Phenomenology, Intersubjectivity and Truth: Merleau-Ponty, de Beauvoir, Irigaray and *la conscience métaphysique et morale.*

Eleanor Godway

Metaphysics and the "natural attitude"

The task of metaphysics in the tradition inherited from Descartes was to sort out and systematize the fundamental structures of our knowledge, and thus of our access to truth. Since Descartes took "I think, therefore I am" as his starting point, the "subject" (the knower) came to be identified as that which is conscious ("I think"), and it has been understood as separate and immaterial, observing its "objects" from outside and above. This was a vindication of the individual thinker, not unconnected with the Protestant Reformation which set in motion a transformation of the moral and religious climate, as well as being an integral part of the whole intellectual ferment out of which the experimental sciences were born. But in due course this understanding of the thinking subject as isolated, cut off from interaction with what it contemplates, began to push philosophy (especially in what has come to be known as the "Continental" tradition) to recognize its shortcomings, if not its fundamental incoherence.[1] Thus we begin to move from what philosophers have identified as "modern philosophy" into "postmodernism."

Husserl's phenomenology begins by inheriting this creaking tradition as the project of a subject not so far removed from its Cartesian predecessor. He thought that Descartes started in the right direction, but did not go far enough.[2] Indeed, the breakthrough of phenomenology may be described as the outcome of taking subjectivity

more seriously than it was by Descartes, who took the subject's status for granted, and moved straight to what concerned him more, the "objects" of thought. This is what Husserl and his successors dubbed the "natural attitude." Of it, Merleau-Ponty wrote:

> It is natural to believe ourselves in the presence of a world and time over which our thought soars, capable of considering each part at will without modifying the part's objective nature. Science, at the outset, takes up and systematizes this belief, which always takes for granted an absolute observer in whom all points of view can be summed up, and correlatively an accurate blueprint (*géométral*) of all perspectives.[3]

No human being can claim actually to be the "absolute observer" with insight into such a blueprint, but it is just this account of what knowledge should be that has come into question. Heidegger, schooled in Husserlian phenomenology, called it "onto-theology", implying as it does that what we seek is a "God's eye view" (a view from everywhere and nowhere) and that what is true, what can be known of what is "real" ("what is") could be laid out before such an all encompassing consciousness. This is the metaphysics that Heidegger would have us move beyond: the "ontological" is not something to be considered from the outside, but something that challenges us, calls us to account from inside, as we shall have occasion to discuss further below.

The appeal of the "natural attitude" – what makes it seem natural, after all – is that we are normally unaware as we focus on the objects before us of what we ourselves bring to the situation. According to Merleau-Ponty, as we have seen, it is the attitude originally adopted by science, which thus tends to leave out of account what is actually contributed from the side of the scientists, their relationships with fellow human beings, and their situation in the world we all share. The goal of "objectivity" is apparently that of rising above the human condition altogether. "Rising above" brings us back to Merleau-Ponty's image of "soaring", and in several other places he refers to *la pensée de survol* ("high altitude thinking") – and one of the issues of particular concern for the present essay is the implication of this distance. For the detachment thus aspired to, the legacy of the "I think" as separate and immaterial as I described it above, means not only that ideally one would have no effect on what one observes, but also one is oneself cut off from being affected in the present. Such a consciousness can have

no sense of a relationship with that of which it is conscious. (Eventually philosophers who go down this path are confronted with the paradox of solipsism – and if this is where they stop, philosophically speaking, they have come to a dead end.[4])

Husserl's phenomenology was developed in response to this impasse in the relationship of the knower to what is known. My take on phenomenology, largely following Merleau-Ponty's existential interpretation, gives me a sense of being brought back to earth (Husserl's "to the things themselves!" – *zu den Sachen selbst!*), an escape from that high-flown metaphysics. For Husserl's move was to turn away from a focus on the object to reflect on our experience of it, bracketing, for the time being at least, the conundrum of internal versus external data (the issue of solipsism.) This experience now becomes "evidence" – the given – and what one goes through in the present (*Erlebnis)* takes precedence over a theoretical perspective, over the "I think" of the tradition. In order to attend to this new data, we must adopt a new attitude, abstaining from the attitude that comes most "naturally." This technique of *epoche*, or bracketing of concern with the "objective," makes possible the "reduction" which brings into view the subjective correlate which has always been there, the aspect of consciousness always already taken-for-granted. What makes phenomenology especially confusing is that it has somehow to convey a sense of consciousness as itself something to reflect on, and so break the spell of the natural attitude. This reflection, the attitude of attending to the evidence of one's own experience (rather than that which is publicly shared and labeled), is not a theoretical approach, and it cannot be justified by a theory: it is a matter of side-stepping theory and, as far as possible, encountering what is given "as is," without what Husserl came to call "the garb of ideas."[5]

