

Phenomenological reduction in Merleau-Ponty's *The Structure of Behavior*: An alternative approach to the naturalization of phenomenology

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Funding information

Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst; John Templeton Foundation; Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada; Society of Christian Philosophers

This is a post-peer-review, pre-copyedit version of an article published in *European Journal of Philosophy*. The final authenticated version is available here:

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/ejop.12452>

A free online version is here:

<https://rdcu.be/byXQE>

Abstract

Approaches to the naturalization of phenomenology usually understand naturalization as a matter of rendering continuous the methods, epistemologies, and ontologies of phenomenological and natural scientific inquiry. Presupposed in this statement of the problematic, however, is that there is an original discontinuity, a rupture between phenomenology and the natural sciences that must be remedied. I propose that this way of thinking about the issue is rooted in a simplistic understanding of the phenomenological reduction that entails certain assumptions about the subject matter of phenomenology and its relationship to the natural sciences. By contrast, Merleau-Ponty's first work, *The Structure of Behavior*, presents a radically different approach to the phenomenological reduction, one that traverses the natural sciences and integrates them into phenomenology from the outset. I outline the argument for this position in *The Structure of Behavior* and then discuss consequences for current methodological issues surrounding the naturalization of phenomenology, focusing on the relationship between empirical sciences of mind, phenomenological psychology, and transcendental phenomenology. This novel exegesis of Merleau-Ponty's view on the reduction offers new insight into his oft-quoted remark that the phenomenological reduction is impossible to complete.

Philosophy is an idea (in the Kantian sense of a “limit idea”) that we cannot totalize. Philosophy remains on the horizon of our thought as the limit of possible operations and is only validated in an open-ended historical process. Thus, philosophy is not the reaffirmation of ancient philosophical entities (e.g., eternal truths and the like), but rather the elaboration of an integral philosophy that is compatible with all research in the human sciences.

(Merleau-Ponty, 2010, p. 320)

1 | INTRODUCTION: THE CHALLENGE OF NATURALIZING PHENOMENOLOGY AND THE CARTESIAN REDUCTION

Bringing together the philosophy of lived experience with the empirical sciences of life and mind is one of the pressing issues for contemporary cognitive science and philosophy of mind in the search for a gapless theory of the mind. A proposal much discussed in this connection in recent years has been the effort to naturalize phenomenology by reconciling the first-person descriptions of conscious experience developed in the phenomenological tradition with more recent advances in the cognitive sciences. This project is generally discussed as one of *rendering continuous* the epistemological, methodological, or ontological dimensions of phenomenology and the empirical sciences (e.g., Petitot, Varela, Pachoud, & Roy, 1999; Ramstead, 2015). The unspoken assumption here is that these areas and styles of inquiry are initially *discontinuous*. My objective in this paper is to show that there is an alternative way of conceiving this problematic, one that points towards original continuity rather than discontinuity, and to explore consequences such an approach might have for contemporary debates surrounding the naturalization of phenomenology and the status of phenomenology as a distinctively transcendental philosophical program. This alternative approach to the understanding of the relationship between phenomenology and the natural sciences can be found in Merleau-Ponty's *The Structure of Behavior* and other works. However, in order to contextualize this alternative position, in this introductory section, I will present the standard view that phenomenology and the empirical sciences are originally—and perhaps essentially—discontinuous.

Let us refer to this way of framing the possibility (or impossibility) of a naturalized phenomenology as the Discontinuity Thesis. Its earliest historical statement in the history of phenomenology can be found in Husserl's early work. Contrasting sciences of essence with sciences of fact, Husserl places phenomenology among the former, while empirical psychology ranks among the latter. In his most dramatic statement of the Discontinuity Thesis, *Ideas I*'s Cartesian version of the phenomenological reduction, Husserl “brackets” the findings of the empirical sciences along with the external world. The natural sciences offer a topic for phenomenological inquiry, but their findings cannot positively contribute to the content of phenomenology (Husserl, 1982 [1913]).

The motivations behind the early Husserl's stark demarcation of phenomenology from the natural sciences are well known. Already in the *Prolegomena* (2001 [1900]), he had maintained that naturalism cannot serve as a coherent epistemological foundation for the sciences. With his turn to transcendental phenomenology in the years between the publication of the *Logical Investigations* and *Ideas I* (1900–1913), Husserl increasingly focused his attention on the conditions of the possibility of the experience of objects. In the “natural attitude” with its “general thesis” of the world, Husserl thought, we live naïvely in a world of objects, taking for granted the achievements of consciousness through which objects are constituted. Just as an individual, object-directed perceptual act posits an individual object before us, so too the general thesis posits the world as a whole as existing before us. In order to redirect our attention to the pure, transcendental, absolute consciousness that constitutes objects and the world, we must first suspend the general thesis and enter a radically new, phenomenological attitude towards the world and our experience. This is achieved through the *epoché*, which suspends the general thesis and brackets the external world, thereby achieving a “reduction”—a leading back—to pure consciousness, which is absolute and independent from the external world.¹ Once it has been suspended, we neither affirm nor deny the general thesis. Rather, we simply allow it to hang there, as it were, no longer granting its validity, but neutralizing it and setting it before our eyes for phenomenological scrutiny. As Husserl takes his lead from Descartes in these pages, this way into the phenomenological reduction has come to be known as the Cartesian route to distinguish it from other approaches Husserl would later develop.²

For purposes of comparison, I want to highlight two aspects of this understanding of the reduction that define the Discontinuity Thesis: (a) the phenomenological subject area disclosed by the reduction and (b) the relationship of phenomenology and the natural sciences that results from the reduction.

- (1) *The subject matter of phenomenology.* Husserl describes the phenomenological domain variously as “pure” (1982, p. 63), “transcendental” (p. 63), or “absolute” (p. 94) consciousness and declares that it is a particular region of being (*Seinsregion*; 94ff.). Later in *Ideas I*, he will notoriously argue that, in some form or another, this region of pure consciousness would even survive the annihilation of the external world (109ff.). This way of putting matters makes consciousness appear to be a special domain of being over and against the natural world and raises questions concerning the relationship between consciousness and a transcendent world. Husserl maintains that the relationship is one of dependence, with consciousness enjoying ontological priority over external reality, which only exists relative to consciousness (p. 93). Without further qualification, this way of describing the subject matter of phenomenology has led generation after generation of critics to assume that Husserlian phenomenology is committed to an untenable idealism and internalism.³
- (2) *The relationship between phenomenology and the natural sciences.* What happens to the natural sciences, and to phenomenology's relationship to them, after the reduction? Husserl claims that the natural sciences are premised upon the general thesis and the natural attitude. As such, with the suspension of the general thesis and all positive knowledge of the world, the results of the sciences, too, are bracketed and are not available to the phenomenologist within the phenomenological attitude (1982, p. 61). The phenomenologist can still examine the natural attitude and its posits, including scientific facts and theories, from a phenomenological perspective. This would amount to a “phenomenology of natural-scientific consciousness as a matter of natural-scientific experiencing and thinking” (171f.). Such critical reflection on the scientific endeavor constitutes an essential part of Husserl's promise to deliver an apodictic foundation for the natural sciences. But the findings of the sciences cannot be treated as valid for phenomenology itself, that is, as positive results about the world or subjectivity to be included in phenomenological descriptions. Phenomenology can study them from the outside, as it were, the way an anthropologist might take an etic perspective towards the belief system of a culture she is studying. But it can make no use of them for its own endeavor. This leaves us with a challenge of how phenomenological and natural scientific findings relate to one another, a problem Husserl would continue to confront for the remainder of his career. It also leaves a question of what methodological tools we have at our disposal at the outset of phenomenology, having left at the door upon entry into phenomenology all conceptual resources and positive knowledge that serve us in the theoretical and practical projects of the natural attitude.⁴

Such a formulation of the problematic does not bode well for a genuinely “mutual enlightenment” (Gallagher, 1997) between phenomenological and empirical inquiry into the mind. But what if there were an alternative way of approaching this issue, of understanding the phenomenological reduction, and of formulating the very problematic of naturalizing phenomenology? I argue that such an alternative can be found in Merleau-Ponty's first work, *The Structure of Behavior*. Merleau-Ponty here presents phenomenology and the reduction not as constituting a dramatic break with empirical enquiry, but rather as emerging out of the immanent *development and fruition* of the sciences themselves.

