MERLEAU-PONTY AND THE **ETHICS** OF INTERSUBJECTIVITY

ANYA DALY

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'On y va'

Maurice Merleau-Ponty walking with his daughter Marianne on the Canebière in Marseille

Anya Daly

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Anya Daly
The University of Melbourne
Melbourne, VIC, Australia

To His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet, Tenzin Gyatso,
and to the courageous people of the Land of Snows—
may your prayers be fulfilled.

To my other inspiring teachers—Grace, Reuben, Raphael Dawa and No Mi.

In-text References for Merleau-Ponty

Where I have had access to the French originals, I have provided these references as well in italics. For *The Phenomenology of Perception*, I have used the quotations from the second version, as this is more familiar to me. Despite a few errors in translation, this still captures for me the original text.

CD "Cezanne's Doubt", in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, Ed. Galen A. Johnson, trans.ed. Michael B. Smith, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press; 1993

DC "*Le Doute de Cézanne*" in *Sens et Non-sens*, Les Editions Nagel: Paris; 1948

CRO "The Child's Relations with Others" in *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays*. Trans. James Edie, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press; 1964

EM "Eye and Mind", in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, Ed. Galen A. Johnson, trans. ed. Michael B. Smith, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press; 1993

OE *L'oeil et l'esprit*, Paris: Editions Gallimard; 1964

EO "The Experience of Others" in *Merleau-Ponty and Psychology*, *Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry*, Vol. XVIII, nos. 1, 2 and 3

HT *Humanism and Terror*, John O'Neill (trans) Boston, MA: Beacon Press; 1969

IPP *In Praise of Philosophy and Other Essays*, J. Wild and J.M. Edie (trans). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press; 1988

EP Élogie de la Philosophie, Paris: Gallimard; 1953

N *Nature: Course Notes from the Collège de France*. trans. Robert Vallier (2003). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press

N *La Nature, Notes, Cours du Collège de France* (1995) Dominique Séglard (Ed), Paris: Seuil

PP *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith 1st edition. London: Routledge Kegan Paul; 1962 (first reference)

PP *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith reprint—2006. London: Routledge Kegan Paul; 1962 (second reference)

PP *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes, New York, London: Routledge; 2012 (third reference)

PP *Phénoménologie de la perception*. Paris: Gallimard; 1945 (fourth reference)

Pri.P *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays*. Trans. James Edie. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press; 1964

Pri.P *La primat de la perception et ses conséquences philosophiques*. Paris: Verdier; 1933, 1934, 1996

PW *The Prose of the World*, John O'Neill (trans). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press; 1964

RMM "Un inédit de M. Merleau-Ponty" *Revues de Metaphysique et de Morale* 67, no. 4 1962, 400–409

S *Signs*, trans. Librarie Gallimard (1964), Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press

S *Signes* (1960) Paris: Éditions Gallimard

SB *The Structure of Behaviour*, A.L. Fisher (trans) Boston, MA: Beacon Press; 1963

SNS *Sense and Non-Sense*, Hubert Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (trans) Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press; 1964

TL Themes from the Lectures at the Collège de France, 1952–1960, trans. John O'Neill, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press

VI *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingus. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press; 1968

VI *Le visible et l'invisible*. Paris: Gallimand; 1964

Biographical Note

Since returning to Australia in 2010 after 5 years teaching and researching in France, Anya Daly has been based in Melbourne, where she has taught on a number of the undergraduate programs in the Philosophy Department at the University of Melbourne.

Acknowledgments

This book has its roots in the coming together of two abiding passions (phenomenology and Buddhist philosophy) and a growing fascination (social neuroscience) in order to address key questions in ethics. What is the nature of ethical subjectivity? What is the real nature of our relations with others and our shared world? Why despite astonishing advances in knowledge and science do people persist in destructiveness? Is ignorance so deep and pervasive that we would be naïve to hope for better behaviour? These are the ethical questions which have motivated my thinking and writing. Through my long-time engagement with Buddhist thought (specifically the notion of *dependent arising*), the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (his notions of ontological interdependence and internal relations) and social neuroscience, I aim to shed new light on these vexing ethical issues. This book has been 9 years in the writing, during which, despite generous funding, I nonetheless needed to earn a living. Teaching has been a necessity, a constraint and also an immensely rich experience because of the widely divergent teaching situations and the even more divergent students I have encountered in both Australia and France.