The difficulty I encounter when I begin to explain phenomenology to students is that what I am really trying to get across is a particular experience which is not amenable to conceptualization, and which, as I shall argue, is inherently open-ended. It is true that the early Husserl apparently believed that the method of phenomenology would enable us eventually to set aside all presuppositions, and in principle the Transcendental Ego once attained would overcome the limitations of individual perspectives, and we would thus still be on the path to "universal truth", the old vision of metaphysics. But this aspiration did not distort his evaluation of what experience offered as evidence, with the result that his commitment to "the things themselves"

kept him from the temptation to *la pensée de survol.* He did not, in Merleau-Ponty's phrase, try to reduce the true to the likely (*le vrai au vraisemblable, le réel au probable*).[6] Thus, what he originally thought of as the ego-pole of intentionality gave way to an understanding of passive synthesis, that is, of meanings we find ourselves already participating in, not attributed to an isolated constituting consciousness. When Merleau-Ponty said that the most important thing that the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction,[7] he was among other things alluding to the way Husserl had to keep starting over in his phenomenological investigations. For one must always be prepared for the recognition – and the recurring possibility – of it turning out that "I only *thought* I knew, but now…," which puts what had so far been concluded into question. There are always further horizons. (Almost every book Husserl published, year after year, was called an "Introduction," or the equivalent, and he referred to his work as always beginning again.) But what becomes relevant for the case I wish to make in this essay is that by the time he wrote the material included in *Experience and Judgment* (edited and published posthumously) he could say that the foundational experience (our first consciousness) is of a "Thou," the second person, with whom I am already in relationship, leaving the third person, the "doxic," the knowledge of objects, to come later.[8]

Phenomenology as "Metaphysical" and the Ethical

Heidegger, who has been identified as the first existential phenomenologist and was a major influence on the French movement, describes the metaphysical question as the question that puts the questioner in question.[9] As *Dasein* is the entity for which "Being is an issue", the outstanding example (the "ontological" question) is that posed by the real possibility of "not-being," i.e., the end of all of one's possibilities in the face of the insurmountable reality of one's own death.[10] This certainly disrupts the natural attitude, and for him and Sartre, as for Kierkegaard, it is this kind of disorientation, frequently experienced as anguish, which breaks through one's taken-for-granted assumptions about what one is, one's existence, and so confronts one with one's ineluctable subjectivity. For these thinkers, though in different ways, subjectivity is revealed in an experience of isolation, of freedom as forlornness, and in relation to action, having to make decisions without the possibility of reassurance that one is on the right track. This existential turn introduces an ethical dimension to the

phenomenological tradition, but perhaps does little more than mark the space left by rejection of the older (modernist) versions of ethics. The analogue of the natural attitude in this domain is that of assuming that there are (or ought to be) ready-made answers to questions about what we ought to do, that it is possible to know what is right. These answers have generally come either as a version of theology or as a set of principles, whether in the form of duties, as for Kant, or rules by which to evaluate consequences, as in utilitarianism. Without this kind of blueprint of what we ought to be and do, without "objective" standards of value, for Sartre we are "condemned to be free,"[11] and "Man is a useless passion."[12] There would seem to be no promise of ethical insight from this version of metaphysics, no resource or guidance for handling our moral dilemmas.

