

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology in the light of Kant's ~~†~~Third *Critique* and Schelling's *Real-Idealismus*

Sebastian Gardner, ^{1,*}

Email sebastian.gardner@ucl.ac.uk

¹ University College London, London, UK

Abstract

In this paper I offer a selective, systematic rather than historical account of Merleau-Ponty's highly complex relation to classical German philosophy, focussing on issues which bear on the question of his relation to transcendentalism and naturalism. I argue that the concerns which define his project in *Phenomenology of Perception* are fundamentally those of transcendental philosophy, and that Merleau-Ponty's disagreements with Kant, and the position he arrives at in *The Visible and the Invisible*, are helpfully viewed in light of (1) issues which Merleau-Ponty identifies as raised by Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, and (2) Schelling's conversion of Kantian idealism into a *Real-Idealismus*. Finally I address the question of whether, and on what basis, Merleau-Ponty's claim to have surpassed systematic philosophy can be defended. ~~My aim in this paper is to show how Merleau-Ponty recapitulates an earlier line of development in post-Kantian philosophy, namely that which proceeds via the critique of the power of judgement from the subjective idealism of Kant to the idealistic metaphysical naturalism of Schelling. This comprises in my view the deepest intersection of Merleau-Ponty with classical German philosophy, and bringing it to light allows the full force of Merleau-Ponty's alternative to Kantian transcendentalism to be appreciated. The parallel with Schelling also raises, I will suggest, a difficult question for Merleau-Ponty: if both philosophers are on the same post-Kantian track, what then justifies Merleau-Ponty's opposition of phenomenology to systematic speculative thinking? My discussion of this question will lead to a revisionary, and partly critical, metaphilosophical proposal concerning the status of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology.~~

AQ1

Keywords

Merleau-Ponty
 Phenomenology
 Kant
 Critique of *J*udgement
 Schelling
 Idealism

My aim in this paper is to show how Merleau-Ponty recapitulates an earlier line of development in post-Kantian philosophy, namely that which proceeds via the *Critique of the Power of Judgement (CPJ)* from the subjective idealism of Kant to the idealistic metaphysical naturalism of Schelling. This comprises in my view the deepest intersection of Merleau-Ponty with classical German philosophy, and bringing it to light allows the full force of Merleau-Ponty's alternative to Kantian transcendentalism to be appreciated. The parallel with Schelling also raises, I will suggest, a difficult question for Merleau-Ponty: if both philosophers are on the same post-Kantian track, what then justifies Merleau-Ponty's opposition of phenomenology to systematic speculative thinking? My discussion of this question will lead to a revisionary, and partly critical, metaphilosophical proposal concerning the status of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology.

My claim is not, I should say, that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy was inspired by a reading of either Kant's Third *Critique* or Schelling: the motive for drawing connections and parallels with Kant and Schelling is to get a better understanding of Merleau-Ponty's solution to the transcendental problem, and to measure his claim to have achieved a new and superior standpoint.

1. The transcendental interpretation of *Phenomenology of Perception*

I will begin by laying out certain assumptions regarding the general character of *Phenomenology of Perception (PP)* which I have defended in an earlier paper and which provide the starting point of the present discussion.¹ Inevitably they will strike some as all too contestable and others as anodyne.

On my account, the task of *PP* can be expressed in familiar transcendental terms: Merleau-Ponty seeks to expound the conditions under which it is possible for us to have knowledgeable or, less committedly, *meaningful* experience of a

determinate object-world. This in a nutshell is ‘the transcendental problem’ referred to above. The principal thesis of *PP* is that enquiry into those conditions leads to the realm of pre-objectivity, a concept which is original to Merleau-Ponty and philosophically innovative: it is part of the difficult task of *PP* to show that pre-objectivity is not to be confused with superficially similar notions found in classical empiricism or in anti-intellectualists such as Bergson.

Pre-objectivity has two characteristics which jointly secure for it a properly transcendental status. First, it incorporates certain basic *formal* features, without which the possibility of experience evaporates. Second, the *necessity* which it consequently enjoys cannot be understood in naturalistic terms (no more than it can in terms of transcendent supersensible grounds).

The first may be obscured by the fact that Merleau-Ponty abjures hylomorphic analyses, but it is not open to doubt that some conception of transcendental form is involved in his core claims regarding spatiality, motility, corporeality, temporality and so on. The second is Merleau-Ponty’s explicitly stated position.

The central strategy employed by Merleau-Ponty to establish the priority of the pre-objective consists in an overarching antinomy. Philosophical thought assumes, he argues, two basic and mutually exclusive forms, empiricism and intellectualism, each of which unavoidably encounters limitations which drive us into the arms of the other; and we release ourselves from the see-saw which they jointly form only by rejecting their common assumption, what he calls objective thought. Integral to Merleau-Ponty’s project is his view that the reality of the pre-objective, though it can be communicated discursively as a philosophical thesis, cannot be *originally* discursive in the sense of being the judgemental content of any familiar species of reflection. Whence the necessity of an indirect, antinomial strategy: only by pushing objective thought to its limit and displaying its incapacity to do justice to the phenomena—revealed in the way that it obliges philosophical reflection to alternate ceaselessly between two contradictory extremes—can philosophical vision open itself up to what lies beyond and behind it, and acknowledge the necessity of a new mode of philosophical reflection, directed to expression and intimation rather than inference and conceptual connection.²

The role played by empirical psychology in Merleau-Ponty’s treatment of many topics in *PP* Parts One and Two of *PP*, which some have construed as signalling a naturalistic departure from transcendentalism, is on my account no such thing. The distinction that Merleau-Ponty draws between philosophical reflection in thrall to objective thought, and the type of reflection that he believes escapes it, is sharp and all-decisive, and every attempt to comprehend our access to the

world by way of the natural or human sciences, or by way of natural consciousness in so far as it operates according to the principles which it regards as defining truth, reflects the hegemony of objective thought. If this is correct, then there is no scope for a naturalistic interpretation—as distinct from *reconstruction*, which is an entirely different matter—of Merleau-Ponty. At least, this is so for as long as we understand by naturalism one of the types of non-metaphysical position in contemporary philosophy that describe themselves in such terms. In order to convincingly interpret Merleau-Ponty as a naturalist, either *achevé* or in the making, it is therefore not enough to point to the many respects in which he disagrees with Kant, Husserl and other frankly transcendental precursors, and seeks to break down distinctions which are essential to them: it would be necessary to show that Merleau-Ponty aims to provide for a new form of philosophical explanation which somehow combines consciousness of the pre-objective with a perspective on the perceiving and acting subject derived from a view of the subject as a natural organism. I can see no evidence in Merleau-Ponty's texts to support this attribution, so long as, to repeat, 'natural organism' refers to the sort of entity that contemporary psychology, physiology, and neuroscience conceive themselves as investigating. Indeed, the further ahead one looks in Merleau-Ponty's writings, the more implausible this interpretation becomes: by the time of *The Visible and the Invisible (V&I)*, scientific psychology has no observable importance for his thinking.³ Whether the naturalistic view is compelling on its own account—whether it represents the direction that Merleau-Ponty *ought* to have taken, having grasped the inadequacies of empiricism and intellectualism—is, once again, a different question.

