

PH9HA-30 Embodiment, Art, Nature: Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology

24/25

Department

Philosophy

Level

Taught Postgraduate Level

Module leader

Tobias Keiling

Credit value

30

Module duration

10 weeks

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

This module provides an advanced introduction to the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Key themes covered will be perception, embodiment, aesthetic experience, and intersubjectivity. With regard to these different areas of inquiry, Merleau-Ponty defends the idea that the paradigmatic form of meaning and experience is not abstract, rational thought but the immediate perception by an essentially embodied subject.

Module aims

The principal aim of this module is to provide an advanced introduction to the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty is a key figure in 20th century continental philosophy, whose work has been taken up in different areas of philosophy and other academic disciplines.

By highlighting the "primacy of perception" in the way humans relate to their environment, Merleau-Ponty develops a unique form of phenomenological thinking. Merleau-Ponty develops key insights of Husserl's phenomenology while critically reacting to the ontological phenomenology of Heidegger's Being and Time and Sartre's existentialism.

Merleau-Ponty's idea that perception rather than abstract thinking is the paradigmatic form of

experience and knowledge and constitutes our basic mode of being-in-the-world is developed in several directions. One is in the philosophy of art. Taking Cézanne's paintings in particular as exemplary, Merleau-Ponty highlights the importance of perception in the understanding of artworks. Another area is the philosophy of language, where Merleau-Ponty highlights the importance of bodily gestures and articulation in the constitution of meaning.

The third area we will cover is recent so-called "critical phenomenology". Because of the emphasis Merleau-Ponty puts on the embodied nature of subjectivity and intersubjectivity, his work has been central in attempts to determine the impact of social arrangements and power distributions on the lived body. We will look at this application of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy through case studies concerning i.e. the gendered nature of bodily existence.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

We will mainly be using *The Merleau-Ponty Reader* (Northwestern University Press, ed. Lawlor/Toadvine), which I encourage all students to buy.

We will also be reading excerpts from *Phenomenology of Perception*, a book you may want to study alongside other readings as well.

The last two weeks of the module will be devoted to current research that relates Merleau-Ponty's philosophy to contemporary debates in different areas of philosophy, uses it in projects of social critique, or applies it in the interpretation of art. This is meant to help students find and discuss research relevant for their essay. There will be an unmarked formative assessment in these weeks in the form of a student presentation (see Assessment below).

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- have a sound and scholarly understanding of key topics in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy
- be able to understand and apply key concepts and ideas as they appear in the texts studied
- be able to discuss important themes from Merleau-Ponty's philosophy in seminar discussions, presentations, and written work

Indicative reading list

The Merleau-Ponty Reader, ed. Lawlor/Toadvine, Northwestern University Press 2007.
Phenomenology of Perception, Routledge 2012.

The relevant chapter in Gutting's *French Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge University Press 2012) offers a brief historical introduction to Merleau-Ponty. Emmanuel Alloa's *Resistance of the Sensible World* (Fordham University Press 2017) is a very good book-length introduction. The *Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty* (ed. Carman/Hansen 2004) holds a number of good essays.

Interdisciplinary

The work of Merleau-Ponty has been of particular interest in neighboring disciplines in the Social Sciences and Humanities, including Sociology, English and Comparative Literature, Media Studies, and Art History.

Subject specific skills

Close textual reading skills. Advanced reasoning skills. Fluency in essay writing.

Transferable skills

Strong presentation skills, verbally and in writing. Skills in logical and analytical reasoning. Skills in creative thinking and critical evaluation of ideas and arguments.

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Lectures	9 sessions of 1 hour (3%)
Seminars	9 sessions of 1 hour (3%)
Private study	282 hours (94%)
Total	300 hours

Private study description

Private study, reading, seminar and essay preparation.

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You must pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Assessment group A

	Weighting	Study time
5000 word essay	100%	

Feedback on assessment

Marked assessment for this module will be in the form of a 5.000 word essay. Feedback on essays will be provided on the coversheet for the essay or via Tabula, addressing standard areas of evaluation and individual content.

As a formative exercise, students will give a brief individual presentation or contribute to a group presentation in week 9 or 10. The presentation will introduce research literature, in particular case studies applying Merleau-Ponty's philosophy to contemporary social issues, in the analysis of art, or with regard to problems in contemporary philosophy. This formative assessment includes some independent research and preparation. It is not marked but individual feedback will be provided, addressing standard areas of evaluation (selection and organization of the material, quality of critical discussion, time management, etc.).

Availability

Courses

This module is Core option list A for:

- TPHA-V7P2 Postgraduate Taught Continental Philosophy
 - Year 1 of V7P2 Continental Philosophy
 - Year 2 of V7P2 Continental Philosophy

This module is Option list A for:

- TPHA-V7PN Postgraduate Taught Philosophy and the Arts
 - Year 1 of V7PN Philosophy and the Arts
 - Year 2 of V7PN Philosophy and the Arts

This module is Option list D for:

- Year 2 of TPHA-V7PM Postgraduate Taught Philosophy

This module is Option list E for:

- Year 1 of TPHA-V7PM Postgraduate Taught Philosophy