

# 12

## Phenomenology as Radical Reflection

Dave Ward

### 1. Introduction

‘What is phenomenology?’, asks Merleau-Ponty in the opening sentence of his *Phenomenology of Perception* (Merleau-Ponty 1945/2012 (henceforth *PhP*), lxx). The next sentences list a series of apparently antinomial characterizations of phenomenology: as the study of ‘essences’ versus the study of facts; as a transcendental philosophy versus a philosophy based on our empirical contact with the world; as an ‘exact science’ versus an account of the world as we live and experience it; as an attempt to provide a theoretically unmediated characterization of experience versus an attempt to investigate the ‘genetic’ processes via which experience is ‘constructed’ (*PhP* lxx). Why begin a characterization of phenomenology in this way? Merleau-Ponty’s intention, I will suggest, is neither to show that phenomenology is a hopeless, self-contradictory endeavor, nor to pick between these apparently opposing aspects of phenomenology. Instead, he aims to show that phenomenology, as he pursues it, is defined by the task of understanding our perceptual and cognitive contact with the world in a way that faces up to and attempts to transcend these apparent contradictions. It is *defined* by this task because, as we shall see, phenomenological philosophy as Merleau-Ponty understands it emerges dialectically from tensions within attempts to understand our perceptual and cognitive contact with the world in ways that emphasize only one side of the antinomies above. This chapter traces that dialectic, with a view to illuminating the distinctive Merleau-Pontian methodology for philosophy of perception that results.

As with any good dialectic, the story unfolds by examining a particular way of understanding some domain (here, perceptual experience and its relation to the world), showing that it falls prey to internal tensions or contradictions, then using these tensions to motivate an alternative understanding. For example (in an instance of this dialectic that will be familiar to readers of *PhP*), Merleau-Ponty argues that ‘empiricist’ accounts of perception as a straightforward record of the impacts of the world on our sensory periphery fail, in a way that motivates ‘intellectualist’ accounts that emphasize the perceiver’s active role in structuring their experience of the world. The dialectical twist in the tale is that the contradictions of the first accounts are only *apparently* resolved by the second—intellectualist

accounts succumb to their own internal contradictions, motivating a new kind of account that aims to develop the best bits of empiricist and intellectualist approaches while avoiding their problems. As we will see, an instance of this empiricist/intellectualist dialectic plays out in Merleau-Ponty's methodological reflections in *PhP* and throughout his career. The upshot, I argue here, is that Merleau-Ponty understands phenomenology of perception as committed to engaging in *radical reflection*—a kind of reflection on the structure of perceptual experience that simultaneously 'attempts to understand itself' (*PhP* 251/288) by understanding its own origins and limitations. Seeing what this means in practice involves understanding how Merleau-Ponty is led to this view via the failures of alternative ways of pursuing phenomenological philosophy. The plan for the next sections is thus to outline various ways of conducting phenomenological philosophy, which I shall label 'Humean', 'Kantian', and 'Husserlian' (§2), and show how the explanatory credentials of each are rendered problematic (§3, §4) in ways that 'Merleau-Pontian' phenomenology aims to resolve (§5). As well as affording a clearer vision of the shape of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy and its motivations, the pay-off of the account I present here is the promise of a richly interdisciplinary way of doing philosophy of perception, according to which it is necessarily integrated with many other branches of philosophy and the sciences.

## 2. Humean, Kantian, and Husserlian Phenomenology of Perception

This section works through three competing ways of pursuing phenomenological philosophy of perception. But what does it mean to adopt a 'phenomenological' methodology when attempting to understand perception? To give us something to work with, let's start with the following broad construal:

Phenomenology of perception is the attempt to draw philosophical conclusions about the structure of perception from careful reflection on experience.

Talk of the structure of perception should be interpreted broadly, as encompassing any invariant feature of perceptual experiences—for example, the kinds of content, phenomenal character, temporal structure, or relationship to the world, that are found in perceptual experiences, or some well-defined subset of perceptual experiences.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In what follows, we will see that this definition of phenomenology needs to be deepened and complicated if phenomenology is to be a viable strategy for doing philosophy of perception. But I nonetheless adopt it for now—seeing the problems it engenders will prove useful for understanding the motivations of Husserlian and Merleau-Pontian phenomenology.

On this broad construal, the history of philosophy is filled with phenomenologists. Consider, for example, some views on perception and causation that might be extracted from Hume and Kant. How, if at all, do causal relations between events figure in our perceptual experience? Hume's sceptical views about causation (as well as induction, the self, and more) are grounded in his reflections on the relations between different elements of our experience. Hume distinguishes between *impressions*—sensory experiences, including internal sensations of desiring, willing, and feeling—and *ideas*, experiences resulting from abstracting from, or reflecting on, impressions. This distinction, Hume thinks, is itself *phenomenologically* obvious—'as evident as that betwixt feeling and thinking' (Hume 1740/1978, p.647). He goes on to argue that our perceptual awareness of causal relations between events is an *idea*, rather than an *impression* of causation. In any given instance where we experience a causal connection between events, we can discern only an impression associated with the perceived cause, an impression associated with the perceived effect, and an idea corresponding to the perceived causal relation between the two. For our purposes here, the most important feature of this argument is that Hume can be understood as simply reading off these conclusions from disciplined reflection on the structure of experience. This reflection first reveals the distinction between Hume's two basic ingredients of experience, then shows how these ingredients are structured in experiences of causal relations. Read in this way, Hume is an example of what we might call an *empirical* phenomenologist. Empirical phenomenologists hold that there are empirical facts of the matter about the structure of experience which serve as key premises in philosophical arguments, and that all an aspiring phenomenologist need do to uncover these facts is attend carefully. In what follows, I'll refer to phenomenologists of this kind as 'Humean'.<sup>2</sup>

According to the orthodox reading of Hume, the above view of the structure of causal experience reveals that our irresistible compulsion to experience certain contiguous events in terms of causal relations reflects a mere quirk of human psychology, rather than any insight into the metaphysical structure of events. Famously, Kant claimed that these sceptical conclusions awoke him from the 'dogmatic slumbers' of rationalist metaphysics. Kant agrees with Hume that the structure of our empirical experience cannot ground the claims to legitimacy of our compulsive application of causal concepts to the world. But he nonetheless argues that this application is justified. His strategy is transcendental—here and elsewhere, he proceeds by attempting to specify structures that perceptual experience and judgement must have in order for it to be intelligible that our experience

<sup>2</sup> The arguments and methodologies I label as 'Humean' and 'Kantian' are not intended as high-fidelity reconstructions of the positions of Hume and Kant themselves. This way of labelling positions is partly inspired by Husserl's (1954/1975) own historical origin story for phenomenology, as well as the rhetorical use Merleau-Ponty makes of Hume and Kant.

or thought instantiates a property that it manifestly possesses. We can illustrate this via considering his response to Hume, which aims to show that applying causal concepts to suitably contiguous events is no mere quirk of human psychology, but required as a matter of rational necessity. Perhaps the simplest version of an anti-Humean argument can be extracted from the second ‘Analogy of Experience’ in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. There Kant argues that the very experience of *something happening* in the perceiver’s world presupposes the application of causal concepts:

I render my subjective synthesis of apprehension objective only by reference to a rule in accordance with which the appearances in their succession, that is, as they happen, are determined by the preceding state. The experience of an event [*i.e.* of anything as *happening*] is itself possible only on this assumption.