What is quite true, however, is that Merleau-Ponty does not bring philosophical reflection to a halt with the demonstration that pre-objectivity constitutes the deepest level in the subject's domain of presentation,⁴ for he *also* maintains that *this very perspective* must be conceived as belonging to the pre-reflectively disclosed world which it opens up-and-onto. This constitutes a limitation of the transcendental interpretation of *PP* so long as it understands his solution to the transcendental problem ~~is~~ in exclusively Kantian terms, that is, identifies it exhaustively with the elucidation of non-empirical conditions indexed to the perspective of the subject. To the extent that the naturalistic interpretation responds to this shortfall in the *Kantian* transcendental reading of Merleau-Ponty, it has a warrant, but it errs in supposing that Merleau-Ponty takes an empirical turn at this juncture: the correct way of understanding Merleau-Ponty's surpassing of Kant, I will argue, is on the model of Schelling's revised and enlarged transcendentalism. On my account, Merleau-Ponty arrives at nature by the *opposite* route from that of our contemporary naturalists: it is not because philosophical explanation requires an empirical character in order to be credible,

but because whatever has an empirical character has so little value for philosophical reflection, that the subject must ultimately be thought to belong to nature (and that there must *be* such a thing as nature, as Merleau-Ponty conceives it).

2. Merleau-Ponty versus Kant

The first point I want to establish, and which lays the ground for the connection to be drawn with Schelling, concerns the importance for Merleau-Ponty of Kant's Third *Critique*. In order to bring this into focus, it will help to have in mind, first, Merleau-Ponty's principal criticisms of Kant, and, second, the general problem which Kantians for their part will locate in the position defended in *PP*. To make clear in advance where the discussion is headed, what I am seeking to show is that there is a shortfall in the position Merleau-Ponty sets out in *PP*, for which reason he cannot be said to offer decisive criticism of Kantian transcendentalism, but that in this context the Third *Critique* plays a crucial role in validating and motivating his proposal for an alternative form of transcendentalism.

Merleau-Ponty grants the soundness of the basic movement of reflection that leads to Kantian idealism, but he rejects Kant's postulation of world-transcending subjective a priori structures. Merleau-Ponty takes no firm stand on the vexed question of whether the priority of the Kantian a priori is a matter of ontology (pre-mundane faculties inhering in the transcendental subject) or of validity (pure normative necessities): what matters is that Kant posits within the subject an *extra-mundane yet world-determining* ground, and this, according to Merleau-Ponty, contradicts the integrity of our perceptually attested, unconditionally attached and immersed, relation to the world.⁵

The first chapter of *V&I*, 'Reflection and Interrogation', gives a more extended but essentially similar account of what has miscarried in Kant's execution of the transcendental turn. Here Merleau-Ponty adopts a more recognizably Kantian starting point, namely the challenge that skepticism poses to 'perceptual faith', from which he proceeds directly to an endorsement of the transcendental turn: if skeptical reflection shows perception to be cognitively null, then it is operating with the wrong conception of a perceptual object; what skepticism properly teaches is the need to adjust our conception of the reality of objects to the conditions under which they can appear to us.⁶ These conditions, Merleau-Ponty goes on to claim, resist discursive clarification: reflection discloses paradox in the perceptual opacity which constitutes the first level of our being-in-the-world, and Kant is mistaken in thinking that it can be expunged by reapprehending perception through the lens of transcendental logic.⁷ What on Merleau-Ponty's

account fundamentally skews Kant's reflection—making it seem as if transcendental logic has unrestricted rights over perception—is his mis-specification of the transcendental problem: when Kant considers the conditions of possibility of a world, he (1) detaches the *possibility* of a world from its *actuality*, (2) conflates the possibility of a world with that of the *thinking* of a world, endowing it with the character of a *hypothesis*.⁸

Next to be considered is the problem that *PP* appears to leave us with, and which Kant's defenders will urge constitutes a fatal weakness in Merleau-Ponty's rival form of transcendentalism.

The intended upshot of *PP*, as said, is to wring acknowledgement of the dependence of objective thought on the pre-objective. But what of the *sufficient* conditions for objectivity, the possibility and reality of which (as distinct from objective thought's *theory* of objectivity) Merleau-Ponty says that he does not deny? Merleau-Ponty occasionally gives sign of thinking that the question is answered simply by exhibiting the *existence* of the pre-objective, and the *fact* of our transition to objectivity,⁹ while elsewhere (in the 'La chose' chapter of *PP*) he cites factors such as constancy in perception, internal relations across sense modalities, and the determinations which the perceived acquires from its relation to bodily motility, as constituting the whence of objectivity. It is difficult to see how elements such as perceptual constancy can amount to more than *cues* or *precipitants* to objectivity. The real problem in any case is that if pre-objectivity stands, for philosophical if not for natural consciousness, in (formal if not real) distinction from objectivity, then there must be some further condition or operation that converts the former into the latter, and which amounts to more than, so to speak, our heeding the intimations of pre-objectivity (this heeding would require its own *principle*). What is this supplement?

In Kant's terms, whatever it is that Merleau-Ponty may have shown to lie in the always-already presupposed background to objective thought, must be regarded as having the character of *intuition* and thus as demanding conceptual determination. Wherewith, the Kantian insists, the Transcendental Deduction reveals its indispensability: for as long as Merleau-Ponty remains silent on the sufficient conditions of objectivity, the Deduction stands unchallenged as an account of what it is for experience to have, in John McDowell's phrase, 'objective purport'. Merleau-Ponty may reject Kant's account of how conceptually determinate objectivity is achieved for the reason that it implies the mutual alienation of self and world, but so long as he has no story of his own to tell concerning the production of objectivity, the rejection is unwarranted. At one point Merleau-Ponty asserts that the cost of allowing Kant's Transcendental Aesthetic to be absorbed into his Transcendental Analytic would be to turn man

into God, as if this settled the issue in favour of an inherently meaningful given, obviating the need for any transcendental deduction,¹⁰ but this is obviously too quick: Kant agrees that sensibility must not be collapsed into understanding whilst adding that the distinction comes at a price, viz., the Deduction's doctrine of synthesis and our intellect's projection of systematic unity onto the objectual world.

Merleau-Ponty's position in the dialectic is further weakened by his acknowledgement, in Part Three of *PP*, that there are fundamental dimensions of human subjectivity which, though bound up with ~~with~~ perception, are not generated out of it. These include awareness of oneself (1) as an *I*, (2) as existing *temporally*, and (3) as possessed of *freedom* in some shape or form. Merleau-Ponty's strategy is to argue that these dimensions resist intellectualist comprehension and so must be thought to have their solution at the level of the *vécu*, with time playing a fundamental role as the overarching structure in which all the paradoxicality pervading the world is grounded.¹¹ But even if all this is granted, including the highly disputable claim that time exemplifies a kind of pure paradoxicality, the Kantian will regard Merleau-Ponty as having made a decisive concession: if there *are* world- and subject-constituting structures that antedate and enable self-conscious human experience, then why not invoke them *also* in the context of, and in order to account for, objective perceptual knowledge?

To say that Merleau-Ponty is aware of the Kantian challenge would be an understatement. The first and most basic point is that Merleau-Ponty's distinction of pre-objective and objective is emphatically *not* to be understood in terms of Kant's distinction of intuition and concept: it is precisely Merleau-Ponty's claim that pre-objective consciousness is *not* 'blind', *not* 'nothing to us', and that it is the very error of intellectualist objective thought to suppose that, without superimposed intellectual operations, the deliverances of perception cannot figure for the subject as (cognitively) meaningful.

