6. The *Cogito*

- Procedural Work and Assessment
- The Cartesian Background
- Merleau-Ponty: the ‘tacit’ *cogito*
Assessment

- Procedural work: Friday Week 8 (Spring)
  - A draft/essay plan (up to 1500 words)
- Tutorials: Week 10 (Spring)
- Assessed work: Monday Week 2 (Summer)
- Word limits
  - Second years: 2000-3000
  - Third years: 3000-4000
  - DO NOT EXCEED!!!
# Marking Criteria

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<tr>
<th>Mark</th>
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<tr>
<td>80 - 100</td>
<td>Exceptional and outstanding work that presents original ideas which are clearly worked out and set in the context of a well-understood philosophical debate.</td>
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<tr>
<td>70 - 79</td>
<td>Excellent work that presents the issues clearly and accurately, which shows evidence of independent thought and critical reflection on the module material, and which displays a sophisticated grasp of the subtleties of the philosophical debate.</td>
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<tr>
<td>60 - 69</td>
<td>Good work that presents philosophical views and problems in an accurate and well-organized way, and which shows a solid grasp of the main issues and an ability to exercise philosophical judgment.</td>
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<td>50 - 59</td>
<td>Satisfactory work that shows understanding of the main issues and familiarity with a decent range of module material.</td>
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<td>40 - 49</td>
<td>Work that adequately presents a limited range of relevant module material in a structured way.</td>
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<td>35 - 39</td>
<td>Work that shows some understanding of a limited range of module material.</td>
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<tr>
<td>0 - 34</td>
<td>Work that shows little or no understanding of the basic issues covered in the module material.</td>
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Resources

• Bibliographies
  – Module Outline and last slide of each lecture
  – *Philosopher’s Index*, available via the library’s website: [http://www.york.ac.uk/library/subjects/philosophy.htm](http://www.york.ac.uk/library/subjects/philosophy.htm)

• Articles and books
  – The library (obviously...)
  – Jstor: [http://www.jstor.org](http://www.jstor.org)
  – PhilPapers: [http://philpapers.org/](http://philpapers.org/)
  – Online Papers on Consciousness: [http://consc.net/online](http://consc.net/online)
  – Philosophers’ homepages
Descartes

The ‘Cartesian’ cogito

- Cogito ergo sum; I think therefore I am (Second Meditation)

Some features of the Cartesian position

- Mind better known than world
- Thinking (cogito) prior to being (sum)
- Mind/world distinction
- An ‘Archimedean point’
Merleau-Ponty

The ‘tacit’ or ‘true’ *cogito*

- The ground of the ‘Cartesian’ or ‘spoken’ *cogito*
- ‘the presence of oneself to oneself’ (p. 470)

Some features of Merleau-Ponty’s position

- Mind not better known than world
- Being (*sum*) is prior to thinking (*cogito*)
- No mind/world distinction
- No ‘Archimedean point’
• Is ‘I see an ashtray’ more certain than ‘There is an ashtray’?
  – ‘See’ a ‘success verb’: ‘I see x’ implies ‘x exists’.
  – So, if I see x, then I can be certain that x exists.
• Is ‘I think I see an ashtray’ more certain than ‘there is an ashtray’?
  – The thought is about the seeing of the ashtray
  – If the seeing is uncertain, so is the thought
• So, ‘In whatever sense we take ‘thought about seeing’, it is certain only so long as actual sight it equally so’ (p. 437)
Sceptical Doubt

- Descartes’s response to scepticism: rational reflection
- For M-P, Cartesian strategy leads to regress
  - Can doubt my doubt (is it really mine?), doubt my doubt about my doubt...
- Instead, sceptical doubts silenced by engaging in the world
  - ‘The only way out, and into ‘sincerity’, is by forestalling such scruples and taking a blind plunge into ‘doing’” (p. 445)
‘I am’, ‘I think’