(Kant 1787/1997, A195/B240)

Why? Kant’s reasoning appears to be as follows. Consider two ways in which you might experientially undergo a successive stream of appearances—first, as a Jamesian ‘blooming, buzzing confusion’ in which it seems that the appearances composing your ongoing experience are arbitrary, chaotic, and unstructured; second, as an experience of a perceptible event unfolding in the perceiver-independent world. Kant’s argument relies on the insight that the first type of experience need not present itself to you as disclosing any *events* that are *external* to your subjectivity—such a sequence of appearances could be experienced merely as a series of arbitrary and unstructured modifications of that subjectivity. To have an experience of an unfolding external event, you must understand the appearances composing your experience as *connected*—you must take there to be some rhyme or reason as to why *this* appearance is succeeded by *that* one. Kant argues that taking one’s subjective appearances to be connected in this way (*i.e.* to experience things in terms of ‘a rule in accordance with which the appearances in their succession . . . are determined by the preceding state’ (Kant 1787/1997)) simply *is* to experience them in terms of their causal connections—that is, in terms of the way in which one appearance necessarily follows from its predecessors. Thus, Kant has argued, having experiences as of external unfolding events presupposes that our experiences are structured by an understanding of how current appearances are determined by past ones; and this simply amounts to understanding the relations between succeeding appearances *causally*.

The argument just sketched counts as a piece of *transcendental phenomenology*. It is a *phenomenological* argument (at least on the broad construal we are currently working with) because it reaches its conclusion by starting from a manifest fact about experience—that we have experiences as of things happening. *Empirical* (or *Humean*) *phenomenology* purports to read off structural properties of experience, such as the way in which causation figures in our perception of the world, from the

experiences themselves. *Transcendental phenomenology*, by contrast, reflects on the conditions of possibility that must be fulfilled in order for experience to manifest itself to us in the way it does, attempting to identify the structural properties of experience that are required for it to possess its manifest properties. Hume argues that *empirical* reflection on perceptual experience reveals that causation is nothing but an idea that we compulsively associate with appropriately-structured impressions; Kant responds by arguing that *transcendental* reflection reveals that our experience couldn't intelligibly possess a property that it manifestly *does* possess (the property of seeming to disclose the occurrence of perceiver-independent events) without its constituent appearances being structured for the subject in terms of their causal interrelations. Thus, contra Hume, our compulsive application of the concept of causality in experience is not a rationally arbitrary psychological habit or custom, but a necessary precondition on the possibility of having a mind that could be in touch with unfolding external events. If the Kantian argument is sound, then, the causal structure of perceptual experience cannot be rationally arbitrary, since it is a prerequisite for the capacity to experience or cognize events at all.

So far I have been using a permissive definition of 'phenomenological' philosophy that allows me to encompass these Humean and Kantian arguments (for some authoritative support for this appropriation, see Husserl: *CES* 87–100; Merleau-Ponty: *PhP* 226–9). Suppose we instead adopted the more restrictive (and more common) construal of phenomenology as picking out a philosophical movement inaugurated by Husserl, running through Heidegger, Sartre, de Beauvoir, Merleau-Ponty and others, and continuing to the present day. Are there any Humeans among the members of that movement? Whilst phenomenologists are sometimes criticized in terms that depict them as simply 'reading off' philosophical conclusions from the inspection of experience (see e.g. Dennett 1991; Metzinger 2003; Bayne 2004), I know of no major phenomenologists who explicitly avow the use of this kind of methodology. The best someone searching for such an avowal can do is, I think, to wrest phrases or passages out of important context—for example, by citing Merleau-Ponty's claim that '[Phenomenology] is the attempt to provide a direct description of our experience such as it is...' (*PhP* lxx). We'll return to the context in which Merleau-Ponty makes this statement below, where we'll see how and why it allows us to understand his distinctive approach to phenomenological methodology.

This lack of bona fide Humean phenomenologists can be traced to the fact that Husserl, in the phenomenological movement's inaugural works, defines phenomenology in transcendental terms, as an attempt to uncover the essential a priori structures governing thought and experience. In his *Logical Investigations*, Husserl defines the subject matter of phenomenology as 'experiences intuitively seizable and generalizable in the pure generality of their essence, not experiences empirically perceived and treated as real facts, as experiences of human or animal

experiences' (LI 86), and goes on to say that each statement of such an essential property of experience is 'an *a priori* statement in the highest sense of the word' (LI 86). In the subsequent *Ideas*, he complains about those who have misinterpreted his phenomenology as a 'sub-domain of empirical psychology' (I 2), and contrasts 'phenomenology' that merely elucidates empirical facts about experience with '*pure or transcendental phenomenology*... which aims exclusively at establishing "knowledge of essences" (*Wesenserkenntnisse*) and *absolutely no "facts"*' (I 3, original emphasis). Husserl makes this contrast between 'essence' and 'fact' here because he sees himself as engaged in a Kantian transcendental project (LI 14) which aims to show how the very intelligibility of there being facts of the kind that Humeans aim to catalogue rests on the essential structural properties that the transcendental Phenomenologist aims to uncover. It is because he thinks that the essences revealed by the Phenomenologist are the transcendental basis of the possibility of empirical facts that he thinks of statements of essence as *a priori* 'in the highest sense of the word' (LI 14). One way in which we can contrast the Humean with the Kantian and Husserlian approaches to phenomenology is by comparing their respective strategies for identifying the essences, or essential properties, of kinds of perceptual experience. Broadly construed, something's essence is that which makes it what it is; its essential properties are those necessary for its being the kind of thing it is. Insofar as we can understand the Humean as attempting to uncover essential properties at all, these are mere empirical regularities—such as the exceptionless regularity that experiences of causation are always occasioned by a concatenation of impressions with a particular structure. For the Kantian, an experience's essential properties are those that are transcendently (rather than merely empirically) necessary—causal structure, for example, is an essential property of experiences that seem to disclose events.

