Review Essay

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FROM REPRESENTATION TO EXPRESSION: MERLEAU-PONTY'S PHENOMENOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

Merleau-Ponty's writings inspire books, articles, and conferences in today's phenomenological circles but are usually ignored by the general public, and they are often dismissed or even misunderstood by those in the Anglo-American philosophical tradition. Hass suggests that barriers include the formidable difficulty of Merleau-Ponty's thought, his unique and often unfamiliar mode of argumentation, and a spurious appearance of subjectivity and irrationality. In this interesting and accessible book, Hass encourages wider knowledge of Merleau-Ponty's works among both students and philosophers. Since the 2008 publication of Hass's book, there has been a remarkable increase in studies that attempt to incorporate some aspects of phenomenology. Hass's introduction to Merleau-Ponty would also be an excellent resource for these "hybrid" areas.

Introduction

Although Maurice Merleau-Ponty's thought continues to serve as a rich resource for books, articles, and international conferences in phenomenological circles, his works are largely unknown in the wider culture and the Anglo-American philosophical tradition. Hass believes that the difficulty of Merleau-

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Ponty's writings, their unusual style of argument, and their false appearance of subjectivity and irrationality have contributed to this problem. In *Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy* (hereafter *MPP*), Hass approaches this concern with expertise, enthusiasm, and "a minimum of jargon." But Hass's book is not just another attempt to summarize Merleau-Ponty's thought. He wishes to draw attention to the lived experience that we habitually bury under Cartesian abstractions: the binaries of mind/body, self/other, thought/sensation; and the view that our bodies and other animals are simply machines. Hass echoes Merleau-Ponty's own project, encouraging us to reawaken our experience of creative "expression" by leaving behind the false picture of "representation." Hass's book consists of an introduction, prelude, seven chapters, and an interesting appendix that traces the various meanings of "flesh" in *The Visible and the Invisible* (hereafter *VI*). The writing is accessible, with the possible exception of the challenging prelude on Cartesian thought. There are helpful chapter summaries, references for those who wish to follow up, and a comprehensive index.

The review portion of this essay will focus primarily on the first three sections of the book: the introduction to Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy: "Singing the World," the prelude: "Scenes from the Cartesian Theater," and chapter one: "The Sensation Fallacy: Toward a Phenomenology of Perception." Altogether, they offer an excellent grounding in Merleau-Ponty's thought and enable the reader to grasp Hass's subsequent chapters fairly easily. After summarizing the first chapters, I will briefly consider key points in the remainder of the book. I will conclude by highlighting and questioning several newer fields of study that have referenced or relate to Merleau-Ponty's ideas. I believe Merleau-Ponty would have been very interested in these "hybrid" areas.

Prelude: Descartes, A Double Game, and Representation Theory

The prelude works out Hass's claim that representation theory underwrites our modern sciences, humanities, and even plain "common sense" (*MPP*, 11). The binaries of mind/body, self/other, thought/sensation, and the view of our own bodies, animals, and nature as machines are abstractions that correspond "to nothing in our experience" (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 3 [hereafter *PP*]). Merleau-Ponty offers a sustained critique of intellectualism and empiricism, both of which derive from the thought of René Descartes (1596–1650). Hass examines in some detail Descartes's *Meditations on First Philosophy* (published 1641), with a primary focus on several "fatal" inconsistencies. Hass's discussion is thoughtful and convincing but might be somewhat difficult for the average reader.

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Hass calls attention to the way that Descartes's standard for certainty changes from the First Meditation to the Second Meditation. In the First Meditation, Descartes imagines that the sensations he perceives with his body might not be at all reliable: an evil demon or malevolent God could be deceiving him about the external world. But then Descartes reasons that even if he is being fooled, the fact that he does think and doubt proves that he must certainly exist as a mind that thinks (*MPP*, 18). Hass claims this progression is invalid: "Even though—on the evil demon hypothesis—I don't know for sure that I have a body while I perceive, it doesn't at all follow that perception is not performed by my body. It doesn't at all follow that 'it is the soul which sees, and not the eyes'" (*MPP*, 17).