Over the years of writing, I have had the good fortune to encounter philosophers who not only have become important references for my own work but also have been great encouragers along the way—beginning with Jocelyn Blomfield, who introduced me to the writings of Merleau-Ponty;

Frances, Adrian, Gabrielle and Monica Daly, who have variously buoyed me up with their friendship, humour, moral encouragement and practical aid when the complications and obstacles at certain junctures appeared insurmountable.

And so I herewith launch this work 'just as the first man launched the first word, not knowing whether it will be anything more than a shout'. *Cézanne's Doubt* Merleau-Ponty.

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Introduction

> *Between an "objective" history of philosophy (which would rob the*
> *great philosophers of what they have given others to think about) and*
> *a meditation disguised as a dialogue (in which we would ask the*
> *questions and give the answers) there must be a middle-ground on*
> *which the philosopher we are speaking about and the philosopher*
> *who is speaking are present together, although it is not possible even*
> *in principle to decide at any given moment just what belongs to each.*
> The Philosopher and His Shadow (S:159)

Merleau-Ponty is arguably one of the pre-eminent twentieth-century philosophers. His work is increasingly regarded as 'classic', not in the sense that its relevance is anchored in a remote time, nor that its concerns and strategies are classifiable in terms of a fixed style, but more in the opposite sense that it continues to speak to and challenge philosophers and thinkers today, opening up new paths of investigation. Even in France his work is belatedly experiencing a renaissance. Despite the delayed recognition of his enduring significance by the French Académie, some French philosophers have long championed the importance of his work—notably, Renaud Barbaras, Françoise Dastur, Emmanuel de Saint Aubert, Étienne Bimbinet to name a few. The extraordinary prescience of his philosophical insights conjoined with the broad range of his engagements spanning not only philosophy but also psychology, aesthetics, politics, physics and the natural sciences has led to a burgeoning recognition

of his relevance to diverse fields. Among these are neuroscience, social cognition, dance, developmental psychology, social psychology, critical theory, sports science, aesthetics, artificial intelligence, play, feminist philosophy, language, environmental philosophy and most recently ethics.

Merleau-Ponty never developed an ethics *per se*; nonetheless, there is significant textual evidence that clearly indicates he had the intention to do so. In *An Unpublished Text by Maurice Merleau-Ponty: A Prospectus of His Work* (1962), he wrote that moving from the study of perception to that of expression would not only give a metaphysics but 'at the same time give us the principle of an ethics' (Pri.P:11, *RMM:409*). Furthermore, in the course of his defence of his thesis *The Primacy of Perception* before the *Société Française de Philosophie* in support of his candidacy for the chair of philosophy at the Collège de France (1946), he declared that he never considered in all his writings of the subject as anything other than an ethical subject (Pri.P:30; *Pri.P:78,79*). Although he makes few explicit references to ethics, those that he does offer are highly suggestive and I propose that these allied to his ontological commitments provide the basis for the development of an ethics which is able to challenge the traditional conceptions of ethical theory and practice. Apart from these important explicit references, within all his works, including the aesthetic and political,[1] there is an identifiable and persistent ethical current underpinning many of his central concepts and concerns. This book thus aims to explicate Merleau-Ponty's implicit ethics, which arises out of his relational ontology wherein the interdependence of self, other and world is affirmed. Such an ethics would be markedly different from traditional and mainstream ethical accounts, which are founded on the assumptions of dualist or monist ontologies. Because of such ontological foundations, the relations between subjects in the accounts of deontology, utilitarianism, consequentialism, contractarian and virtue ethics are external. We could characterize such ethics as 'high altitude' in that they invoke a higher authority than the subject,

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[1] I had hoped to include a chapter on Merleau-Ponty's engagement with politics, his ethics writ large, but this proved to be a much larger undertaking than anticipated. This will be on the 'to do' list for later this year. To those who wish to pursue this line of investigation, I would recommend the insightful article 'Politics and the Political' (Coole 2008) and book *Merleau-Ponty and Modern Politics after Anti-Humanism* (Coole 2013), both by philosopher Diana Coole.

whether of divine ordinance, duty, utility, consequences, the social good or the valorization of a virtuous ideal. These are the ethics of norms, obligations and prescriptions, which engage at the level of reflection. Such ethics are able to offer not only justifications for actions and values but also cohesion, guidance and significant harmony within any society; however, adherence to any one requires a certain degree of selective blindness. They cannot capture the complexities of experience and sometimes when rigorously applied lead to abhorrent outcomes or to outcomes essentially antithetical to the chosen ethical *telos*. As a consequence, the domain of ethics today is characterized by conflict, dogmatism and reductionism.

