

The Sound of Silence: Merleau-Ponty on Conscious Thought

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1. Introduction

The nature of thinking and its relation to language is a perennial topic for philosophy. We take ourselves to have an inner life of thought, and we take ourselves to be capable of linguistically expressing our thoughts to others. But what is the nature of this 'inner life' of thought? Do we always think in language, or can we think non-linguistically? If we can think non-linguistically, is this a form of *conscious* thought? More precisely, if we sometimes think *consciously* prior to or independently of any perceptible, linguistic expression, what kind of conscious experience is this?

This paper takes up these questions by examining Merleau-Ponty's theory of expression in *Phenomenology of Perception (PoP)*,¹ along with some reference to his later work. For Merleau-Ponty, language *expresses* thought. This suggests that thought must be, in some sense, prior to the speech that expresses it. He also claims, however, that thinking *just is* linguistic expression, and thus that language *constitutes* thought. The primary aim of this paper is to make sense of this constitutive claim while maintaining that, for Merleau-Ponty, there is an inner life of thought that is not identical to its linguistic expression; thought and expression are tightly related, but there is a form of experience that lies prior to or beneath expression that we may rightly understand as 'thought-experience'. The upshot of this account is twofold. First, it explains why the mainstream view of Merleau-Ponty's theory of expression seems plausible, but is ultimately inadequate. Second, it functions as a corrective to contemporary debates about the nature and scope of phenomenal consciousness and the sense in which conscious experience has content.

The first section of the paper gives a more precise articulation of the problem and the mainstream view of Merleau-Ponty's theory of expression. Several leading interpreters of Merleau-Ponty's work argue that he subscribes to what I will refer to as the 'inner speech theory' (IST). The inner speech theorist is not committed to the position that *all* conscious thought requires inner speech. IST allows that conscious thought occurs when we express our thoughts aloud. But the question at hand is whether conscious thought is possible in the absence of outward verbal expression. It seems that we often think thoughts without expressing them aloud. According to IST, this 'inner life' of thought, or 'thought-experience' still requires a 'sensory vehicle'—namely inner speech—in order to count as *conscious* thought. Though IST seems like a plausible reading of Merleau-Ponty based on select

passages from *PoP*, this ultimately misconstrues his view. The confusion arises when interpreters conflate IST with the claim that expression ‘constitutes’ or ‘performs’ thought. As I will argue, Merleau-Ponty is committed to the thesis that thought (in a specific sense) *needs* expression. Call this view ‘TNE’. But while it would seem that TNE naturally commits one to IST, TNE does not entail IST. Merleau-Ponty is committed to TNE, but this does not make him an inner speech theorist.

The second and third sections lay out the positive proposal, which can be summarized with the slogans ‘Thought-experience *motivates* linguistic expression’ and ‘Linguistic expression *articulates* thought-experience’. The first slogan explicates the sense in which language *expresses* thought. We must understand Merleau-Ponty’s (Husserlian) concept of motivation in order to understand the expression relation. The second slogan explicates the sense in which language *constitutes* thought. Articulation is the generic form of action that constitutes unities of sense across all forms of experience. Linguistic articulation can be understood by examining Merleau-Ponty’s more familiar examples of perceptual articulation, namely depth perception. The fourth section spells out the implications of the proposal for both Merleau-Ponty scholarship and the notion of phenomenal consciousness operative in contemporary philosophy of mind.

2. The Inner Speech Theory and the Silence Beneath

In contemporary philosophy of mind, the terms ‘phenomenal character’ and ‘phenomenology’ are used to refer to the qualitative aspect of consciousness as we experience it from the first-person perspective. If an organism undergoes a conscious experience, then by definition there is ‘something that it is like’ to be that organism at that time (Nagel 1974). Talking about what a conscious experience ‘is like’ may seem inherently vague, but it can be made more clear through paradigmatic examples and by drawing contrasts between different forms of experience. Feeling pain and seeing red are standard paradigms of phenomenal consciousness. There is something that is like to feel a sharp pain in one’s knee, and this is different from what it is like to feel an itch. What it is like to see red is different from what it is like to see blue. A natural taxonomy of phenomenal consciousness starts with the building blocks of sensory experience. What it is like to see red may differ from what it is like to see blue, but both share in being forms of visual phenomenal character. The feel of sand paper differs from the feel of a felt billiards table, but both are forms of tactile phenomenal character.

The question of the *scope* of phenomenal consciousness, therefore, inquires after the expansiveness of this taxonomy. ‘Conservative’ views of phenomenal consciousness hold that this taxonomy is limited to sensory, and perhaps affective, forms of experience. ‘Liberal’ views hold that consciousness is not exhausted by sensory and affective forms of phenomenal character. A full characterization of conscious life includes experiences of thinking and understanding—‘cognitive phenomenology’.² Thus, if one asks ‘what is it like to think that p?’ one gets

markedly different answers from liberals and conservatives. Since conservatives do not admit cognitive phenomenology into their taxonomy of phenomenal consciousness, they hold that the phenomenal character of an occurrent conscious thought is reducible to its sensory (and perhaps affective) phenomenal character.³ Call this view about conscious thought 'reducibility'. Liberals deny reducibility. For the liberal, thought-experience may very well include a variety of sensory phenomenology, but *qua* conscious experience, it is not reducible to those sensory aspects.⁴

An especially strong liberal position not only denies reducibility, but also affirms 'independence'.⁵ Independence is the thesis that when we express our thoughts (either aloud or in inner speech) the phenomenology of the experience breaks down into separable sensory and cognitive components, and that the cognitive component could occur just the same in the absence of the sensory component or in the company of a completely different sensory component.⁶ Notice, however, that denying reducibility does not commit the liberal to independence.⁷ A liberal may very well hold that expression in sensory vehicles is necessary for conscious thought while denying that the overall phenomenal character of such thought-experience is exhausted by the phenomenal character of the sensory vehicle (denying reducibility is compatible with TNE). Thus, in the case of thought-experience that is not outwardly vocalized, given a commitment to TNE, a liberal would seem naturally committed to IST as well. After all, if thought needs expression, and we have thought-experiences that we do not express aloud, then inner speech seems like the best (or perhaps the only) candidate for the job.

Assessing where Merleau-Ponty fits into this landscape of possible positions is valuable for the contemporary debate because it allows us to carve out a unique liberal view that remains committed to TNE while denying IST. Roughly, the idea is that though conscious thought is intimately connected to expression, it is not completely contemporaneous with the experience of its sensory vehicle. But in order to understand the details of how this view is possible, we need to first explore what Merleau-Ponty says about language and thought, and why this has led many to interpret him as an inner speech theorist.

Two recent systematic treatments of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy interpret him as an inner speech theorist. Romdenh-Romluc (2011) reads him this way in order to account for his emphasis on the thoroughly bodily nature of subjectivity. On her reading, in order for embodiment to be constitutive of thought episodes, Merleau-Ponty must conceive 'of thought as dependent on its expression in such a way that to think a thought just is to express it', in other words, 'Expression constitutes or performs thought', and expression is a bodily activity (Romdenh-Romluc 2011: 187). Thus, in the case of private thought episodes that do not involve moving one's body Merleau-Ponty conceives 'of private thinking as silent speech. To engage in such thinking consists in silently saying sentences of public language to oneself' (*ibid.*: 188).