However, Husserl (at least by the time of *Ideas*) recommends a route from an experience's manifest properties to its essential properties that looks slightly different from Kant's. Whilst Kant aimed to identify experience's *a priori* structures via constructing arguments about the conditions under which experience could possess its manifest properties, Husserl's phenomenology aims at *intuiting* essences—that is, gaining direct, self-evident experience of fundamental structural properties of experience—via the activity of *eidetic variation*. In eidetic variation we home in on the *eidōs* (essence) of a type or property of experience through imaginatively varying aspects of the experience, and seeing what must remain invariant if the type or property of experience is to be preserved (I 14, 134–7). Consider a perceptual experience of a dog. What could you imaginatively remove from the way in which the experience presents its object to you whilst preserving its dog-presenting character? Tail-wagging? Fur? Three-dimensionality? Whatever you *couldn't* consistently imagine subtracting from the experience whilst leaving its dog-presenting character intact is part of the *eidōs* of your perceptual experiences of dogs. We might see Kant's transcendental arguments as a sophisticated instance

of this kind of eidetic variation. The Kantian argument sketched above invited us to consider whether an experience as of external unfolding events could survive the subtraction of the experiencer's grasp of the way in which successive appearances were determined by their predecessors. The suggested conclusion was that it couldn't, thereby showing that causal structure is an essential property of experiences of external happenings. Despite this commonality, Husserl and Kant diverge importantly. Whereas the ultimate aim of Husserl's analyses are *intuitions* of experience's essential properties, Kant aimed instead at a *discursive understanding* of those properties. The contrast between these options will become clearer in the next section, when we examine how Husserlian phenomenology is motivated by a dissatisfaction with the Kantian approach.

In addition to Humean phenomenology, which aims to read perception's structural properties off the surface of experience, we now have two kinds of transcendental phenomenology: *Kantian* phenomenology which aims at discursive understanding of the necessary preconditions for manifest features of our experience, and *Husserlian* phenomenology which aims at an intuitive grasp of the essential properties of experience, achieved via eidetic variation. This latter conception of phenomenology, however, is transformed by the end of Husserl's career (though I'll continue to refer to it simply as 'Husserlian' in what follows), and the transformation is inherited and continued by Merleau-Ponty. We can start to understand this transformation and its motivations by considering a pressing question that phenomenologists face—from where do the standards that guide phenomenological reflection derive their authority?

### 3. Problems with Authority

So far, I've said nothing to support my initial claims that there is a dialectical relationship between the Humean, Kantian, and Husserlian approaches sketched above, and that this relationship is important for Merleau-Ponty's methodology. In this section I suggest that we can see how Humean, Kantian, and Husserlian phenomenology stand in a dialectical relationship by considering how each of them attempts to ground the authority of their own phenomenological claims. As we will see, the Husserlian approach is motivated by problems with the sources of authority appealed to by the Humean and Kantian strategies. This will put us in a position to see, in the subsequent sections, how Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is motivated by similar problems for the Husserlian approach.

The Humean, Kantian, and Husserlian as presented above each have a different strategy for characterizing the structural properties of perceptual experience. Which strategy should we prefer? One way of attempting to answer this question is to consider the authority on which the characterizations of each strategy are supposed to rest. Consider first how this issue of authority arises for the Humean.

As we saw above, Hume took his view of the way in which causality figures in our experience to motivate the sceptical conclusion that our experience gives us no insight into the metaphysical structure of reality with respect to causal relations. Once we see that our compulsive association of causal ideas with suitably structured impressions is a rationally arbitrary psychological custom, we have no reason to think that this custom reflects anything but a quirk of our own psychological structure. There were several parts to this Humean argument: an initial claim that the elements of experience can be partitioned into impressions and ideas; the claim that our experiences never involve an impression of causation, only conjunctions of impressions that reliably give rise to the idea of causation; and the concluding claim that this shows that we have no reason to think that our experiences of causation track some experience-independent structural feature of reality. Why should we accept these claims? As I've depicted Humean phenomenology above, it invites us to simply 'read off' the structure of perception from our experiences—and Hume invites his readers to consider their own experiences in support of his split between impressions and ideas, and his claim that experiences of causation consist in ideas occasioned by impressions. So part of the authority of the Humean phenomenology of causation is supposed to derive directly from its match with experience itself. But note that the Humean claims above concern more than just the manifest properties of particular experiences—they include claims about a general distinction between impressions and ideas that is supposed to apply to *all* experiences, about the structure of *all* experiences of causation, and about what this shows about the relationship between experiences of causation and the world. These are conclusions that can't simply be 'read off' from individual experiences, since they aspire to a generality that goes beyond any individual experience we might examine. Instead, Hume arrives at these more general conclusions by *reasoning* and *extrapolating* from the specific experiences he appeals to. The problems for the Humean arise when we ask after the authority of these extrapolations and episodes of reasoning. As Husserl points out,

Hume did not ask the question, or at least did not say a word, about the status of the reason—Hume's—which established this theory as truth, which carried out these analyses of the soul and demonstrated these laws of association. . . . Even if we knew about them, would not that knowledge itself be another datum on the tablet? (CES 88)

That is, the Humean's demonstration of the lack of a rational relation between our ideas and the concatenations of impressions with which they are associated appears to undermine its own authority. If the moves in Hume's argument strike us as compelling or unavoidable, the worry arises that they do so only in virtue of other rationally arbitrary psychological habits. We have no reason to think that



the episodes of reasoning involved in Hume's argument are any more than a series of ideas occasioned by the impressions on which the Humean was reflecting—that is, we have no more reason to think that they disclose a fundamental structural feature of perception than we have to think our experiences of causation disclose a structural feature of reality. By limiting their methodology to reading psychological structure off the surface of experience, Humeans thus appear to deprive their read-outs of any plausible source of authority. When faced with the question of why their descriptions should compel assent, or why they represent an important epistemic gain, the only resources available for an answer will be more rationally arbitrary psychological facts—more 'data on the tablet'. Humeans might invite us to reflect further on our experiences of billiard-ball collisions, or to gather more such experiences; or they might appeal to how rationally compelling the moves in their argument seem. But no particular experience of causation, or of rational compulsion, can mandate the general claims about the structure of perception that Humeans seek to establish. This is not yet to say that the Humean claims should be rejected—only that, in considering how those claims can be supported, we must look beyond the surface properties of experience to which Humeans appeal. Thinking through the credentials of Humean phenomenological claims thus motivates us to consider what sources of authority there might be, other than appeal to the surface properties of experience, for general claims about the structure of perception.

Does the Kantian approach fare better? From where do its phenomenological claims draw their authority? We saw above that the Kantian's transcendental claims are supposed to have a straightforwardly *rational* grounding—Kantians start with uncontroversially manifest features of experience (such as the facts that perceptual experience seems to present us with a mind-independent world, or takes place from a perspective, or can involve experiences as of things happening) and attempt to provide a priori arguments about the necessary conditions for experience's possession of those features. They traffic in a priori claims about which structural properties of perception are necessarily required for it to be intelligible that experience possesses a given manifest property. The focus on rational necessity and a priori entailment means that the Kantian's claims should automatically have the generality and universality that eluded the Humean.