Merleau-Ponty's ethics, grounded in the ontological interdependence of subjects within which internal relations obtain, demands an entire reappraisal of ethical questions. The questions that motivate my investigation are the following: What constitutes an ethical subject? What is the real nature of my responsibility for others and our shared world? If their well-being is inherently linked to my own, can I afford to be indifferent, negligent or destructive? How would an ethics of internal relations motivate action? What could this ethics offer to the resolution of seemingly irresolvable ethical problems and dilemmas? Is it possible finally to answer the amoralist, for whom ethical injunctions and ethical intuitions are at worst irrelevant and misguided and at best mere conventional conveniences? Such questions are in urgent need of illumination given the weakening and corruption of many of the traditional cultural structures, whether social, political or religious, which in the past have served to constrain aggression, redress injustices and ameliorate inequities. This urgency is also underscored by the shrinking of our world through infotechnology and travel. The citizens of the world can no longer claim ignorance and retire to the comfort of their immediate and personal concerns. In particular, at this time, the Other has come to be most vividly embodied in the refugee and the terrorist. Both inspire profound fear, one because he demands our compassion and our generosity, and the other because he threatens our security and confronts us with an entirely other point of view. The first threatens because he demands recognition as equally deserving of the advantages we enjoy and the second because there is a legitimate basis for resentment in that, whether directly or

indirectly, our comforts have often been achieved at the expense of these Others and, moreover, because he neither accepts nor trusts the so-called egalitarian ethos of democracies. And so all the psychological and political mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion are set in motion, hurtling inexorably from one disaster to the next, from one outrage to the next, the atrocities escalating, the hearts hardening against each other, failing or refusing to recognize the Other as an-other suffering fellow human being. What is really going on? How do these failures become possible? Why within the general understanding of ourselves, others and the world do these problems appear intractable and inevitably tragic? We could retreat into the easy, reassuring comforts of discrimination against the irredeemable Other or invoke the psychological mechanisms of projection to explain what is happening. I, however, propose that through a careful explication of Merleau-Ponty's implicit ethics, we can reveal the grounds of such problems.

I propose that we are caught in a primitive[2] perception of others and our world which is no longer viable. Just as our perception evolved to be able to accommodate 'perspective' and 'colour', so too we need to evolve beyond oppositional perception to one that recognizes our deep interdependence. In this way, the failure to recognize this interdependence can be compared to an optical illusion—our distorted perception persists in seeing others as inherently independent, radically separate entities, and it is this failure of insight that grounds and leads to ethical failures. Albert Einstein has made a similar comparison:

> A human being is a part of a whole, called by us 'universe'—a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest … a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our

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[2] I use 'primitive' to indicate not only what has gone before but also that these earlier perceptive capacities are less evolved—they have not captured the full range, complexity or depth of our perceptive powers. Further to this, I do not support views that would have humans as necessarily the peak of evolution, nor the assumption that evolution is a necessary historical progression to higher and more refined capabilities all in the service of survival—there may be other motivators than survival. Moreover, the evolutionary trajectory is uncertain and uneven and may in fact include periods of devolution.

personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.[3]

The project to explicate a Merleau-Pontian ethics thus arises from the ethical questions posed by the Other and begins with perception. It is this which reconfigures the philosophical landscape to enable a new approach. Merleau-Ponty's rehabilitated account of perception conjoined with the many suggestive ideas regarding perceptual intervolvement point towards his implicit ethics. I wish to interrogate these notions in the intersubjective domain, drawing out their implications in order to establish an ethics which is coherent with his overall aims. Although it may be said I am taking liberties with this philosopher's work, I propose that this is justified in that I can offer sufficient textual support and also these 'creative liberties' offer an account with not only explanatory power but also power to galvanize the domain of ethical debate.