How then can Merleau-Ponty write of *la conscience métaphysique et morale*? The answer lies in the way Merleau-Ponty takes up the existential application of phenomenology. While for Heidegger and Sartre, subjectivity is isolated ("in each case mine", as Heidegger puts it), Merleau-Ponty is closer to Husserl, especially with respect to the point made above, namely that we are always already in relationship with other people. For ethics, at a minimum, has been about human beings coping with living together, and the rules and principles mentioned above are meant to address the problems that have always arisen in human societies. Even when there seemed to be universally acknowledged standards and/or criteria, judging by them and/or living up to them was never a cut and dried procedure: the lived situation always presented problems. The practical continually confounded the theoretical. The move away from the natural attitude which is the achievement of phenomenology is, for Merleau-Ponty, a move towards a clearer sense of what is inherent in the relations between subjectivities, as well as the possibilities of shared knowledge and value: "Metaphysics begins from the moment when, ceasing to live in the evidence of the object . . . we apperceive the radical subjectivity of all our experience as inseparable from its truth value [*valeur de vérité*]" (*SNS* 93). For, where Heidegger and Sartre believed there could be no valid (authentic) relationship between "subjectivity" and "truth", Merleau-Ponty saw it differently: "Metaphysics is not a construction of concepts by which we try to make our paradoxes less noticeable, but is the experience we have of these paradoxes in all situations of personal and collective history and the actions which, by assuming them, transform them into reason"(*SNS* 95-96). This is a *métaphysique en acte* (*SNS* 95) and this

"reason" is not a pre-existing logos or an impersonal perspective which is to take account of all relevant (possible) knowledge; rather, it is a call, one might say, to ask participants in a discussion to be "reasonable," to be prepared to take risks, to cope with ambiguity, to learn from mistakes and from another, perhaps radically different, point of view. The truth which is tied to subjectivity, then, is not an objective truth (as in the "evidence of the object") which somehow belongs to no-one in particular and is outside time; rather, it is a task before us: we are to work together to accomplish the "becoming" of truth. Subjectivity then comes into the world as a way towards this truth, this value which we are to bring into being together.

Thus, the experience of subjectivity for Merleau-Ponty is not that of dread and isolation, and though it makes one aware of one's irreducible "me-ness," it grows out of the relationships into which we are born, and to which we continue to belong. We begin, he shows (through studies of child psychology as well as his own sense of what is going on) by participating in what one might call a "proto-subjectivity." Merleau-Ponty describes a *vie à plusieurs* ("undifferentiated group life", or "life lived by several"[13]) in which the small child is not yet aware of itself as "I." At the other extreme from Husserl's Transcendental Ego which would transcend all points of view,[14] this is the context out of which subjectivity (a point of view) can emerge: Heidegger's *Mitsein,* perhaps, but not yet intersubjectivity.[15] For that, I must be aware of "I" as not "you," perhaps the first inkling of the reduction, and then in, due course, further experiences of the need for a new orientation beckon us towards an expanding intersubjectivity, the possibility of an open community which will take account of as many points of view as possible. So as Merleau-Ponty envisages it, the effort of philosophy is to "push beyond all limits the becoming of truth, which supposes and brings it about that there is one single history and one world."[16] This is in no way guaranteed, however. It is not even an intelligible blueprint, because this approach does not sacrifice the means to the end.[17]

In recovering the significance of human relationships, Merleau-Ponty offers us a sense of the inseparability of the ethical and the epistemological, so that phenomenology is seen as bringing about a moral awakening (*conscience*), as well as letting the world we live in begin to make sense in new ways. This is why I have used Merleau-Ponty's phrase, *la conscience métaphysique et morale,* without attempting to translate it into English, that is, make a choice between "consciousness" and "conscience." If, as Merleau-Ponty is telling us, the awakening to

