

University of Denver

Digital Commons @ DU

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Graduate Studies

1-1-2016

Phenomenology and Blindness: Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, and an Alternative Metaphysical Vision

Jesse Younger Workman
University of Denver

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd>



Part of the [Continental Philosophy Commons](#), [Ethics and Political Philosophy Commons](#), and the [Metaphysics Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Workman, Jesse Younger, "Phenomenology and Blindness: Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, and an Alternative Metaphysical Vision" (2016). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 1210.
<https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd/1210>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Studies at Digital Commons @ DU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ DU. For more information, please contact jennifer.cox@du.edu, dig-commons@du.edu.

Phenomenology and Blindness: Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, and an Alternative Metaphysical Vision

Abstract

This project addresses the problem of an "ocularcentric" bias in philosophy, with a focus on phenomenological and continental thought. Being a blind phenomenologist, I noticed an ocularcentric tendency dominating philosophers' perspectives, including their arguments, use of metaphors, and choices of examples. As a blind reader I found that such ocularcentrism prevented me from understanding their claims. This made me wonder whether ocularcentric biases might be leading them to unbalanced or invalid arguments and world-views. The questions raised are: Can there be philosophy that is not reliant on vision above all other senses? Is it possible for philosophy to not be grounded at its core in vision and visual concepts?

In my project, I examine the works of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Emmanuel Levinas to determine if it is possible to philosophize from a non-ocularcentric perspective. As part of my project, I examine a trend in continental thought towards what Martin Jay calls "anti-ocularcentrism"; while I find many of his insights quite valuable, I conclude that the "anti-ocular" cases examined by Jay are not ultimately free of ocularcentrism, nor do they provide a sound alternative to it: As long as vision (or its opposite, blindness) remains a core part of a philosophical world-view, it remains ocularcentric at its core.

I find in the works of Merleau-Ponty tantalizing philosophical arguments suggesting a potential alternative. In his emphasis on all five senses, including full embodiment of the perceiving subject, Merleau-Ponty can be seen as presenting an alternative to the ocularcentric perspective. In the end, though, his arguments prove unsatisfactory and remain ocularcentric. It is only when we turn to Levinas that we find a true break from ocularcentrism. Offering an "alternative metaphysical vision," his ethics is founded on relation to the Other as a metaphysical reality beyond comprehension, beyond experiencing with the senses, and beyond definition. Vision, in this case, doesn't reveal truth. Using the work of Levinas, one can arrive at a philosophical perspective that is not reliant on vision. With Levinas, we find that it is possible to philosophize from a truly anti-ocularcentric perspective.

Document Type

Dissertation

Degree Name

Ph.D.

Department

Religious and Theological Studies

First Advisor

Sarah Pessin, Ph.D.

Second Advisor

Bin Ramke

Third Advisor

Jere Surber

Keywords

Blindness, Emmanuel Levinas, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Metaphysics, Ocularcentrism, Phenomenology

Subject Categories

Continental Philosophy | Ethics and Political Philosophy | Metaphysics | Philosophy

Publication Statement

Copyright is held by the author. User is responsible for all copyright compliance.

Phenomenology and Blindness: Merleau-Ponty, Levinas,
and an Alternative Metaphysical Vision

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the University of Denver and the Iliff School of Theology Joint PhD

Program

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Jesse Y. Workman

August 2016

Advisor: Dr. Sarah Pessin

©Copyright by Jesse Y. Workman 2016

All Rights Reserved

Author: Jesse Y. Workman
Title: Phenomenology and Blindness: Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, and an Alternative
Metaphysical Vision
Advisor: Dr. Sarah Pessin
Degree Date: August 2016

ABSTRACT

This project addresses the problem of an “ocularcentric” bias in philosophy, with a focus on phenomenological and continental thought. Being a blind phenomenologist, I noticed an ocularcentric tendency dominating philosophers’ perspectives, including their arguments, use of metaphors, and choices of examples. As a blind reader, I found that such ocularcentrism prevented me from understanding their claims. This made me wonder whether ocularcentric biases might be leading them to unbalanced or invalid arguments and world-views. The questions raised are: Can there be philosophy that is not reliant on vision above all other senses? Is it possible for philosophy to not be grounded at its core in vision and visual concepts?

In my project, I examine the works of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Emmanuel Levinas to determine if it is possible to philosophize from a non-ocularcentric perspective. As part of my project, I examine a trend in continental thought towards what Martin Jay calls “anti-ocularcentrism.” While I find many of his insights quite valuable, I conclude that the “anti-ocular” cases examined by Jay are not ultimately free of ocularcentrism, nor do they provide a sound alternative to it. As long as vision (or its opposite, blindness) remains a core part of a philosophical world-view, it remains ocularcentric at its core.

I find in the works of Merleau-Ponty tantalizing philosophical arguments suggesting a potential alternative. In his emphasis on all five senses, including full embodiment of the perceiving subject, Merleau-Ponty can be seen as presenting an alternative to the ocularcentric perspective. In the end, though, his arguments prove unsatisfactory and remain ocularcentric. It is only when we turn to Levinas that we find a true break from ocularcentrism. Offering an “alternative metaphysical vision,” his ethics is founded on relation to the Other as a metaphysical reality beyond comprehension, beyond experiencing with the senses, and beyond definition. Vision, in this case, does not reveal truth. Using the work of Levinas, one can arrive at a philosophical perspective that is not reliant on vision. With Levinas, we find that it is possible to philosophize from a truly anti-ocularcentric perspective.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	1
Chapter One	8
Chapter Two	22
Chapter Three	49
Chapter Four	90
Chapter Five	129
Bibliography	139

PREFACE

For nearly all of its history, Western philosophy suffers from being metaphysically imbalanced: since its beginning all the way until the 20th century, philosophy favored the visual faculty above the other senses. Philosophy is usually written from the perspective of ocularcentrism and as such is slanted heavily in favor of the sense of sight as a means to arrive at philosophical truths. Visual metaphors have also often been resorted to in order to more clearly explicate propositions or make conclusive statements about reality or human existence. Plato's Cave immediately comes to mind as the most obvious historical case in point. There are equally prominent examples where a lack of vision, darkness, or blindness are used as both a metaphor and as a contrasting statement to clarify the experiential state of perceiving. For philosophers working with perception, and studying Phenomenology, the most obvious experiences they reach for to help explicate reality are those experiences most commonly presented to human beings: visual perceptions.

If one knows by seeing, and equates seeing with knowing, what is seen and known? Who is it that knows? Phenomenology deals with questions of pure consciousness using the perceptual experiences of the perceiver as the beginning of the analysis. Phenomenologists usually try to describe a given perceptual experience (almost always a visual perspective) in a neutral way in the hope of discovering the essence of

consciousness, or discovering and describing the nature and boundaries of Being. Ontology asks: What is it? Or, as often, phenomenological ontology asks: Who is it? Who perceives? The thinker may even go so far as to ask: What am I? What is my being? What is my role? What is my purpose? I will attempt to answer these questions.

From the perspective of a blind philosophy student, I could not help feeling alienated as a result of this analytical error and found myself deeply frustrated with Phenomenology's heavy slant in favor of the visual. I found that such a slant prevented me from easily identifying with or even understanding various works of philosophy, in addition to the expected difficulties and complexities of the problems and proposed solutions put forward by each Phenomenologist in question. But, this study should not be confused with an emotionally driven rant against ocularcentrism, or with a call for equal rights or inclusive excellence in the voices of philosophers. It could be that my arguments will actually imply such things, but even though the genesis of this project arose from my frustration with visual descriptions that were impenetrable to me, it is a theoretical critique, not a personal one based on personal feelings.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Emmanuel Levinas appear to offer a sound alternative to a visually-slanted discourse. Both thinkers offer a phenomenology. For Levinas, this is less so in terms of phenomenology, since he does not follow the trends and tendencies of mainstream Phenomenology or Continental thought. Merleau-Ponty appears to take a step away from that binary discourse by studying full embodiment as an ontological state, including all the senses and constitution of a person's perceptions, and

later by decentralizing the viewer completely. For Merleau-Ponty, however, phenomenological ontology remains his starting point.

Emmanuel Levinas, on the other hand, proposes an alternative entirely outside the standard discourse of ontology, arguing instead in favor of an Ethical Metaphysics which places at its core my relation with alterity. Through demonstrating that “I” am responsible for “the other,” I am not constituted of myself as an individual operating in a world of other individuals to fulfill selfish ends, but rather, “I” am entangled with and inextricably connected to “the other” and grounded in a demand to fulfill my responsibilities to him or her. This arrangement is a fact of reality (or, more to the point, it is a ground beyond mere facts), and is not a lawful or behavior-based set of principles that we enact from a list of prohibitions. The other demands of me whether I am aware of it or not, and that relation is what constitutes me. This metaphysical system does not require ontology. It is a move to a higher metaphysics. Levinas’ metaphysical system, while still allowing that the individual’s perceptions must be a starting point and a subject for study, places the needs, reality, and call of the other at its foundation.

Martin Jay outlines a trend against ocular-centric discourse in twentieth century phenomenology – a trend which runs seemingly counter to the great bulk of philosophy’s history. Naturally, human beings see and human nature also leads us to grasp at those perceptual descriptions and metaphors that feel closest or most important to understanding what is real. But, in contrast to history, Martin Jay saw modern phenomenological thought swinging against that long-term ocular-centric trend. French thinkers lead the charge and, throughout the twentieth century in phenomenological or

Continental discourse, they have ruthlessly attacked visual supremacy. They completely reject it in favor of linguistic, or blindness-based, metaphors.

The attack began, according to Martin Jay's analysis, near the end of the nineteenth century, first in the work of Henri Bergson, and later throughout the works of those French Phenomenologists and cultural theorists who followed him. Today, it could be argued that Phenomenology stands divided between two polarities: either ocular-centric and visual in its approach to Phenomenology or critical theory, or anti-ocular-centric, which substitutes blindness, or darkness, as the primary focus of its explication. Those opposed to ocular-centric discourse are still caught within it. The denigration of ocular-centric discourse failed to clarify the work of Phenomenologists and, although they attacked the problem, the attackers offered no solution or suitable alternative to it.

I said above that Levinas presents us with an alternative Phenomenological viewpoint. He still uses certain aspects of phenomenological analysis, but, according to its nature, alterity cannot be experienced such that one can analyze it, or define it, according to a list of philosophical terms. In order for Phenomenological analysis to be valid, it should be complete and include the best description of experiences possible. In this case, I suggest that excluding the other senses, and arguing that disabled people have an incomplete phenomenological field of experience, reflects back on a greater flaw in general. Ontology requires vision. Rearranging the senses so that another one of them is superior is not an alternative, but is simply a reconstructed version suffering from the same errors of emphasis and imbalance. When Levinas critiques Heidegger's concept of Being, he demonstrates that Heidegger left out a vastly important set of factors that have

an effect on the individual perceiver and on that person's reality. The clearest way that I can demonstrate that Phenomenologists have erred is to show how they use visual perceptions as complete truths. There are, no doubt, any number of approaches one may utilize to critique Phenomenologists that would be equally valid. I propose to present through the works of Levinas an alternative discourse (or an alternative Phenomenological metaphysics) that escapes both the confines of the visual and the potentially the currently existing limits of a Phenomenology that rules out the disabled person's perspective. It is assumed that this perspective is a full expression of metaphysical exploration.

Since philosophers like Merleau-Ponty or Levinas do not directly answer inquiries such as the one I am considering, I extract the answer through their ontologies, metaphysics, and arguments to create a stronger alternative to ocular-centric Phenomenology. Ocularcentrism is not just a tendency in phenomenology that I disagree with. It actually does limit a phenomenologist's creativity and understanding.

The layout of this project is fairly simple. The first chapter will be devoted to an introduction to phenomenology, what it is, along with its various interpretations. The second chapter will trace the development of ocularcentric discourse and the opposing so-called anti-ocularcentric currents in 20th century thought. The third chapter will discuss the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and demonstrate both how his work is and is not a unique step away from ocularcentrism. I will discuss in that chapter how his work both favors the phenomenological experiences of disabled people, and classifies such phenomenological experiences as inferior to those of able-bodied people. The fourth

chapter will concentrate on the work of Emmanuel Levinas. I will show how and why his thought offers a conclusive escape and alternative to ontology and, as such, frees us from the limits of ocularcentric discourse. It is from his work that I construct a potential path of escape from ocularcentrism. The fifth chapter presents my closing thoughts, observations, and conclusions concerning this topic. Throughout, I will discuss the implications of the works of these thinkers and the potential avenues they offer for a fresh engagement with phenomenology, or with metaphysics as we understand it.

Starting Word on Blindness and the Construction of this Document

Due to the fact that I am totally blind while writing this dissertation, I am using unique technologies in a novel way. As a result, there are some anomalies in this work that one would not see in the work of a fully sighted doctoral candidate writing a dissertation. I am using a screen reader to read electronic copies of the books that I need. The books are scanned using OCR software, like photocopying, and converted into either PDFs, or into text files that the computer can read back to me as speech. To augment my typing, which I am not terribly good at, I am also using speech-to-text dictation software. All of these measures are designed to speed up the process of composition. As a result, some of the words that I dictate, the computer misprints or mishears. The opposite is also true. Sometimes the computer will read words to me and unless I go through them one letter at a time, I may misunderstand what that word is.

Furthermore, I am unusually limited in the sources that I draw from. The process of converting a print book into a text file that I can use may take several weeks. The scans do not always come out accurately. Even more difficult, some of the books that I

draw from do not have the page numbers from the original printed version in the electronic file. This can be for a number of reasons. I do not have software that makes footnotes easy to compose and organize. I do it all by hand. As a result, some of the parentheticals that are used do not have page numbers. At this point in the composition of the text, I am not using numbers of the footnotes in brackets. I am not able to write all of my notes, organize them on note cards, paste them to the wall and look up at them, etc. I do it all by listening. It is true that I am used to reading electronic books by listening to them and have become exceptionally good at it. I can read far faster than the average sighted reader. Yet, a subject like this that is difficult and obscure, forces me to slow down my screen reader considerably. All this having been said, I point this out as the first demonstration to the reader of how blindness effects and changes the common everyday experiences we all have. The very composition of this document is a much different experience both intellectually and phenomenologically than it usually is for sighted students. If it is the case in the mere composition of this work that there are so many differences between my experience in composing it and that of sighted persons, imagine a comparison of one's phenomenological experiences and phenomenological world. The question of what we perceive is, ontologically, a deeply important question.

CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS PHENOMENOLOGY?

In this chapter, my intention is to give a basic survey of the main ideas in phenomenology and highlight the salient points of change as the movement evolved between 1901, the time of its founding, to the 1960s and 70s, when Emmanuel Levinas arrived on the Continental philosophical stage. Within this survey, I seek to place Levinas and Merleau-Ponty in context, and plan to highlight the essential elements that shape phenomenology through the mid-20th century.

Phenomenology structures consciousness from a first person perspective, as experienced by that person, with special attention to experiencing objects within a meaningful context, and establishing an “Intentional” relation between the individual and the object.¹ In this case, “Intentional,” or “Intentionality,” means the contextual and emotional connection and contact that the object has for the person experiencing it. The word “intentionality” or “intention” does not mean plan, goal, or purpose.

Phenomenological language, although it uses many words we are familiar with in the “natural” way we use them, has different meanings and different contexts for many of those very same words.

¹ “Phenomenology,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/>.

Phenomenology refers to the philosophical methodological discipline that encompasses the description and characterization of qualities of emotional experiences as they are being experienced. Phenomenology, in this sense, refers to the discipline of philosophy that had its official beginning in 1901 with the work of Edmund Husserl.² Although the philosophical movement was founded by Husserl, and its methodologies initiated and interpreted by him, many of his followers did not agree with his interpretations or methods, and deviated significantly from the original phenomenological methods of the founder. Their outlook was still phenomenological. However, this gave rise to a wide range of interpretations and practices, all of which have their foundation in Husserl's work.³

Phenomenology aims to evaluate and study perceptions as they are experienced without interpretation or judgment following the technique of transcendental phenomenological reduction proposed by Husserl. This approach was meant to instill purity and objectivity in the phenomenologist. Many of Husserl's followers had similar ideals but broke away from the transcendental phenomenological reduction, deviating dramatically from Husserl's original intentions, although they may have inscribed themselves in the continuity of his work.⁴ I will briefly discuss the key elements that make phenomenology what it is. The current that I am most concerned with in this study is what Martin Jay called "Ocularcentrism." Put simply, this is the tendency for

² Ibid.

³ Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 2-3.

⁴ Ibid., 3.

phenomenologists to favor visual experiences over all other sensory experiences, including experiences of embodiment, self-consciousness, or time. I will argue Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Emmanuel Levinas – the two thinkers on whose works I am focusing most deeply – helped clear the way for, or entirely broke free from, ocularcentrism. In the case of Levinas, he broke free even from ontology itself.

We can all agree that we share more or less the same sensory experiences and live as embodied beings in the same world. We share a physical world and its rules apply across all human experience. The laws of physics are proof enough that reality consists of a physical world and our experiences in the world, along with our natural assumptions, are all true and correct.⁵ What may or may not be real is the idea that the body is operated like a machine, and by an embodied separate creature that drives it. This being is separate from, but not outside of, the physical body. The soul, whether we mean it in the Cartesian sense or the modern psychological sense, is not corrupted or affected by the body. So, the soul has its own existence. The soul is the thinking portion of the human being. The fact that the thoughts remain constant and separate from experience shows that there is strength behind this theory. We live as if looking out upon the world through the eyes, hearing through the ears, and smelling through the nose. The brain somehow interprets for us what the world throws at us, and then we see or hear or feel what the brain gives us. The mind, then, experiences apart from the brain what we perceive.

⁵ "Phenomenology," *Internet Encyclopedia of Phenomenology*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/phenom/>.

According to Hubert Dreyfus, this idea is so embedded in our culture and our psyche, that we are all “unconscious Cartesians” whether we profess to believe in the separate soul or not. We are dualistic in our self-perception.⁶ It is to a great extent entrenched in our religion, our psychology, and our philosophy. Those who do not believe in such a thing as a soul might say that the brain constructs a picture, a copy of that outside world and interprets it for us. It constructs it for us, like a virtual copy, and that is how we experience the world. If you break parts of the brain that do the interpreting, the interpretations become flawed, which is why diseases or injuries to the brain lead to vision or hearing loss, the inability to feel, partial impairment of senses, etc. If one is adept enough, one can analyze the mind’s interpretation of the outside world. If one is careful and perceptive enough, one can separate the body from the mind. This view, which Merleau-Ponty calls the “Intellectualist” point of view, requires more consideration, as it is also held by modern thinkers.⁷

Not all thinkers hold to this dualistic understanding of the self. The phenomenologists whose work I will explore in this project definitely do not. What Merleau-Ponty thinks of as “embodiment” differs from what you or I might naturally think of as embodiment. Unconsciously, we see “embodiment” as that term which describes the way the soul dwells within and controls the body. The soul is embodied, embedded in the body, and contained by it. One branch of Phenomenology, that of

⁶ Hubert Dreyfus, “Consciousness,” Recording, 8:35, 2005, www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bhz7bRiuDk0.

⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1962), vii-xi.

Husserl and after him Jean-Paul Sartre's, holds to a similar idea of the separate soul (pure consciousness). Another branch of Phenomenology, beginning with Martin Heidegger through Merleau-Ponty and Levinas, does not.

Phenomena are those experiences we have in the world. What we see, hear, and feel, are phenomena. Phenomenology, as a separate discipline, can be traced to Edmund Husserl's 1901 treatise, *Logical Investigations*, but the term had existed for at least a hundred years prior to that as a philosophical concept. Arguably, doing Phenomenology goes all the way back to the beginning of human thought – whenever people discuss and analyze experience in the world. Edmund Husserl is given the credit for the creation of phenomenology as a methodology of its own.⁸ Some of the techniques that compose Phenomenology can also be credited to other thinkers in other sciences. Hegel used the term Phenomenology in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). Psychologists like William James or Franz Brantano grappled with the elements of consciousness and the experience of sensation. Immanuel Kant in his *Third Critique* wrote about an emotional response of the individual to various experiences. But, it was Husserl who integrated, and, in some cases, redefined these ideas and techniques in such a way as to create that methodology which we now call phenomenology, a methodology that stands on its own, apart from psychology or introspection.⁹

⁸ "Phenomenology," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/>.

⁹ Ibid.

Descartes is one of the primary enemies of phenomenologists. Husserl dismissively characterized Descartes' description of the soul, or that people have souls, as merely replacing what we experience as the ego with the religious concept of soul.¹⁰ Although Husserl himself is, in a sense, a Cartesian, some passages suggest that he is as much resistant to being classified as Cartesian as any other phenomenologist would be. There is such a thing as pure consciousness for Husserl, but he sees phenomenology as a new scientific philosophical methodology.¹¹

The transcendental phenomenological reduction is the technique that Husserl created that is supposed to separate the phenomenologist and his acceptance of his experiences, since they are from someone who naturally interprets his or her experiences, and assigns reasons and causes to the phenomena being experienced.¹² The transcendental phenomenological reduction is a tool that gives the phenomenologist the ability to gain a neutral position from which to observe, accepting and describing the phenomenon as it is experienced in itself without interpretation. The phenomenological reduction enables us to experience the world as given, the givenness of the world, and its pure form.¹³ The transcendental phenomenological reduction also allows for people to

¹⁰ Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), Section 18.

¹¹ Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 2-3.

¹² "Phenomenology," *Internet Encyclopedia of Phenomenology*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/phenom/>.

¹³ Ibid.

experience things as they are. These are things in themselves, and are without the prejudices that might actually prevent one from describing the phenomenon as it is.

Komarine Romdenh-Romluc explains that a transcendental phenomenological reduction is not a denial or negation of the natural or scientific world. Instead, it is a suspension of all preconceived notions, allowing the experience to be had directly.¹⁴ Note that, in-and-of itself, this step is not enough. One must also perform an eidetic phenomenological reduction. In an eidetic reduction, one tries to imagine a given experience without a certain quality. If the quality in question can be removed but does not change the essential nature of the experience, then it is not essential to the experience. If removing a given quality dramatically changes the experience, then it is essential for that experience to be what it is. Romdenh-Romluc describes her dog: changing the color of his paws would not make him less of a dog, but changing his paws would make him a different creature.¹⁵ Many phenomenologists, including those I study in this work, could not see performing a transcendental phenomenological reduction as being possible, and largely moved away from that particular element of Husserl's phenomenological methodology.¹⁶

Although Phenomenology states that the self is part of the world – contextually it is in the world – we still do have experiences that let us see ourselves as separate

¹⁴ Komarine Romdenh-Romluc, *Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception* (London & New York: Routledge, 2011), 7-8.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁶ Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 161-62.

individual selves, housed in, but apart from, our bodies, and having a separate ethereal soul. We are all unconscious Cartesians whether we like it or not. Husserl and Sartre were also Cartesians; their phenomenology built around both the Cartesian premise and a neo-Kantian concept of reason interacting with concepts apart from the body, and the world in which it dwells.¹⁷ On the other hand, beginning with Martin Heidegger, phenomenologists see the body and the self as being part of the world. You cannot say a person moves out into the world since he or she is already embedded in it, and is open to its influences in mood, in thought, and in relation to it. As a person copes with the world, attempting to get a maximum grip on it in order to achieve an important task, the person and the world are not apart or separated from each other. We are, as Merleau-Ponty goes on to emphasize, embodied beings. We cannot evaluate our consciousness as if it were separate from the body, as if there were a purified substance called primary consciousness which, in its essence, is the root of all impressions, as posited by Husserl.¹⁸ It is true that Merleau-Ponty tries to elucidate such states of consciousness that are pre-thought (or pre-awareness) as one might have in an expert driver, or athlete, or chess player. One eventually reaches a state wherein one is aware of, but not specifically thinking about, what one is doing. It is merely done. Opportunity is recognized to carry out a certain bodily activity and the body, being embedded in the world, allows for the opportunity to engage with the world in a certain way.

¹⁷ Ibid., 11-12.

¹⁸ Ibid., 78.

