philosophies

MDPI

Article

The Primal Scream: Re-Reading the "Temporality" Chapter of *Phenomenology of Perception* in the Context of Negative Philosophy

Keith Whitmoyer

Philosophy and Religious Studies, Pace University, One Pace Plaza, New York, NY 10038, USA; kwhitmoyer@pace.edu

Abstract: Merleau-Ponty's specific theory of negation has received surprisingly little attention within the literature. Given his engagement with Sartre, not to mention Hegel and Marx, one would think that this concept and its surrounding issues and problems would occupy a more central place within various readings and interpretations. This essay attempts to give some indications of how to think about a Merleau-Pontian theory of negativity specifically. By re-reading the "Temporality" chapter from *Phenomenology of Perception* in dialogue with later writings and lectures, I propose a theory of "integration" and "disintegration" of temporal passage in place of a dialectic of pure being and nothingness. This theory organizes various themes in Merleau-Ponty's work, including sense-genesis and his references to the "scream of light".

Keywords: phenomenology; Merleau-Ponty; *Phenomenology of Perception*; temporality; negativity

Academic Editor: Glen A. Mazis

Received: 30 September 2024
Revised: 25 November 2024
Accepted: 9 December 2024
Published: 18 January 2025

Citation: Whitmoyer, K. The Primal Scream: Re-Reading the "Temporality" Chapter of *Phenomenology of Perception* in the Context of Negative Philosophy. *Philosophies* **2025**, *10*, 12. https://doi.org/10.3390/philosophies10010012

1. Introduction

In the sixty years since the publication of *Le visible and l'invisible*, much ink has been spilled discussing the relationship between this last, unfinished work, an "introduction" as Lefort says ([1] p. xxii), and Merleau-Ponty's most complete, "definitive" work, *Phenomenology of Perception*, published nineteen years earlier[1]. The frameworks for interpretation and theses have been diverse: there is Lefort's emphasis on Merleau-Ponty's role and status as a "classical" phenomenologist and the problematic emphasis on subjectivity that seems to plague the earlier work. As he says, "Positivism was not yet overcome when the *Phenomenology of Perception* showed that the sensible field cannot be reduced to the objective, as empiricism, as well as its intellectualist compensation, supposed; the positivist preconception of being recurs even in the philosophy of negativity[2], which, indeed, is its radical vindication" ([1] p. xliv). Lefort, quite naturally, seems to represent the most thorough account of how *The Visible and the Invisible* attempts to overcome the shortcomings of the earlier work. There is a related line of commentary, beginning in 1946, organized around the question of whether *Phenomenology of Perception* adequately overcame the vestiges of the idealism that it claimed to oppose. Jean Beaufret posed this very question at the Société française de philosophie address, "The Primacy of Perception", when he states that Merleau-Ponty failed to abandon "subjectivity and the vocabulary of subjective idealism as, beginning with Husserl, Heidegger had done" ([2] p. 42). Barbaras has more recently echoed this idealist worry when he says, "guided by the presupposition of consciousness, *Phenomenology of Perception* remains profoundly dependent on the intellectualism it denounces" ([3] p. 14). The earlier work is seen as overly situated within the context

of Husserlian idealism, that of the *Ideen*, for example, and for this reason, *Phenomenology of Perception* is seen as insufficiently radical—at least when compared to *The Visible and the Invisible*.