Descartes's Second Meditation turns to an observation about wax. It can exist as a liquid or solid, but we know that it is the same substance; "no one denies" this is the case. Hass objects to this move. In the First Meditation, Descartes *doubted* the evidence of his senses. But in the Second Meditation, Descartes *relies* on the evidence of his senses (e.g., that the melted and solid wax are the same) (*MPP*, 15). Somehow, the "evil demon" has disappeared, and the common folk knowledge that Descartes questioned in the First Meditation is now taken to be definitive.

Hass suggests that this sort of inconsistency is the "double game" that Merleau-Ponty describes. This is plausible, but I think Merleau-Ponty has another more subtle idea in mind.

> With one stroke the philosophy of reflection metamorphoses the effective world into a transcendental field; in doing so it only puts me back at the origin of a spectacle that I could never have had unless, unbeknown to myself, I organized it.... Once one is settled in it, reflection is an inexpugnable philosophical position.... But are we to enter into reflection? In its inaugural act is concealed a decision to play a double game which, once unmasked, divests it of its apparent evidence. (*MPP*, 19; *VI*, 44)

Merleau-Ponty observes that the philosophies of reflection adopt the pretense of radical doubt but require an unacknowledged reliance on commonly held beliefs in order to move their argument forward. If it were not for the effective world, I could not imagine a transcendental field. Ironically, Descartes claims to doubt his former learning, but all the while he is tacitly affirming and relies on these cultural beliefs.

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Descartes's influence is deep, pervasive, and often unnoticed; it is a habitual picture that we both *have* and are *in the midst of* (Poteat 1985, 134).[1] We regard perception as a "mental representation, a *representation* of those extended bodies that are in mechanistic, point-by-point causal relations. It is a *copy* of that original presentation, a *mimēsis*, with color, depth, texture, size and shape added by the mind" (*MPP*, 21). It is a false construct that comes to appear more real, legitimate, and trustworthy than ordinary experience (*MPP*, 23).

Merleau-Ponty's unique methodology reveals the abstractions of both intellectualism and empiricism and shows that, in contrast, perception and being in the world are expressive: fundamentally embodied, situated, and creative.

Merleau-Ponty's Methodology: "Discourse on Method," Dialectic, Saying to Show

Merleau-Ponty's methodology is unusual but not "subjective" or "irrational." He weaves an opposition between empiricism and intellectualism throughout *Phenomenology of Perception.* He demonstrates that contrary to expectation, the two epistemologies are actually similar in their account of perception.

> In the first case consciousness is too poor, in the second too rich for any phenomenon to appeal compellingly to it. Empiricism cannot see that we need to know what we are looking for, otherwise we would not be looking for it, and intellectualism fails to see that we need to be ignorant of what we are looking for, or equally again we should not be searching. They are in agreement in that neither can grasp consciousness in the act of learning. (*PP*, 28)

The similarities between empiricism and intellectualism lead Hass to object that a true dialectic between them is not valid. This may be technically true, but in my view, it is more likely that Merleau-Ponty takes this strategy because his typical reader would assume that they were real options.

Along with his dialectical argument, Merleau-Ponty draws supporting examples from everyday life. Hass calls this move "saying to show," or

1 Merleau-Ponty and Michael Polanyi often addressed similar topics, including Gestalt theory, machine-like functions of the body, and non-propositional knowledge. Michael Polanyi had no direct contact with Merleau-Ponty and read his works only after persistent encouragement from Marjorie Grene (Mullins, 2022). This review can only briefly mention some of these areas.

"perceptual realism," asserting that it is a legitimate, common form of inference that relies on personal experience and bodily demonstration:

> I could try to teach my son how to move the rook with a defining proposition: "The rook is the piece that moves vertically or horizontally on the board for any number of squares." Or instead, I can…pick up the rook, hold it above the board, and *show* him how it moves…. I move the rook relative to the board, and my son *gets* it, he passes from non-understanding to understanding through the act of showing. (*MPP*, 5).

