# Merleau-Ponty’s Conception of Dialectics in *Phenomenology of Perception*

**Abstract**

Although the fact that Merleau-Ponty has a dialectical approach in *Phenomenology of Perception* is discussed in recent Anglophone readings, it is rarely explicitly clarified how his regular and varying usages of the term hang together. Given his repeated references to Hegel and to dialectics, coupled with the fact that dialectics are not part of either the Heideggerean existentialism or Husserlian phenomenology from which Merleau-Ponty draws so much, the question as to just what Merleau-Ponty does with the idea of dialectics presents itself.In this article I argue that in *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty saw Hegel as providing a model for the conception of rationality and meaning that must underpin the existentialist response to the problems bequeathed him by Husserlian phenomenology regarding embodiment, perception and the constitution of the world.I suggest an interpretation of Merleau-Ponty’s conception of an “existential dialectics” that focuses on his three principal uses of the term: 1) a “dialectic of objective thought” which uses a dialectical form of argument to articulate the relation between the antinomial theoretical forms of “Empiricism” and “Intellectualism”; 2) a set of existential-dialectical categories intended to capture the ontological structure of the “body-subject” as “being-in-the-world”; and 3) a dialectic at the cultural level concerning others and history that is distinguishable from, though underpinned by, the existential dialectic of “consciousness” and “body” in the “body-subject”, and “body” and “world” in “being-in-the-world”.

**Keywords:** lived body; existential; lifeworld; ambiguity; being-in-the-world

**Introduction**

Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy evolved over the span of his career, and with it his conception of dialectics. From *The Structure of Behaviour* to *Phenomenology of Perception,* to *Adventures of the Dialectic* and *The Visible and the Invisible,* he modifies his conception of dialectics in line with his shifting philosophical position. In this article I focus on the view that is integral to the position he presents in what is commonly taken to be his major work: *Phenomenology of Perception*. Although the fact that Merleau-Ponty has a dialectical approach is discussed in recent Anglophone readings of this position, it is rarely explicitly clarified how his regular and varying usages of the term hang together.[[1]](#footnote-2) This dimension of his thought is often discussed only briefly, and some authors explicate his position without mentioning it at all.[[2]](#footnote-3)

In this article I argue that in *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty saw Hegel as providing a model for the conception of rationality and meaning that must underpin the existentialist response to the set of problems bequeathed him by Husserlian phenomenology due to its inability to cope with the passive constitution of the background – the world, the body, perception. A key influence on Merleau-Ponty here was the interpretation of the humanized Hegel presented in the work of Jean Hyppolite’s influential *Genesis and Structure of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*. In forming his conception of a philosophy of human action in a concrete social situation that both enables and constrains choice, Merleau-Ponty was also influenced by the “humanist” revisions of Marx that drew on Marx’s earlier writings, such as Alexandre Kojeve’s “Hegelianized Marxism”. Merleau-Ponty attended Kojeve’s multi-year course and had close personal contact with him.[[3]](#footnote-4) Kojeve emphasized Hegel as historicizing reason, and so pointing in the direction of a concretizing of the master/slave dialectic through the Marxian conception of different actual classes in conflict in different historical periods.[[4]](#footnote-5)

If we look at the uses of the term “dialectic” in *Phenomenology of Perception* we cannot but be struck by the fact thatMerleau-Ponty gives the concept very wide application. This is because his conception of reason and meaning dovetails with his desire to be responsive to what he comes to understand as the ontological ambiguity in its variety of phenomenological manifestations. Given that Merleau-Ponty himself does not provide an explicit discussion of his appropriation and use of dialectics, a reconstruction of the rationale of that appropriation will help to make clear what his conception amounts to.

Taking Merleau-Ponty’s references to Hegel and dialectics in *Phenomenology of Perception* seriously is fraught with interpretative difficulties. For, like Merleau-Ponty’s other appropriated terms (for example, “phenomenological reduction”, “transcendental”), the term “dialectics” is substantially reconfigured in the process of its importation into an “existential dialectics”. This conception is all too easily misunderstood if the language of dialectics that he uses is interpreted through the lens of its traditional meaning in Hegelian phenomenology, and not properly situated in the framework of his existential phenomenology.

**“Hegel’s Existentialism” and Merleau-Ponty’s Philosophy of the Concrete**

Around the time of *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty holds that the central movements in modern philosophy that he seeks to integrate in his own position – phenomenology, existentialism and Marxism – do not appreciate that their origin lies in Hegel’s philosophy. “Not that Hegel himself offers the truth we are seeking”, says Merleau-Ponty, but rather:

If we do not despair of a *truth* above and beyond divergent points of view, if we remain dedicated to a new classicism, an organic civilization, while maintaining the sharpest sense of subjectivity, then no task in the cultural order is more urgent than re-establishing the connection between on the one hand, the thankless doctrines which try to forget their Hegelian origin and, on the other, that origin itself.[[5]](#footnote-6)

The Hegelian dimension to Merleau-Ponty’s position can be seen in the importation of dialectics in his conception of reason, of meaning, and thus in the ontology that he seeks to construct through them. Merleau-Ponty argues that Hegel is vitally important to existential phenomenology because he is the philosopher who “started the attempt to explore the irrational and integrate it into an expanded reason”.[[6]](#footnote-7) By “the irrational” Merleau-Ponty is not referring to the incoherent or contradictory. Rather, he means *non-rational* in the sense of the lived or the existential. Merleau-Ponty sees his attempt to incorporate the pre-reflective intentionality of the lived body into philosophy as Hegelian in this sense. The term “lived body” denotes the phenomenological concept of “the body as we live it”. As a “lived body” we are neither pure subject nor pure object but rather experience a richly meaningful intentional “world”, resting on our basic bodily level awareness of, and responsiveness to, our environmental context. This basic intentionality consists of unreflected-upon but nevertheless meaningful relationships that manifest themselves through the “phenomenal field” that takes shape as the context of our active exploration of the world. As such, this background pre-reflective intentionality subtends all explicit acts of reflective judgement, and even all consciously directed acts of perception.

