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Introduction

In this paper I discuss the stances of Thomas Reid and Maurice Merleau-Ponty towards some relationships holding between the activities of perception, gesture and speech. Taking as a starting-point the simple observation that we *see* gestures and *hear* speech, I draw out connections between the two philosophers regarding the directedness of intentionality, a direct account of perception, the rejection of a representational theory of mind, and a tight theoretical linking between the perception of things in the world, and the comprehension of others, a linking that Reid effects through a theory of signs. There are also, of course, dis-connections, most importantly over the basic metaphysics of mind and body: Reid is usually taken to be a substance dualist, whereas one of Merleau-Ponty's primary goals is to dissolve mind-body dualism via a two-pronged appeal to the essential embodiment of mind on the one hand, and an experiencing body-subject on the other. Further, Merleau-Ponty is very concerned with what Heidegger was first to call 'being-in-the-world': a theme quite alien to Reid's epistemological project.

Intentionality as an Innate Principle

I start with the notion of intentionality, used to characterize our mental attitudes as being 'about', or perhaps better, 'directed at' some entity (using the word broadly so to include things, events and propositions). My visual perceiving of the desk in front of me is directed at the desk; my remembering of this morning's breakfast is directed at a meal taken earlier today; and my current imagining of a centaur as a creature half-man, half-horse is directed at a mythical creature. It is clear from the last of these examples that our mental attitudes may be about, or directed at, things which do not exist in the ordinary, uncomplicated way in which I take it that individual entities

such as the things in this room exist, or in which my breakfast existed this morning, and yet, there does seem to be something in common to the way that I think about desks, breakfasts and centaurs. It is this something in common, this structure of intentionality, which Franz Brentano identified as being *the* defining feature of all mental phenomena in his *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (Leipzig, 1874). In so doing he was reviving a Scholastic term derived from the Latin *intendo* meaning to aim or point at, yet as Taylor Carman notes, Brentano gives us 'a curious hybrid of two very different conceptions of intentionality': that is, of directedness and containment.[1] As we will see, it is the first of these conceptions which connect Reid and Merleau-Ponty.

Reid, of course, was thinking and writing a century before Brentano, and didn't speak in terms of intentionality. However, Keith Lehrer identifies in Reid's thought a 'principle of intentionality',[2] and quotes from Reid's *Essays on the Intellectual Powers*: 'I take it for granted, that, in most operations of the mind, there must be an object distinct from the operation itself. I cannot see, without seeing something. To see without having any object of sight is absurd. I cannot remember, without remembering something.'[3] This points us in two directions which require further elaboration: Reid's innate principles, of which the principle of intentionality is but one of many; and the idea of perception, of seeing, as a 'success notion'. It is the second of these which will prove most productive in connection with Merleau-Ponty, but I will first begin with Reid's innate principles, as they play a foundational role in his 'common sense' philosophy, and I return to them below in my discussion of Reid's ideas on gesture and language.

Reid maintains that there are certain innate principles, possessed by all human beings, which do not require and indeed are not open to, proof; rather, they 'have such evidence that every man of common understanding readily assents to them, and finds it absolutely necessary to conduct his actions and opinions by them'.[4] These principles are discoverable not by reason but by intuition.[5] This not to say, however, that we cannot at first be mistaken about them, but once our judgement is clear of any prejudice we will realize that we cannot doubt them. These principles, whose denial Reid claims leads to

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[1] Taylor Carman, *Merleau-Ponty* (London, 2008), 33.
[2] Keith Lehrer, *Thomas Reid* (London, 1989), 88.
[3] Thomas Reid, *Inquiry and Essays* (Indianapolis, 1983), 156.
[4] Reid, *Inquiry and Essays*, 151.
[5] Ibid., 152.

absurdity, include what Lehrer refers to as the metaprinciple,[6] a principle given among Reid's 'First Principles of Contingent Truths': '*That the natural faculties, by which we distinguish truth from error, are not fallacious*'.[7]