This reading resonates with contemporary conservatives about the scope of phenomenal consciousness like Jesse Prinz:

Sentences do not merely stand in for thought, but actually constitute thoughts. When we produce sentences in silent speech, they issue forth from unconscious representations that correspond to what those sentences mean... (Prinz 2011: 187)

Notice that Prinz still posits an underlying layer of non-conscious mental representations that bear 'content' in some way. Landes (2013), however, reads Merleau-Ponty as denying that whatever lies prior to expression has content in this way. Landes explains that speech 'is surely a response to *something*', but he characterizes this something as a 'vague fever' that if 'left unspoken, is not in any sense a *what* at all' (Landes 2013: 8, 13, 21). Expressive acts feel appropriate not because they express the content of this vague fever, but rather because they establish what he calls a 'metastable equilibrium' that relieves the fever (Landes 2013: 13). Similarly, Romdenh-Romluc describes the 'inchoate feelings' that only take shape as thought as one works them out in writing or through dialogue (Romdenh-Romluc 2011: 192).

What I am calling the 'mainstream view', therefore, extends a longstanding emphasis in Merleau-Ponty scholarship on the non-representational, bodily, affective aspects of human experience.⁸ Linguistic expression is conceived as bodily gesture. Conscious thinking *just is* speaking, and if there is anything 'beneath' or 'prior' to linguistic expression it is characterized as a purely affective phenomenology without content – a 'vague fever' or 'inchoate feelings'.

This seems like a plausible reading of Merleau-Ponty because he appears to directly endorse it at times:

To Kant's famous question, we can respond that it is indeed an experience of thought, in the sense that we give our thought to ourselves through inner or outer speech. (*PoP*: 183)

For the speaker, then, speech does not translate a ready-made thought; rather, speech accomplishes thought. (*ibid.*: 183)

The orator does not think prior to speaking, nor even while speaking; his speech is his thought. (*ibid.*: 185)

From these passages it seems clear that Merleau-Ponty endorses TNE, and that this endorsement brings a commitment to IST with it. But these passages are not the full story. He arrives at a more complex understanding of the relationship between thought-experience and its linguistic expression as he begins to consider the distinction between language as intersubjectively available cultural asset and speaking as generative act.

In his discussions of language and expression, it is clear that Merleau-Ponty rejects independence, or what he refers to as the 'spectre of pure language': the idea that 'The person speaking is coding his thought', replacing an underlying and pre-established thought 'with a visible or sonorous pattern which is nothing but

sounds in the air or ink spots on the paper' (Merleau-Ponty *PoW*: 7).⁹ The passages above, however, only focus on one specific way Merleau-Ponty understands 'thought'. Thought, in this specific sense, is an intersubjectively available cultural resource. In these passages, speech is not the means by which fully formed private thoughts are made public; rather, thought already is public because it is constituted through speech—and more specifically, through communicative action. Here, speech is a kind of bodily gesture through which we mobilize our 'cultural assets' (i.e., the words and expressions of our language) (*PoP*: 189). The words and expressions of our native languages are available to us as tools, as 'equipment' that 'constitute a certain field of action' (*ibid.*: 186). I reach for certain words to express myself just as 'my hand reaches for the place on my body being stung' (*PoP*: 186). If the words and expressions of language are available to us as cultural acquisitions, however, this leaves an obvious problem: 'How are these available significations themselves constituted?' (*ibid.*: 192).

At this point we begin to see hints of a more complicated picture of thought, language, and expression in *PoP*. Though he does not present it in a straightforward or systematic way, Merleau-Ponty seems to argue for a distinction between the activity of drawing on intersubjectively accessible cultural assets, and the activity which brings such assets into existence. He states this in terms of the classic distinction between 'languages' [*languages*] and 'speech' [*parole*]:

[I]t might be said that *languages*, that is, constituted systems of vocabulary and syntax, or the various empirically existing "means of expression," are the depository and the sedimentation of acts of *speech*, in which the unformulated sense not only finds the means of expressing itself on the outside, but moreover acquires existence for itself, and is truly created as sense. Or again, the distinction could be made between a *speaking speech* and a *spoken speech*. In the former, the meaningful intention is in a nascent state. (*ibid.*: 202)

On my reading, the 'unformulated sense' that 'acquires existence for itself' in 'speaking speech' (*parole*) should be understood as thought-experience; i.e., the inner life of thought with a palpable cognitive phenomenal character. Though it is 'unformulated' it is still 'sense'. It is still meaningful. Through what Merleau-Ponty calls 'authentic' (*PoP*: 200) or 'originary' (*ibid.*: 409) speech (i.e. 'speaking speech' – *parole*), this unformulated sense is brought into intersubjective life. Through this activity we have a nascent meaningful intention governing the activity whereby thought 'knows itself by donning already available significations' (*ibid.*: 189). It arises and operates at the interface of unformulated sense and constituted systems of vocabulary and syntax. The idea here is that *which* specific words one chooses to articulate an unformulated sense cannot be utterly arbitrary. The unformulated sense *tends toward* certain already available cultural significations because it already *is* sense, albeit *unformulated* sense.

One could object to this reading since Merleau-Ponty does say that this 'unformulated sense' is only 'truly created as sense' through speech. This objection is important, and related to the broader idea that even if there is some sort of

phenomenally conscious 'inner life' prior to linguistic expression, it does not deserve to be called 'thought'. In the subsequent sections of this paper I will argue for my reading in more detail and confront this objection, but before doing so I want to further motivate why I think so many have opted for the mainstream view.

A problem for my proposal is that when Merleau-Ponty does gesture at something like thought-experience he often does so in purely negative terms. If there is a 'pure' thought at all then it 'is reduced to a certain emptiness of consciousness and to an instantaneous desire' (*ibid.*: 189). Furthermore, it is 'not an explicit thought, but rather a certain lack' that initiates a person's speech (*ibid.*: 189). And yet, Merleau-Ponty goes on to characterize this 'emptiness' or 'lack' as something of supreme importance:

Our view of man will remain superficial so long as we do not return to this origin, so long as we do not rediscover the primordial silence beneath the noise of words, and so long as we do not describe the gesture that breaks this silence. (*PoP*: 190)

But what kind of cognitive phenomenology are we really pointing at here if it is a 'primordial silence'? Is not the very essence of the phenomenal to *appear* or be *manifest* in some way?

The key to overcoming this exegetical difficulty is to focus on Merleau-Ponty's characterization of expression as a kind of action. Recall that Merleau-Ponty describes the more primordial, originary 'speaking speech' as a 'meaningful intention' in a 'nascent state' (*ibid.*: 202). The ready-to-hand equipment of conventional expressions, whose use I learn 'just as I learn the use of a tool' (*ibid.*: 425), are the means by which the meaningful intention 'knows itself' (*ibid.*: 189). This activity is governed by 'an unknown law' according to which pre-established words and expressions intertwine (*ibid.*: 189). Speech is thus a 'paradoxical operation' through which 'we attempt to catch up with an intention that in principle goes beyond' the words we use 'and modifies them in the final analysis, itself establishing the sense of the words by which it expresses itself' (*ibid.*: 408–9). Thus, the 'primordial silence' beneath speech should not be understood as a phenomenological vacuum. Rather, it should be understood as a domain of experience that depends on the culturally determined intersubjective acquisitions we call language in order to be *known* or *shared*, not in order *to be*. Linguistic expression does not bring the meaning intention to life *ex nihilo*; rather, we use language to bring the meaning intention into intersubjective life. This 'open and indefinite power of signifying' is an 'ultimate fact' (*ibid.*: 200, cf. 409).