But even if the cumulative argument of ~~p~~Parts ~~e~~One and ~~t~~Two of *PP* convinces us that Merleau-Ponty has the right view of our phenomenology, his thesis of pre-objectivity will still not be vindicated. Whatever Kant's limitations may be—that is, even if Merleau-Ponty is right that Kantian intellectualism falsifies perceptual phenomenology—the present issue concerns the conditions for objectivity. The only possibility, it seems, is for Merleau-Ponty to assert that his pre-objectivity has an *intrinsically* proto-objective character: he must affirm that, in grasping the pre-objective, we also grasp, incorporated within it, a *potentiality* for objectivity. That we apprehend, as *contained in* the pre-objective, its very own *movement* towards-and-into objectivity might seem a claim that Merleau-

Ponty can readily accept. But it generates a new problem. If pre-objectivity exhibits this (potentiality for) movement *of itself* and *necessarily*, then why should we not reduce it, as Merleau-Ponty believes Kant does, to a simple *anticipation* of objectivity? In more forthright Hegelian terms: Why not say that pre-objectivity finds its ‘truth’ in objectivity, which provides the *teleological explanation* of pre-objectivity.

It seems a dilemma confronts Merleau-Ponty. If pre-objectivity can subsist without becoming objective, then the original question of the sufficient conditions of objectivity is still without an answer, but if it cannot, then it is unclear why we should suppose there is anything more to pre-objectivity than *incipient* objectivity, objectivity-in-the-making.¹² The fact that the conversion is never complete, that a residue, an aura, of merely immanent proto-objectivity clings to determinate objectivity, does not interfere in any serious way with the Kantian (or Hegelian) proposal.

There is an additional problem. To posit a movement towards objectivity is to suppose that some kernel of conceptual form is originally present in the data of sensibility. And this gives scope for the Kantian to charge Merleau-Ponty with illusion of a type not treated in the *Critique of Pure Reason* but bearing comparison with those diagnosed in the Transcendental Dialectic—the illusion of unwittingly reading proto-conceptual structure back into raw appearance. As with all transcendental illusion, this error goes back to transcendental realism, which here takes the form of construing proto-conceptual form as inhering in sensible being and as indistinguishably given with it. This would be the reverse of the error that Merleau-Ponty finds in Kantianism, of taking perception to be inherently meaningless. This objection will resurface at a later point.

Having indicated the difficulties that Merleau-Ponty encounters in his argument with Kant, we can now turn to Merleau-Ponty’s comments on Kant’s *CPJ* in the Preface of *PP*. What he says is brief and condensed, and not expanded on later in the work, but the gist is clear enough:

What distinguishes intentionality from the Kantian relation to a possible object is that the unity of the world, prior to being posited by knowledge through an explicit act of identification, is lived as already accomplished or as already there. In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant himself demonstrated that there is a unity of the imagination and of the understanding, and a unity of subjects *prior to the object*, and that, in an experience of beauty, for example, I undergo the experience of a harmony between the sensible and the concept, between myself and another, which is

itself without any concept. Here the subject is no longer the universal thinker of a system of rigorously connected objects, no longer the subject who is, if he is to be able to [*pouvoir*] form a world, the positing power [*puissance*] that imposes the law of the understanding upon the manifold; rather, he discovers himself and appreciates himself as a nature spontaneously conforming to the law of the understanding. But if the subject has a nature, then the hidden art of the imagination must condition the categorial activity; it is no longer merely aesthetic judgment that rests upon this hidden art, but also knowledge, and this art also grounds the unity of consciousness and of consciousnesses.

Husserl takes up the *Critique of Judgment* when he speaks of a teleology of consciousness [...] ¹³

It is not hard to understand why Merleau-Ponty should invoke the Third *Critique* and allude to the doctrines of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgement. The Kantian impugned Merleau-Ponty's conception of pre-objectivity on the grounds that he fails to supply a transition principle for the derivation of objectivity. Merleau-Ponty's reply is that Kant himself, in the broader context of enquiry that frames the *CPJ*, avails himself of notions and assumptions which, though of course not articulated in terms of pre-objectivity, are equivalent in status and import. Kant postulates the capacity of subjects to determine via feeling alone the accordance of the sensible with their power of concepts anterior to any exercise of the latter, whereupon they also discover (or take) themselves to be bound into an intersubjective order. This is required, Kant says, by the analysis (Analytic) and justification (Deduction) of pure judgements of taste and it is legitimated by the requirements of cognition in general. Judgements of the beautiful are what Kant calls *reflective* aesthetic judgements, and in this lies their distinctive philosophical import: they furnish palpable evidence for the existence of a mode of 'reflective' judgement distinct from the 'determinative' judgement analysed in the First *Critique*, and which Kant describes in the Introduction of *CPJ* as absolutely indispensable for empirical knowledge as such.

Kant thus assumes, as Merleau-Ponty says, a 'hidden art of the imagination', manifest in aesthetic judgement and which underlies categorial activity. And Merleau-Ponty is also right to suppose that this addition to Kant's panoply of transcendental functions appears on the face of it to have major repercussions. The activity of reflective judgement, Kant argues, is correlated with a certain complex assumption concerning the form of nature—namely that it is such as to appear in ways that permit our formulation of a system of empirical laws, as

required if there is to be empirical knowledge. Kant insists that this assumption—that nature is ‘purposive for our cognition’—is ‘merely subjective’, on the grounds that it concerns only our employment of the power of judgement. This claim is however extremely puzzling: if the assumption possesses full-blown transcendental necessity and its content—that is, what it maintains to be the case or to stand in need of being assumed—relates to an *objective* state of affairs (the existence of determinate rational structure *in nature*), then why should it be any more subjective than space and time or the principles of substance and causality?

This gives Merleau-Ponty the means to vindicate his conception of pre-objectivity. The ‘reflective’ function of judgement, as Kant theorizes it, turns on *the world’s unforced contribution* to our formation and deployment of concepts: judgement in general, and therefore also objective judgement, is possible only because there is a subvening level which steers concept-application at a level above mere quality of sensation, an original unity and immanent directionality in perceptual experience.¹⁴ This order which steers the subject’s syntheses cannot itself be a product of synthesis. Since Kant himself is thereby committed to the existence of a pre-conceptual order incorporating a movement towards objectivity, it cannot be a problem for Merleau-Ponty that he asserts the same, and even if Kant himself elects to ground this subvening stratum on mere subjectivity (the work of imagination in compliance with the demands of judgement), and to maintain the supremacy of objectivity as a principle for the explanation of experience (the *conditions* for conceptuality understood as *anticipations* of objectivity), it is equally defensible—this is Merleau-Ponty’s thesis—to regard the unity and ‘hidden art’ of the world as *neither* received passively from it *nor* derived from the subject’s acts of conceptual determination. In other words, it may legitimately be assumed that the world cooperates with our cognition from the very first.

Merleau-Ponty’s conception of perception as neutral with respect to the Kantian duality of passive receptivity and active spontaneity¹⁵ is reflected in his characterization of it as a process of ‘crystallization’: the becoming of objects is given to us as a lateral process *within* the perceptual field, *not* as a transaction (either active or passive) *between* subject and object.¹⁶ What Merleau-Ponty calls crystallization takes the place of what Kant calls nature’s purposivity for our cognition.¹⁷ On this picture, there is no pressure to reduce the pre-objective to an anticipation of objectivity, for it is a simple ultimate fact that perceptual experience includes the precipitation of a world of things, and another such fact that the world of things allows itself to be taken up in determinate conceptual object-determination. Nothing in this motivates the idea that objective thought represents the destiny, the Hegelian ‘truth’, of perception. As Merleau-Ponty puts it (in a passage to be cited later in full) phenomenology

requires ‘an understanding and a reflection more radical than objective thought’,¹⁸ and in working out this new form of reflection Merleau-Ponty may be said to be reworking Kant’s concept of reflective judgement, which, properly understood, reveals itself to be nothing other than the arising of the *world-as-conceptualized* on the ground of the pre-objective *monde perçu*.