The faculties that Reid refers to include those of Perception, Consciousness and Reason, and this metaprinciple is a prime demonstration of Reid's methodology, in which he demands that we trust the evidence given to us by our external senses just as strongly as we trust the evidence granted us by consciousness of the workings of our minds, or indeed in the results of reason. Reid's view sets Descartes' methodological doubt on its head, and resonates strongly with what Merleau-Ponty would later call our 'perceptual faith' in *The Visible and the Invisible* (Paris, 1964). Reid argues that it is our lack of trust in perception which has led previous philosophers, including Hume, into the absurdity of denying the real existence of the external world. His own position of common sense metaphysical realism is clearly expressed in what I shall refer to as his 'principle of existence': '*That those things do really exist which we distinctly perceive by our senses, and are what we perceive them to be.*'[8]

These principles, of the existence of the external world, and of the existence of an intentional object, operate together in the case of perception. As noted above, they imply that perception is a success notion, that perceiving only counts as perceiving when the consciousness that I am perceiving something is coupled with the actual existence of the thing that I am seeing. Further to these principles, Reid claims that the factors involved in the act of perception are (i) the external object and its qualities; (ii) the sensation(s) caused in us by this object; (iii) a mental conception of this object, and (iv) an 'irresistible conviction' in the existence of the object.[9] An implication of this is that the operation of conception (which includes the imagination), must be distinguished from perception, and indeed Reid does this by making perception and conception separate faculties of the mind. The distinguishing feature of conception is that it 'is not employed solely about things which have existence';[10] in other words, its intentional object does not have to exist. It is worth emphasizing that for Reid a conception is not a mental *object*, but an *operation* of the mind directed at an intentional object.

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[6] Keith Lehrer, *Thomas Reid* (London, 1989), 162.

[7] Reid, *Inquiry and Essays*, 275.

[8] Ibid., 272.

[9] Lehrer, *Thomas Reid*, 23.

[10] Reid, *Inquiry and Essays*, 225.

Intentionality and Phenomenology

I return here to intentionality, and move to the twentieth-century movement of phenomenology and its founder, Edmund Husserl. Husserl had attended Brentano's lectures in Vienna and was impressed by his claim that intentionality was the mark of the mental: indeed, the slogan 'all consciousness is consciousness of something' became the rallying cry of the phenomenologists as they set out to describe the essential structures of experience from the first person perspective. According to the 'West Coast' reading put forward by philosophers such as Dagfinn Føllesdal and Hubert Dreyfus, in Husserl's thought the concept of intentionality has more to do with containment than directedness, with the focus moving away from the intentional object to the intentional *content*, or noema of a thought; meaning *how* the object is given to us, or how we might try to put it into words.[11] Furthermore, Husserl deliberately refuses to consider the connection between thought and world: as part of his phenomenological reduction the existence of the object of thought is 'bracketed', and he focuses on what he sees as the essential intentional structure of consciousness itself.

Husserl, therefore, is a philosopher whose version of intentionality may be said to have little in common with that of Reid. However, in Merleau-Ponty we see a rejection of the phenomenological reduction ('The most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction'[12]), and a turning towards a more literal reading of the directedness of intentionality, at least as regards perception. In part this is due to his focus on the body, and his insistence that we cannot understand perception if we take it as a purely mental phenomenon. For Merleau-Ponty, a phenomenological description of perception must include both the passive aspects of sense experience and the active aspects of the motor skills which are called on to optimize my 'grip' on my world. So, for example, the muscles of my eyes, head, and neck are in a constant play of contraction and relaxation as I look around the room or read a text, even though I am usually unaware of them and indeed may have no conscious control over them. Merleau-Ponty sometimes refers to this aspect of perception as the *body schema*: meaning by this the dynamic set of preconscious and subpersonal bodily attitudes which both constrains and enables our conscious and intentional mental attitudes

[11] Tim Crane, 'Intentional Objects', *Ratio*, 14 (2001),336–349.