Perceptual realism works by calling attention to our ordinary being in the world: lived spatiality and temporality. It is not the type of "logical" argument found in analytic philosophy, but its truth can be judged according to its efficacy—whether or not a particular demonstration gets the point across. Randomly waving one's hand above the chess board fails as a teaching tool. Hass encourages us to "say" in order to show, according to this practical standard (*MPP*, 5). As we shall see, Merleau-Ponty also draws tools for his argument from fields such as Gestalt theory, psychology, neurology, and studies in animal learning. Having outlined these strategies, Hass turns in chapter one to sensation and physicalism.

Chapter One: "The Sensation Fallacy and Contemporary Physicalism"

The "constancy hypothesis" was current during Merleau-Ponty's time. This theory reduces perception to an impersonal, point-by-point correspondence between a stimulus and an invariant response. The "Sensation Fallacy" is Hass's "name for the notion that simple sense-qualities are fundamentally real and constitutive of perceptual wholes" (*MPP*, 29). Merleau-Ponty's counter-argument draws on the findings of Gestalt psychology: "Perceptual experience is always complex, a *figure* against a *background*, a thing amid a context" (*MPP*, 29). We even perceive a white patch—supposedly, a simple "quality"—by visually separating it from a background. "Our most basic perceptions then are not pure, atom-like *qualia*, but meaning-laden perspectives (or *Gestalten*) that open up a host of possible behavioral and affective responses on my part" (*MPP*, 32.)[2]

Hass has another objection to Merleau-Ponty's argument. The constancy hypothesis has been displaced in contemporary thought by "physicalism," which

2 This construct closely resembles Michael's Polanyi's use of Gestalt to establish his notion of subsidiary and focal awareness.

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is “the view that neurophysiological explanation can tell us everything (or everything important) about consciousness or perception” (*MPP*, 211, note 21). Hass questions whether Merleau-Ponty would still have something to say about these new developments. I believe Merleau-Ponty’s analysis is relevant in several respects. He clearly lays the groundwork for physicalism with his concepts of “central” and “peripheral” neurological functioning. He reveals the damaged “intentional arc” of the unfortunate patient, Schneider, and he discusses other anomalies such as the phantom limb and anosognosia (*MPP*, 42). These discussions offer theoretical standpoints that could be brought to bear on physicalism.

Then Hass raises an excellent question: does contemporary physicalism still rely on Cartesian concepts? He argues that physicalists still “speak Cartesian” when they refer to “representations” as “inside” (*MPP*, 43). Hass’s question is also important when we consider other “hybrid” fields that have recently developed. In the conclusion of the present review, I will briefly treat a selection of these areas and highlight ways that Merleau-Ponty’s project offers opportunities for further reflection and theoretical grounding. First, I will touch on the main points in Hass’s later chapters.

Hass’s Subsequent Chapters

Chapter Two: “The Secret Life of Things” (*MPP*, 53-74)
The world presents itself to us as an inexhaustible field of possibility; we actively create meaning. Hass (*MPP*, 66-67) provides an interesting example of Gestalt in *The Night Watch* by Rembrandt (the actual title is *Militia Company of District II Under the Command of Captain Frans Banninck Cocq*).

Chapter Three: “Singing the Living Body Electric” (*MPP*, 74-99)
In his later works, Merleau-Ponty often refers to the strange phenomenon that occurs when a person touches both hands together. The hands inevitably alternate between touching or being touched. This suggests that the world acts upon us just as we act upon the world. Merleau-Ponty develops the concepts of synaesthesia, chiasm, and écart in *The Visible and the Invisible*. But despite Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis on embodied being in the world, contemporary scholars such as Marion Young are concerned that he paid little attention to the effects of politics and culture on the meaning of embodiment (*MPP*, 94). “Critical Phenomenology” explores these influences (Magrì 2023, Bredlau 2024). On the other hand, in “The War Has Taken Place,” Merleau-Ponty did call attention to the failure of European intellectuals to understand the meaning of the Nazi invasion

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of Poland and the occupation of France. The cultural ideas of fairness, humanism, freedom, and intellectual argument turned out not to be universal after all (Merleau-Ponty 1964b).