As I have argued elsewhere [4], I think we lose focus on important aspects of *Phenomenology of Perception* by placing too much emphasis on an alleged "break" between the earlier and later work. This essay takes up some of those arguments and suggests that there is more continuity between the earlier and later work and that the differences have more to do with available concepts and language more so than any decisive shift in direction. To this end, I will read Merleau-Ponty's theory of time, as expressed in the *Phenomenology*, through the lens of what he will call "negative philosophy" in the later works. Rather than an explicit account of a Merleau-Pontian theory of negativity, dialectic, or *surdialectique*, I would like to explore how the anti-Eleatic ontology that he will eventually begin to call "negative philosophy" conforms to the theory of time offered in the earlier work. Negative philosophy not only rejects the purity of being and nothingness definitive of Eleatism but also the premise on which it is based: that "being is; non-being is not", along with the claim that the former is the only path available for thought. In this respect, I want to read Merleau-Ponty within a context much broader than his immediate predecessors, one that allows us to think about this work beyond the realism–idealism duality and which might allow us to further contextualize the origins of realism and idealism as different ways of reconciling the proposition "being is" with our lived-experience. In accordance with this, I will frame this discussion not only with reference to Parmenides but to Aristotle and Augustine as well, as heirs of the concept of "positive time" that Merleau-Ponty will critique.

In line with this broadened framework for reading *Phenomenology of Perception*, I also want to indicate that the stakes of this text are much more significant than a philosophy of embodiment, a situated cognition, a critique of his contemporary psychologies, or even a renewed way of understanding experience. As Simone de Beauvoir said in her 1945 review of *Phenomenology of Perception*,

> It is therefore of extreme importance . . . to give back to man this childish audacity that years of verbal submission [have] taken away: the audacity to say: 'I am here.' This is why *The Phenomenology of Perception* by Maurice Merleau-Ponty is not only a remarkable specialist work but a book that is of interest to the whole of man and to every man; the human condition is at stake in this book ([5] p. 164).

I think Beauvoir's claim that the human condition is at stake in this earlier work is not an exaggeration. The theory of time that will later become negative philosophy, in the end, does more than touch on classical issues like past and future, being, and the meaning of thought; precisely because it addresses these, it also communicates something about what it means to live—not only to be biologically alive but to assume our thrownness into the world and carry it into the precarity of the future, "the human condition". I do not think it is a coincidence, therefore, that the theory of time offered in *Phenomenology of Perception*, a theory that will eventually make the concept of negative philosophy possible, leads directly into reflections on "the movement of a life". Contrary to the classical view that insists on time's essential quantifiability, αριθμός, and likewise, counter to the view that time is an "abstract" condition of possibility or even a transcendental origin—"positive time"—it is, instead, an event unfolded between birth and death with the essential shape of the life that is lived. This shape, however, is not that of the λόγος that would assign each event its *Grund*, nor that of a perfect harmony or diapason. As the principle of a negative philosophy, "negative time" unfolds as *le cri*—the primal scream according to which this life and all others come to pass. To reject Eleatism is at the same time to reject the principle that would hold being together as being, that would secure its purity and difference from nothing. There is no λόγος, no diapason or final harmony according to which all things

would be assigned their names and proper place—there is only the primal scream where sense dissolves into non-sense and where the event of sense is only the inverse or envelope of this disarticulateness.

I will begin these reflections by returning to the Aristotelian account of time in the *Physics* in order to frame how the concept of positive time has been thought and, eventually, how it is inherited by Augustine and constitutes what Heidegger has called the "vulgar" tradition of thinking time. Positive time, which is, in principle, quantifiable, requires that time be understood "assertorically", that is, as the φατικός, the putting forward of an identifiable and countable being. The assertoricity of time ensures time's quantifiability because it identifies the temporal present with phenomenological presence or availability—since only what is in this dual sense can have cardinality[3]. Past and future are, in principle, not countable since they are no longer and not yet. Time, therefore, must be a function of the present/presence, which is counted in movement. The identification of the temporal present with phenomenological presence, at the same time, establishes a principle of coherence, i.e., that time, in its assertoricity, is the affirming and putting forward of sense. Not only is positive time assertoric, but it is also "melodic" and is, in every case, the making of sense out of a non-sense that metaphysically and temporally lacks being.