metaphysical (phenomenological) consciousness is also at the same time moral consciousness, it may not be that the French word is ambiguous. Perhaps rather there is a distortion (even a systemic bad faith) in the usual distinction that English speakers make between the ethical and the epistemological, the moral and the cognitive. At any rate the phenomenological reduction, like deconstruction,[18] is not so much something one does as it is something one undergoes, and for that reason both Husserl (*CES* 228) and Simone de Beauvoir describes it as a species of conversion,[19] as it is through the consciousness of another consciousness that we come to recognize that we *have* a point of view, and that there is more to be discovered than what we can see from our side. The awareness that the perspective of another person differs from mine is not just an example of the way our supposed "objectivity" might be called in question; it is what allows us to become "subjects" that can appreciate that there are "objects" in the first place. It is therefore the very germ of rationality, of the possibility of discovering the real. For example, in perception, what makes the object I can see real is that it has another side which is visible to another person. In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty describes how perspectives blend, perceptions confirm one another and a meaning emerges (*PP* xix) and the way "the paths of my various experiences intersect, and [...] my own and other peoples' engage like gears" (*PP* xx). Acknowledging that this is another person, another awareness, what both Simone de Beauvoir and Merleau- Ponty call another freedom, means that we are already in the domain of the ethical. (The reason Merleau-Ponty resists the term "ethical other" is that as soon as there is an other for me, the situation is constituted as ethical (*PrP* 307.) There is no non-ethical other: to assume that there could be is already to betray the other, to refuse an existing relationship – in a word, to be "unethical"[20]). That is why Merelau-Ponty understands the consciousness that allows itself to be open to question as *la conscience métaphysique et morale* – not two kinds of consciousness, but one. He tells us that this awareness "dies upon contact with the absolute, because, beyond the dull world of habitual or dormant consciousness [*conscience*], this consciousness [*conscience*] is itself the living connection between myself and me and myself and others [*autrui*]"(*SNS* 95).

I suggest that *la conscience métaphysique* is the "living connection between myself and me" and is experienced in what Merleau-Ponty called "paradoxes," while *la conscience morale* is that which emerges in conflict with others. "[W]hatever solidity there is in my belief in the

absolute is nothing but my experience of a harmony (*accord*) with myself and with others. Recourse to an absolute foundation – when it is not useless – destroys the very thing it is supposed to support" (*SNS* 95).

And in the case of the ethical, as I have suggested, moral absolutes fail to help. Rather, as he says elsewhere "If we are to rediscover a morality [*une morale*[21]], we must find it through the conflicts that we meet in the experience of immorality" (*SNS* 4, translation modified). It is when things go wrong between us that we wonder about what we should be doing – so the real questions arise in a situation where we have to deal with the conflicts as best we may, within the horizons open to us. Ethical judgements from outside, which Merleau-Ponty would regard as *pensée de survol,* however naturally they present themselves to us, never touch the experience as it is lived: "Everything happens on the level of life because life is metaphysical" (*SNS* 44) and man's "bare fortuitous existence is itself the absolute value" (*SNS* 44). Moreover, our existence finds us, as I have been insisting, always already in relationship: "I" and "Thou" come into being together. "Our freedom waits for the recognition of other people and needs them to become what it is" (*SNS* 45).

Metaphysics and Literature: Simone de Beauvoir

Simone de Beauvoir's close association with Sartre has sometimes interfered with recognition of her philosophical distance from him. The two philosophical books she published, *Pyrrhus et Cinéas*[22] and *The Ethics of Ambiguity* develop a version of existentialism which directly addresses the very issues that Sartre seems to avoid, namely the meaning of human life and the relationship between freedom and ethics. When de Beauvoir said that she did not regard herself as a philosopher, this should not be taken, I think, as a modest self put-down, but rather as wanting to distance herself from the traditional role of a philosopher who tries to escape the ambiguities of lived existence and achieve what Merleau-Ponty called "a perfect transcendence of expression" (*SNS* 28). It is true that many of Merleau-Ponty's examples of the "metaphysical" (especially in his essay "The Metaphysical in Man") come from what he called "the sciences of man" – the human sciences – which challenge what we think we know about ourselves, nevertheless he is impressed by what can be learned from novels. He discusses several nineteenth century authors and explains how, since the emergence of phenomenology and existentialism, "the tasks of literature and philosophy can no longer be separated" (*SNS* 28). He

himself was accused of writing something more on the lines of a novel, not philosophy, when he was defending *The Phenomenology of Perception*[23] and was particularly impressed by the metaphysical significance of de Beauvoir's novel, *L'Invitée* (in English, *She Came to Stay*).

In this section I will use some of de Beauvoir's philosophical insights (as well as convergences between her ideas and Merleau-Ponty's) to reflect on a few of her other works as well. She herself came to describe the first book, (*Pyrrhus et Cinéas*) as too dry and abstract, and although I value it for laying out the clear path of her early thought, I too feel she was able to delve more deeply into the human condition in that long, highly sophisticated, philosophical novel, *l'Invitée*.

