Course Organiser: Dr. Dave Ward [Dave.Ward@ed.ac.uk; Office Hours: Wednesdays 10-12, DSB 605]
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Course description: This course will introduce students to the 20th century philosophical movement of Phenomenology. Originating with the work of Edmund Husserl, Phenomenology attempts to ground substantive philosophical claims concerning metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of mind, and beyond, in a careful articulation of the ways in which our experience of the world is structured. After introducing Phenomenology via some key ideas from Husserl's work, the course will focus on Merleau-Ponty's influential 1945 work, *Phenomenology of Perception*. There, Merleau-Ponty argues that proper attention to the structures that characterize thought and experience reveals that we are fundamentally *embodied* creatures, and that this has important consequences for our understanding of mind, language, metaphysics and epistemology. Most of the course will be devoted to exploring ideas and arguments of key sections of *Phenomenology of Perception* in detail. We will also consider how Merleau-Ponty applied his views to aesthetics and politics, and how other thinkers such as Heidegger and Sartre pursued Husserl's research programme in different ways, and how (or whether) Merleau-Ponty's views evolved over time.

Required text: Merleau-Ponty, Maurice & Landes, Donald A. (2012). *Phenomenology of Perception*. Routledge. [Please make sure you have access to this translation rather than the earlier one by Colin Smith]

Seminar Topics and Readings

Week 1: Introducing Phenomenology
Our job for this week is to understand enough about what Phenomenology is to allow us to understand what Merleau-Ponty is up to in his *Phenomenology of Perception*. We'll do this by introducing some key ideas from Edmund Husserl, a formative influence on Merleau-Ponty, and thinking through some classic and contemporary examples of 'Phenomenological' arguments.

Required Reading: During the lectures each week I'll try to give some background that will be helpful for understanding the required readings that we'll discuss in tutorials. The hope is that the most valuable part of the course for you will be your own reading, and the discussions that we have in tutorials. So please make sure you do the reading, and come prepared to discuss it in tutorials!

This week there are different readings for honours students and postgraduates:

If you're in 4th year: Please read
- Sartre: Intentionality: A Fundamental Idea of Husserl’s Phenomenology
- Merleau-Ponty: The Contemporary Philosophical Movement [Both v. short, and on Learn]

If you're an MSc student: Please read
- Merleau-Ponty: The Primacy of Perception and its Philosophical Consequences [Read up to the 'discussion' section]
On Husserl


In a course on Phenomenology, you should really read some Husserl. The problem is that Husserl is no fun to read! This series of lectures is one of the more accessible introductions to his conception of Phenomenology in the middle part of his career. ([on Learn](#))


[A relatively short and lucid overview of the main themes of Husserl's Phenomenology ([Library Website](#))]

On Phenomenology


[A very nice introduction and overview of Phenomenology as a movement and research programme in philosophy, from the trusty Stanford Encyclopaedia]

**Week 2: Introducing Merleau-Ponty**

This week we dive in to the *Phenomenology of Perception*, where we'll spend most of the rest of the course. After a quick sketch of what M-P is up to, we'll start working our way through the initial chapters of the introductory part of the book, where M-P tries to get us to identify and overcome 'classical prejudices' and 'return to the phenomena'.

**Required Reading:**

*Phenomenology of Perception*: Introduction, chapters 1-3:

- "Sensation" (pp.3-12);
- "Association" and the "Projection of Memories" (Sections a-c [pp. 13-20] and e [pp.24-27]);
- "Attention" and "Judgment" (Sections a-b [pp.28-38])

**Additional Reading:**

The rest of the 'Introduction' part of PoP is also important. In ch.4, *The Phenomenal Field*, MP tries to summarise the lessons of the first three chapters.

Romdenh-Romluc, Komarine. (2011) *Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception*, ch.2 ‘Traditional Prejudices and the return to phenomena’ (pp. 36-62) [Available via Library Website]


**Week 3: Perception and the Body**
The lesson of the chapters we looked at last week is that we need to rethink our experience, and that doing this will involve understanding how our status as embodied agents is inseparable from our experience of the world. This week we look at the chapters of *PoP* where M-P begins to introduce and explore these ideas.