Now the same construal of the Third *Critique* as betokening an upheaval in Kant’s system—by dint of committing Kant to an order of meaning anterior to the subject’s acts of conceptual determination—is crucial for the development of Schelling’s post-Kantian idealism, which grows out of (among other things) a negative estimate of Kant’s subjectivist theory of teleology.¹⁹ Teleology requires, according to Schelling, a fully realistic interpretation: the Kantian ‘merely regulative’ *als ob* is an unsustainable compromise and must give way to a metaphysics that gives organic nature its proper due.

That Schelling and Merleau-Ponty share an interpretation of the *CPJ* and take themselves to be following its lead, does not guarantee that their philosophical standpoints will coincide in substantial respects, but it gives the supposition likelihood, and in the next section I will try to show that, in one important sense, it is borne out. Having aligned Schelling and Merleau-Ponty, in the fourth section I will indicate a respect in which they stand opposed.

3. Schelling’s *Real-Idealismus* and Merleau-Ponty’s chiasm

It is obvious that the position which Merleau-Ponty takes up, though it dispenses with much of the elaborate baggage of Kantianism, introduces complexities which are absent from the comparatively simple impositional, prescribing-law-to-nature model of the First *Critique*. I propose to explore these in relation to the concept of a system of ‘real-idealism’ formulated by Schelling in 1800–1801 and which concluded the first major stage of his philosophical development.

The term *Real-Idealismus* was not of Schelling’s own coinage: it had been employed previously by Fichte in his 1794–1795 *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*. There its function was merely to indicate the way in which the *Wissenschaftslehre* steers between idealism and realism as pre-Critically conceived and avoids the objections standardly levelled at each (a claim made already by Kant for his own transcendental idealism). Schelling’s conception of real-idealism is much more specific. It concerns the melding of subject-centred transcendental idealism with an object-centred philosophy of nature in a manner without philosophical precedent.

Among the several motives that led Schelling to the idea of *Naturphilosophie* were (first) his early commitment to Spinozism on strictly a priori grounds, and (second) the realization noted above and owed to the Third *Critique*, that a realistic interpretation of nature—of the right kind—would allow the natural sciences to be recruited to the cause of idealism.²⁰ The primary condition for the latter is that nature be released from the narrowly subject-orientated requirements of epistemology and pure practical reason to which Kant and Fichte subject it, and that its structure be interpreted *in parallel* to that of transcendental subjectivity—whereby we raise it from dead mechanism to the level of rational mind and organic autarchy. At which point the a posteriori results of natural science enter: investigation of natural phenomena discloses the play of productive forces in nature and their organization into an ascending chain of being. Because this new philosophy of nature is presented as supplementing transcendental idealism, not as sweeping it away, the result is a double model of reality, with two symmetrical sides. If an exposition of Schelling were to be attempted here for its own sake, the next step would be to consider his different formulations of the systematic whole compounded of transcendental idealism and *Naturphilosophie*. What I am going to do instead is offer a construal of Schelling's conception of the system-of-philosophy-as-a-whole.

The extraordinarily original thesis of Schelling's real-idealism is that (1) philosophical understanding must resolve itself without residue into two irreducibly distinct and internally self-organized standpoints, (2) each of which apprehends the other as its opposite, and (3) each of which can recognize itself as both (i) *producing* and (ii) *passing over into* the other; and (4) which consequently relate to one another as inverted images of themselves.

Now it is essential, in order for the connection with Merleau-Ponty to emerge, that Schelling's real-idealism be distinguished clearly from other ways of coordinating nature and subjectivity which it may suggest and with which it may be confused. First, idealism and *Naturphilosophie* are not for Schelling to be contrasted as epistemological and metaphysical orders respectively: transcendental philosophy is not merely the process of reasoning by which we arrive at the metaphysical-naturalist truth of things. Nor, therefore, should they be understood simply as two distinct orders set in a relation of correspondence or pre-established harmony, an order of cognitions or representations on the one hand, and an order of things on the other. Nor, yet again, is Schelling employing Spinoza's model of a parallelism of orders of modes across attributes, which would fail to provide for the crucial idea that each at its limit leads into the other.

Having excluded these more familiar options, we are brought to realize that an entirely new kind of metaphilosophical conception is involved; Schelling's

aphorism that nature is ‘mind made visible’ and mind ‘the invisible nature’²¹ appears simple, but the identity which it asserts is not. When it is asked what description the ultimate unconditioned ground of all things satisfies, Schelling’s answer takes the form, not of a system in the Fichtean—Kantian sense of a maximally coherent totality of cognitions deriving from a single principle, but of a *movement between* (and not merely a *conjunction of*) two such systems. As it may be put, the unity of Schelling’s system of philosophy is expressed by an *instruction to rehearse* the relevant movement in thought, a ‘postulate’ in a sense analogous to the geometer’s instruction to begin by drawing a line in space. The postulate of Schelling’s real-idealism is considerably more complex than Fichte’s relatively simple, ‘Posit yourself as = I!’, and may be stated thus: ‘First posit *either* the I *or* Nature! Then follow through the conditions of possibility of whichever you have chosen to its final ground or, equivalently, to its final end. Whereupon you will find yourself positing the *other* disjunct. Now follow *that* through to *its* final ground or end. Observe that you now find yourself back where you started.’

Once the two narratives—self to nature, nature to self—have been followed through and joined up with one another, the further question for Schelling is how to rationalize this structure, that is, how to explain why the two standpoints are not contradictory but genuinely united, such that they amount not to a relativization of (otherwise conflicting) truths to different perspectives, but to a *single non-perspectival truth*. It is here that Schelling’s account, as said earlier, diversifies; his texts from 1797 to 1802 explore different options. For present purposes the important point is that Schelling employs two major conceptualizations. The one is that of a logical movement, in the sense just explained. The other is that of a ‘point of absolute indifference’ supplying the unitary origin of the two opposing terms, self and nature. The two conceptualizations are not rivals but mutually supporting: to postulate an absolute *Indifferenzpunkt* is to imply a *movement* of self-differentiation into opposing terms, and to postulate a circular logical movement is by implication to posit something *identical* that ‘travels’ from self to nature and back again. But this ‘something’ cannot be some *thing*, nor indeed can it figure *as* absolute indifference *within* either the transcendental perspective or that of *Naturphilosophie*. That it is not an internal postulate of either transcendental idealism or philosophy of nature does not mean, however, that it eludes cognition: we must be able to cognize it, for otherwise there could be no point of contact and inter-conversion of the transcendental and *naturphilosophisch* perspectives.

It will by now be clear what all this has to do with Merleau-Ponty, and especially with his later writings. Several new concepts are introduced in *V&I* with the aim

of elucidating at a deeper level the perceptual relation theorized in *PP*²² and of addressing the puzzle bequeathed, as explained above, by Merleau-Ponty's rejection of Kant's First *Critique*: If perception is not constructed in Kant's way, and yet exhibits at least the minimal structure that Kant supposes—that is, an articulation of a polarity of subject and object, and a difference of thought and sense, whereby a domain of presentation is constituted²³—then what accounts for the unity of this assembly? What binds perceiver with perceived, and sensing with thinking?