I would like to stress here at the outset that seeking norms, obligations and prescriptions is not applicable for this *ethics of insight*. Some may claim that this does not then qualify as ethics. However, if it motivates skilful action (i.e., action that avoids harming and may in its best manifestations promote the well-being of others), it would be pedantic if not perverse to qualify it as anything other than ethics. And this skilful action is possible by virtue of direct pre-reflective insight, intelligent percipience[4] into the real nature of our relation to others and the particularities of the given situation, not on any absolutist formulations, not by virtue of religious prescriptions, nor on principles founded on a metaphysics of man from which rights and duties are extrapolated, nor on the moral accounting typical of consequential or utilitarian ethics.

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[3] The same viewpoints are central to Buddhism, and the analogy of the optical delusion/illusion to denote this misapprehension is one regularly used in Buddhist texts and also by HH Dalai Lama.

[4] I elaborate on this notion of *intelligent percipience/pre-reflective insight* later in Chap. 8 by using both Merleau-Ponty's aesthetic analyses, his idea of hyper-reflection and the Buddhist practice of *mindful percipience*; suffice to say here that this is an apprehension anterior to intellection/reflection.

The Challenges Confronting Other Ethical Accounts

Each of Merleau-Ponty's major works begins by critically engaging with a *provocateur*, through which he delineates the *problématique* which he intends to address through an alternative account. Likewise, I follow a similar strategy, and so my critique of traditional normative ethics, while not intended to be a thoroughgoing critique, both indicates in broad strokes the shortcomings of these accounts and serves as an *entrée* into the elaboration of the distinctive features of Merleau-Ponty's implicit ethics.

Within traditional approaches to ethics, it is possible to distinguish three broad trends: deontology, consequentialism and virtue ethics. The first depends on a view of human nature according to religion or metaphysics from which are extrapolated notions of purpose, rights, duties and good, and it is these which prescribe or proscribe action; the second aims for an account that avoids religious dogmas and metaphysical assumptions about human nature so as to establish ethical action on the basis of a sought-after 'good', whether happiness or preference satisfaction, thereby maximizing overall beneficial consequences; and the third promotes the cultivation of particular qualities or virtues in the individual and proposes that through the cumulative effect of this cultivation, both individual and societal flourishing can be achieved.

The perspicacity of these approaches notwithstanding, that there has been a need to regularly qualify and refine these accounts in order to overcome objections and to better align the outcomes with our ethical intuitions suggests that there is something fundamental missing in the formulations. Before elaborating on this lacuna, I wish first to outline the conflicts and challenges of each of these traditional approaches. In the first approach, traditional deontology, because of the plurality of religious and metaphysical allegiances, it is impossible to establish a universally acceptable ethics. We know all too well that the worst atrocities in human history have been committed and continue to be committed in the name of 'true gods', 'chosen peoples', a 'superior' human destiny or unwavering adherence to absolute principles. Even putting aside the problem of opposing religious or metaphysical

allegiances, it is possible that the selfsame individual may experience irresolvable conflicts of duty, and moreover there is the ever-present question about the legitimacy of partiality. Must partiality be eliminated from all ethical considerations, and is it even possible to achieve impartiality? Another criticism of traditional deontology is that foreseeable but unintended harm does not merit reprobation and so too non-action and negligence are not considered culpable. The second approach, of which utilitarianism is the most predominant form, has great intuitive appeal. Not only does it provide a simple formula but it also appears to be offering a solution to the problem of plurality, by bypassing both religious and metaphysical considerations. However, this solution collapses when the following questions are posed. How is it possible to measure happiness for diverse individuals? What is considered beneficial? Who decides? Who can arbitrate when negative consequences for one may represent positive consequences for another? We well know that the utilitarian formula when applied consistently may lead to abhorrent outcomes (such as the various versions of the trolley case, the organ transplant case, the Jim and Pedro case). Moreover, minorities are immediately expendable. And in its strict formulation, it becomes too demanding in that every action must come under utilitarian scrutiny. There is also the need to distinguish between short-term and long-term consequences, and the longer the view, the more difficult it becomes to predict consequences and therefore utility. Furthermore, there is the concern that utilitarianism does not take due account of central ethical notions such as 'justice', 'agency', 'responsibility' and 'integrity'. In addition to all the above challenges, there is the undeniable fact that utilitarianism crucially depends on the assumptions of an egalitarian motivation and that impartiality is always possible. The third approach, a virtue ethics approach, is without question more compatible with a Merleau-Pontian ethics but nonetheless cannot offer adequate explanations or justifications for why particular virtues should be cultivated and moreover it runs up against problems with the exception to the rule—that is, legitimate/constructive anger or patience/tolerance which colludes in exploitation and violence. Furthermore, there is the assumption that certain qualities and virtues are 'natural' for humans to have or value.