[12] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London, 2002; 1945), xv.

towards things and events in our world.[13] Shaun Gallagher suggests the example of reading a text in bad light, which may lead to me squinting and developing a headache: even before becoming aware of my discomfort I may start to find the text difficult or boring. Only later awareness of my discomfort and subsequent reflection reveals how my bodily response to the dimness of the light influenced my conscious intentional beliefs about the text. It is the body schema, then, which controls our literal orientation in the world, our directedness towards particular objects or to the world more generally, and as such Merleau-Ponty characterizes it as a bodily intentionality.

This bodily intentionality neither belongs to the body characterized, in a Cartesian or Reidian way, as extension; nor to the mind characterized as a thinking thing. For part of Merleau-Ponty's criticism of Cartesian dualism is that it gives us no metaphysical room to describe my experience of my body, and indeed his *Phenomenology of Perception* is in large part a phenomenology of what he calls *le corps propre* (literally: one's own body). *Le corps propre* does not simply feature in our experience as an *object* of our awareness: rather it conditions and structures our very awareness of the world, and it is this partially anonymous 'body-subject' which is the subject of perception.[14] The body-subject is an attempt to return to a pretheoretical grasp of the body; it is 'my point of view upon the world'.[15] Carman describes this bodily point of view as the middle ground between disembodied intellect and objective body, not just lying between them, but also providing their *ground*, 'for it is what they depend upon and presuppose'.[16]

According to Merleau-Ponty, then, the intentionality of perception essentially depends upon the directedness of the bodily attitudes involved. The fact that perception cannot be divorced from its embodiment in a corporeal agent, and its embeddedness in a world, means that for Merleau-Ponty too perception is a success notion.[17] He writes that '[p]erception is precisely that kind of act in which there can be no question of setting the act itself apart from the end to which it is directed … If I see an ash-tray, *in the full sense of the word see*, there must be an ash-tray there … To see is to see something.'[18] It

[13] Shaun Gallagher, 'Body Schema and Intentionality' in José Luis Bermúdez, Anthony Marcel and Naomi Eilan (eds), *The Body and the Self* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995), 233–4.

[14] J. N. Mohanty, 'Intentionality' in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (eds), *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism* (Oxford, 2009), 75.

[15] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 81.

[16] Carman, *Merleau-Ponty*, 78.

[17] Ibid., 34.

[18] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 435–6.

is striking how Merleau-Ponty expresses his conclusion about perception in almost exactly the same terms as Reid, terms which allow us to characterize them both as direct realists: they both deny that in our experience there are 'representations' mediating between the acts or operations of the mind and its independently existing objects.

Representationalism

Reid was motivated by a desire to refute David Hume's scepticism about the external world, which he considered an absurdity. In Reid's interpretation of Hume, what we are immediately presented with in the mind are impressions and ideas. This so-called 'Ideal Theory' is usually taken to entail an indirect account of perception: our perception of an external object is always mediated by some kind of representation in the mind. Hume's argument for this in his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* runs as follows: when I see a table, I must have an idea before my mind, because when I move away from the table my perception of it – its appearance – changes, though the qualities of the 'real' table are assumed to stay the same.[19]

Hume thought, and Reid thought he was right to think, that if the Ideal theory were true we could never get beyond the representations to the objects themselves, and thus we are condemned to scepticism. As Lehrer points out, Reid realized that no amount of introspection or 'attentive reflection' revealed to him these representations, that they were 'a mere fiction of philosophers'.[20] Furthermore, Reid has a reply for Hume's argument which he bases on the difference between apparent and real magnitude: 'Let us suppose, for a moment, that it is the real table we see: Must not this real table seem to diminish as we remove farther from it? It is demonstrable that it must. How then can this apparent diminution be an argument that it is not the real table?'[21]

Here I interpret Reid as realizing that our perception of a thing is necessarily perspectival, is a 'view from somewhere': and also that this is no reason to distrust the senses. And this is very close to Merleau-Ponty's insistence that the perspectival nature of perception is not a *fault* in perception, as a Descartes or Hume might maintain, but is part of its essential character;

[19] David Hume, *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals* (Oxford, 1975), 152.

[20] Lehrer, *Thomas Reid*, 14.