We should not confuse the claim that speech is a special (intersubjective, shareable) form of *manifestation* for conscious thought, and thus an important means of *access* to what we are thinking, with the claim that speech *ontologically constitutes* conscious thought. Speech may be said to play a constitutive role in thought – but only thoughts understood as discreet meaningful contents in the domain of intersubjective meaning. Thus, in *this* sense of 'thought', thought is only *achieved* through expression. Furthermore, the claim that Merleau-Ponty's theory of expression makes essential reference to a notion of cognitive phenomenology is not

anachronistic so long as we do not import contemporary dogmas. These dogmas construe cognitive phenomenology in terms of propositional attitudes with determinate contents that are more or less transparent to introspection. Understanding Merleau-Ponty's conception of thought-experience, on the other hand, requires a more holistic understanding of his overall view of subjectivity – a view that, I will argue, is critical of some of these dogmas. Unpacking the phenomenology and ontology of this view will allow us to heed his imperative to

consider speech before it has been pronounced, against the ground of the silence which precedes it, which never ceases to accompany it, and without which it would say nothing. Moreover, we should be sensitive to the thread of silence from which the tissue of speech is woven. (*PoW*, 46)

3. Ontology and Phenomenology: Operative Intentionality and Motivation

In order to understand the nature of cognitive phenomenology within Merleau-Ponty's system, we must look beyond the chapter of *PoP* that specifically addresses speech and expression. At the outset of the project, Merleau-Ponty explains what he takes to be a seminal insight from Husserl, who

distinguishes between act intentionality – which is the intentionality of our judgments and of our voluntary decisions [...] – and operative intentionality (*fungierende Intentionalität*), the intentionality that establishes the natural and pre-predicative unity of the world and of our life [...] that provides the text that our various forms of knowledge attempt to translate into precise language. (*PoP*: lxxxii)

My proposal hinges on taking this distinction between operative and act intentionality (also referred to as 'thetic' intentionality) seriously, which requires that we recognize that it holds across all forms of experience, including both perception and thought. Merleau-Ponty's Husserlian heritage is largely due to the importance of operative intentionality that Husserl gestured at in various places in his corpus. The concept is fundamentally connected to Husserl's analyses of time-consciousness and passive synthesis, through which he began to see that talk of temporally isolated 'states' or 'acts' of consciousness analyzed in terms of stable, discreet representational content is useful, albeit an abstraction that is a level removed from the concrete stream or flux of consciousness in which unities of sense become demarcated through the activity of the subject. Husserl's 'discovery' of the intentionality characterizing this pre-given level of sense led to the concept of operative intentionality. This concept, characterized as 'functioning' [*fungierende*] or 'living' [*lebendig*] intentionality, is only hinted at in his later writings (Husserl 1969: 235).

Taking operative intentionality seriously requires putting talk of experiential 'acts' and 'states' in proper perspective. Operative intentionality is the form of directedness that operates at a deeper level of subjectivity. At this level it is inappropriate to speak of discreet units of experience since this betrays the ontological

structure of consciousness. Consciousness is a durational flow, or as Husserl characterizes it, 'an incessant process of becoming' (Husserl 2001a: 270). Though the basic structure of consciousness is essentially processive, this does not mean that individuating it in terms of 'states' or 'acts' is inherently arbitrary. For example, Husserl draws a distinction between judging as a temporally unfolding process, what is judged as a temporal unity of sense (a judgment, or thought) that obtains in virtue of the process, and what is meant, namely the proposition to which this unity refers. 'The formation produced here is obviously not the process of formation' (Husserl 1991: 134). 'The formation produced' is the judgment that obtains within the durational flow of consciousness. It can be understood as an *achievement* that obtains in virtue 'the process of formation'. In other words, we can individuate the inherently processive stream of consciousness in terms of 'states' or 'acts' in a non-arbitrary way so long as these states can be said to obtain in virtue of what is going on at the level of the underlying processive level. 'States' or 'acts' of consciousness are achievements.¹⁰

Achievements can be understood as consisting of product and process (Bradford 2015: 11). Furthermore, the product must be brought about by the process. In the case of some achievements, such as building a house or painting a painting, the product is distinct from the process. In the case of other achievements, such as a dance performance, the process and product are the same (Bradford 2015: 11). That is, when one 'dances a dance' the finished product (the completed dance) does not persist independently of the process which brings it about (the dancing). Thus, when Husserl draws the distinction between the process of forming a judgment and the judgment that is formed, I think it is best to understand this analogously to a dance performance. The product is only achieved when the performance is completed, but the product in this case at all times depends on the ongoing process of performing the dance. Of course, the product formed in judgment can be said to persist beyond the process of forming the judgment (in the sense of becoming an acquired *belief* that can be characterized as a set of dispositions to behave, think, and talk in certain ways). But *qua* occurrent mental state, it does not exist independently of some ongoing activity of consciousness.

Furthermore, in the case where the process does not culminate in the product, we would be remiss to characterize the process independently of the product towards which it was aiming. That is, a dancer may initiate a specific move or sequence of moves, but fail to execute the full move or complete sequence. In this case we can say that the dance was not danced, or that no pirouette was performed. But we can still say that the dancer danced. The dancer was doing *something*, was moving in *some particular way* that *aimed* at something. Failing to complete the movement does not entail that no dancing was done, or at least some dance-like movement. Whatever we want to call the movement they completed, we have to acknowledge that it was not *random*, and that it *would have been* something had it continued in the direction it began. Likewise, the process of forming a judgment may be interrupted, in which case we would say that the subject, for example, did not judge that *p*. But the subject did *something*, for *some* process was interrupted. In the case of both the dance and the judgment, some form of initial

activity contributes to the product at which that activity aims only in the case where the activity is developed in the right way.

I am proposing that we understand Merleau-Ponty's (Husserlian) distinction between operative and act intentionality analogously to the process-product structure of achievements. Operative intentionality is the directedness of experience as it processively unfolds. Intentional acts or states obtain in virtue of certain phases or changes of activity at the operative level. With this ontology of mental states and processes in place, we can begin to properly characterize the phenomenal character that constitutes its 'present and living reality' – the phenomenal flesh on the structural bones (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 25). Merleau-Ponty's primary means of doing this, again, relies on his Husserlian heritage as he further develops the concept of motivation. Motivation is 'one of those "fluid" concepts that must be formulated if we want to return to phenomena' (*PoP*: 51).