Like Hegel, he seeks “a new idea of reason” that does not forget the “experience of unreason”.[[7]](#footnote-8) This expanded, yet concrete and situated, conception derives from the “Hegel of 1807”[[8]](#footnote-9), the Hegel of *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Merleau-Ponty finds this Hegel’s conception of a phenomenological exploration of the concrete historical structures of meaningful human activity – for example “customs, economic structures, and legal institutions”[[9]](#footnote-10) – consonant with the existentialist’s profound concern with one’s concrete situation. This is because it:

… does not try to fit all history into a framework of pre-established logic but attempts to bring each doctrine and each era back to life and to let itself be guided by their internal logic…[[10]](#footnote-11)

Thus, Hegel’s phenomenological thought is “existentialist in that it views man not as being from the start a consciousness in full possession of its own clear thoughts but as a life which is its own responsibility and which tries to understand itself”.[[11]](#footnote-12)

Merleau-Ponty agrees with the Hegelian idea that it is the philosopher’s task to “*reveal the immanent logic of human experience*”. So, like Hegel he rejects the Kantian opposition of matter and form, the view that experience can somehow be analysed into meaningless matter to which the mind gives form, or meaning. And, with Hegel, he affirms that experience itself is pregnant with meaningful form. Kant holds that the conditions of experience can be divided between the form of experience and the contents of experience, where the *a priori*forms of intuition (time and space) and the categories of the understanding are taken to *give form* to the formless “manifold of sensation” (the contents of perception). Whereas on Merleau-Ponty’s view, as Sebastian Gardner puts it: “pre-objective perception is intuitive, and it is intuitive without being, like Kant's matter of experience, determinately formless; it is a formed-content”.[[12]](#footnote-13)

From a Kantian perspective it might be argued that the exact nature of this formed-content, which Merleau-Ponty discusses under the theme of “the world that is always already there”, is not made entirely clear. Merleau-Ponty, for his part, would see this as a criticism informed by “Intellectualist” confusions about the nature of perception and of the perceived world. The basic problem with the Intellectualist approach for Merleau-Ponty is that it misunderstands perception because it attempts to model perception on judgement, where to perceive an object is to synthesize a set of sensations under a category. With Kant, it holds the view that “intuitions without concepts are blind”.[[13]](#footnote-14) On this type of view, to perceive an object is to supplement our sensations via an act of judgement that synthesizes those sensations as a unified object. However, in viewing perception as an act of judgement in this way, the Intellectualist pays insufficient attention to what our perceptual experience is actually like – the way that objects and world are dynamically and progressively constituted in relation to an active corporeal subject. Merleau-Ponty’s approach replaces Kant’s analysis of the object of experience with a phenomenological account of the object *as it is experienced*.

Based on his phenomenological account he argues that the notion that the “formed-content” structure that comprises the world (“a whole already pregnant with an irreducible meaning”[[14]](#footnote-15)), and the objects within it, could be made entirely clear is based on failing to grasp the significance of the constraints placed on the reach of rationality due to its intrinsic situatedness. By implicitly “postulating a knowledge rendered totally explicit”, says Merleau-Ponty, [the Kantian intellectualist view] instantiates an unjustified “*presumption* on reason’s part”.[[15]](#footnote-16) The lived phenomenological world that is “always already there”[[16]](#footnote-17) before we reflect on it is a primitive experiential dimension that represents our primordial contact with, and participation in, being. As such, it necessarily resists a total explication. Thus, for him, the intellectualist’s form/content binarism is one that he does not feel obliged to theorise the structure of pre-objective being in terms of. This is because the characterization of pre-objectivity is in the last analysis answerable to the content and structure of our lived experience rather than to “logicist” either/or categorial frameworks.[[17]](#footnote-18) Only a dialectical type of reason can capture the nature of the form/content relation manifested in the formed-content structure of perceptual phenomena.

Merleau-Ponty’s identification of the philosopher’s role as the revealer of the “immanent logic of experience” necessitates his fundamental rejection of what Gardner calls the “reproach of ambivalence”. As Gardner points out, Merleau-Ponty holds the Hegelian view that:

… we should reject the ‘reproach of ambivalence’, i.e. that we should regard antinomy as a philosophical discovery, and not as a failure of philosophical thought showing the need to withdraw our logically contradictory description of the world.[[18]](#footnote-19)

Although Merleau-Ponty provides no explicit account of his adoption of this key move, it is clear that he assents to the view that the dialectical embracing of what are traditionally understood to be antinomies is appropriate for the philosophical level of thinking because this move is adequately phenomenologically grounded. Its appropriateness is further demonstrated by the way that it enables us to overcome irresolvable traditional philosophical problems.

Although Merleau-Ponty understands the dialectical nature of the world differently from Hegel, his dialectical conception of reason has its origin in Hegel’s critique of Kant’s distinction between “the understanding” and “Reason”. Attacking the legitimacy of this distinction, Hegel advocates a kind of thinking that is not constrained by this core Kantian schema. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant argues that our cognitive capacities are empirically constrained in such a way that only possible objects of experience are capable of becoming possible objects of knowledge. The understanding is the faculty through which we can acquire knowledge of the objects of experience. Reason, in contrast, is the faculty that seeks, but can never achieve, knowledge of an experience-transcendent reality. Thus in its application in the speculative metaphysical philosophies of the Rationalists it becomes a faculty that leads to unjustifiable conceptual constructions. Merleau-Ponty interprets Hegel as advocating a speculative rational faculty, a “quasi-Kantian Reason (*Vernunft*)” as Stephen Priest puts it.[[19]](#footnote-20) Thus we see Merleau-Ponty arguing that Hegel has a conception of “Reason” that is:

… broader than the understanding, which can respect the variety and singularity of individual consciousnesses, civilizations, ways of thinking, and historical contingency, but which nevertheless does not give up the attempt to master them in order to guide them back to their own truth.[[20]](#footnote-21)

However, in Merleau-Ponty’s version it is not applied in the service of an absolute idealist metaphysics, as is the case for Hegel on Merleau-Ponty’s reading. Instead it is constrained through the phenomenological principle of evidence - the stipulation that all theoretical constructions be grounded by phenomenological evidence - and pressed into the service of existential ontology, the search for the *concrete* existential structures of human being.