Having presented the Discontinuity Thesis, in the following section, I will introduce Merleau-Ponty's alternative path into phenomenology in *The Structure of Behavior*. There, through an immanent critique of the sciences of behavior, Merleau-Ponty shows how the shortcomings of behaviorist science of mind internally motivate a turn to a richer, phenomenological orientation, leading us back to the phenomenal field as an essential component of the subject matter of a mature science of mind and behavior. In this transformation, however, phenomenology does not sever all ties with empirical enquiry, but rather retains certain appropriately modified concepts from empirical enquiry that phenomenology can employ from the outset. This allows for a new way of imagining phenomenological

reduction and phenomenology's relation to the empirical sciences. I then go on to discuss the significance of Merleau-Ponty's position for the contemporary debate surrounding the naturalization of phenomenology, specifically the proposal of distinguishing between phenomenological psychology and transcendental phenomenology. Following Merleau-Ponty, I argue that no such tidy division of labor within phenomenology is possible. For Merleau-Ponty, the subject matters of phenomenology and psychology, and accordingly the empirical and transcendental dimensions of phenomenological-psychological inquiry, cannot be readily disentangled. This is an insight into the shared ontology of phenomenology and psychology that is achieved by taking Merleau-Ponty's route into the phenomenological reduction via the sciences of behavior, and one that is missed on the more commonly pursued Cartesian way. I close with a remark on the "essential incompleteness" of the phenomenological reduction. While most commentators have focused on how the reduction is essentially incomplete for Merleau-Ponty owing to his views on the embodied, existential nature of experience, I point out another aspect of this incompleteness that has thus far been overlooked. As an intersubjective and historical undertaking continuous with the natural sciences, the horizons of phenomenology remain open. We are forever attempting to properly characterize the subject matter and task of the phenomenological enterprise itself.

2 | MERLEAU-PONTY'S REDUCTION IN THE STRUCTURE OF BEHAVIOR

2.1 | The essentially incomplete reduction

It was once common to assume that there was no place for a phenomenological reduction in Merleau-Ponty's thought.⁵ Even quite recently, Taylor Carman has written that Merleau-Ponty rejects Husserl's reduction as "impossible, indeed incoherent" (2009, p. 632). There is no textual basis in Merleau-Ponty's work for this claim. On the contrary, we find sympathetic, albeit critical, discussions of Husserl and the phenomenological reduction throughout Merleau-Ponty's corpus. The assumption that Merleau-Ponty rejects the reduction has perhaps been accepted in large part because of a tendency to ascribe to Husserl as his considered, final, and *sole* position on the reduction something like *Ideas I*'s Cartesian account—an account whose grave shortcomings Husserl himself would later acknowledge.⁶ Merleau-Ponty was a much more careful reader of Husserl's work, and he developed an accordingly nuanced stance on the reduction, one likely informed by his studies of Husserl's late *Nachlaß*.

In recent years, Merleau-Ponty scholarship has increasingly taken Merleau-Ponty at his word when he writes in the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Perception* that the reduction is not impossible, not incoherent, but rather *essentially incomplete*: "The most important lesson of the reduction is the impossibility of a complete reduction."⁷ In discussing the incompleteness of the reduction, commentators have generally emphasized how Merleau-Ponty's understanding of experience as essentially embodied, affective, worldly, existential, and ultimately *natural* precludes the possibility of a complete reduction. As discussed above, on the *Ideas I* account of the reduction, the general thesis of the natural attitude amounts to a sort of proto-judgment that can be suspended just like any explicit, articulated, individual judgment can be modified. Just as I can find motivations to suspend my perceptually based judgment that there is a book on the desk in front of me, analogously, it should be possible to suspend the general thesis of the world. By contrast, Merleau-Ponty contends that our most basic way of relating to the world should not be compared with an isolated,thetic, epistemic act at all. It is rather a *pre-thetic background* (2012, p. lxxiv) of bodily-worldly relation that is constitutive of the self and hence can never be bracketed. While I can suspend any individual object-oriented act without thereby ceasing to be myself, I simply *am* the primitive relationship self-world. Husserl argued in *Ideas I* that there would be a substantial "residue" of consciousness that would survive even the annihilation of the external world (Husserl, 1982, §49). For Merleau-Ponty, by contrast, our being is essentially defined by the internal relationship self-world. In the closing words of the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty quotes approvingly from Saint-Exupéry, who writes that "man is but a knot of relations, and relations alone count for man."⁸ Hence a complete reduction that would reveal a pure subjectivity that is "absolute" and independent of

worldly being is impossible. To believe we could achieve such a thing would be to misconstrue radically consciousness's essential union with the world. However, it is precisely through attempting the *epoché* and seeing what can and cannot be eliminated from our experience that we gain this insight into consciousness and its relationship to the world.⁹ As Merleau-Ponty writes in a programmatic statement meant to highlight the unity of phenomenological inquiry, "Heidegger's '*In-der-Welt-Sein*' only appears against the background of the phenomenological reduction" (2012, p. lxxvii). The reduction is not impossible or incoherent. It is, however, impossible to complete or to perform absolutely in a single inaugural gesture of suspension—an insight one might not have anticipated based on a study of the Cartesian version of the *epoché* presented in Husserl's *Ideas I*.

2.2 | A paradigm shift in the science of behavior

I believe this interpretation is correct exegetically and phenomenologically. It is not, however, my present purpose to further clarify or defend this position.¹⁰ What I want to add is that there is a crucial and underappreciated feature of the reduction's incompleteness, one that pertains to phenomenology as an essentially intersubjective and historical undertaking continuous with scientific inquiry more generally. To highlight this dimension of the phenomenological reduction, we must turn to Merleau-Ponty's first treatment of the reduction, in his first book, *The Structure of Behavior*. Published in 1942, *The Structure of Behavior* precedes the more frequently studied *Phenomenology of Perception* by 3 years. Though not itself an explicitly phenomenological work, *The Structure of Behavior* serves as a sort of propaedeutic to *Phenomenology of Perception*, as is evidenced by the fact that much of the dialectic of the earlier book is reproduced in the Introduction to *Phenomenology of Perception*. It can thus be seen as playing a role in Merleau-Ponty's work analogous to that of the *Prolegomena* in Husserl's corpus.