However, the Kantian's appeal to rational authority faces a different challenge: why should the rational authority that is grounded in the cogency of the Kantian's theoretical arguments and reconstructions have any jurisdiction within the domain of *untheorized, lived experience* that is the subject matter of phenomenology? Before we start to philosophize, after all, experience isn't presented to us in Kantian terms of syntheses, apperceptions, and mutually interdependent faculties of cognition. If it were, the *Critique of Pure Reason* would read like a long-winded reminder of facts that were already perfectly familiar to us. Instead, these terms are theoretical constructions via which Kantians attempt to make the structure of

experience intelligible to reflection. There is, of course, nothing intrinsically wrong with this—theorizing a domain inevitably involves imposing some general framework upon it that confers intelligibility in part by abstracting away from fine-grained details and particularities. But we can always ask of a given theory whether it abstracts away from the *right* particularities—whether it ignores or glosses over important facts about the theorized domain that it cannot readily accommodate. In this case, Kantians attempt to understand the structure of perceptual experience by providing transcendental arguments about the structures such experience must have—as a matter of rational necessity—if it is to possess its manifest properties. In response, we may wonder whether this methodology abstracts away from important structural features of experience. Perhaps there is a gap between aspects of the immediate, untheorized experience from which Kantian phenomenology begins, and the theoretical reconstruction of the abstract structures of experience at which it aims. There may be important structural aspects of our experience which are simply unamenable to the Kantian's reflective analysis, in that their contribution to our experience cannot be revealed via a rationally compelling transcendental argument.

The problem I am raising here is not that there demonstrably *are* such aspects of experience which resist the Kantian's rational reconstructions—merely countenancing the possibility that there *might* be poses a serious problem for their methodology. To see why, consider how a Kantian might respond to this possibility. The simple strategy of taking an introspective inventory of one's experience to check for the presence of such rationally unanalysable structural features is unavailable to them, since their methodology is defined by the reflective attempt to abstract away from the surface features of experience to the a priori structures that are their transcendental requirements. Because Kantian phenomenology is motivated by the attempt to provide a more compelling source of authority for phenomenological claims than the Humean appeal to the surface properties of experience, it cannot now fall back on an appeal to its fit with those properties to ground the authority of its transcendental claims. An alternative response on behalf of the Kantian would be to claim that their a priori reflections *must* be accurately revealing the structural properties of experience—for how could it intelligibly be otherwise? Their transcendental arguments, after all, show that perceptual experience could not intelligibly possess some universally agreed-upon manifest property without having these structural features. But in this context, such a response is clearly question-begging—the '*must*' above is the '*must*' of rational necessity. But the possibility we are countenancing is that the Kantian's project of telling us, via armchair rational reconstructions, about the structure that experience (rationally) *must* have might obscure important facts about the structure that it *does* have. Husserl (*CES* 97, 115) and Merleau-Ponty (*PhP* 228/265, *PrP* 18–19) both suggest that Kant fails to break completely from his dogmatic rationalist roots by neglecting to properly consider this question of

the authority of his rational reconstructions over the domain of untheorized experience.

We have been asking about the source of the authority of phenomenological analyses—why should we think that these analyses accurately reflect the reality they aim to capture, or that they represent an epistemic gain? In answering this question, we have seen that Humeans can appeal only to *empirical experience*, Kantians only to *rational intelligibility*. But the scepticism that flows from Humean phenomenology makes the first answer unconvincing, and in the context of Kantian phenomenology the second answer is question-begging—Kantians lack the materials to build a bridge between the character of lived experience and their theoretical descriptions. We can see a dialectical relationship between the Humean and Kantian positions and their respective shortcomings. The problem for the Humean was that appeal to the surface properties of *particular* experiences cannot ground their *general* claims about the structural properties of experience. We can see the Kantian position as a natural reaction to this problem. Because it relies on a priori theorizing about the necessary preconditions of experience, the a priori structures it identifies should be *generally* valid—they should apply to all experiences that we can make intelligible sense of. But we asked above why the fact that these structures *should* apply entitles us to conclude that they *do* apply to the particular experiences we in fact have. Surely the right test for whether they do apply is simply to look and see? But to endorse this test would, it seems, be to fall back on the Humean position from which the Kantian was attempting to escape.

The Husserlian approach described above can be seen as attempting to resolve this dialectic by synthesizing the Humean and Kantian approaches—building on each of them in a way that keeps the good bits and throws away the bad.<sup>3</sup> Husserlians assure us that we can trust their claims about the essential structures of our experience because those essences are *intuited*—grasped directly and self-evidently. Like the Humean, the Husserlian grounds the authority of their analyses in the experience on which they are reflecting—when discovering a Husserlian essence we intuit, rather than discursively understand, a property that our experience really has. But Husserlians can say more than Humeans about why we should take the psychological properties we intuit as revealing important structural truths, since we intuit them as features of experience that are reflectively *necessary*

<sup>3</sup> I'm not arguing here that the development of Husserl's philosophy is explicitly motivated by the failings of Humean and Kantian approaches—only that this way of labelling and understanding the tensions at work in Husserl's early phenomenology (that is, up to and including *Ideas*) helps us understand the Merleau-Pontian methodology outlined in the next sections. But a plausible case could be made that something like the dialectic sketched in this section plays out in the development of Husserl's early thought. It might be argued that the criticisms of the 'psychologistic' project of his *Foundations of Arithmetic* (see Frege and Kluge 1972) parallel the problems for Humean phenomenology sketched above, and motivate the transcendental methodology of his *Logical Investigations* which develops into the Husserlian phenomenology of the *Ideas*.

and *self-evident*. By appealing to an intuitive contact with the necessity and self-evidence of the essential structures of perception, the Husserlian thus attempts to simultaneously ground the authority of their claims in experience and in reflection.

However, it appears that this attempted synthesis of Humean and Kantian phenomenology inherits rather than transcends the problems with each position. For any intuited essence we can ask the Husserlian why we should be impressed either by the authority of its experiential character, or by the way it appears to reflection. Why isn't the fact that I experience a purported essential property as apodictic or self-evident just another 'datum on the tablet' to be set alongside all the other arbitrary empirical properties of my experience? If the Husserlian answers via appeal to the *rational* credentials of the intuition—the way in which the experienced self-evidence makes good reflective sense—then they can be asked the same questions we used to embarrass the Kantian, above. Instead of being stuck in the unsatisfactory positions of either the Humean or the Kantian, the Husserlian is now see-sawing between them—a different predicament, but not obviously a better one.

We are now in a position to see why the later works of Husserl, and the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, come to see phenomenology as defined by the need for 'radical reflection' that involves a critical awareness of its own presuppositions. We can see each of the positions sketched above as attempting to secure general philosophical conclusions about perception via a particular kind of reflection. The Humean attempts to attend carefully to the surface features of particular experiences. The Kantian attempts to provide theoretical reconstructions of the rationally necessary preconditions for uncontroversially manifest features of general classes of experience. And the Husserlian occupies a halfway house between the Humean and Kantian positions, attempting to intuit essential properties of types of experience by grasping them directly and self-evidently. We have just questioned the authority of each kind of reflection, asking why it should count as a reliable source of insight into perception's structural properties. In the next section we will see how these questions motivate the later Husserl and Merleau-Ponty to build a commitment to an ongoing assessment of the genesis and authority of our reflective capacities into phenomenological methodology.