***Geist*, Dialectics and Absolute Knowing**

Merleau-Ponty claims that the most fruitful way to interpret Hegel’s philosophy is through the lens of existential phenomenology. Thus, he suggests that we ought to “base his logic on his phenomenology and not his phenomenology on his logic”.[[21]](#footnote-22) This inverts Hegel’s own understanding of his philosophy where the logic is the key to understanding the true meaning of the phenomenology. This inversion, however, is consistent with Merleau-Ponty’s central thesis of the “primacy of perception” and his philosophy of the concrete where all ontological claims are understood to rest on a phenomenological grounding.[[22]](#footnote-23)

Merleau-Ponty’s interpretation of Hegel’s metaphysics is a version of what is often referred to as the traditional metaphysical view[[23]](#footnote-24). This reading views Hegel as arguing that “the separation of the material and the immaterial can be explained only on the basis of the original unity of both”.[[24]](#footnote-25) However, the relationship between body and spirit (*Geist*) is a relationship between a particular and a universal, thus: body and universal *Geist*. It is impossible to translate the German word ‘*Geist*’ into English and retain all of its resonances. The two main ways it has been rendered are“spirit” or “mind”. The term “spirit” has divine connotations while “mind” represents the mental as it is commonly understood, in contrast to the physical. The traditional view holds that both meanings are involved in Hegel’s conception of, as Peter Singer puts it, “an over-arching collective Mind that is an active force throughout history, and of which all individual minds—that is, all human beings, considered in their mental aspect—are a part”.[[25]](#footnote-26)

On this reading of Hegel the physical world is viewed as an expression of universal *Geist*. For example he says:

In truth the immaterial is not related to the material as particular to a particular but as the true universal which overarches and embraces particularity is related to the particular; the particular material thing in its isolation has no truth, no independence in face of the immaterial.[[26]](#footnote-27)

Nevertheless, *Geist* cannot exist but through the physical through which it expresses itself and comes to know itself in a process of progressive historical self-realization. Not, however, at the level of the individual but at the level of human collectivities through which *Geist* is manifest and which evolves in a process of dialectical movement that Hegel refers to as “sublation” (*Aufgehoben)*. “Sublation” is Hegel’s term that is intended to capture the movement of synthesis between two opposing or contradictory historical forms of human life and consciousness. As Robert Sinnerbrink observes, Hegelian dialectics is:

… the attempt … to show the relatedness of opposing terms, the negative movement of thought from one determination [thesis] to its opposite [antithesis], and their synthesis within a more complex configuration of conceptual meaning. Dialectic thus underscores the role of *negation* in the constitution of positivity (the new emerges out of the negation or superceding of the old).[[27]](#footnote-28)

In Hegel’s dialectics the movement of historical forms of human life and consciousness proceeds via “a determinate negation that both cancels and preserves”, a “‘supercession’ that synthesises opposing terms into a more integrated and complex ‘conceptual unity’”.[[28]](#footnote-29) This is a process whereby a general historical form of life is grasped as generating a contradictory form contained within it and where, through a process of dynamic historical development, the two forms are subsumed and transformed (sublated) via a new synthesis into a new form. This new form, in turn, contains its own contradictions, which will develop towards a new sublation, and so on.

Hegel’s account of the process and the stages of the growing historical expression of *Geist* in human activities in *Phenomenology of Spirit* is complex as it is intended to be an account of all the stages of consciousness that Hegel thinks are possible. The details of this story, however, are not important for our purposes because Merleau-Ponty rejects this aspect of Hegel as he understands it. That is, he rejects the conception of the world as the expression of *Geist* and the account of the stages which Hegel claims the evolution of *Geist* to involve.

**Merleau-Ponty’s Appropriation and Hegel’s ‘Absolute Knowing’**

 On Merleau-Ponty’s reading Hegel is taken to hold that the mental and the physical are united in an ultimate reality: “universal *Geist”*. On this view Hegel understands universal *Geist* as the unity of all dialectical opposition, including particular and general. *Geist*, then, is in fact the totality of what exists, as it really is. Hegel’s “absolute idealism” is interpreted as reminiscent of pantheism because it is taken to hold that ultimately the individual minds of finite human beings are perspectives of one universal divine mind called *Geist*: “Spirit is this absolute substance which is the unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses”.[[29]](#footnote-30) Hegel is also taken to hold the view that at each higher stage of development *Geist* comes closer to understanding itself. The culmination of this historical process is “Absolute knowing” (*Absolute Wissen*), whereby there is a “‘unity of thought and being’ and Spirit … knows itself as Spirit”.[[30]](#footnote-31) In Hegel’s conception of absolute knowing, as Stephen Priest puts it:

… there is no difference between what is *knowing what it is* and what is *being what it is:* it is what it knows and it knows what it is. All the various dialectical structures of consciousness and self-consciousness are subsumed or *aufgehoben* into the ultimate speculative synthesis of subjectivity and objectivity, epistemology and ontology.[[31]](#footnote-32)

This identity of knowing and being in “Absolute knowing” – the claim that consciousness and that which exists are ultimately identical – is why Hegel’s idealist position is taken to be an “absolute idealism”.