Chapter Four: "Elemental Alterity: Self and Others" (*MPP*, 100-145)
The spurious "problem of other minds" is the result of Cartesian dualism. Merleau-Ponty shows that we are primordially grounded in an intersubjective world: "A baby of fifteen months opens its mouth if I playfully take one of its fingers between my teeth and pretend to bite it" (*MPP*, 108; *PP*, 352).

Chapter Five: "Later Developments: Écart, Reversibility, and the Flesh of the World" (*MPP*, 124-145)
Merleau-Ponty's unfinished work, *The Visible and the Invisible,* is dense and enigmatic. He attempts to account for the separation we perceive between thought and active perception, but without resorting to Cartesian dualism. Merleau-Ponty begins to describe an ambiguous chiasm, or interfolding, of the person, intersubjectivity, and the world. Hass revisits this project in the conclusion.

Chapter Six: "Expression and the Origin of Geometry" (*MPP*, 146-170)
We are often tempted to view geometry as "pure idea." Hass raises the curious notion that whether in mathematics or language, once we have created an idea, it seems to stand outside of its background situation and the flow of time. He argues that even a mathematical figure is a Gestalt with temporal dimensions and that geometrical space mimics our embodied spatiality.

Chapter Seven: "Behold 'The Speaking Word': The Expressive Life of Language" (*MPP*, 171-192)
Merleau-Ponty encounters the thought of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) and shows that sedimented language (La Langue) is not fixed but transformed each time we speak.

Conclusion: "The Visible and the Invisible" (*MPP*, 193-199)
How do thoughts and ideas (the invisible) arise from and interact with our embodied experience (the visible)? Merleau-Ponty tackles this difficult question in his later works and suggests that thought is a "sublimation" of first-order perception.

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> It seems to me to that knowledge and the communication with others that it presupposes not only are original formations with respect to the perceptual life but also [that] they preserve and continue our perceptual life even while transforming it. Knowledge and communication sublimate rather than suppress our incarnation, and the characteristic operation of the mind is in the movement by which we recapture our corporeal existence and use it to symbolize instead of merely to coexist. (Merleau-Ponty 1964c, 7; *MPP*, 155)

Hass says that in order to follow Merleau-Ponty's direction, we first need to set aside our Western tendency to reduce one phenomenon to another, to divide and classify. Examples are Freud's argument that thought and desire are "really" impulses of the body and Skinner's description of human and animal action as observable "behaviors."

Then, we should try to grasp Merleau-Ponty's much more subtle description of interactions between the self, others, and the world. Hass offers a diagram of Merleau-Ponty's ontology (*MPP*, 196). The illustration features interconnected ovals, suggesting a dynamic synergy between the visible and the invisible. Theories can be oversimplified with visual aids, but a close reading of Hass's accompanying text supports a nuanced understanding:

> There is no Platonic hierarchy or division between thought (and language) and our carnal relations with the world. Creative new ideas, words, meanings, paradigms, theories, and thought-acquisitions surge up amid the world as ways of organizing the world. But also, the artifacts of those acquisitions (writings, artworks, images, texts, spoken words) literally, actually become part of the visible and may go on to inspire further transcending articulations. (Hass, 196)

Merleau-Ponty's later works require "a new flexibility of mind" in which we avoid reduction and simplification, and accept difference, temporality, and situatedness. "The perceived world," Hass writes, "is in the process of becoming. It unfolds…through contingent, creative, culturally and historically informed acts of transcending amid an overflowing world, acts which themselves leave sediments and thus transform the world" (196).

Future Connections: Contemporary Studies and Merleau-Ponty

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Merleau-Ponty's thought has inspired contemporary studies in history, art, ecology, and philosophy.[3] David Abram (2011, 2017) and Ted Toadvine (2024) have gestured towards several of the most interesting and creative theoretical directions. Abram intends his work to provide a stronger conceptual basis for environmental activism and to raise philosophers' awareness of ecology (Abram 2017, x). He reveals the "more-than-human" world and our primordial kinship with other animals. Other creatures and even objects have their own meaning and disclose themselves to our gaze (Abram 2005). As Cézanne said, "The landscape thinks itself in me…and I am its consciousness" (Merleau-Ponty 1964a, 17). If we pay attention, we even notice that solid objects, such as the walls and beams of a house, take on different meanings depending on the overall situation, such as the temporary absence of a child (Abram 2010, 11).