One of the new concepts introduced by Merleau-Ponty, arguably the most important, is that of chiasm, or chiasmic form, as exemplified in the body's self-touching.²⁴ The following elements are involved in this notion:²⁵ (1) Perception is possible only on the condition that it takes place *within a whole*.²⁶ (2) This whole has the value, and takes the place, of the classical *a priori*.²⁷ (3) Because this whole has no reality transcending perception, and because it cannot be thought to have boundaries, it is equally appropriate to conceive it as a *medium*.²⁸ (4) Perception is possible only as a reflexive relation within this medium. (5) This reflexive relation occurs at two levels, or takes two forms, which are nonetheless intimately related and cannot subsist independently: (i) the reflexivity of the perceiving body (its actual or possible self-touching or seeing-itself-seeing), and (ii) the reflexivity of the whole within which the body is contained or which it inhabits. The two reflexivities join in the idea that (i) it is the perceiving body's *being within the whole* that allows it to relate to itself, and that (ii) its self-relation derives from the self-relation of the whole. (6) This reflexivity of perception—which is of a different kind from that of the self-conscious *I* as theorized in modern philosophy—is opaque, not merely in the general sense of belonging to the pre-objective, but in the more specific sense that the fulfilment of the reflexive relation, the final point of contact of its two 'terms', is necessarily elided in the movement that comprises perception. And it is here that the chiasm is to be found: the exchange or interaction which constitutes perception is at once (a) the self's intentional *going out* to the world or nature, as a domain presented to it, and (b) the world or nature's *return* to itself.²⁹ And because this identity, which is *implicated in* perception, cannot be presented *within it*, the chiasmic form of perception can be grasped philosophically only as either a movement or as something 'invisible', present within perception but as its *obverse*.³⁰ The similarities with the system of *Real-Idealismus* need no spelling out.³¹

4. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology as a form of philosophical aestheticism

If Merleau-Ponty and Schelling are aligned in the way described, a question is raised. The fact that a common conceptual figure is employed in their respective accounts of the relation of subject and world does not guarantee that they have reached the same conclusion by different routes. To the contrary, in the present case the difference of routes appears to entail sharp disagreement. What it *means* to think of the world as radiating out from and revealing itself to a subject which it at the same time encloses cannot be the same for Schelling and Merleau-Ponty.

Merleau-Ponty's view of what philosophy can and cannot do is plainly at odds with Schelling's conception of philosophy as *Wissenschaft*. Merleau-Ponty's claim is that the philosopher has *experiential access* to what, according to Schelling, can be grasped only by maximally comprehensive, *non-experiential* theoretical reflection; Schelling lays claim to the System, while phenomenology proceeds in an 'inchoate style'.³² Merleau-Ponty must deny the strict meaningfulness of Schelling's real-idealism, since it takes its cue from objective thought and follows Kant's path of analytical reflection, inferring and hypostatizing conditions of possibility, at the behest of a false conception of philosophy as explanation.³³ Of equal importance is the point that Schelling's metaphysics must by Merleau-Ponty's lights be supposed to founde~~d~~ on paradox. The fact that criticism of Schelling is all but absent from Merleau-Ponty's discussion in his *Notes de cours* should not be allowed to obscure this point.³⁴

Schelling for his part must regard Merleau-Ponty's claims concerning what can be found to be revealed in perception as an abortive attempt to transpose speculative truth into the medium of sense experience. In Schelling's eyes, Merleau-Ponty must be thought to have *fabricated* a type of experience, his 'pre-objectivity' comprising an attempt to schematize a purely intellectual structure which *could not* be given. Each must therefore regard the other as having had, at most, an inkling of the truth but as having failed to grasp its proper grounds and nature.

If this is so, then it would appear that we must take sides—either for *Wissenschaft*, or against. And if this is the situation, then in one respect at least Merleau-Ponty would seem to be at a disadvantage. His repudiation of the traditional default ambition of philosophy to achieve systematic completeness was supposed to be grounded on our acceptance of the absolute priority of pre-objectivity, but if it is possible after all for philosophy—Schelling's—to *conceptualize* and *describe* what Merleau-Ponty says can only be *apprehended* and *expressed*, then this strategy is undercut. So unless Merleau-Ponty can point to some logical incoherence vitiating Schelling's real-idealism—and on the face of it any such criticism is likely to rebound on Merleau-Ponty's own standpoint

in *V&I*³⁵—it seems he will be reduced to relying on a bare appeal to experience for the validation of his claims, and this will fall prey to the suspicion voiced earlier: How can Merleau-Ponty legitimately claim to *know* that his putative apprehensions of pre-objectivity are not just the obverse of pure reason's transcendental illusions?

I now want to make a suggestion as to how a result more favourable to Merleau-Ponty might be reached. Two points concerning the respective commitments of Merleau-Ponty and Schelling may be noted. First, it should be recalled that Schelling *does* make provision, of a sort, for the sensible presentation of the speculative indifference-point: this is famously the role of art, in **p**Part **s**Six of the *System of Transcendental Idealism*.³⁶ The work of art is an objectification of the intellectual intuition which constitutes the alpha and omega of the transcendental philosopher. Second, the assumption that Merleau-Ponty is committed, in the way I have just implied, to the notion that pre-objectivity is an *apprehended or apprehensible part of experience*, with the implication that our coming to grasp it is a matter of attending more closely to what is *already present in perceptual experience*, of *transparent acquaintance* with its opacity, is open to challenge. The following passage from *PP* implies a much less empiricist conception:

Along with the natural world and the social world, we have discovered that which is truly transcendental [...] These descriptions [viz., of the 'phenomenon' or 'phenomenal field'] must be the opportunity for us to define an understanding and a reflection more radical than objective thought. To phenomenology understood as a direct description, a phenomenology of phenomenology must be added. We must return to the *cogito* in order to seek there a more fundamental Logos than that of objective thought, one that provides objective thought with its relative justification and, at the same time, puts it in its place.³⁷

AQ3

This account of phenomenology as description of a different *order* from that which we, in our ordinary empiricist fashion, think of perceptual experience as lending itself to—and as moreover *second-order* description—is suggestive and promises to help in understanding what Merleau-Ponty means by philosophy as expression. But it also requires elucidation, for which we may return to Kant's Third *Critique*.

Judgements of beauty on Kant's account are a species of second-order judgement: *what* they judge to be the case is nothing less than the indeterminate fulfilment of the conditions of judgement in general. What might be suggested, therefore, is that Merleau-Pontian phenomenological description (discourse, reflection) stands in the same *kind* of relation to the ordinary empirical description of experience, as the Kantian judgement of taste stands in relation to ordinary empirical cognition: in both cases the given first-order *relation to the objectual world* is raised up and re-presented, in place of the worldly objects themselves, allowing us to (as it were) 'watch' the 'process' of cognition and object-emergence unfolding.³⁸

If the comparison of Merleau-Pontian phenomenology with Kantian taste is drawn closely, then it will seem to carry the following implication: namely that the phenomenological experience of the world is *itself aesthetic* (in our [present-day](#) sense, not merely in Kant's sense of not being based on a concept). This might seem an odd result, but it is not really an embarrassment, for there is a clear sense in which Merleau-Ponty's intensely expressive renderings of perceptual phenomenology are suggestive of *poèmes en prose*: they do not show the world to *be* beautiful in any strict sense, but they undoubtedly help to make it intelligible that the world *can* be experienced as aesthetically significant. It is in any case a commonplace that phenomenology is associated with an attitude of 'wonder', which is a close neighbour of aesthetic affect. Also worth recalling is the worry often voiced in the secondary literature that Kant's analysis of judgements of taste makes it puzzling that not all objects are experienced as beautiful. Noteworthy in the same context is the ambiguity which Kant leaves as regards the *either* exclamatory *or* assertoric status of judgements of taste: Do they function semantically as vehicles for expressing feeling, or do they say something about the object? Or do they somehow do both? A similar ambiguity seems present in the results of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. All of this speaks in favour of a convergence of *PP* with the Analytic of the Beautiful.