Below, I will speak less abstractly about the individual coping with the world, or being open to it through the body. Equally, in Heidegger, when one is using a tool or equipment for the purpose of completing a given task, one is not consciously thinking about the tool, unless somehow the flow is interrupted, or the tool breaks for example. The tool serves as the extension of the body, and one is unconscious of it as a separate object. Now, at that point where a person is no longer able to cope with the world because of some unforeseen interruption (say because of the tool's breaking), then one must think about how to solve the problem. One falls into a place where thoughts are consciously experienced.¹⁹ Our inner narrative focuses on the problem. This is a reaction to unusual breakage, or breakdown, against the individual.

Seemingly, to carry out the transcendental phenomenological reduction or the additional eidetic reduction, a person must already have the knowledge of what the essential elements are or are not in a given experience that defines it. The purpose of the transcendental phenomenological reduction is to exclude pre-existing knowledge, scientific or otherwise, or to escape preconceived interpretations of the experience that one already has from one's previous experiences. For instance, one already has to know that if you change an essential element of a dog, it changes the creature. That is, if you change a dog's paws to hooves, you no longer have a dog in front of you. You already have to know this. This suggests that carrying out the transcendental phenomenological

¹⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers Inc., 1962), 98ff.

reduction as Husserl describes is difficult, if not impossible.²⁰ Perhaps that accounts for why Heidegger arrived at a different view of how an individual is connected to the world around him or her. One is already fully integrated into the world and experiencing the world without needing to carry out a transcendental phenomenological reduction.

Heidegger takes the entire experience of “always already being in the world” and accepts all its elements as part of the experience. One is already, as it were, inside, fully engulfed in the experience. There is not a point at which you can stand outside the experience and arbitrarily declare which elements may be excluded and which included. We are part of the world, and the world is part of us. This is a concept that Merleau-Ponty will include in his phenomenology, but with the important addition of emphasizing—in a way not found in Heidegger—the human body and its connection to the world.

Being in the world includes behavior or one’s comportment, how one presents and carries oneself in the world. For Heidegger, behaviors are often predetermined according to the project or task one is determined to do or preassigned. In order to accomplish a project, whatever the project may be, one needs to have access to the correct tools. For Heidegger, the right tool is essential for the task to be completed. He will often use the example of hammering. Suppose that someone is building something with a hammer. They may have several different sized hammers available that they can use. The tools are either “ready to hand” or “present at hand” for the worker. If the tool is available but not necessarily in use, it is “present at hand.” If one is using it and it is the

²⁰ Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 228.

correct tool for the job, then it is “ready to hand.” This is not as important as the idea that when one is using the proper tool one is absorbed by the task and no longer aware of swinging a hammer or aiming the hammer at the nail. You are absorbed fully by your work and by the goal that you wish to achieve.²¹

Another example: composing this chapter. My tools are words. The right word to convey the correct meaning simply communicates what I wish to convey and the word loses its visibility to me. I am not thinking about the words anymore. One is doing such a task “for the sake of” a greater purpose or role in life. Someone may be hammering for the sake of building a house to dwell in. One dwells in houses for protection against the elements. I am composing this chapter “for the sake of” getting a Ph.D. Getting a Ph.D. will provide increased options for employment for me “for the sake” of being a greater part of society. If one suddenly discovers that the tool being used is broken or one attempts to use the wrong tool for the purpose of the job, then one becomes fully aware of the task that one is doing in all of its nuances. The flow is broken, as it were. One then becomes aware that one is hammering and each swing is carried out with certain motions. The hammer is very heavy and hard to handle. If the hammer breaks, the disruption causes a person to be completely caught up in the moment and disconnected from the task. Aspects of this Heideggerian description of doing a project are important because they will recur in a slightly altered form in the work of Merleau-Ponty, as we shall show in Chapter 3.

²¹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers Inc., 1962), 98-100.

It would be reasonable to ask what exactly does this have to do with ocularcentrism? For Heidegger, oftentimes truth is revealed to a person through one's vision. Objects reveal themselves, or show themselves, to the person, and they shine in the world. Metaphorically, when one suddenly has an insight or recognizes something one did not understand before, that is as a clearing in the forest and the light shining in the clearing. Heidegger does not exclude hearing, but clearly for Heidegger vision is the preeminent sense. Additionally, it is important to recognize the place of vision as a skill itself. Seeing is not something people do automatically because they are born with eyes that function correctly. Seeing is a skill that they acquire and learn over time. It is an embodied skill. I will demonstrate in chapter three how Merleau-Ponty defines seeing and feeling as embodied skills. You become unaware that you are using your eyes and you simply look at something and watch. If one sees something that one is mistaken about and it takes a moment to more clearly recognize what is being looked at, one will not necessarily remember the steps taken to arrive at the correct perception. The object will be remembered as if always seen correctly, and never mistaken for anything else.

For Heidegger, embodiment and the other senses are less important than the project one is engaged in, or the reasons motivating that project. Levinas points out that “Dasein” (Heidegger’s name for human being) is never hungry, or cold, or happy.²² Everybody’s life is nothing but “the task,” what is set to be achieved, the essence of

²² Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (The Hague and Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne UP and Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), 134.

being. Personal "authenticity" is an important concept in Heidegger's philosophy.²³ "Authenticity" emerges when the person understands his or her destiny in the world and surrenders to that destiny. In fact, you are most free when your decisions are all being made for the sake of some higher purpose that seemingly determines your actions. There are certain times when you act in accordance with the majority, with the many, or as Heidegger called them the "They." In this, you act the way one expects someone to act in a given situation. If you read the newspaper about an outrageous story, you feel like the average person. If you get a promotion at your job, they expect you to be happy and to celebrate that promotion. In social situations, there are expected patterns of behavior that all of them engage in.²⁴ Whether one is engaged in authenticity, or is more in a state of acting like the "They," what one is not is an independent freethinking deciding being that is separated from the world, with an ego separated from the body that thinks for itself and is the origin of its own feelings.

Like every other phenomenologist who I will be talking about in this work, Heidegger's main target was Descartes and his ideas of mind-body dualism, namely that the mind apart from the body in the world thinks of the world in the form of its own mental representations that it has re-created. In other words, concepts do not exist in the mind on their own, and the subject does not create the world. For Heidegger, one is open to the world, not closed off from it. A person may seem to have a private stream of

²³ Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 239-40.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 241-43.

thought that is their own, or that seemingly belongs to them. But, oftentimes, one is influenced by thoughts and expectations. A person is open to the mood and the atmosphere of the world around them. You enter into a mood the way you may enter into a cold room. Moods do not come from within.²⁵ They are not created separately or independently by you. One is already embedded in the atmosphere of the world, and responds accordingly. A person exists in a state of being-in-the-world. While Merleau-Ponty extends this phenomenological concept, Levinas, we will see, more drastically questions this fundamental identification of self in and through ontology.

Heidegger's primary phenomenological focus and attention is to answer one most basic question – that is, “Why is there something rather than nothing?” or “What is it?” Most phenomenologists are engaging in ontology in one form or another. The clearest way to interact with or register the presence of other things in the world is through one's vision. Vision is an important element of ontology. Therefore, ocularcentrism is supportive of ontology. Heidegger's philosophy is steeped both metaphorically and perceptually in visual concepts and visual metaphors. While Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on embodiment will help us move to a more balanced viewpoint, his work remains ontological. Levinas' break from ontology will decisively move beyond ocularcentrism.

²⁵ Ibid., 237.

CHAPTER 2: WHAT IS OCULARCENTRISM?

In this chapter, I would like to take up the topic of ocularcentrism. I will be primarily following the works of Martin Jay, drawing from other works as needed. His concept of what ocularcentrism is, is the foundation for my critique of phenomenology, but it should be pointed out that, although we agree in many cases, Jay's concept of what constitutes true ocularcentrism disagrees with mine for several reasons. First of all, there is a methodological differentiation between the ways in which we are both using the term. Jay is a cultural theorist engaging in cultural critique and historiography, and who is writing from the tradition of the Frankfurt School. He presents an intellectual history of the concept as it developed across culture, in this case Continental philosophy that is somewhat similar to mine. We have the same starting point. However, my concept is based on the phenomenological methodology. For me, it is not enough for a thinker to be saying that ocularcentrism is a negative thing. It is not enough that a thinker refutes ocularcentrism simply by speaking of its opposite, or of, in a manner of speaking, blinding the visual. Doing that feels like the other side of the ontological coin.

I will illustrate using a simple example from our day-to-day lives that I hope will clarify my point. Hatred is not the opposite of love, since one can turn into the other. They are closely related, but one wishes to benefit the loved one, while the other wishes to harm her or him. Indifference truly opposes love. For me, truly engaging in anti-

ocularcentric discourse requires stepping out of the ocularcentric discourse entirely. It means, engaging in a system that is not dependent or reliant on ocularcentric concepts to express itself. That being the case, simply rejecting ocularcentrism with what at first glance appears to be its opposite, does not constitute breaking free of ocularcentrism, or of creating a useful or reasonable methodological differentiation that leads to a truly anti-ocularcentric system. Though I will be following Martin Jay's concept of ocularcentrism, we ultimately have different methodological perspectives, and different purposes in critiquing ocularcentrism. I am therefore led to different outcomes than his. Keeping those differences in mind, what is ocularcentrism, and, by extension, what is anti-ocularcentric discourse?

First of all, people see what they look at because of light. It seems very self-evident and obvious, but I needed to look up light since I have heard that sometimes people can see beams of light. Yet, people cannot see light. I do not actually know what seeing a beam of light would be like, so I felt the need to do some very basic Internet research to find out exactly whether or not people see light. It turns out they cannot see light, but can see dust particles or water droplets forming a beam of light. The human eye cannot see light directly. Light lets people see the world around them, without being visible itself. This is due to something called Maxwell's Equations, which demonstrate that light photons do not bounce off of each other, or scatter off of each other. We only see the objects we look at because light is reflected by those objects, and reaches our eyes that interpret the wavelengths. The physical properties of photons or electromagnetic waves are not strictly important to my inquiry, and, in any case, the agents did not

understand the physical properties of electromagnetic waves. They did, however, recognize the transparency of light and had a number of optical theories that are largely unimportant until we reach the work of Descartes.

As a brief aside, Cartesian dualism has very deep roots. According to Hans Jonas, dualism, the separation of soul from matter, or of mind from body, had prevailed for many hundreds of years.²⁶ To the ancients, what we would strictly call matter was a living substance. In this worldview, the unusual exception to the rule was death; opposite of our modern scientific view, that life is the exception to death.²⁷ To us, matter is largely non-living. This non-living material is in some mysterious manner given life when taken up by living organisms. It is common knowledge that many of the elements and metals in the Earth's crust are essential for life.

Let us pause for a very brief moment and consider the implications of this dichotomy that Jonas speaks about. We, unconsciously, look at the majority of the materials in our world not only as non-living matter, but these elements or chemicals or compounds have never and will never in and of themselves live. It is interesting that if you take the chemical reactions that occur in our universe each and every minute of each and every day, and instead let those same chemical reactions operate in a living being, that being lives. It is a wonder that the very same reactions that in non-living matter do not result in consciousness in living things contribute to the life of a living thing. Life and

²⁶ Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1966), 1-4.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 7-9.

non-life is an important dichotomy. These dichotomies seem to permeate every aspect of our lives, and it is these dichotomies that the phenomenologists seek to challenge or rethink.

Obviously, another deep dichotomy is the subject-object dichotomy that separates the viewer from the object viewed. I can argue that, in subtle ways, this subject-object split changes how we interpret what we see, and furthermore has an effect on our phenomenological perceptual experience of the process of seeing. These dichotomies lie at the root of ontology and epistemology in many cases. Foremost among them, and often the target of phenomenological investigation, stands the Cartesian dualism between mind and body. I will speak more of Cartesian dualism later.

Hans Jonas clearly articulates the ancient view of seeing, and the supremacy of vision, in Chapter 6 of *The Phenomenon of Life*, or alternatively in a separately published article by the same title as Chapter 6 called, “The Nobility of Sight.” Vision, as outlined by Jonas, is superior to the other senses in a multitude of ways. First, vision is superior with regard to the amount of information conveyed by what is seen in an instant.²⁸ Metaphorically, vision is endowed with the widest bandwidth among all five senses. In an instant, a vast quantity of information is conveyed to the seer, whereas the sense of hearing must reveal itself to the listener overtime. This gives vision a timeless, almost magical quality. Vision is superior because of the great distance that it can encompass. It is true that we can hear sounds a good distance away, but our ability to

²⁸ Ibid., 136.

identify them fades with distance, and the distance allows one to understand the objects being looked at is in many times greater than that of auditory sensation.²⁹ Vision is active, while hearing is passive. Hearing occurs whether we wanted to or not. The listener plays a passive role, in that he or she will hear everything that is making sounds in the immediate facility.³⁰ We do not choose what we hear, or focus on what we hear, nor can we stop hearing with the same level of ease in which a person can stop looking.³¹ It is true that I can plug my ears manually, but that is hardly the same thing as if I were looking at something, and blinked my eyes so as not to see it, and opened them again. One chooses what one wants to look at; vision allows one to have freedom of movement that most of the other senses do not allow, except for touch.

Although touch allows freedom of choice or movement in what you are touching, the range is very limited, and, again, unlike vision, touch takes place over time.³² It takes time to run one's hands over something and build a picture as to what it is. Vision would reveal that in an instant to the viewer. Touch also requires time for the three-dimensional image to formulate fully in the awareness of the one doing the touching.³³ I personally find that I do not like touching large statues or sculptures for that very reason. I cannot

²⁹ Ibid., 137.

³⁰ Ibid., 138.

³¹ Ibid., 138-39.

³² Ibid., 140.

³³ Ibid., 140-41.

build in my head a picture of what it is I am looking at that is sufficient to gain an aesthetic appreciation for that object. Jonas elaborates on this in the following passage:

Indeed only the simultaneity of sight, with its extended 'present' of enduring objects, allows the distinction between change and the unchanging and therefore between becoming and being. All the other senses operate by registering change and cannot make that distinction. Only sight therefore provides the sensual basis on which the mind may conceive the idea of the eternal, that which never changes and is always present. The very contrast between eternity and temporality rests upon an idealization of 'present' experienced visually as the holder of stable contents as against the fleeting succession of non-visual sensation.³⁴

The other senses all require interaction with the object, or a reaction to what may be happening. However, objects that are seen reflect light back upon the viewer according to their properties. Hearing, on the other hand, requires something to be happening that is causing the sound, since objects do not make sounds by themselves or return sounds back to the listener unless something is occurring. Knowing that something is occurring requires me to react accordingly.

In the case of looking, the object remains untouched, and the observer and the object observed remain separated and unaffected by the observer seeing the object. This allows a freedom of choice that one does not have with the other senses. Yet, I will show that this will later prove to be at odds with Maurice Merleau-Ponty's view as to what a bodily action really is, or, for that matter, what interacting with objects in the world requires. What is more, Jonas continues that we can envision objects that we have seen in the world in the imagination, and have those visual images in the imagination reflect accurately the object in the real world. Although this can to an extent be done with music,

³⁴ Ibid., 142.

it is vision that allows for this tremendous breadth and depth of imaginary action. Jonas cited the idea that geometry, something that we envision in the mind, reflects universal principles that hold true in the physical world.³⁵

Now that we have established the value and importance of vision, we can begin to build an explanation of how that value and importance translates into both a physical and a conceptual superiority of vision, not just in terms of physical experience, but also in terms of cultural and philosophical significance. Simply put, as defined by the dictionary, “ocularcentrism” is the privileging of vision over the other senses. It turns out that even though this is an exceptionally simple definition of the term, the concept, “ocularcentrism,” as it plays out across history and across phenomenological and epistemological discourse, has a far more complex meaning. The term demands deeper thinking.

To begin with the basics, ocularcentric metaphors literally pepper our language according to Martin Jay, and we cannot help but use them.³⁶ I happen to use them in fact. It seems perfectly natural to use such figures of speech as, “I hope you see what I mean.” If this is so with the case of ordinary language, imagine how our more technical languages are affected by the ubiquity of such visual metaphors. Although the concentration of my analysis is speaking of perceptual phenomenological descriptions, metaphors do have a part to play, as they are ubiquitous and heavily used.

³⁵ Ibid., 143.

³⁶ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century Thought* (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1994), 2.

My focus, though, is not on metaphor, but rather on actual phenomenological perceptual analysis. I will later speak of and adequately differentiate metaphors from real, albeit ocularcentric, descriptions of phenomenological experience. Linguistically, it does appear that vision is very closely associated with language, since often times our ability to visualize something determines our ability to verbalize it.³⁷ Although the eye has many noble qualities, it does have certain weaknesses, namely the blind spot in the eyes where the retina connects to the optic nerve. According to Martin Jay, this fact is often exploited by the anti-ocularcentric critics who seek to attack ocularcentrism.³⁸ Ocularcentric concepts or relationships permeate our religions and religious worldviews.³⁹ The divine is often compared to light from the sun or warmth, while the divine presence watches over us. In some cases, the sun is worshiped outright, or fire is valued as a religious symbol for its light and warmth. Mystics seek illumination, and the experience of light has a part to play metaphysically in many religious systems.⁴⁰ It would be a simple thing, almost too irresistibly simple, to open up the Gospel and read the beginning of the *Book of John*, noting as you do so how it compares light to word and speaks of the light not being conquered by the darkness (Cf., *Book of John*, 1:4-5 and 1:9-13, etc). Also, note the place of mirrors and reflected light in religion. For instance, the apostle Paul spoke of seeing

³⁷ Ibid., 7-8.

³⁸ Ibid., 6.

³⁹ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 11-12.

through a glass darkly.⁴¹ Although there is a tendency in Judaism and Christianity towards what Martin Jay calls anti-ocularcentric discourse, it does not reach the intensity or depth that it seems to reach when Jay describes the way French Phenomenologists express it.⁴²

Let us keep in mind that there is a difference between metaphors and phenomena. Metaphors may reveal much about a thinker if he or she uses ocularcentric metaphors, and they do have an effect on the philosophy or the perceptions of the philosopher. Metaphors are, in this case, not the most important element in phenomenology, and they are not my primary focus. They are important, but phenomenologists are using them to describe how we actually see or experience our world. In order to more clearly differentiate a visual metaphor from a visual perceptual experience, I want to briefly discuss metaphors.

At first glance, it seems like we should all know what metaphors are and why we use them; they are everywhere in our language, our stories, our poetry, our every-day conversations. We all use them instinctively. They help get our point across more strongly. The word ‘metaphor’ is from the Greek word ‘*metaphora*,’ which means ‘a transfer or a carrying over,’ and ‘*phor*’ is from the Greek verb ‘*pherein*,’ which means ‘to carry’ or ‘to bear.’ A metaphor is a figurative use of language, as revealed in the following passage: “Metaphor is a poetically or rhetorically ambitious use of words, a

⁴¹ Ibid., 13. Of note here are the many Biblical passages Jay draws our attention to.

⁴² Ibid., 14-15.

figurative as opposed to literal use. It has attracted more philosophical interest and provoked more philosophical controversy than any of the other traditionally recognized figures of speech.”⁴³ It is very hard to pin down and analyze metaphors. Perhaps some find such complexity or slipperiness of the meaning of the term frustrating? Max Black comments on this when he writes:

In general, when we speak of a relatively simple metaphor, we are referring to a sentence or another expression, in which some words are used metaphorically, while the remainders are used non-metaphorically. An attempt to construct an entire sentence of words that are used metaphorically results in a proverb, an allegory, or a riddle. No preliminary analysis of metaphor will satisfactorily cover even such trite examples as: ‘In the night all cows are black.’ And cases of symbolism (in the sense in which Kafka’s castle is a ‘symbol’) also need separate treatment.⁴⁴

Insofar as philosophy goes, metaphor was at one time seen as a kind of crime, a falsehood one should not use, and that in no way clarifies what the philosopher is saying.⁴⁵ John Searle points out that some metaphors are easy to spot, but others are not, and if the metaphor is too obscure one may not be able to understand in any way what the person means by it. If you hear somebody say, “Sally is a block of ice,” or “Sam is a pig,” you are likely to assume that the speaker does not mean what he says literally, but that he is speaking metaphorically. Furthermore, you are not likely to have very much trouble figuring out what he means. If he says, “Sally is a prime number between 17 and 23,” or

⁴³ “Metaphor,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/metaphor/>.

⁴⁴ Max Black, “Metaphor,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell Publishing), 274.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 273.

“Bill is a barn door,” you might still assume he is speaking metaphorically, but it is much harder to figure out what he means.⁴⁶

Our language, including the language of philosophy, abounds with metaphors, very many of them visual. Martin Jay adds to this understanding of metaphor when he writes:

If this is so with ordinary language, it is no less the case with the specialized languages intellectuals have designed to lift us out of the commonsensical understanding of the world around us. As Ian Hacking and Richard Rorty have recently emphasized, even Western philosophy at its most putatively disinterested and neutral can be shown to be deeply dependent on occluded visual metaphors.⁴⁷

Though metaphors seem to bring with them a number of complexities and risks, their place in philosophical discourse, especially in the Continental tradition, is secure, according to Clive Cazeaux. He writes about this in the following passage:

The continental tradition from Kant to Derrida, I maintain, provides arguments, which not only inform and support existing claims for the cognitive value of metaphor, but also extend the significance of the figure to the point where it becomes an ontological tension, operating in between the fundamental distinctions of philosophy.

How is it that metaphor, the description of one thing as something else, has become so important for questions of knowledge and cognition? There are, I suggest, a number of reasons. Firstly, the linguistic turn in the humanities – following the work of Saussure (1883), Frege (1952), Wittgenstein (1922; 1953), and Whorf (1956) – has foregrounded awareness of the role our linguistic categories play in the organization of the world into identifiable chunks. This position can be regarded, to some extent, as an elaboration of Kant’s thesis that concepts within the mind of the subject are responsible for determining the nature of reality. A key question for this view is how objectivity can be confirmed given that the

⁴⁶ Andrew Ortony, *Metaphor and Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press), 79.

⁴⁷ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century Thought* (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1994), 2.

task of organizing the world has been assigned to subjective consciousness. As several commentators have observed, metaphor itself raises this question.⁴⁸

Criminal or not, confusing or not, metaphors are deeply embedded in our language and in our philosophy. They are highly important pieces of our discourse, and there can be no doubt that they have an important linguistic role to play in the analysis of the ocularcentric or anti-ocularcentric discourse. Perhaps, a study for another time would focus specifically on ocularcentric metaphors, or the opposite, in order to determine their weight and effect on a philosopher's argument or discourse. Whatever the case may be for metaphors, they are part of our language and our thought, and subsequently part of our philosophy.

Concepts in thought and philosophy, or even in our day-to-day experience, may occupy different roles in context. Some of these roles may be metaphorical, and others may be of a different sort. The concept of light is a good example of this, as outlined by Hans Blumenberg in his essay, "Light as Metaphor for Truth" (Chapter 1 of *Modernity and The Hegemony of Vision*). In this densely packed essay, Blumenberg outlines the context and interpretation of light across history from as far back as ancient Greece to the present day.⁴⁹ His survey depicts light as it involves, changes, and symbolizes different abstract concepts in the hands of different philosophical or religious groups.⁵⁰ Following

⁴⁸ Clive Cazeaux, *Metaphor and Continental Philosophy from Kant to Derrida* (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis, 2007), 1.

⁴⁹ Hans Blumenberg, "Light as Metaphor for Truth," *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision* (Albany: SUNY University Press), 30-62.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

on these insights, I trace the evolution of the context and metaphorical status of light, since in more ways than not, the way light is portrayed and depicted is directly connected to the way vision is portrayed and depicted. It is because of light that people can see in the first place.

The story of light as metaphor for truth begins where so many other philosophical concepts begin: in Plato's Cave.⁵¹ The first metaphor of light for truth we come across is that of the sun for the philosopher who has escaped from Plato's Cave with its artificial lighting and shadows thrown upon the wall. It is a well-known allegory. When the philosopher leaves the cave and is initially in the light of day, he is blinded by the light. I find it interesting that when one first enters the darkness one is blinded, and when one first enters the light one is blinded. Blindest blind. The idea that there is such a thing as too much light is considered in this metaphorical construct, but in truth there is no such thing as too much knowledge, which is what light and truth will come to represent in the enlightenment.⁵² Blumenberg draws a complex chronology, not all of which requires repeating, as far as my purposes are concerned. From the ancient Greek concept of Plato's Cave, light transitions from a metaphorical concept to a metaphysical one. Whether it is in Augustinian Christianity, in the Gnostic religions, or for the individual seeker, light is no longer just a metaphor for truth. It is the presence of the divine and it is an internal light, light that cannot be seen with the eyes, but instead seen with the mind or

⁵¹ Ibid., 32-33.

