

Instructor: Dr. Ted Toadvine ([toadvine@uoregon.edu](mailto:toadvine@uoregon.edu))  
Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:00 - 3:00 and by appointment, PLC 319  
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### COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will explore Merleau-Ponty's conception of the natural world and the human place within it as this is developed in his three major theoretical works – *The Structure of Behavior*, *Phenomenology of Perception*, and *The Visible and the Invisible* – as well as in his late lecture courses on nature. Topics explored will include the “structures” of matter, life, and mind; the perceptual relationship between the human body and the natural world; the philosophical implications of modern biology; and the ontology of flesh. Our goal will be to understand the maturation of Merleau-Ponty's conception of nature across his writings. We will also concern ourselves throughout with the question of philosophical access to nature: what do we mean by “nature,” and from what philosophical vantage point can it be described? Is a “phenomenology” of nature possible, and can Merleau-Ponty's work serve as a guide in this endeavor?

### REQUIRED TEXTS

Students are expected to bring the assigned texts to every class. Those who have some facility in French are encouraged to consult the original texts as well as the available English translations.

### **Texts by Merleau-Ponty:**

SB = *The Structure of Behavior* (Duquesne, 1983); *La structure du comportement* (PUF, 1942).  
PP = *Phenomenology of Perception* (Routledge, 2nd ed., 2002); *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Gallimard, 1945).  
VI = *The Visible and the Invisible* (Northwestern, 1968); *Le visible et l'invisible* (Gallimard, 1964).  
N = *Nature* (Northwestern, 2003); *La nature* (Seuil, 1995).

### **Recommended secondary material:**

David Abram, “Merleau-Ponty and the Voice of the Earth,” *Environmental Ethics* 10, no. 2 (Summer 1988): 101-120.  
----- “Maurice Merleau-Ponty and the Participatory Nature of Perception,” in Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 44-72.  
John Bannon, “The Structure of Behavior,” Chapter 1 of *The Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty* (Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967), 27-57.  
Renaud Barbaras, “Merleau-Ponty and Nature,” *Research in Phenomenology* 31 (2001): 22-38.  
Elizabeth Behnke, “From Merleau-Ponty's Concept of Nature to an Interspecies Practice of Peace,” in *Animal Others*, ed. H. Peter Steeves (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), 93-116.  
Rudolf Bernet, “The Subject in Nature: Reflections on Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*.” Trans. R. P. Buckley and S. Spileers. In *Merleau-Ponty in Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Patrick Burke and Jan Van Der Veken (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1993), 53-68.  
Mauro Carbone, “Nature: Variations on the Theme,” in Carbone, *The Thinking of the Sensible: Merleau-Ponty's A-Philosophy* (Evanston: Northwestern, 2004), 28-38.  
Mikel Dufrenne, “The A Priori and the Philosophy of Nature,” trans. Garth Gillan. *Philosophy Today* 14, no. 3 (1970): 201-212.  
Fred Evans, “Chaosmos and Merleau-Ponty's View of Nature,” *Chiasmi International* 2 (2000): 63-81.  
Theodore F. Geraets, “Merleau-Ponty's Conception of Nature.” In *Soul and Body in Husserlian Phenomenology: Man and Nature*, *Analecta Husserliana* 16, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1983), 301-312.  
Galen Johnson, “The Problem of Origins: In the Timber Yard, Under the Sea,” *Chiasmi International* 2 (2000): 249-257.  
Monika Langer, “Merleau-Ponty and Deep Ecology.” In *Ontology and Alterity in Merleau-Ponty*, ed. Galen Johnson and Michael Smith (Evanston: Northwestern, 1990), 115-129.  
John Llewelyn, “A Footnote in the History of Φύσις,” *Research in Phenomenology* 31 (2001): 39-61.  
Don E. Marietta, Jr., “Back to Earth with Reflection and Ecology.” In *Eco-Phenomenology*, ed. Charles Brown and Ted Toadvine (Albany: SUNY, 2003), 121-35.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

	<u>Undergraduate</u>	<u>Graduate</u>
1. participation & attendance	10%	10%
2. two short essay, 4-5 pages each	50 %	
3. final essay, 7-9 pages	40 %	
4. term paper prospectus, 3-4 pages & annotated bibliography		25%
5. final term paper, 10-12 pages		65%