[21] Reid, *Inquiry and Essays*, 178–9.

though Merleau-Ponty goes further, of course, in insisting that this perspectival nature is a consequence of embodiment.

Merleau-Ponty's own rejection of representationalism is based on a careful phenomenological description of our perceptual experience, leading to a radical, and currently very influential view of perception, in which it is recognized that the activity of our senses is thoroughly bound up with bodily movement. He gives the example of a skilled typist who is typing out a manuscript, and emphasizes that it is wrong to consider this 'as if the perception of a letter written on paper aroused the representation of the same letter which in turn aroused the representation of the movement needed to strike it on the machine.'[22] To do this is to ignore the role of the practical 'knowledge in the hands'[23] possessed by the typist. For the possessor of this kind of knowledge or know-how, looking at the manuscript with the intention to type it out elicits patterns of movements which are performed in a 'manual space' without any requirement for explicit representations. Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty's rejection of representationalism is an expression of his thesis of the 'primacy of perception': that is, that perception is not merely the means by which perceivers gain information about the world, but should rather be viewed 'as a mode of being *in* the world, an existential condition of the very possibility of representations – imaginative, semantic, or otherwise cognitive – intervening *between* ourselves and the world.'[24]

In summary, Merleau-Ponty gives us a descriptive account rather than an explanatory theory of perception, in which perception is characterized as a success notion, essentially perspectival and embodied, intimately related to movement and taking place in a world. Rather than straightforwardly an act of the mind, it is the 'background from which all acts stand out'.[25]

Direct Perception and 'Direct Comprehension'

Thus far I have focused on the activity of perception in its traditional application to *things*, loosely speaking: in its application to the sights, sounds, smells and so on of the objects we encounter in the world around us. But of course perception also enables us to see gestures and to hear speech,

[22] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 166.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Carman, *Merleau-Ponty*, 37.
[25] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, xi.

and thus it is both natural and revealing that Reid introduces his thoughts about language in his *Inquiry into the Human Mind* in the section titled 'Of Hearing', for this implicitly brings his theory of language within his theory of sense-perception. Reid writes that 'One of the noblest purposes of sound undoubtedly is language, without which mankind would hardly be able to attain any degree of improvement above the brutes.'[26] An explicit theoretical link between language and perception is provided by his theory of signs, and indeed Reid goes on to tell us that 'By language I understand all those signs which mankind use in order to communicate to others their thoughts and intentions, their purposes and desires.'[27]

Artificial and Natural Signs

I will shortly explain how signs feature in perception, but first I present Reid's distinction between 'artificial' and 'natural' signs, and the concomitant distinction between artificial and natural languages. Once again he relies heavily on the idea of innate principles: artificial signs are those whose meaning is attached to them 'by compact or agreement'; whereas natural signs are those 'which every man understands by the principles of his nature'. And, in a careful way which permits the ordinary language we speak to each other to be both natural and artificial at once, he specifies that 'Language, so far as it consists of artificial signs, may be called *artificial*; so far as it consists of natural signs, I call it *natural*.'[28]

This distinction is used in Reid's investigation into the origins of language, in an argument designed to demonstrate that the existence of artificial language relies on the prior existence of natural language, and that the possession of artificial language is unique to human beings: in a familiar thought, it is the possession of words which distinguishes man from other living creatures. Reid's argument is ingenious, and is premised on the idea mentioned above, that the connection between words and their meanings is arbitrary: that meaning is affixed to words by a process of agreement among the members of a linguistic community. To forestall the obvious objection, let us read him charitably as only asserting a requirement of tacit agreement. The ingenious part lies in his further claim that only human beings possess the

[26] Reid, *Inquiry and Essays*, 32.
[27] Ibid., 33.
[28] Ibid.

innate principles of 'contracts and covenants', and of the 'moral obligation to perform them'.[29] These natural principles, which lie within our moral faculty of Conscience, are said to be expressed in natural signs. It is only through our expression of these principles that language-users would ever agree on the particular meanings to be attached to particular words.