⁵² Ibid., 52.

spirit.⁵³ In order for the concept of light to evolve as it does, the concept of darkness must also equally evolve.

Darkness is more than the absence of light, or the state in which one does not see. It is, although oftentimes evil, equally a romantic darkness, darkness that would be a comfort or an inspiration, since it contains the mystery of love and lovers.⁵⁴ I suspect, although I will not investigate further, that Levinas had this sort of darkness in mind when he talked about fecundity at the end of, *Totality and Infinity*. Of course, for Levinas, the night was also a state of terror or insomnia. The cave also evolved. For Descartes, who hated darkness, which to him represented lack of intelligence or insight, the cave became the refuge for the scholastics defending their outdated and superseded knowledge.⁵⁵ He describes this when he writes:

Their fashion of philosophizing, however, is well suited to persons whose abilities fall below mediocrity; for the obscurity of the distinctions and principles of which they make use enables them to speak of all things with as much confidence as if they really knew them, and to defend all that they say on any subject against the most subtle and skillful, without its being possible for anyone to convict them of error. In this they seem to me to be like a blind man, who, in order to fight on equal terms with a person that sees, should have made him descend to the bottom of an intensely dark cave: and I may say that such persons have an interest in my refraining from publishing the principles of the philosophy of which I make use; for, since these are of a kind the simplest and most evident, I should, by publishing them, do much the same as if I were to throw open the windows, and allow the light of day to enter the cave into which the combatants had descended. But even superior men have no reason for any great anxiety to know these principles, for if what they desire is to be able

⁵³ Ibid., 53.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 35.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 49-50.

to speak of all things, and to acquire a reputation for learning, they will gain their end more easily by remaining satisfied with the appearance of truth, which can be found without much difficulty in all sorts of matters, than by seeking the truth itself which unfolds itself but slowly and that only in some departments, while it obliges us, when we have to speak of others, freely to confess our ignorance.⁵⁶

In fairness to Descartes, these modern-day Aristotelians were holding back knowledge and hindering the advancement of knowledge by suppressing his work, “The Optics,” and one might reasonably call them blind to the value of his contributions. In order to understand Descartes’ theory of seeing, and the metaphor that he used to illustrate it, we first need to discuss Descartes’ take on dualism.

Now, we call it, Cartesian Dualism.⁵⁷ Like other dualists, Descartes believed that the mind and the body were separate, but they could interact. The body could have an effect on the mind, as in seeing, or the mind could have an effect on the body, as in emotions, or will, or desire. The mind cannot be divided; it cannot be cut into pieces, as can the body. The body can be dismembered, but that has no effect on the mind. The mind and body are connected through the pineal gland, which Descartes thought was evidence for the soul. He came to realize that anything he experienced in the world through his senses could be reasonably doubted. The one thing that he came to understand that could not be doubted or corrupted is the fact that he himself consisted in his essence of being a thinking thing.⁵⁸ This creates a separation between the mind and

⁵⁶ Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method* (New York: Rough Draft Printing, 2014), Chapter 6, 33.

⁵⁷ “Dualism,” *Internet Encyclopedia of Phenomenology*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/dualism/>.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

the body. They are not made of the same substances. The subject the mind perceives through the medium of the body is the object out in the world. If you look at an object in the world, you are seeing as if outside yourself there is the object, as though there were a little person driving around the body that carries it. There is a subject-object dichotomy, a subject that will come up over and over again. This is important to understand when the phenomenologists argue against Descartes' dualistic theory.

For Descartes, seeing takes place in the mind, not anywhere else, as described by Martin Jay when he writes:

For many commentators, Descartes is considered the founding father of the modern visualist paradigm. Thus, for example, Rorty claims that: 'in the Cartesian model, the intellect inspects entities modeled on retinal images. In Descartes's conception – the one which became the basis for 'modern' epistemology – it is representations which are in the mind.'⁵⁹

The mind responded to light like touch; in this case, the touch conveyed to a blind man through the medium of his stick. In the same way that vibrations would travel up the stick to the hand of the blind man walking with it feeling the ground ahead of him, the eyes pick up the information that, as it were, travels through the medium of light to the eye itself.⁶⁰ Descartes thought light was a kind of still substance that did not travel or move through any space, as Jay explains in the passage that follows:

Here, as many commentators have remarked, Descartes's reasoning was neither deductive nor inductive, but rather analogical, based on a comparative thought experiment that involved another sense. The analogy between sight and the touch of a blind man's stick was an old one, used as early as Simplicius's commentary

⁵⁹ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century Thought* (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1994), 70.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 73-74.

on Aristotle's *De Anima*. The point of the comparison is that both reveal an instantaneous transmission of the stimulus through pressure, either seen or felt, to the sensory organ. Descartes's physics was, in fact, grounded in the assumption that light passes without any lapse of time through an extended medium that filled the space between object and eye, no vacuum existing in nature. Nothing material passes from one to the other – just the pressure conveyed through the medium. Thus the medieval idea of actual images passing through the air – those 'intentional' or 'visible species' already called into question by William of Ockham – was mistaken. Rays of light, for Descartes, were not even movements per se, but what he calls, somewhat vaguely, 'an action or inclination to move.'⁶¹

According to Descartes, touch was the least fallible of the senses, the one least likely to be subject to deception on the whim of the Evil Genius.⁶² The blind man holding the stick is left in no doubt of how the ground feels ahead of him, its contours, hardness or softness, etc.⁶³

Descartes was able to imagine and empathize to some extent what it would be like for a blind person feeling his way across the ground with a cane, and he did so very effectively. It led him to write:

No doubt you have had the experience of walking at night over rough ground without a light, and finding it necessary to use a stick in order to guide yourself. You may then have been able to notice that by means of the stick you could feel the various objects situated around you, and that you could even tell whether they were trees or stones or sand or water or grass or mud or any other such thing. It is true that this kind of sensation is somewhat confused and obscure in those who do not have long practice with it. But consider it in those born blind, who have made use of it all their lives: with them, you will find, it is so perfect and so exact that one

⁶¹ Ibid., 74.

⁶² Dalia Judovitz, "Vision, Representation, and Technology in Descartes," *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision* (Albany: SUNY University Press), 70.

⁶³ Ibid.

might almost say that they see with their hands, or that their stick is the organ of some sixth sense given to them in place of sight.⁶⁴

The blind man was thought to use two sticks, since, as Martin Jay mentioned above, this comparison was a medieval one, and Descartes saw it as a geometric triangulation to explain how the blind man could take in sensory information in space. The two eyes work the same way as the two sticks.⁶⁵

In modern day life, blind people use a white cane, one stick. Its purpose is to feel the ground ahead of where he or she is about to step. The blind person does this by sweeping the cane in an arc, from left to right, and right to left, approximately shoulder-width for each arc. The person steps forward with the right foot; they are feeling the ground ahead of them to their left. Then, they step forward with the left foot, knowing that it is safe to do so, and swing the cane to the right. This must be timed exactly in order to give protection to the blind person as he or she walks. It is actually a choreographed and coordinated motion. It takes a great deal of concentration, but as I will explain in chapter 3, the use of the cane becomes habituated to such an extent that it becomes transparent. Why a blind person would use two sticks is difficult for me to imagine. Did blind people in the Middle Ages perhaps use two sticks for improved balance? It must have been different in the Middle Ages and Enlightenment. Surely, they must have used the sticks primarily for support, and felt the ground ahead of them in what would

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century Thought* (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1994), 78.

probably appear to be, by the standards of our day, a disorganized technique. That is the only explanation I can come up with as to why any philosophers would draw upon that metaphor, which is so obviously different now.

The state of blindness and of perception would become increasingly important for philosophers. There is a very deep ontological need for philosophers to understand reality both as an objective experience and as a subjective one, assuming that these philosophers are not phenomenologists. When people ask me, “What can you see?” I sense that deep down what they are asking me is, “What is the nature of your reality?” In line with these questions, the opportunity arose for philosophers literally to ask a blind person, “What can you see?” Even now, over 300 years later, Molyneux’s problem is still a subject for debate, and still has not entirely been conclusively settled. Indeed, what would happen if a blind person, having never seen before, had their sight restored? Could they understand the world, a completely new world that they are now seeing, by translating their tactile understanding of the world over to the visual?⁶⁶ This, in essence, is what William Molyneux, an Irish scientist and politician, wrote to John Locke in 1688, his interest largely driven by his wife’s loss of sight.⁶⁷ It took five years for Locke to answer, but when he did, he included Molyneux’s problem in the 1694 edition of “An Essay Concerning Human Understanding,” and he presents the problem to us this way:

Suppose a Man born blind, and now adult, and taught by his touch to distinguish between a Cube and a Sphere of the same metal and of the

⁶⁶ Ibid., 98-101.

⁶⁷ “Molyneux’s Problem,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/molyneux-problem/>.

same bigness, so as to tell, when he felt one and the other; which is the Cube, which the Sphere. Suppose then the Cube and Sphere placed on a Table, and the Blind Man to be made to see by his sight, before he touched them, he could now distinguish, and tell, which is the Globe, which the Cube.⁶⁸

Philosophers solved the problem according to somewhat different criteria, guided by whether they thought perception was experienced then understood, or that there was some kind of pre-existing foreknowledge of shapes and objects.⁶⁹

Most of them agreed, however, that it was unlikely the blind man could recognize the shapes placed before him at first, and that it would take some time before he could learn how to “see.”⁷⁰ They had their chance to test their results, when, in 1728, a man blind since birth had cataracts removed, and his vision was restored to him.⁷¹ The French thinkers thought that there had to be something wrong with the experiment, the questions asked, or that the man’s eyes needed time to heal, because unfortunately for some of the researchers, the blind man was unable to recognize the difference between the cube and the sphere.⁷²

In chapter 3, I will be discussing the connection of the different senses and how they augment and strengthen one another when I discuss Merleau-Ponty’s

⁶⁸ Ibid., citing “An Essay Concerning Human Understanding,” John Locke, Book 2, Section 9.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century Thought* (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1994), 98-101.

⁷¹ Ibid., 98.

⁷² “Molyneux’s Problem,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/molyneux-problem/>.

phenomenology in greater depth than I do in this chapter. It may be here worth noting that Merleau-Ponty's response to this problem would have been in line with those who believed that a person blind since birth could not recognize the two shapes.⁷³ Merleau-Ponty talks about the experiences of blind people who have their vision restored, how they react to spatial dimensions, how they interact with the world around them, discovering to their amazement that in spite of having knowledge, both reasonable and linguistic, their perceptions are nothing like the truth.⁷⁴ Tactile information cannot be transferred literally to visual perception, although the two certainly augment each other for people whose senses are intact. I will discuss this interconnectivity of the senses in chapter 3. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology would likely put a new spin on the question, especially as he engages the problem of perception from a different standpoint, and is endeavoring in his explorations with a different purpose.

Diderot was eventually inspired to write *Letter of the Blind for the Use of Those Who See*, basing his portrayal on the real-life mathematician Nicholas Saunderson.⁷⁵ Diderot wanted to take a swipe at Descartes' rational, albeit theological, belief in the soul, although he did not go far toward achieving that.⁷⁶ As far as the history

⁷³ Komarine Romdenh-Romluc, *Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception* (London & New York: Routledge, 2011), 223-24.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century Thought* (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1994), 100.

⁷⁶ Curtis Margo et al, "Blindness and the Age of Enlightenment," *Jama Ophthalmol* 131, (2013): 98.

of the blind goes, the essay did represent a “turning point” for how the blind were perceived, painting them in a more positive and humane light.⁷⁷ According to the authors of “Blindness and The Age of Enlightenment,” to undermine Descartes’ notion of innate ideas, including the idea of God, morality, and logic, Diderot chose to write a parable about men born blind because he saw the so-called primacy of vision as a vulnerable link in Cartesian reasoning. Diderot wanted to play on the popular misconception that seeing was synonymous with understanding, thereby minimizing the notion that vision had a privileged role in human thought and reasoning. Although this strategy seems convoluted, Diderot was able to weave his treatise into a story of human accomplishment, which may explain why the work had wide appeal.⁷⁸ Jay, on the other hand, does not specifically say as much, but it may be that this essay was the first purposeful, though unsuccessful, attack on French ocularcentrism launched by French philosophers.

Anti-ocularcentrism is a huge catchall term, and Martin Jay is aware of this.⁷⁹ Many things can be classified or are classifiable as anti-ocularcentric, including ideas, metaphors, or images that contradict each other.⁸⁰ He goes on to explain that anti-ocularcentric discourse is not organized, and is not a kind of conspiracy where all players

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century Thought* (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1994), 16.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

agree on waging an anti-ocularcentric war.⁸¹ Martin Jay draws a vast and compelling picture of the history and development of this movement. He demonstrates the power and entrenchment of anti-ocularcentric discourse along with its twin, ocularcentrism. Indeed, Rukavina suggests that anti-ocularcentrism is merely another way of seeing, and thus is ocularcentric after all.⁸² If anti-ocularcentrism is another way of seeing, then it is not enough to focus on the opposite (or on the simple absence) of seeing and call it anti-ocularcentric. In order for a philosopher to present an argument that is anti-ocularcentric, the argument cannot focus on the eye, or depend on vision—or on a mere lack of vision. While as a social critic Jay examines how anti-ocularcentric discourse moves away from ocularcentrism, as a blind phenomenologist I will be setting out to find a viable alternative to the entire category of “ocularcentrism” and “anti-ocularcentrism.” As we will see, Levinasian ethics will ultimately provide me with that viable alternative.

Ocularcentrism does seem to include its opposite, and that is the reason why Jay can trace so many different occurrences of ocularcentrism manifesting across history. The main thrust of his book, however, is the vast movement in the 20th century against ocularcentrism that French thinkers initiated. Although there may be a few reasonable contenders as to whom the credit can be given for beginning the anti-ocularcentric attack in earnest, Martin Jay follows Hannah Arendt by arguing that it was Henri Bergson who

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Consult the online English abstract for Katarina Rukavina’s, *Ocularcentrism, or the Privilege of Sight in Western Culture: The Analysis of the Concept in Ancient, Modern, and Postmodern Thought* [in Croatian].

began the wave of anti-ocularcentric discourse in the 20th century.⁸³ It was Bergson who, among other things, established the body as the central point and opening to the world, and to experiences in the world.⁸⁴ The true frontal attack as Martin Jay calls it commenced at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century.⁸⁵ I have said and will argue in detail that Merleau-Ponty takes the first step towards a philosophically anti-ocularcentric discourse not just as a knee-jerk reaction to ocularcentrism, but as an actual step that overcomes the paradigm of ocularcentric discourse. It is true that Merleau-Ponty's goal may have been somewhat different, since Martin Jay argues that Merleau-Ponty is trying to revitalize the value of vision.⁸⁶ However, like so many thinkers that Martin Jay examines, Merleau-Ponty can serve equally in certain respects as ocularcentric or anti-ocularcentric, and it is very difficult to determine exactly how one should categorize his thought. It is this question that will occupy a fair amount of the material in Chapter 3 in this study.

Jay has described and categorized the achievements of the anti-ocularcentric movement when he writes in the following passage:

... three changes must be singled out for special mention. The first concerns what can be termed the detranscendentalization of perspective; the second, the recorporealization of the cognitive subject; and the third, the revalorization of

⁸³ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century Thought* (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1994), 186-187.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 192-193.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 187.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

time over space. In all of these ways, the status of visual primacy was brought into question.⁸⁷

Merleau-Ponty's thought primarily takes up the second of Jay's changes that he outlined. But, inadvertently, Merleau-Ponty's work will also embrace the first change. I will discuss this in more detail in Chapter 3. Meanwhile, Martin Jay also draws a wider picture that, while the attack on ocularcentrism was beginning, a real war broke out (WWI). What people witnessed in the war through pictures of it (created both as photography and in the minds of people) had the effect of destabilizing and perhaps of "disenchanted" the hegemony of the eye.⁸⁸ Martin Jay cites several examples of the war and of reactions to it.

The Surrealists, a very wide and diverse group of artists, were affected by views from the trenches and views from the air.⁸⁹ Human beings were literally seeing things that had not been possible or thinkable before the war. Although initially enchanted by the dreamlike quality of cinema, Surrealists themselves were quickly disillusioned of their former love for it.⁹⁰ Most likely this occurred, according to Martin Jay, when they recognized how difficult making films actually was.⁹¹ It is not my intention to summarize every artist, thinker, or participant in the anti-ocularcentric movement, but rather simply

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 212-213.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 212-214.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 253-256.

⁹¹ Ibid., 255-256.

to demonstrate how Merleau-Ponty and Emmanuel Levinas were both surrounded by multiple participants in a large social and intellectual upheaval. Their works and conclusions are responses to the movement, and to some degree active elements of it.

For Martin Jay, many different thinkers fall under the rubric of anti-ocularcentrism. In general terms, anyone who critiques in any way, denigrates, rejects, pushes back against, questions, subverts, or in any way blinds the eye, is included. Jay describes the anti-ocularcentric works of the surrealist Georges Bataille and his surrealist pornographic novella *The Story of The Eye*, in which, through violent imagery and metaphor, Bataille very definitely does denigrate the eye.⁹² Martin Jay also mentions Sartre's complicated and ambivalent relationship with vision.⁹³ Sartre is both fearful of being blinded, and is also fearful of being the object of the gaze of another for fear of having his shame seen by the other. Yet, in his writings according to Jay, he seeks to be as transparent as possible, revealing as much about his personal life and internal emotional or intellectual flaws as he is able to for the sake of honesty.⁹⁴

A philosopher may be both interpretable as ocularcentric and as anti-ocularcentric at the same time for the same reason. This is the case with Husserl, who was a tremendous influence on Merleau-Ponty and Levinas, and is viewed as too ocularcentric, and critiqued for it by Levinas. Yet Husserl also provides the tools that Merleau-Ponty

⁹² Ibid., 216.

⁹³ Ibid., 276.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 276-280.

uses to present an anti-ocularcentric discourse.⁹⁵ Husserl was criticized both by Levinas and by one of Merleau-Ponty's followers for being too visual and ocularcentric because of his concept of the timeless blink.⁹⁶ But, paradoxically, he also cleared the way for the intertwining of subject and object – which I will be speaking of presently in chapter three. By focusing more on the lifeworld [Lebenswelt] instead of the transcendental ego and its essence, Husserl opened the door for Merleau-Ponty's argument, which grounded phenomenology completely in the body, while at the same time removing the subject-object split.⁹⁷ This gave Merleau-Ponty a potent weapon to use against Cartesian dualism.⁹⁸

Although all these things can be accurately and truthfully classified as anti-ocularcentric, the anti-ocularcentrism that I am seeking in this study is the kind of philosophical, metaphysical anti-ocularcentrism that allows one to break free of its bonds. This may mean ocularcentrism is refuted; it may also mean simply that the conditions of the argument are changed, such that ocularcentrism no longer serves a relevant purpose. For example, Merleau-Ponty's intertwining of the subject and the object represents a first step for me, along with his embodiment phenomenology. These things do not suggest anti-ocularcentrism merely because they go against ocularcentrism.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 265-266.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 266-267.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 268.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

CHAPTER 3: MERLEAU-PONTY TAKES THE FIRST STEP AWAY FROM
OCULARCENTRISM?

“I would like to see more clearly, but it seems to me that no one sees more clearly.”

Maurice Merleau-Ponty⁹⁹

I.

In this chapter, I explore how Merleau-Ponty’s embodiment seems to move beyond ocularcentrism by including the whole body in his phenomenology. I will give examples that demonstrate how he includes disabled people and their perceptions as part of his phenomenology. Then, I will give examples that qualify his inclusion of disabled or blind phenomenological experiences. If it is the case that Merleau-Ponty in any way and anywhere rejects blind phenomenological experiences, then he is still ocularcentric, and does not represent a step forward. Finally, I will contrast Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology with that of Emmanuel Levinas, who very definitely and decisively breaks out of ocularcentrism with his metaphysical system.

In this context, we might also consider a critique of ocularcentrism based on the work of Martin Jay. In *Downcast Eyes*, he argues that Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s

⁹⁹ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century Thought* (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1994), 263.

phenomenology represents a “new ontology of seeing.”¹⁰⁰ I argue that Merleau-Ponty did indeed take the first step away from an ontology limited by ocularcentric perspectives, but there is no break from ontology (as we will later find in Levinas) as the foundation of his phenomenological explorations. Jay maintains that Merleau-Ponty sought to create a new ontology that would bring about a new system, freed from the previous ocularcentric paradigm. It is based on Jay’s cultural critique of ocularcentrism that I attempt to find a metaphysical path out of ocularcentrism, which is a different goal from Jay’s, and with a potentially different conclusion. Jay seems to imply that Merleau-Ponty’s new ontology is somehow less ocularcentric than previous philosophers. Jay’s ocularcentrism is based on his cultural critique of it through the Frankfurt School,¹⁰¹ and differs from my understanding of ocularcentrism, as I have previously argued. For Jay, speaking generally, his ocularcentric discourse is any discourse that denigrates or removes the eye from its central position, as described by Jonas, and relegates it to a place of inferiority. In short, if in any way the eye and its vision is held suspect or violently reacted against, that is anti-ocularcentrism.

Merleau-Ponty includes all five of our senses that we experience, without favoring one over another.¹⁰² The sensory experiences are ordinary experiences that we all share; yet, Merleau-Ponty also includes emotional content, imagination, language,

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Jere Surber, Private Conversation, Winter 2016.

¹⁰² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), xv.

culture, and history as part of his phenomenological picture.¹⁰³ Vision is still a highly important piece of his phenomenological analysis, as exemplified by the essay, “Eye and Mind.” Since Merleau-Ponty includes the entire body, all five senses, and even our emotions in his study of perception, I maintain that upon these grounds he is not strictly ocularcentric, since he does not elevate vision at the expense of the other senses. Yet he does not appear to break away from ocularcentrism.

II.

Komarine Romdenh-Romluc stated that Merleau-Ponty saw himself as continuing Husserl’s work in the most accurate way possible.¹⁰⁴ We will often interpret our conscious experiences in the light of what we believe we know; that is, our scientific knowledge or our natural experiences of the world around us.¹⁰⁵ For Merleau-Ponty, a proper way to use phenomenology to more truthfully understand perception is to understand that the perceiving mind is the incarnated mind.¹⁰⁶ Our perceptions are not the result of forces or circumstances acting upon us, causing the perceptions to occur. Instead, our perceptions are not brought about or caused by an outside world acting upon a mind inside a body, or by the body and brain’s physiological response to

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Komarine Romdenh-Romluc, *Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception* (London & New York: Routledge, 2011), 14-15.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 12.

¹⁰⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 1-3.

stimuli.¹⁰⁷ Merleau-Ponty argued against the objectification and separation of the human body.¹⁰⁸ He wanted to research the way an individual's consciousness interacts differently with the body or with inanimate objects, not classifying the body as another object, acted upon and controlled by forces in the world, or accepting that perception may be accounted for as a response to environmental factors.¹⁰⁹ Science, as far as he was concerned, did not properly recognize that its observations are built upon lived experiences of human beings in the world. Merleau-Ponty resisted the diminution of the subject that science often projects upon a person.¹¹⁰ A person is not the outcome of materialistic processes, but is the source of its own existence.¹¹¹ Hence, as I will show below, he formulated his objections against what he calls empiricism, behaviorism, or scientific realism. Equally, his objection against the idealists is grounded in the fact that they separated the mind from the body, making consciousness stand apart from the body.¹¹²

Merleau-Ponty takes the perceptual experiences we have of objects in the world as entire experiences. He does not break them down into sensory units, or individual

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 13-14.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 14.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

sensations, as did many philosophers up until the early 20th century.¹¹³ We do not have singular sensory experiences of blue or red for instance. We experience blue or red as one quality of the object that we perceive in its entirety as part of the greater whole. This experience is against the backdrop of our other sensory experiences.¹¹⁴ Even from our preliminary discussions, we can see that there is no such thing as a homogeneous color sensation.¹¹⁵ According to Romdenh-Romluc, if you lie on your back staring up at the sky, the blue sky filling your field of vision, so that all you see is blue, is not a homogeneous sensation, since one would also feel his or her position in space, the ground against the back, the warmth of the sun, etc. This is not an example of a pure sensation.¹¹⁶ All of these so-called sensations are experienced spatially. We feel an itch in a certain place in or on our bodies. Our fingers hurt. We experience perceptions within the totality of the entire body, along with our other senses.¹¹⁷ They occupy a point in space. The woolly red of the carpet is significant apart from its being red, but rather, it is significant as part of the carpet, not as redness, but as that particular red in the context of that particular object.¹¹⁸ There is more to our experience of seeing a house than that part of

¹¹³ Ibid., 421-422.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 421.