This 'para-aesthetic' construal of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology allows him to head off the suspicion of sheer fabrication: if judgements of taste are possible, then phenomenological reflection too, on the same general grounds, must be accorded validity. Even if perceptual experience of pre-objectivity is in one sense a 'construction'—that is, a supplement to the ordinary empirical given, and not a pre-existent part of it—it is not *arbitrary*, rather it 'spells out', experientially, the act of perception, in the same way as the Kantian judgement of taste 'exposits' in feeling the harmony of imagination and understanding.³⁹

Schelling for his part need not take issue with Merleau-Pontian phenomenology under this construal. True, the notion that philosophical practice can engender an

actual experience of the concrete particularized subject-object relation is not entertained by Schelling, and it is not implied by his conception of the work of art as exhibitor of intellectual intuition, but the argument can be made that it coheres well enough with core Schellingian ideas: if nature is ‘mind made visible’, and if works of art have the distinctive philosophical function claimed for them by Schelling, then there is no obvious reason why it should not be possible to *veridically* experience the pre-objective foundation of one’s inhabitation of the objectual world in a mode analogous to that in which art articulates intellectual intuition. If the phenomenological presentation of speculative truth is understood rightly,⁴⁰ confusion of speculative insight with empirical consciousness will be avoided. In Schelling’s terms, Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology may be interpreted as concerning itself with an experience of the identity of transcendental subjectivity with nature’s productivity; this, or something similar, will plausibly comprise for Schelling the meaning of pre-objectivity.⁴¹

The downside of this marriage with Schelling’s speculative idealism from Merleau-Ponty’s point of view is of course that it is *unequal*, for it means surrendering the claim that the truths of phenomenology are inaccessible to systematic philosophy. In so far as Merleau-Ponty is committed to this position, the resolution just proposed fails and we are back with the choice of *either* Merleau-Ponty’s philosophical expressivism *or* Schelling’s *Wissenschaft*. The appropriate question to raise at this point is whether Merleau-Ponty is *entitled* to assert the necessary inaccessibility of phenomenological truth to systematic thinking (a claim over and above his rejection of objective thought, though it is uncertain that he distinguishes them carefully). The question ~~is~~ in other words *is* why it should be considered *impossible* for a speculative system to escape objective thought, and it derives particular force from the consideration that German Idealism, in its concern to liberate philosophical thought from the objectivating *Verstand*, appears to attempt something extremely similar to what Merleau-Ponty demands.

One issue here will concern Merleau-Ponty’s repeated claim that ‘contradiction’ or ‘paradox’ is necessarily encountered at the limit of analytical reflection. This point arose on earlier occasions and I suggested that it will not be an easy matter to convince the Kantian of the paradoxicality of time or Schelling of the incoherence of his *Real-Idealismus*. It will be retorted to Merleau-Ponty that ‘paradox’ is an inappropriate characterization of the results to which transcendental reflection ultimately leads, these being *sui generis*, ‘surd’, ‘absolute’ or whatever, but not contradictory. (With what could they stand in contradiction, being ultimate? And how could they exhibit contradiction within themselves, being unanalysable?)

Another aspect of the question, which it is more fruitful to consider in the space remaining, concerns the semantics of the core propositions which define Merleau-Ponty's philosophical standpoint. These are characteristically formulated in what seem unabashedly metaphorical terms.⁴² I understand the world because it 'understands' me and 'speaks' to me of myself.⁴³ The world 'imposes my vision upon me as a continuation of its own sovereign existence'.⁴⁴ Flesh, that of the world and my own, 'is the coiling over of the visible upon the seeing body' by means of a 'dehiscence or fission of its own mass'.⁴⁵ Intuition is 'auscultation or palpation in depth'.⁴⁶ And so on. Now it is true that for all such phrases and locutions one can offer, as I did earlier, would-be equivalents that eliminate the relevant imagery, and it is these that allow a bridge to be built to Schelling's *Real-Idealismus*. But to suppose that one is thereby releasing the literal philosophical truth that Merleau-Ponty has in mind from its merely metaphorical formulation is to fail to take seriously his metaphilosophy. The proposition, 'absolute indifference divides itself into subjective and objective', does *not* give us the *literal truth* of 'flesh effects a dehiscence of its own mass': austere logical formulations are for Merleau-Ponty *not closer* to reality, if anything—and especially if taken in the spirit of analytical reflection, i.e. as self-grounding—they are *more remote* from it, for they fail to register (and, by omission, eliminate) its ambiguity, opacity, paradoxicality, etc.

Now the challenge for Merleau-Ponty, given his refusal to privilege logical over quasi-pictorial conceptual figures, is to answer the objection that he himself clear-sightedly puts at a late point in *PP*:

[W]e have discovered that which is truly transcendental [...] the ambiguous life where the *Ursprung* of transcendences takes place, which, through a fundamental contradiction, puts me into communication with them and on this basis makes knowledge possible. Perhaps the objection will be raised that a contradiction cannot be placed at the centre of philosophy, and that all of our descriptions, not being ultimately thinkable, are entirely meaningless.⁴⁷

If the objection were sound, he adds, 'then it would be necessary to choose between either believing the descriptions and abandoning thought, or knowing what we are saying and abandoning these descriptions'.⁴⁸

Declaring phenomenological discourse metaphorical *would* amount to 'abandoning thought'. Merleau-Ponty's solution, we know, is instead to invoke 'an understanding and a reflection more radical than objective thought',⁴⁹

whereby he means to repudiate the alternatives of *either* mere metaphorical aptness *or* inferentially sanctioned self-standing propositional truth.⁵⁰ His intention to situate phenomenological discourse in the space between (or beyond) those two extremes is entirely coherent, but it is worth asking whether in his attempt to do so Merleau-Ponty really comes out from under the shadow of classical German philosophy. It is crucial for Merleau-Ponty that our understanding of his philosophical doctrines should *not* draw tacitly on non-phenomenological philosophical understanding. If in reading him we are silently entertaining Schelling's speculative theory, or alternatively if we are charitably interpolating a Kantian 'as if' in order to lend his assertions a kind of non-metaphorical truth-likeness,⁵¹ then no metaphilosophical break has been achieved. And it may legitimately be wondered if such tacit resort can be avoided: if we are to take the doctrines of flesh and chiasm as candidates for *truth*, then we must have some understanding of what it is for them to have truth, and it is far from clear what this conception of truth is, if it is not the same as that which we would deploy (whatever it might be) in considering the theses of Kant, Schelling ~~or~~and others in the systematic tradition. When we look to Merleau-Ponty's writings for a statement of his conception of metaphilosophical truth,⁵² we find on the one hand a set of negatives: philosophy should *not* aim at truths dissociated from the *vécu*, *not* seek to insulate reflection from the flow of temporality and possibilities of action, *not* aspire to absolute transparency, and so on. On the positive side, we are told that philosophical truth is an act of 'expression', a 'creation', a 'reintegration of Being', and so on,⁵³ **one** that *lifts off* (*relever, survenir*) from perception and understands itself as doing so. The nature of this arising-from has, however, no further characterization, or at any rate, none that will help the traditional philosopher to grasp what is involved: we need to, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, 'plunge into'⁵⁴ pre-objectivity in order to *grasp what it is* for philosophical reflection to orientate itself towards truth in the right way. What Merleau-Ponty tells us about the nature of philosophical truth thus seems to re-exemplify the philosophical praxis for which a justification was wanted.⁵⁵ His conception of philosophical truth recalls Kant's conception of the validity available to reflective aesthetic judgements—but with the crucial difference that Kant has an independent, non-aesthetic, purely discursive theory of what this validity consists in, for which Merleau-Ponty, in so far as he declines the aestheticist Schellingian interpretation of his phenomenology, has no equivalent.