Reid goes on to offer a three-fold taxonomy of the natural signs, the 'elements of the natural language of mankind': these are the 'modulations of the voice, gestures, and features' which express our basic thoughts, emotions, and desires.[30] Here he seems to be on more conventional ground – we find this idea of a natural language in Rousseau, Condillac and other Enlightenment thinkers – and it is surely inspired in part by the explorers' tales circulating in Europe at this period of the expansion of empire, and colonization overseas. It's not surprising to read, then, that through the use of their natural language 'two savages who have no common artificial language, can converse together; can communicate their thoughts in some tolerable manner; can ask and refuse, affirm and deny, threaten and supplicate'.[31] From the vantage point of our own era I note the irony involved: it would presumably have been rather more common for the colonizing parties to have had to call upon a natural language in order to threaten the so-called savages. However, from a philosophical-historical perspective it is more important to note the echo of the contemporary cult of the 'noble savage' in Reid's praise of the use of natural language and his decrying of its loss in 'civilized life'. Natural signs, when combined with artificial signs, are said to give 'force and energy to language',[32] and to make it more expressive and persuasive. The perfection of language as a whole, which is found in the performances of the actor and the orator, rather than in a written text, therefore includes natural language. Indeed, Reid puts this point in a way which is rather suggestive for Merleau-Ponty's gestural theory of speech: 'Where speech is natural, it will be an exercise, not of the voice and lungs only, but of all the muscles of the body'.[33]

Briefly mentioned here in Reid's *Inquiry* and further elaborated in his *Lectures on the Fine Arts*, is the idea of an aesthetic realm lying between the realms of the body and the mind. An avenue which I reluctantly leave unexplored, but would clearly have bearing upon the issue of mind/body dualism, is a

[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid., 34.
[33] Ibid.

further connection between Reid and Merleau-Ponty based upon their shared expressivist theory of the arts.

Theory of Natural Signs

But to come back to Reid's tight theoretical connection between perception and language, this is found a little further on in the *Inquiry*, shortly after he summarizes his account of touch: '[B]y an original principle of our constitution, a certain sensation of touch both suggests to the mind the conception of hardness, and creates the belief of it: or, in other words, that this sensation is a natural sign of hardness.'[34] Reid goes on to draw parallels between the natural signs of a natural language that we have been discussing, sensations themselves as the natural signs of the qualities of external bodies, and furthermore the regularities of nature studied by natural philosophers and known more commonly as causes and effects (for example, that smoke is a sign of fire). In all these phenomena, the connection between sign and that which is signified is established by nature, but whereas this connection is 'discovered only by experience'[35] in the case of natural philosophy, in the case of perception and natural language the connection is 'discovered to us by a natural principle, without reasoning or experience'.[36] So, for example, even a new-born baby can be frightened by an expression of anger, and calmed by smiles, because it possesses innate principles of mind that allow it to recognize that such signs stand for certain emotions.

Reid further explores this parallel between natural language and perception when he comes to consider the case of language as a source of knowledge. As Lehrer puts it, 'Nature has, in both cases, established the connection between the sign and the thing signified and has taught us the interpretation of the signs. The signs of natural language and original perception "have the same signification in all climates, and in all nations; and the skill of interpreting them is not acquired, but innate".'[37] Lehrer points out out this use of innate principles by Reid gives him a response to two pressing problems posed by the Ideal Theory of the mind, the problem of the existence of the external world, and the problem of other minds. In the case of natural language, it is

[34] Ibid., 41.
[35] Ibid., 42.
[36] Ibid., 42–3.
[37] Lehrer, *Thomas Reid*, 74.

of course the problem of other minds that is solved: 'In the case of other minds, we have a conception of mental operations from our consciousness of them. The problem is not that of obtaining a conception of mental operations of others. It is to determine what behaviour signifies those operations in that the operations of others are 'invisible' to us.'[38]

