

# 1. What is Phenomenology?

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- Introduction
  - Course Outline
  - *The Phenomenology of Perception*
- Husserl and Phenomenology
- Merleau-Ponty
- Neurophenomenology

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# *The Phenomenology of Perception (PP)*

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- Published 1945; Merleau-Ponty's major work
- Other works include:
  - *The Structure of Behaviour*, 1942.
  - *The World of Perception*, 1948.
  - *The Primacy of Perception*. A collection of essays.
  - *The Visible and the Invisible*. Unfinished manuscript.
- Within the phenomenological tradition of Brentano, Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre...
- ...but also draws on (then-current) empirical psychology

# What is Phenomenology?

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## 1) Subject Matter

- *Phenomena*: literally, things that appear or appearances
- ‘Phenomenal world’: the world as it appears
- Conscious experience of the world
  - Perception, Bodily Awareness, Sensation, Imagination, Memory, Emotion, Thought, etc.
- What is the *essence* of consciousness?
- Cf. psychology; ‘analytic’ philosophy of mind

# What is Phenomenology?

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## 2) Methodology

- Descriptive, not (causal) explanatory
  - ‘Return to the things themselves’
  - Contrast (experimental) psychology, biology...
- Provides *a priori* basis for psychology and science
- Employs technique of ‘reduction’
  - Types include: phenomenological, eidetic

# Phenomenological Reduction

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- Also called *epoché*
- Putting the world (as such) ‘in brackets’; suspend judgement about its existence
- Contrasts with ‘natural attitude’ of day-to-day life and science
- Compare/contrast: Descartes’s method of doubt
- Uncovers world as it appears to consciousness
- Necessary, because experience is ‘everywhere intertwined with external experience, with that of extra-psychical real things’ (Husserl, p. 24a)

# Eidetic Reduction

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- Used to uncover essence of consciousness
  - ‘eidos’, ‘eidetic’ refer to ‘essence’
- Essence: that which makes a thing what it is
  - Standard examples (not Husserl’s): man = rational animal (Aristotle); material substance = extension (Descartes); 2 = successor of 1
- From instances to essences
  - Consider particular examples and use ‘imaginative variation’
  - Uncovers the ‘necessarily enduring invariant in the variation’ (Husserl, p. 25b)

# Intentionality

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- Object-directed, *not* deliberate
  - From ‘*intentio*’: literally, striving or pointing towards
  - Contrast also: intensionality (relates to meaning)
- ‘About-ness’: consciousness always consciousness *of*..
  - Perception *of* a tree; memory *of* a kiss; fear *of* the dark; thought *of* sitting an exam
- Brentano: intentionality the ‘mark of the mental’
  - Some controversial cases:
    - Maps, signs: intentional but not mental?
    - Pain, emotion, mood, qualia: mental but not intentional?
- Consciousness has an *act-object* structure

# Intentionality

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## 1) Intentional object

- What an intentional act is directed towards
- ‘Intentional inexistence’
  - Distinct from physical object: ‘The experienced “exterior” does not belong to one’s intentional interiority’ (p. 24a)
  - Physical object does not necessarily exist: e.g. I can think about the highest number, imagine a golden mountain, be afraid of the bogeyman, (see a pink elephant?)
- Not necessarily an ‘object’; could be an event, property, abstract object, etc.
- In general: *noema*; *noematic* refers to *noema*.
  - (N.B. Relation of intentional *object* to *content* controversial)<sup>8</sup>



# Intentionality

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## 2) Intentional act

- Modes of consciousness: perceiving (seeing, hearing, touching, etc.), remembering, imagining, etc.
- Different modes of awareness (each intentional) are 'synthetically unified' in consciousness *of* an object
- Example: individual experiences of different appearances presented by a die, depending on orientation, depth, illumination, etc.
- In general: *noesis*; *noetic* refers to *noesis*

# Transcendental Idealism

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*'I-subject', 'I-pole', or transcendental Ego*