The second part then turns to the theory of "negative time" we find in Merleau-Ponty, beginning with *Phenomenology of Perception*. Where positive time asserts and affirms the presence of being in the temporal present, negative time accounts for temporal passage according to a principle of "disarticulateness". Where positive time is organized around assertoricity, φατικός, negative time is αποφατικός, "apophatic". "Negative theology", also referred to as "apophatic theology", is derived from this term, and so Merleau-Ponty's "negative philosophy" can be understood in terms of an "apophatic philosophy". Here, I will move in the other direction—beginning with an account of "negative philosophy" as it appears in the later writings, I will then move to the theory of time as "disarticulateness" in the *Phenomenology of Perception* that underwrites the later development.

Apophatic time, in principle, challenges a number of concepts associated with the assertoric concept of positive time, and I think this was quite intentional on Merleau-Ponty's part. Where positive time will model sense as eloquence and λόγος, and where non-sense, then, is simply the absence of sense, negative time models sense as the inverse, the product, if you will, of a "simultaneous" non-sense. In other words, according to this model, non-sense is not simply the absence of sense but one pole of a movement out of which sense emerges. Sense is "produced" by non-sense (and non-sense by sense). And so, the principle of this articulation–disarticulation is not harmony, not λόγος, but the *cri*, what Hermes Trismegistus called "the scream of light". The "primal scream", then, becomes the image offered by Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, in *Phenomenology of Perception* and the later works, of "the human condition", the sense, such as it is, of the life that is lived. There is no "perfect narrative" for a life, no λόγος, no diapason—only the disintegration of sense into non-sense and the emergence of a fragile and precarious sense that we all have yet to live.

A. The positive concept of time and eloquence

In the *Physics*, Aristotle defines time as the "αριθμός [calculable measure, number] of a κίνησις [movement] with respect to the πρότερον [before, earlier] and the ὕστερον [after, later]" ([6] 219b). The concept of αριθμός, which we find in Plato as well ([7] 37d-e)[4], seems to function as a principle of quantifiability and cardinality at the same time. In this context, to be able to assign a number (quantification) is necessarily to be countable (cardinal). The difficulty of time, then, is how can a phenomenon that is, in principle, κίνησις, i.e., movement, change, at the same be quantifiable-countable? The solution is to assert that time, in order to be an object of αριθμός, must be of a positive, assertoric nature rather than of a negative, interrogative one. When I count—counting out a rhythm

for example—I put forward and assert the succession. It is an additive process rather than a subtractive one, or at least this is what seems to be the case. In the case of rhythm, the downbeats correspond to the positive articulation of temporal moments, a series "nows." Aristotle goes so far as to say that "the now [νῦν] itself is identical with [time's] essence" and that the πρότερον and ὕστερον are relative to the νῦν ([6] 219b). In other words, for Aristotle, time is the succession of temporal present(s), which at the same time accounts for time's phenomenological presence or experienceability. The syncopations between the downbeats—the gaps, lacunae, negativities—that mark the passage between successive presents are either infinitely divisible "nows" or they are nothing, κενόν [void][5].

The positivity of time, as articulated by Aristotle, is notably inherited by Augustine. In his *Confessions*, Augustine states:

> Now it is apparent and clear to say that there are neither futures nor pasts; nor is it appropriate to say that there are three times: past, present, and future. It would be more appropriate to say: there are these three times, a presence of the past [*praesens de praeteritis*], a presence of the present [*praesens de praesentibus*], and a presence of the future [*praesens de futuris*]. For there are three kinds of things in the soul [*anima*], and I do not see them elsewhere: the present memory of the past, the present thought of the present, the present expectation of the future. If we are allowed to speak thus, I see and admit that there are three times, that three times truly are ([8] Book XI, p. 223).

Again, for Augustine, only the present/presence is—the future is not yet; the past is no more. Time must, therefore, be thought in its positivity as the successive assertion of the present, its "repetition"[6], as the future transitions into the present and the present into the past. Only the temporal present allows for phenomenological presence—the future as such and the past as such cannot appear, since they are not. All presence, then, must be a function of the temporal present: the past appears in the temporal present in the form of memory; the future appears in the temporal present in the form of expectation. It would not be "appropriate" to speak of past and future independently of their appearance in the present, since they are, for Augustine, non-experienceable. The three times that "truly are", are the three temporal ecstases insofar as, in every case, they are organized by the present. As in Aristotle, for Augustine, time must be now or be nothing.