**Required Reading:**
*Phenomenology of Perception*: Part One: Introduction to Part One (pp.69-74), and The Body as an Object and Mechanistic Psychology (pp.72-91)

**Additional Reading:**
[Brief overview of Merleau-Ponty’s bodily conception of experience. Takes us up to and beyond what we’ve covered so far – to the end of M-P’s career, in fact]

A bit of a lull in terms of additional reading this week! Many of the readings from the previous week and from next week are also relevant for understanding this week's material. If you find yourself at a loose end, re-read or read ahead in *PoP*!

**Week 4: Bodily Perception and Cognitive Science**
We get to the heart of part 1 of *PoP* this week, with the introduction of some key notions (motor intentionality; the intentional arc) and an intriguing blend of phenomenological and cognitive scientific support (or illustration?) for the position we saw M-P begin to develop last week. We’ll think some more about the relationship between phenomenology and cognitive science, and consider how this week's material stacks up against cognitive science since M-P was writing.

**Required Reading:**
*Phenomenology of Perception*: Part One: The Spatiality of One’s Own Body and Motricity (pp.100-148);

**Additional Reading:**
*Phenomenology of Perception*: Part One: The Synthesis of One’s Own Body (pp.149-155)
[An impressive forensic examination of Merleau-Ponty's account of motor intentionality and one of the case studies he uses to support it.]

[A classic paper applying Merleau-Pontian ideas to issues of gendered experience of body and space. Read it!]

[An exploration of the cognitive science of motor intentionality at the turn of the century]

[Some overlap with the previous reading, but more emphasis on linking M-P's arguments and related empirical work to issues about the structure and content of perception]

**Week 5: Speech and Gesture**
We finish off part 1 of PoP by looking at M-P’s influential treatment of speech and gesture, building on the previous chapters. We’ll also consider the significance of the previous chapter, ‘The Body as a Sexed Being’ for M-P’s thought.

**Required Reading:**
*Phenomenology of Perception*: Part One: The Body as Expression, and Speech (pp.179-205)

**Additional Reading:**
*Phenomenology of Perception*: Part One: The Body as a Sexed Being (pp.156-178)
[M-P uses the simultaneously bodily and perceptual character of sexual experiences as a case study for the way the body figures in all perception, and should inform our understanding of the qualities we perceive.]


[A critical investigation of M-P’s thoughts about language and gesture in this week’s chapter, and in subsequent work.]

Merleau-Ponty (1964/1995). On the Phenomenology of Language, in *Signs*, Northwestern University Press (pp.84-97)
[M-P revisits the themes from this week’s reading later in his career.]

[An exploration of the historical antecedents of the ‘expressive’ conception of language M-P argues for in this week’s reading, and its relevance for our self-understanding.]
Week 6: Art
This week we take a break from working through *PoP* to look at the way MP thought his views applied to various aesthetic domains – and in which those domains informed his views. We’ve already seen numerous literary and artistic examples in *PoP*, but this week we’ll look at a couple of M-P’s most celebrated essays on art.

Required Reading:

Additional Reading:


Week 7: Sensing
We’re now into part two of *PoP*, ‘The Perceived World’, where the arguments of the previous parts of the book inform M-Ps treatments of various topics: what is perception? What is space? What are things?

Required Reading:
Please read the following sections of part 2 (About 25 pages, in total):

- Introduction to Part 2
- These sections of the ‘Sensing’ chapter: a, c, d, e, j, m, n
- These sections of the ‘Space’ chapter: A(iii), A(iv); B(i), B(iii), B(iv), B(vii) [Note that I’ve uploaded some reading questions that suggest some parts of the latter sections that you can skip...]

