness of what preceded it and where it came from to language in his later works.

“There is truly a reversal when one passes from the sensible world, in which we are caught, to a world of expression, where we seek to capture significations to serve our purpose, although this reversal and the ‘retrogressive movement’ of truth are solicited by a perceptual anticipation. Properly speaking, the expression which language makes possible resumes and amplifies another expression which is revealed in the ‘archaeology’ of the perceived.”<sup>6</sup>

There is a sort of non-reciprocal reversibility between perception and language<sup>7</sup>, since perception suggests certain linguistic expressions, which are nevertheless needed to bring the perception to full articulation. Perception and language thus cross into one another, need one another, yet

perception remains the primary term, for it occurs prior in time, and without its contribution language would have nothing to say. The meaning of the word “triangle,” for example, is undoubtedly related to the perception of this form and to the body’s hold on this particular visual physiognomy, and even though the geometer can derive new theorems from primary definitions, neither would retain much meaning without the original perceptual hold on the world. Unlike certain postmodernists, then, who claim that language is a trace that *erases* the trace of perception, and thus sever language from perception and the world,<sup>8</sup> Merleau-Ponty seeks to understand how they are connected. Unlike certain postmodernists, then, instead of submitting to skepticism with regard to perception, language and knowledge, instead of making language an interpretive system that does not reach perception and the world, he, rather, has developed a theory that accounts for their intersection and integration. We can see in both his early and late works that humans are not trapped in the lived moment, are not just the blind product of material, social, or cultural/linguistic structures or conditions, for, as he has argued, as soon as we make this claim we do so from the point of view of an *awareness* that goes beyond these conditions by grasping and taking possession of them. Humans are neither a blind product nor pure knowers possessing complete clarity. We are in the world and undoubtedly are influenced by it, but we also possess the ability to pause, reflect, and gain enough distance from the present moment to grasp, if not fully penetrate, its meaning, to grasp, if not completely understand, the distance we have traveled from our past.

Since Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of time is central to these themes, it will be helpful to turn briefly to this topic. Merleau-Ponty accepts that there is an actual time, that it is a dimension of the natural world, yet he also argues that the passing of time requires an awareness of time, for without this awareness each moment would exist as an eternal now. Moreover, the awareness of time cannot be the awareness of the reflective subject outside of time, for this would mean that time is fully present to, or fully before, the reflecting subject, and thus, again, time would not pass. The subjective awareness of the passing of time, then, is necessary but must take place

within the passing of time itself. The awareness of the present experiences itself as part of the flow of time, experiences the present as gradually shading into the past and toward the future, as a gestalt foreground opens to an implied spatial and temporal horizon. This, of course, presupposes that the present moment is not a distinct unit with precise borders that is fully present but that it gradually opens out to the past and toward the future. In *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty goes so far as to compare, almost identify, the structure of time and the structure of subjectivity, since both are characterized as an *ekstase*, as an active transcendence toward the other, as an opening toward the other that remains aware of and in contact with itself. In fact self awareness is the awareness of the prior openness upon the world as other. Reflective awareness is aware that something precedes it, that the pre-reflective exists prior to it, and that it can never be fully grasped precisely because it slips away in time. Yet this is not a loss, for it is a distance with which we remain in contact, as the present moment remains in contact with the moments that gradually slide or drift away from it. This contact with oneself that remains at a distance, that is not fully coincident with itself, is, for Merleau-Ponty, the full dawning of human consciousness, is the bursting forth of a being that is not just in-itself but is “a being the whole essence of which, like that of light, is *to make visible*.” (PhP 426) As he has said here in *The Structure of Behavior*, consciousness is being in the concrete moment but also the taking possession of this moment, i.e., gaining a distance from it that remains in contact with it.