¹¹⁵ Komarine Romdenh-Romluc, *Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception* (London & New York: Routledge, 2011), 37.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 38.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 39.

¹¹⁸ Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 422.

the house we see. We automatically see it as complete and having a back even if we never see the back.¹¹⁹ Merleau-Ponty draws upon Husserl's ideas of the lived experience both in the world¹²⁰ and on Sartre's idea of the lived body¹²¹ in order to deobjectify and unify the body with consciousness against the view that they are separate.¹²²

For Merleau-Ponty, who wishes to refute the transcendental Neo-Kantian philosophy of his day, the experiences that we have are not being created in the mind and are composed of mental representations. We instead experience them directly as they are. The experiences that we have are real in themselves.¹²³ We experience the world, in this body, arranged around the body as the central axis of our experiences. We experience objects around us and our perceptions as having spatial orientation with regard to us, as in left, right, ahead, behind, above, below, etc.¹²⁴ The body has an automatic faculty that arranges the world that we experience for us. People see colors as constant, even when the light changes.¹²⁵

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 421.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 424.

¹²¹ Ibid., 423.

¹²² Ibid., 422.

¹²³ Phenomenology," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/>.

¹²⁴ Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 424.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 425.

The world is given to us as a series of possibilities or actions that I can take. There is not a mind separated from the body that delivers and decides, as in “I think,” as envisioned by Descartes or by the Intellectualists. It is an “I can,” which encompasses all the possibilities and choices we could potentially make without needing to think and decide beforehand.¹²⁶ When Merleau-Ponty studies phantom limbs as experienced by patients who have lost a limb, he finds that they experience conflict between the “habitual body,” and the body that is actually there. That is, if one is missing a hand, but still feels the hand as if it were there, one still possesses the “I can” of the habitual body, and may attempt to use that hand as such, before truly learning that the hand is missing, and recognizing that the “I can” of today does not match the “I can” of yesterday.¹²⁷ Moreover, even our language, something we might consider certain proof that there is a thinking mind separated from our body, is not something that I think before I speak. Rather, language is as much an embodied expression of the “I can” as is walking or playing the piano, or some other physical activity.¹²⁸ One Intellectualist attempt at explaining how our behavior is initiated is that our behavior is directly controlled by our thoughts. We think of doing an action, and we do it. We have symbolic representations, in our minds, of the action that we are going to carry out. And we act accordingly. Obviously, Merleau-Ponty objects to the idea that we have a mind separate from our

¹²⁶ Phenomenology,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/>.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 426.

body that acts first through abstract thought, a decision, and then, the person carries out the decided upon course of action. For the Intellectualists, consciousness exists separately from the body.

On the other hand, Merleau-Ponty sees our capacity to conduct automatic movements, coping with the situation at hand, as habit, as absorbed coping, or as “reckoning with the possible.”¹²⁹ I should rather call that “skill,” as Hubert Dreyfus translates it in various papers and lectures. It feels as though calling it a skill is more a reflection of what it truly is, as opposed to habit. I expect Merleau-Ponty calls it so because it is an automatic gesture, and some habits are automatic, and done without thinking. I chew my nails without thinking. The difference is habits are uncontrolled unconscious actions, most of which are hurtful in the short or long term to the individual, or are something he or she wishes to stop. It is true, that certain movements or negotiations of the world appear automatic and reflexive. But, that does not constitute it as being a habit. Skill is what allows the woman to not brush the feather of her cap against the doorway, accounting for the extra space her cap will take up while negotiating that doorway.¹³⁰ Our ability to learn different skills, driving for instance, or walking through a narrow doorway wearing a hat with a feather without brushing that feather against the side of the doorway, demonstrates how a skill that we acquire using an external object integrates that object into the body image, or body schema, of the person.

¹²⁹ Komarine Romdenh-Romluc, *Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception* (London & New York: Routledge, 2011), 90-91.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 142.

For Merleau-Ponty, following the Gestalt psychologists, the environment has to offer opportunities for an action, or one sees an invitation by an object to do a given action. One must also have the skills to carry out the action.¹³¹ The objects in a person's environment are more than just objects. They have significance to the perceiver. They also have context. So, along with an object seemingly inviting a person towards a given action, the context also determines whether or not it is wholly appropriate or reasonable that the person should take that particular given action.¹³² A soccer ball naturally looks kickable. It invites a person to kick it because that is its purpose. On the soccer field, one can use skills to play soccer to kick that ball and not be out of place doing it. When there is not a game in progress, however, it is not in the proper context of the rules of the game. If you are playing the game and somebody kicks the ball at you, you would be expected to kick it to another player, or to kick it into the goal. If someone were to kick it at you during a time when there was not a game in progress, you would probably avoid it as a threat, or one would avoid it because kicking the ball would be out of place anywhere but in a soccer game.¹³³ A glass of water may invite us to drink. It is natural to drink it. We are given the opportunity to carry out a given skill by the environment. If we have the corresponding motor skills to match, then we can carry out the activity.¹³⁴ Consciousness

¹³¹ Ibid., 71-72.

¹³² Ibid., 72.

¹³³ Ibid., 96-97.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 77.

is embodied; the body itself constitutes consciously the world it perceives, according to its maximum grip on the objects in that world, objects that have invited the grip to be gotten, according to their purpose, or according to previous interactions. Kittens invite to be stroked, cups invite to be drunk from, chairs to be sat on, fruits to be eaten, etc.; which is at once a feeling of being invited to stroke, drink, sit, and eat.¹³⁵

Merleau-Ponty accepts that certain thoughts have representational content, but he denies that they are “inner” items. He argues instead that to think a thought is to express it. Expressions can have representational content, but they are not the sorts of thing that can populate a private, inner realm. Moreover, only embodied beings are capable of expression. It follows that to be a thinker one must be embodied. The mind cannot be simply identified with the brain.¹³⁶ What constitutes the make-up of a person is their embodied thoughts and expressions, which are an interconnected whole, and the context and meaning those expressions may have. If we are thinking, our thoughts often manifest as art, poetry, painting, etc. Merleau-Ponty denies the separation between the mind and the body as Descartes said, and suggests that even our words, or our artistic creations, and the thoughts that appear to be their origin, are embodied.¹³⁷ We do not speak as a direct result of the thoughts we have. When it seems as though we have private inner thoughts, and seem to hear an inner dialogue taking place, this is not because thoughts are separate

¹³⁵ Ibid., 140.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 207.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 209.

from speech, but because speech is a physical action. We are in fact sub-vocalizing and rehearsing the bodily expression of that action.¹³⁸

Also, when we imagine a close friend, we are reckoning with the possible because our interactions with this friend are embodied actions. We are led to behave in a certain manner while interacting with this person, and we perceive their familiarity and affection. By thinking of this person, we are reenacting that embodied perception, in a pseudo or holographic manner. One cannot introspect about them, or claim that they are separate from the body, as Descartes did. What is more, our thoughts are often incomplete. It takes speaking or writing to make the thought manifest in the world. Even very complex or higher order skill is classifiable as embodied. If Descartes is right, then learning a skill requires that we follow a rule. Following a rule requires that we think about that action in order to follow it. We may begin to see the problems with such a view when we realize that, in order to think about that rule, we have to recognize that we are thinking, et cetera, et cetera. We have to learn that rule from somebody else, which implies thinking privately while considering it.

Humans are designed to copy other humans' behaviors. Hubert Dreyfus very articulately diagrams this process, suggesting overall that it is the novice who follows rules to the letter, and the skillful expert who recognizes when opportunities invite certain higher order skillful actions to be carried out.¹³⁹ Dreyfus demonstrates this situation by

¹³⁸ Ibid., 216-217.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 195.

describing the various stages a chess player goes through while learning the game. As the chess player increases in experience, she will recognize winning situations and opportunities as invitations for strategic action, the same way we recognize opportunities in our other embodied actions. Thoughts and their expressions are two smaller pieces of an interconnected whole, and there are no independent abstract objects that exist separate and apart from the expression. The meanings of words are significant only to the consciousness experiencing the words, but they are not arbitrary.¹⁴⁰ I do not assign the meaning to the word that I use, but we have different languages on the planet. So the meaning of those words or sounds is part of a wider context.¹⁴¹ The subject may have the language given to him, as from the world, but the body constitutes the meaning of the words, according to the context of the given situation or motor intentional act. The new acts are the body's acquisition of new skills, and new ways either to act directly, or to "reckon with the possible," expanding the ways in which the subject can come to a maximum grip on the world. Thinking is an action, a bodily action, just like walking, ice-skating, or driving a car.

Certain qualities of seen objects bleed over into the other senses, especially in synesthesia. When you see a heavy object, it is as though the weight of the object is felt in the hands. The senses bleed into each other, complimenting each other, and constructing a Gestalt experience of the world. The body constitutes the world as a

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 187, 193-94.

unified whole. The body unifies the senses as one continuum; one does not see through two eyes, but one continuous field.¹⁴² The body has a kind of knowledge built into it; it is not as the rationalists say it is, that one actively thinks the world into synthesis, but that it already always is.¹⁴³ One may not always recognize at first what is being perceived or seen. It may appear to be a random splash of colors randomly strewn about the visual field. But, as the body adjusts to what it is sensing, it integrates the past into the present, and one recognizes what it is that is being seen. In this case, Merleau-Ponty is speaking about looking at his table.

Once the table is recognized for being a table, it turns out that it was always a table, and has always been recognized as a table. It was as if there was never that period of confusion before the recognition. There is no way to re-create the fact that there has ever been a mistake made. The body integrates past, present, and future, according to Merleau-Ponty.¹⁴⁴ Space is more than that place which is occupied by a given object. Space is also its orientation, in relation to other objects, and space is the body's orientation up, down, left, right, forward, and backward. Merleau-Ponty discusses experiments done to reverse the visual image, so that the top is the bottom. This scrambles the person's physical tactile perception and kinesthetic awareness. But, after a few days, the person adapts to the new incoming information.¹⁴⁵ He attempts to show,

¹⁴² Ibid., 233-236.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 237-238.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 239.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 243-246.

through discussing these experiments, that the senses are integrated as one unified whole. The body is in a constant engagement with the world to get the best connection, what Hubert Dreyfus calls “maximum grip,” and, as such, adapts to all incoming or integrated sensory data. The body, seemingly, has an automatic ability to adjust to any environment. Merleau-Ponty recounts a number of experiments where participants wore glasses that turned their perspective upside down, or wherein they saw reflected images at strange angles. Though the twisted visual information disoriented them at first, the body always corrected to those stimuli to give the person full control and bodily balance once again.¹⁴⁶

The appearance of the objects that we see can also be imbued by extrasensory content, either drawing from sensory information that is tactile or kinesthetic, or they may be enhanced with emotional context. For instance, Merleau-Ponty points out that to a child who has been burned by candle flame, the candle flame now looks menacing and has that quality added to it when the child sees it.¹⁴⁷ When I see you have the woolly looking rug, mentioned above, the appearance of that rug being woolly is how I would expect the rug to feel if I touched it. The information being conveyed to the visual sense is enhanced by an expectation of tactile sensory information. My “inner” emotional landscape dramatically alters how the world will present itself to me. Merleau-Ponty sees our moods or our emotional states as embodied actions like all of our other bodily

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 248.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 51.

actions. These change how we interact with the world, reckon with the possible, or cope with the world.¹⁴⁸

Love is like any other motor skill. It is an action that we perform on the world. The mood of love is our opening to the world, and is an action that we engage in and thereby interact with the world.¹⁴⁹ This is counterintuitive, because we believe our emotional states are passive, or that they are responses to the world around us or to our internal circumstances. But there are no abstract objects, and there is no internal mind or emotional entity separate from the body, or else Descartes would be correct. The perceiver plays an active role, not a passive one, in terms of their perception. The world allows for certain perceptions, and the perceiver acts skillfully in the world, so that the person's perception is a combination of what the world allows them the opportunity to do, and what the perceiver, for lack of a better word, projects into the world. It is an action created jointly by the world and the perceiver.¹⁵⁰

When I love, I experience the landscape as a unified loving whole. Objects invite me to act. The cat invites me to pet her. The chair in the sunlight invites me to sit outside. Things I would have found troubling before enhance the glow transmitted to me by the world. We can also recognize whether other people are in love. We observe their behavior, and though we do not feel love at that moment, we see the qualities that invite

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 175.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 176-177

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 178.

the other person's behavior. And, we can see by that person's behaviors and actions that they love. We can also see qualities in objects that we do not feel at the time, but those qualities invite love from the person we are observing. Then, we see those qualities for ourselves, and we too may feel as part of that loving invitation.¹⁵¹ Romdenh-Romluc writes about this in the following passage:

The analysis can also accommodate cases such as the gloomy landscape. One may at first find this claim puzzling, since it is extremely implausible to hold that the landscape feels gloomy, interacts with the world gloomily, or sees the world as gloom inducing. It is also implausible to hold that anyone who perceives the landscape as gloomy sees it as capable of being a subject of gloom in these ways. Nevertheless, it seems that the landscape is perceived as a quasi-subject of gloominess. This claim may initially seem odd. However, the phenomenon in hand is actually commonplace. It includes, for example, the anthropomorphizing of inanimate things. A teddy bear can appear contented. A lone tree growing in the middle of a building site can look forlorn. A squat coffee mug can appear jolly. In all of these examples, the inanimate thing is perceived as something capable of having emotions, that is, as a subject.¹⁵²

III.

A strong foundation for Merleau-Ponty's research, an element I will be coming back to repeatedly since it deals with disability, is his reliance on the Gestalt psychologists, and their analyses of war veterans with brain damage who were subsequently disabled.¹⁵³ He is able to extract much support for his theories by studying the dysfunction caused by such injuries.¹⁵⁴ In the case of either tactile, visual, or brain

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 178-179.

¹⁵² Ibid., 179.

¹⁵³ Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 411.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 412.

damaging alterations to how sensory experiences are processed, he proposes to better understand and analyze the qualities and characteristics of perception by examining its breakdown. A great deal of his study is famously focused on the deficits and disabilities of a brain-damaged soldier named Schneider.¹⁵⁵ His deficits are unusual and various. In another attempt at understanding the perceptual experiences of disability, he writes imaginatively, as if from the perspective of the blind man using a white cane.¹⁵⁶ Through all of these, he hopes to uncover the hidden workings of perception and show how the body constitutes our reality. We cannot consciously remember our perceptions; we cannot see ourselves seeing. The changes that a person sees or experiences leading to understanding something are obscured and hidden from us.¹⁵⁷ The sensory process remains mysterious to us in certain aspects that are revealed in cases of dysfunction.

In a seemingly counterintuitive move, Merleau-Ponty takes up a number of examples of bodily disability in order to highlight, review, and study perception. In one example, he expressed his hypothesis very directly, maybe accidentally, that through the study of damaged perceptions or missing perceptual information, he thought he could arrive at a stronger understanding of how humans perceive when they are healthy. He describes this in the following passage:

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 418-419.

¹⁵⁶ Komarine Romdenh-Romluc, *Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception* (London & New York: Routledge, 2011), 142.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 57-58.

Take the act of attention whereby I locate a point on my body which is being touched. The analysis of certain disorders having their origin in the central nervous system, and which make such an identification impossible, reveals the profound workings of consciousness.¹⁵⁸

In yet another example, Merleau-Ponty cites the usefulness of studying the damaged reactions of disabled people according to their perceptual deficits. The organism tries to adapt to its environment in the most efficient way it can. In order to better highlight this concept, Merleau-Ponty contrasts the anosognosic with the amputee with phantom limb syndrome. In the one case, the person is unaware of his or her disability, while in the other, there is a sensation of the missing limb, that may or may not feel as though it were still attached and in pain. Merleau-Ponty explored in a phenomenological fashion the implications of such a disability when he writes the following:

It is true that in the case of the phantom limb the subject appears to be unaware of the mutilation and relies on his imaginary limb as he would on a real one, since he tries to walk with his phantom leg and is not discouraged even by a fall. But he can describe quite well, in spite of this, the peculiarities of the phantom leg, for example its curious motility, and if he treats it in practice as a real limb, this is because, like the normal subject, he has no need, when he wants to set off walking, of a clear and articulate perception of his body: it is enough for him to have it 'at his disposal' as an undivided power, and to sense the phantom limb as vaguely involved in it.¹⁵⁹

I have shown these examples at this point in the chapter generally as a means of sharing with the reader the flavor of Merleau-Ponty's studies, and his tone when speaking of the disabled. Some of these examples I will go into greater depth on – i.e., the blind man's

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 28.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 79-81.

cane – whereas others need only be briefly mentioned. Merleau-Ponty's examples are so copious that I only need highlight a select few. These will be the ones dealing with vision and with the bodies feeling in space.

It is very interesting and strange that Merleau-Ponty proposes to use disabled phenomenological experiences as a model through which to enhance the able-bodied understanding of “normal functioning” individuals with fully functioning phenomenological fields. To me, as a blind metaphysician, this could cut one of two ways. It may be that Merleau-Ponty's thought includes the disabled phenomenal field on an equal footing with those of the able-bodied. Or, it could be that the disabled phenomenal field is inferior (inferior by reason of its being broken and incomplete) to that of the normal person coping with the world. There may be a reduction of the individual's ability to reckon with the possible or cope with the world, and as reflective of that reduction, that person's perceptual experiences are deemed less. In the next few paragraphs, I propose to examine this possibility. First, taking up the idea that Merleau-Ponty sees disabled people as equal in terms of phenomenal experience, and, secondly, in terms of inferiority. If it proves to be the case that he has any reason to perceive blindness as a reduction of capacity, then it would be an error to attempt to argue persuasively that Merleau-Ponty's thought represents a step away from ocularcentrism. It would truly be, in that case, as Martin Jay describes it, a new ocularcentric ontology. While on the one hand, Merleau-Ponty is taking a step forward by including the rest of our bodily senses in his analysis, viewing the perceptual experiences of disabled people in any way as being lesser than those of able-bodied people would qualify him as remaining ocularcentric. His

thought would not be at the same level of ocularcentrism as other French thinkers of his generation, but it would still be placing the eye and its vision at the pinnacle of perceptual value. The trouble with Merleau-Ponty is that his thought can be argued convincingly to lean heavily in either direction, or even in both at once.

Disability occurs when there is damage to the mind or the body. Even phrasing it in such a way suggests that we are unconsciously Cartesian in outlook. Some disabilities physically affect the brain and its capacity to think where to proceed, while others affect our ability to move our physical strength or our coordination. In the view of the natural opinion on disability, whether or not someone believes in the soul, it is common to suggest that the able-bodied soul (putting it ironically) is imprisoned by, trapped in, contained by, limited by, challenged by, tested by a body that – although disabled – is separated from “the soul” of the individual in question. It is common when speaking of persons suffering from Parkinson's disease to say that the mind is as sharp as ever, but is trapped in a body that it cannot control. In my experience as a blind person, I have had to contend with the common perception that although on the one hand I cannot physically see, on the other hand I have some sort of compensatory increase in either my other physical senses, my spiritual awareness or perception, my mental acuity or emotional intelligence, and other such assumptions. These assumptions may or may not be true.

The idea continues, however, that apart from a handicapped “shell” there is inside of that “shell” a soul of equal value, or a mind of equal worth. Throughout, disability exemplifies dichotomy and separation, and such dichotomies Merleau-Ponty wished to overcome forever. It is as though the disabled person exemplifies the subject/object

dichotomy – that she is a “soul” (the subject) and her disabled “shell” is the object that she has to cope with. Implicit in these complicated concepts of what constitutes a human being, we can face a determination projected upon us by others that we are fully equal to yet limited, or unequal to according to our limited capacities. You might hear people say that the soul of the person is equal since we all have them. Or, you might hear it said somewhat more quietly, that we must be realistic when dealing with coping and adapting to our disabilities and limitations. Merleau-Ponty seeks to do something entirely different in his thought with regard to what constitutes a human being, but his interpretation faces equivalent challenges.

Merleau-Ponty has a different concept of how we perceive and interact with the world. We do not think before we act or separately from our actions and then act because of our thoughts. The body is conscious. A person’s motor skills and capacities determined how they act in the world and determines or limits the range of actions we are capable of performing. When dealing with the world, our motor skills allow us to reckon with the possible. Our perceptions are built cooperatively between the environment’s affects upon us, and our motor skills and capabilities of reckoning with the possible. Speech is a motor skill. The words we speak at a given time in a given social situation are not determined by our thoughts, but by our recognition of specific opportunities to use those skills to reckon with the possible. It is about use and utility.

Our emotions are also motor skills. Our emotions change our perceptions according to their qualities. Our senses complement each other and work as one continuous whole to augment and enrich our perceptions. We cope with the world and

reckon with the possible to our fullest capacity. The question I ask in this and the following section of this chapter is according to Merleau-Ponty's schema, do our disabilities have an effect on us that ultimately causes inequalities with regards to our perception or our motor skills when acting in the world? Does Merleau-Ponty in the final analysis see disabled people and their altered perceptions and motor skills as being less valuable or less complete? Is there an implicit bias in favor of "normal" human beings and their perceptions? Or, does his unique, imaginative, and creative new ontological interpretation of what constitutes a human being actually provide dignity and a new avenue for equality to disabled people?

The argument in favor of Merleau-Ponty's system granting any quality of indignity to the phenomenological experiences of disabled people is supported when he writes the following:

In the self-evidence of this complete world in which manipulatable objects still figure, in the force of their movement that still flows towards him, and in which is still present the project of writing or playing the piano, the cripple still finds the guarantee of his wholeness. But in concealing his deficiency from him, the world cannot fail simultaneously to reveal it to him: for if it is true that I am conscious of my body via the world, that it is the unperceived term in the center of the world towards which all objects turn their face, it is true for the same reason that my body is the pivot of the world: I know that objects have several facets because I could make a tour of inspection of them, and in that sense I am conscious of the world through the medium of my body.¹⁶⁰

Initially, his declaration seems positive. He seems to imply that the disabled person's inability to walk does not reduce his world or his ability to cope with it beyond the

¹⁶⁰ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 1-3, 81.

exception of the fact that the man cannot walk. He does not appear to imply that his phenomenological experiences are lessened by his handicap. Nor does he seem to imply that this individual is rendered less capable. This person's body is still the center of the world around which all objects flow. It seems that this person is no less integrated with the world. One may argue that this quote does not demonstrate a novel interpretation, because it is while this person is playing the piano that he is unaffected by his inability to walk. Then again, I cannot play the piano. Is that a handicap or merely a lack of a given motor skill?

People who have properly functioning vision cannot always see everything in their world in any case. They can only see what they are looking out for. The fact that they cannot see everything in their world, however, does not disconnect them from those objects that they cannot see, whether they know what they are specifically or not. Are we looking at the sensory deficit as an actual absence, or are we looking at a sensory deficit as something that may prevent a person from knowing the full details of the world, but that does not erase parts of that person's world? Do the objects in my world that I do not know and have no way of verifying or learning about exist? Do they have an effect on me? My capacity to reckon with the possible is already limited and shaped by my project. Romdenh-Romluc often speaks of rock climbing and the person being able to recognize the ability to do that.¹⁶¹ If I were to walk by those cliffs whether or not I was aware of

¹⁶¹ Komarine Romdenh-Romluc, *Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception* (London & New York: Routledge, 2011), 126.

those cliffs looming over me, I am not a rock climber and it would mean nothing to me. Is that the same thing as being unaware of aspects of the physical world? Not having the ability to reckon with the possible may be a personally chosen limitation, but it may also result from disability. How do we determine the difference? Perception is more than simply registering the existence of a given object with your senses.¹⁶² A full perceptual experience involves reckoning with the possible. That is, a person recognizes that they have the potential to carry out a given task bodily when they recognize certain environmental cues. It is more than just simply seeing or hearing the echoes change as a result of a given object. That would be taking things back to the empiricist view, measuring the senses as being separated, and entirely made up of individual building blocks of sensation. We have already ruled this out.