Husserl introduced the concept of motivation in his *Logical Investigations* as a way of describing the phenomenal character of 'felt belonging' that characterizes our subjective experience of indication relations. If A indicates B to a thinker, not only does B succeed A, but A points to B and the thinker feels the connection between the two (Husserl 2001b: 187). For Husserl, this phenomenal character of felt belonging is manifest in perceptual experience – you see smoke as 'meaning' fire over yonder – as well as cognitive experience – when entertaining the premises of a proof you feel inclined toward a certain conclusion. Husserl developed this concept throughout his career. In *Ideas I* he explicates his concept of horizon in terms of motivation. An essential feature of intentional experience is that it implicates a horizon of 'motivated' possibilities, predelineated by the subject's background knowledge, context, and immanent concerns (Husserl 2014: §47, §140). *Ideas II* includes an extensive treatment of motivation, which he calls 'the fundamental law of the spiritual world' (Husserl 1989: 223). It is pervasive throughout perceptual experience:

If we examine the structure of the consciousness that constitutes a thing, then we see that all of nature, with space, time, causality, etc., is completely dissolved into a web of immanent motivations. (*ibid.*: 238)

That is, my perceptual sense of spatiotemporal objects essentially includes a felt motivational character pointing toward further possible profiles not occurrently manifest. Husserl even goes so far as to say that the unity of time-consciousness, the deepest form of unity operating in conscious life, is a unity of motivation (*ibid.*: 239).

In many ways, one can trace the development of Husserl's concept of motivation as the development of his theory of the intentionality of consciousness. Whereas in his earlier work we get a sense of motivation as the 'phenomenal glue' that creates a felt connection between discreet mental states, by the middle and later periods we see motivation as more of an affective orienting force operating at the most basic level of consciousness.¹¹ Objects (in the broadest sense) become constituted in the ongoing flow of experience as the subject is continuously solicited to take various positions, to actively involve itself, in what originally

presents itself through a felt passive affection. As Steinbock describes Husserl's mature analyses in his lectures on active and passive synthesis:

What is central to these new concrete investigations is the phenomenon of affection or affective force. By affection, Husserl does not mean a causal stimulus, a contextless power, or a third person force; rather, Husserl understands the exercise of an affective allure [*Reiz*] on us, an enticement to be on the part of the "object," a motivational (not causal) solicitation or pull to attentiveness, eventually to respond egoically and epistemically, though the response does not have to be egoic. (Steinbock 2004: 24)

This understanding of motivation as the phenomenal character of the affective force that orients the flow of experience may seem to corroborate the mainstream view described in the previous section. Prior to linguistic expression all we experience is a 'vague fever' of 'inchoate feelings'. These feelings 'motivate' expressions, but we do not have 'thoughts' with 'content' prior to the act of expression. There is a grain of truth to this, and this is what TNE captures. But accepting that thought needs expression does not commit one to the idea that whatever it is that expression expresses completely lacks the sort of content that emerges in the subsequent thought that is expressed. On my understanding of Merleau-Ponty, expressions arise in virtue of felt motives, and this passage from motivating to motivated is a passage from something indeterminate to something determinate. The error in the mainstream view, however, is to construe the layer prior to expression – the motivating – as a 'vague fever' or 'inchoate feelings' devoid of content. As we will see by attending to how Merleau-Ponty takes up his Husserlian inheritance, motivation always operates at the level of sense. The 'fleeting life within ourselves' is indeed an inner life of thought (*PoP*: 409).

For Merleau-Ponty, meaningful objects (in the broadest sense of 'objects') become constituted in the processive flux of experience insofar as something that pre-exists the sense-constituting activity of the subject motivates the subject's attentive regard. This is *not* to say, however, that what pre-exists this activity is utterly senseless. The sense-constituting activity of the subject takes up an indeterminate field that tends in certain directions, that makes a kind of proto-sense. When we attend to something our attention

is the active constitution of a new object that develops and thematizes what was until then only offered as an indeterminate horizon [...] the still ambiguous sense that it offers to attention as needing-to-be-determined, such that the object is the 'motive' of and not the cause of this event. (*PoP*: 33)

In the case of motivation, all that matters are the 'experienced properties' of the object that solicits subjective activity, not the objective properties of the object considered as a mind-independent feature of the natural world (Husserl 1989: 228). The subject experiences something – there is an '*undergoing of something*' – and in this sense is '*passively determined*' (*ibid.*: 229). This is an affective form of experience, but not a 'raw feeling' lacking sense. Rather, 'the motive is an antecedent that only acts through its sense' (*ibid.*: 270). But motives are not 'causal triggers' either:

One phenomenon triggers another, not through some objective causality, such as the linking together the events of nature, but rather through the sense it offers—there is a sort of operative reason, or a *raison d'être* that orients the flow of phenomena without being explicitly posited in any of them. (*PoP*: 51)

Here we see Merleau-Ponty's refusal to construe the affective phenomenal character of motivation ('orienting force') independently of sense or content ('a sort of operative reason'). He illustrates this point through perceptual examples, and these are what commentators typically focus on when explicating the idea of motivation.¹²

O'Conaill (2013) offers the most extensive treatment of motivation in Merleau-Ponty. Though he focuses exclusively on how motivation functions in action as physical movement of one's body, the account is helpful for our purposes because it emphasizes another essential feature of motivation: normativity. When one is motivated to act one has a sense of what the situation calls for. A variety of different specific actions could all satisfy this general sense of what is called for. For example, if one wants to get a better look at the bottle on the table, there are a variety of ways one could move her body to accomplish this. 'A key point here is that the course of action the agent is motivated to take up is presented normatively [...] the relation holds between a demand which one feels, and an action's being felt to satisfy this demand' (O'Conaill 2013: 584). Furthermore, the affective phenomenal character constitutive of one's lived experience of this normativity is contentful precisely because *it* is what prescribes satisfaction conditions: the demand is 'relieved' only when certain conditions are met. O'Connell calls the content of such states 'motivational content', which is both normative and affective. 'This content is not a matter of affect alone, nor of the one state having both affective and perceptual content, but of the affective content drawing the agent to respond in a certain way to what is perceived' (*ibid.*: 587).¹³ Understood in this way, we can begin to see how *PoP* is a theory of motivational content.

The 'phenomenal field' – which Merleau-Ponty introduces as a new way of characterizing the subject's experience of the world – is the domain of motivational content. It is not governed by logical entailment or causal mechanism. Rather, it is a field of motives that solicit the subject to take up an indeterminate milieu and bring it to a more determinate level of sense. Perception makes sense of the phenomenal field by taking it up through bodily movement. The normativity of motivation functions in this basic form of activity by inclining the subject toward certain positions that give her a 'maximal grip' on the world (Dreyfus 2002). Of course, it seems to us that the objects we visually perceive, are already 'there' independently of any activity on our part. And this is true for Merleau-Ponty. At the level of operative intentionality, the phenomenal field presents us with the to-be-determined objects that become determined through, e.g., a certain focusing or positioning of the eyes, head, and torso. These forms of movement become so thoroughly engrained in us that we cease to notice them in the course of normal perceptual encounters with the world. But, as Husserl pointed out and Merleau-Ponty concurs, 'hidden'

motivations that are 'indeed actually present in consciousness, but [do] not stand out' and 'are to be found in habit, in the events of the stream of consciousness' (Husserl 1989: 234–35). Accordingly, Merleau-Ponty's seminal discussion of embodiment in *PoP* is a theory of the body as a nexus of habits – as the *habitus* that orients our encounter with the world. The body is oriented by the complex array of motives that affect it as it navigates the phenomenal field. Though we typically dwell in the unities of sense that become constituted through perceptual habit, we are still able to discern the motives that operate at the pre-given level prior to these unities.