#### 4. From Husserlian Phenomenology to Radical Reflection

Let's revisit some of the antinomial characterizations of phenomenology with which Merleau-Ponty begins his *Phenomenology of Perception*, alluded to at the start of this chapter. Phenomenology is a 'study of essences', but one which 'places essences back within existence and thinks that the only way to understand man and the world is by beginning from their "facticity"' (*PhP* lxx); and it

is a ‘transcendental philosophy’ which nonetheless seeks to rediscover a ‘naïve contact’ with a world which is ‘always “already there” prior to reflection’ (*PhP* lxx). These are the tensions we have just articulated for Husserlian phenomenology, as it see-saws between the unsatisfactory Humean attempt to ground its claims in untheorized (intuitive) experience, and the unsatisfactory Kantian attempt to support those claims via reflective reconstruction of transcendental conditions. As we will see below (§5), there is a lot packed in to Merleau-Ponty’s claim that phenomenology ‘places essences back within existence’ and emphasizes the ‘facticity’ of perceivers and world. But it in part alludes to the tension we have seen between Humean and Kantian approaches—between the Humean impulse to ground their claims in the empirical regularities that characterize particular experiences and the Kantian impulse to ground their claims in the transcendental necessity of the perceptual structures they describe. Likewise, we have just seen that a potentially problematic gap opens up between the Kantian’s ‘transcendental philosophy’ and the ‘naïve’ untheorized experience that exists ‘prior to reflection’—but also that the Humean’s sole emphasis on the surface properties of experience appeared to thwart their aspiration to articulate general structural features of perception. The Husserlian attempts to respond to these problems by amalgamating the Humean and Kantian positions, appealing to a capacity to ‘intuit’ essential properties of perception that is supposed to be simultaneously experiential (grounded in an experience of insight arrived at via eidetic variation) and rational (the insight is experienced as reflectively apodictic). In this section I further develop the problems that Merleau-Ponty, drawing on Husserl’s later work, sees for the Husserlian position, and the way in which these problems motivate a conception of phenomenology as involving ‘radical reflection’.

A good starting point is the final antinomy Merleau-Ponty lists. Phenomenology is, he says:

the attempt to provide a direct description of our experience such as it is, and without any consideration of its psychological genesis or of the causal explanations that the scientist, historian, or sociologist might offer of that experience; and yet in his final works Husserl mentions a ‘genetic phenomenology’ (*PhP* lxx)

Whereas the ‘static’ Husserlian phenomenology we have been considering aims only to grasp the essential structures that our experience has, the ‘genetic Phenomenology’ mooted in Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations* and developed in his *Crisis of European Sciences* and other late writings aims to uncover the genesis of those structures in our bodily, historical, and cultural situation. Because, in my view, this kind of genetic phenomenology receives its fullest articulation in Merleau-Ponty’s work, I’ll refer to it simply as *Merleau-Pontian* phenomenology in what follows. This move from static to genetic phenomenology should be understood, I suggest, as a response to the worries about the credentials of

Humean, Kantian, and Husserlian modes of reflection on experience summarized at the end of the last section. Genetic phenomenology aims to investigate the origins of what seems reflectively evident or apodictic to us, and does so in a way that problematizes the kinds of phenomenological reflection we've considered so far. Considering the ways in which bodily, historical, and cultural factors condition our experience suggests that we can't properly identify experience's essential structures via the armchair reflections of the Kantian or Husserlian. And considering the way those same factors condition our reflective capacities problematizes the idea that those capacities are apt to put us in touch with the kinds of essences that Kantians and Husserlians seek. This appears to send us back into the arms of the Humean. But we have just seen that Humeans cannot motivate conclusions about essential structures of experience that have the generality which phenomenologists seek. This all sounds like bad news for phenomenologists. Indeed, the rest of this section draws on Merleau-Ponty to note the negative consequences that the contingent bodily, linguistic, and cultural origins of our experiences and reflections appear to have for Husserlian phenomenology. But don't despair—the negative consequences surveyed in this section allow us to see, in the next section, the positive shape that a Merleau-Pontian phenomenology of perception must take.

Merleau-Ponty has the most to say about the ways in which bodily and psychological contingencies shape our reflective capacities and intuitions about essential properties of experience. I'll say more about this in the next section, since Merleau-Ponty's views here are particularly helpful for understanding his positive suggestions about how Husserlian phenomenology should be superseded. But the simple idea is familiar from some Humean worries considered earlier. Recall that Hume argued that we lacked reason to think that the apparent ineliminability of some ideas, such as causal connectedness, from certain perceptual experiences reflected any more than a quirk of our psychology. If a Husserlian phenomenologist, engaged in eidetic variation, finds themselves unable to imaginatively subtract causal structure from their experiences of unfolding events then this might reflect only contingent features and limitations of their psychology, rather than any deep insight into transcendently necessary structures of experience. The contingencies of our bodily (including neural and thus, I am supposing, psychological) organization constrain what is reflectively and imaginatively possible for us. Can you imagine, for example, having a perceptual experience without simultaneously experiencing yourself as existing? Probably not—but this is just how some sufferers of Cotard's syndrome sincerely describe their experience (Debruyne et al. 2009). When you engage in phenomenological reflection on whether a sense of one's own existence as a perceiver is a necessary structure of perceptual experience, your best introspective, reflective, and imaginative attempts to answer this question might be mere reflections of the happy neural contingency that you don't have Cotard's syndrome.

As well as worrying the Husserlian with the possibility that the results of their eidetic variation reflect mere contingent psychological quirks, we can worry them with the possibility that their intuitions of reflective apodicticity or self-evidence are results of their contingent linguistic, cultural and historical situation. Merleau-Ponty writes:

It is possible for me to believe that I am seeing an essence when, in fact, it is not an essence at all but merely a concept rooted in language, a prejudice whose apparent coherence reduces merely to the fact that I have become used to it through habit. (*Phenomenology and the Sciences of Man*

(henceforth *PSM*), *PrP* 75)

Abstracting away from the nuances of Merleau-Ponty's account of language, we can read his argument here as drawing on two uncontroversial claims. First, the phenomenologist's capacity for sophisticated reflective thought depends on facility with language. Making reflective judgements based on the results of eidetic variation is something that we can only do in virtue of the fact that we are language users. Second, this facility with language is a contingent, culturally mediated acquisition—the linguistic capacities on which the phenomenologist's reflective thought depends are available to them only because they are born and enculturated into existing practices for using language. It follows from these two claims that the Husserlian's reflections on the essential structures of experience can no longer be understood as uncovering a priori truths that are straightforwardly independent of the empirical contingencies of their situation. We saw above that if phenomenology consists in attempting to grasp the essential structures of experience, then it is susceptible to the question of how we can be certain we've attained such a grasp. We also saw that attempting to answer this question via simple appeal to the way in which such a grasp is experienced by the phenomenologist courts Humean sceptical worries—why isn't such an experience just one more datum on our tablet of contingent psychological phenomena? Now we have seen that the more sophisticated attempt to answer this question in terms of the way in which an intuited essence presents itself to reflection as apodictically certain also faces a challenge: if we agree that the Husserlian's reflective capacities depend on the contingent fact that they have been enculturated into a specific system of linguistic practices, then their reflective judgements of apodicticity appear to be tainted with this contingency. It thus becomes hard to see how such judgements can be taken to reveal essential as opposed to contingent structural properties of experience. More bluntly, the worry is that the Husserlian's putative grasp of an essence fails to show anything interesting about the fundamental structure of perception; instead, it merely shows us something about the way they happen to think, which is in turn a mere function of a way they happen to talk.