- Transcend: literally, to go beyond
- Ego exists independently of temporal/causal world...
- ...and prior to the world; 'constituting consciousness'
  - Condition of the possibility of objective experience: nature of the perceived world *determined by* the transcendental Ego and its essential 'structures'
  - 'I must lose the world by epoché, in order to regain it by a universal self-examination. "Do not wish to go out," says Augustine, "go back into yourself. Truth dwells in the inner man."' (*Cartesian Meditations*, 1931, §64)

# Transcendental Idealism

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- Perceived objects ‘transcendent’
  - ‘Go beyond’ particular experiences, e.g. the die
  - But nature not independent of all *possible* experience. Always an object-for-a-subject; hence idealism
  - World is ‘spread out and completely transparent’ before the transcendental Ego (Merleau-Ponty, *PP*, p. xii).
- Q: Do you find Husserl’s account of the essence of consciousness compelling?

# Merleau-Ponty

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- Influenced by later Husserl, e.g. *Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (1936)
  - First system account of phenomenology in *Ideas* (1913); developed subsequently...
  - *Encyclopaedia Britannica* entry (1927); *Cartesian Mediations* (1929, published 1931)
  - Later introduced *Lebenswelt* ('lived-world'); possibly response to Heidegger's *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*, 1927)
- Q: What is Merleau-Ponty's relation to Husserl and phenomenology?

# Merleau-Ponty

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- Transcendental Idealism
  - Rejects transcendental idealism of early, and perhaps late, Husserl
  - “Truth does not “inhabit” only the “inner man”, or more accurately, there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself” (*PP*, p. xii)

# Merleau-Ponty

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- Being-in-the-world
  - Similar to (late) Husserl's *Lebenswelt* ('life-world') and Heidegger's being-in-the-world
  - Subject and world are 'intertwined'
  - Perceiving more 'primitive' than thought; 'operative intentionality' (vs. intentionality of act)
  - Lived-world indeterminate, ambiguous, opaque
  - Experience essential meaningful
    - We are '*condemned to meaning*' (p. xxii)
    - (Cf. Sartre, 'we are condemned to be free')

# Merleau-Ponty

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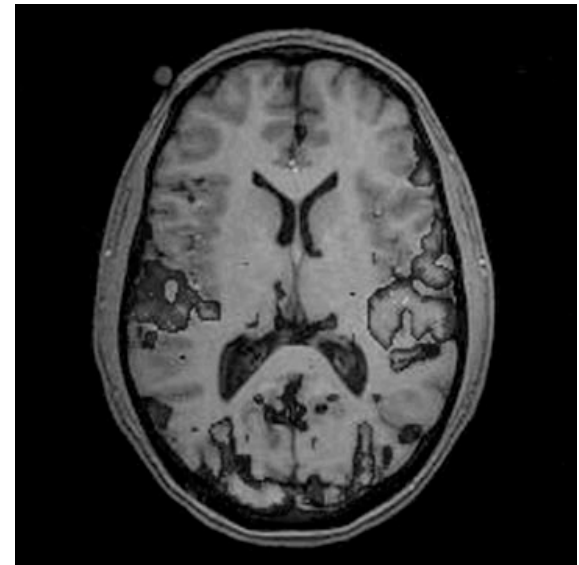
- Phenomenological Reduction
  - ‘places in abeyance the assertions arising out of the natural attitude’ (*PP*, p. vii)
  - ‘to return to the “things themselves”, is from the start a foreswearing of science’ (*PP*, p. ix)
  - ‘The most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction’ (*PP*, p. xv)
  - Existential, not transcendental, phenomenology
- Eidetic reduction:
  - Phenomenology ‘puts essences back into existence’ (*PP*, p. vii)

# Neurophenomenology

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## Is Phenomenology Still Relevant?