According to this model of positive time, rhythm is the succession of these presents, and the moments of passage between them, the syncopations, are organized by presence and assertion of the present. If there are syncopated rhythms, it is only in virtue of the pulsation of the positive that they have as their referent, and only this pulsation exists. In Aristotle, we see that the αριθμός of movement and change is a function of its countability—time is *now* and only the *now* can be counted. Similarly in Augustine, the three dimensions or "ecstases" of time only exist as functions of the present—the presentness of the past, present, and future—and the past and future as such do not and cannot exist. Finally, to allow for the existence of past and future (coming into being and passing away), would be to allow for an identification between being and nothingness—that being could not be (passing away) and that non-being could be (coming into being). If we accept the basic proposition "being is", then we cannot accept either coming into being or passing away. Future and past must be mythological, illusory with respect to the vivid and irrepressible presence of the *now* ([9] p. 18)[7].

This identification of the essence of time with the present probably goes back to Parmenides, who first puts forward the proposition that anything other than the present cannot exist and that, therefore, there must be only an eternal, unchanging present. The difficulties raised by Augustine and Aristotle are, structurally speaking, nearly identical to those of Parmenides. Fragment 8 states:

> It never was nor will be, since it is now, all together, one, continuous. For what birth will you seek for it? How and whence did it grow? I shall not allow you to say nor to think from not being: for it is not to be said nor thought that it is not; and what need would have driven it later rather than earlier, beginning from nothing to grow? Nor will the force of conviction allow anything besides it to come to be even from not being ([10] pp. 249–250).

This fragment is arguably the origin of the identification between the temporal present and phenomenological presence that, in Aristotle and Augustine, produces the positive, assertoric theory of time. Non-being, because it *is not*, can be neither phenomenologically present nor temporally in the present. To say that non-being is phenomenologically present would be to say that *what is not* could be a possible object of experience. But how could this be since my experiential field is populated by objects, that is to say, by *beings*. Non-being, then, could only be, at best, derived from being—the absence of a being that, as it were, was supposed to be there. Now Parmenides will simply reject the proposition that non-being is any way phenomenologically available, and this seems to be what is entailed by his insistence on its unthinkability. Non-being, by definition, cannot be a possible object of experience; therefore, my experiential field must be filled with being(s) only. Likewise, non-being, because it *is unthinkable,* must also in principle be uncountable, and the fragment under consideration seems to make this clear. If being had come into being, then there would be some prior time where it was not—but this would mean that being was, earlier, non-being, and this is impossible. Likewise, if it were subject to temporal decay, there would be some future time where it would not be, and, again, this is impossible. Therefore, being can be subject neither to temporal generation nor decay. However, we could still put being on a line where it moves through time but without any kind of change (eternity as "temporal" passage without change). It seems to be here that we encounter the origins of positive time: if the thinkability of being is dependent on its immunity to generation and decay, then its thinkability depends on its continual and repeated presence in the temporal now. For it to be thinkable, i.e., phenomenologically present, it must, in every case, *be now*. *If time is, it must be now, even as the infinite repetition of nows*.

This Eleatic, positive concept of time is what Heidegger called the "vulgar" conception of time. As Simon Critchley has noted:

> [Heidegger in *Being and Time*] is trying to criticize the idea of time as a uniform, linear and infinite series of "now-points". On this model… the future is the not-yet-now, the past is the no-longer-now, and the present is the now that flows from future to past at each passing moment. This is what Heidegger calls the "vulgar" or ordinary conception of time where priority is always given to the present. Heidegger thinks that this Aristotelian conception of time has dominated philosophical inquiries into time from the ancient Greeks to Hegel and even up to his near contemporary Bergson [11].