Lehrer's reading of Reid's response here suggests that Reid is arguing by analogy, which would open him up to the powerful critique mounted by Wittgenstein in his argument against the possibility of a private language.[39] However, Reid himself addresses the issue further in his *Essays on the Intellectual Powers*, where he states two further first principles relating to other minds: '*That there is life and intelligence in our fellow-men with whom we converse*',[40] and '*That certain features of the countenance, sounds of the voice, and gestures of the body, indicate certain thoughts and dispositions of mind.*'[41] The first of these is said to be one of those irresistible and unshakeable convictions, and is on a par with what I earlier called Reid's 'principle of existence' which applies to all the objects of perception. Just as we have an unshakeable belief in the existence of the everyday objects around us, so do we have a belief that our fellow-men are more than automata, that they are living, thinking beings. The second principle is a restatement of the idea that certain perceptible characteristics of a human being immediately give rise in us to conceptions of the thoughts or emotions which they signify. Here, Reid goes on to reveal his mind-body dualism very clearly, in an argument designed to show that these conceptions are indeed innate:

> When we see the sign, and see the thing signified always conjoined with it, experience may be the instructor, and teach us how that sign is to be interpreted. But how shall experience instruct us when we see the sign only, when the thing signified is invisible? … thoughts and passions of the mind, as well as the mind itself, are invisible, and therefore their connection with any sensible sign cannot be first discovered by experience; there must be some earlier source of this knowledge. Nature seems to have given men a faculty of sense, by which this connection is perceived. And the operation of this sense is very analogous to that of the external senses.[42]

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[38] Ibid., 45.
[39] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford, 1958), §258.
[40] Reid, *Inquiry and Essays*, 277–8.
[41] Ibid., 279.
[42] Ibid., 280.

This turns on the truth of the premise that our thoughts and emotions in themselves, are invisible to others, and incidentally allows Reid to distinguish the way we learn about the mental attitudes of others from the way in which we carry out natural science, that is in the establishing of scientific laws through the observation of regularities in nature. For if our emotions themselves were visible, then they too could be learnt about through experience.

In summary: Reid's account of the mind is a faculty theory which places great importance on perception and a common sense view of the world of things and people which we experience. His account of the mind includes a set of innate principles, including one of intentionality, and includes arguments against the representational, or Ideal Theory of mind. Reid's theory of signs unites his accounts of perception and natural language, and suggests to me that we might call the comprehension of gestures and other natural signs displayed by fellow human beings 'direct comprehension', by analogy with his theory of direct perception. Finally, Reid's metaphysics of mind and body is a dualist one.

It is this final point which brings us to a fundamental disagreement between Reid and Merleau-Ponty: although Reid rejects the Ideal Theory of mind, he retains the Cartesian premise that mind and body are essentially different. At the beginning of the *Essays on the Intellectual Powers*, Reid writes: 'The essence both of body and mind is unknown to us. We know certain properties of the first, and certain operations of the last, and by these only we can define or describe them. We define body to be that which is extended, solid, moveable, divisible. In like manner, we define mind to be that which thinks.'[43] Here is not the place to examine how Reid might have responded to the problem of mind-body interaction, except to note that his defence would certainly have drawn upon the innate sign-signified connections about which I have already spoken. I consider this to be a rather unsatisfactory tactic, as it simply leaves us with something we can investigate no further.

For Merleau-Ponty on the other hand, a rejection of the dichotomy between mind and body is at the heart of his entire project, and we have seen him starting this project by placing primary importance on a perceiving and moving body-subject capable of carrying out skilful practical activities, and characterized by a bodily intentionality. Following Carman, I have previously referred to it as the middle ground between objective body and disembodied intellect. This body-subject is then the necessary background for our conscious

[43] Ibid., 132–3.

intentional mental attitudes, which may also involve the use of language and the exercise of our capacities for judgement and reasoning. And it is to Merleau-Ponty's account of gesture and speech found in the *Phenomenology of Perception* that I now turn, an account which in treating these activities as expressive and meaningful movements allows us to see them as a natural development from other practical skills exhibited by the body-subject.

The Worlds of Gesture and Speech

I come now to the way in which Merleau-Ponty connects his accounts of perception and language. He hopes to provide us with an detailed phenomenology of gesture and speech, in which he will not only aim to take us back to a pretheoretical description of how things seem to us, but through an examination of the structures of experience will claim to provide an account of the bodily preconditions of this experience.