Merleau-Ponty's analysis of depth perception is the most frequently cited example of how motivation functions in perceptual experience, and in the next section I will explain it. My aim differs from most Merleau-Ponty scholarship, however, in that I will present this as an example of a more general form of action that I call *articulation*. Perceptual articulation is the basic form of activity through which the subject constitutes a meaningful perceptual world. Once we understand how this works for Merleau-Ponty, we will be in a position to grasp the more general structure of articulation and see how an analogous form of activity – *linguistic articulation* – constitutes a meaningful cognitive world. In both cases, the constitutive activity of the subject does not ontologically constitute the phenomenal field that motivates the activity. Sensory phenomenology motivates perceptual articulation, and unities of perceptual sense are thereby constituted. Cognitive phenomenology, or 'thought-experience', motivates linguistic articulation, and unities of thought are thereby constituted.

4. Articulation

'Articulation' denotes the general form of activity whereby a subject constitutes an object – a 'meaningful unity' or 'unity of sense' – in a shared space. Articulation can always be understood as a form of 'movement' within 'space', although moving one's body through physical space is just an instance of a more general structure. Linguistic articulation is also a form of movement within a space, which we will be able to understand more clearly after examining the perceptual case.

Merleau-Ponty's analysis of depth perception is the most well worked out example of how motives function within the phenomenal field. The experience of depth in the visual field is a *motivated* phenomenon, he tells us (*PoP*: 267 ff.), and should not be analyzed in terms of causal stimuli or intellectual judgment. One does not take the apparent size of an object together with knowledge of the degree of convergence of one's retinas and then make a judgment, however quickly, regarding the distance of the object. To do so would require that one already understand the experience of depth that one is supposedly creating through the judgment. In other words, the experience of depth cannot originally come about through a chain of reasoning that presupposes an understanding of its conclusion. But the apparent size of objects in the visual field together with certain retinal positioning cannot be

understood as causes of the experience of depth either. This is true for the same general reasons that form Merleau-Ponty's sustained critique of the constancy hypothesis, i.e. the idea that there is a constant correlation between perceptual stimuli and perceptual phenomenology. But this is not true, as the case of perceived size shows. One can have different visual experiences of distance-in-depth even when the visual stimuli occlude an identical portion of the visual field. For Merleau-Ponty, this shows that 'to have the experience of a structure is not to receive it passively in itself' – for this would preclude the possibility of having markedly different experiences in response to the same perceptual stimuli – rather, 'it is to live it, to take it up, to assume it, and to uncover its immanent sense' (*PoP*: 269).

The experience of perceptual depth is a product of a norm-governed process or activity – what we here refer to as 'perceptual articulation'. Prior to the visual experience of specific objects at various distances is an indeterminate milieu of visual sensory phenomenology. One engages this milieu as one is solicited – through the felt affective character of motivation – to bring discreet objects at specific distances into relief. The alternative to the experience of objects at a distance is diplopia. The eyes focus on an object and thereby bring a moment of unity and stability to the visual field. This is perceptual articulation, the body orienting itself and 'gearing into' the world (*ibid.*: 310). This activity is guided by norms like solidity, equilibrium, unity, stability, and depth (Rojcewicz 1984). The subject does not explicitly 'choose' these goals or the forms of movement that tend toward them, but perception opts for them as favorable ways of engaging the world. Again, this opting is neither explicit choice nor blind mechanistic process. It is 'simply a way of looking' that becomes habituated due to our common perceptual needs (*ibid.*: 42).

Merleau-Ponty explicitly describes this form of movement within space that achieves perceptual sense as 'articulation' in an example of seeing a patch of sunlight in the distance as a stone in garden pathway:

The flat stone only appears, like everything that is far off, in a field whose structure is confused and where the connections are not yet clearly *articulated*. In this sense, the illusion, like the image, is not observable, that is, my body is not geared into it and I cannot spread it out before myself through some *exploratory movements*. (*PoP*: 310, my emphases)

Perceptual articulation reaches a point of stability – i.e., culminates in an achievement – when the perceiving subject gains 'a precise hold on the spectacle' (*PoP*: 311). This 'precise hold', however, is not a 'complete' knowledge of the perceptual object since 'it could only be complete if I had been able to reduce all of the object's interior and exterior horizons to the state of *articulated* perception, which is in principle impossible' (*ibid.*, 311, my emphasis).

Thus, the picture of perception that emerges in these passages aligns with our previous discussion of the ontology and phenomenology of operative intentionality and motivation. The subject does not bring the perceptual object into existence through a constitutive power. Nor does the subject simply find perceptual objects 'out there' to be inspected. Rather, the subject finds itself affected by something

that pre-exists its own activity yet must be brought into relief by that activity. An indeterminate milieu of sensory – in this case visual – phenomenal character is manifest as replete with motivational solicitations. The subject attentively orients itself within this field, following through on certain motivations while passing over others. This orienting activity is governed by a felt normativity, which entails satisfaction conditions of some kind. These conditions are met when the subject feels properly oriented toward the world, gaining a certain hold on it depending on what the situation demands. The exploratory movement of the subject within perceptual space yields ‘products’ in the form of stable entities that can be reliably tracked and re-identified. The processive flux of visual experience can thereby be individuated in terms of perceptual ‘states’ with discrete entities as their objects. Unities of perceptual sense are therefore *achieved* through the constitutive activity of the subject, but this activity does not ontologically constitute the field at which it is directed.

Before turning to linguistic articulation it is important to note that Merleau-Ponty has more general notions of movement and space in mind than physical bodily movement and geometric space. Movement, in this generic sense, is ‘an original intentionality, a manner of being related to that is distinct from knowledge’ (*PoP*: 407). It is ‘a modulation of an already familiar milieu’ (*ibid.*: 288) and is not to be ‘understood as objective movement and shifting of locations in space’ (*ibid.*: 243). This notion of movement as basic intentional activity is a “‘motion that generates space’”, that is distinct from “‘objective movement in space’”, which is the movement of things and our passive body’ (*ibid.*: 406). Throughout his chapter on space in *PoP*, Merleau-Ponty discusses the ‘spaces’ of myth, sexuality, perception, and dreams, and refuses to isolate them as distinct ‘islands of experience’ or as somehow all derived from ‘geometric space’ (*ibid.*: 305). Movement within space just is the basic activity through which subjectivity has a world:

the subject is being-in-the-world and the world remains ‘subjective,’ since its texture and its articulations are sketched out by the subject’s movement of transcendence. (*ibid.*: 454)

We have examined the structure of perceptual articulation in order to elucidate the more general structure of articulation and the concepts of movement and space that function therein. This opens the possibility for a space of thought with its own form of articulation.