The linguistic mediation of thought is one way in which the Husserlian's cultural and historical situation threatens to infect their claims about experience's essential structures with contingency. Beyond this, we might worry that empirical evidence of sociological and anthropological diversity suggests that what strikes us as an apodictic or essential feature of experience is a mere cultural quirk—as when, for example, intuitions about the way in which numerical quantity figures in our experience are called into question by learning that some Australian or Amazonian cultures have no fine-grained system for describing numerical quantity (e.g. Frank et al. 2008). In this connection, Merleau-Ponty reports Husserl changing his mind about the relevance of empirical anthropological data to phenomenology upon reading Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's ethnological study *Primitive Mythology*. 'Before this,' he writes, 'Husserl had maintained that a mere imaginative variation of the facts would enable us to conceive of every possible experience we might have' (*PSM, PrP* 90). But in a subsequent letter to Lévy-Bruhl Husserl admits that:

the philosopher could not possibly have immediate access to the universal by reflection alone—that he is in no position to do without anthropological experience or to construct what constitutes the meaning of other experiences and civilizations by a purely imaginary variation of his own experiences. (S, 107)

The worry thus arises that the Husserlian's contingent cultural inheritance places arbitrary restrictions on their reflections in two ways—via constraining the vocabulary within which those reflections can take place, and via local cultural idiosyncrasies influencing reflection on what is or is not an essential structural property of experience.

Finally, the particular point in intellectual history at which we are situated can make a difference to the truths we take to be apodictically certain, as when the formalization and empirical application of non-Euclidean geometries reveals that 'The supposed evidentness of Euclidean geometry' was 'evident merely for a certain historical period of the human spirit' (*PhP* 414/454). Romdenh-Romluc's example (2018, this volume) of Carmita Wood illustrates how phenomenological reflection can be tied to cultural and historical contingencies. Wood, a lab worker in Cornell's department of nuclear physics during the 1960s, quit her job after being subjected to a sustained campaign of sexual harassment by a senior scientist. But it was only years after her resignation that Wood was able to make full sense of the pattern of behaviour and experiences that drove her from her job. The reflective understanding of that pattern as a manifestation of sexual harassment was not readily available in Wood's 1960s environment; her intuitive grasp of that pattern only became possible retrospectively, once the concept of sexual harassment had become common currency. Like Carmita Wood, a phenomenologist's best attempts at grasping the essential structures of their experience will go



only as far as the reflective apparatus afforded by their historical and cultural situation can take them.

So far, then, we have seen that the problems for Humean, Kantian, and Husserlian phenomenology point towards the need for a ‘radical reflection’—a way of doing phenomenology that critically examines the origins of its own reflective capacities and convictions. But the suggestions about these origins canvassed here look like bad news: the ‘human sciences’—including psychology, linguistics, sociology, and history—reveal multiple ways in which the phenomenologist’s grasp of putatively essential structures of experience is inescapably influenced by contingent features of their situation.

## 5. Merleau-Pontian Phenomenology of Perception

The sources of contingency surveyed in the last section simultaneously motivate scepticism about the essences that the phenomenologist tries to grasp, and the reflective capacities used to grasp them. Both now appear to be reflections of various contingencies of our factual situation. The Merleau-Pontian phenomenologist, however, views these contingencies not as problems but as opportunities. Merleau-Ponty argues that we should reconceive our understanding of both essences and reflection in ways that acknowledge and embrace these contingencies, putting them to work in accounts of how particular experiential structures come to count for us as essential to our subjectivity—that is, in accounts of the genesis of essences and their reflective credentials. For reasons of space, I’ll limit myself to one example of this strategy—the way in which Merleau-Ponty’s use of a specific empirical case study figures in an argument that an implicit sense of the possibilities for active engagement with our environment is an essential property of world-disclosing perception. This illustration, however, does not fully capture the way in which Merleau-Pontian phenomenology involves a reconception of *reflection itself* as well as the essences at which reflection aims. The remainder of this section briefly brings the general shape of this ‘radical reflection’ into clearer view.

Merleau-Pontian phenomenology remains committed to the search for essences, but—as we will now see—its vision of what those essences are, and how to find them, changes. One source of this change is the recognition of a close relationship between the essential structures and the factual contingencies of the ways in which they are realized by our body and its relation to the world. Merleau-Ponty argues that the Husserlian’s transcendental methodology already entails this relationship:

If in Husserl’s view the knowledge of facts is impossible without some insight into essence and is always helped by this, it follows that all sound knowledge of

facts must include, at least implicitly, some insight into essences, and that Husserl must admit, as he does in effect, that those psychologists who have been preoccupied with facts have nevertheless been able to find out something concerning essences. (*PSM, PrP* 66)

We saw above (§2) that Husserl makes the transcendental claim that our access to empirical facts is necessarily mediated by the essential structures that phenomenologists aim to grasp and catalogue. Merleau-Ponty's claim above is that this commits us to thinking that, insofar as we agree that psychologists are successfully uncovering empirical facts about our minds, these facts can function as a source of insight into the essences to which they are necessarily related. This is why Merleau-Ponty took such a keen interest in a wide range of scientific disciplines, including Gestalt psychology, Saussurian linguistics, and Freudian psychiatry. Whilst he disagreed in important ways with the commitments of these approaches, he nonetheless argued that each domain yields new insights into the structures of experience that must be integrated into an adequate phenomenology. Empirical psychology thus becomes a key catalyst for eidetic variation—each of the above domains prompts us to consider, and find truth in, new ways of understanding ourselves.