Towards the end of *The Structure of Behavior*, we find a remarkable footnote in which Merleau-Ponty claims that, having arrived at the work's destination, "We are defining here the 'phenomenological reduction' in the sense which is given to it in Husserl's final philosophy" (1963, 249fn56). Let us set aside for the time being the contentious exegetical claim about the sense of the reduction in Husserl's "final philosophy."¹¹ What is remarkable here is that Merleau-Ponty thinks he has achieved anything like a phenomenological reduction in *The Structure of Behavior* at all. On its surface, the book has little to do with phenomenology. Authors self-identifying with the phenomenological movement are seldom mentioned in the main text of the work, and the focus is much more philosophy of science (the concept of behavior in psychology in particular) than phenomenology. Where in all of this are we to find a phenomenological reduction?

The dialectical argument of *The Structure of Behavior* attempts to show that the objectivist notion of behavior employed by behaviorists leads to shortcomings that ultimately motivate a turn to a phenomenological science of behavior. By an objectivist approach to mind, I understand any approach that attempts to account for cognition or behavior by relying solely on categories used to describe objects without recognizing that there are original structures and categories of experience that may inform the possibilities of cognition and behavior.¹² In Merleau-Ponty's telling of its history, the study of behavior comes to recognize that it cannot account for animal behavior and intelligence from the outside, as it were, with its objectivist concepts of externally related stimulus and response. Rather, it must enter the perceived world of the animal itself, recognizing behavior and situation as *internally* related structures with a unique logic, and the body and environment as meaningful perceived totalities. These totalities, however, are unique to the perceived world and cannot be accounted for in the picture of the world assumed by objectivist natural science. In short, Merleau-Ponty seeks to motivate a paradigm shift from a reductionist behaviorism that elides the perceptual world as it is experienced to a phenomenological science of behavior that makes the perceived world its central theme.¹³ Crucially, on Merleau-Ponty's telling, this paradigm shift is motivated internally, in Hegelian fashion, through the immanent dialectic of the science of behavior itself, rather than through heavy-handed arguments from an external, aprioristic-philosophical perspective.¹⁴ The ensuing vision of phenomenology that emerges

is informed by its genesis out of behaviorism, rather than taking itself to be an autonomous sector of knowledge demarcated against natural science.

There is never an airtight argument for a paradigm shift in any field of inquiry. Merleau-Ponty, anticipating more recent philosophy of science, was well aware of this (1963, p. 127; 2012, 499fn17). He acknowledges that the behaviorist can always come up with auxiliary hypotheses to prop up a faltering research program (1963, p. 127). But if shortcomings, lacunae, and anomalies can never *necessitate* a paradigm shift, they can *motivate* one. Merleau-Ponty's efforts to motivate such a paradigm shift out of the internal dialectic of the science of behavior unfolds across the whole of *The Structure of Behavior* and cannot be reproduced in its entirety here. To illustrate in part the line of reasoning he presents, and the conclusions he draws from it, I will briefly discuss his account of the inadequacy of behaviorism in one particular area of the study of behavior: its inability to illuminate the phenomenon of animal problem solving. While the following presentation does not stand as a comprehensive defense of Merleau-Ponty's position in *The Structure of Behavior*, it is meant to portray a viable alternative approach to understanding the relationship between phenomenology and the natural sciences.

Merleau-Ponty was much influenced by Gestalt psychologist Wolfgang Köhler's studies of animal intelligence, and by the Gestaltists' critiques of behaviorism more generally. By placing animals in more naturalistic problem-solving scenarios than the behaviorists had done, Köhler was able to elicit qualitatively different patterns of behavior from what the behaviorists had studied, patterns that could not easily be accounted for with the behaviorists' proposed minimalist learning mechanisms. Take, for example, the case of chimpanzee tool use. Köhler's chimps learned to use sticks to obtain objectives that were out of arm's reach through a grill. In an elaborated version of this scenario, a chimp must break a branch off a tree that is also on the other side of the grill at some distance from the objective and use the fashioned tool elsewhere to obtain the objective. Describing the efforts of one subject, Tschego, to succeed at this task, Köhler reports the breakthrough to the solution after several initial failed attempts to draw the entire tree through the bars:

After many failures, [Tschego] finally sits down quietly. But her eyes wander and soon fix on the little tree, which she had left lying a little way behind her, and all of a sudden, she seizes it quickly and surely, breaks off a branch, and immediately pulls the objective to her with it. (Köhler, 1927)

According to the classical behaviorist perspective, problem solving should be explicable in terms of trial and error behavior. The stimulus and response should be describable in strictly objectivist terms, without reference to the ways in which a particular organism actively construes its environment. Adaptive responses achieved through trial and error should establish themselves in the animal's behavioral repertoire through reinforcement. But such a paradigm does little to illuminate Tschego's behavior. First, there is no gradual connection or chance transition from Tschego's earlier efforts to pull the entire tree through the bars to her breakthrough solution that an individual branch can be detached from the whole. The transformation of behavior seems better explained through a sort of *insight (Einsicht)*—an abrupt restructuring of the perceptual *Gestalt* affording a new mode of behavior—than through trial and error or luck. Tschego comes to perceive the situation in a qualitatively different way, and this allows for a qualitatively different behavior. Second, it is unclear under what objectivist description we could describe the stimulus in question. For though the branch of the tree that Tschego would eventually use for the solution was there all along within her field of vision, it is only when she came to perceive it in the right way, attentively identifying it as an isolable and removable part within the whole, that she was able to solve the problem. It is not the object described in the objectivist terms of classical behaviorism that is the stimulus cause of a response, but rather the *object-perceived-as-x-by-a-subject* that solicits behavior.

For Merleau-Ponty, the upshot of classical behaviorism's shortcomings is that we must overturn the objectivist approach to understanding the stimulus as a physically described object and the response as the movement of an animal body described *partes extra partes*. These notions must give way respectively to the holistic, internally related concepts of *situation*, understood as a structured perceptual totality, and behavior, understood as a general *aptitude* to employ one's body in a suitable way across an array of structurally similar situations (Merleau-Ponty, 1963, p. 96).

These notions are informed by the concept of structure, or form, which Merleau-Ponty appropriated from Gestalt psychology. Perceived totalities are wholes with properties that cannot be reduced to their parts (p. 47). Thus, it does not suffice to describe stimuli in objectivist terms. Rather we must take into account the subjective structures in which they are presented, the whole milieu of environmental relations in which the individual object is given for the animal with a particular significance. The branch-on-the-tree cannot be equated to the tool-lying-on-the-ground for Tschecho, even if the two have all the same intrinsic properties (cf. p. 116).