To summarize, the problem facing Merleau-Ponty has the following form. If what is claimed in Schelling's *Real-Idealismus* is incoherent, then it avails nothing to try to say the same (sort of) thing in a mode putatively free from systematic pretensions.⁵⁶ Switching from *Wissenschaft* to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological-ontological idiom cannot salvage anything, for it is only by

tacitly converting ~~them~~ his claims back into systematic doctrines that they can be understood as candidates for truth. Ramsey's dictum, that what cannot be said cannot be whistled either, applies in the present case. If the ontology of *V&I* is not 'mere metaphor' but has philosophical truth, then the same must be said for *Real-Idealism*, in which case the question must be faced of how they relate to one another—to which the most convincing answer is provided, I have suggested, by the para-aesthetic reading of *V&I* and its subordination to *Real-Idealism*.

This objection does not, however, have the last word. The demand for metaphilosophical explication which Merleau-Ponty leaves unmet, may be charged with assuming the necessity of a *pensée de survol*, begging the question and betraying a failure to grasp his vital lesson that reflection, though it must indeed account for itself, can do so only by way of a kind of abdication. The circle formed by Merleau-Ponty's metaphilosophy and his first-order phenomenology is therefore, it may be replied, both unavoidable and *benign*.

This is certainly consistent, but whether it is enough to reassure us that Merleau-Ponty's doctrines have their own independent intelligibility, and are not parasitic on traditional philosophical discourse, is another matter.⁵⁷ All in all it is hard to see how the issue can be brought to a more definite conclusion without extending the discussion to other areas. For those who are already skeptical of claims for the autonomy of phenomenological method, and who also believe that the speculative turn in post-Kantian idealism succeeds in raising philosophy above the mere *Verstand*, it will seem that nothing is lost and much is gained if Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is accommodated *within* Schelling's speculative system rather than advanced as replacing it, and from such an angle, the aestheticist construal of Merleau-Ponty will make good sense. If on the other hand the metaphilosophical project of German Idealism is considered to fail, then a plausible case can be made that Merleau-Ponty (alongside Heidegger and some recent philosophers in the French phenomenological tradition) is among those who pick up the pieces and warrantably seek to turn the classical project of philosophical systematicity inside out.⁵⁸ The difficulty of explaining *to* the tradition what this amounts to, on this view, is a mark of its having been genuinely surpassed.

References

Barbaras, Renaud. 1991. *The being of the phenomenon: Merleau-Ponty's ontology* (trans: Toadvine, Ted, and Lawlor, Leonard). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Evans, Fred, and Leonard Lawlor (eds.). 2000. *Chiasms: Merleau-Ponty's notion of flesh*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Gardner, Sebastian. 2007. Philosophical aestheticism. In *The Oxford handbook of continental philosophy*, ed. Brian Leiter, and Michael Rosen, 75–121. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gardner, Sebastian. 2015. Merleau-Ponty's transcendental theory of perception. In *The transcendental turn*, ed. Sebastian Gardner, and Matthew Grist, 294–323. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gardner, Sebastian. 2016. German idealism, classical pragmatism, and Kant's *Third Critique*. In *Pragmatism, Kant, and transcendental philosophy*, ed. Gabriele Gava, and Robert Stern, 22–45. London: Routledge.

~~Hass, Lawrence. 2008. *Merleau-Ponty's philosophy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.~~

AQ4

Matherne, Samantha. 2014. The Kantian roots of Merleau-Ponty's account of pathology. *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 22(1): 124–149.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1964a. Cézanne's doubt [Le doute de Cézanne, 1945]. In *Sense and non-sense* (trans: Dreyfus, Hubert L., and Dreyfus, Patricia Allen), 9–25. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1964b. Faith and good faith [Foi et bonne foi, 1946]. In *Sense and non-sense* (trans: Dreyfus, Hubert L., and Dreyfus, Patricia Allen), 172–181. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1964c. The philosopher and his shadow [Le philosophe et son ombre, 1959]. In *Signs* (trans: McCleary, Richard). Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1968. *The visible and the invisible* [*Le visible et l'invisible*, 1964] (trans: Lingis, Alphonso). Evanston: Northwestern University Press [V&I].

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1988. *Philosophy and non-philosophy since Hegel* [*Philosophie et non-philosophie depuis Hegel: notes de cours*, 1961]. In

Philosophy and non-philosophy since Merleau-Ponty, ed. Hugh J. Silverman (trans: Silverman, Hugh J.). London: Routledge.

~~Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 2001. *The incarnate subject: Malebranche, Biran, and Bergson on the union of body and soul [L'union de l'âme et du corps chez Malebranche, Biran et Bergson, 1947–1948]*, ed. Andrew G. Bjelland Jr. (trans: Milan, Paul B., and Burke, Patrick). New York: Humanity Books.~~

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 2003. *Nature [La nature: notes, cours du Collège de France, 1956–1960]* (trans: Vallier, Robert). Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 2012. *Phenomenology of perception [Phénoménologie de la perception, 1945]* (trans: Landes, Donald A.). London: Routledge [PP].

Moore, A.W. 2012. *The evolution of modern metaphysics: Making sense of things*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sacks, Mark. 2000. *Objectivity and insight*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Schelling, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von. 1988. *Ideas for a philosophy of nature [1797, 2nd and revised edn. 1803]* (trans: Harris, Errol, and Heath, Peter). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schelling, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von. 2007. *The grounding of positive philosophy [1842–1843]*, ed. Bruce Matthews (trans: Matthews, Bruce). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Toadvine, Ted. 2009. *Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of nature*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Vallier, Robert. 2013. *Être sauvage and the barbarian principle: Merleau-Ponty's reading of Schelling*. In *Wirth and Burke* 2013: 121–148.

Wirth, Jason, and Patrick Burke (eds.). 2013. *The barbarian principle: Merleau-Ponty, Schelling, and the question of nature*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

¹ Gardner (2015).

² And which consequently stands apart from the traditional philosophical aim of *explanation*. See, e.g., *PP*, pp. lxxxiv–lxxxv, 382–383, 452, and *V&I*, p. 100. Other remarks suggest that a notion of explanation remains in place, e.g., *V&I*, p. 28.

³ See in particular *V&I*, pp. 20–23, 256, the essay on Husserl (1964c, pp. 163–164), and the late statement concerning the heuristic value of science for philosophy in 2003, pp. 85–86. I am grateful to Andrew Inkpin for long-term discussion of the question of Merleau-Ponty's transcendentalism or naturalism.

⁴ The concept is borrowed from Sacks (2000, pp. 228–257). Certifying Merleau-Ponty's fundamental commitment to this notion, see *PP*, pp. 134, 334, *V&I*, p. 4, and (1964c, pp. 162–163).

⁵ See *PP*, pp. lxxii–lxxvi, and *V&I*, pp. 29–37.

⁶ Merleau-Ponty follows the strategy of Kant's Fourth Paralogism.

⁷ *V&I*, pp. 28–35.

⁸ *V&I*, p. 34.

⁹ E.g., *PP*, p. 45.

¹⁰ *PP*, pp. 228, 317–318.

¹¹ *PP*, pp. 382–383.

¹² Merleau-Ponty may argue that the presence of paradox in intellectualism rules this out, but this is a charge that the Kantian will obviously contest.

¹³ *PP*, p. lxxxii. See also *PP*, p. 45 and the accompanying note 49 (p. 507). Relevant in this context is Matherne's (2014) account of Merleau-Ponty's neo-Kantian borrowings.

¹⁴ Had Kant 'followed his own program to its logical conclusion', this would have become clear to him and he would have reconceived the a priori accordingly (*PP*, p. 229).