All three approaches, without question, have made important contributions to the domain of ethical debate, without which they would have already been relegated to the annals of history. So today, the more refined and qualified versions of these approaches are able to offer more nuanced and sophisticated accounts which escape some of the above-mentioned criticisms. However, there remain two significant weaknesses in these accounts: their reductionist tendencies and their intellectualist assumptions of moral agency and moral cognition. Deontologists, for example, propose that within the various manifestations of morality it is always possible to identify a deontological structure. However, while it is clear that duties and rights play a central role in commonsense morality, there is much in moral practice that is irreducible to duties and rights, such as 'the good' as emphasized by consequentialists and the virtues as promoted by virtue ethicists. I contend that the absolutist ambitions of all these accounts need to be renounced in favour of a more inclusive and integrated approach which respects not only the important contributions of 'right', 'good' and 'virtue' to our ethical understandings but also the essential underpinnings of such understandings in a pre-reflective ethical engagement. This is where Merleau-Ponty's ethics makes a crucial contribution.

Because such approaches rely on an objective view of humans and the world, the justification for ethical behaviour is external to the subject whose self-understanding, emotions and perceptions are regarded variously as irrelevant, untrustworthy or inconsequential. Owing to this lacuna, they promote a 'top-down' or 'high altitude'[5] approach in which notions of duty, utility or virtue are paramount, the ethical imperative being above and beyond the embodied particular subject. That being said, these approaches, of course, *are* concerned about application to particular circumstances and so the embodied particular subject is relevant as the final repository of these injunctions, imperatives and ideals which presumably inform their actions. So too the particular embodied subject may become relevant as that which alerts to the need for revisions, as a test case in the applied ethical arena, as somewhat a guinea pig in the

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[5] 'High altitude' or 'pensée de survol' is a term Merleau-Ponty used to designate objective thinking, in which god's-eye-view paradigms are assumed to be possible.

ethical experiment—whether a thought experiment or a real-life scenario. However, what I wish to stress is that such ethics remain at the level of objective thought, of reflection, of intellection and so behaviour can be designated 'ethical' only when it matches the justificatory requirements of the ethical framework, and these justificatory requirements are external to the subject. This intellectualist approach to moral cognition is especially apparent in utilitarianism and deontology, wherein normative moral judgements are traced respectively to principles of utility and maximization or to moral rules. The emphasis on emotional dispositions in virtue ethics seems to resist this intellectualist bias by arguing that moral competence cannot be adequately captured in formulas and rules. However, although virtue ethics is compatible with the account I am proposing, it still does not capture the primordial level of ethical susceptibility of an ethics founded on internal relations between subjects. This primordial level is anterior to the dispositions represented in traditional virtue ethics. It is important to note here that the virtue ethicist takes an internalist stance in regard to ethics in that the subject cultivates virtues so that he is pre-disposed to behave according to these virtues. The ethical orientation has become internalized by the subject and it is this which moderates relational behaviour. The difference with a Merleau-Pontian ethical approach is that it is *the relation that is internal*. Otherness is internal to the subject and it is this *insight* which drives the ethical motivation from a fresh starting point with each encounter, not in some pre-rehearsed manner that has come to seem 'natural'. Such an ethics is demanding in the sense that it demands *full presence* when faced with the other and the particularities of the situation. Full presence is mindful and affectively embodied, not switching to auto-pilot even if a virtuous auto-pilot.

Merleau-Ponty returns ethics to pre-objective reality, to pre-reflective percipience, to the immediate encounter stripped of all conceptual overlays. A Merleau-Pontian account is 'bottom-up', it brings ethics 'down to earth' with the understanding of the subject as having intrinsic ethical capacities by virtue of his ontological interdependence with other subjects. Importantly, these subjects are perceiving, embodied, expressive subjects. An interrogation of this primordial level of ethical susceptibility is, I contend, able to throw new light on ethical questions and the whole domain of ethical debate.

