

Department of Philosophy

**Merleau-Ponty**

Spring Term 2011

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**Essay Topics**

Here are some suggestions. As I have emphasised, these suggestions are not intended to be exhaustive, but to enable you to start thinking about what you want to write about. As you will see, quality secondary literature in this area is rather limited. This means that you will have to concentrate on Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology* (and other texts). There are longer bibliographies on the web (e.g. attached to the rather dated (2004) and unhelpful entry in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy).

Still, some books are useful, and I list them below with the abbreviations I shall use in the lists which follow, along with those I shall use for Merleau-Ponty's works. I have asked for copies of these books to be placed in the Key Texts section of the Library. Other books marked with an asterisk (\*) are also in the 'Key Texts' section.

PhP M. Merleau-Ponty *Phenomenology of Perception*. Page numbers are for the 2002 edition of the English translation.

- \*CC T. Carman (ed.) *Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*
- \*KRR Komarine Romdenh-Romluc *Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception*
- \*Carman T. Carman *Merleau-Ponty*
- \*TRB T. Baldwin (ed.) *Reading Merleau-Ponty*
- \*Matthews E. Matthews *The Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty*

**1. Phenomenology**

What is Merleau-Ponty's conception of phenomenology? How far does it differ from Husserl's?

M-P

PhP: Preface, Introduction ch. 4 ('The Phenomenal Field'), Part III ch. 1 ('The Cogito')

\**Signs* 'The Philosopher and his Shadow'

Husserl

Either \**The Crisis of European Sciences* Part III (A & B) (best!)

Or *The Idea of Phenomenology*

Or \**Ideas* book 1, part 2 chs. 1-4

Secondary Literature

KRR ch. 1

Matthews ch. 1

S. Heinamaa 'Merleau-Ponty's modification of phenomenology' *Synthese* 118 (1999) 49-68  
(obtainable via JSTOR)

## 2. Intentionality

What is distinctive about Merleau-Ponty's conception of intentionality? How does it relate to Brentano's account? or to Husserl's? or to other contemporary discussions?

M-P

PhP Preface, 157-70 ('motor intentionality'), Part II ch. 1 'sense-experience' (the intentionality of perception), 497-500 ('operative intentionality')

Brentano

*Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* Book 2 ch. 1 §5-end (pp. 88-100), Appendix 1 (pp. 271-5)

Husserl

\**Ideas* §84-6 (pp. 199-207 in the translation by Kersten) – but then go bak to Part II chs. 2 and 3

Contemporary discussions

The Stanford Encyclopedia by P. Jacob is excellent, and has a useful bibliography. But you will see that it raises many issues which do not connect with M-P's discussion.

Secondary Literature

\*Carman chs. 2, 3

M. Reuter 'Merleau-Ponty's notion of pre-reflective intentionality' *Synthese* 118 (1999) 69-88 (obtainable via JSTOR)

## 3. Perception

What is Merleau-Ponty's positive account of perception?

M-P

PhP Intr. ch. 4 'The Phenomenal Field', Part II ch. 1 'Sense-experience', Part II ch. 3 'The Thing and the Natural World' esp. pp. 381-9.

Secondary Literature

\*CC papers by Carman, Wrathall, Kelly

\*Carman ch. 2

\*KRR chs. 4, 6

\*Matthews ch. 3

\*TRB paper by Kelly

F. Olafson 'A central theme of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy' in eds. E. Lee & M. Mandelbaum *Phenomenology and Existentialism*.

(possible side-topic here: M-P's account of hallucinations – cf. PhP pp. 389-402).

#### 4. The Body

What is Merleau-Ponty's account of our embodiment? What is the significance of his distinction between the 'phenomenal' body and the 'objective' body?

M-P

PhP Part 1 esp. ch. 1 'The Body as Object' & ch. 3 'The Spatiality of one's own body'

Secondary literature

\*Matthews ch. 4

\*Carman ch. 3

\*KRR ch. 3

\*TRB paper by Smith

Gallagher 'Pursuing a Phantom' in module handbook

Gallagher 'Bodily schema and intentionality' in J.L. Bermudez, N. Eilan & A. Marcel (eds.) *The Body and the Self*.

(possible side-topics here:

(i) compare M-P's account with that of J-P Sartre, as set out in:

\*J-P. Sartre *Being and Nothingness* part III ch. 2)

(ii) pursue topic of 'phantom limb' – cf. O. Sacks

(iii) pursue topic of Kurt Goldstein's study of Schneider; compare with the work of Dr W.H.R. Rivers?)

#### 5. Language

What is the importance of speech and language for Merleau-Ponty's account of the body? What is his distinction between speaking and spoken speech?

M-P

PhP part I ch. 6, pp. 413, 452-7

\**The Prose of the World*

\**Signs* 'The Phenomenology of Language'

Secondary literature

\*TRB paper by TRB

\*KRR ch. 7

L. Spurling *Phenomenology and the Social World* ch. 2

S. Priest *Merleau-Ponty* ch. 10

## 6. Others

What is Merleau-Ponty's account of our understanding of others? How does it compare with that proposed by J-P. Sartre?

M-P

PhP Part II ch. 4

Sartre

\**Being and Nothingness* Part III ch. 1 §IV 'The Look'

Secondary literature

\*KRR ch. 5

\*Carman ch. 4

\*Matthews ch. 5

\*TRB paper by Wrathall

(possible side-topics:

(i) compare M-P with A. Schutz *Phenomenology of the Social World* esp. ch. 3)

(ii) compare M-P with D. Davidson, esp. *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*)

## 7. Self-Knowledge

What is Merleau-Ponty's account of self-knowledge? Does he have a satisfactory account of first-person authority? Compare his position with that of Descartes? with Sartre?

M-P

PhP Part III ch. 1 'The Cogito'

Descartes

*Meditations* esp. I – III

Sartre

\**Being and Nothingness* Introduction, Part 2 ch. 1

Secondary literature

\*KRR 208-16

\*Matthews ch. 5

## 8. Freedom

What is Merleau-Ponty's account of freedom? How does it compare with Sartre's?

M-P

PhP Part I ch. 1 pp. 95-8, Part III ch. 3 'Freedom'

Sartre

\**Being and Nothingness* Part IV ch. 1 pp. 433-509.

## 9. Painting

What is the importance for Merleau-Ponty of Cezanne's paintings? How far does Merleau-Ponty's approach to Cezanne illuminate the work of other painters?

M-P

PhP look under 'Cezanne' in index and follow references

\**The World of Perception*

'Cezanne's Doubt' in module handbook

'The Eye and the Mind' in *The Primacy of Perception* and in H. Osborne *Aesthetics*

Secondary Literature

\*CC papers by Gilmore, Goehr

\*Carman ch. 6

P. Crowther *Critical Aesthetics and postmodernism* ch. 2

## 10. The intertwining

What are the central themes of Merleau-Ponty's late essay on the subject/object 'chiasm'? How far does his position here differ from that of his *Phenomenology*? Is it an improvement?

M-P

'The chiasm' from *The Visible and the Invisible* in module handbook

Secondary literature

\*Matthews ch. 8

\*Carman ch. 3 pp. 120-133

L. Irigaray 'The invisible of the flesh' in C. Caseaux (ed.) *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*