Merleau-Ponty rejects Hegel’s “absolute idealism” with its concept of “universal *Geist*”, believing that Hegel fails to appreciate the significance of the insights that his phenomenology helps to reveal. The most important of these is that the concrete “incarnation” of consciousness in a cultural and historical situation places constraints on human experience and thus on human knowledge. For Merleau-Ponty, following Kierkegaard, the metaphysical aspect of Hegel’s philosophy that I have been describing “offers us nothing but a ‘palace of ideas’ … where all historical antitheses are overcome, but only by thought”.[[32]](#footnote-33) As Hubert Dreyfus observes, in Merleau-Ponty’s view:

Hegel attempts to overcome the incompleteness and contradictions in individual experience by absorbing the individual in a universal harmony, thus eliminating the incarnate perceiver … who raised the original difficulties.[[33]](#footnote-34)

Merleau-Ponty views this part of his philosophy as deeply misguided arguing that:

Insofar as he reduced history to the history of the spirit, Hegel found the final synthesis heralded and guaranteed in his own consciousness, in his certainty at having understood history completely; and in the very realization of his philosophy. How could he help being optimistic, when history was consciousness’s return to itself and the internal logic of the idea as he lived it in himself testified to the necessity of this return and to man's possibility of attaining totality and freedom from anxiety?[[34]](#footnote-35)

Whereas, by contrast, existential philosophy:

… which renounces absolute Spirit as history's motive force, and which admits no other reason in things than that revealed by their meeting and interaction, could not affirm *a priori* man's possibility for wholeness, postulate a final synthesis resolving all contradictions or affirm its inevitable realization.[[35]](#footnote-36)

Hegel doesn’t learn the lesson that phenomenology teaches us about how the perspectival and incompletable nature of perceptual experience cancels the possibility of any necessary meaning and direction in historical experience. Hegel’s view of a meaning that is implicit in all experience that will in the end be made fully explicit overcomes the contingency and perspectivality of our lived perceptual experience. As Merleau-Ponty has shown us, we are irreducibly embodied beings and the contingency of our perceptual experience is at the base of all of our cultural activities and endeavours. It follows from this that there can be no justification for claims regarding an ultimate achievement of social or cosmic order in Hegel’s sense.

The degree of transformation that Hegel’s ideas undergo in Merleau-Ponty’s appropriation is exemplified in the fact that he is capable of making the suggestion that we should read Hegel’s “Absolute knowing” (*Absolute Wissen)* in existentialist terms:

Absolute knowledge, the final stage in the evolution of the spirit as phenomenon wherein consciousness at last becomes equal to its spontaneous life and regains its self-possession, is perhaps not a philosophy but a way of life.[[36]](#footnote-37)

By any standards this is an extremely unorthodox interpretation of “Absolute knowing” that goes very much against the grain of Hegel’s thought. It is, however, a powerful example of Merleau-Ponty’s “existentializing” of Hegel. And what it begins to illustrate for us is the pattern by which Merleau-Ponty brings together existential and Hegelian concepts in his attempt to formulate a phenomenological ontology. He brings them together in order that the Hegelian concepts be recast, giving them a thoroughly existential reading designed to flesh out and enhance his fundamentally existential view. Thus it is suggested, in line with his existentialist emphasis on lived experience and on action, that “absolute knowing” is interpreted in terms of an experience that cannot be intellectually grasped but instead must be lived. This rendering of “absolute knowing” is not so much an *incorporation* of the idea as a *transformation*. Merleau-Ponty does not go on to work out this suggestion in any detail and what he is perhaps really up to here is attempting to draw Hegelian scholars into an appreciation of the phenomenological concept of the depth and richness of pre-objective lived perceptual experience in powerful terms with which they are familiar.[[37]](#footnote-38) Thus, indicating where they really ought to be looking if they wish to see a genuine – lived – overcoming of the conceptual contradictions that exercise philosophers in the European tradition.

Merleau-Ponty’s existentializing of this Hegelian concept is not simply the suggestion of a way that we might read Hegel in order to get a fuller appreciation of Hegel, but rather represents the morphing of Hegel into Merleau-Ponty, so to speak. What the suggestion really amounts to is an indication that the philosopher who attends to pre-objective lived experience finds an experiential structure that shares certain qualities that Hegel attributes to “Absolute knowing”. Namely, it is an existential unity (being-in-the-world) that is prior to the subject-object distinction. It is also an existential unity of being and “knowing” in the sense that pre-objective perception involves simultaneously an intentional and ontological relation with the world: a pre-reflective intentional relation and an existential relation. It is both our access to being via the perceived world as well as a kind of “knowing” that we live. We don’t just grasp being reflectively but rather we *live being* in the body-world relation, and our pre-reflective grasp of the perceived world is a kind of “antepredicative *knowledge”*’.[[38]](#footnote-39) Thus, Merleau-Ponty talks about the philosopher as attempting to capture in reflection our lived pre-reflective bodily “complicity” with the world, a primordial “pact” of which our pre-reflective bodily being “knows” more than we do from our explicit reflective stance towards it.

**The Three Principal Senses of Dialectic in *Phenomenology of Perception***

Although Merleau-Ponty’s brazen existentializing of “absolute knowing” serves to indicate something of the way that Merleau-Ponty treats Hegelian concepts in his transformative appropriation, nothing theoretically substantive rests on this suggestion. If we turn to the issue of dialectics, however, the same cannot be said. Merleau-Ponty incorporates dialectics within an existential-phenomenological framework in order to provide a “logic” – a kind of thinking – that is appropriate to the task of describing the phenomena and their relations as revealed to the phenomenologist. So when he talks of his fundamental existential categories as dialectical, what he is claiming is that dialectics is the only way to express the structures that are present in our dynamic lived experience. But this is the case *only* if we reconfigure dialectical thought, strictly constraining it by “the principle of phenomenology”. So “dialectical unity” in Merleau-Ponty’s existentialist sense is not the same thing as Hegel’s sublation (*aufheben*). In Hegel, a “dialectical unity” is born out of an antinomy that is subsumed in a historical process of “sublation”, that involvesa “determinate negation” that “cancels and preserves”, synthesising opposing terms into a more complex unity. This is not the case for Merleau-Ponty because of the ontological primacy of the pre-objective perceived world, the world of our lived experience prior to the distinctions of subject and object.