Merleau-Ponty summarizes the transformation of behavioral psychology enjoined on us by classical behaviorism's shortcomings in his lectures on phenomenology and the human sciences from the years 1950–1952:

In such an effort [i.e., classical behaviorism's] to objectify psychology, a moment arrives in which one is confronted by relations that cannot be assimilated into relations between objects. The "stimulus-response" relation is mediated by a structure introduced by the practice of the organism. Similarly, between the stimuli and behavior, we are obliged to interpose a structuration of these stimuli. From the very moment when a structuration is found, certain phenomena only appear by means of the functional totality of this structuration. (Merleau-Ponty, 2010, p. 356)

2.3 | The reduction in the structure of behavior

But what does this critique of objectivism in psychology have to do with the phenomenological reduction? Merleau-Ponty's claim is that in introducing the notion of structure into the study of behavior, it is essential to recognize that the structures in question are only given in the perceived world. This means, first, that we can only understand the behavior of a sentient organism by entering into its perceived world. As Merleau-Ponty puts it in "The Metaphysical in Man" (1964a), we must "reconstitute the animal's universe in all its originality" (p. 84). The forms of the animal's perceived world that behavior engages can only be understood by studying the forms unique to perception. They cannot be reduced to real relations of the physical world, objectivistically understood and described *partes extra partes*. At the same time—and this is the second point—we must recognize that the starting point for the reconstitution of the animal's perceived world will be the way in which animal behavior as a structure of environmental interaction is given to us, the observer, in perception. The starting point of a science of life is the way in which animal behavior is disclosed in perception to a fellow embodied living being.¹⁵

This, then, is where Merleau-Ponty arrives at the end of *The Structure of Behavior*. We must return to the original givens of perception, the world as disclosed in perception as opposed to the world delineated by an objectivist, scientific ontology. The latter is a theoretical abstraction based on the world of perception. But to return to this original experience is, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, "to impose upon oneself an inversion of the natural movement of consciousness."¹⁶ It is to question, that is, the natural attitude of consciousness which tends to immerse itself in the object worlds of science and everyday life and that thereby forgets the constitutive role of consciousness in structuring and disclosing the world. The science of behavior comes to see that it requires a phenomenology of perception. It thus achieves through its own immanent critique (with a bit of hermeneutic aid from Merleau-Ponty) a phenomenological reduction, leading us back to the perceived world as the cradle of science. Far from being the antithesis of behaviorism, then, there is a sense in which phenomenology arises in part as the culmination of a mature behaviorism. Indeed, in the lectures mentioned cited, Merleau-Ponty speaks of his reinterpretation of the notion of behavior as "admitting the legitimacy of the behaviorist enterprise" and even as "fulfil[ling] the initial project proposed by Watsonian behaviorism" (Merleau-Ponty, 2010, p. 343). Just as Husserl had provocatively claimed that phenomenologists are the true positivists (1982, p. 39), Merleau-Ponty might well have claimed that phenomenologists are the true behaviorists.

In the discussion above of Husserl's Cartesian approach to the phenomenological reduction in *Ideas I*, I highlighted two consequences of that understanding of the reduction that are definitive for the Discontinuity Thesis. Let us consider how the reduction proposed in *The Structure of Behavior* compares on these points.

- (1) *The subject matter of phenomenology.* Merleau-Ponty believes that the path into phenomenology through behaviorism safeguards against the risk of an intellectualist misconstrual of the subject matter of phenomenology (cf. Merleau-Ponty, 1963, p. 127). *Ideas I's* Cartesian approach to the reduction understands consciousness as something over against the natural world, something to be defined in opposition to it. It suggests that the existence of consciousness is absolute, while that of the external world is merely relative to and dependent on consciousness. By contrast, by beginning with simpler manifestations of behavior and working up to more abstract, symbolic modes of intelligence, Merleau-Ponty's approach in *The Structure of Behavior* presents consciousness as essentially interwoven with more basic structures of vital embodiment that undergird it. This is an important insight to win at the outset of phenomenology and one that protects against the detached spectator understanding of consciousness that a more Cartesian approach tends to suggest. For Merleau-Ponty, any higher-order processes of reasoning and conscious experience will always be informed by the bodily processes and structures that support them and out of which they emerge. The subject matter of phenomenology admittedly thereby loses some of its purity and self-transparency, a point to which I will return in the following section.¹⁷
- (2) *The relationship between phenomenology and the natural sciences.* On the Merleau-Pontian approach, phenomenology is no longer defined in opposition to the empirical sciences, but precisely emerges through and out of them as the maturation of the sciences themselves. Sounding the Hegelian theme that runs throughout *The Structure of Behavior*, we might say that phenomenology is the blossom contained in the bud of classically conceived, objectivist natural science. From Merleau-Ponty's perspective, the tendency to cast the question of naturalization as a matter of "rendering continuous" the ontologies or methods of phenomenology and the natural sciences presupposes an originally mistaken statement of the problematic. It is only through a misunderstanding of their proper relation to one another that the natural sciences and phenomenology are viewed as initially discontinuous to begin with. Further, the natural sciences are not simply a ladder to be kicked away once we have ascended to phenomenology. On the contrary, central phenomenological notions that are required at the outset of phenomenology— notions such as behavior, structure, and the phenomenal field—retain much of the transformed content they developed through natural scientific inquiry when they are taken up into phenomenology. There is a "truth of naturalism" (1963, 201ff.; cf. Merleau-Ponty, 1964c, p. 164) that is retained in phenomenology from the outset.

3 | NATURALIZING PHENOMENOLOGY

3.1 | Phenomenological psychology and transcendental phenomenology

How do Husserl's Cartesian approach to the reduction and Merleau-Ponty's approach through the sciences of behavior stand with respect to contemporary discussions of the naturalization of phenomenology?

Before addressing this question, let me first respond to a potential concern that a reader might have at this point. Merleau-Ponty's unique path of entry into phenomenology in *The Structure of Behavior* emerges out of a dialectical critique of behaviorist psychology. Contemporary psychology is not obviously behaviorist in the same way that the Watsonian and Skinnerian psychologies were. What, then, is the use of a "phenomenological reduction" that proceeds through a historical manifestation of psychology that has been superseded? The answer is that Merleau-Ponty's critique does not only apply to behaviorist approaches to the mind, but to any *objectivist* approach to mind. That is, it should apply to any approach to the mind that attempts to account for cognition and behavior without recognizing original categories of experience. *Mutatis mutandis*, then, it should also apply to the objectivist accounts of mind offered in the classical cognitivist approaches to the mind that succeeded behaviorism at the beginning of the second half of the 20th century. Like behaviorism before them, these approaches generally had little regard for the experiencing subject and the way in which its active construal of its situation may play a role in the final story of

cognition and behavior. It is no coincidence, then, that in the contemporary revival of phenomenology in embodied cognitive science, we find a comparable critical telling of the history of objectivist classical cognitive science presented as motivation for the turn to a phenomenological cognitive science (e.g., Thompson, 2007; Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991). With a bit of tweaking, these accounts could be presented in something very much like the dialectical version of the preceding intellectual history that Merleau-Ponty offers in *The Structure of Behavior*.

I suggested above that many contemporary approaches to the naturalization issue implicitly or explicitly embrace the Discontinuity Thesis: Pure, transcendental consciousness is a distinct ontological region and subject matter for phenomenology, and the methods and insights of the natural sciences are radically excluded at the outset of phenomenology. The Husserlian heritage of *Ideas I* is explicitly embraced by the editors of the *Naturalizing Phenomenology* volume (Petitot et al., 1999), who turn to *Ideas I* for a concise introduction to Husserlian phenomenology. With it, they embrace Husserl's commitment to the study of consciousness as a "region of being" of "pure lived experiences" (26ff.) and to the phenomenological reduction in its Cartesian presentation (pp. 26, 73). From the Merleau-Pontian perspective I have outlined, this initial, anti-naturalist ontology is an unpromising starting point for any attempt to reconcile phenomenology and natural science. But this is not the only concern phenomenologists can raise against the proposal advanced by Petitot et al. Considering further concerns will help us get into focus what is unique about Merleau-Ponty's approach in *The Structure of Behavior*.