Additional Reading:
*Phenomenology of Perception*: Part 2: Space (pp.253-311); The Thing and the Natural World (pp.311-360)
[Both great and important chapters – but I couldn’t quite squeeze them in as required readings. Next week’s required reading is shorter, so you might use the extra time to have a look at one or both of these.]


[A great paper arguing against (what probably counts as) the orthodox interpretation of M-P as engaged in empirically-motivated philosophy of perception. Relevant to issues about the relationship between Phenomenology and cognitive science]

[Kelly gives an account of what he thinks M-P’s fleshed out theory of perception amounts to]

[Some overlap with the previous reading – but (again) the focus here is more on debates in the philosophy of perception, this time about the objects of perceptual experience, than on M-P exegesis.]

**Week 8: Things, Others**
Though most of *PoP* so far has been concerned with us and our bodies, M-P has a lot of original and important things to say about the perceived world, and about other minds and our access to them. Our focus this week will be on these aspects of his thought.

**Required Reading:**
Please read the following sections of part 2 (About 26 pages, in total):

‘The thing and the natural world’: A(i), B(i), B(ii), B(v), C(i), C(ii)

‘Others and the human world’: a, b, d, e, f, g, k, l, o

There are some suggested questions you can use to guide your reading uploaded on Learn.

**Additional Reading:**
It would be good to go back and have a look at the previous chapters of Part 2 if you haven’t done so already.

Romdenh-Romluc, Komarine. (2011) *Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception*, ch.5 ‘Other Selves and the Human World’ (pp.130-153) [Available via Library Website]


[Transcript of a late lecture where M-P argues (with a characteristic mix of phenomenology and psychology) that the ability to distinguish between one's own experiences and another's is something a child acquires only through development.]

[A critical examination of M-P's thought on self and other in PoP and the above reading]

[Uses findings from cognitive and developmental psychology since M-P’s time to support some of his claims and question others]

[Argues that Phenomenological insights and observations have no evidential or explanatory value in debates about social cognition.]

[A recent, Phenomenologically-inspired, argument for the direct perception of other people’s mental states. Mainly cites Husserl, but could just as well be talking about M-P!]

**Week 9: Thinking**
This week we start on part III, which deals with weighty themes like freedom, temporality, and – our focus for this week – the Cogito. M-P's goal in this part of the book is to show how the self-consciousness that philosophers like Descartes and Kant wanted to put at the heart of philosophy consists in the bodily, perceptual and agential relationship to the world we've been trying to uncover and understand.

**Required Reading:**
*Phenomenology of Perception:* Part III, The Cogito (pp.387-431)

**Additional Reading:**
*Phenomenology of Perception:* Part III, Temporality (pp.432-457); Freedom (pp.459-483)
[Again, important chapters that can’t be squeezed on as required readings. But do give them a look if you have time!]

[Not specifically focused on this week’s reading, but a great big-picture account of how Taylor sees M-P's thought fitting in with the currents that have come together to form contemporary philosophy]


**Week 10: Politics**
Merleau-Ponty was involved in politics throughout his career, as a writer, campaigner and public intellectual. The relationship between his Phenomenology and his politics is much more complex than is the case with art – nonetheless, this week we’ll consider the evolution of M-P’s political views, and draw some connections with the different aspects of his work we’ve considered on this course.
**Required Reading:**
Merleau-Ponty (1946/1991) Marxism and Philosophy, in *Sense and Non-Sense* [Scanned copy on Learn]

*Phenomenology of Perception: Part III, Freedom (pp.458-483)*

**Additional Reading:**

Merleau-Ponty has many hundreds of pages of political writings. The most famous collection is his *Humanism and Terror* (1947), currently available online. A later collection, more critical of Marxism, is his *Adventures of the Dialectic* (1955). A key essay from each of these is reprinted in the Northwestern University Press edition of *Primacy of Perception*.


**Week 11: Revision**

We’ll use this week of the course to go over themes from the past weeks that we think need more discussion, and to talk about plans for the final essays.