**Sense 1 (the dialectic of objective thought) and** **Sense 2 (existential-dialectical categories)**

Merleau-Ponty argues that it is the nature of the pre-objective perceived world to produce an antinomy of “objective thought” (the antinomy of Empiricism and Intellectualism[[39]](#footnote-40), realism and idealism), as it draws on the either/or binaristic structure inherent in objective thought to represent our lived experience. This antinomial structure is a necessary feature of our natural existence due to the fact that we live in the “natural attitude”. Merleau-Ponty describes our natural attitude as involving a fundamental pre-predicative “faith” – a kind of primitive perceptual understanding that there exists a subject-independent “real world” out there wholly independent of human enquirers. Objective thought, or objectivism, is said to grow out of the natural attitude as we use our intrinsic tendency to understand perception on the model of objects as the basis on which to theorize the world in the natural sciences. And when we attempt to provide a *philosophical* grounding to the sciences this form of thinking produces a sharp subject-object divide that inevitably produces an irreconcilable antinomy, classically in the form of Rationalism and empiricism.

Merleau-Ponty’s account of the relation between Empiricism and Intellectualism as they try to make sense of pre-objective being is an example of how he uses a dialectical strategy of argument. In *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty doesn’t simply proceed by asserting and defending the position that he advocates. Rather, he addresses each successive topic in the book via a description and analysis that outlines familiar approaches to the phenomenon in question and then “measures” them in relation to the phenomenon they purport to explain. Doing this allows them to demonstrate their own inadequacies. Merleau-Ponty first describes an Empiricist account of the phenomenon in question, where the subject is held to be inherently passive and acted on by an objective external world. Analyzing this account in relation to the phenomenon that it purports to explain reveals an insufficient account of the contribution of subjectivity. He then turns to an Intellectualist account as an alternative, where the subject is viewed as inherently active, constituting the world of experience. Analyzing this account in relation to the phenomenon that it purports to explain reveals an insufficient account of the contribution of the body and the world, the passive dimension of the phenomena. Merleau-Ponty then argues, as John Russon points out, that:

… the positive characteristics of the phenomenon revealed through these accounts, together with their mutual insufficiencies, are then shown to point to the need for a third form of accounting for the phenomenon that reveals the subject (and *mutatis mutandis* the object) to be being-in-the-world, a condition that … necessarily underlies and makes possible the sorts of attitudes that [E]mpiricism and [Intellectualism] presume to be primary.[[40]](#footnote-41)

By thinking - from within - through the implications of one-sided accounts Merleau-Ponty shows how they are both in need of supplementation by what they exclude as opposite. But he then goes on to show how these “objectivist” accounts are locked in an antinomial relationship with each other because their meaning derives from a more basic form of experience that is not defined in terms of the antithesis that characterises the two opposites, and which provides their conditions of possibility. So the move from objective thought to existential-phenomenological thought involves a dialectical interplay between the claims of Empiricism and Intellectualism that is “resolved” in the move to existentialism: a “third form of accounting for the phenomenon”. However, it is important to emphasise that the “resolution” of the antinomial structure of objective thought is achieved through the phenomenology of the pre-reflective perceived world. The argument is that what phenomenological description finds is that the antinomies are always already “overcome” at this pre-objective level of experience. This is because at this level we experience ourselves, not as Cartesian souls in mechanical bodies, but as “body-subjects”. Merleau-Ponty holds that a central expression of our fundamental ontological ambiguity can be seen in our experience of the “lived body”. The body is lived by me as being ambiguous between the notion of a pure “subject” (a pure consciousness) and a pure “object” (in the sense of an extended substance). What phenomenological investigation reveals is that the body that we live cannot be adequately characterised by either of these basic concepts of objective thought. Hence, Merleau-Ponty argues, only an existential dialectic can do that. Thus we have the ontological category – the existential-dialectical category – “body-subject” to express the irresolvable ambiguity that we live, as we are a “perceiving/perceived”. I phenomenally experience my body as I live through it, as that through which there is a perceptual world. And yet in the way that others can perceive my body as an exteriority in the world, I am a “perceived” for others. Thus I am a perceiving/perceived.

Likewise, we experience the world not as completely independent from us, as a totality of objects, but as the horizonal and perspectival phenomenological world of our concrete experience – a “world-for-us”. We do not experience objects as absolute and subject-independent things-in-themselves; rather, we experience objects perspectivally, as a transcendence in immanence, an “in-itself-for-us”.[[41]](#footnote-42) In connection with this is the existential-dialectical structure of the body/world relation. Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy is ‘dialectical’ in the sense that he sees the relations between humans and the world as consisting in a complex and inextricable “intertwining” between body and world. Merleau-Ponty rejects the (Cartesian) assumption that the world and the subject are ontologically separable. What phenomenological investigation reveals is that all of our experience is fundamentally world-oriented, through our pre-reflective intentional relation. There can be no objects of experience except through our taking up of those objects as figures standing out against a background, or world, which is essential for them being the objects that they are. The world for us is “always already there”; we are consciousness-for-a-world. Likewise there can be no conception of “world” but through the body-subject’s capacities for having a world. A world is that which is structured in relation to the bodily explorations of a motor-intentional subject. Thus Merleau-Ponty’s philosophical strategy for dealing with the irremovable ambiguity of the body/world relation is to conceptualise it, on phenomenological grounds, as the existential-dialectical structure “being-in-the-world”.