Petitot et al. are well aware of Husserl's strident anti-naturalism where the study of consciousness is concerned. In order to make their case that his position here has been surpassed by the development of the sciences, they point to recent advances in mathematics that challenge Husserl's insistence that inexact essences cannot be mathematized (1999, 41ff.). Zahavi (2004, 2013) replies that by focusing on this *scientific* concern about the naturalization of consciousness, Petitot et al. are missing Husserl's deeper, *transcendental-philosophical* reasons for opposing naturalism. What is peculiar about consciousness for Husserl is that it is not merely another part of the natural world. Rather, it is that by means of which a natural world is constituted to begin with. To view consciousness transcendently, as "the place in which the world can reveal and articulate itself" (Zahavi, 2004, p. 336) is to embrace an entirely different attitude and perspective from the one that characterizes the natural sciences. To attempt to naturalize this dimension of phenomenology is to be deeply confused about it, for understood in this way, it is not clear that consciousness is of the order of "natural" phenomena at all. To simply ignore this point is to fail to do justice to a central and unique feature of the Husserlian enterprise.

This reminder about the transcendental dimension of phenomenology need not preclude the possibility of all positive exchange between phenomenology and the empirical sciences of mind, however. It is here that many phenomenologists who hold such transcendental reservations but who are otherwise enthusiastic about the "mutual enlightenment" between phenomenology and cognitive science have drawn on Husserl's distinction, especially in texts from his middle and later period, between *transcendental phenomenology* and *phenomenological psychology* (e.g., Gallagher, 2012; Zahavi, 2004, 2013, 2017). The latter is a regional ontology of consciousness viewed as a part of the natural world. On Husserl's view, phenomenological psychology would perform eidetic analyses of its subject matter which in turn provide a foundation for the empirical sciences of mind. Since such analyses, according to Husserl, can be performed within the natural attitude, there could be room for a genuine back and forth between empirical cognitive science and phenomenological psychology, with each standing to learn from the other. Transcendental phenomenology, by contrast, is "a much more ambitious global enterprise" that investigates consciousness insofar as it is taken as "the condition of possibility for meaning, truth, validity, and appearance" (Zahavi, 2004, p. 339).

Merleau-Ponty's approach to phenomenology upsets this convenient division of labor both within phenomenology and vis-à-vis psychology. Bifurcating between the properly transcendental-philosophical dimension of phenomenology and a regional ontology of the psyche could lead one to think that it is only the latter that would be of interest to the empirical sciences of the mind. But as we have seen, according to the historical development of the science of behavior that Merleau-Ponty charts in *The Structure of Behavior* and related texts, it is science itself that comes to see the need for an understanding of the way an organism constitutes its behavioral milieu in order to understand behavior. The objectivist study of behavior eventually confronts us with "relations that cannot be

assimilated into relations between objects" (2010, p. 356), thus forcing us to "reconstitute the animal's universe in all its originality" (1964a, p. 84). And these are not questions for a phenomenological psychology that remains in the natural attitude. They are questions that concern the transcendental dimension of phenomenology. Hence, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty writes that "the transcendental attitude is already implied in the psychologist's descriptions" and that "a psychology is always led toward the problem of the constitution of the world" (2012, p. 60). An empirical psychology that remains within the natural attitude and treats consciousness as another object in the world is inadequate. To take consciousness this way is not only to neglect the broader transcendental–philosophical ambition of phenomenology. It is to positively mischaracterize the subject matter of psychology, too.

But if the empirical study of mind needs transcendental phenomenology, the converse is also true. Merleau-Ponty will go so far as to state that "Philosophical awareness is possible only on the basis of science" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964b, p. 36). There is a "truth of naturalism"—to borrow the title from the penultimate section of *The Structure of Behavior*—brought to light through phenomenology's genesis out of the empirical sciences discussed above. This truth positively characterizes the subject matter of phenomenology and we miss it if we take the short route into phenomenology through the Cartesian reduction. Midway through *The Structure of Behavior*, Merleau-Ponty pauses to wonder whether the "long inductive research" he has pursued thus far in the book is really necessary in order to produce the insight that an objectivist science cannot explain behavior. He asks,

Does not the cogito teach us once and for all that we would have no knowledge of any thing if we did not first have a knowledge of our thinking and that even the escape into the world and the resolution to ignore interiority or to never leave things, which is the essential feature of behaviorism, cannot be formulated without being transformed into consciousness and without presupposing existence for-itself (pour soi)? Thus behavior is constituted of relations; that is, it is conceptualized and not in-itself (en soi), as is every other object moreover; this is what reflection would have shown us. (1963, p. 127)

I take Merleau-Ponty's remarks here to apply also to the Cartesian way into the phenomenological reduction. A pure reflection on the cogito such as this would, it seems, also achieve the insight, won in *The Structure of Behavior* through empirically oriented dialectical critique, that an objectivist science of behavior is missing the dimension of subjectivity that informs behavior. But, Merleau-Ponty continues, something would be missing from this approach, something that could potentially lead to a positive mischaracterization of consciousness:

But by following this short route [i.e., the Cartesian way into the reduction – HK¹⁸] we would have missed the essential feature of the phenomenon, the paradox which is constitutive of it: behavior is not a thing, but neither is it an idea. It is not the envelope of a pure consciousness and, as the witness of behavior, I am not a pure consciousness. (1963, p. 127)

For Merleau-Ponty, the subject matter of phenomenology, as we saw above, is not the pure consciousness thematized in *Ideas I*, separable from body and external world. The focus on behavior, and the careful scrutiny of the empirical attempt to reduce it to objectivity, reveals to us that consciousness is essentially conditioned by its inherence in a body and its activity in a world.¹⁹

3.2 | Phenomenological naturalism and the redefinition of transcendental philosophy

In my exegesis of Husserl, I have focused on his Cartesian way into the phenomenological reduction. The rationale for this is that, as I argued at the beginning of this section in discussion of the Petitot et al. *Naturalizing Phenomenology* volume, this approach has directly informed the very statement of the naturalization problematic and the underlying Discontinuity Thesis. However, in later texts, Husserl would propose other ways of gaining entry into the transcendental phenomenological reduction, including a route that runs through psychology (Husserl, 1970, 191ff.; 1968, 302ff.). It is perhaps best to understand Merleau-Ponty's footnote from *The Structure of Behavior* alluding to the

1 “phenomenological reduction in the sense of the late Husserl” as referring to this version of the phenomenological
2 reduction. In his 1928 Amsterdam Lectures on phenomenology and psychology, Husserl even grants that there are
3 “great propaedeutic advantages” to this “empirical” route into phenomenology (Hua IX, p. 347). Merleau-Ponty can
4 be seen not only as appropriating and making good on this suggestion. He also adds a stronger claim. In addition
5 to the merely propaedeutic advantage, there is in fact a different *substantive* field disclosed to a phenomenology that
6 germinates in empirical science.²⁰