Whether Hegel and Bergson are fairly inserted into this tradition is a question we will leave aside, even if Heidegger believed this to be the case. What concerns us is: (1) is there another, "tasteful" tradition of time (we will also leave aside the question as to whether Heidegger would rightly be included in any tradition qualified as "tasteful"); this other tradition, rather than beginning from the prioritization of presence/the present, would be a "negative" account of time. That is, rather than thinking time as the assertion of presence, which organizes all other temporal *ecstases*, this other tradition would attempt to think time from non-presence. Rather than being a function of an asserted presence/present, the absent moments would articulate the given—the given (presence/present) would be a function of what is not given (non-presence/not-in-the-present) rather than the other way around. Rather than a succession of presences, *nows*, time would be a succession of

"negativities" of which the now would "merely" be the reverse. Rather than "articulation", this account of time would operate as "disarticulation".

However, before moving to time as "disarticulateness", there is another feature of positive time to address: eloquence. As positive, as the assertion of a succession of *nows*, time, as it were, has a "melodic" character. By "melodic", I mean that the succession of nows are held together in an articulated continuity—the way a melody unfolds the Augustinian future, which becomes present, and then past. Each note of the melody "expects" the next (and is expected by its predecessor); we hear it, and then the now-past note is echoed, "remembered", by the one that comes forth from the future. As melodic, the succession of notes (nows) "hangs together" in accordance with the Augustinian model—and therefore corresponds with the tradition of thinking time as a series of nows, the "vulgar" model of time[8].

Speech likewise seems to have this melodic character[9]. Rather than a succession of notes, speech is the succession of phonemes that, again, "hang together" to create a coherent expression and articulation. If the phonemes are in the wrong order (or do not coherently follow in succession for some other reason), we no longer have speech as such. Rather than coherence, we have nonsense. Therefore, we have an account of speech where, in accordance with the "vulgar" model of time, its fecundity and expressivity are functions of a positive succession. Sense is made through the melodic and eloquent order of the positively articulated phonemes. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Augustine's study of creation in Book XI of the *Confessions* invokes this expressivity: God creates by speaking, *dicere*, an infinite eloquence by which all things come into being and are sustained. "What exists save You exist? You spoke [*dixisti*] and heaven and earth were created; in Your word [*verbo*] you created them" ([8] Book XI, chapter v, pp. 214).

What happens to this melodic and eloquent conceptualization of expression, as well as our conceptualizations of time, if we attempt to think outside of the "vulgar" theory that has, according to Heidegger, dominated the tradition? First of all, the phoneme would no longer itself be a positivity—or if it is, its positivity is only a function of what it lacks. In a sense, there is no phoneme outside of the absences that make it possible. Sensical sound requires pauses, rests, and breaths. In the context of time, there would be no "now" strictly speaking. What we experience and perceive as now is, rather, the inverse of a temporal lacunae, the *passage* between past and future. We never experience either "the present" or even "presence". As he says in *The Visible and the Invisible*, "... the absolute present which I am is as if it were not" ([1] p. 191); in *Phenomenology of Perception*, "what there is, is not a present ... there is only one single time which is self-confirmatory, which can bring nothing into existence unless it has already laid that thing's foundations [*fondé*] as present and a past which is to come [*passé à venir*], and which establishes itself at a stroke" ([14] p. 489). I am present—or at least I experience myself as present—but this present appears only insofar as "it is not". Everything that appears does so in, as it were, an elongated and yet dynamic process of integration–disintegration. We could go so far to say that there is no "final" integration either, since any integration is only the inverse of a corresponding disintegration. There is only movement, κίνησις, "becoming" and not "being". The moment I open my eyes I am exposed to a flux of "sensations" (not sense data but "meanings") where everything is in motion: my body, my eyes, the things around me. If "objects" appear—"solid", across duration, across extension, "there", "real",—they do so only as the inverse of this flux; they are the "background", if you will, against a foreground of blurred lines, liquidity, shifting planes, and indeed, "ambiguity". We believe in "the real" because in our ordinary experience, this relationship is reversed: we see the object, and its coming into and passing out of being is pushed into the background, rendered barely perceptible.