In Merleau-Ponty, I suggest, the key to the connection is to be found in his claim that the body itself is the 'mediator of a world',[44] or is 'our general medium for having a world'.[45] The world of perception is the world of perceptible objects, this much is obvious, but I should point out immediately that for Merleau-Ponty this world is not the objective, or scientifically-describable world in which photons and pheromones carry information to a body which can be captured in its entirety in a web of quantum mechanical wave functions. Neither is it the philosopher's world of primary and secondary qualities or the sensations resulting from such qualities. Rather, this world is the irreducible Husserlian *Lebenswelt*, the subjective human world of everyday objects which have meaning or value for us, as human agents. In this world things appear differently to me depending on my past experience. To a child who has been burnt fire *looks* different to a child who has not. This is not to say that these objects and this world cannot be characterized scientifically, but it is to say that for the experiencing subject such a reduction cannot ever satisfactorily characterize the experience of living in it. This world, then, is the world of the perceiving and moving body-subject.

Naturally, the *Lebenswelt* is also a world of 'others', and Merleau-Ponty seeks to describe how we interact and communicate with them. In the following extract from the *Phenomenology of Perception*, we see once again

[44] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 167.

[45] Ibid., 169.

how Merleau-Ponty rejects any notion of conscious translation from inner thought to outer behaviour and back, and in the 'immediate' reading of a gesture we also have a connection with what I called above Reid's direct comprehension:

> When I motion my friend to come nearer, my intention is not a thought prepared within me and I do not perceive the signal in my body. I beckon across the world, I beckon over there, where my friend is; the distance between us, his consent or refusal are immediately read in my gesture; there is not a perception followed by a movement, for both form a system which varies as a whole. If, for example, realizing that I am not going to be obeyed, I vary my gesture, we have here, not two distinct acts of consciousness. What happens is that I see my partner's unwillingness, and my gesture of impatience emerges from this situation without any intervening thought.[46]

In this exchange between friends, just as in the typist's interaction with the typewriter, we see how perception and movement form a unified system, and in addition it is clear that because of this perception and gesture can also work together; after all, gesture necessarily involves movement. Merleau-Ponty further claims that our gestures are *intentional* movements, displaying the bodily intentionality possessed by the body subject, and that communication is achieved when a dynamic reciprocity is established between the intentions of the one party and the behaviour of the other. Communication *is* an act of understanding, but this act is not one carried out by some pure calculating intellect: rather, it is a 'bodily understanding' taking place in the body-subject. He writes, 'The communication or comprehension of gestures comes about through the reciprocity of my intentions and the gestures of others, of my gestures and intentions discernible in the conduct of other people. It is as if the other person's intention inhabited my body and mine his. The gesture which I witness outlines an intentional object. This object is genuinely present and fully comprehended when the powers of my body adjust themselves to it and overlap it.'[47]

These passages help to demonstrate the connection between Reid and Merleau-Ponty: in Merleau-Ponty's statement that 'I see my partner's unwillingness' we recognize a description of a common sense account of

[46] Ibid., 127.
[47] Ibid., 215–16.

our awareness of the emotional states of another, and a spelling out of an exchange couched in natural language, which Reid would surely have accepted. However, they also reveal the differences between the two philosophers, in Merleau-Ponty's continual emphasis of the importance of the role of the body in our intentional states. This is both a deliberate undermining of the kind of dualist talk common even amongst professed materialists, and an attempt to recover what our bodies are for us as experiencing and embodied agents acting in a world. As Carman puts it, 'experience is simply not the sort of thing that has sharp metaphysical boundaries, either inside or outside the material world'.[48]

The message is clear enough: in the perceptible world we can communicate through gestures. Yet as pointed out above, Merleau-Ponty wishes to go further, to give a phenomenology of speech. For gestures tend to be limited to the expression of relatively simple thoughts and emotions, and it is our verbal speech which implies rationality. Hence even if a dualist might accept that our passions are partly bodily, the rational intellect has often been considered something pure and disembodied, only contingently attached to a body. If Merleau-Ponty can find a means of insisting that even the exercise of our rational intellect is essentially embodied, then he comes another step closer towards making plausible his rejection of mind-body (or consciousness-matter) dualism.