Consider, for example, Merleau-Ponty's discussion of the brain-damaged World War I veteran, 'Schneider' (*PhP* Pt. I ch.3). As a result of his injuries, Schneider exhibited an unusual patchwork of sensorimotor and cognitive impairments, including an inability to visually recognize objects coupled with intact visuomotor abilities to perform habitual and automatic actions, such as negotiating his environment, opening doors, and even making leather wallets. The most important feature of Schneider's syndrome of impaired and intact capacities, for Merleau-Ponty, is the contrast between Schneider's intact sensorimotor habits and his impaired capacity to put those habits to use in flexible, open-ended interaction with his environment—what Merleau-Ponty calls a power to 'reckon with the possible' (*PhP* 112/139; Romdenh-Romluc 2007). Schneider can interact with his perceptible environment in rigid, task-specific ways, but lacks, on Merleau-Ponty's diagnosis, a sense of the way in which his relation to that environment affords the satisfaction or frustration of an open-ended range of actual and potential projects. The sensorimotor actions Schneider can successfully perform are habituated and task-specific ones that are automatically drawn from him by his environment. The actions which he cannot, or struggles to, perform—such as pointing, pantomiming, or playful and creative ways of engaging with his surroundings—are those not directly linked to a current, habituated task. The case of Schneider is one of many in *PhP* that is intended to reveal the way in which our awareness of our surroundings is pervasively structured by an implicit sense of the way in which they afford the satisfaction or frustration of both our current and our potential projects. We might judge, from our armchairs, that our perceptual

252 DAVE WARD

experience of objects could survive the subtraction of a background sense of the open-ended range of possible ways we might engage with them. But the empirical facts about the way in which this sense is impaired for Schneider help us intuitively grasp the role that it plays in structuring our own experience—a role that we might otherwise have missed. At the same time, these facts reveal a sense in which this essential structure of our experience has its basis in empirical contingencies—the happy contingency that we lack the brain lesions that are responsible for Schneider’s symptoms.

Importantly, Merleau-Ponty’s use of Schneider’s case is just one strand of a central argument of *PhP* which aims to demonstrate that in perception, ‘a system of possible movements, or “motor projects” radiates from us to our environment’, and that all perceptual experiences are conditioned by this ‘global, practical, and implicit notion of the relation between our body and things’ (*PrP* 5). Abstracting away from its details, we can call this the ‘bodily-structure claim’ (BSC):

BSC: Perceptual experience necessarily involves an implicit awareness of the perceiver’s embodied practical relationship to the perceived.

Why should we think that BSC constitutes the kind of claim about the kind of *essential* structure of experience that phenomenologists seek, rather than one of the contingent psychological quirks catalogued by Humeans? Considering the empirical facts of Schneider’s case, or of our own experiences, cannot answer this question. Instead, a sustained transcendental argument is woven through the rest of *PhP* that BSC is a condition of the very possibility of perceiver/world relations, since our experience of the reality of the objects of perception must be understood in terms of their positive and negative relations to our actual and potential exploratory activities and projects.

In brief outline, the argument aims to show that perceiving something as ‘real’—as enjoying a perceiver-independent existence—requires being aware of it ‘as the infinite sum of an indefinite series of perspectival views in each of which the object is given, but in none of which is it given exhaustively’ (*PrP* 15). As finite, embodied perceivers, any vantage point on an object reveals particular aspects while obscuring others—as when we see the facing side of a cube better than its partially visible or hidden sides. Merleau-Ponty argues, however, that this partial access does not impede our perception of the cube’s objective properties, but makes it possible: ‘It is not accidental for the object to be given to me in a “deformed” way, from the point of view which I occupy. That is the price of its being “real”’ (*PrP* 15–16). Unlike your inner speech or sensory imaginings, your experience of external objects is given to you as provisional and incomplete, in a way that permits and invites further bodily exploration: ‘When I see an object, I always feel that there is still some being beyond what I currently see . . . a depth of the object that no sensory withdrawal will ever exhaust’ (*PhP* 224/261). This

experienced provisionality is part of what it is to experience those objects as having an objective, rather than purely subjective, existence. And we experience this provisionality in the form of an implicit awareness of the ways in which changes in our bodily relationship to the object will bring other aspects into view.

In the interests of space, I am suppressing many of the details of this argument as it figures in *PhP*.<sup>4</sup> Most important for our purposes is its general structure, which closely parallels the Kantian strategy we encountered above. Faced with the challenge of demonstrating that BSC reflects an *essential* structure of perceptual experience, Merleau-Ponty argues that it is a prerequisite for an uncontroversially manifest property of perceptual experience—its seeming to present us with real, perceiver-independent things. The aim is to show that BSC inherits its essentiality from the world-disclosing character of perception, an essential structural feature of perceptual experience that is not in dispute. However, this is not the armchair transcendentalism of the Kantian. Like the Husserlian, Merleau-Ponty attempts to bring this structure into view for us via eidetic variation, inviting us to test his claims against specific experiences of our own. Unlike the Husserlian, Merleau-Ponty's eidetic variation also makes use of empirical cases involving experiences his readers are unlikely to have had (such as Schneider's) as catalysts. The reported experiences of those for whom implicit understanding of the systematic and open-ended range of possibilities for bodily exploration of the perceived has gone missing (as in Merleau-Ponty's discussion of Schneider) or has yet to be learned (as in his discussion of the experiences of post-operative congenital cataract patients) (*PhP* 231–2) provide contrast cases that illuminate the way in which this bodily understanding structures our own perception. Once we have homed in on BSC in this way, Merleau-Ponty (like the Husserlian and Kantian) argues that it qualifies as an essential structure of experience in virtue of its status as a necessary prerequisite for an uncontroversial manifest feature of experience—its world-disclosing status.

The above argument thus involves a reciprocal interplay between empirical and transcendental considerations in the service of identifying an essential structure of experience. In doing so, it sets Merleau-Pontian phenomenology apart from the other positions canvassed above. For our purposes here, the most important consequence of this form of argument is a blurring of the boundaries between empirical facts and transcendental structures. Kantian and Husserlians are committed to a sharp distinction between the essential structure we have identified (as expressed in BSC) and the contingent facts in virtue of which experience possesses that structure. The contingent facts in this case would include the particular details of our embodiment, and the ways in which Schneider's sensorimotor capacities were impaired. Merleau-Ponty's claim, here and elsewhere, is that fact

<sup>4</sup> See in particular *PhP* 242/280; 331–41/373–84.

and essence cannot be pulled apart—the reflective purchase we have on BSC exists only in virtue of the contingent facts of our embodiment that give our experience the structure BSC describes. An articulation of an essence like BSC ties together and reveals the significance of particular contingencies of the facts of our embodied perceptual lives—but that significance is only available to the phenomenologist’s reflection in virtue of their living such a life. As Merleau-Ponty puts it in *PhP*’s preface, ‘essences must bring with them all of the living relations of experience, like the net that draws up both quivering fish and seaweed from the seabed’ (lxxix, 15–16).