In *Ethics of Ambiguity*, de Beauvoir describes the phenomenological/existential conversion in terms of "refusing to set up absolutes" (*EA* 14). Throughout that book she shows ways in which we can fail (and by implication, avoid failure) to live together in authentic ways. (Merleau-Ponty noted that many "existential" novels, not just this one, were "immoral," insofar as they treat "the conflicts we meet in the experience of immorality.") But de Beauvoir also indicates what it would take for us to live with our fellows without falling into the trap of that "dull and dormant *conscience*" described by Merleau-Ponty (which she defines as "bad faith"[24]). She does not offer moral principles, but ways to recognize the taste of authenticity in how we relate to one another. In *Pyrrhus et Cinéas*, concerning our capacity to act in the world, she wrote, "respect for the freedom of others is not an abstract rule – it is the first condition of the success of my effort."[25] It does not guarantee that success, of course, but without that hope there is no possibility of even trying, so we must make the first gesture, make an appeal. And I make that appeal, she says, to someone I have to regard as my peer. The violence I do to others, that I may find I have to do in situations of conflict, is not wrong because of the Ten Commandments or the Categorical Imperative, but because "the man to whom I do violence is not my peer, and I need human beings to be my peers" *(PC* p 138; F: *PC* 362). *She Came to Stay* is an account of such need – for the recognition of one's peers – as well as of a struggle which wavers between success and failure, freedom and frustration. The quotation from Hegel which she uses as an epigraph: "Each consciousness desires the death of the other" is not a conclusion about the human species, nor does it refer to a fact about a particular situation, but instead evokes a terrible sense of what is at stake. If life is a game that can be won or

lost *(EA* 23), in some sense it cannot be won, not once and for all. "The essential is not to lose – but one never wins – it is in the face of uncertainty and risk that we have to take responsibility for our actions [*assumer nos actes*]" *(PC* 139; F: *PC* 365).

In Merleau-Ponty's words, "there is...no *solution* to human problems" (*SNS* 40). *She Came to Stay* and others of de Beauvoir's novels, as well as the play, *les Bouches Inutiles*, can take us again into that intolerable situation where there are no ready-made answers. In her own discussion of novels which are true to existence, de Beauvoir argues that the writer must be caught up in the situation of the protagonists, so that their problems and possibilities are alive enough to push the author, too, to make discoveries.[26] Only thus can the novel hope to fulfill its proper task, which is to so involve its readers as to appeal to their freedom.[27] Thus she also has to struggle with the issues as she writes...she isn't the outside observer even in the fictional world she is creating. There are then no *solutions*, none that is that can relieve us of the responsibility of facing the risks, of taking up the task that being-in-the-world-with-others sets for us. And life is undeniably ambiguous, good and evil are mixed. But this ambiguity, these dangers, are not a reason for despair. While, as I remarked above, the *epoche* in its existential version is frequently experienced as anguish, in this is not the same as despair. De Beauvoir does not agree with Sartre that "Man is a useless passion." Rather usefulness or uselessness depend for their meaning on what is being aimed at, and it is human desire, human goals, that introduce value into the world (*EA* 11).

In her novel, *All Men are Mortal*, Fosca, who becomes immortal, eventually despairs because there is no longer a real future for him, towards which his desires can draw him. That is to say, there is no blank page to challenge him, no moment of choice like Kierkegaard's *aut...aut...*, which divides time into before and after. All meanings are alike to him.[28] Because he cannot lose, he cannot win. Like Orestes at the beginning of Sartre's play *The Flies*, his actions carry no weight. He is neither mystified, like the young Orestes, nor in bad faith (like de Beauvoir's adventurer turned tyrant, as described in *Ethics of Ambiguity*), but neither is he human. In the end, he has no peers whom he can be with or against, so the power he once hoped to use for the good of his community comes to naught, since he cannot share its goals nor anyone else his. And so one of the points de Beauvoir is making in this novel is that the means only matter in light of the end. It is appropriate that the activity that holds Fosca's interest a bit longer is experimenting in

science. It seems as it did to the Seventeenth Century philosophers, (and perhaps to scientists today) as if one could seek knowledge for its own sake, and this might give Fosca a reason to go on. But this too is only a means, like the money that he has so much of, and it could only have significance in relation to human ends – and without that, it is pointless.