¹⁵ *V&I*, pp. 42–43, 221.

¹⁶ *V&I*, p. 100. See also *PP*, p. 313.

¹⁷ The order that we hope and expect to find in nature, which Kant thinks calls for a regulative principle, is on Merleau-Ponty's account embedded *within* the perceptual field, not *carried over* to the world from any subjective source: see *V&I*, pp. 40–42. Flesh is 'not contingency, chaos, but a texture that returns to itself and conforms to itself' (*V&I*, p. 146).

¹⁸ *PP*, p. 382.

¹⁹ This thought is well explored in the secondary literature. My own version is in Gardner (2016).

²⁰ This under-represents Schelling's view, which is that the defects of Spinoza's Spinozism can be corrected only by idealistic means, and that the aporiae in Kantianism—especially those arising from the theoretical/practical division—require its Spinozistic reformulation. Beginning in 1797, *Naturphilosophie* is what supplies the Spinozistic component.

²¹ Schelling (1988, p. 42).

²² **When** Merleau-Ponty tells us in *PP* that 'the subject is simultaneously creating [*naturant*] and created [*naturé*]' (*PP*, pp. 382–383), **he does so** simply in order to mark off what is inaccessible to objective thought; in *V&I* the *naturans-naturata* relation is elucidated for its own sake.

²³ See note 4 above.

- ²⁴ The concept of chiasm is inseparable from the associated notions that figure in *V&I*—flesh, visibility and the invisible, intertwining and reversibility. Plotting their relations is a complex matter, but the concept of chiasm is pivotal ('ultimate truth', *V&I*, p. 155). Chiasmic form is instanced in several dimensions, of which the subject-world relation, the most important for my purposes, is only one. On the concept, see in particular Barbaras (1991) and Toadvine (2009). The substitution of chiasm for time as the ultimate *explanans* (and thus source of paradox) is plausibly the major change of doctrine between *PP* and *V&I*.
- ²⁵ The first four of which parallel Schelling's exploitation of §§76–77 of the *CPJ*; see Gardner (2016).
- ²⁶ *V&I*, p. 133, and p. 134: 'since vision is a palpation with the look, it must also be inscribed in the order of being that it discloses to us'. And pp. 134–135: 'he who sees cannot possess the visible [...] unless he *is of it*'.
- ²⁷ Merleau-Ponty affirms transcendental necessity—'Between my exploration and what it will teach me, between my movements and what I will touch, there *must exist some relationship by principle*' (*V&I*, p. 133; emphasis added). The invisibility of the world is not merely 'de facto' (*V&I*, p. 151).
- ²⁸ *V&I*, pp. 140, 147. Comparison may be drawn with the ether of Kant's *Opus postumum*.
- ²⁹ Succinctly formulated, in application to intersubjectivity: 'I borrow myself from others; I create others from my own thoughts' (Merleau-Ponty 1964c, p. 159).
- ³⁰ Merleau-Ponty in 1956–1957 refers again to the *CPJ*, which he now suggests, in Schellingian mode and adding to what he had said in *PP*, (1) 'blurs' the correlation of subject and object in terms of which Kant previously conceived nature, and (2) at least recognizes the possibility that organic form provides an epistemological alternative to object-construction.
- ³¹ To bring the point home fully, see how Merleau-Ponty employs, though not by name, the concept of an indifference point in *V&I*, pp. 137–138, 146–148. The relation of Merleau-Ponty and Schelling has recently received close attention in the valuable collection edited by Wirth and Burke (2013), which shows it to have many more dimensions than the one I focus on here.
- ³² *PP*, p. lxxxv.
- ³³ At a minimum, Merleau-Ponty's criticisms of Sartre's totalizing system in Chap. 2 of *V&I*, and of Hegel in Merleau-Ponty (1988), have logical application to Schelling.
- ³⁴ Minimizing their differences, but surely aware of the creative character of his appropriation, Merleau-Ponty allows himself highly tendentious characterization of Schelling's thought (2003, pp. 39, 40, 43–45, 47, 48). At the end of the day however Merleau-Ponty appears to refuse any precursor: 'What we are calling flesh [...] has no name in any philosophy' (*V&I*, p. 147).
- ³⁵ I return to this point at the end. In any case, he does not do so in the lectures, where he in fact defends Schelling against Hegel (2003, p. 49; see also p. 84). *Real-Idealismus* appears moreover to meet Merleau-Ponty's conditions for 'good' ambiguity (1988, p. 52).
- ³⁶ Schelling (1988, pp. 219–236).
- ³⁷ *PP*, p. 382.
- ³⁸ Which is just how Merleau-Ponty describes Cézanne (1964a, pp. 12–15).

³⁹ ‘The phenomenological world is not the making explicit of a prior being [...] but rather, like art, the actualization of a truth’ (*PP*, p. lxxxiv).

⁴⁰ One option is to understand it as a *Darstellung* or exhibition in the sense of the Third *Critique* (which Merleau-Ponty refers to approvingly at *PP*, p. 116), an experience with the same oblique cognitive character as our cognition of the supersensible in reflective aesthetic judgement. Another is suggested by Schelling's late ‘metaphysical empiricism’; see Schelling (2007, esp. pp. 182–183).

⁴¹ Many positions in the immediate Kantian aftermath affirm a parallelism of aesthetic experience with transcendental truth: see Gardner (2007).

⁴² This is something distinct, note, from the metaphoricity of his evocations of pre-objective perceptual experience.

⁴³ *PP*, p. 430, and p. 134.

⁴⁴ *V&I*, p. 131.

⁴⁵ *V&I*, p. 146.

⁴⁶ *V&I*, p. 128.

⁴⁷ *PP*, p. 382.

⁴⁸ *PP*, p. 382.

⁴⁹ *PP*, p. 382.

⁵⁰ That there is a flesh of things, making vision possible, ‘is no analogy or vague comparison and must be taken literally’ (*V&I*, p. 133). Merleau-Ponty describes his use of words as ‘not according to their pre-established signification’ and ‘beyond themselves’ at *V&I*, p. 38. It is worth noting Merleau-Ponty's remarks on parable and sacramental language (1964b, p. 175).

⁵¹ Note Merleau-Ponty's frequent resort to *comme si*—‘as though’, ‘as if’, ‘as it were’; e.g., *V&I*, pp. 8–9, 130.

⁵² Important passages in *PP* are in the Preface, pp. lxxx–lxxxii and lxxxiv–lxxxv, and in the chapter on the cogito, pp. 411–419.

⁵³ *V&I*, p. 197.

⁵⁴ *V&I*, pp. 38–39.

⁵⁵ The problem here is on the same pattern as that which, we saw, afflicts Merleau-Ponty's account of objectivity.

⁵⁶ This disagrees with Vallier (2013) and other contributors to Wirth and Burke (2013) who affirm a *logical* path from Schelling to Merleau-Ponty by taking the former's aporiae as a *warrant* for the latter. A third possibility is that Schelling's *Ideal-Realismus* is itself also, already, a ‘whistling’: see Moore (2012), on whose (*Tractatus*-influenced) view the choice of Schelling or Merleau-Ponty can only be aesthetic.

⁵⁷ Concerns will be fuelled by Merleau-Ponty's remarks on the task of philosophy in *V&I*, pp. 95–96, 101–103, 107, 128–129. Merleau-Ponty's problematic relation to the tradition is discussed from various angles in Evans and Lawlor (2000), Pt. I.

⁵⁸ I take this to be the implication of Merleau-Ponty's 1961 lectures on Hegel (1988, esp. pp. 43–53).