I started this section by saying that Merleau-Pontian views the contingencies we noted for the Husserlian (§4) as opportunities rather than problems—we have now seen one way in which this is so. The contingent facts of our embodied relation to the world are put to work in an account of how the phenomenologist can grasp a particular structural property as essential to their subjectivity, since those facts constitute the phenomenologist’s mode of reflective access to that property. This is the sense in which Merleau-Pontian phenomenology involves ‘radical reflection’—it focuses not just on identifying essences that are experienced as reflectively apodictic, but on accounting for the origins of that reflective status via connecting it to the contingent facts of our lives and situation. The example I have just sketched drew only on the facts of our *bodily* situation—but we saw above that the phenomenologist’s reflections are also shaped by linguistic, sociological, and historical facts. Whilst bodily contingencies of the kinds we’ve just alluded to shape the perceptual experience on which the phenomenologist reflects, linguistic, social, and historical contingencies chiefly shape the reflective capacities that the phenomenologist trains on their experiences. Thus, a Merleau-Pontian ‘radical reflector’ is committed to understanding their own reflective capacities and activities by, in part, studying and understanding these contingencies and their role in our reflective lives.

Merleau-Ponty’s sustained engagement with linguistic theory, history, politics, sociology, and anthropology speaks to this ambition. The task of extracting a stable theory of reflection from this huge body of work is a daunting one. Instead of attempting it here, I will end by considering some remarks that suggest the shape which Merleau-Ponty thought such a theory should take. A good place to start is with a line of thought in *PhP* on the dependence of the ideals of truth and objectivity at which reflection aims on an intersubjectively shared set of linguistic capacities. Speech, argues Merleau-Ponty, involves ‘a power of thinking *according to others*, which enriches our own thoughts’ (*PhP* 184/218–19, original emphasis; compare *CES* 360–1), and does so by leading ‘to a thought which is no longer ours alone, to a thought which is presumptively universal’ (Merleau-Ponty 1962/1964, 8). Our acquisition of unthinking facility with speech and the intersubjectively accessible and situation-independent meanings at which it aims gives rise to the

ideal of a locus of meaning and truth that is independent of particular contingent acts of expression:

Language has, in fact, installed in us this certainty that we have of reaching, beyond its expression, a truth separable from that expression, and of which this expression is only the clothing and the contingent manifestation.

(*PhP* 422/460, see also 196/231)

Just as Merleau-Ponty argues that the world-disclosing nature of our experience is founded on, rather than undermined by, our inevitably incomplete bodily relation to the world, he wishes to argue that our ideal of truth is founded on, rather than undermined by, the complex web of intersubjective conventions and relations that composes the cultural institution of language. This line of thought persists throughout Merleau-Ponty's career. In a late essay, he writes:

Since we are all hemmed in by history, it is up to us to understand that whatever truth we may have is to be gotten not in spite of but through our historical inheritance. Superficially considered, our inherence destroys all truth; considered radically, it founds a new idea of truth . . . [I]f I have once realized that through it [my inherence in a historical situation] I am grafted onto every action and all knowledge which can have a meaning for me, and that step by step it contains everything which can *exist* for me, then my contact with the social in the finitude of my situation is revealed to me as the point of origin of all truth. (S, 109)

An aim of phenomenology as radical reflection, then, is to understand the ways in which the very ideal of truth—the ideal which guides our assessment of the veracity of the phenomenologist's descriptions and reflective reconstructions—is not undermined by, but is dependent on, the facts of our social, cultural, and historical situation. Much of Merleau-Ponty's work after the completion of *PhP*, variously focusing on linguistics, sociology, anthropology, and history, affords suggestive hints about how he might have wished to fill in the details of this picture. But they remain only hints, as Merleau-Ponty's work was cut short by his early death.

If we don't know the exact shape that a Merleau-Pontian phenomenology of radical reflection would take, however, we do know its general structure. As well as identifying the essential structures of perceptual experience, it must simultaneously identify the essential structures of the reflective capacities involved in its own execution. And it must do both of these things in a way that shows how these essential structures emerge from the contingencies of our worldly situation, in a way that must be informed by a richly interdisciplinary engagement with multiple empirical and human sciences. If the Merleau-Pontian argument above is right, then phenomenological philosophy of perception *must* take this shape—the

failures of Humean and Kantian approaches that appeal only to the concrete matter or the abstract structure of experience, and of Husserlian approaches that appeal to an undertheorized capacity to intuit apodictically necessary essential structures, lead us inexorably to a conception of phenomenology as radical reflection. Even if Merleau-Ponty has, understandably, left us short of the destination of a truly radically reflective phenomenology, he has provided us with a good head start, a detailed map, and plenty to do on the journey.<sup>5</sup>

### List of Abbreviated Works

- LI: Husserl, E. 1900/2001) *Logical Investigations*. Trans. J.N. Findlay, ed. D. Moran. UK: Routledge.
- I: Husserl, E. 1913/2012) *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*. Trans. W.R. Boyce Gibson. UK: Routledge.
- CES: Husserl, E. 1954/1970) *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*. Trans. D. Carr. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- PhP: Merleau-Ponty, M. 1945/2012) *Phenomenology of Perception*. Trans. D. Landes. UK: Routledge.
- PrP: Merleau-Ponty, M. 1964) *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*. J.M. Edie (ed.). Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- S: Merleau-Ponty, M. 1960/1964) *Signs*. Trans. R.C. McLeary. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

### References

- Bayne, T. 2004. 'Closing the gap? Some questions for neurophenomenology'. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 3 (4): 349–64.
- Debruynne, H., Portzky, M., Van den Eynde, F., and Audenaert, K. 2009. 'Cotard's syndrome: a review'. *Current psychiatry reports* 11 (3): 197–202.
- Dennett, D. C. 1991. *Consciousness Explained*. Boston: Little Brown.
- Frank, M. C., Everett, D. L., Fedorenko, E., and Gibson, E. 2008. 'Number as a cognitive technology: Evidence from Pirahã language and cognition'. *Cognition* 108 (3): 819–24.

<sup>5</sup> Thanks to the editors of this volume and Clare Mac Cumhaill for helpful comments on previous drafts of this essay. Thanks also to several generations of students in my class on Phenomenology at the University of Edinburgh, conversations with whom have shaped my thinking about Merleau-Ponty's methodology.

- Frege, G. and Kluge, E. W. 1972. 'Review of Dr. E. Husserl's Philosophy of Arithmetic'. *Mind* 81 (323): 321–37.
- Hume, D. and Selby-Bigge, L. A. 1740/1978. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Kant, I. 1787/1997. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated and edited by P. Guyer and A. W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. 1962/1964. 'An Unpublished Text'. In Merleau-Ponty, M. (1964) *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*. J.M. Edie (ed.). Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Metzinger, T. 2003. *Being No One: The Self-Model Theory of Subjectivity*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press.
- Romdenh-Romluc, K. 2007. 'Merleau-Ponty and the Power to Reckon with the Possible', in T. Baldwin (ed.) *Reading Merleau-Ponty*. London: Routledge, 44–58.
- Romdenh-Romluc, K. 2018. 'Science in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology: from the early work to the later philosophy'. In D. Zahavi (ed.) *Oxford Handbook of the History of Phenomenology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 340–59.