Merleau-Ponty’s references to Hegel do not always make his position immediately clear and are written in a way that invites misunderstanding. For example, he argues in relation to the opposition of “being-for-itself” and “being-in-itself” that:

The synthesis of *in itself* and *for itself* which brings Hegelian freedom into being has, however, its truth. In a sense, *it is the very definition of existence*, since it is effected at every moment before our eyes in the phenomenon of presence, only to be quickly re-enacted, since it does not conjure away our finitude.[[42]](#footnote-43)

So, for Merleau-Ponty “the lived synthesis of subject and object” is “effected every moment before our eyes” in our pre-objective experience precisely because we are a transcendence toward a world, not a pure subject. But this is also because “the world” defies the status of pure object due to its co-constitutional role with respect to the perceived world. This primordial process is “the very definition of existence”.

Merleau-Ponty’s reference to Hegel here is, however, potentially misleading. This is because his talk of “the synthesis of *in itself* and *for itself*” ashaving “its truth” might be taken to suggest two separateparts that are coming together and being synthesized. But this is not what Merleau-Ponty means. The key phrase here is: “the synthesis of in itself and for itself” is an idea that “*has* *its truth*”. By “having its truth” Merleau-Ponty means that, in as much as the Hegelian idea of speculative identity articulates a theme that his phenomenology more truly captures in its account of the body-subject as being-in-the-world, it is approximating to our true ontological structure. Being-in-the-world is the fundamental ontological concept for Merleau-Ponty, expressing a primordial existential unity. There are in actuality no “opposites” here because, strictly speaking, the two putative parts (*for-itself/in-itself*) do not exist. They are, in fact, a product of viewing the issue from the perspective of objective thought. In reality the terms capture two inseparable moments of a primordial existential whole.

Merleau-Ponty uses the concept of an “existential-dialectical unity” to characterise this primordial existential whole. This is because it consists of two distinguishable, though ultimately inseparable, aspects. On this view “unity” has to be understood in the sense of “dialectically dependent”. As Stephen Priest puts it:

… a and b are dialectically dependent if and only if not a then not b and if not b then not a. Then we have the thesis that there is no subject without a world and a situation and no world and no situation without a subject. Subject on the one hand and world or situation on the other hand are then “identical” in the sense that they are parts of a single existential whole, or primordial existential unity.[[43]](#footnote-44)

Paradoxical though this is, says Merleau-Ponty, it is precisely what phenomenology reveals to us.

The foregoing discussion has specified two of the three principal senses of “dialectic” for Merleau-Ponty. The first sense is that of a dialectical form of argument that articulates the dialectical relations between Empiricism and Intellectualism, and their “overcoming” in the phenomenology of pre-objective lived experience. This is Merleau-Ponty’s dialectic of object thought. The role that the term “dialectic” is playing here is that it expresses both a) the structure of the argument and b) the structure of the relation between subject and object that his argument articulates. Basically, if you follow Empiricism through to its conceptual limits then you get Intellectualism and vice versa, provided that you are thinking within the framework of objective thought. Only by going beyond objective thought are you able to make sense of its existential ground. So a “dialectic of objective thought” points us in the direction of the existential ground.

When we arrive at that ground the second principaluse of “dialectic” serves to characterise the nature of the ground. This usage operates in the articulation of the existential-dialectical “unities” of “body-subject” and “being-in-the-world”, beyond the constraints of objective thought. These distinct usages, taken together, illustrate how “pre-objective being” functions as *both* mediating term *and*ground simultaneously. However, in its role as mediator, it is emphatically not mediating two genuinely separate individual things (bodies and minds, subjects and objects), rather it *appears to be* when we approach the issue *from the perspective of objective thought*. And approaching the issue from the perspective of objective thought is something that we inevitably have to do because we live in the natural attitude. So, in relation to the role of pre-objective being as existential ground, it should now be clear that in the formulation of basic ontological categories and relations it is the existential mode of interpretation that is the more fundamental usage. This is because the existential-dialectical relations that are articulated in the ontological terms “body-subject” and “being-in-the-world” provide the conditions of possibility for the dialectic of objective thought played out in the contest between Empiricism and Intellectualism. Thus, the second principal usage (existential-dialectical categories) underpins the first (the dialectic of objective thought).

**Sense 3 (the dialectic at the level of language and culture)**

The third of the three principal usages of dialectic in Merleau-Ponty is the dialectic at the level of language and culture. It is this dialectic that Taylor Carman refers to when he says that for Merleau-Ponty dialectic:

… seems to consist in a kind of holism, an appreciation of the superficiality of familiar dualisms, the mutual dependence of their terms, and the way in which new forms of understanding emerge not by direct confirmation or refutation of considered judgments, but fluidly and unpredictably through transformations in our ways of being in the world.[[44]](#footnote-45)

This existential-dialectic addresses an irresolvable ambiguity revealed in the phenomenology of cultural experience. Our cultural experience is fundamentally a historical experience, and history is also ambiguous between objective and subjective. This is because events of the past come to be understood only through particular human interpretations, and these interpretations of past events go on to influence future events. So while we in a sense “*receive*” a “heritage of ideas” that are, as such, “external” to us, this “external” heritage is only accessible through our “subjective” interpretations, which necessarily “inject” our “own and always different way of being into [them]”.[[45]](#footnote-46) So as Merleau-Ponty puts it, in “taking up” a cultural tradition of thought we “[transform] it by the very fact that [we] come … to know it”.[[46]](#footnote-47) And so “new forms of understanding emerge not by direct confirmation or refutation of considered judgments, but fluidly and unpredictably through transformations in our ways of being in the world”.[[47]](#footnote-48) The “fluidity” and “unpredictability” of cultural change are a function of the intrinsically creative process of “taking up” a tradition of thought or cultural practice. Only a dialectical existentialism, argues Merleau-Ponty, could possibly do justice to this ambiguous structure of our lived experience. This is because it accounts for the way that we, as individuals, must make the cultural tradition in which we are raised “our own” through the appropriation of its beliefs and practices – by “taking them up” as Merleau-Ponty puts it. And because this “take up” occurs at the individual level by an active participating subject, as opposed to a subject who is the passive receptacle of cultural tradition, it is, as Merleau-Ponty observes, an intrinsically creative process.