Methodology

Phenomenology is a distinct but evolving philosophical method that begins with 'lived experience' as given from the first person point of view. It is thus concerned with how things appear in conscious experience, rather than with making claims about 'objective' reality. Methodologically, unlike analytic philosophy which is concerned exclusively with arguments and insists that arguments must be kept rigorously distinct from any empirical support, phenomenology has a more expanded repertoire. This repertoire includes arguments, detailed descriptive analysis of lived experience *in situ* or from literary sources and more recently it has drawn on empirical support from the natural and human sciences. It is important to remember that phenomenology is as much a 'showing' as a 'telling'. The divergent approaches are directly traceable to the differing epistemological and ontological commitments of each philosophical tradition.

I. My focus is primarily the original work of Merleau-Ponty and is less concerned with the ever-burgeoning scholarship based on his work. Although much of this is important scholarly work, I am not concerned with pitting interpretations against each other except where this may further my purpose in drawing out Merleau-Ponty's core ideas with regard to his implicit ethics. I aim primarily though not exclusively for interrogative, responsive thinking inspired by the originals, a thinking alongside Merleau-Ponty himself. That being said, I must acknowledge my debts to the work of Renaud Barbaras, Martin Dillon, Shaun Gallagher, Francisco Varela and Dan Zahavi most notably. Furthermore, it is well documented that Merleau-Ponty was not always consistent. He was constantly extending the reach and grasp of his own thinking and so in keeping faith with the spirit of his endeavours, I will pursue a similar tactic—reaching and, I hope, grasping fruitful conclusions on the basis of the indications in Merleau-Ponty's work. This approach is endorsed by Renaud Barbaras, who notes in his book *The Being of the Phenomenon* that owing to the unfinished nature of Merleau-Ponty's work, no final position can be identified and there is no 'one text that allows us to resolve everything'. Rather, we must 'take up on its own account and pursue the path that his thought opened' (Barbaras 2004). Merleau-Ponty also saw his own

efforts in this way, especially with regard to his appreciations of the later works of Husserl, and so he wrote:

> By advancing the thesis of the primacy of perception, I have less the feeling that I am proposing something completely new than the feeling of drawing out the conclusions of the work of my predecessors. (Pri.P:27; *Pri.P:72*)

There is debate among scholars of phenomenology about the extent of Merleau-Ponty's reliance on the work of Husserl. As Dan Zahavi has observed, there has been a puzzling persistence particularly with American scholars to mistakenly interpret Merleau-Ponty's own acknowledgement of his indebtedness to Husserl as an indication of Merleau-Ponty's generosity and humility. In fact, however, it is clear, as Zahavi reveals in his paper 'Merleau-Ponty on Husserl: A reappraisal' (Zahavi 2002), Merleau-Ponty's declarations are a genuine recognition of his indebtedness to the later Husserl particularly. Zahavi notes that central notions, usually attributed to Merleau-Ponty, are actually pre-figured in the previously unpublished manuscripts of Husserl. These include the signature notions of reciprocity and reversibility, incarnated subjectivity, operative intentionality and the notion that transcendental subjectivity leads to transcendental intersubjectivity. The last complete essay Merleau-Ponty wrote, *The Philosopher and His Shadow*, bears eloquent testimony to his reliance on and appreciation for the thought of Husserl. Nonetheless, Merleau-Ponty extends many of Husserl's key ideas and develops original lines of investigation, in part because of his active engagement with disciplines outside of phenomenology. His work is thus distinguished from pure phenomenology as advanced by Husserl through its creative and incisive deployment of the neurology and psychology of his day, applying the theoretical framework of phenomenology to the empirical domain. In this way, we can see that Merleau-Ponty pioneered what is now commonly referred to as 'the naturalist turn' in phenomenology. The issue of whether phenomenology can legitimately engage with the natural and human sciences continues to inspire heated debate (Gallagher 2012a, b, Moran 2013, Zahavi 2002, Aikin 2006, Harney 2015).

The original contribution of this book to philosophical scholarship lies in the extrapolation of Merleau-Ponty's unwritten ethics. Whereas

a number of insightful papers have addressed the ethical within Merleau-Ponty's work, none to my knowledge has yet delineated the crucial distinctions between a Merleau-Pontian ethics and normative ethics, nor have they fully addressed the role his non-dualist ontology plays in establishing such an ethics.