The phenomenal field is something that I possess and that I am connected to, and the objects in and of themselves exist on my horizon, whether or not I make full use of them, or whether or not I am even aware of them.¹⁶³ The being said of the world, as one great vast exemplification of being, has an effect on me since it exists, whether I am fully capable or fully aware of interacting with it.¹⁶⁴ Merleau-Ponty suggests that even if I am aware of hearing something, and then through concentration stop hearing sounds, and then hear them once again, the idea that there is sound in the world is not negated, nor is

¹⁶² Ibid., 123.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 328.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

the world or any part of the world negated.¹⁶⁵ In other words, these things exist whether I am aware of their existence in my consciousness or not.¹⁶⁶ In my case, I am fully aware of the existence of a given object, and if I have had previous interaction with it and then made aware of it. In the sense of my direct experience, if I have not previously been made aware of a given place or object, that place or object does not exist for me, in that that place or object will not be a part of my options to reckon with the possible. I cannot draw upon that place or object, because it has not previously been made known to me. I may stumble across it, in which case it is immediately part of my list of choices and options that I have the potential to take. We cannot say that it does not exist because I am not aware of it. But could we say that it may as well not exist? What is the difference?

As far as a positive view of the disabled phenomenal field goes, what Merleau-Ponty says in the quote above that I have been drawing from, seems to suggest that in this case he does view it positively. It turns out that he ended up saying the following:

Just as, in the hearing subject, the absence of sounds does not cut off all communication with the world of sounds, so in the case of a subject deaf and blind from birth, the absence of the visual and auditory worlds does not sever all communication with the world in general. There is always something confronting him, a being to be deciphered, an *omnitude realitatis*, and the foundation of this possibility is permanently laid by the first sensory experience, however narrow or imperfect it may be. We have no other way of knowing what the world is than by actively accepting this affirmation that is made every instant within us; for any definition of the world would be merely a summary and schematic outline, conveying

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

nothing to us, if we did not already have access to the determinate, if we did not in fact know it by virtue of the mere fact that we are.¹⁶⁷

While I take Merleau-Ponty in this quote to be expressing a positive interpretation of the phenomenal field of someone who is disabled, there are a few words and phrases in this quote that suggest otherwise, which I will get to shortly. To further clarify this quote, I can share a personal story of the discussion I had with two other blind friends, concerning the question, “what do you see?” When people ask, “what do you see?” or, “what is it like to be blind?” we might well here discern an ontological and phenomenological question of tremendous depth. It is nearly the entire foundation of phenomenological philosophical discourse. The question of what is reality is a question that has driven philosophers for 2500 years.

In this example, there were three of us discussing this question, all totally blind. The manner we were blinded and the degree is slightly different. One friend was blinded in a car accident from suffering a head injury. Another friend was blinded at birth due to eye cancer. His eyes were removed at birth. I was blinded at birth by retinal detachment, but I have a small quantity of light perception. I cannot make out anything I see with it, but I know what the difference is between light and darkness. The friend who was blinded in the car accident described his blindness as being darkness to him. It was as though he were in a darkened movie theater, staring at a darkened screen, waiting for the picture to begin. He felt and had the sensation of darkness. He was 35 when he was

¹⁶⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 328.

blinded. I described the narrow field of light perception that I had, but that I too was totally blind. Most blind people have some degree of what they call light perception, but that perception of light does not aid in seeing objects in the physical world. The third friend when he heard my question, answered with another question. He asked, “What does your elbow see?” to which I replied, “nothing.” He said, “that is what I see: nothing.” What he meant is that for him he has no perception of absence. He has no concept that he is missing vision. He cannot see it is true. But in his experience, he does not experience the not seeing as missing something. He does experience not seeing. One has no expectation that your elbow should see anything. It never occurs to one that the elbow is blind. It is exactly the same for my friend. His phenomenal field cannot be said to be lacking anything according to his phenomenological experience, or his abilities to reckon with the possible.

Merleau-Ponty correctly reconstructed and described what it is like for a blind person to use a cane to help get around. When I, or any other blind person who uses one, am using a white cane to navigate the world around me, what I am actually doing is touching the ground ahead of me, feeling the ground to make sure that the next step is a safe one. You learn to recognize very minute features in the landscape as landmarks, that give clues to where you are in space with relation to your destination, and give hints on how far you have traveled according to a kind of internal three-dimensional embodied map of the given area. It is very important that a blind traveler is aware of how far they have come, and this internal sense of distance is equally helpful to recognize the location that you presently occupy. I find counting steps to be of limited use. For me, there seems

to be an internal pedometer that records and tracks how far I have walked. All of these features and variations in the landscape and in the surrounding environment are connected to the person through the cane itself, which is no longer a separate object but is an extension of that person's bodily awareness, and it is connected to a person's capability of reckoning with the possible. If one has already traveled through this area, and learned where various places of interest are, those places are variables and elements that allow for a full range of potential actions and choices. Merleau-Ponty used several quotes to account for a blind traveler using a cane, and to account for how a human being experiences three dimensionally certain aspects of the physical world that allow for reckoning with the possible.

When traveling about in the world, no matter what part of the world you are in, the body coordinates and arranges the world for you. The world is as deep of familiarity as your familiarity with using your arms and legs, or their position in space. In order to first illustrate the bodily familiarity a person has with the world, Merleau-Ponty writes the following:

When I move about my house, I know without thinking about it that walking towards the bathroom means passing near the bedroom, that looking at the window means having the fireplace on my left, and in this small world each gesture, each perception is immediately located in relation to a great number of possibilities the body coordinates. . . . My flat is, for me, not a set of closely associated images. It remains a familiar domain round about me only as long as I still have 'in my hands' or 'in my legs' the main distances and directions involved, and as long as from my body intentional threads run out towards it.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 128-130.

He writes that he knows without thinking about it. He knows where objects and furniture are placed in his apartment without thinking about them; and, presumably, without needing to look every time he passes by them. They are part of his body schema now, and part of his capacity to reckon with the possible. It is not composed of separate images that he coordinates in his mind. His world is embodied. It is a continuous Gestalt.

Taylor Carman puts it very clearly when he characterized embodied perception for Merleau-Ponty when he says, “More simply, to perceive is to have a body, and to have a body is to inhabit a world.”¹⁶⁹ The body is the world. The things in the world are part of my body. In effect, they are a part of my choices and capacities to reckon with the possible. This is why, in the case of the blind man’s cane, it ceases to be an object and appears to become an extension of the embodied perception of the blind person.¹⁷⁰

Merleau-Ponty continues to elaborate on this in the following passage:

The blind man’s stick has ceased to be an object for him, and is no longer perceived for itself; its point has become an area of sensitivity, extending the scope and active radius of touch, and providing a parallel to sight. In the exploration of things, the length of the stick does not enter expressly as a middle term: the blind man is rather aware of it through the position of objects than of the position of objects through it. The position of things is immediately given through the extent of the reach that carries him to it, and which comprises, besides the arm’s own reach, the stick’s range of action.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Taylor Carman, *Merleau-Ponty* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 14.

¹⁷⁰ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1962), 150.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 142.

When I am using my cane, it becomes transparent for me. Far more than feeling along the ground with my feet, the cane provides not only tactile two-dimensional sensory information, but it also provides three-dimensional tactile sensory information. It gives me a clear idea of my direction and distance in space. It makes it easier for me to walk straight and to have a clearer understanding of the physical position I take up in the world. The cane integrates into what Merleau-Ponty calls perceptual synthesis.¹⁷²

So far, Merleau-Ponty's words suggest that he has a positive view of disabled people and their perception, that their perception adds to and strengthens his argument and his phenomenology. While it may be true that his examples clarify what he means to say about the body and the person's being-in-the-world, not everything he says suggests he views the phenomenological experiences of disabled people as equal to his own.

IV.

Merleau-Ponty uses the case of a traumatically brain-damaged war veteran named Schneider, and draws upon the case notes of his psychiatrist, Dr. Goldstein. Goldstein was a Gestalt psychologist. In many ways, Schneider's deficits and disabilities are remarkable, contradictory, and difficult to wrap one's mind around. It is interesting that Schneider can do automatic simple gestures normally, but when told to salute he cannot do this without looking and carefully arranging his own arms. Merleau-Ponty gives many cases such as this. Schneider lacks the ability to think abstractly in such a way as to carry out the required movements in an imaginary situation. Certain simple automatic gestures,

¹⁷² Ibid., 150.

gestures we could carry out instantly and without thinking, are to him very methodical and nearly impossible to do. He seems to lack the ability for spontaneous action.¹⁷³

Schneider can do the basic movements that are habitual to him, or required for him to maintain himself. He moves as much as he needs to in order to live.

What he cannot do is have abstract thoughts that lead to actual movements imagining the situation in question.¹⁷⁴ He cannot put himself into an imaginary situation, and carry out the movement, pretending as if he were in that situation. He has to see in the mirror or he has to watch his other hand in order for him to touch his nose on command. To perform a military salute, he has to do it with the other hand, as well as arranging his one hand with the other, in order to watch himself doing it. It takes his entire body to do the salute. He cannot do it the way you or I would do it by simply snapping a salute with one hand, as if we were standing at attention. He has lost that capacity in his brain, and that element of his transcendental field, or the phenomenological field, is missing in Schneider. Although cognitively aware of the deficit, Schneider cannot react according to his awareness of that deficit.¹⁷⁵

Merleau-Ponty argues that what Schneider lacks is the ability to “reckon with the possible” as part of his motor skills, and this is what prevents him from doing abstract

¹⁷³ Komarine Romdenh-Romluc, *Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception* (London & New York: Routledge, 2011), 71.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 73.

¹⁷⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1962), 122FF.

actions in imaginary situations.¹⁷⁶ The full range of motor function that a person has includes the ability to react to the environment, or to react to the perceived and potential environment. For example, because of Schneider's brain damage, unless he is acting in a situation where he is required or expected to go to his psychologist's house, he is incapable of recognizing that house outside of that specific situation.¹⁷⁷ A person without the brain damage could walk by his psychologist's house and recognize that the house was there. I would be aware of his house's existence because the possibility potentially exists that I could walk-in and pay him a visit outside of the expected and planned for time.¹⁷⁸ Although cognitively aware of the deficit, Schneider cannot react according to his awareness of that deficit.¹⁷⁹ Schneider's intelligence is in no way impaired, since he is fully cognizant of what the doctors are asking him to do, and he genuinely wants to do it, but he cannot.¹⁸⁰ Clearly, his capacity to interact with the world is seriously impaired, and Merleau-Ponty sees it as such. Schneider exists on a lower level than a fully able-bodied person, according to his incapacities to reckon with the possible. It is equally worthy of note, and very interesting, that 20 years later, according to Moran, two German

¹⁷⁶ Komarine Romdenh-Romluc, *Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception* (London & New York: Routledge, 2011), 92.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 93-94.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 94-95.

¹⁷⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1962), 102FF.

¹⁸⁰ Komarine Romdenh-Romluc, *Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception* (London & New York: Routledge, 2011), 92.

neurologists looked up Schneider. They found that he did not have the disabilities and deficits any longer that he once had.¹⁸¹ This could either mean that Schneider is malingering or faking his symptoms, or potentially it could mean that his brain had healed itself to a point, and at that time doctors would not have recognized the capability of the human brain to heal itself. In either case, this gravely qualifies the quality of Merleau-Ponty's information and sources from which he is deriving the case study.¹⁸²

No one would dispute that blindness is a severe physical disability. Not being able to see causes problems in the physical world that are not easily overcome. That in certain aspects a blind person has fewer choices or capabilities in terms of negotiating the world cannot be doubted. Once again, remember that my inquiry is not whether or not blindness is a disability. My inquiry is whether or not Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology allows for the phenomenal world of a disabled person to be considered equal to that of a fully able-bodied one. A disabled person's phenomenological world is in fact inferior to that of an able bodied person, according to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. This is exemplified when he writes the following:

We conclude that the tactile field has never the fullness of the visual, that the tactile object is never wholly present in each of its parts as is the case with the visual object, and in short that touching is not seeing. It is true that the blind and the normal person talk to each other, and that it is perhaps impossible to find a single word, even in color vocabulary, to which the blind man does not manage to attach at least a rough meaning.

¹⁸¹ Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 512. See especially Note 32.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 514.

... But such indications remain theoretical and problematic for the blind person. They ask a question to which only sight could provide an answer. And this is why the blind person, having undergone his operation, finds the world different from what he expected, as we always find a man different from what we have heard about him. The blind man's world differs from the normal [sic] person's not only through the quantity of material at his disposal, but also through the structure of the whole.¹⁸³

It cannot be doubted that Merleau-Ponty's description is accurate. The sense of touch conveys less information than the sense of sight must. If I am touching something, I only feel what is immediately under my fingers, according to the breadth of my hand. This does contradict what Merleau-Ponty argued before.

There are objects in the world which he cannot see all of. Yet, those objects remain complete in his phenomenological field. If you cannot see the back of the house because you are standing in front of it that does not mean that this object is incomplete in your perception. You see it from the front as having a back. Why is it not so that an object that I am touching can be measured perceptually in the same manner as the house, for there is no difference between seeing an object incompletely, or touching one incompletely? It is not always clear from a given passage in *The Phenomenology of Perception* whether or not Merleau-Ponty is truly arguing the point he is trying to make, or if he is attempting to present the opposing view that he means to refute. Merleau-Ponty rarely makes it clear in his writing which point he is communicating.¹⁸⁴ This is one of the

¹⁸³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1962), 223-224.

¹⁸⁴ Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 418.

reasons why *The Phenomenology of Perception* is such a difficult book to read and comprehend.

I do, however, believe that in this case he means what he says. Because vision gives more to the viewer and touch to the blind person, vision gives more opportunities to interact with the world. Since seeing is a bodily action, and a motor skill, I can only conclude that Merleau-Ponty sees the absence of that motor skill as being a limiting factor that degrades the value of a blind person's phenomenological experience. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty continues further on in that passage to assert:

The whole significance of our life – from which theoretical significance is merely extracted – would be different if we were sightless. There is a general function of substitution and replacement, which enables us to gain access to the abstract significance of experiences, which we have not actually had, for example, to speak of what we have not seen. But just as in the organism the renewed functions are never the exact equivalent of the damaged ones, and give only an appearance of total restitution, the intelligence ensures no more than an apparent communication between different experiences, and the synthesis of visual and tactile worlds in the person who is blind and operated upon, the constitution of an intercessory world must be effected in the domain of sense itself, the community of significance between the two experiences being inadequate to ensure their union in one single experience. The senses are distinct from each other and distinct from intellection in so far as each one of them brings with it a structure of being which can never be exactly transposed.¹⁸⁵

This leaves even less room for doubt. Not only does he seem to be saying that a blind person's phenomenological perceptual experiences are of lesser value than those of a sighted person, but even if that blind person's vision is restored to him or her, it can never

¹⁸⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1962), 223-224.

be the equal of being born with perfectly working vision. Somehow, in this case, even if a person's vision is granted to them, their phenomenological world is not equal to that of a person who has had their vision all their life. When he argues that the entire theoretical significance of reality is changed for a blind person without vision, it seems to suggest that he means theoretically that a blind person's understanding of reality, ability to reckon with the possible, or that person's being-in-the-world, is inferior to that of a sighted person. If he believes this, and sees the theoretical observations of the blind phenomenologist as being unequal to those of a sighted phenomenologist, then while he has seemed to make advances in phenomenology by demonstrating our embodied being in the world, he has undermined those advances by arguing this point, and remains like all other phenomenologists before him. That is, he is ocularcentric and no less caught up in the discourse of measuring the value of the sense of sight as superior to the lack of it.

V.

The direction of his work after *The Phenomenology of Perception* is difficult to predict. His philosophy had taken a new direction in his later works, all agree, but stating exactly what his purpose may have been is at best a well-supported speculation, at worst absolute guesswork. Some scholars believe that they can accurately reconstruct his thought, such as Douglas Lo in, "Merleau-Ponty's Last Vision." That Merleau-Ponty was undeniably an ocularcentric thinker cannot be negated, but the question of those new directions that he did take in his work remains valid. His concept of the flesh might offer a "new ontology" of seeing, as Jay argued, but that same novel ontology might remove the viewing subject entirely.

What Merleau-Ponty now calls “the flesh” is a state of being in the world where one is both intertwined by and intertwines with the world.¹⁸⁶ In order to see, one must also be visible. In order to touch something, the object being touched must be touchable, and in turn the one doing the touching must also be touchable.¹⁸⁷ One cannot be both the toucher and the touched at the same time, however.¹⁸⁸ Above all, what Merleau-Ponty seeks to do is eliminate the idea of subject-object. Yet there is a divergence between the two. The situation of being touched or touching is reversible, so that if one can touch one must also allow that one can be touched; if one is looking, then one is also visible and can be seen.¹⁸⁹ It is the reversibility that lends itself to a structure, an intertwining, and an interconnection that is chiasmic. All dualisms can be seen to be structured chiasmically, including those of intersubjectivity.¹⁹⁰

Taylor Carman points out that intertwining has always been an element of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy, and there is nothing new in this.¹⁹¹ It is the idea of the flesh that is the revolutionary addition to his thought.¹⁹² Carman explains it thus:

¹⁸⁶ “Phenomenology,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/>. See especially Section 7.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ “Phenomenology,” *Internet Encyclopedia of Phenomenology*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/phenom/>. See especially Section 3, Subsection 2.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Taylor Carman, *Merleau-Ponty* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 129.

¹⁹² Ibid., 130.

The point is no longer simply that the body, in being aware of the world, is also always reflexively aware of itself, or that its conscious sensory and motor capacities are dependent moments of a unified whole. Instead, he now wants to make the more radical ontological claim that organisms, conscious or not, just by being alive, are already woven into their environments, not as minds, or even pre-minds or proto-minds, but as flesh, as both sense and sensibility.¹⁹³

Merleau-Ponty himself describes the intertwining in light of his renewed emphasis on the flesh in the following passage:

We have to reject the age-old assumptions that put the body in the world and the seer in the body, or, conversely, the world and the body in the seer as in a box. ... The world seen is not 'in' my body, and my body is not 'in' the visible world ultimately: as flesh applied to a flesh, the world neither surrounds it nor is surrounded by it. A participation in and kinship with the visible, the vision neither envelops it nor is enveloped by it definitively. The superficial pellicle of the visible is only for my vision and for my body. But the depth beneath this surface contains my body and hence contains my vision. My body as a visible thing is contained within the full spectacle. But my seeing body subtends this visible body, and all the visibles with it.¹⁹⁴

Merleau-Ponty was never able to fully or satisfactorily express these ideas, since he died before he could articulate them.¹⁹⁵ His working notes, as far as Moran is concerned, leave little room to fully interpret what he meant to do.¹⁹⁶ Still, even keeping that idea in mind, it must be conceded that his thought would have gone in a very novel direction through his idea of the flesh had he lived long enough to fully articulate his ideas.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 132.

¹⁹⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and The Invisible. Followed by Working Notes* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 138.

¹⁹⁵ Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 428-429.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 429.

VI.

Merleau-Ponty recognizes a kind of ascendancy of the other, although he does not go so far as Levinas does in this acknowledgement. The responsibility that I have for the other in every way is different from the way Merleau-Ponty understands alterity. He does acknowledge that we live in the world of the other that is already constructed for us by the other, not that we construct or constitute the other, as Husserl would have argued.¹⁹⁷ Like Levinas, whose work I will be focusing on in the next chapter, Merleau-Ponty grappled with the concept of the other, intertwined with the subject, and the other's otherness. He actually uses the term "alterity," a term that Levinas would later use.¹⁹⁸ But, it is impossible to extrapolate exactly what he intended to do with that concept conclusively; it is unlikely, in any case, that Merleau-Ponty was headed in the direction of Levinasian ethics. Unlike Levinas, Merleau-Ponty builds the nature of our relationship with the other on a kind of solipsistic sameness, since he argues that the only insight we may have into the consciousness of the other is based on, and built around, our own experiences in our own bodies that we project upon the other.¹⁹⁹ Levinas definitely avoids treating the Other by way of "sameness with self."

Merleau-Ponty's theory of the other that he began to build in *The Phenomenology of Perception* is built on an ontology of reflection, in that I am better able to empathize

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 426.

¹⁹⁸ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and The Invisible. Followed by Working Notes* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 78.

¹⁹⁹ Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 426.

with the other because I too have a body. He is saying arguably, that we understand the other because the other is the same as us (again, an emphasis on sameness that we would not find in Levinas' treatment of Other). Merleau-Ponty found evidence of this occurring even among very small children infants. He writes in the following passage:

The other consciousness can be deduced only if the emotional expressions of others are compared and identified with mine, and precise correlations recognized between my physical behavior and my 'psychic events.' Now the perception of others is anterior to, and the condition of, such observations, the observations do not constitute the perception. A baby of fifteen months opens its mouth if I playfully take one of its fingers between my teeth and pretend to bite it. And yet it has scarcely looked at its face in a glass, and its teeth are not in any case like mine. The fact is that its own mouth and teeth, as it feels them from the inside, are immediately, for it, an apparatus to bite with, and my jaw, as the baby sees it from the outside, is immediately, for it, capable of the same intentions.²⁰⁰

Yet his theories continue to evolve, and by the time of *The Visible and the Invisible*, he seems even more sensitive to the idea of alterity. Indeed, Levinas was impressed by and respectful of Merleau-Ponty's concept of intersubjectivity.²⁰¹

In several passages, Levinas praised Merleau-Ponty's intersubjectivity and its incarnate subjectivity. Moran cites him in the following passage as follows:

It is difficult for me to find terms adequate to express my admiration for the subtle beauty of the analyses in Merleau-Ponty's work of that original incarnation of mind in which Nature reveals its meaning in movements of the human body that are essentially signifying, i.e. expressive, i.e. cultural... the French philosopher's own quest doubtless permitted him to say the non-said (of at least the non-published) of Husserl's thought.²⁰²

²⁰⁰ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1962), 352.

²⁰¹ Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 431.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 431-432.

Merleau-Ponty ultimately recognized that the alterity of the other is always already intertwined with me. His response was not that of Emmanuel Levinas, namely replacing ontology as first philosophy with ethical metaphysics. Merleau-Ponty specifically wanted to avoid going that route; he did not want the other's alterity to be elevated to such an extent as being unknowable, making the other alien and inexpressible.²⁰³ There can be no absolute alterity.²⁰⁴ For Merleau-Ponty, vision is still highly important, and I can only argue that he remains ocularcentric, albeit in a novel way.

²⁰³ "Phenomenology," *Internet Encyclopedia of Phenomenology*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/phenom/>.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 4: EMMANUEL LEVINAS: THE TRUE ANTI-OCULARCENTRIC
METAPHYSICIAN

“A person is a person through other persons.”

- Zulu Proverb

If Western philosophy, from its beginning, has been built on a foundation of ontology as its primary purpose, then ocularcentrism and the use of vision may be called its primary tools that one may use to research reality and the world. Vision was always the noblest of the senses, and, as such, has been seen throughout the history of philosophy as the most accurate and reliable tool one can use to do the research of ontology, second only, I would argue, to the mind itself. It is the mind that sees after all, not the eye. Phenomenology restored the centrality of the individual researcher/philosopher as both the subject and the object of research. As such, the phenomenologists both elevated vision as a central tool of philosophical exploration, and denigrated the supremacy of the eyes, as I have outlined in Chapter 2. Although many French thinkers attacked the supremacy of vision, it was still important and highly relied upon by leading phenomenological thinkers. Even Merleau-Ponty heavily relied on vision to support and verify his phenomenological claims. If Martin Jay is right, and Merleau-Ponty did indeed begin to build the suggestion of a new ontology of seeing, the ontology of seeing that he sought to build was still ontology.