In going beyond gestures to speech, Merleau-Ponty offers a wealth of phenomenological evidence, and there is space here only to sketch out a single line of approach. This amounts, roughly speaking, to an argument by analogy, an analogy between a perceptible world of objects and a linguistic world of meaningful words. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty frequently refers to the 'gestural meaning' of a word, by which he seems to mean something like the *total* meaning of a word, in which its conceptual and emotional meanings are intermingled. And in this we see an echo of Reid's privileging of natural language. According to Merleau-Ponty, a word is not only a sign standing for something else, it is also literally the expression of a thought which must take place in the spatio-temporal world of perception. If a gesture is a patterned movement of the body, so also is a word. But whereas the gesture 'outlines an intentional object' in the perceptible world, a word functions in the linguistic world. Replying to the objection that whereas the perceptible world is in some sense 'given', the linguistic world must be acquired, Merleau-Ponty claims that

[48] Carman, *Merleau-Ponty*, 91.

the linguistic world is provided by our cultural background.[49] In answer to the objection that this is all just metaphorical, that meanings have no real existence, Merleau-Ponty develops a parallel with an expressivist theory of aesthetic meaning, and claims that just as the meaning of a piece of music has no existence beyond its sounding notes, so the meanings of thought have no existence beyond inner or outer speech.[50]

Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty asserts that for the language user the linguistic world exists just as surely as the perceptible world. The utterance of a word is simply a possible use of my body and I know where to find words as I know how to locate a part of my body: which is to say in the practical employment of the body schema. In an echo of Heidegger's focus on our practical and concernful dealings with 'ready-to-hand' objects in the world, Merleau-Ponty writes: 'I reach back for the word as my hand reaches towards the part of my body which is being pricked; the word has a certain location in my linguistic world, and is part of my equipment. I have only one means of representing it, which is uttering it, just as the artist has only one means of representing the work on which he is engaged: by doing it'.[51] Here we find also another statement of Merleau-Ponty's extension of an expressivist theory of aesthetic meaning to linguistic meaning, and a development of his rejection of a representational theory of mind.

To summarize Merleau-Ponty's position on gesture and speech, I quote a passage to reinforce the message that it is *being-in-the-world* with which he is chiefly concerned, in language just as in perception. It is our experience of existing in a world that has meaning for *us* that he seeks to describe, and the way in which our behaviour, whether verbal or non-verbal, involves both the interpretation and the creation of this meaning.

> What then does language express, if it does not express thoughts? It presents or rather it *is* the subject's taking up of a position in the world of his meanings. The term 'world' here is not a manner of speaking: it means that the 'mental' or cultural life borrows its structures from natural life and that the thinking subject must have its basis in the body-subject. The phonetic 'gesture' brings about, both for the speaking subject and for his hearers, a certain structural co-ordination of experience, a certain modulation of existence, exactly as a pattern

[49] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 216–17.
[50] Ibid., 212–13.
[51] Ibid., 210.

> of my bodily behaviour endows the objects around me with a certain significance both for me and for others.[52]

Conclusion

I have begun to explore the two worlds of Reid and Merleau-Ponty, and their two worlds of perception and comprehension. I have suggested that the two thinkers are united in their conception of intentionality as *directedness*; as proponents of a direct account of perception as a success notion and as essentially perspectival; in their rejection of a representational theory of mind; and in a concern for an accurate description of our conscious experience. Here, Reid's arguments against Hume are still of vital relevance to the contemporary debate regarding the representational nature of mind. Both thinkers too seek to bring together perception and comprehension, though Reid's system is structured around a Cartesian mind-body dualism, and I suggest that Merleau-Ponty's description of gesture and speech as based in a body-subject's moving and sensing relationship with its world offers us not only a richer and thoroughly *existential* phenomenology but also a more detailed account of the relationship holding between these activities.

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[52] Ibid., 225; translation corrected.