Existence is spatial, Merleau-Ponty tells us, and this means that ‘through an inner necessity, it opens to an “outside”’ (*ibid.*: 307). Importantly, this is what allows us to ‘speak of a mental space and of a “world of significations and objects of thought that are constituted within those significations”’ (*ibid.*: 307). Thus, as we look beyond the standardly cited passages that are used to deny that Merleau-Ponty allows for an inner life of thought, we see a number of indications to the contrary.¹⁴ Later, in *Prose of the World*, when Merleau-Ponty deepens his account of language and expression, we find further evidence that he understood perception and linguistic expression as sharing in the common structure I am describing as articulation:

All this only makes more clear the transcendence of signification in relation to language. Just as the analysis of perception makes clear the transcendence of the thing in relation to the contents and *Abschattungen*. The thing emerges over there, while I think I am grasping it in a given variation of the *hylē* where it is only in adumbration. Similarly, thought arises over there, while I am looking for it in a particular inflection of the verbal chain. (*PoW*: 37)

Consider the commonly discussed example of searching for the right word, the ‘tip of the tongue’ experience. The phenomenology is not one of being *thoughtless*. It is a feeling of having *something* to say. But, again, if we characterize this something as ‘inchoate feelings’ or a ‘vague fever’ we cannot explain the experience of finding the *right* word, or of feeling the need to express oneself in different words that somehow *more accurately* convey what one means.¹⁵

The structure of the experience here has the same structure as perceptual articulation. Both are the constitution of a unity of sense through the movement of a subject in a shared space of meaning. In the perceptual case this shared space of movement has a spatiotemporal sense. It is the space in which others could inhabit different perspectives on an object. The object is something others could also bring into relief and further articulate through their own movement. If one only has a vague sense of what one is looking at, one feels motivated to get a better look, which amount to further movements, inhabiting *other* perspectives, additional perceptual articulation. In the linguistic case we can understand the shared space of meaning as *discursive* space. Movement within this space is linguistic expression. Just as different forms of bodily movement can articulate different aspects of a perceptual object, different forms of linguistic expression can articulate different aspects of a thought. When our expressions seem to fall on deaf ears we feel motivated to make ourselves clearer, to make more linguistic moves that further articulate one’s thought, to use different words that others might prefer.

We also find the same process/product ontology of achievement. Recall that Merleau-Ponty speaks of expression ‘accomplishing’ thought (*PoP*: 183). Previous commentators have taken this together with his talk of expression ‘constituting’ thought to mean that linguistic expression literally brings thought into existence. But as we saw in the perceptual case, Merleau-Ponty does not take the constituting activity of the subject to bring the phenomenal field into existence. The visual field pre-exists the subject and solicits different forms of movement that articulate determinate unities of perceptual sense. The subject finds itself confronted with a visual something-or-other and achieves a perceptual state with a determinate object through activity governed by norms like stability, unity, depth, etc.

Likewise, Merleau-Ponty speaks of linguistic expressions in metaphors that suggest the same structure. Speech ‘sediments’ an ‘intersubjective acquisition’ (*PoP*: 196). The act of expression ‘like a wave gathers itself together and steadies itself in order to once again throw itself beyond itself’ (*ibid.*: 203). And ‘when I want to express myself, I *crystallize* a collection of indefinite motives in an act of consciousness’

(*PoP*: 309, my emphasis). While analyzing the case of Schneider, an aphasic, Merleau-Ponty says we need to stop thinking of speech pathologies through the dualism of 'motricity' and 'intelligence'. It is not that Schneider, who 'hardly speaks unless he is questioned', is deficient in one or the other of these categories. Rather, we need a 'third notion' that integrates these two categories: 'a function, identical at all levels, that would be at work as much in the hidden preparations of speech as in the articulatory phenomena' (*ibid.*: 201–202). It is not the case that Schneider has simply lost the motor ability to articulate certain words. Nor has he become *thoughtless*. Rather, he has lost a certain capacity for articulation as the general form of movement that constitutes thoughts through linguistic expression. The sense of words 'is somehow *congealed*' and 'his experience never *tends toward* speech' (*ibid.*: 202, my emphasis). Merleau-Ponty contrasts this with 'essence of normal language', in which signitive intentions appear 'as boiling appears in a liquid, when, in the thickness of being, empty zones are constituted and move outward' (*ibid.*: 202).

All of these characterizations present images of the expression of a thought as a state that obtains in virtue of an underlying process. Speech 'solidifies', 'gathers together', or 'crystalizes' thought. The boiling metaphor is especially revealing. Boiling is a phase change in water. At no point is there a definitive break in the underlying process that constitutes the state of boiling. Rather, the ongoing molecular motion on which the phase change depends is essentially processive. Different states (temperatures) obtain in virtue of changes in the ongoing processive activity.

Insofar as they share the process/product ontology of achievement, both linguistic and perceptual articulation share the same motivational phenomenology. This fact also explains why we are often tempted to carry out phenomenological descriptions in terms of discreet mental states with determinate contents. The indeterminate milieu of the phenomenal field is the *motivating* while the points of stability that arise through the constitutive activity of the subject are the *motivated*. We typically dwell in the motivated unities of sense and take little notice of the underlying motivating flux of phenomenal character. Our eyes automatically adjust to visual conditions to bring familiar objects into focus. This activity is the *habitus* of the body. But the motives that solicit this act of focusing are nonetheless (a fleeting) part of conscious life. For example, two objects may occlude identical portions of the visual field, though the subject sees one as further away. A different act of retinal focusing could allow the subject to articulate the visual scene such that the two objects appear to be the same size. These different articulatory possibilities are what enable landscape painters to capture depth on a flat surface. Because we are so accustomed, however, to focusing our eyes in the familiar ways that bring everyday landscapes into focus, our phenomenological descriptions are carried out at the level of the constituted unities of sense and not the passage from the indeterminate milieu to perceptual achievement. This does not render motives phenomenologically impalpable, it only relegates them to the fleeting life of non-thetic awareness. Motivation is an 'internal relation' between the motivated and motivating phenomena, such that 'rather than merely succeeding it, the motivated phenomenon makes the motivating one explicit and clarifies it, such that the motivated seems to have preexisted its own motive' (*ibid.*: 51).

In the case of linguistic expression, the indeterminate milieu that solicits articulatory movement is the cognitive phenomenology constitutive of thought-experience – the ‘inner life’ of thought. ‘The verbal gesture, however, intends a mental landscape that is not straightaway given to everyone, and it is precisely its function to communicate this landscape’ (*PoP*: 192). Linguistic articulation brings the inherently indeterminate cognitive phenomenology into the shared space of language, with language here understood as *langue* – cultural acquisitions with intersubjective meaning that can be repeated. But these acquisitions must have a source, and for this reason ‘we must recognize as an ultimate fact this open and indefinite power of signifying – that is, of simultaneously grasping and communicating a sense – by which man transcends himself through his body and his speech toward a new behavior, toward others, or toward his own thought’ (*ibid.*: 200, my emphases). But just as the motivational phenomenology of perceptual articulation is typically marginal or non-thetic, the passage from indeterminate signifying intention to speech is typically automatic, thus tempting us to construe the phenomenology of thinking as the expressive achievements it tends toward. It may *seem* like conscious thought is always carried out in language, just as it *seems* like visual phenomenology presents us with stable perceptual objects. But

this is rather a product of expression and is always an illusion to the extent that the clarity of the acquired rests upon the fundamentally obscure operation by which we have eternalized a moment of fleeting life within ourselves. We are called to uncover beneath thought, which basks in its acquisitions and is merely a stopping point in the indefinite process of expression, a thought that attempts to establish itself and only does so by bending the resources of constituted language to a new usage. This operation must be considered an ultimate fact... (*ibid.*: 409–410)

Thus, on my reading of Merleau-Ponty, thought-experiences motivate certain expressive acts to varying degrees. The motivated phenomena (the expressions) clarify and make explicit that which motivated them (the thought-experiences). That the underlying thought-experiences have a phenomenology does not entail that they have fully determinate content in the way that expressions in public language do. So when someone asks me what I am thinking, my linguistic response is motivated by what I am actually thinking. But this does not mean that what I was actually thinking was phenomenologically manifest to me in a linguistic form before I expressed it. By expressing myself I articulate my thought and thus ‘constitute’ it in the same manner that I constitute a field of meaningful perceptual objects through movement.