Merleau-Ponty makes much the same point, yet taken considerably further, in *The Visible and the Invisible*. In the late text the self is described not as a hole in being, as a gap of full awareness, as it is for many in the Cartesian tradition, but descends into being through the body. The self is formed at the hinge of the body’s reflexiveness, for as the body touches something from its inside, it is aware that it is being touched from the outside, and must be so to experience the touch. The touched folds back on the touching. Consciousness is thus the body’s openness to the world that folds back upon it. Human consciousness, the full light of human awareness, is formed here, where the touching and touched cross into one another. The pre-reflective and reflective

connect, cross into one another, yet remain distant, distinct, for, as we have seen, they are separated by the passing of time. Pre-reflective awareness and reflective awareness need each other, and both are needed to form a sense of self, the sense of an aware being that opens upon the world and holds together through time. Moreover, the sense of pre-reflective awareness, of reflective awareness, and of the self, as we have seen above, are all rooted in the body, in the human body's reflexivity, in its capacity to touch and be touched. The body thus has two sides or aspects that make it fully what it is. It has a subjective and objective side, which fold in upon one another. It is part of nature yet possesses attributes that allow nature to experience or be aware of itself through one of its own. Consciousness lives in the concrete embodied moment, but because of its relexiveness it has the ability to take possession of this moment, to gain some distance from it.

For Merleau-Ponty, then, in both the later works and here in the earlier *The Structure of Behavior*, neither materialist nor idealist philosophers produce adequate explanations of embodied consciousness or the relationship between embodied consciousness and the world. (SB 208) Mind cannot be reduced to the body as a mere thing. Yet the mind is not a separate substance or a series of thoughts (or linguistic systems) separate from the body and the world. The mind does not use the body as a pilot uses an airplane or a driver uses a car. In the human being mind and body conflate or fold into one another. Consciousness "realizes itself through [the human body] at the same time transferring the body outside of physical space." (SB 208-209) The human body is thus not a thing in-itself, nor is human conscious totally for-itself. The human being is a third kind of thing, one that integrates mind and body, one that has two sides, an inside and an outside, one that reveals both subjective and objective attributes, attributes that nevertheless fold into one another. We have seen briefly above that Merleau-Ponty develops this unique version of the dual aspect theory in depth in his last, posthumously published work *The Visible and the Invisible*, that nature, as it expresses itself in the human body, has two sides or aspects: the human body is a thing among things, yet it is the thing that is aware, that holds all

things in awareness around it, that is in contact with a world that transcends it. However, it is here in *The Structure of Behavior* that he first develops the arguments that are presupposed by the later works, that consciousness is embodied and conditioned by the surrounding world, yet it is a world that is simultaneously taken up and “possessed” by the embodied perceiver, that embodied consciousness is in contact with a world that nevertheless remains distant from it. In addition, it is also in *The Structure of Behavior* that he develops a form of emergent materialism to explain the appearance of a consciousness that can be understood neither as a mere thing nor as a separate force somehow introduced from the outside.

“The notions of the soul and body must be relativized: there is the body as mass of chemical components in interaction, the body as dialectic of living being and its biological milieu, and the body as dialectic of social subject and his group; even all our habits are an impalpable body for the ego of each moment. Each of these degrees is soul with respect to the preceding one, body with respect to the following one. The body in general is an ensemble of paths already traced, of powers already constituted; the body is the acquired dialectical soil upon which a higher ‘formation’ is accomplished, and the soul is the meaning which is then established.” (SB 210)

We have seen, here, and in Merleau-Ponty’s later works, that human consciousness cannot be constructed out of discrete parts in mechanical relationships to one another, and that physical structures themselves must not be described apart from our perception of them, that they must be seen as sublimated and integrated within higher or more abstract levels of consciousness. Things, including the body, must be seen as presenting themselves to consciousness. Yet it is to an embodied perceptual consciousness that this presentation is made, and it is within the contingency of experience that meaning is first formed. It is thus a perceptual consciousness that has some awareness of where it started and where it came from that must be fully interrogated. (SB 210)

This is what Merleau-Ponty has done here in *The Structure of Behavior*, what he does for the rest of his professional life, especially in *Phenomenology of Perception* and *The Visible and the Invisible*,<sup>9</sup> and what, for reasons he has supplied, we would do well to do in the present.

In closing I would like to draw attention to various points of contact and separation between Merleau-Ponty’s work and the works of various Anglo-American authors, as presented by

William Lycan in *Mind and Cognition*. My purpose here is to promote exchange between the Continental and Anglo-American traditions and not to enter into a detailed discussion or polemic.