I have argued up to this point that the French thinkers who denigrated vision failed to properly challenge ocularcentrism, and that Merleau-Ponty, although challenging it, did not succeed in escaping ocularcentrism. He could not have, for the problem is not ocularcentrism itself as such, but the problem is rather ontology itself. Removing the site from the researcher, or from that person's critical exploration of reality, will not bring one closer to an understanding of reality. It is, in many senses, equivalent to the argument that nothingness being the opposite of being refutes being, in that it is nothingness. Nothingness does not refute that there is being; assuming that we agree such a thing as nothingness both is conceivable and exists, and that nothingness can only be categorized as the opposite side of the coin. That coin is, metaphorically speaking, the heads and tails of ontology. Despite his many admirable advances in the argument, Merleau-Ponty did not, nor did he wish to, break free from phenomenological ontology. That was never his goal. Emmanuel Levinas, of whom I will be speaking in this chapter, did want to break free of ontology, and as part of his overall battle strategy directly challenged ocularcentrism not by blinding it, but by seeking to change the very purpose behind the looking itself.

In speaking of Emmanuel Levinas, the anti-ocularcentric visionary, I will be brushing over or briefly touching upon certain of his philosophical/metaphysical ideas. I have described, in general terms above, what Levinas' work overall sought to achieve. His basic intentions I need not repeat in great detail a second time. My purpose in this chapter is to tell the story of Emmanuel Levinas, the anti-ocularcentric thinker. Of the select quotes from two of his major works that I will be analyzing, the majority will be

those in which he downplays vision as a means of understanding reality, downplays totality, and elevates infinity. His primary purpose was not the refutation of ocularcentrism in the first place. However, it was a major and primary element of his thesis that he do so.

If the primary question of ontology can be expressed as, “Why is there something rather than nothing?” (as in the case of Heidegger) or “what is it?” then the question that Levinas seeks to ask differs dramatically, because Levinas is not engaging in ontology. The primary question he asks is, “what am I?”²⁰⁵ or “how does my being justify itself?”²⁰⁶ How do I justify, in terms of explanation and reason, not in terms of how do I demonstrate my right to exist, or justify the sense of morality? Levinas seeks to avoid all traditional ethical discussions or systems of morality, like utilitarianism, or other morally structured philosophies.²⁰⁷ Phenomenology and perception are a major part of his exploration, but since his question is not “what is it?” perception does not serve the purpose of helping him define the physical or mental worlds. His research is grounded in the interaction with, or the awareness of, the Other, and, more importantly, of my responsibility for the Other. Above all, he examines the question of, “how do I relate to the Other?” Levinas does not ask the usual ethical question, one grounded in ontology, namely, “What do I need to do?” or “What is it best that I do?”²⁰⁸ “What am I?” is not a

²⁰⁵ Sarah Pessin, Private Conversation, Spring 2016.

²⁰⁶ Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 320.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 319.

²⁰⁸ Sarah Pessin, Private Conversation, Spring 2016.

question of ontological importance. “What am I?” stands as how do I define my subjectivity, my very being in terms of the Other being the source, the foundation, a teleological root of my existence?

Levinas is considered difficult by many critics due to his writing style, even among such impenetrable writers as Derrida and Heidegger.²⁰⁹ Moran laments that Levinas makes assertion after assertion without backing them up, and goes from one metaphor to the next without unpacking them. Furthermore, when he seems to speak ethically, one cannot tell if he means to speak of what is ethically a description of the way the world actually is, or if he is speaking of how he would like the world to be.²¹⁰ Moran also levels a fairly serious charge at Levinas, namely that he is straying into mysticism as a result of the obscurity and contradictory style of his prose;²¹¹ this charge would certainly not sit well with Levinas, who is very critical of mysticism. Below I will demonstrate why this is the case.

Mysticism, although it may speak of otherworldly entities and the inability to comprehend interacting with them, is merely another form of ontology.²¹² Furthermore, claims such as “Ethics is an optics” can be very difficult to understand.²¹³ Even Simon

²⁰⁹ Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 320.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 320-322; 351-353.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 320-321.

²¹² Sarah Pessin, Private Conversation, Spring 2016.

²¹³ Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 321.

Critchley admitted in a panel discussion, that Levinas' writing has a wildness and unpredictability about it. It holds a spontaneity in it that suggests Levinas is not always conscious of what he is doing in his work, that not every word or image is deliberately planned.²¹⁴ It may be that sometimes he is as if taken by the spirit and swept along by inspiration. Such a statement as, "Ethics is an optics," then, holds a mystery worth exploring before we move ahead. While he does not mean that ethics and ethical questions are somehow visible, he does mean to say that the outlook of a person can change when she comes under the grip of the ethical picture of herself.²¹⁵ The way one sees, and the focus of the seeing, changes because the intention behind the seeing leads one to look for a different purpose. One would be looking with the purpose that is aimed toward satisfying the needs of the other, not for satisfying one's self. Levinas is no more in favor of blinding the eye, than he is of throwing away totality so that there is only infinity. We still need totality. We must still live in the world. His phenomenology is not utopian. He seeks to account for the fact that there is ever any semblance of ethics at all, that there ever is an "after you, sir" in the first place.²¹⁶

Levinas juxtaposes seeing and hearing in the same way that he juxtaposes totality and infinity. If we are attentive to literally seeing the physical face of the other and the

²¹⁴ Simon Critchley, "Reading Levinas as a Husserlian Might Do," Recording, 2:08, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gqx-F2Z_sCI.

²¹⁵ Sarah Pessin, Private Conversation, Spring 2016.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

features of that face, we are not actually seeing the Other at all.²¹⁷ A more direct connection to the Other, one that allows for the infinity and for the irreducibility of the Other, is available through hearing.²¹⁸ Seeing belongs to the ontology of totalization. Speech is the way Levinas sees my building a connection with the other.²¹⁹ Yet, like other aspects of relating to the Other as Other, no actual words need be exchanged; the call is still upon me in its fullest power, as though I were compelled in the strongest terms by the most intensely spoken words, but none are necessarily spoken.²²⁰ Below, I will cite specifically a very lucid quotation by Levinas that demonstrates the place of vision in totality, and give it a closer reading.

There are two opposing modalities throughout Western philosophical history, as pointed out by John Wild in the Preface of *Totality and Infinity*: one is the totalizers, the other the infinitizers.²²¹ The philosophy of the totalizers has predominantly ruled the day in Western metaphysics. Levinas is one of the only thinkers who challenges totality with the infinite.²²² In a totalizing system of thought, Wild writes, “The real is something that can be brought before the senses and the mind as an object. The acts of sensing, thinking,

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), 34-34.

²²⁰ Sarah Pessin, Private Conversation, Spring 2016.

²²¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), 17.

²²² Ibid.

existing, as they are lived through, are discounted as subjective. A priority is, therefore, placed on objective thinking...²²³ There is an aversion or an allergy to alterity, or for difference in Western thought.²²⁴ From the earliest philosophers, especially Plato, to Heidegger's being-in-the-world, there is a movement towards totality, towards making everything, either through thought or through dialectic, so that all objects and ideas fall into the category of sameness.²²⁵

For Levinas, ontology cannot be first philosophy, for it has no way of grounding anything other than interpersonal and political violence.²²⁶ Ontology, as first philosophy, leads to the making of Other into sameness, not by agreement or consent, but by force and by subjugation.²²⁷ Placing ethics as first philosophy does not mean he prescribes a code of conduct to us which we should follow. Rather, by placing the otherness of the Other as more important than me, or more important than making the Other into the same, the disruption the Other causes me and the surprise the disruptive Other causes me, is the truest sign of freedom for me and for the other.²²⁸ By juxtaposing the reverse relationship as a kind of mirror image to ontology, Levinas demonstrates that such a

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Sarah Pessin, Private Conversation, Spring 2016.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), 46-47.

²²⁷ Ibid., 47.

²²⁸ Ibid., 43-44.

juxtaposed relation can allow for the possibility of nonviolence. Ontology creates only the possibility for a cessation of violence between violent periods.²²⁹ In this juxtaposed relationship, there is no collision, coercion, violence, or transformation of the other into the same, since in the transcendence of the face-to-face relation, one can neither touch nor be internally touched, by the Other.²³⁰

The very calling into question of my sameness, of my control, is itself the ethics that Levinas wishes to place as first philosophy, not the ontological drive for more control, more knowledge, more domination of my world, and those who share it with me.²³¹ In spite of this, I further point out that since the Other is the foundation of my subjectivity, this foundation is the case whether I recognize or react to the other as other in a manner that would be expected, that I am somehow moved by the presence of the Other as Other. It is also the case that this relation affects me even if I never recognize the Other as Other, and even if I never feel the influence of the Other working upon me, as if the other were like a “Mysterium tremendum” that has a dramatic effect upon me.²³²

In relation to this, Levinas said very clearly in a radio interview the following:

...The tie with the Other is knotted only as responsibility, this moreover, whether accepted or refused, whether knowing or not knowing how to assume it, whether able or unable to do something concrete for the Other. To say: here I am ... To do something for the Other. To give. To be a

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid., 42-44.

²³¹ Ibid., 44.

²³² Sarah Pessin, Private Conversation, Spring 2016.

human spirit, that's it. The incarnation of human subjectivity guarantees its spirituality...²³³

The interaction with the Other could be mundane and unrecognized, and this is the foundation of my subjectivity and freedom. Yet, for Heidegger, freedom is not simply doing what I want when I want it, but it is my aligning myself with Being, and as the next step, making the Other mine.²³⁴ Levinas calls vision, “The grasp before the grasp.”²³⁵ Whether or not the seeing is literal or metaphorical, seeing and thereby knowing is possessing and grasping, which is ultimately controlling. It is a requirement for Levinas to battle against ocularcentrism to overcome ontology. Ocularcentrism is the primary tool one uses to enact ontology upon the world.

Levinas replied to an interviewer’s question in a radio interview when he asked him about seeing the face this way: “I do not know if one can speak of a ‘phenomenology’ of the face, since phenomenology describes what appears.”²³⁶ There is no seeing the face, and experiencing it as a phenomenologically definable experience. One does not experience the phenomenon of the face, since phenomenon implies experiencing something with your senses. Although he is using the methodology of phenomenology, Levinas is not an ordinary phenomenologist, since subjectivity of my

²³³ Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo* (Duquesne: Duquesne, 1985), Chapter 8, 6-7.

²³⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), 45-46.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 189.

²³⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo* (Duquesne: Duquesne, 1985), Chapter 7, 1.

being and my relation to the Other are not conveyed through phenomenological experience.²³⁷ Levinas claims some allegiance to phenomenology, stating that he is in fact doing phenomenology, according to Moran, but in other ways he severs himself from it.²³⁸

Levinas saw that phenomenology freed philosophers from merely discussing psychic states, as in Descartes, and created a restored place for human beings dwelling in the world, experiencing the world as human beings, and overcoming the dehumanizing ontologies that came before.²³⁹ With the advent of phenomenology, humankind is no longer an isolated ego standing apart from the world, but rather is seen as part of the world. Consciousness is restored to meaningful content, since it is the consciousness of something, due to the Husserlian transcendental phenomenological reduction.²⁴⁰ But phenomenology falls short, since it is a branch of ontology.²⁴¹ Phenomenology for Levinas is simply one more totality amidst the mass of Western philosophical thought.²⁴² For Levinas, Husserlian intentionality errs when it leads to a system of representation and adequation, where the thoughts that we have are representations of the objects we see in

²³⁷ Sarah Pessin, Private Conversation, Spring 2016.

²³⁸ Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 326.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 327.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 326-327.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 329.

the world, and, like previous philosophical ontologies, it seeks to totalize and possess everything.²⁴³ Moran explains this in greater depth in the following passage:

He [Levinas] is constantly challenging the Husserlian conception of philosophy as a rigorous science, itself the logical outcome of the whole tradition of Western philosophy. In trying to break through the stranglehold of ‘totality,’ Levinas evokes experiences of the unbounded and indeed infinite nature of the ‘other.’ For Levinas, that which challenges the sphere of totality may be understood as ‘transcendence,’ the ‘other,’ and ‘the infinite’; and Levinas may be seen as trying to open up phenomenology to describe this transcendent dimension of human experience.²⁴⁴

When we come across such terms, then, as “transcendence” or “infinite,” it needs to be kept in mind that Levinas does not mean what others might mean in speaking of an interaction with separate otherworldly forces from another reality. We need to keep in mind that Levinas defines all of these terms in the context of relations with other human beings, and our responsibility towards them.²⁴⁵

Levinas continues to explain this connectivity to other human beings. This time he focuses on the visible, and that it cannot be known either, since knowing is seeing.

Levinas writes the following:

I think rather that access to the face is straightaway ethical. You turn yourself toward the Other as toward an object when you see a nose, eyes, a forehead, a chin, and you can describe them. The best way of encountering the Other is not even to notice the color of his eyes! When one observes the color of the eyes one is not in social relationship with the Other. The

²⁴³ Ibid., 327-328.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 328.

²⁴⁵ Sarah Pessin, Private Conversation, Spring 2016.

relation with the face can surely be dominated by perception, but what is specifically the face is what cannot be reduced to that.²⁴⁶

One still sees, but the seeing does not convey the thing in itself. The face is not contained or containable in the seen or in the comprehended. He means more than do not judge people because of how they look. How the person looks is not in any way related to the Otherness of the person that commands me and calls me into question. He adds in that same interview, that the face is the most naked part of a human being. Ironically, we try to hide its nakedness from ourselves and from each other, according to the context of our social roles in society.²⁴⁷ The naked face, unconcealed by context or by social roles, cannot be defined, and by that, it cannot be contained. It is more than what one sees. Vision, for Levinas, is not a connection or relation to the Other. Vision is the force that absorbs being, the tool of totalization.²⁴⁸

All of our senses are classified and called seeing, even if we mean touch. Levinas points out that from Saint Augustine to Heidegger himself, this fact is recognized, that vision is what we always speak of whenever we see, feel, or understand something.²⁴⁹ The thoughts of the person are unchanged by the status of the person looking; whether he or she is blind has no relevance to the ultimately ontological state of seeing. However,

²⁴⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo* (Duquesne: Duquesne, 1985), Chapter 7, 1.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), 189.

from my standpoint as a blind phenomenologist, it is true that I am perhaps less distracted by who or what I see, or rather, do not see. This lack of distraction may open an opportunity for us to penetrate and more deeply understand Levinas' concept. Seeing, we cannot help but look. By looking, we cannot help but unconsciously engage in an ontology of totality. In this way, a person is, without regard to his or her qualities as a thinker, trapped or swayed by the ontological dynamic that we practice, built upon the foundation of vision.

Personally, I do not feel the absence of knowing what someone's face looks like, and I find that I have no need to know what someone's face looks like. I do not need to touch their face in order to feel as though I am connected to – or for Levinas, commanded by – that person. On occasion I have, but touching someone's face in that case is more of an exercise in curiosity than an exercise in the need to know. Still, as we have classified seeing and touching as falling under seeing, the blind person is still locked in an ontological paradigm. It is not an escape for me simply to say that I cannot see, therefore I am better able than my sighted counterpart to appreciate my ethical relation to the Other. It is not true. On the one hand, for Levinas we are all already ethically constituted by the Other; and, on the other hand for Levinas, we all are required to better live in the world in light of that fact. Blindness does not automatically give me an advantage on either front. Blindness does not necessarily give me a leg up on other human beings, although it does provide me a world without the visual distraction in this case, if one may call it such. Vision allows one to see an object as given, and to grasp that object; it does not give an actual connection, but allows one to expand my interaction with and control

over anything that I possess as the same.²⁵⁰ Vision and light in and of themselves do not open one up to transcend one's self. Vision is the connection of the same to the same, giving me the ability to acquire objects, and, Levinas further elaborates, allowing for consciousness to hide from the infinite, to flee from the infinite within the act of seeing, and of grasping.²⁵¹ Since a genuine connection with another human being as the Other is beyond what we sense, or what we do not sense, the connection would be a more fully embodied one (at once infinite and concrete), and fully realized by my mere subjectivity, even if I do not react or acknowledge this state of relation.

But, the face demands a response. It calls upon me, first demanding that I do not kill.²⁵² The presence of the naked face before me exerts control upon me, and, as if speaking, its demands cannot be denied. They can be resisted or disobeyed; killing happens all the time. But, the demand is no less for it is being silent, and no less infinite because of this. My connection and obligation to the Other is not an exchange between equals. I am unequal to the Other.²⁵³ Levinas takes as an example the Cartesian idea of the infinite. He learned from the Cartesian example that he sees the idea of the infinite, that we even have a thought that there is such a thing, even though the thought of the idea of the infinite cannot contain the actuality of the infinite, to apply a similar construction

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 191.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo* (Duquesne: Duquesne, 1985), Chapter 7, 1.

²⁵³ Ibid.

to the face of the Other. But, if there were in no way any such thing as the infinity of God, there would be no thought at all about the potential infinity of God.²⁵⁴ For Levinas, the face has an infinite nature, beyond the boundaries of what we can know or see. He described the greater ethical implications of this in the following passage:

I think that whatever the motivation which explains this inversion, the analysis of the face such as I have just made, with the mastery of the Other and his poverty, with my submission and my wealth, is primary. It is the presupposed in all human relationships. If it were not that, we would not even say, before an open door, 'After you, sir!' It is an original 'After you, sir!' that I have tried to describe. You have spoken of the passion of hate. I feared a much graver objection: How is it that one can punish and repress? How is it that there is justice? I answer that it is the fact of the multiplicity of men and the presence of someone else next to the Other, which condition the laws and establish justice. If I am alone with the Other, I owe him everything; but there is someone else. Do I know what my neighbor is in relation to someone else? Do I know if someone else has an understanding with him or his victim? Who is my neighbor?²⁵⁵

The face does not give itself to me or to my vision the way objects in the world are given,²⁵⁶ the same way that the Gestalt thinkers and Merleau-Ponty saw objects in the world as being accessible to them because they were given to them and gave themselves to them. The world belongs to the one who sees it. It actively gives itself to the viewer. This is not true in the case of seeing the face. When one sees the face, it has no clear and direct relevance to either my ethical relation to it, or to its infinite status. The characteristics and physical qualities of the face that separate the person from me in basic

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), 194.

aspects of appearance or of race or of sex in no way lends to the face its quality of infinite irreducible nature,²⁵⁷ and we cannot classify the irreducibility of the face according to its racial or physical characteristics and qualities. Although these differences and qualities do exist, they have no relevance for Levinas' main ethical point. I would go so far as to argue that neither does seeing the face have relevance. If the face is not prevented from reaching the status of being infinite, irreducible, and not giving itself to me if I see it, then I must equally assume that in my not seeing it the qualities of the face are in no way blocked or altered. It is still infinite. It still does not give itself to me or lend itself to my power. The face is still irreducible and infinite beyond my ability to categorize, classify, or control. Thus, if vision does not have relevance in a direct fashion, neither then does blindness. Blindness is no more or less a means of interacting with the face. My interaction with the alterity of the Other exceeds and transcends my capacity to see the face's characteristics, or my lack of capacity to see the face. In short, speaking more generally, blindness does not hinder or aid me in discerning the nature of subjectivity, nor in escaping ocularcentric discourse or realities, in both the natural and the ontological sense. By not disadvantaging the blind person in any way, Levinas' ethics offer an avenue by which a thinker may overcome ocularcentrism and ontology.

However, here we have a paradox. The face is in fact graspable, since the face can be seen and touched.²⁵⁸ The fact that it exists in physical space and can be discerned

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 195.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 197.

within our five senses means that the face is indeed graspable, especially seeing as my vision is the first way that I grasp at a given object. The face does not resist my power by exerting greater strength upon me, and overthrowing my will. Rather, the face exists as an epiphany according to Levinas.²⁵⁹ This epiphany opens onto a higher reality, which negates, or to put it another way, maybe ignores, the power that I possess to control or hold it.²⁶⁰ It exceeds my grasp because it exceeds the bounds of the known (and seen) world. It stands high above the rest of the world. Yet, this is a paradox because before I said even though it can be seen or cannot be seen, the seeing or the not seeing has no effect on it.

In order for it to be beyond the grasp, the possession, or the reduction that I would cast upon it, in some way or other, the face must be vulnerable to me;²⁶¹ the face is naked before me. Even though its first commandment is, “Thou shall not kill,” I can murder that person. The face of the person in the physical sense can be completely annihilated. But if I killed that person that does not mean I have grasped, possessed, or reduced the face. It only means that person is vulnerable to annihilation,²⁶² in that the person before me is naked and vulnerable to annihilation; she is destitute. As Levinas says throughout his work, the Other is the widow and the orphan. The impoverishment of the face is also

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 197-198.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 198-199.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 199.

²⁶² Ibid.

what renders its height above me. It also lends to it the power of its infinity and its demands upon me.²⁶³

Vision is not a reasonable or actual way to connect with the Other as Other in a manner where their otherness remains undiminished and irreducible. The nature of vision demands obtainment, wherein objects are acquired and controlled, and in the case of human beings made into creatures that represent sameness and not irreducible otherness. Vision is not the medium through which the Other throws me into question, disrupting my power and control. Vision is, as it were, the beacon of the lighthouse through which the ontology of the lighthouse keeper will see to it that every vessel makes it into the harbor. The way we see, and are expected to see, is founded by, and indicative of, the totality under which we all live and labor. For Levinas, the first act of discourse, which will lead truly to one's freedom, is through speech—an idea which leads him to speak of a Jewish focus on “hearing” over and above “seeing.” Obviously, a blind phenomenologist may have an element that is advantageous in this regard. For instance, I do not associate visual appearance or physicality with the people that I know. To me, the person's voice is the strongest identification of that person as a being expressing themselves, not their face. As I have said previously, the actual appearance of the face that I may comprehend, either tactilely or visually, has little to no meaning for me. Seeing that the voice is the primary characteristic that I associate with people, speech is of the highest importance to me. In a number of obvious and not so obvious ways, the shared

²⁶³ Ibid.

reality and meanings (and, for Levinas, disruptiveness) of words is the primary vehicle through which I interact with people. They serve as the primary creator of my reality.

For Levinas, speech is either the beginning of, or is a means through which the otherness of the person can be expressed as otherness irreducible and unchanged. Levinas writes the following:

...Better than comprehension, discourse relates with what remains essentially transcendent... Words are said, be it only by the silence kept, whose weight acknowledges this evasion of the Other. The knowledge that absorbs the Other is forthwith situated within the discourse I address to him. Speaking, rather than 'letting be,' solicits the Other. Speech cuts across vision. In knowledge or vision the object seen can indeed determine an act, but it is an act that in some way appropriates the 'seen' to itself, integrates it into a world by endowing it with a signification, and, in the last analysis, constitutes it.²⁶⁴

In his ethical sense of speech (tied elsewhere to an ethical sense of hearing), one need not actually speak out loud for there to be a command spoken.²⁶⁵ It is significant, in that he is not elevating an alternative sense over that of vision. Nor is he suggesting the means of conquering ocularcentric ontology is through blinding the seeing eye. He gives alternative actions, not alternative senses. He suggests that speech transcends the limits of vision. Speech does not force the Other into becoming the same necessarily.

It should be additionally pointed out that knowledge is as often stored in the form of words as it is in embodied cognition. Levinas cites Merleau-Ponty and his "I CAN" of the body. In fact, working in general with a highly concrete, embodied sense of

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 194-195.

²⁶⁵ Sarah Pessin, Private Conversation, Spring 2016.

subjectivity, Levinas agrees with Merleau-Ponty that speech does not reflect our internal thought patterns or some internal thinking entity separate from the body.²⁶⁶ He agrees with Merleau-Ponty that speaking is an embodied action that is automatic and responsive in its nature. Speaking is merely another embodied coping with the world.²⁶⁷ In this case the world, with regard to the speaking and the reaction elicited, is composed of the words of the Other. But words are important because they communicate, and because the words spoken by the Other put me into question, the kind of question that leads to feeling the demand of the Other's infinity.²⁶⁸ Yet, the Other speaks to me without speaking, and beyond speaking. His calling me into question occurs even if he never says a word to me, or even if I am never made aware of his call.