It is important to note here that when Merleau-Ponty deploys dialectics in order to account for cultural change, this dialectical historical change at the level of human culture is nevertheless underpinned by his more fundamental ontological categories (body-subject, being-in-the-world, also the object as an “in-itself-for-us”[[48]](#footnote-49)). So, again, the dialectics are constrained by the existential phenomenology, forming an existential-dialectical conception of cultural change.

**Conclusion**

In this article I have pointed out the unique way in which Merleau-Ponty combines the concept of “dialectics” within the frame of his existential ontology. He does this in order to articulate the fundamentally ambiguous nature of the lived world that the phenomenology of perceptual experience reveals. Merleau-Ponty’s use of dialectics is such that the term can be very misleading to interpreters of his position if we fail to grasp the way in which his usage is distinct from Hegel’s. The incorporation of dialectics as a means to articulate his view of the lived body-subject as finite, historical and situated decisively transforms the meaning of dialectics from its original Hegelian conception. For Hegel history is understood as the realization of reason, and individual historical events are viewed as expressing logical relations between ideas. Merleau-Ponty, by contrast, understands history as an open-ended process that is without any intrinsic direction. This is because he understands historical events and processes as being grounded in the concrete historicity of lived individuals, and those individuals always have the creative capacity to reinterpret their history and their present situation and thus the freedom to redirect their future course.

As I have argued, Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy involves three principle uses of “dialectic”. The first is his dialectic of objective thought which uses a dialectical form of argument to articulate the dialectical relation between the antinomial theoretical forms of Empiricism and Intellectualism, and their “overcoming” in the phenomenology of pre-objective lived experience. Secondly, the exploration of the pre-objective leads to the formulation of existential-dialectical categories intended to capture the ontological structure of the “body-subject” as “being-in-the-world”. And thirdly, the concrete situatedness of the subject in a cultural context is expressed in terms of a dialectic at the level of language and culture, a dialectic of cultural transmission and change as individuals modify their culture in the very process of reproducing it.

With respect to method Merleau-Ponty holds that dialectics is not only appropriate for *phenomenological description* but, more generally, a dialectical conception is built into an existentialist view of reason that is appropriate for *ontological theorising*. So in spite of its Hegelian origin and general form, it should now be clear that Merleau-Ponty’s existentialist conception of reason is, as Herbert Spiegelberg points out, most definitely “not that of Hegelian logic which is intelligible through and through and self-sufficient”.[[49]](#footnote-50) Rather, in line with Merleau-Ponty’s inversion of priorities, the rational structure of the world, and thus what he considers a viable conception of reason, is understood to derive from the order and structure encountered in lived perceptual experience.

Consistent with Merleau-Ponty’s view that being always exceeds the capacities of reason, he speaks of a “mystery of reason” and asserts that:

Rationality is precisely proportioned to the experiences in which it is disclosed. To say that there exists rationality is to say that perspectives blend, perceptions confirm each other, a meaning emerges.[[50]](#footnote-51)

With his “existentialized” version of a Hegelian conception of reason, Merleau-Ponty asserts, “the philosopher’s thinking is sufficiently conscious not to anticipate itself and endow its own results with reified form in the world”.[[51]](#footnote-52) The philosopher, on this view, seeks to “conceive the world, others and himself and their interrelations” but he does not “rediscover an already given rationality”. Rather, the world, others and self, and their interrelations “establish themselves”, and thus “establish rationality”, by:

… an act of initiative which has no guarantee in being, its justification resting entirely on the effective power which it confers on us of taking our own history upon ourselves.[[52]](#footnote-53)

This helps to bring out the sense of Merleau-Ponty’s *prima facie* opaque claim in the Preface to *Phenomenology of Perception* that:

The phenomenological world is not the bringing to explicit expression of a pre-existing being, but the laying down of being. Philosophy is not the reflection of a pre-existing truth, but, like art, the act of bringing truth into being.[[53]](#footnote-54)

So truth is “brought into being” in a similar way that an artwork is created. That is, it involves unique historical acts that represent a unique confluence of forces, and that is contingent upon the structure of human being and the structure of language and culture through which it is articulated. So it is “a laying down of being” in the sense that rationality and truth do not simply “pre-exist” our experience – there to be discovered. Rather, they are constituted *through* the subject in his co-constitutive relation with being.

And if opponents raise the question as to “how this creation is *possible*” and whether it “does not recapture in things a pre-existing Reason”, the answer is that:

… the only pre-existent Logos is the world itself, and that the philosophy which brings it into visible existence does not begin by being *possible*; it is actual or real like the world of which it is a part.[[54]](#footnote-55)

Here we can see Merleau-Ponty’s dialectical conception of reason connect with his existentialist emphasis on a “phenomenological positivism which bases the possible on the real”.[[55]](#footnote-56) It is this unique combination of views that allows him to declare that:

Rationality is not a *problem*. There is behind it no unknown quantity which has to be determined by deduction, or, beginning with it, demonstrated inductively. We witness every minute the miracle of related experience, and yet nobody knows better than we do how this miracle is worked, for we are ourselves this network of relationships. The world and reason are not problematical. We may say, if we wish, that they are mysterious, but their mystery defines them …[[56]](#footnote-57)

Reason is not viewed as a problem for Merleau-Ponty precisely because he holds that “the sense of things must emerge from their own dynamism, and cannot be measured by some alien, pre-defined, static ‘reason’”.[[57]](#footnote-58) This dynamic, dialectical conception of reason is, in his view, the core of his Hegelian debt. Hegel was the first to ‘explore the irrational and integrate it into an expanded reason’ and Merleau-Ponty “takes up” this new model of “Reason, broader than the understanding” that provides the philosopher with a rationality capable of respecting “the variety and singularity of individual consciousnesses, civilizations, ways of thinking, and historical contingency”.[[58]](#footnote-59) This dialectical conception of reason is, he holds, only brought to fruition in the context of existential phenomenology. This is because in the attempt to do justice to the singularity of nature and of embodied being, in all its richness and complexity, we discover that a new type of open-ended dialectic is required. This existential dialectic refuses Hegel’s totalising synthesis and, instead, centres on the three principal usages I have outlined. For only this model of rationality is adequate to the task of capturing the dynamic structure of the pre-objective body/world relation, as well as the dynamic structure of reciprocal constitution between individual and cultural context.

