

# Merleau-Ponty

## Lecture 6

# Other selves

- Part II chapter 4 Basic Structure

403-5 Summary on 'the Natural world'

405 The cultural world

406-9 Problem (1): 'Objective thought' excludes others

409-14 Solution (1): Our intuitive experience of others

414-19 Problem (2): The deep problem of solipsism

419-25 Solution (2): Transcendental subjectivity is intersubjectivity

# Background: 'other minds'

## Traditional positions (i):

- 'Cartesian myth'
- 1<sup>st</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> person asymmetry
- 'Argument by analogy'
- Inference only

## Traditional positions (ii):

- Behaviourism
- No asymmetry
- No 1<sup>st</sup> person authority
- No 'subject' / 'self'
- Problem of holism
- Still inference to dispositions

# More recent positions (i)

- Functionalism
- Explanatory model
- 'Theory of mind'
- Holism - ok
- Still no 1<sup>st</sup> person authority
- Intentionality? (teleological approach?)

## More recent positions (ii)

- ‘Simulation’/’Replication’ thesis
- Priority to 1<sup>st</sup> person expressions
- Commitments – not explanatory hypotheses
- 3<sup>rd</sup> person ascription: empathy (=analogy?)

# Intentionality issue

- Teleological approach?
- Causal approaches?
- 'Normative' positions
- Thought and language
- Shared understanding
- 'Rule-following' (Wittgenstein)
- 'Triangulation' (Davidson)

# Phenomenological approaches

- Sartre: 1<sup>st</sup> person/3<sup>rd</sup> person conflict ('subject'/'object')
- 1<sup>st</sup> person assumption of authority
- 3<sup>rd</sup> person alienation
- Mutual suspicion and the experience of war
- Impossibility of love
- Beyond doubt?



# Heidegger

- Mit-sein ('being-with-others')
- As fundamental as: being-in-the-world
- The 'pre-objective' world is shared.
- And 'pre-personal' experience is of this shared world.

# Back to M-P

- It's clear that M-P basically agrees with Heidegger
- M-P implicitly on Sartre: pp. 420-1
- Objectification (alienation) occurs – yes: but only as a withdrawal from antecedent understanding.
- Transcendental subjectivity is intersubjectivity (421)
- But it's not that we are transparent to others
- But we are not transparent to ourselves either
- (which is why: we must return to the cogito (425))

# Objective thought and others

- M-P's key thesis: one cannot 'insert' others into a world already conceived as objective (407)
- M-P directs this primarily against Cartesian position (406)
- Against behaviourism etc. – less to say, but see p. 409 on the 'objective' body
- N.B. comments re intentionality (409) and science (407-8)

# First solution:

- Get behind the in-itself/for-itself categories of objective thought (408)
- Back to 'existence', the phenomenal body (408)
- Theme of body as 'pre-personal' subject, and thus 'anonymous' (412)
- Our shared life with others in a shared world (412)
- Experience of dialogue (413)
- The child's experience (413-4) (Joint attention)
- nb. M-P's own childhood (403-4)
- Basic belief (doxa) (414)

## Second problem

- But feelings etc. are not shared –
- It's not just a matter of getting beyond objective thought (415).
- The 'solipsism rooted in living experience and quite insurmountable' (416)
- (Beyond *mitsein* to existential subjectivity – in Heidegger too)
- No solution for this in a Godlike universal consciousness (417-8)

## Second 'solution'?

- Recognising 'the truth of solipsism' (cf. Wittgenstein)
- Comparison between self-knowledge and knowledge of others (418-9)
- Presumption of mutual understanding (420) – but it is defeasible.
- Hence the social world as 'a permanent dimension of existence' (421)
- But this does not make us transparent.

# Final comparisons

- The 'transcendence' of others
- My own death and another's 'presence to himself' (424)