The meaning of the words, or the information that the words convey on the surface, is not the reason that one is confronted by the Other in his infinite need and solicitude.²⁶⁹ The words do not communicate from the interior of an infinite entity, or they do not contain the essence of an infinite Other by their meaning in the message that they convey. Neither do the words reflect the inner cogito in the way that the Cartesians believe, indicating a separated mind carried by the body. That is not what Levinas means

²⁶⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), 205-206.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 206-207.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 195.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 200.

by interior. It is the fact that the Other is invoking me and revealing vulnerability to me, which I cannot refuse to hear.²⁷⁰ Levinas said in a radio interview the following:

Certainly. Face and discourse are tied. The face speaks. It speaks, it is in this that it renders possible and begins all discourse. I have just refused the notion of vision to describe the authentic relationship with the Other; it is discourse and, more exactly, response or responsibility which is this authentic relationship.²⁷¹

For the remainder of this chapter, I will be drawing from the essay “Substitution,” but I will be using two different drafts. The first draft was published in 1968 after having been given as a lecture in 1967, and appears in the book *Basic Philosophical Writings*, where the original draft of the essay was published.²⁷² It was considered by the editors and translators to be a somewhat more easily accessible version of this essay.²⁷³ Nonetheless, as freely admitted by the translators, the essay is exceptionally difficult. The second draft of this essay from which I will be drawing appears as Chapter 4 in Levinas’ 1974 work, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*. This draft has significant differences in language and in concept from the former draft, but topically is the same. It is the focal chapter for *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*. In this chapter, Levinas responds to the insight of Jacques Derrida, when he pointed out that although Levinas attempted to critique and escape from ontology in *Totality and Infinity*, he nonetheless

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo* (Duquesne: Duquesne, 1985), Chapter 7, 1.

²⁷² Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 80.

²⁷³ Ibid.

continued to use ontological terminology and definitions. Thus, he failed to properly refute or escape from Heidegger's ontology.

Robert Bernasconi also points out that there is no critical or scholarly consensus as to what question Levinas seeks to address beyond a response to Derrida.²⁷⁴ But, that does not mean there are not answers or suggestions of answers. Levinas does not seek to moralize, or suggest how we should behave to make a better world. Rather, he attempts to account for the fact that there is, under any circumstances, any suggestion or semblance of morality to begin with.²⁷⁵ Although Hobbes and Hegel are sometimes targets of his counterattack, it is, as always, Heidegger who is the primary focus against whom Levinas is fighting.²⁷⁶ Even Derrida, against whose seeming critique he responds to in the essay, cannot be said to be attacking or refuting Levinas.²⁷⁷ I tend to think of Derrida's *Violence and Metaphysics*, in light of the fact that Derrida does not mean to demolish Levinas, as a kind of philosophical dance. Although the flaws in Levinas' *Totality and Infinity* are arguably as Derrida said they were (an assessment with which Levinas ultimately agreed), it was not meant to undermine or refute Levinas' work. I see it as a dance that Derrida conducts with Levinas, instead of an attack, because it was Derrida's work that may have given Levinas the means to truly achieve his purpose and break free of

²⁷⁴ Robert Bernasconi, "What is the Question to Which 'Substitution' is the Answer?" *Cambridge Companions Online* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 233.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 234.

²⁷⁷ Sarah Pessin, Private Conversation, Spring 2016.

ontology. I would be willing to wager that Levinas already knew his work had not fully succeeded in overcoming the ontological paradigm, and that he was still confined to, and using, ontological language to argue his point.

One aspect of the human phenomena that Levinas explores in his work is the fact that there ever is, under any circumstance, a situation where someone holds the door for someone else and says, “After you, Sir,” or Madam, as the case may be. Or, additionally, the fact that there even remotely exists the potential, or the possibility, for such a thing to occur as the ‘After you, Sir’ in this world in the first place.²⁷⁸ If the egoistic self were at its heart “me first” purely egoistic, then this should be under any conditions an impossibility,²⁷⁹ even if self-interest suggests kindness it would get us further than unkindness. Levinas argues that at the heart of subjectivity, instead of selfishness, there is the one for the Other, or the substitution.²⁸⁰ The relationship is asymmetrical, since one takes responsibility for the other’s responsibilities completely, and even for the past decisions or future decisions of the Other.²⁸¹ Western ethical discussions tend to place more weight on legality and assignment of fault than what Levinas is trying to do.²⁸² Indeed, this placing of blame would be in keeping with the ontological nature of Western

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Robert Bernasconi, “What is the Question to Which ‘Substitution’ is the Answer?” *Cambridge Companions Online* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 234-235.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 234.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 239.

²⁸² Ibid., 240.

philosophy and metaphysics. What Levinas describes is simply how reality is. He describes what the subject is according to his metaphysics. I am responsible for the Other, whether or not I choose to act on it, or whether or not I am capable of acting on it, because at the core of subjectivity, there is the one for the Other.

In the essay “Substitution,” Levinas advances his concept of responsibility to include all levels of responsibility, and the I is fully disrupted. This is unlike *Totality and Infinity*, wherein Levinas only recognized by the end of the book that the Other had an absolute claim through fecundity. In this case, responsibility encompasses everything, meaning I am responsible even for my enemies, for their persecution of me, and I am responsible for their seeming sense of responsibility, or lack thereof. Levinas attempts to rewrite the ontological language that he was previously adopting in *Totality and Infinity*. His wish is to fully escape ontology and to redefine how the I is seen in philosophical terms, breaking free of philosophical terms entirely. But, Levinas has magnified the sense of responsibility to the point where I am held hostage by my responsibility for the Other.²⁸³

Levinas states in a very significant passage found in *Basic Philosophical Writings* in the essay, “Substitution,” a quote that I will help clarify with commentary, and that succinctly explains what the nature of the relation of self to the Other is, and what relational elements subjectivity consists of. He begins by saying that, “Proximity is a

²⁸³ Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 80.

relationship with what cannot be resolved into ‘images’ and exposed.”²⁸⁴ Clearly, the word “proximity” is not being used in the usual sense. Normally, it means something is close by, but in this case the usual meaning of the word could not be further from the meaning with which it is here being imbued. Proximity is representative of the subjectivity relating to something that cannot be defined, sensed, comprehended, or thematized. The words that Levinas most often uses are not to be understood in their conventional meaning. There are a number of words whose meaning has been changed in order to fit the point that Levinas wishes to make. In this case, the relationship cannot be exposed, which means defined, and it cannot be known or perceived. The presence of the Other and, by extension, the summons of the Other, are not perceivable in conscious experience. Although one is unaware consciously of the alterity of the Other, consciousness is still displaced and called into question by the Other, and the person may not consciously be aware of the source of the summons.²⁸⁵ The relationship cannot be resolved, which means it cannot be categorized or understood, and I cannot react to it as if it were a relation that is definable in terms of traditional relation.

Levinas continues in this vein when he writes, “It is a relationship not with what is inordinate with respect to a theme but with what is incommensurable with it; with what cannot be identified in the kerygmatic logos, frustrating any schematism.”²⁸⁶ This is a

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Robert Bernasconi, “What is the Question to Which ‘Substitution’ is the Answer?” *Cambridge Companions Online* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 236.

²⁸⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 80.

relationship that is otherwise than being. It is outside of our categorization of being and not being, and it is outside of our categorization of human and superhuman.²⁸⁷ This is not a case of being touched by an Other of mystical and indefinable proportions. It is not a case of the super being.²⁸⁸ In and of itself, the ethical situation that one finds oneself in is concrete, that is it is real, in spite of the fact that the Other cannot be sensed, perceived, or thematized.²⁸⁹ Yet, this relationship is considered a transcendent one, even though Levinas does not mean one is interacting with a power-as-presence – for example, a traditional notion of God – that exceeds my boundaries and dimensions, as in the case of Descartes.²⁹⁰ Descartes had a kind of mystical connection with the divine as a “being beyond being,” so to speak, since he understood that the thought of the divine exemplified the fact that such a being had to exist, in order to plant the thought of divinity in his mind. The relationship actually is transcendent, according to Levinas, but too often Western thought has mistakenly envisioned the transcendent as a “super-being,” and has in that spirit called the transcendent mystical.²⁹¹

²⁸⁷ Sarah Pessin, Private Conversation, Spring 2016.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Robert Bernasconi, “What is the Question to Which ‘Substitution’ is the Answer?” *Cambridge Companions Online* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 248.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

It is not a case of what Anthony Steinbock calls, “Vertical Givenness,” a state that elevates a person and leaves them with the very definite awareness that they are touched by a significant relationship, either with the divine or with an individual.²⁹² In the case of the mystics that Steinbock highlights in his phenomenological analysis of verticality against idolatry, those mystics had a very definite awareness that they were touched by the divine and moved to change by that connection.²⁹³ Logos, in this, does not proclaim itself, not because it chooses not to, or feels no need to, but because the ethical relation stands outside any totality and is of an entirely different paradigm—one otherwise than being, not simply “a being above being” – that cannot be readily categorized in terms of Western spirituality or mysticism.²⁹⁴ There is no way, in this case, that somebody can concentrate and look very hard to distinguish the Other as Other, and thereby categorize that Other. Western traditions have largely ignored the needs for the definition of the Other, with the exception of a few mystics who have attempted to describe the Otherness of the Other, even though that Other is beyond description. In these cases, mystics are describing God as the ultimate Other, and not other human beings in their alterity. The Other is not another me, but another who is completely different in form from me. The

²⁹² Anthony J. Steinbock, *Phenomenology and Mysticism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 10.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, see especially the Introduction.

²⁹⁴ Sarah Pessin, Private Conversation, Spring 2016.

Other could be not just an alien human being. The Other could be the past or the future version of me.²⁹⁵

Mystics, on the other hand, although the breadth and infinite alienness of what they are attempting to describe is elusive, do resort to imagery – related to a sense of a being or presence “above ordinary being” – in order to explain their encounters with the divine. Anthony Steinbock explains in the following passage:

It is due to a kind of presence that is experienced as overwhelming from their side as finite persons that the mystics are motivated to eloquence and imagery. It is not that there is somewhere an ‘adequate’ language, and imagery and metaphor are a second best. Rather, for the mystics, imagery and metaphor suggest at least an implicit awareness of language’s own limits; and to the extent that it (imagery) is aware of its (language’s) own insufficiency at indicating or provoking the Holy (e.g., ‘this is God’), imagery becomes for the mystics a ‘superior’ mode of language. Imagery, in this regard, is perhaps less naive than philosophical discourse.²⁹⁶

So, in spite of the vastness and difficulty in defining the divine, even something as unknowable and mysterious as the divine can be understood as a presence, which is not the case of the alterity of the Other. Logos, it would seem, is a totalizing ontology that defines everything by reason, even the nature of the divine.²⁹⁷ Levinas continues, “Incapable of remaining in a theme and of appearing, this invisibility that becomes contact...”²⁹⁸ This is a description of how Levinas sees the ethical relation. There is, in

²⁹⁵ Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 326.

²⁹⁶ Anthony J. Steinbock, *Phenomenology and Mysticism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 34.

²⁹⁷ Sarah Pessin, Private Conversation, Spring 2016.

²⁹⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 80.

the ethical, no point of awareness at all, “invisible,” but I am entirely responsible and bound even by that which I cannot perceive, “contact.” The Other is the absolute epiphany that breaks the world, and, even if I speak with the Other, and the Other speaks to me, he (or she) does not descend to my level, and his (or her) infinite alterity remains unchanged. The Other still transcends me.²⁹⁹

Levinas also continues, “. . . this invisibility that becomes contact does not result from the nonsignifyingness of what is approached but rather from a way of signifying wholly other than that of exhibition from a beyond of the visible.”³⁰⁰ This is an approach entirely outside of being and ontology and cannot be defined in those terms.³⁰¹ The beyond, in this case, does not mean from beyond the veil, or from another dimension, as one might suspect one would feel if he or she was interacting with the divine as a presence, albeit a “super-being” sort of presence above ordinary being.³⁰² It is neither a person nor presence, and is, as such, not available to ontology or logos, words or definitions. And, Levinas adds in that regard, “Not that the ‘beyond’ would be ‘further’ than everything that appears, or ‘present in absence,’ or revealed by a symbol, which would again be to submit to a principle and to give oneself to consciousness.”³⁰³ It is not

²⁹⁹ Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 346.

³⁰⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 80.

³⁰¹ Sarah Pessin, Private Conversation, Spring 2016.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 80.

even revealed by what it is not. It cannot be defined ontologically by the absence of the defining qualities of the Other, according to what he does not have, and the Other originates from a place beyond ontology; it is not, in other words, an “absence-presence.” It is not subject to ontology, and can, as such, not even be understood according to what it is not. It is completely outside all categorization. One is incapable of capturing it using words, imagery, or metaphor.

There is no way, not even through speech, to categorize or contain the Other. We have previously determined that speech is not merely the communication of information from one mind to another, nor is touching merely the physical act of touching. The act of touching is a caress. These words and actions exceed the normal interpretation of their content, and thus we may infer that any visual imagery that we see is interpreted not in the context of the information communicated to the seer, but that it is instead interpreted in this higher context, that is of connection and exchange that exceeds the finite dimensions to which we are ordinarily subject.³⁰⁴ This almost tantalizingly suggests to me that the fact that one sees is irrelevant, and one may as well be blind for all that the seeing can benefit the viewer. Since what is being seen of the Other cannot be broken down or defined or signified according to the definitions that we might use to define or encompass what we look at, then what is being seen can no longer be defined and no longer has definition.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 81.

In that case, the viewer may as well not be seeing the Other at all. This is a step further in the direction of declaring vision useless or even undesirable, in that now seeing is completely pointless to the ethical reality of human subjectivity. It is not an exceeded finite dimension; now it is an incomprehensible, invisible blur. The way of seeing, however, as implied by Levinas in the previously cited passage, suggests that seeing may still be plausible or possible, if the viewer is looking with a different intention, and/or is seeing in a manner that does not require signification, definition, or the conversion of what is being seen into symbolic information conveyed by words and signifiers, as in logos. The Other is now seen in such a context that they are indestructible, irreducible, and indefinable. This is much the way in which Levinas spoke of vision in *Totality and Infinity*, only with far greater emphasis on the irreducibility, uncontainability, and indestructible nature of the Other. Levinas has gone to a place even further away from vision in “Substitution” than he had previously expressed in *Totality and Infinity*, and is, if anything, even less visual in this case than he was before.³⁰⁵

If seeing is a kind of consumption or digestion, wherein the Other is broken down into categories, concepts, and themes by the viewer, then the majestic quality of the Other defies definition completely. This is more extreme than in his previous work because at least in his previous work he recognizes that one may see the face of the Other as a face, and define it in such terms. Now, however, nothing can be applied to the definition of the Other, the one looked out and seen. It surpasses comprehension in all aspects. Indeed, it

³⁰⁵ Sarah Pessin, Private Conversation, Spring 2016.

is the Other's refusal to be defined or interrogated by logos that gives the Other such a majestic standing with regard to me in my attempt to see.³⁰⁶ The face is an abstract entity; it is signification itself. The face is not a phenomenon that one can experience, it is not even experience per se.³⁰⁷ Moran expresses this when he writes the following:

Levinas does not mean that ethics takes on a special personal significance when we look at the Other directly in the face. Looking at the face in that sense is a kind of reification for Levinas. In fact, the 'face' in Levinas's sense escapes phenomenality altogether. He repeatedly emphasizes that the face escapes sight: 'It cannot be comprehended, that is encompassed' ...³⁰⁸

Unlike those experiences highlighted by Steinbach, those interactions with the divine that can be analyzed through a phenomenological methodology, the experience Levinas speaks of is not phenomenological in any ordinary sense.³⁰⁹ In the face of this challenge, the I or the ego is rendered incapable of speech, or of thought.³¹⁰

That subjective quality, which I call myself, cannot withstand such a challenge, and maintain itself as itself when confronted by the Other. It is this state of seemingly complete annihilation in the present, and even in relation to the past, it is this state of overthrownness which Levinas refers to as "persecution."³¹¹ As stated above, this is not

³⁰⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 81.

³⁰⁷ Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 346.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Sarah Pessin, Private Conversation, Spring 2016.

³¹⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 82.

³¹¹ Ibid., 82-83.

an issue of legality or politics in a manner that we may understand such things. In other words, I am not literally being subjected to brutality and persecution by the Other.

Levinas is not suggesting that this is what he condones in as far as the behavior of the Other towards myself. It is this state of absolute annihilation, and removal from any categorization one may call upon for self-definition or defense, that he means to say is the persecution by the Otherness of the Other that grounds me as a self-for-another.

Levinas discusses this in the previously cited radio interview. He states in the following passage:

I analyze the inter-human relationship as if, in proximity with the Other – beyond the image I myself make of the other man – his face, the expressive in the Other (and the whole human body is in this sense more or less face), were what ordains me to serve him. I employ this extreme formulation. The face orders and ordains me. Its signification is an order signified. To be precise, if the face signifies an order in my regard, this is not in the manner in which an ordinary sign signifies its signified; this order is the very signifyingness of the face.³¹²

The essence of the face with regard to me is defined by its effect upon me. It is therefore unbounded by imagery, by definitions, and by expectations. Even in my reaction to the presence of the Other, there is an undefinability and unthinkability with regard to it. The face exerts a call upon me, one that demands a response that I am forced to give, whether or not I speak the words or act accordingly.³¹³ Levinas explains that the relationship is asymmetrical, and that the response it requires from me is as infinite as the face is infinite

³¹² Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo* (Duquesne: Duquesne, 1985), Chapter 7, 1.

³¹³ Ibid.

in my inability to categorize, or seemingly to ingest it. Dostoyevsky, in a favorite quote that Levinas cites more than once, states how guilty I am before all others, and that as humans we are all guilty before the Other, but none more so than myself. This does not mean that I am in actuality guilty, or being persecuted as such, either for a criminal act or for being part of an oppressed group, but rather it signifies the heaviness of my responsibility for the Other, and is indicative of the call that is placed upon me, a call as if someone were asking for you.³¹⁴

My response is best signified by the Hebrew term *hineni*, which means, “here I am.” It is the accusative “me” that is directly addressed by the Otherness of the Other.³¹⁵ Levinas wishes to draw upon this Biblical term (an utterance made by various prophets in response to God’s call) to elevate his explication of the response to the Other which I give automatically and without regard to the context of the present situation in which I interact with the Other.³¹⁶ The word occurs 178 times in the Hebrew Bible, and its general meaning is quite simply, “here I am.” Although it often appears as though it is an ordinary response in ordinary circumstances, it is the response that Abraham gives when God calls upon him to sacrifice Isaac, and subsequently when the angel calls upon him not to do so. The word is indicative of a profound response to God, a response that signifies my willingness to serve absolutely and without question. It is at this depth and at

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ Sarah Pessin, Private Conversation, Spring 2016.

³¹⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo* (Duquesne: Duquesne, 1985), Chapter 8, 7-8.

this level of intensity, that Levinas wishes us to contemplate my response to the Other as a response that, as it were, cuts across vision and totality. My response is fully accepting of my responsibility towards the Other, without regard to the response of the Other. The Other does not need to reply with reciprocity to me, and it is irrelevant whether or not he or she does so.³¹⁷ Such a response on the part of the Other is not my concern, since this is not a reciprocal transaction between equals. Rather, it is an asymmetrical relationship against which I am powerless to protest. It is an exchange at which I always arrive late; the Other always arrives before me with her call, and in my response I am always already late. My consciousness is afflicted by this imbalance, in spite of my wishes to the contrary, and it is this additional element to which Levinas refers when he speaks of persecution. It is this persecution that is also a kind of solidarity with the Other, my humanity, and his.³¹⁸

Subjectivity, then, for Levinas, includes as an integral element of its composition, the place of the irreducible Other. In order for it to be subjectivity in the fullest sense, the Other must be present, and the Other must be a total stranger.³¹⁹ The self is, as it were, turned inside out and completely open to the influence of the Other over it, and in its very

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 82.

³¹⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being Or Beyond Essence* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), 99.

nature it is free to take on the burden of the Other.³²⁰ This is not done for the sake of humiliating or degrading oneself, since suffering in and of itself does not atone for or expiate the wrongs that the self faces from the Other.³²¹ Ego by its very nature cannot sacrifice itself in any case, since that would be against the nature of ego.³²² The self is prepared to take on the responsibility of the entire universe and everyone in it.³²³ Yet, this is not human sacrifice either. A person is not permitted to conduct human sacrifice, and that extremity is not asked of or expected of the subject. So, the question remains: what is this taking of responsibility if it is not sacrifice or atonement? Levinas explains:

To be a 'self' is to be responsible before having done anything. It is in this sense to substitute oneself for others. In no way does this represent servitude, for the distinction between master and slave already assumes a pre-established ego. To say that subjectivity begins in the person, that the person begins in freedom, that freedom is the primary causality, is to blind oneself to the secret of the self and its relation to the past. This relation does not amount to placing oneself at the beginning of this past so as to be responsible within the strict limits of intention, nor to being the simple result of the past. All the suffering and failure of the world weighs on that point where a singling out occurs, an inversion of being's essence. A point is subject to everything. The impossibility of slipping away is the very singling out of the subject.³²⁴

We experience the Other both in space and in time. We experience the Other in space as what Levinas described as silhouettes, and in time we experience the Other as a

³²⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 91.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 90.

³²² *Ibid.*, 89.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 90.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*

multiplicity in the past, present, and future.³²⁵ Taking into account the fact that I am always late in my meeting with the Other, it must include taking place in time and in futurity, or else it would not be all-inclusive of the multiple elements that make up full subjectivity. It is not what we might ordinarily think of as consciousness either in the Cartesian or in the phenomenological sense. In other words, it is not Cartesian, in that there is not a mind separate from the body. It is not phenomenological, in that phenomenology argues that at the central axis of its composition, consciousness dwells within me, although it is open to the world, and radiates outward from me to include the world. It is, in this way, that Levinas also refers to the self, in the totality of being including the Other, as finding itself, losing itself, and finding itself again, obviously through interacting with the Other.³²⁶

Though my experience of the Other may take place in space and time, and elements thereof be consciously experienced by me, I cannot put myself in any manner ahead of the Other in this conscious experience. That is, I cannot say I met so-and-so and saw so-and-so and talked with so-and-so and felt a certain way, given that I met so-and-so. This is the case because consciousness can only be described as signified in its self. That is, consciousness is my meeting of the Other in such a manner that I am called into question before I meet the Other, and indeed before I act in any manner or interact with

³²⁵ Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being Or Beyond Essence* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), 99.

³²⁶ Ibid.

the Other.³²⁷ Like being in the world, consciousness includes the Other and includes the impact of the Other upon me. In the same way that we are always already in the world, according to the phenomenologists and Gestalt thinkers, we are always already overwhelmed by meeting the Other, and unable to define, categorize, thematize, or contain her Otherness – her alterity – in any way (including a containing by seeing), the presence of my standing before the Other and looking at him or her.³²⁸ I can never place the person with whom I am interacting below me in any description or thought, nor can I say I saw that person, and acted accordingly, because it is not my choice to act upon what I see, as if I had arrived at the meeting beforehand, because my meeting with the Other is already superseded by the Other's Otherness, rendering me in a subordinate role.

The Other is outside of me, which is why I cannot reduce this consciousness to a level where it can be broken down or understood.³²⁹ Levinas deliberately speaks of this interplay as being beyond vision because vision is a means through which one thematizes, and categorizes what one sees, in the manner of "I saw."³³⁰ I cannot place myself first in any manner in this exchange. I cannot say I saw even if I did see the Other before the Other sees me. This is a relationship that is beyond seeing itself. That is why my obligation is infinite and why I am hostage to the demands of the Other. My only response that is in any way honest is 'hineni.' Yet, in the face of all this, I cannot break

³²⁷ Ibid., 100-103.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Ibid., 100-101.

down the Other into an experience that I experience, where I am overwhelmed by these forces by guilt, or by fear. This simply is the nature of reality, improperly defined by Western ontology throughout its history.

Levinas does not say anywhere that one should be blinded, or ignore the visible, but that the ethical truth of the Other (and of myself) cannot be conveyed by way of the visible. Although blindness in and of itself is not an escape from this paradigm, it does seem that the relation between the self and the Other is the same on this approach regardless of whether or not the self in question is blind. The blind viewer is here given an equal – if not improved – means through which to encounter the call of the Other and, as such, the self. When I am confronted by the Other the potential exists for me to reply in a manner closer to truth, because of the elevation of speech in my experience. For Levinas the relationship to the Other is separate from vision in the first place. It is for this reason that Levinas' ethical metaphysics—his overcoming of ontology in his reminder that “ethics is first philosophy”—equalizes the experience of the blind and sighted subject.