- In general, knowledge of things prior to knowledge of properties
- Recall perceptual constancy (Pt. 2, Ch. 3)
- Optimum viewing conditions for an object
  - objects ‘vouchsafe’ most of themselves
- Implicit understanding of ‘best grip’ on an object
- Perceptual constancy presupposes object constancy
- It is ‘only in so far as my perception is in itself open upon a world and on things that I discover constant colours.’ (p. 365)
‘I am’, ‘I think’

- Similarly, knowledge of self prior to knowledge of thought
- Aware of myself as the active subject of my thoughts
- If not, I would be uncertain whether the thoughts were ‘really mine’
- ‘It is not the ‘I am’ which is pre-eminently contained in the ‘I think’...but conversely the ‘I think’, which is re-integrated into the transcending process of the ‘I am’, and consciousness into existence’ (p. 446)
The Cartesian Cogito

• Another I’s *cogito* ‘strips my own *cogito* of all value’ (Pt. 2, Ch. 4, p. 411)

• Cartesian *cogito* a cultural thing
  – Presupposes human action
  – ‘In the cultural object, I feel the close presence of others beneath a veil of anonymity’ (Pt. 2, Ch. 4, p. 405)

• Grasping Cartesian *cogito* presupposes grasping ‘my own *cogito*’ (p. 431)...
Thinking of Things

- Thinking of a thing requires ‘actual contact’ with it
- This awakens ‘primordial knowledge of all things’
- A condition of distinguishing one thing from another
  - Cf. the house (Pt 1, Introduction, pp. 77-9)
- Only possible if things depend, in some sense, on the subject
  - ‘The very experience of transcendent things is possible only provided that their project is borne, and discovered, within myself’ (p. 430)
- Applies to thoughts, like the *cogito*, as well as things
I, You, One

• Singular personal pronouns include
  – I: first-person
  – You (Thou): second-person
  – One: third-person

• Example: *penser* (to think)
  – Je pense *que Merleau-Ponty est hypercool*
  – Tu penses...
  – On pense...

• One, or ‘*le on*’ (in French)
  – Singular: contrast plural ‘we’ (*nous*), ‘you’ (*vous*)
  – Genderless: contrast third-per. sing. ‘he’ (*il*) or ‘she’ (*elle*)
  – Anonymous, generalized: neither I nor You (nor him, her...)
The ‘Tacit’ Cogito

• The ground of the Cartesian cogito
  – Unspoken, silent; not in (empirical) ‘language’
• ‘the presence of oneself to oneself’ (p. 470)
  – Contact with one’s existence or being (sum)
  – ‘Direct’; neither observational nor inferential (p. 432)
• Oneself: being-in-the-world (être au monde)
  – A ‘possibility of situations’ (p. 473)
  – ‘one single temporality which is engaged, from birth, in making itself progressively explicit’ (474)
Mind and World

• Undermines traditional distinctions between
  – Mind/body
  – Mind/world
  – Inner/outer
  – Subject/object...

• ‘Inside and outside are inseperable. The world is wholly inside and I am wholly outside myself’ (p. 474)
An ‘Archimedeans Point’

- A ‘view from nowhere’
- A point from which to compare our conception of the world with the world ‘as it is in itself’
- Presupposed by realism (and certain forms of idealism)
No ‘Archimedean Point’

- We can occupy different perspectives or situations
- No ‘view from nowhere’; we are inseparable from the world
  - Cf. the house (Pt 1, Introduction, pp. 77-9)
- Realism (with a capital ‘R’) unintelligible
  - One might say: things are real, but not really real
  - ‘To ask oneself whether the world is real is to fail to understand what one is asking, since the world is not a sum of things which might always be called into question, but the inexhaustible reservoir from which things are drawn’ (Pt. 2, Ch. 3, p. 401)
Selected Further Reading


* Merleau-Ponty, M. 1968. ‘The Intertwining-The Chiasm’, from The Visible and the Invisible (Northwestern)

* Priest, S. 1998. Merleau-Ponty (Routledge), Ch. 8