The phenomenologist Ted Toadvine has extended Merleau-Ponty's work in many directions. He has given significant attention to the implications of Gestalt theory, intentionality, the human-nature chiasm, and memory, and brought out apocalyptic themes relating to our awareness of climate change. Among his many innovations is his suggestion that human perception is based on our substrate of animal knowing. There is an "anonymous 'someone' who perceives within me without coinciding with my personal life. This anonymous someone is precisely animal life, the life of my body as a natural self" (Toadvine 2024, 140). Explicitly rejecting Cartesian "clear and distinct ideas," Toadvine finds the origin of thought in non-propositional awareness. He acknowledges our bodies as perceptual fields that are already situated in the world by the time we begin to form abstract theories. The implication is that even without language, non-human animals develop figure/ground patterns to construct a world that is meaningful and useful.

The theories of Abram and Toadvine are fascinating and enticing, but we now turn to several other scientific and philosophical proposals of the sort that I suspect may have captured the attention of my colleagues in Merleau-Ponty studies. On a daily basis, has anyone else been taken aback by areas of thought that have inadvertently bought into Cartesian assumptions, or that have attempted to incorporate phenomenological ideas, but without completely understanding them? I suggest that Hass's discussion of Merleau-Ponty can help raise questions that might resolve some of these concerns: (1) To what extent have these "hybrid" studies resolved the impasses of representation theory and the binaries of mind/body, self/other, and thought/sensation? (2) Are human bodies and animals regarded as machines? (3) Are the investigators playing a "double game" that holds up an ideal of impersonal, unsituated knowledge, and

3 The International Merleau-Ponty Circle is an excellent resource.

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all the while relying on everyday experience to support their views? (4) To what extent are first person experiences and saying to show admissible as evidence? These questions are complex and cannot be fully resolved in this review, but I hope that they might guide others in future research. The following discussion will have a primary focus on Animal Cognition, with briefer treatments of other "hybrids."

Merleau-Ponty and Hybrid Studies

Embodied Cognition

This vast and growing field of study is well worth future consideration. The area acknowledges and explores the interrelationship between mental activity (thought and perception) and the physical substrates (the brain) that make it possible. Both phenomenology and ecological psychology have had some influence on the establishment of these studies. Ecological psychology, pioneered by J. J. Gibson and E. J. Gibson, considers the interaction between an animal creature and his environment (Gibson, 1996; Lobo, 2018). At this point, embodied cognition has gone in many different directions, with numerous theoretical constructs and controversies. Subfields include psychological research, neurology, perception, and robotics.

Animal Cognition

Two of the main issues in this field are (1) since Descartes, we have regarded animals as unthinking machines, and (2) we have based human exceptionalism on our ability to use language, understood as clear and distinct ideas. These assumptions have had a significant influence on the way research on animal intelligence has been conducted (Andrews, 2021). Despite these conceptual roadblocks, there is growing interest in "animal cognition."[4] As might be expected, the approaches used to study animal awareness, attention, and problem solving raise many of the same issues that Hass and Merleau-Ponty identify. Here I will report on several representative types of research on animal intelligence (Birch, 2002).

(A) Behaviorist Approaches: A Double Game.

Behaviorism was one of the first methods used to study animal intelligence. This position argues that even if mental states exist, they cannot be measured

4 Books are too numerous to mention. Selected journals include *Animal Cognition*, *Animal Behavior and Cognition*, *Animal Sentience*, and *The Journal of Experimental Psychology*.