- To e.g. find the neural correlates of consciousness, we first need to know what we are finding correlates of
- Careful description of experience can help interpret experimental data and influence experimental design
- ‘Phenomenological accounts of the structure of experience and their counterparts in cognitive science relate to each other through reciprocal constraints’ (F. Varela, ‘Neurophenomenology: A Methodological Remedy for the Hard Problem’; cf. Gallagher and Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind*)



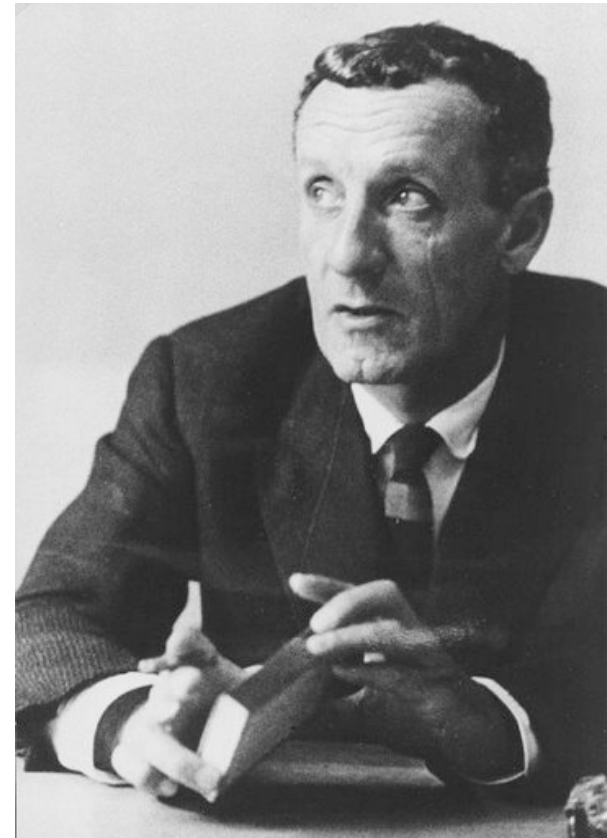


# Neurophenomenology

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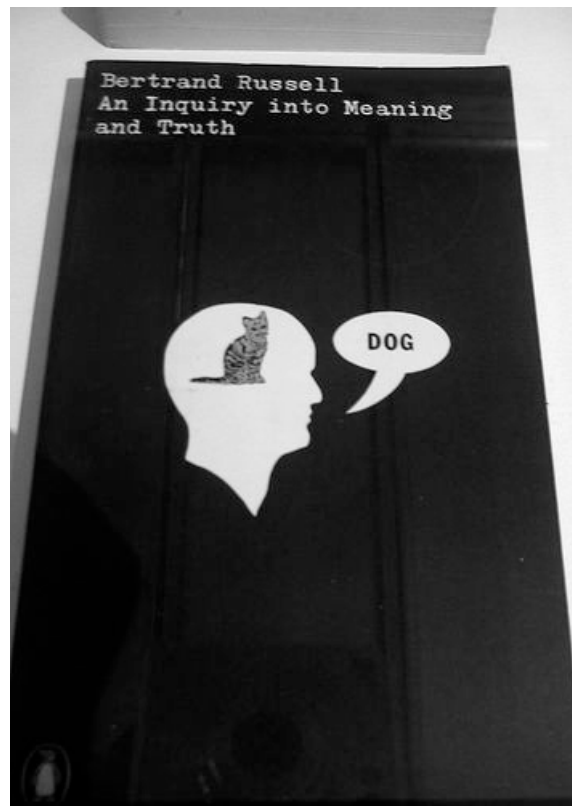
## Merleau-Pontyan Inspiration

- ‘To return to things themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always *speaks*, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language, as is geography in relation to the country-side in which we have learnt beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is’ (*PP*, p. x)



# An Alternative Perspective

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- ‘Physics assures us that the occurrences which we call ‘perceiving objects’ are at the end of a long causal chain. We all start from ‘naïve realism’, i.e., the doctrine that things are what they seem. ...**Naïve realism leads to physics, and physics, if true, shows that naïve realism is false. Therefore naïve realism, if true, is false; therefore it is false**’ (B. Russell, *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* (Pelican, 1962), p. 13.)
- Q: How would Merleau-Ponty respond? Is this plausible? Why? Why not?

# Selected Further Reading

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