In both cases the process/product ontology of achievement helps us understand the manner in which different forms of articulation are necessary for certain mental states to obtain. If I try and fail to bring something in my visual field into focus, further articulatory movement is required in order to achieve a perceptual state with a specific content. But this yet-to-be determined thing that I see is not brought into existence by the activity through which I try to see it. My visual phenomenal field is not *completely indeterminate*, and certainly not *empty*. Even if the process of

perceptual articulation fails to achieve a sufficiently determinate product in this case, it is certainly a process *tending* toward something, *striving* to achieve a sufficient degree of stability and unity. The directionality of this tending toward is what the phenomenology of motivation is meant to elucidate. The visual phenomenal field is a field of motives that we experience as soliciting specific forms of articulatory movement. This motivating form of experience is necessary but insufficient for the obtaining of full blown perceptual states with determinate contents.

Likewise, in the case of thought-experience we can allow that 'no thought was thought' in the absence of its linguistic articulation or in the case of its being only partially articulated. So thought *needs* expression (TNE) just as perception needs the forms of bodily movement that bring stable perceptual objects into relief. But this should not lead us to conclude that *no thinking occurred* or that there is *no such thing as thought-experience* in the absence of expression. If thoughts are achievements that require the determinate content characteristic of intersubjectively available linguistic expressions, then the underlying thought-experiences that motivate these expressions are necessary but insufficient for thought *in this sense*. But just as we can recognize the subtle motives in the visual field that solicit the activity that achieves fully determinate perceptual states, we can recognize the underlying thought-experience that solicits, or 'calls for' a specific form of expression. This recognition can arise through reflection on tip-of-the-tongue experiences, as discussed above, or when we circle back to repeat ourselves in different words and we feel as though we have *better* or *more clearly* articulated what we *meant*.

These forms of experience would not be possible if we did not have a silent, pre-articulate grasp of what we mean to say prior to saying it. This grasp is *felt* or *experienced* as the motivational force that solicits a more or less specific form of articulation. A mere 'vague fever' or 'inchoate feeling' is insufficiently specific to function in the manner of the motivational phenomenology of thought-experience. This form of phenomenal character is rightly understood as an aspect of *thought-experience* because a characterization of what it is like will vary depending on the thought whose achievement is motivated. Discerning motives as the specific motives that they are (underlying thought-experiences), therefore, requires a grasp of that which they tend toward (their expression). This does not mean that the underlying thought-experiences lack motivational force in the absence of their articulation, although it may mean that we lack the power to specify all of our thought-experiences.

Thus we can see how it is possible to hold TNE while rejecting IST: conscious thought needs expression to know itself and achieve a certain degree of determinacy, but thought-experience, *qua* conscious episode, is not strictly contemporaneous with the sensory vehicle of its expression. In both the perceptual and cognitive cases, the motives that solicit articulation (the visual-phenomenal field; thought-experience) do not always seem to be experienced prior to the motivated phenomena (perceptual states with determinate content; linguistically expressed thoughts) that articulatory movement achieves. But as Merleau-Ponty pointed out, the motivated only *seems* to preexist its own motive due to the force of habit. Just as our eyes automatically adjust to bring things into focus, our words automatically issue forth

in the course of expressing the mostly mundane thoughts we entertain. It is the more difficult cases of perception and thought that help us see the temporal priority of motives. Struggling to get a good look at something is to feel the motivational force of a certain visual something-or-other that solicits various moves to bring it into view. Trying to find the right words to articulate a complex or atypical thought-experience is to feel the motivational force of a certain cognitive something-or-other that solicits various expressions that feel more or less appropriate.

5. Objections and Dogmas

This account of cognitive phenomenology in Merleau-Ponty has broader implications for both how we should understand his work and for contemporary debates about consciousness. First, it requires a reexamination of Merleau-Ponty's concept of the body and his emphasis on the thoroughly embodied nature of consciousness. Second, it functions as a corrective to contemporary debates about cognitive phenomenology and that manner in which conscious experience has content.

One might object that my reading of Merleau-Ponty on conscious thought does not preserve the *bodily* nature of consciousness and intentionality that is so central to *PoP*. Indeed, this seems to be the reason Romdenh-Romluc (2011) argues for an inner speech view of Merleau-Ponty on conscious thought. But as my explications of his concepts of space and movement above portend, my response is that Merleau-Ponty's concept of the body is a general explanatory notion in his theory of subjectivity. Our physical bodies are only instances of his more general notion of body, which is an *organizational principle* that governs the activity that constitutes unities of sense in the phenomenal field. Merleau-Ponty speaks of the body as the form of unity of the senses (*PoP*: 242–44) as well as a form of interpersonal unity in social encounters (*ibid.*: 368, 370). This more general concept of the body denotes the pre-organized system of motivational correlations that are operative in the constitution of meaningful unities of sense. In the case of perceptual articulation, there are motivational counterfactual dependencies that constitute the systematic variation in the phenomenal field; e.g., the systematic variation between kinesthetic, proprioceptive, and visual stimuli. So for subjectivity to be 'embodied' or for a form of experience to be 'bodily' all that is required is an in principle point of opacity within reflection – i.e. a *determined nature* that in principle cannot be discerned since it simply is the discerning capacity itself, the conditions of discernment, the operation of discernment according to basic laws, to a basic structure.

My understanding of Merleau-Ponty's concept of the body agrees with other readings outside of the inner speech view. Several scholars have noted that questions about language and expression take center stage for Merleau-Ponty shortly after *PoP*. We should not see this change of orientation as a turning away from the results of *PoP* toward a more disembodied theory of subjectivity. Rather, understanding how Merleau-Ponty reconciles the fact of an inner life of thought offers an opportunity to 'deepen' the meaning of the body (Barbaras 2004: 50). The general form of the activity of articulation that I have explored above is what unites all

forms of experience in Merleau-Ponty. We are directed toward the world through the body, but this does not mean that all forms of experience involves moving one's physical body in a specific way (Matherne 2014). Rather, as Besmer (2007) argues, 'we must see that phrases such as "linguistic gesture" and "expressive gesture" are meant to indicate that every gesture is "linguistic" all the way down, as it were, not that language is bodily and perceptual all the way up' (105).