Although Fosca is not human, it may well be that he represents the fulfillment of what some human beings wish for – certainly when Fosca chose his fate, he thought it was exactly what was needed at the time. But such fulfillment, the novel tells us, does not bring the expected satisfaction. I find myself assuming that it is men who would identify with Fosca, and in so identifying, in trying to escape the limitation of mortality, would be confronted with the absurdity of human activity when seen from outside the human horizon. If for Sartre and other (male) existentialists human life is meaningless, perhaps it is because men have felt more sustained by the absolute, whereas women have not been able to buy the illusion of *being* in the same way. Thus de Beauvoir writes of the joy of disclosing being (*EA* 30), of the richness and freedom of transcendence, of leaving the fixed and identical behind. For her, human reality (Heidegger's *Dasein*) is not Sartre's (unfulfillable) "project to metamorphose its own For-itself into an In-itself-For-itself" *(BN* 784).[29] Her ambition is not futile, it is more open-ended, being concerned with the humanly possible or what Merleau-Ponty calls the "fecund." The ambiguity she writes of means there is more than one meaning possible, conveying a sense of the unfinished which offers an opportunity, if we can rise to it, for the implementation of new meaning, the enactment of what Merleau-Ponty calls expression. Simone de Beauvoir agrees with Merleau-Ponty in finding the situation of the (authentic) artist analogous to the moral dilemma. He is perhaps more emphatic than she, though, when he writes:

> In morality as in art there is no solution for one who wants to be certain ahead of time where he is going, and confident at every moment he is in the right and absolute master of himself. We have no other recourse than the spontaneous movement which binds us to others for weal or woe, in selfishness or generosity. (*SNS* 9; F: *SNS* 4)

The "logic" of expression is that of *parole originaire* (originating speech, speech as origin), which is the occasion of the coming to be of new meaning, exemplified in the first words of a child, the declaration

of a lover, as well as the achievement of the poet, artist or thinker,[30] and also the capacity of one who is able find a way to make sense of what may have seemed an impossible situation. This speech, also called *parole parlante*, is distinguished from *parole parlée (secondaire)*, in which we make use of already established, second-hand meaning – symptomatic of that "dull world of habitual or dormant consciousness/conscience" referred to above. A creative response which breaks out of that world can introduce a new dimension, a way forward, opening up a future for us all; although of course, as Merleau-Ponty says, "It is like a step taken in the fog, no-one can tell if it will lead anywhere" (*SNS* 3; F: *SNS* 8). What I am claiming then is that the logic of expression, that of morality and art in the quotation from Merleau-Ponty, can help us make sense of the search for truth. For, as we have seen, truth is not something already fixed and immutable, available to an "absolute observer," yet it is not therefore an illusion, to be abandoned when we have to recognize that what we "know" is relative to our situation. While there is no "accurate blueprint of all perspectives," there is your perspective and mine, and to the extent that they differ, and exactly to that extent, we have a chance of learning more, of widening our horizons. What matters is our capacity to let our own perspective be put in question. This, if anything is the practical (lived) meaning of "objectivity," the re-orienting experience of "I thought I knew," which has been the blind spot of so much epistemology.

A Reflection on the work of Luce Irigaray

To illustrate this theme I want now to turn to some insights I have gleaned from reading Luce Irigaray. Upon first encountering her work, some years ago now, I experienced a dislocation, an inward shudder (yes, a reduction), because I realized that her attempt to appropriate philosophy – to read Plato and all the others as a *woman* – jolted me into an awareness that I had not let myself think that way before. And I knew myself to be implicated, me a woman, effectively put in question, *mise en cause*, so that the significance of femaleness in relation to philosophy became an inescapable question – for me, certainly, if not for philosophy, for our time, as Irigaray suggests in the opening words of *Ethics of Sexual Difference*.[31] I realized I had taken the philosophical tradition as *parole parlée,* and it was not truly mine; she helped me see how much I was stuck in assumptions that did not sit right with my experience. In particular, my reading of Merleau-Ponty was transformed by her example as much as by what she herself wrote

about him.[32] Thus I came to recognize that his sense of corporeal intersubjectivity and *la chair* (flesh) may be too generic (i.e., taken-for-granted masculine), but it can be corrected and enhanced by Irigaray's works in the phenomenology of women's embodiment.[33] Different perspectives mean different contributions to making sense of our shared world, and a new understanding of the possibilities of male/female intersubjectivity. Since then I have been acutely aware of my responsibility to find my voice as a woman thinker. And it is here, especially, that the ethical and the epistemological are indistinguishable. The question why men should listen to women, or why women should learn to speak from their own experience cannot be classified as one to the exclusion of the other.