- **Class Participation/Attendance:** You are expected to participate actively in this class, which includes attending class, reading all assigned material prior to class, and participating productively and professionally in class discussions. Missing **three** classes *for any reason* will result in a full grade reduction. An additional full grade reduction will be made for each additional missed class after the third. You will be expected to document your presence in class by signing a daily roll sheet. Three late arrivals for class will count as one absence. Discussion is crucial to this class, and I will do my best to make you feel at ease and welcome to contribute to the class conversation. Please feel free to contribute any question, objection, or other thought about the topic at hand when such occurs to you. Although no relevant remark is out of bounds in this class, you will be expected to treat all members of the class respectfully. The quality and quantity of your participation in the class discussion will be evaluated in assigning 10% of your final grade. Obviously, absences from class will negatively affect your participation grade.
- **Short and Final Essays (undergraduates only):** Two short essays (4-5 pages with standard margins and fonts) are due, in 3rd and 6th weeks. The final essay (7-9 pages) is due on the date assigned for the final examination. Assignments for these essays will be distributed in class and posted on Blackboard at least one week in advance of the due date (accessible from the UO homepage or at <https://blackboard.uoregon.edu/>). All written work must be typed, stapled, double-spaced, and proof-read. Essays will lose one letter grade for each calendar day that they are late. The short essays are each worth 25% of your final grade, and the final essay is worth 40%.
- **Final Term Paper (graduate students only):** Graduate students will complete a final 10-12 page term paper. Final papers will explore a specific independently-chosen topic or theme from the course in detail and must include (a) examination of at least five scholarly secondary sources in addition to primary texts, and (b) the development of your own original position or critical response. You will submit, in the 8th week, a prospectus of your final paper, which will be a 3-4 page detailed description of the topic and outline of your proposed argument. The prospectus must also include an annotated bibliography of the secondary texts you have consulted. Your prospectus must receive my approval in order for your final term paper to be accepted. The prospectus and bibliography will be worth 25% of your final grade, and the term paper itself will be worth 65%. Term papers must be stapled, double-spaced, and proof-read. Papers are due on the date scheduled for the final exam, and extensions will be granted only in the case of genuine, documented emergencies. Late papers will lose one letter grade for each calendar day that they are late.

## PLEASE NOTE

- **Academic Dishonesty:** Academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated. Please review the university policy available at <http://www.uoregon.edu/~conduct/sai.htm> for an explanation of what constitutes academic dishonesty and how it will be dealt with in this course.
- **Disability Accommodations:** If you have a documented disability, please let me know as soon as possible so that appropriate accommodations can be made.

TENTATIVE ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE (any changes to these assignments will be announced in class)

Week 1: 9/27, 9/29	Introduction to the course and Merleau-Ponty Thursday: attend lectures at the Merleau-Ponty Circle Conference (Fir Room, EMU)
Week 2: 10/4, 10/6	The structures of behavior: matter, life, and mind (SB 3-5, 93-184)
Week 3: 10/11, 10/13	Soul and body: the problem of perception (SB 185-224) <b>Undergrads: First short essay due Thursday, 10/13</b>
Week 4: 10/18	What is phenomenology? (PP vii-xxiv, 60-74)
Week 5: 10/25, 10/27	The problem of the body (PP 77-111, 171-232)
Week 6: 11/1, 11/3	The world as perceived: sensibility, the thing, and the natural world (PP 235-82, 348-402) <b>Undergrads: Second short essay due Thursday, 11/3</b>
Week 7: 11/8, 11/10	Others and the Human World (PP 403-425): guest lecture by Beata Stawarska, 11/8 The concept of nature; Modern biology and animal behavior (N 3-4, 139-99)
Week 8: 11/15, 11/17	Animal body and human body (N 203-84) <b>Grads: Term paper prospectus due Thursday, 11/17</b>
Week 9: 11/22, 11/24	Perceptual faith and Interrogation (VI 3-27, 105-29)
Week 10: 11/29, 12/1	Chiasm and flesh (VI 105-162), and the following working notes: 201-206: Perceiving subject..., untitled, The problem of analysis, Gestalt; 213-14: Perception and language; 215-20: untitled, The visible and the invisible, The 'senses'..., Depth, untitled; 223-24: 'World'; 248-51: Flesh of the world...; 259-62: Flesh-Mind, Visible-seer
Monday, 12/5, 5 pm.	<b>Final Essays/Term Papers Due</b> , Philosophy office, 3rd floor of PLC