This understanding of subjectivity offers a new way to understand contemporary debates about the 'content' of consciousness and the nature of cognitive phenomenology. These debates often permit certain dogmas about the ontology and epistemology of consciousness that Merleau-Ponty would reject; namely, that if the content of a mental state is not transparently available to introspection then that content is not phenomenally conscious. The account advanced above suggests that introspective attention to the content of thought just is a form of articulation that takes up an indeterminate field. So there is certainly a sense in which Merleau-Ponty agrees that conscious thought does not have content independently of its expression, but this is the same sense in which, he would argue, perceptual experience lacks content independently of articulatory movement.

Thus, we should not allow dogmas about how to individuate mental states according to conceptual/propositional structures obscure the phenomenological reality of *how* those thoughts occur in the stream of consciousness. 'The only thing we have refused subjectivity', Merleau-Ponty says, 'is objective thought, or the thetic consciousness of the world and of itself' (*PoP*: 427). But this is not necessarily to deny a proprietary and distinctive cognitive phenomenology. It is only to 'prevent ourselves from presupposing an explicit consciousness that doubles and subtends the confused hold that originary subjectivity has upon itself and upon the world' (*ibid.*: 427). We need not conceive of cognitive phenomenology as necessitating 'immediate, non-inferential, non-interpretive' access to propositional contents (Carruthers 1998: 459–460). Rather, 'I can live more things than I can represent to myself, my being is not reduced to what of myself explicitly appears to me' (*PoP*: 310).

On this Merleau-Ponty anticipates recent accounts that make the same point and help elucidate it in more contemporary idiom. Montague (2016), for example, argues that even if one agrees that the content of a particular conscious thought is constituted by a unique set of cognitive phenomenal properties, this does not entail that two subjects tokening that thought have an identical cognitive phenomenal profile. Two subjects thinking the same conscious thought can have differing cognitive phenomenal lives because of the aspectual shape of the concepts with which they are thinking. 'The idea here is that there is a sense in which, when we think, the concepts we think with are often not fully explicit in the thought itself' (Montague 2016: 177). Bourget (2015) shares this view and argues for it in terms of the differing degrees to which one can be said to 'grasp' a proposition. It may be the case that most of the time we 'do not fully and occurrently grasp the complete and precise contents that we express or may plausibly be attributed' (Bourget 2015: 22). The source of the confusion resides in the dogma that phenomenal consciousness 'has to be somehow self-intimating in a way that registers across the

board in cognition' (Bourget 2015: 23). Once we rid ourselves of this dogma, as Merleau-Ponty invites us to do, we can understand the introspective availability of the content of thought analogously to the perceptual availability of the content of perception. The complete accuracy conditions of a perceptual experience are not transparently manifest ('Does my visual experience present that speckled hen as having 47 spots, or only 46?'), so why should we think that the content of a non-linguistic inner life of conscious thought are perfectly manifest? Much of this confusion, in my view, is born of the predominantly ocular metaphors used to characterize our access to our own minds. If I cannot 'see' fully articulated propositional structures independently of their linguistic manifestation, then they must not be there. But the account of motivational content and articulation that we get in Merleau-Ponty allows for a picture of cognitive phenomenology that is phenomenologically manifest through the felt normativity governing our expressive activity. Cognitive phenomenology might be better understood as that which pushes and pulls us in different expressive directions than as something luminous.

In my own case, it is often immediately and directly obvious to me what I was thinking, and articulating the contents of my thoughts is a relatively straightforward matter. But there are clearly times when I am thinking something, and I am not *exactly* sure what it is I am thinking, though I am certainly not *clueless* about what I am thinking. I could certainly rule out a large swath of possible contents of such thoughts. I know I am not thinking about *those things*. I can articulate a thought to you a certain way, and might want to double back and express it to you a few different ways because they also seem to be plausible ways of getting at the content of my thought.

The motivation relation between what I am thinking and the expression of that thought is often very strong, such that finding the right expression is straightforward. But much of mental life requires careful discernment in order to express accurately. We might think of literature and poetry as dedicated to finding the best articulation of such complex and rich thought episodes. And though the inner speech theorist may argue that I am suffering from an illusion brought on by a swift retrodictive interpretation of what I *must have* been thinking (Carruthers 1998: 471), I would argue that the reverse is actually the case. Philosophers, and those whose waking lives are largely devoted to the careful and precise articulation of thoughts and their interconnections, are the most highly trained adherents of the skillful discernment necessary for expressing what one is thinking in a way that others will understand. It is philosophers and other writers, therefore, who are understandably tempted to insist that conscious thought just is inner speech. Just as a painter might be said to see the landscape differently, the philosopher probably comes to think differently in virtue of her articulatory prowess.¹⁶

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NOTES

¹ All references to Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* are to Landes's (2013) translation.

² See Bayne and Montague (2011) for an overview of the debate and the variety of conservative and liberal positions.

³ See, e.g., Carruthers (1998), Carruthers and Veillet (2011), Prinz (2011).

⁴ See, e.g., Siewert (1998), Pitt (2004), Strawson (2008), Montague (2016).

⁵ My discussion of reducibility and independence in this section follows Chudnoff's (2015: ch. 5).

⁶ Pitt (2011) seems to hold this view

⁷ As Siewert notes: 'It is not as though, when I speak comprehendingly, I can distinguish two different aspects of the phenomenal character of my experience: one that is similar to the way it seems to think wordlessly, and one that is like that of hearing or auralizing, uncomprehendingly, utterances of a kind one understands—so that the phenomenal character of the experience accurately represented as the mere co-occurrence of these two aspects' (1998: 283). See also Siewert (2011: 249–250).

⁸ Hubert Dreyfus has played a key role in this trend, and has recently commented that, as far as he knows, 'Merleau-Ponty had nothing to say' on forms of experience like thought and judgment that seem to be detached from the absorbed coping that characterizes our perceptual engagement with the world (Dreyfus 2007: 67). Likewise, Taylor Carman's *Merleau-Ponty* (2008) and *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty* (Carman and Hansen 2005) do not discuss language, thought, or expression in any substantial way.

⁹ All references to Merleau-Ponty's *Prose of the World* are to O'Neil's (1973) translation.

¹⁰ Cf. Soteriou (2007).

¹¹ This paragraph summarizes more extensive treatments of Husserl's concept of motivation in Walsh (2013) and Walsh (forthcoming).

¹² See, e.g., Rojcewicz (1984) and Wrathall (2005).

¹³ Cf. Siegel (2014) on 'experienced mandates' and Gibson's (1979) notion of 'affordance'.

¹⁴ In addition to the passage already cited in the paragraph, e.g., 'The verbal gesture, however, *intends a mental landscape that is not straightaway given to everyone*, and it is precisely its function to communicate this landscape' (*PoP*: 192, my emphasis).

¹⁵ William James (1890) calls this a 'peculiar' state of consciousness in which we experience a 'gap therein; but no mere gap. It is a gap that is *intensely active*. A sort of wraith of the name is in it, *beckoning* us in a given direction [...] And the gap of one word does not feel like the gap of another, all empty of content as both might seem necessarily to be when described as gaps' (251, my emphases).

¹⁶ I would like to thank Ben Sheredos and an anonymous reviewer for extensive feedback that substantially improved the paper.

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