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objectively, so the focus should be on "external," observable behaviors. A test animal is isolated in a box and eventually learns that he can get a reward if he presses a lever. As expected, researchers are soon able to document an increase in the number of lever presses. This approach is used less frequently today but still underlies the assumption that non-human animals are basically machines that exhibit fixed responses to discrete stimuli; this is obviously a throwback to the constancy hypothesis. But behaviorist research can only be successful if the animal has used his own intelligence to grasp the significance of the lever-reward connection—a feat he accomplishes without abstract, propositional thought. Dreyfus provides an excellent discussion of how Merleau-Ponty would interpret this phenomenon:[5]

> If one can act without representing one's goal, what motivates skillful action? According to Merleau-Ponty, higher animals and human beings are always trying to get a maximum grip on their situation. Merleau-Ponty's inspiration for his notion of maximal grip comes from perception and manipulation. When we are looking at something, we tend, without thinking about it, to find the best distance for taking in both the thing as a whole and its different parts. When grasping something, we tend to grab it in such a way as to get the best grip on it. (Dreyfus, accessed October 7, 2025)

Behaviorists rely on the animals' previously discounted native intelligence, thus playing a double game. Even in the behaviorist's abstracted environment, animal intelligence will sometimes burst forth. Peter Dews attempted to apply B. F. Skinner's methods to the study of captive octopuses. The researcher was surprised by the creatures' individual personalities, creativity, and persistent squirting of water at people they did not like.

> Albert and Bertram were "generally cooperative" but Charles (1) applied great force to the lever and broke it. (2) Charles grasped the overhead light and pulled it into his tank. (3) Charles had a high tendency to direct jets of water out of the tank; specifically, they were in the direction of the experimenter. The animal spent much time with eyes above the surface of the water, directing a jet of water at any individual who approached the tank. This behavior interfered

5 Michael Polanyi discusses trick, sign, and latent learning in *Personal Knowledge* (71-74).

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> materially with the smooth conduct of the experiments, and is, again, clearly incompatible with lever-pulling. “Dews comments dryly, ‘The variables responsible for the maintenance and strengthening of the lamp-pulling and squirting behavior in this animal were not apparent.’” (Godfrey-Smith 2016, 52)

Charles subverted the restrictive research plan and in a sense created his own reality. As the Gibsons point out, animals have an intelligence compatible with their normal environment, which in a behaviorist framework is regarded as trivial.

(B) Mirror Recognition Studies: Clear and Distinct Ideas? We often assume that self-recognition is a sign of advanced intelligence. Some animal studies have tried to get at the question of whether animals have an explicit sense of self. Researchers place a mark on the animal while he is anesthetized and observe his behavior once he wakes up. Will the animal notice the new, unusual mark and study it in a mirror? Some animals do seem curious, but others have specific lifestyles that may work against the assumptions of mirror recognition. For example, gorillas habitually avoid direct eye contact and may feel uncomfortable looking in a mirror. A cleaner wrasse (coral reef fish) might assume that a mark on his body is something edible (de Waal, 2019).

(C) Experimental Problems that Approach Real-Life Conditions. Researchers devise more complex lab experiments that are similar to what an animal might encounter in life. Crows are especially adept at solving multi-step problems (Starr, 2014). They have also exhibited signs of cultural transmission. Crows were presented with a threatening masked man who caught them and put them in a cage. The crows apparently passed this information along to the next generation, because young crows who had never before seen the man also reacted with alarm when he walked by their tree (*PBS Nature* 2010).

(D) Brain Imaging and Physicalism. To what extent are dogs’ brains similar to our own? Will this information give us clues to “what it is like to be a dog”? In one notable and ingenious study, a researcher gradually trained dogs to lie still in an MRI machine. Like human volunteers, the dogs were free to leave the scanner at any time. The results showed that when dogs hear language, brain areas analogous to our own language and speech areas become active (Berns 2017, 2-3).

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(E) Naturalistic Studies. Using a form of participant observation, primate ethologist Jane Goodall (1934–2025) discovered behaviors in chimpanzees that surprised us because we had assumed that only human beings had them (Goodall 1986).