Q5

7
8 In his lectures on Phenomenology and Human Sciences from 1950 to 1952, Merleau-Ponty credits Husserl with
9 detecting the “secret connections” between and “reciprocal envelopment” of phenomenological and empirical
10 research in a way more radical than Heidegger or Scheler (2010, p. 337). But whereas Husserl tended to emphasize
11 the “parallels” between empirical psychology and phenomenology (e.g., Husserl, 1977, pp. 32, 49, 131), leaning
12 towards the strategy discussed above of holding apart transcendental phenomenology and phenomenological
13 psychology, Merleau-Ponty spoke of a genuine *convergence* of the two approaches (2010, p. 337). Merleau-Ponty
14 was not naïve to the antagonism that prevailed between certain phenomenologists and psychologists in his own time.
15 “Never,” he writes,

16
17 *have philosophy and psychology been further from understanding one another than now: the*
18 *phenomenologists do not understand that the psychologists are sometimes in agreement with them, and*
19 *the psychologists believe that phenomenology represents a return to introspection. Given such a constant*
20 *lack of understanding, the task of bringing these positions together might never be complete. (2010, p. 317)*

21
22 And yet, he allowed himself to imagine a dialectical development leading to a future state of understanding—perhaps
23 one we can only ever asymptotically approach—for which “there will be no difference between psychology and
24 philosophy” (2010, p. 7).

25 This liberal approach to incorporating empirical research with properly phenomenological–transcendental philos-
26 ophy, which characterizes Merleau-Ponty’s entire body of work, suggests an alternative view to the naturalization
27 issue. Above we considered one approach to naturalizing phenomenology suggested by Zahavi, that of holding apart
28 the empirical and transcendental aspects of phenomenology. But another approach discussed by Zahavi characterizes
29 Merleau-Ponty’s ambition much better: Throughout his work, Merleau-Ponty seeks to understand the relationship
30 between naturalism and the transcendental and the place of mind in nature. And this ontological task, for
31 Merleau-Ponty, is not a future project for a mature phenomenology to address down the road. Rather, it is posed
32 at the outset, either as going hand-in-hand with the inauguration of phenomenology or perhaps even as belonging
33 to its prolegomena. *The Structure of Behavior*—which, as I have argued, can be read as a sort of extended phenome-
34 nological reduction and introduction to phenomenology—*begins* by setting the goal of “understand[ing] the relations
35 of consciousness and nature” (1963, p. 3). And it concludes with the call to “define transcendental philosophy anew in
36 such a way as to integrate with it the very phenomenon of the real” (p. 224).

37 For Merleau-Ponty, then, phenomenological psychology can only fulfill its task when it is taken up in light of the
38 broader questions of the sense of naturalism and the transcendental and the relationship between consciousness and
39 nature. The question of naturalizing phenomenology is always ontological at the same time as it is methodological
40 and epistemological. For if it is true that for the clarification and evaluation of the project of naturalizing
41 phenomenology, everything depends on what one means by “naturalization,” it is also true that what one means
42 by naturalization depends on an implicit or explicit conception of nature. The “mutual enlightenment” of
43 phenomenology and the cognitive sciences may well remain fractious and fitful until it is placed on the solid ground
44 of a *phenomenological naturalism* that reconciles the current tensions between phenomenological and naturalist
45 intuitions through a coherent account of the phenomenal nature that is the cradle of both phenomenology and nat-
46 ural science. There is a “truth of naturalism” to be retained, but it will only come to light as such once transcendental
47 philosophy, too, has been redefined. This task continues to stand before phenomenology today (cf. Morris, 2018).

48 Clearly, an entrance into phenomenology that moves through and includes the natural sciences from the outset
49 problematizes more classical claims of phenomenology to be a presuppositionless study of consciousness generating

apodictic, a priori knowledge. Throughout his career, Merleau-Ponty pursued *The Structure of Behavior's* call to redefine transcendental philosophy by way of an ontological interrogation of the relation of mind and nature without ever arriving at his own final position on the issue. Already in that first work, he urges that the “celebrated distinction between a *a priori* form and empirical content” is problematized with this transformation of transcendental philosophy (1963, p. 171). In the Introduction to *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty introduces the phenomenal field, the domain to be explored by phenomenology. But he adds an important methodological qualification at the end of a long footnote: “With regard to the fundamental question, which is the question of the transcendental attitude opposite the natural attitude, this will only be possible to resolve in the final part of this study where the transcendental signification of time will be examined” (2012, p. 510). However, notwithstanding a few scattered remarks (e.g., 488f., p. 493), Merleau-Ponty does not explicitly return to deliver the promised clarification.²¹

Nonetheless, in light of both the existential and historical–hermeneutical considerations discussed in this paper, we can say that the natural attitude can never be left behind for good and that one can never fully enter into a purely transcendental–phenomenological attitude. These challenges need not indicate the demise of phenomenology, but rather its maturation, the emergence of a phenomenology at once more self-critical and at the same time more capable of engaging the empirical sciences on a common ground. Merleau-Ponty sums up the situation in “The Philosopher and His Shadow,” a late essay on Husserl in which he returns to the question of the reduction and the relation of the natural and phenomenological–transcendental attitudes:

The truth is that the relationships between the natural and the transcendental attitudes are not simple, are not side by side or sequential [...]. There is a preparation for phenomenology in the natural attitude. It is the natural attitude which, by reiterating its own procedures, tumbles into [bascule dans] phenomenology. It is the natural attitude itself which goes beyond itself in phenomenology—and so it does not go beyond itself. Reciprocally, the transcendental attitude is still and in spite of everything “natural” (natürlich). There is a truth of the natural attitude—there is even a secondary, derivative truth of naturalism. (1964c, p. 164 - translation modified)

In light of Merleau-Ponty's attempt, from his first work to his last, to reconceive the transcendental, it is only natural that doubts arise as to whether or not his conception of transcendental phenomenology remains “transcendental” in any commonly recognizable sense. Indeed, Inkipin (2017) has recently argued that Merleau-Ponty fails to answer the “transcendental challenge” of providing a method for justifying transcendental claims, where these are understood to be different in kind from empirical claims. By contrast, Husserl, on Inkipin's reading, remains an archetypal transcendental philosopher and does answer the transcendental challenge.

Though it lies beyond the scope of the present paper to address this question in detail, I will content myself here to highlight that (1) there is a recognizable, albeit somewhat weakened sense of “transcendental” in which Merleau-Ponty's work is consistently transcendental and (2) that this is characterization of the transcendental that applies as much to Husserl's thought as to Merleau-Ponty's. Merleau-Ponty's thought is transcendental in that it is a form of *correlationsim* (cf. Zahavi, 2017), recognizing an internal relationship of necessary interdependence between subjectivity and objectivity. As Merleau-Ponty writes in *Phenomenology of Perception*,

The world is inseparable from the subject, but from a subject who is nothing but a project of the world; and the subject is inseparable from the world, but from a world that it itself projects. The subject is being-in-the-world and the world remains 'subjective,' since its texture and its articulations are sketched out by the subject's movement of transcendence. (2012, p. 454)

This view of transcendental philosophy may stand in contrast to the notion of an independent, absolute transcendental consciousness advocated by Husserl in works such as *Ideas I*, one of the primary works upon which Inkipin relies when developing his interpretation of Husserl. However, as recent readers of Husserl's unpublished works have noted, Husserl's considered position on these topics moves his conception of the transcendental much closer to that of Merleau-Ponty.²² Indeed, Merleau-Ponty may have been inspired by these late, unpublished Husserlian texts in

developing his own views on the reduction, the nature of consciousness, and the relationship between the natural and the transcendental.