CHAPTER 5: OBSERVATIONS OF A BLIND PHENOMENOLOGIST

Why, then, is ocularcentrism bad, or if not bad why is there a problem? Can we not simply acknowledge that philosophy is ocularcentric, and leave it at that? Why must we challenge ocularcentrism in the first place? We could simply moderate ocularcentrism and leave things as they were. What is the problem with acknowledging that most people experience and value their vision as their highest and most important sense? Is there a way out of ocularcentrism that is reasonable? Is there an alternative? If there is another way of "looking" at the world through our metaphysical senses, is that view closer to the truth if it is not ocularcentric? Is that view closer to the truth if it is not ontological? What is the truth? Is there a bigger truth to be gained? In this era of postmodernity and suspicion of grand narratives, are these even the right questions to be asking? Is it a pointless exploration? Is there ontological or metaphysical significance because of the differences of worldviews, or of experiences of reality between blind and non-blind persons? Can I practice philosophy blind, without being ocularcentric, from a point of view that does not require vision at all?

This work is only a prologue. I have arrived at a few conclusions, and I will share them. But, I do not consider most of my conclusions to be answers to any of these questions. It may be that many of these questions still do not and never will have answers, but there is continued value in discussing them, addressing them, and

confronting them. Ultimately, the question of why ocularcentrism is negative and why it should be challenged has an answer.

As philosophers and as cultural theorists, we should attempt to engage in meaningful study and philosophizing in ways that are not ocularcentric, not arbitrarily limited to a visual perspective. My questioning of ocularcentrism in phenomenology has led me to arrive at additional, potentially very challenging, conclusions. They could even suggest reforming philosophy entirely along new principles. The entire system and its whole apparatus need to be questioned and challenged. I am, perhaps quite surprisingly, not in favor of erasing ocularcentrism or overthrowing it or negating it. I am in favor of strongly challenging the ocularcentric discourse and questioning it. That is what I have endeavored to do in this study.

In philosophy or in metaphysical inquiries, the concepts being discussed and examined must be universal, or as close to being universal as is conceivably possible. In one sense, from my phenomenological experience, I cannot claim that many of my experiences intertwined with blindness or vision can be classified as universal. A majority of people whose vision functions perfectly, if they base their phenomenology upon their well-functioning vision, can claim their experience as universal because they can all see. But blind people are unique, and their experiences of vision loss or lack of vision have different contexts. Although I may draw from my personal experience, my goal is to surpass that limiting factor, to try to find what is universal about my phenomenological experiences that I share with all humanity. The most obvious element that I share with all humankind is the fact that I am conscious and alive in the first place.

As Jonas pointed out in his book, *The Phenomenon of Life*, how is it that some matter is nonliving or dead, and that matter which makes up human beings is conscious? That I am a living being that has meaningful and unique perceptual experiences is a thing to be wondered at. Phenomenology requires and asks that we go back to the things in themselves. At the bedrock level of things in themselves is the conscious perceiving being, and the intentional relation between that being and the object perceived. Each experience that a person has is meaningful in context with:

- a. The other experiences that the person has had or will have.
- b. The other people with whom that person shares his or her life, and competing expectations, goals, and obligations upon that person.
- c. The experience linked to that person's emotions and the so called "inner landscape" that makes up an unseen portion of the world.

I have spoken of several different phenomenological theories and interpretations in this study. I come away from it with several concepts that I have solidified in my mind as a direct result of working through this topic. I have come to accept what Levinas argues, that I am responsible for the Other without necessarily feeling it, and that responsibility and the Other's alterity is what determines my subjectivity. Merleau-Ponty did not see alterity the way Levinas did. Merleau-Ponty had no intention of creating an ethical system like Levinas. The concept of flesh eliminates the subject. It may be said that Merleau-Ponty found a means of refuting the subject/object dichotomy.

The metaphysical implications of my responsibility are potentially far-reaching and extraordinary. Consider that we are intertwined in such a way that even when my

actions feel like they are my actions, those actions are a result of my obligation to the infinite Other. Even in our natural day-to-day lives, there are elements of our experiences that suggest this condition is possible. For example, I am spending and have spent days alone in a room writing this document. What could be more my own than my thoughts and my words? Is there a more independent state to be dwelling in than to be by oneself absorbed in contemplation? From whom do I receive the words that I am using? Have I chosen freely and independently to spend these days in front of a computer? There are requirements I need to fulfill. I did not determine those requirements. My thoughts that seem so much my own and independent of others are drawn from the works of others, these philosophers I have studied in this dissertation. Can there be such a thing as an independent thought that originates with you? The origin is the Other even in natural life. The entanglement of obligations in natural life is a result of my obligations to the Other.

Levinas identifies the "after you, sir" as a phenomenon that demonstrates the alterity of the Other, and along with it the obligation into which I am called by the face of the Other. If there were not such entanglements and obligations (whether felt or unfelt), then the "after you, sir" could not happen. It would not and it could not happen. But it does. If this is so, can we truly speak of the freedom of will? Can we truly hold on to the Cartesian separation and dualism? All dichotomies may be challenged by this phenomenological methodology.

I am against ocularcentrism that implicitly devalues my perspective and my phenomenological reality. Ocularcentrism limits philosophy. Who decides that the visual is the best place to begin analyzing experience from a phenomenological perspective? In

the case of a blind person, phenomenologically, the ability to cope with the world is changed, in that one would need to adapt to work around not seeing. Schneider very definitely lacks certain capacities and these lacks prevent his full connection with the world. Merleau-Ponty may have included the blind person in such an assessment also, since touch is inferior to sight. Schneider's disabilities are much more severe to the point where he cannot do certain things that I am not prevented from doing by blindness. Is vision so valuable, then, that without it, philosophy is impossible?

Ocularcentrism implicitly places value judgments suggesting that vision or the ability to see is ideal or an important part of the ideal perspective for interrogating and arriving at phenomenological truth.

For my friend who was born blind he had no experience or concept that he was missing his vision. He could not see. But he did not feel as though he were missing his vision. From a phenomenological standpoint, we have to accept that his life world is complete. We cannot allow our natural or common everyday prejudices to obfuscate our judgment when doing metaphysical or phenomenological inquiries. And, by "prejudice" I am not using the word in terms of political prejudice or prejudice driven by hatred. I am using the word in the meaning of favoring my own perspective over that of others; it is unconscious for us to favor our own perspective.

I will try to give another example: I cannot play the piano. That is an ability I do not have. I am blind and I walk by a piano, and may never know the piano was present. It does not matter. If you restored my vision, and I looked and saw the piano, I might register that the object exists. I might be aware that the instrument sounds beautiful if

someone else plays it. But, in as far as my capacities are concerned, from a phenomenological standpoint, whether or not I see the piano makes no difference. I cannot play it. If we are talking about egalitarianism, which I am not in this case, it would be a different philosophical inquiry that I present to you. Then, it would be social critique or political philosophy. In this case, it is neither. It may include the idea that dignity should be afforded to all human beings. It may include the concept that all people should be treated equally well by society. It may allow for the idea that everybody in a given society should be supported, encouraged, and allowed to reach their fullest potential. But, my anti-ocularcentric inquiry is not driven by the desire for equal rights. My inquiry is not driven by a wish to supersede the ocularcentric phenomenological discourse with my particular phenomenological reality. I do not seek to overthrow ocularcentrism. I do seek to challenge it.

Ultimately, the challenge is not even against ocularcentrism itself. I challenge the arbitrariness of ocularcentrism. In Schneider's case, there are actions he cannot do. Those incapacities far exceed my inability to see. I am prevented from seeing, which is a bodily action. But, Schneider is prevented from doing certain actions, and from perceiving aspects of his environment, i.e., his doctor's house. If I walk by that piano that I cannot see, I am not incapable of learning the piano is there. I am not incapable of learning how to play it. Very likely, Schneider is incapable. If we use Levinas's ethical metaphysics, as opposed to phenomenology, there is no need to begin asking such value questions as these. The value of an individual does not begin and end with their abilities or disabilities. We are all incapable of experiencing the Other's alterity, yet we are all

beholden to our responsibilities toward the Other. Are we equally disabled in this case? My physical blindness does not prevent me from fulfilling my responsibility toward the Other, or cause me to fail at it. If my abilities or disabilities are not required, then neither is ocularcentrism.

Levinas' thought insists that we change our first philosophy from ontology to ethics. It does not tell us to build a better or newer or fairer ethical system. It presents us with a dynamic view of what constitutes an individual human being, and it allows us to open the possibility that ontology can be questioned. In my case, I question an ontological ocularcentrism. The two are inextricably linked. It may be that others will argue against my point, suggesting that ocularcentrism is not a guiding principle of philosophical inquiry. It might be argued that ocularcentrism does not stand alone as a paradigm. I would still insist otherwise. There has always been an anti-ocularcentric current in Western thought and, since the beginning of the 20th century, there has been a very powerful anti-ocularcentric movement in philosophy. But, I do not see that reactionary anti-ocularcentric movement as being truly anti-ocularcentric. In its spirit, it is still trapped in a system of thought where vision remains important, either as ocularcentrism, or as the absence of sight. It is still beholden to ocularcentrism. Instead, I am suggesting that we start our inquiries from a different perspective that excludes ocularcentric-ontological discourse. I am arguing against the unconscious bias and the almost clichéd grasping at ocularcentric tendencies that phenomenologists seem to express.

Levinas himself also argued against ocularcentrism. He recognized that there were potential repercussions and potential biases of arguing from an ocularcentric perspective. I maintain that he recognized that when ontological arguments rely on ocularcentric discourse, there is, metaphorically speaking, a dynamic of “oppression” being expressed. I do not expect he had blind phenomenologists in mind. Had the point been brought up to him, however, perhaps he would have agreed with my questioning of ocularcentrism. What he identified is the objectification or reduction of human beings that occurs when ontology directs its gaze at the world. The intellectual gaze exemplifies grasping, controlling, and the achievement of mastery. In the case of the Other, when this type of gaze is directed at the Other, alterity is ignored and the ego is elevated as a kind of first-person perspective. This first-person perspective elevates the “I” and what I have, or what I see, or what I understand. This sort of paradigm might as well bring us all the way back to Descartes, saying that the most reliable and graspable knowledge that proves my existence is in fact after all the I think. We may as well remain Cartesian.

*

There are many topics in this dissertation that I have barely touched upon. I would like to devote additional research to them in the future. A few of these topics are:

1. In terms of ocularcentrism, can we more clearly define the role that metaphor plays in creating a concept? Is there a connection between the two? Can we separate metaphor from phenomenological discussions of reality?
2. Is it possible to conclusively determine whether or not Merleau-Ponty thought that disability unquestionably diminishes a person’s actual being in the world? Because

he seems to argue strongly for either case, it is difficult to definitively determine his conclusions on the issue. There is evidence to suggest that he did see disability as diminishing a person's connection to the world, their being in it, or even the phenomenological validity of their perceptions. He never stated that view explicitly, however. The changes that he initiated in, *The Visible and The Invisible* suggest that he might have evolved beyond such a narrow perspective.

3. Having barely touched on Levinas' thought, although it would be a tangential journey, I would like to research the influence on his ideas of Kabbalistic thought, if any. Is there any evidence or potential that Levinas was influenced by Lurianic Kabbalah? Could he have been influenced by other aspects of Jewish mysticism? If so, does that in any way effect or diminish the rational validity of his philosophy?

By way of conclusion, this short work suggests that we need not limit ourselves because of an ocularcentric model of thought. I argue that there is no escape from ocularcentrism through its negation directly. Attacking ocularcentric premises from within ontology remains ocularcentric. Escaping ocularcentrism might be achievable through the works and counter-phenomenology of Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas does not defeat phenomenology by employing elements of its reverse and opposition. He still uses a methodology based on a phenomenological framework. Yet, he succeeds in his counter-phenomenology by changing the focus and purpose of the self from ontology to ethics. His ideas open the way potentially to challenge counter-ocularcentrism. In his thought, it is not relevant whether I can or cannot see. There still is room to accept the validity of my perceptions from my perspective, but as a result of replacing ontology with ethics as first

philosophy, my purpose is not to control and acquire all that I see. It is not a hindrance if I cannot see in this case. My purpose is to acknowledge the command of the face of the other, even if I do not feel its effects upon me. In the same way that Levinas escapes ontology, I can also propose an escape from ocularcentrism.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alanen, Lilli. *Descartes's Concept of Mind*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2003.
- Al-Saji, Alia. "A Phenomenology of Critical-Ethical Vision: Merleau-Ponty, Bergson, and the Question of Seeing Differently." *Chiasmi International: Trilingual Studies concerning Merleau-Ponty's Thought* 11, (2009): 375-99.
- . "When Thinking Hesitates: Philosophy as Prosthesis and Transformative Vision." *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 50(2), (2012): 351-61.
- Amundson, Ron. "Disability, Ideology and Quality of Life." In *Quality of Life and Human Difference*, edited by David Wasserman et al., 101-124. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005.
- Angelino, Lucia. "Merleau-Ponty's Thinking Eye." *Philosophy Today* 58(2), (2014): 265-78.
- Barnes, Elizabeth. "Disability and Adaptive Preferences." *Philosophical Perspectives* 23, (2009): 1-22.
- Bayne, T., and Montague, M. *Cognitive Phenomenology*. Oxford & New York: Oxford UP, 2011.
- Bergson, Henri. *Creative Evolution*. Translated by Arthur Mitchell. London: MacMillan & Company, 1922.

- . *Matter and Memory*. Translated by Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer. London & New York: The Macmillan Company, 1911.
- . *Mind Energy*. Translated by H. Wildon Carr. New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1920.
- . *Time and Free Will*. Translated by Franck Lubecki Pogson. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1910.
- Bernasconi, Robert. "What is the Question to Which 'Substitution' is the Answer?" In *Cambridge Companions Online*, 233-236. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Black, Max. "Metaphor." In *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 273-274. Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell Publishing, 1954 – 1955.
- Blumenberg, Hans. "Light as Metaphor for Truth." In *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*, 30-62. Berkeley: U of California P, 1993.
- Brandt, Robert B. *Making it Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998.
- Bredlau, Susan M. "Learning to See: Merleau-Ponty and the Navigation of 'Terrains'." *Chiasmi International: Trilingual Studies concerning Merleau-Ponty's Thought* 8, (2006): 191-200.
- . "Monstrous Faces and a World Transformed: Merleau-Ponty, Dolezal, and the Enactive Approach on Vision without Inversion of the Retinal Image." *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 10(4), (2001): 481-98.

- Brook, Isis. "Experiencing Interiors: Ocularcentrism and Merleau-Ponty's Redeeming of the Role of Vision." *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 33(1), (2002): 68-77.
- Canguilhem, Georges. *The Normal and the Pathological. With an Introduction by Michel Foucault*. Translated by Carolyn R. Fawcett. New York: Zone Books, 1989.
- Carman, Taylor and Mark B.N. Hansen, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004.
- Carman, Taylor. *Merleau-Ponty*. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Cazeaux, Clive. *Metaphor and Continental Philosophy from Kant to Derrida*. New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2007.
- Chalmers, D. *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*. Oxford & New York: Oxford UP, 2002.
- Critchley, Simon. *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002.
- . "Reading Levinas as a Husserlian Might Do." Recording, 2:08. 2016.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gqx-F2Z_sCI.
- Davidson, Scott. "The Husserl Heretics: Levinas, Ricœur, and the French Reception of Husserlian Phenomenology." *Studia Phaenomenologica: Romanian Journal of Phenomenology* 13, (2013): 209-229.
- Davis, Lennard. *The Disability Studies Reader*. 4th ed. London: Routledge, 2013.
- Derrida, Jacques. "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy." *New Literary History*, 6, (1974): 5-74.

- Descartes, Rene. *Discourse on Method*. New York: Rough Draft Printing, 2014.
- Dreyfus, Hubert. *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991.
- . "Consciousness." Recording, 8:35. 2005.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bhz7bRiuDk0.
- . *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*. Translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993.
- . *What Computers Can't Do: The Limits of Artificial Intelligence*. New York, N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1979.
- Dreyfus, H., and Dreyfus, S. *Mind Over Machine*. Free Press, 1982.
- with Hall, H. *Husserl, Intentionality and Cognitive Science*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982.
- and Rabinow, Paul. *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1982, 1983.
- "Dualism." *Internet Encyclopedia of Phenomenology*. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/dualism>.
- Fauvel, Lysane. "The Blind Spot of the Sovereign Eye: On the Gaze in Merleau-Ponty and Lacan." *Philosophy Study* 2(7), (2012): 450-62.
- Foucault, Michel. *Naissance de la Clinique: Une archéologie du regard medical*. [*The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*.] Paris: PUF, 1963.
- . *Raymond Roussel*. Paris: Gallimard, 1975.
- . *Surveiller et punir*. [*Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*.] Paris: Gallimard, 1975.

- Gibson, J.J. *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979; 1986.
- . *The Perception of the Visual World*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1950.
- . *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966.
- Hand, Sean. *The Levinas Reader*. Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell, 1989.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson. New York: Harper & Row Publishers Inc., 1962.
- Heinämaa, Sara, Vili Lähteenmäki and Pauliina Remes. *Consciousness: From Perception to Reflection in the History of Philosophy*. Dordrecht: Springer, 2007.
- Hoeller, Keith. *Merleau-Ponty and Psychology*. Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities P, 1993.
- Hull, John. *Touching the Rock: an Experience of Blindness*. New York: Vintage, 1992.
- Husserl, Edmund. *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. Translated by David Carr. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970.
- . *Ideas Vol. I: General Introduction To Pure Phenomenology*. Translated by W. R. Boyce Gibson. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1913; 1931.
- Jay, Martin. *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century Thought*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1994.
- Jonas, Hans. *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1966.

- Judovitz, Dalia. "Vision, Representation, and Technology in Descartes." *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*, edited by David Michael Levin, 63-68. Berkeley: U of California P, 1993.
- Kant, Emmanuel. *The Critique of Judgement*. Translated by James Creed Meredith. Oxford: World Classics, 1952, 2007.
- Koffka, Kurt. *Growth of The Mind*. New York: Psychology Press; Routledge, 1999.
- . "Perception: An Introduction to Gestalt Theory." *Psychological Bulletin* 19, (1922): 531-585.
- . *Principles of Gestalt Psychology*. New York: Mimesis International, 1935, 2014.
- Köhler-Ryan, Renée. "'De profundis clamavi ad te Domine': The Existential Significance of Depth for Berkeley, Merleau-Ponty and Desmond." *Yearbook of the Irish Philosophical Society: Voices of Irish Philosophy* (2005): 237-53.
- Kriegel, U., and Williford, K. *Self-Representational Approaches to Consciousness*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. 2006,
- Kristiansen, Kristjana, Simo Vehmas and Tom Shakespeare. *Arguing about Disability: Philosophical Perspectives*. London & New York: Routledge, Taylor St. Francis Group, 2008.
- Lakoff, George. *More Than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989.
- and Mark Johnson. *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought*. New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, 1999.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Basic Philosophical Writings*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996.

- . *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*. Translated by Richard A. Cohen. Duquesne, PA: Duquesne, 1985.
- . *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981.
- . *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. The Hague & Pittsburgh, PA.: Duquesne UP & Martinus Nijhoff, 1969.
- Levin, David Michael. *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1993; Albany: SUNY P, 1991.
- Magee, Bryan Magee and Martin Milligan. *On Blindness: Letters Between Bryan Magee and Martin Milligan*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996.
- Margo, Curtis, Lynn Harman, et al. "Blindness and the Age of Enlightenment." *Jama Ophthalmol* 131 (2013): 98-102.
- Mazis, Glen A. "Touch and Vision: Rethinking with Merleau-Ponty Sartre on the Caress." *Philosophy Today* 23, (1979): 321-28.
- McClamrock, Ron. "Visual Consciousness and the Phenomenology of Perception." *Metaphilosophy* 44(1-2), (2013): 63-68.
- McDowell, John. *Mind and World*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1996.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The Incarnate Subject: Malebranche, Biron, and Bergson on the Union of Body and Soul*. Translated by Paul B. Milan. Amherst, N.Y.: Humanity Books: 2001.
- . *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Colin Smith. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1962.

- . *The Primacy of Perception*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1964.
- . *Visible and The Invisible. Followed By Working Notes*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1968.
- “Metaphor.” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/metaphor/>.
- Minister, Stephen. “The Optics of Responsibility.” *Southwest Philosophy Review: The Journal of The Southwestern Philosophical Society* 25(2), (2009): 1-5.
- Mohanty, J. N. *Transcendental Phenomenology: An Analytic Account*. Oxford & Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1989.
- “Molyneux’s Problem.” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/molyneux-problem/>.
- Moran, Dermot. *Introduction to Phenomenology*. London & New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Morris, Katherine J. *Starting with Merleau-Ponty*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012.
- Obeyeskere, Gananath. *The Awakened Ones: Phenomenology of Visionary Experience*. New York: Columbia UP, 2012.
- Oliver, Kelly. “Ecological Subjectivity: Merleau-Ponty and a Vision of Ethics.” *Studies in Practical Philosophy: A Journal of Ethical and Political Philosophy* 4(1), (2004): 102-25.
- Ortony, Andrew. *Metaphor and Thought*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge UP, 1979.
- Pessin, Sarah. Private Conversation. Spring 2016.

- Petitot, J., Varela, F. J., Pachoud, B., and Roy, J.-M. *Naturalizing Phenomenology: Issues in Contemporary Phenomenology and Cognitive Science*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1999.
- “Phenomenology.” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
<http://www.iep.utm.edu/phenom/>.
- “Phenomenology.” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/>.
- Protevi, John. “The ‘Sense’ of ‘Sight’: Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty on the Meaning of Bodily and Existential Sight.” *Research in Phenomenology* 28, (1998): 211-23.
- Ricœur, Paul. *The Rule of Metaphor*. Translated by Robert Czerny, Kathleen McLaughlin & John Costello. Toronto and Buffalo: U of Toronto P, 1977.
- Romdenh-Romluc, Komarine. *Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception*. London & New York: Routledge, 2011.
- Rosenthal, Sandra B. “Mead and Merleau-Ponty: Toward a Common Vision.” Albany: SUNY P, 1991.
- Sallis, John. ed., *Merleau-Ponty: Perception, Structure, Language – A Collection of Essays*. Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1981
- Schroeder, Brian. “The Listening Eye: Nietzsche and Levinas.” *Research in Phenomenology* 31, (2001): 188-202.
- Searle, John. *Intentionality*. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge UP, 1983.
- Shakespeare, Tom. *Disability Rights and Wrongs*. London: Routledge, 2006.

- Shapiro Gary. *Archaeologies of Vision: Foucault and Nietzsche on Seeing and Saying*. Chicago & London: U of Chicago P, 2003.
- Simmons, J. Aaron. "‘Vision without Image’: A Levinasian Topology." *Southwest Philosophy Review: The Journal of The Southwestern Philosophical Society* 25(1), (2009): 23-31.
- Smith, D. W., and Thomasson, Amie L. *Phenomenology and Philosophy of Mind*. Oxford & New York: Oxford UP, 2005.
- Smith, Joel. "Egocentric Space." *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 22(3), (2014): 409-33.
- Steinbock, Anthony J. *Phenomenology and Mysticism: The Vertically of Religious Experience*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2007.
- Sokolowski, R. *Introduction to Phenomenology*. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge UP, 2000.
- Spiegelberg, Herbert. *The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969.
- Stellardi, G. *Heidegger and Derrida on Philosophy and Metaphor*. Amherst, New York: Humanity Books, 2000.
- Surber, Jere. *Culture and Critique: An Introduction To The Critical Discourses Of Cultural Studies*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1997.
- . Private Conversation. Winter 2016.

- Tallon, Andrew. "Intentionality, Intersubjectivity, and the Between: Buber and Levinas on Affectivity and Dialogical Principle." *Thought: Fordham University Quarterly* 53, (1978): 292-309.
- Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1989.
- Terzi, Lorella. "The Social Model of Disability: A Philosophical Critique." *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (2004): 141-57.
- Todes, Samuel. *Body and World*. Cambridge, MA: MIT UP, 2001.
- Turner, Donald L. and Ford Turrell. "The Non-Existent God: Transcendence, Humanity, and Ethics in the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas." *Philosophia: Philosophical Quarterly of Israel* 35(3-4), (2007): 375-382.
- Zahavi, D. *The Oxford Handbook on Contemporary Phenomenology*. Oxford & New York: Oxford UP, 2012.