First, and perhaps most obviously, Merleau-Ponty argues against the Cartesian dualism of substances, as do most Anglo-American philosophers of the last 150 years. (MC 3f) Secondly, he argues against Behaviorism's idea that the mind must be understood only as overt, observable behavior, in agreement with a significant number of Anglo-American philosophers. (MC 4-5) Third, and subsequently, he argues that to understand human experience some appeal must be made to conscious awareness. In the Anglo-American tradition, U. T. Place argues that there is an "intractable residue" of mental states that must be grasped to fully understand human behavior (MC 4-5, 8, 9, 10, Place in MC 14), and D. M. Armstrong makes a similar claim.<sup>10</sup> Fourthly, he argues for certain functionalist conceptions of the human organism, that certain mental states are seated in certain brain functions, certainly an argument accepted by most recent Anglo-American philosophers (MC 5-6 and Putnam in MC 31-33), and that brain functions are connected in a whole that is arranged in a hierarchical manner, something that Lycan (MC 50-51), Fodor (MC 46-49), Dennett, and others have likewise claimed. (MC 9) Fifthly, he argues that human experience displays teleological functions—that functions serve a biological role, that when functions are damaged others may perform these functions to help take their place, and that physiological function sometimes follows the more integrated intentions associated with perceptual consciousness. Lycan informs us that numerous Anglo-American authors "have argued powerfully that teleology must enter into any adequate analysis of the intentionality or aboutness of mental states such as beliefs and desires" (MC 9), thus placing them in general agreement with Merleau-Ponty's position. Moreover, as we have seen, even though Merleau-Ponty agrees that there is a parallelism between global physiological functioning and perceptual events, he also argues that the perceptual is richer than the physiological, that in order to fully understand the physiological functions, an appeal must be made to the perceptual, that even though the perceptual is seated in the physiological, perception cannot be explained completely in

its terms, thus underlining the agreement with the Anglo-American authors just mentioned in the fifth point immediately above. All of the above points of contact, I believe, are more than superficial similarities and represent, in many cases, substantial points of agreement between Merleau-Ponty and numerous Anglo-American authors. Continental philosophers would do well to read more Anglo-American authors, and vice versa, since from each group much can be learned by the other.

Recognizing points of agreement, however, is obviously not enough, for each tradition can certainly learn from points of disagreement as well. Merleau-Ponty, for instance, would certainly disagree with the currently popular “cognitivism” in Anglo-American philosophy of psychology, with the view that behavior can be understood as the result of the processing of information according to conceptual rules and representations, much as a computer accomplishes its tasks. There is something lacking in this view, for while Merleau-Ponty recognizes that computers and algorithmic thinking are powerful and efficient tools, he insists that we must still, from time to time, pause and reflect, and place them in the broader context of human experience as a whole. First, these formulas are abstractions from our lived openness upon the world, an openness that is richer and more fluid than can be captured in any conceptual formula. They are interpretive frameworks that are, at best, approximations of the world, not a priori templates of reality. Secondly, human language and human knowledge cannot be totalized in a way that language and knowledge can be within a computer system. They cannot be brought before our reflective gaze and witnessed as complete or completely defined—since they follow a nature that is organic and changing (albeit slowly and with patterns), and since each definition or proposition implies others in an open cultural horizon. There are always elements within this horizon that remain implied, or, if these implied elements are brought into focus, can only be done so by relying upon others that are then implied. Thus, even though Merleau-Ponty’s works have much in common with a number of Anglo-American authors, the idea that the mind is a computer built on a binary system of zeros and ones, of linear pathways and on/off switches, is not one of them.