4 | THE ESSENTIALLY INCOMPLETE REDUCTION REVISITED: PHENOMENOLOGY AND SCIENCE AS OPEN HISTORICAL AND INTERSUBJECTIVE HORIZONS

I would like to conclude with a comment on the phenomenological reduction understood as an essentially incomplete procedure intimately intertwined with the development of empirical science as an open intersubjective and historical horizon. Merleau-Ponty's insight that phenomenology emerges out of the natural sciences helps us to recognize the extent to which phenomenology is a historically situated endeavor. Far from arising out of the "perfect freedom"²³ of an individual phenomenologist, it arises at a particular moment in our intersubjective intellectual history in light of the motivations and exigencies of that historical period. As Merleau-Ponty put it in discussion shortly after the publication of *Phenomenology of Perception*, "Phenomenology could never have come about before all the other philosophical efforts of the rationalist tradition, nor prior to the construction of science" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964b, p. 29). But this emergence of phenomenology only comes about once "having passed a certain point in its development, science ceases to hypostasize itself; it leads us back to the structures of the perceived world and somehow recovers them."²⁴

This insight, however, implies a new dimension to the essential incompleteness of the reduction introduced above. We saw that Merleau-Ponty regards the reduction as incomplete owing to the essentially existential, embodied, and envired situation of the phenomenologist who performs it: For beings like us, pervasively constituted by our being-in-the-world, there can be no possibility of ever completely "suspending" or "putting out of action" the background of pre-thetic intentional relations that bind us to the world. However, we have now seen another respect in which the phenomenological reduction is essentially incomplete. This has to do with the fact that phenomenology itself, as continuous with empirical inquiry, is a historically conditioned, intersubjective research program. As such, it is constituted and constrained by the temporal horizons of any such collective pursuit of knowledge. Let us call this a *hermeneutic* and historical incompleteness of the reduction to go alongside the previously discussed existential-embodied incompleteness.

Joseph Rouse expands on this aspect of the historical situatedness of scientific research programs in a discussion of Merleau-Ponty's existential conception of science:

The sense of a theory cannot be confined to its explicit content any more than could the sense of ordinary utterances. Theories have temporal horizons, which are integral to what they say about the world. They cannot be adequately understood except as the outcome of other theories proposed and investigated, and as the progenitor of further research as yet only partially anticipated. [...] The sense of current theories thus has yet to be fully disclosed; they are laden with potential. (Rouse, 1986, 259f.)

What holds for a scientific theory holds for phenomenology as well, once it is viewed as inescapably continuous with natural scientific inquiry. The sense of the phenomenological enterprise, its central concepts and ambitions, is drawn from the context out of which it emerges. But the very meanings of the terms out of which one would construct theories are always subject to a principled indeterminacy. The contexts of inquiry, of discovery and justification, are forever in flux, dependent upon past efforts that in themselves are still "laden with potential" and subject to further determination. Further, the terms used to articulate theories are always contingent and vague. This vagueness and contingency will rest in part on a historically contingent network of underdetermined empirical examples, idealized illustrations, and conceptual constructs that one uses to give content and intuitive concretion to the theory in question.

From a certain classical phenomenological perspective, one might object that a phenomenological reduction that is in multiple respects essentially incomplete and that fails to completely suspend the general thesis is not worthy of

the name “phenomenological reduction” at all. Here, we can only reply that, though an incomplete reduction may not satisfy the methodological demands of a certain early stage of phenomenology, it is a transformation within phenomenology that unfolds from phenomenology’s fidelity to the phenomena themselves. This commitment is more fundamental than any particular methodological procedure of phenomenology, and, indeed, phenomenological method must modify itself accordingly in order to better accommodate the phenomena it seeks to investigate. In the ensuing development of phenomenology, and specifically, in elaborating a phenomenology of phenomenology itself, we come to see that the phenomenologist does not possess the “perfect freedom” required for the complete suspension of the general thesis. Moreover, the analogy in *Ideas I* comparing the general thesis to individual thetic acts directed towards individual objects failed to appreciate the essential depth and non-epistemic character of our most basic relation of being-in-the-world. Such insights do not amount to a forfeiture of phenomenology, but rather are evidence of how much it matures from *Ideas I*, to Husserl’s late research manuscripts, to *The Structure of Behavior* and beyond. In a late working note, Merleau-Ponty returns to the theme of the incompleteness of the reduction announced in *Phenomenology of Perception*:

[T]he passage from philosophy to the absolute, to the transcendental field, [...] is by definition progressive, incomplete. This is to be understood not as an imperfection [...] but as a philosophical theme: the incompleteness of the reduction [...] is not an obstacle to the reduction, it is the reduction itself.²⁵

To conclude, saying that phenomenology is continuous with empirical inquiry and that the reduction is essentially incomplete amounts to saying that the temporal and epistemic horizons of phenomenology itself are forever open and in flux. This emphasis on the intermingling of phenomenological and empirical inquiry adds a new inflection to Husserl’s view that phenomenology is an infinite task.²⁶ How could it be otherwise when the horizons of phenomenology are themselves delineated by the things themselves, phenomena, to which phenomenology returns time and time again, with their essentially vague, ambiguous, and open horizons?

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Robert Duffy, Matt Bower, the participants at the YHouse workshop “Opening Up Phenomenology” (held at Fordham University on 13 February 2018), and an anonymous reviewer for *European Journal of Philosophy* for helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.

ENDNOTES

¹For present purposes, it is not essential to distinguish between the moment of phenomenological inquiry that brackets the general thesis (the *epoché*) and the moment that analyzes the correlational interdependency between subjectivity and that which it experiences (the phenomenological reduction). Indeed, if the Merleau-Pontian account I advance in this paper is correct, it is through deepening our analyses of correlational interdependency (phenomenological reduction) that we come to see the essential incompleteness of the attempt to suspend the natural attitude and bracket the external world (*epoché*). Hence, I will use the two terms interchangeably. For a clear statement of the distinction between these “two closely linked elements of a philosophical reflection,” see Gallagher and Zahavi (2012, 25ff.).

²Husserl (1982, 33ff.). It is important to emphasize that the *Ideas I* presentation of the *epoché* is far from representing Husserl’s considered view. I choose this text to illustrate the Discontinuity Thesis because of its tremendous influence in the reception of phenomenology. This influence continues in the present discussion of the naturalization of phenomenology. The editors of the widely read *Naturalizing Phenomenology* volume (Petitot et al., 1999) selected *Ideas I* as illustrative of phenomenology, including the statement of the Discontinuity Thesis and the construal of the naturalization problematic that arises from it. Later in this paper, I will have occasion to discuss the extent to which Husserl’s later thought (and his self-critique of *Ideas I*’s Cartesian reduction) provides resources for an alternative conception of the reduction and the relationship between phenomenological and empirical inquiry that arguably brings him closer to the Merleau-Pontian position I will develop.