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1. See, for example: Stephen Priest, *Merleau-Ponty*,(London: Routledge, 1998); John Russon, “Dialectic, Difference and the Other: The Hegelianizing of French Phenomenology” in *The History of Continental Philosophy Volume 4. Phenomenology: Responses and Developments*, Leonard Lawlor (ed.) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Taylor Carman, *Merleau-Ponty* (London: Routledge, 2008); Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, (London: Routledge. 2000); Sebastian Gardner, “Merleau-Ponty's Transcendental Theory of Perception”, (2007). Available at http://sas-space.sas.ac.uk/375/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. See, for example: Hammond, Howarth and Keat, *Understanding Phenomenology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); Komarine Romdenh-Romluc, *Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception*,(London: Routledge, 2010); Christopher Macann, *Four Phenomenological Philosophers: Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty* (London: Routledge, 1993);David Cerbone, *Understanding Phenomenology* (Chesham: Acumen, 2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement*, 3rd rev. and enlarged edition, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), 548. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. There is another story to be told here about Merleau-Ponty and specifically Marxian dialectics but the focus on Hegel is sufficient for the purposes of this article. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Hegel’s Existentialism” in *Sense and Non-Sense*, (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Merleau-Ponty, “Hegel’s Existentialism”, 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Merleau-Ponty, “Author’s Preface” in *Sense and Non-Sense*, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Merleau-Ponty, “Hegel’s Existentialism”, 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Merleau-Ponty, “Hegel’s Existentialism”, 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Merleau-Ponty, “Hegel’s Existentialism”, 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Merleau-Ponty, “Hegel’s Existentialism”, 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Gardner, “Merleau-Ponty's Transcendental Theory of Perception”, 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. Merleau-Ponty*, Phenomenology of Perception,* 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. Merleau-Ponty*, Phenomenology of Perception,* vii. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. “Logicism” is Merleau-Ponty’s term referring to a philosophy that places an unjustified emphasis on an autonomous rationality, and on the universal applicability of syllogistic logical categories unconstrained by experiential context. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Gardner, “Merleau-Ponty's Transcendental Theory of Perception”, 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. Priest, *Merleau-Ponty*,38. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. Merleau-Ponty, “Hegel’s Existentialism”, 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “The Battle over Existentialism” in *Sense and Non-Sense*, 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. Merleau-Ponty’s thesis of the “primacy of perception” holds that being is revealed to us directly in our preobjective lived perceptual experience and that it is this primordial level of experience that we need an account of, giving it a properly “philosophical status”. The claim has two key aspects: the *epistemological* primacy of perception – in Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological sense of perception – and the *ontological* primacy of phenomena. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. For a useful schematization of contemporary Hegel interpretation, including a clear statement of the traditional metaphysical view, see: Paul Redding, "Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/hegel/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. Georg Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, A.V. Miller (trans.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), §389n. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. Peter Singer, “Hegel” in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, Ted Honderich (ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 342. cf. Merleau-Ponty’s talk of Hegel’s ‘absolute Spirit as history's motive force’ in Merleau-Ponty, “The Battle over Existentialism”, 81. Likewise, his talk of the ‘“World Spirit”’ as ‘that cunning spirit which leads men without their knowing it and makes them accomplish its own designs’. Merleau-Ponty, “Marxism and Philosophy”, 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*,§389n. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. Robert Sinnerbrink, *Understanding Hegelianism* (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2007), 166. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. Sinnerbrink, *Understanding Hegelianism*, 166. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 110. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, 493. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. Priest, *Merleau-Ponty*,40. cf: Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 490. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. Merleau-Ponty, “Hegel’s Existentialism”, 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. Hubert Dreyfus, “Editor's Introduction” in *Sense and Non-Sense*, xviii. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. Merleau-Ponty, “The Battle over Existentialism”, 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. Merleau-Ponty, “The Battle over Existentialism”, 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. Merleau-Ponty, “Hegel’s Existentialism”, 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. “Hegel’s Existentialism” was occasioned by Jean Hyppolite's lecture of the same title, delivered on February 16, 1947, to *l'Institut d'Études Germaniques*. cf: “The great interest of Hyppolite's lecture is that, as far as existentialism is concerned, it begins the translation which will illuminate the discussions of our time”. Merleau-Ponty, “Hegel’s Existentialism”, 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 82 (italics added). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. I follow Gardner in capitalising these terms in order to indicate that I am referring to Merleau-Ponty’s technical usage. “Empiricism” refers to classical empiricist philosophy, psychology that draws on it, and scientific realism. “Intellectualism” denotes Kant’s philosophy, psychology that draws on it, 17th century Rationalism and 20th century French neo-Kantianism. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
40. Russon, “Dialectic, Difference and the Other”, 32-33. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
41. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 375. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
42. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 528 (italics added). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
43. Priest, *Merleau-Ponty*, 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
44. Carman, *Merleau-Ponty*,171. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
45. Merleau-Ponty, “Man and Adversity” in *Signs*, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 224. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
46. Merleau-Ponty, “Man and Adversity”, 224. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
47. Carman, *Merleau-Ponty*,171. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
48. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 375. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
49. Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement*, 534. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
50. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, xxii. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
51. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* xxii. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
52. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, xxii. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
53. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, xxii. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
54. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, xxii. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
55. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, xix. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
56. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, xxxiii. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
57. Russon, “Dialectic, Difference and the Other”, 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
58. Merleau-Ponty, “Hegel’s Existentialism”, 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)