The relation between language and the lived body described in such a wealth of detail by Merleau-Ponty takes on a new significance as one comes to realize the differences between the sexes. And the way the masculine take on the world has taken precedence has meant that in many ways women's experience, women's meanings have been seen as deviant if not denied altogether, both by men and women. Hence the importance that Irigaray attaches to the need for *parler femme*, the articulation of speech by women from women's experience, which is not distorted by trying to make it congruent with men's. One of the reasons then, that I feel called to try to do philosophy without being de-sexed is that it has become important to me to figure out how my being different from a man can be a resource for reaching for a truth, achieving a rationality that would not otherwise be possible. The struggles, the conflicts I discussed earlier in the paper take on a new poignancy in the light of woman's contesting of man's hegemony. De Beauvoir's account of language as appeal seems peculiarly feminine to me.[34] But Merleau-Ponty writes about the way *parole originaire* can express a *vérité de demain,* a "truth of tomorrow," which speaks without saying and "which touches the springs of hope and anger in everyone."[35] And this depends on each of us witnessing as fearlessly as we can to what is revealed in our differing perspectives, and handling the conflict in such a way as to move forward. As Merleau-Ponty says of Sartre's *No Exit,* "If other people are our instruments of torture, it is first and foremost because they are instruments of our salvation. We are so intermingled with them that we must make what order we can out of the chaos" (*SNS* 41). As de Beauvoir illustrates so well, intersubjectivity is fragile – which is what Merleau-Ponty says of reason. (The point being made here is that they are effectively the same thing.) But even in

the midst of bitter conflict, "My consciousness of another as an enemy comprises my affirmation of him as an equal" (*SNS* 68), which is why there is hope as well as pain in the raised consciousness of the oppressed group, and it holds a promise for us all. For we are part of, or are called to be part of, "a real humanity which *creates* itself through work and through praxis rather than seeking to define itself once and for all" (*SNS* 85). So let us, male and female, rich and poor, black and white, etc., etc., "Push beyond all limits the becoming of truth, which supposes and bring it about that there is one single history and one world."

Central Connecticut State University

Notes

[1] See Henri Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics,* originally published in 1903. See also the discussion of this text in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non Sense,* trans. by H.L. Dreyfus and P.A. Dreyfus. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964, 97 (henceforth cited in the text as *SNS*).

[2] See, especially, Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Philosophy*. Trans. by D. Cairns. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1993.

[3] *SNS*, 92ff. Here and elsewhere I have amended the English translation. Reference to the original French text are as follows: *Sens et Non Sens*. Paris: Nagel, 1966, 162. (Henceforth cited as F: *SNS*.)

[4] See John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*, New York: Humanity Books, 1998, pp. 17 and 20.

[5] Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. Trans. by D. Carr. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970, 51. (Henceforth cited in the text as *CES*.)

[6] Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *The Visible and the Invisible*. Trans. by A. Lingis. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968, p 39. (Henceforth cited in the text as *VI*.)

[7] Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *The Phenomenology of Perception*. Trans. by C. Smith. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962, pp. 81 and xiv. (Henceforth cited as *PP*.)

[8] Edmund Husserl. *Experience and Judgment*. Trans. by J.S. Churchill and K. Ameriks. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973, 15-16.

[9] Martin Heidegger. *An Introduction to Metaphysics*. Trans. by R. Manheim. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1959.

[10] See Martin Heidegger. *Being and Time*. Trans. by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson. New York: Harper & Row, 1962, especially section 52 and *passim.*

[11] Jean-Paul Sartre. "Existentialism is a Humanism," in Walter

Kaufmann, ed. *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre.* New York: The New American Library, 1975, 353.