(F) Phenomenological or "Bi-Constructivist" Approaches.
In a deliberate rejection of realist-Cartesian methodology, a "bi-constructivist" approach takes as axiomatic the subjectivity of animals and the situational emplacement of their human observers as living beings themselves. Rather than supposing an "objective" alienation, the ethological perception of animal lives—of the meaning-making activities by which they construct their worlds—requires the assumption of agency and perception in a situation of shared life. An example is a rich description of interactions between a human and domestic cats living in a New York apartment (Lestel 2014, 7).

(G) Citizen Science. Retired psychology professor John Pilley (1928–2018) trained Chaser, a border collie, to recognize the spoken names of over 1,200 toys and to retrieve them. In one especially notable instance, visiting scientist Neil deGrasse Tyson placed "Darwin," a doll Chaser had never seen before, among other familiar toys. It took her more time, but after a few moments Chaser realized that the toy she did not know was "Darwin" (*PBS Nova* 2018).

(H) Animals sometimes engage human help with a problem. A raven covered in porcupine quills sat on a farm fence and called until humans came to investigate and assist with removal of the quills (CTV News, 2013).

These research styles range from more mechanistic models to ones that regard other animals as intentional creatures or even "persons."[6] There are ethical, epistemological, and ontological questions involved for our understanding of non-human animals and for our relationship with them.

Brief List of Other Interesting Topics for Future Study

6 Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 387; M. Héder and D. Paksi 2018. I disagree with Héder and Paksi when they say, "non-human animals have only tacit knowledge" (61). Figure/ground patterns could not have arisen in humans without an evolutionary development, and we know that non-human animals must be centers of intelligence, or else they could not achieve interaction with their environment. I suggest that in the figure/ground patterns of non-human animals, the focal object of attention is usually *nonverbal* but not *tacit.*

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Neurophenomenology: As we have seen, Hass identifies "physicalism" as a contemporary explanation of perception (*MPP*, 41-45). Neurophenomenology is now a major field of study that calls for significant further analysis and commentary. This field is based on the observation that a person's thoughts are necessarily associated with brain structure and function. Accordingly, studies attempt to find a "common language" between the subject's reported first-person experience and modern brain imaging techniques. However, researchers recognize that "there is an 'explanatory gap' in our understanding of how to relate first-person, phenomenological data to third-person, biobehavioural data" (Lutz 2003, abstract). This explanatory gap has conceptual, epistemological, and methodological elements (Thompson 2005). One of the many questions for further analysis is whether there is an assumption that thought is reducible to brain function.[7]

Analytic Phenomenology: Philosophers in the analytic tradition recognized that realistically, desires, plans, and emotions share space with thoughts in the mind. This is another field that has highly complex approaches, disagreements, and theoretical variety. Tomasetta (2003, 312) is not convinced that the field has correctly appropriated key insights of "4E phenomenology": that the mind is embodied, embedded, extended, and enacted.

Artificial Intelligence: Can Robots Mimic Human Gestures? "Training" robots to mimic the gestures that humans can accomplish without thinking, such as tying a shoelace, requires scientists to minutely dissect the steps in the operation—explicit steps that human beings do not need. Trainers must then program the steps with tedious repetition and correction. This process compares very unfavorably with the seemingly effortless way that infants learn to reach and grasp. Merleau-Ponty would point out the obvious: we are embodied persons who are primordially equipped to acquire tools, machines, language, and all other forms of knowledge as "gestures," extensions of our bodies. It is worth recognizing that in the case of robots, it is the scientists whose intentionality and skills are guiding the process (Bernal 2024; Somers 2024). Artificial intelligence is a "sedimented" compilation of knowledge already accomplished by humans.

Conclusion

7 More so than Hass, Tarnas (1991, 325) insists that assumptions about being and knowing can have harmful existential consequences.

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I strongly recommend Hass's book as an excellent and accessible summary of Merleau-Ponty's thought. After a close look at Descartes's missteps, Hass provides a useful description of Merleau-Ponty's unique methodology: dialectic, saying to show, Gestalt theory, and using supporting evidence from contemporary research. Hass calls out the binaries and fallacies that continue to entangle modern thought. The current scientific and philosophical studies we have discussed can benefit from a greater awareness of Cartesian influence and from a more thoughtful appropriation of Merleau-Ponty's ideas.

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