³For recent examples, see, for example, Carman (2009), Dreyfus (1990), and Searle (2005). Merleau-Ponty’s critiques in *The Structure of Behavior* and *Phenomenology of Perception* of an intellectualist transcendental philosophy can also be read as directed against the position of *Ideas I*. Husserl scholarship has done well to show that such an ontology need not follow from Husserl’s views on the reduction (Zahavi, 2017). But the constant recurrence of such interpretations certainly

testifies to the fact that the Cartesian way of presenting the reduction and subject matter of phenomenology in *Ideas I* exposes itself to these concerns, as Husserl himself would later come to see (cf, for example, Husserl, 1959, p. 432). Kern (2018) argues that in later work, Husserl was reoriented from the intellectualist, Platonic phenomenology of possibility expressed in the *Ideas* towards a phenomenology rooted in actuality. Correspondingly, his conception of the reduction transformed as well. Indeed, in *Crisis*, he acknowledges points similar to those Merleau-Ponty will make concerning the impossibility of a complete reduction (1970, 148ff.). Luft (2012) argues that in Husserl's late work, the "reduction" comes to stand in as "shorthand for the meaning of Husserl's entire phenomenology in its mature stage" (p. 5).

⁴Again, Husserl's own self-critique on these points is illuminating. See his comments on the disadvantage of the Cartesian way to the reduction in §43 of *Crisis* (Husserl, 1970, 154f.).

⁵For discussion, see Smith (2005).

⁶For example, Husserl (1959, p. 432; 1970, 154f.).

⁷See Merleau-Ponty (2012, p. lxxvii). For discussion, see Bernet (1993), Depraz (2002), Heinämaa (2002), Inkipin (2017), Pollard (2018), Smith (2005), and Weiss (1983).

⁸Merleau-Ponty (2012, p. 483—translation modified).

⁹This is a point that is, on one defensible interpretation, corroborated by Husserl's own developing views on the reduction. See again Husserl (1959, p. 432; 1970, 154f.) and Zahavi (2002, 2017).

¹⁰See the extensive references in the previous section and the concluding section of this paper for a further comment. Understanding the reduction as essentially incomplete by no means entails a decisive break with previous phenomenology, and it is arguably anticipated in Husserl's later reflections on alternative ways to the reduction.

¹¹I will have occasion to comment briefly on this point later in this paper.

¹²For example, an (incomplete) objectivist description of a Necker cube drawing would treat it as 12 line segments in a two-dimensional plane, intersecting and joining at their ends in various groupings, with various relations of parallelism and perpendicularity. By contrast, a non-objectivist account will recognize that these line segments are perceived by the subject as a three-dimensional cube whose front and back can be reversed through a gestalt switch.

¹³Romdenh-Romluc (2010) makes a similar claim about *Phenomenology of Perception*.

¹⁴This Hegelian rendition of the history of the science of behavior is at times somewhat tendentious, neglecting ongoing disagreements between practitioners in the field both historical and contemporary to *The Structure of Behavior*. Important issues are raised here that are beyond the scope of the present effort. In particular, in focusing on what Merleau-Ponty portrays as the immanent development of the issues, I am leaving somewhat underdeveloped the role of critical debates between Gestaltists and behaviorists on these issues and the question of how to understand Merleau-Ponty's appropriation of the Gestalt concept of *form*. In brief, Merleau-Ponty argues in *The Structure of Behavior* that the Gestaltists have failed to grasp the full anti-realist consequence of their critique of behaviorism. I omit a further elaboration of this topic as I am primarily interested in presenting Merleau-Ponty's account of the relationship between phenomenology and the sciences more generally rather than the full back-and-forth of the historical debates leading up to it. For Merleau-Ponty's appropriation of Gestalt psychology, see Harrison (2016), Romdenh-Romluc (2018), and Sheredos (2017).

¹⁵Thompson (2007) has taken up this aspect of Merleau-Ponty's thought, emphasizing the need for empathy, in the sense given to it in the phenomenological tradition, for the sciences of life and mind (p. 165).

¹⁶Merleau-Ponty (1963, p. 220). The footnote to this passage in *The Structure of Behavior* includes the cryptic reference to the phenomenological reduction mentioned above (249fn59).

¹⁷A fuller appreciation of this point would require a thorough study of the metaphysics of forms advanced in *The Structure of Behavior* (see Sheredos, 2017), and how this relational, hylomorphic ontology of consciousness differs from consciousness understood as a *Seinsregion* as Husserl had proposed in *Ideas I*.

¹⁸Further evidence that Merleau-Ponty is here referring to the Cartesian way into the reduction comes from the fact that Husserl himself, when discussing the disadvantage of the Cartesian way vis-à-vis the path proposed in the *Crisis*, also refers to the Cartesian way of *Ideas I* as a "much shorter way to the transcendental epoché," an entry achieved "in one leap," as it were (Husserl, 1970, p. 155).

¹⁹It is a point of some interpretive contention to what extent Husserl came to recognize the transcendental significance of embodiment and intersubjectivity to any subjectivity whatsoever. See Zahavi (2001, 2003).

²⁰Again, Husserl perhaps anticipates this critique when he writes in *Crisis* (Husserl, 1970, p. 155) that the disadvantage of the Cartesian way into the reduction is that it reveals an ego "apparently empty of content." Compare Husserl (2002, 122ff.).

²¹In this regard, his early magnum opus recapitulates Heidegger's. In the Introduction to *Being and Time*, Heidegger delivers a "preliminary conception [Vorbegriff]" (Heidegger, 1962, 49ff.) of phenomenology, claiming that the complete presentation of the phenomenological method would later follow concrete phenomenological analyses and the decisive transformation

of our understanding of temporality and being. Once these were achieved, the preliminary concept of phenomenology was to be superseded by the “idea of phenomenology” (p. 408) in Division Three of Part I of *Being and Time*—which, of course, Heidegger would never complete.

²²See, for example, Zahavi (2002, 2017). As Zahavi argues, key phenomenological notions such as intentionality and constitution must be understood within the context of this correlationist understanding of the transcendental: “Ultimately, the process of constitution must be conceived as a process involving several intertwined transcendental constituents. Subjectivity and world are both necessary, and cannot be understood in separation from each other. To ask what one is without the other is like asking what a background is in itself, independently of the foreground” (Zahavi, 2017, p. 111).

²³Husserl (1982, p. 58) appeals to our “vollkommenen Freiheit.” Variations of this phrasing occur numerous times in §§31–32 of *Ideas I*.

²⁴Merleau-Ponty (1964b, p. 37). Merleau-Ponty believes this to be true not only of the sciences of life and mind, but also for physics, as can be seen from his discussions of the phenomenological significance of the theory of relativity (Merleau-Ponty, 1964b, p. 37) and quantum mechanics (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, p. 109; see also 1969, p. 15, 22f.). As Merleau-Ponty argues in *The Structure of Behavior*, even the structures invoked in physics are originally borrowed from the perceived world (1963, 137ff.).

²⁵Merleau-Ponty, (1969, p. 178). On the compatibility of Merleau-Ponty's and the late Husserl's understanding of the reduction, see Zahavi (2002). See also Luft (2012), arguing that in Husserl's late work, the term “reduction” comes to stand “as shorthand for the meaning of Husserl's entire phenomenology in its mature stage,” the infinite task of phenomenological philosophy.

²⁶See especially “The Vienna Lecture” (Husserl, 1970, pp. 269–299).

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How to cite this article: Kee H. Phenomenological reduction in Merleau-Ponty's *The Structure of Behavior*: An alternative approach to the naturalization of phenomenology. *Eur J Philos*. 2019;1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejop.12452>