I conclude with a few general lessons that can be drawn from Merleau-Ponty's philosophy that I believe are still relevant today: reductionisms, either physical or conceptual (or linguistic) do not adequately account for the range of structures found in the human experience of nature. We certainly cannot understand human experience by reducing it to physical structures, especially understood as discrete units in linear mechanical relationships with one another. Nor can we understand human experience as reducible to conceptual or merely linguistic relationships, for abstract relationships must always relate back to our embodied perceptual encounter with the world. We should begin with the lived through perceptual openness upon the world, then pause, reflect, compare and contrast experiences, mine within me as I actively open upon the world, and mine with those of others as we actively open upon the world together. Since we are similarly embodied creatures, we will tend to experience the world in similar, if not identical, ways. It is thus by cross checking our experiences against each other, and by checking them against the stable structures of the world, that we will move toward adequate theoretical representations of the world. Where we cannot do this, Merleau-Ponty tells us, we must try to live with differences. The investigation of this intriguing moral claim, however, will have to wait until another day.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, sixth printing, trans. Colin Smith with corrections by Forrest Williams (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962). Referred to as PhP. Originally published as *Phenomenologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945). All citations will refer to the English translations of Merleau-Ponty's texts.

<sup>2</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible: Followed by the Working Notes*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alfonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968). Referred to as VI. Originally published as *Le Visible et l'invisible: suivi de notes de travail*, ed. Claude Lefort (Paris: Gallimard, 1964).

<sup>3</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*, trans. Alden L. Fischer (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963). Referred to as SB. Originally published as *La Structure du comportement*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1942).

<sup>4</sup> William G. Lycan, editor, *Mind and Cognition*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999). Hereafter referred to as MC.

<sup>5</sup> "...my body is geared into the world when my perception presents me with a spectacle as varied and as clearly articulated as possible, when my motor intentions, as they unfold, receive the responses they expect from the world. This maximum of sharpness of perception and action points clearly to a perceptual ground, a basis of my life, a general setting in which my body can co-exist with the world." (PhP 250)

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- <sup>6</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Themes from the Lectures at the College de France, 1952-1960*, trans. John O'Neill (Evanston: Northwestern university Press, 1970), p. 4. Originally published as *Resumes des cours, College de France, 1952-1960* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968).
- <sup>7</sup> M.C. Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 194ff, 208ff.
- <sup>8</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Ousia and Gramme: Note on a Note from *Being and Time*," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 66.
- <sup>9</sup> The case is obvious with regard to *Phenomenology of Perception*, less so with *The Visible and the Invisible*, for some have argued that Merleau-Ponty moves away from the phenomenological description of perception toward a philosophy of language. I do not believe this is the case, even though it is clear that this late work takes great care to discuss the importance of language. Consider the following statements. "...especially since to understand is to translate into disposable significations a meaning first held captive in the thing and in the world itself. But this translation aims to convey the text; or rather the visible and the philosophical explication of the visible are not side by side as two sets of signs, as a text and its version in another tongue. If it were a text, it would be a strange text, which is directly given to all of us, so that we are not restricted to the philosopher's translation and can compare the two. And philosophy for its part is more or less than a translation: more, since it alone tells us what the text means; less, since it is useless if one does not have the text at one's disposal. The philosopher therefore suspends the brute vision only in order to make it pass into the order of the expressed: that vision remains his model or measure, and it is upon that vision that the network of significations which philosophy organizes in order to reconquer it must open." (VI 36) "But philosophy is not lexicon, it is not concerned with 'word meanings,' it does not seek a verbal substitute for the world we see, it transforms it into something said... It is the things themselves, from the depths of their silence, that it wishes to bring to expression." (VI 4) And, "it is the error of semantic philosophies to close up language if it spoke only of itself; language lives only from silence; everything we cast to others has germinated in this great mute land which we never leave." VI 126) And finally, "yet there is a world of silence, the perceived world, at least, is an order where there are non-language significations, but they are not accordingly *positive*. There is for example no absolute flux of singular *Erlebnisse*; there are fields and a field of fields, with a *style* and a typicality—Describe the existentials that make up the armature of the transcendental field." (VI 171)
- <sup>10</sup> See D.M. Armstrong, *A Materialist theory of Mind* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), p. 68-69, where he states that "calculation in the head" is not just about a disposition to behave, that when we calculate there is something going on that we are *aware of*, and p. 74 where he claims the following: "To deny mental states is, as A.J. Ayer put it, 'to pretend to be anaesthetized.'"
- <sup>11</sup> This task has begun elsewhere. See Douglas Low "Merleau-Ponty and the Foundations of Multiculturalism," *Journal of Philosophical Research* Volume XXI (1996): pp. 377-390. Yet the task remains to be more fully investigated.