[12] Jean-Paul Sartre. *Being and Nothingness,* H. Barnes, trans., New York: Washington Square Press, 1966, 754. Henceforth cited as *BN*.

[13] *Les Relations avec Autrui chez l'Enfant.* Paris: Centre de Documentation Universitaire, 1975, 33. English version in *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays.* Edited by J. Edie. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964, 119. Henceforth cited as *Pr*.

[14] By the time of *The Crisis*, Husserl seems to be interpreting the transcendental ego more in terms of a transcendental intersubjectivity, the accomplishment of which will be "an infinite task."

[15] As suggested above, Heidegger's version of the metaphysical does not include the challenge of another subjectivity: his *Mitsein* remains either naïve or inauthentic, and his account of truth as *aletheia* gives us not a shared perspective, but a revealing/concealing vision which is intermittently vouchsafed through poetry and art.

[16] "...fait qu'il y a une seule histoire et un seule monde." Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *In Praise of Philosophy.* Trans. by J. Wild and J.M. Edie. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1963, 58. *L'Eloge de la Philosophie*. Paris: Gallimard, 1953 67. The English translation has "presuppose" for the French *suppose,* which is somewhat misleading.

[17] Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *Prose of the World.* Trans. by J. O'Neill. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964, 64.

[18] Gayatri Spivak defines deconstruction as "the radical acceptance of vulnerability" (Spivak, "the Post-Modern Condition," in S. Harasym, ed. *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*. London and New York: Routledge, 1990, 18).

[19] Simone de Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity,* B. Frechtman, trans., Citadel, Carol Publishing Group Edition, 1991, 14. (Henceforth cited as *EA*.)

[20] Levinas's concern with the primacy of the ethical is not inconsistent with Merleau-Ponty's, but the integration of the ethical with the epistemological (our responsibility for truth) is not central to Levinas' project.

[21] The English translation has "system of morality," which unfortunately conveys the opposite of what the author goes on to describe, but it does illustrate how difficult it is to give up the natural attitude.

[22] Simone de Beauvoir. "Pyrrhus and Cinéas" in *Philosophical Writings*. Edited by M. A. Simons et. al. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004. (Henceforth cited as *PC*).

[23] The accusation was made by M. Brehier (See *PR* 30).

[24] The term here is *mauvaise foi*, which is unfortunately mistranslated in the English version as "dishonesty."

[25] Simone de Beauvoir. *Pour une morale de l'ambiguité suivi de* Pyrrhus et

Cinéas. Paris: Gallimard, 1974, 358. Henceforth cited as F: *PC*.

[26] Simone de Beauvoir. "Literature and Metaphysics" in *Philosophical Writings*. Edited by M. Simons et. al. Champaigne: University of Illinois Press, 2004, 271. "Littérature et Métaphysique" in *Les Temps Modernes,* vol. I, no. 7, April 1946, 1156.

[27] "Literature and Metaphysics," 272. "Littérature et Métaphysique," 1162. She says that reading a good novel can bring about imaginary experiences as complete and disturbing as experiences that we live through - offering an occasion for "an authentic spiritual adventure" (270).

[28] As they seem to be from the point of view of Cinéas, who tries to dissuade Pyrrhus from acting at all, since in the end it will not make any difference (*PC* 90.)

[29] "...and a project of the appropriation of the world as a totality of being-in-itself" (*BN* 784).

30 Cf. *PP* 179, 184, 384.

[31] Luce Irigaray. *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. Trans. by C. Burke and G.C. Gill. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993, 5. (Henceforth cited as *ESD*.)

[32] See especially, "The Invisible of the Flesh," *ESD* 151-184.

[33] For a fuller account, see my essay, "Phenomenology and the Frontiers of Experience: Merleau-Ponty and Irigaray," in *Historical Reflections/ Réflexions Historiques* Winter 1993, Vol. 19, No.1.

[34] Which may be one reason that *Pyrrhus et Cinéas* had to wait so long to be translated into English.

[35] Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *Signs*. Trans. by R. C. Mcleary. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964, 5. For my definition of truth – "That for the sake of which we take the next step" – see my article "Faith and Knowledge in Crisis," *Listening: Journal of Religion and Culture*, vol. 27, no. 2, Spring, 1992.