Merleau-Ponty has provocatively claimed that resolving 'the problem of the Other' would lead to an entire reconstruction of Western philosophy (VI:193, *VI:246*). There are two things to note about this extraordinary assertion: firstly, he refers to Western philosophy; so it can be supposed that he knew this was not a problem for Eastern philosophy—and there is reason to suggest he means Buddhist philosophy; and secondly, he speaks of a reconstruction *not* a demolition. To my mind, this will then require a reorganization, a re-situating, a contextualizing and a necessary deflation of certain absolutist ambitions.

In drawing out Merleau-Ponty's implicit ethics, I propose that a parallel claim can be made with regard to ethics—that a reconstruction, not a demolition, of the ethical domain is in order, so that a truly pluralistic approach is possible, one in which the veridical intuitions and strategies of each normative account can be honoured. The supporting claims are, firstly, that there is an ethical level anterior to the reflective level of normative ethics and this pre-reflective level constitutes the ground for the possibility of reflective ethics; the second and stronger claim is that this pre-reflective level of ethical engagement itself directly motivates ethical behaviour through pre-reflective percipience, through direct insight. It is this ethical touchstone which ensures that any of the normative accounts remain true to ethical intuitions and do not stray from their own underlying *telos*. This Merleau-Pontian account thus offers an architectonic for ethics wherein all legitimate ethical intuitions can be accommodated.

II. My methodological approach depends to greater and lesser extents on other phenomenologically based disciplines so as to support my claims and interpretations—neuroscience, aesthetics and Buddhist philosophy.

The first of these, neuroscience, is the current domain of scientific research that intersects in interesting ways with phenomenology and these intersections have been exploited to useful effect in both directions. It is well known that Merleau-Ponty's regard for science was complex, some might say ambivalent. Merleau-Ponty proposed that the tendency

to esteem science as the paradigm for knowledge is seriously mistaken.[6] He criticized science on two crucial points which challenge our usual assumptions about scientific knowledge. Firstly, he asserted that science presupposes an objective world of which its aim is to validate. Secondly, that science does not question its means of access. Science has seduced us with its spectacular successes, and because of this we too readily overlook its failures. Science's dazzling power over us is based on the claim that our senses, our perceptions are not to be trusted and that we must rather rely on reason, inference and the expert knowledge of scientists. Perception, such scientists claim, gives us only appearances and it is the knowledge of scientists that can offer the 'objective' realities of physics, biology and chemistry. Merleau-Ponty argued that this so-called objective reality is in fact only an abstraction on the basis of phenomena and that our perceptive faculties have been extremely underrated.[7] These ideas and concerns, introduced in *The Structure of Behaviour*, are extended and deepened in Merleau-Ponty's opus, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, in which perception and body are shown to be integral and pervasive in all epistemic enterprises, going against the tendencies of science and commonsense understandings which marginalize or claim to eliminate their contributions. The perceiver is revealed as a situated, embodied subject, not the pure Cartesian thinker, and consciousness is first and foremost a prereflective bodily intentionality. And so, Merleau-Ponty offers not just a rehabilitated account of perception, but one that recognizes the extraordinary philosophical consequences of a perceptual epistemology and correlatively a phenomenal ontology that not only will challenge the epistemic hegemony of science but, as stated earlier, will eventually lead to an entire

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[6] As explained by Edith Stein, the phenomenological reduction eliminates all assumptions of science, natural experience, psycho-physical realities including those of the investigator—and applies itself only to that which is indubitable—the experience of a thing, whether by perception, memory or imagination—the phenomenon (Stein 1964, p. 4; Moran 2013).

[7] 'All my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world without which the symbols of science would be meaningless. The whole universe of science is built upon the world as directly experienced, and if we want to subject science itself to rigorous scrutiny and arrive at a precise assessment of its meaning and scope, we must begin by reawakening the basic experience of the world of which science is the second-order expression. Science has not and never will have, by its nature, the same significance *qua* form of being as the world which we perceive, for the simple reason that it is a rationale or explanation of that world' (PP:viii, PP:ix, PP:lxxii, *PP:8* and *9*).