B. Negative time and disarticulateness

Merleau-Ponty's thinking about negativity is framed by his relationship to "Hegelio-Sartreanism", where both being and nothingness are thought in their "purity" and therefore in terms of a radical opposition. The Hegelio-Sartrean account of negativity, for Merleau-Ponty, is a function of the Eleatic tradition described above: after all, if being as such were colored or etched with negativity, it would not be "being"; it would be some obscure and ambiguous space between being and nothingness, neither fully being nor fully nothing. The words "it is" would be misleading at best or at worst, meaningless, since we could not say that "it is" in the "proper sense". We could only say "it seems so" or "it could be". Therefore, for being "to be", it must be purified of all nothingness—and the traditional dialectical relationship between being and nothingness is founded on this purification. Is it even possible to think about being and nothingness outside of this purified, oppositional and dialectical framework? I would suggest, though this cannot be taken up fully here, that the entire rubric of concepts in Merleau-Ponty's thought—reversibility, chiasmus, ambiguity, the body, depth, and so forth—is organized around an attempt to do precisely that, to reconsider the possibility of negativity beyond Heglio-Sartreanism and therefore beyond Eleatism as well. In any case, the account of time offered across the scope of texts rests on a concept of negativity that no longer requires the "purity" of being and nothingness. It is unsurprising then, that the way we must think about "dialectic" must also be revised. Rajiv Kaushik expresses this very nicely in his account of negativity in relation to Merleau-Ponty's diacritical theory of signs:

> According to this model of meaning, there is no positive value of identities or visibles; they have their value only because of their negative value or separation from every other identity or visible. Just as in the diacritical system of signs words mean what they mean in deviation from other words that they are not and there is no single word that explains all words, in the diacritical ontology, the nothing of consciousness and being deviate from one another and at no place do they turn into one another or come from the same source ([15] pp. 372–393).

There is no such thing as the positive value of the "sign"—or even the visible thing before me. The sign as well as its visible referent become articulated as the other side of a διαίρεσις—a splitting, division, indeed, a differentiation within which there is a lacuna, a crack—an *écart*, that allows the sides of the division *to be*[10]. The sign, as well as its referent, therefore, have their meaning in virtue of a variation rather than an assertion. We might take this a step further and suggest that "they are"—not in virtue of their being-as-presence—but in virtue of the splits, divisions and cracks that differentiate them, not only from other beings, but from "themselves" as well. The response to Eleatism is to point out that there is no τὸ ἐόν (what-is), neither metaphysically nor phenomenologically—there is only difference, the ῥέω, "becoming". This indicates a Heraclitean, apophatic tradition of thinking time, opposed to the Eleatic, "vulgar" tradition of positive time.

This seems to be what Merleau-Ponty suggests in his well-known references to "negative theology". I will consider three. The first is from the last paragraph of a 1959 working note with the heading "Genealogy of logic; History of being; History of meaning" that attempts a series of summaries of the work underway:

> I will finally be able to take a position in ontology, as the introduction demands, and specify its theses exactly, only after the series of reductions the book develops and which are all in the first one, but also are really accomplished only the last one. This reversal itself—*circulus vitiosus deus*[11]—is not hesitation, bad faith and bad dialectic, but return to Σιγή, the abyss[12]. *One cannot make a direct ontology*. My

> 'indirect' method (being in the beings) is also conformed with being----"negative philosophy" like "negative theology" ([1] p. 179).

Negative theology, also known as "apophatic theology", includes any theological approach to articulating or speaking about God that proceeds *via negativa*, by way of negativity.[13] The term "apophatic" comes from αποφατικός, "negative". The stem, φατικός, roughly translates as "assertion" and comes from the verb φημί, "to speak". The prefix, απο-, roughly means "away from", so to "negate" in this sense is literally "to speak away from". We cannot speak of what God is so must speak "away" from what God is—speak only of what God is not. The divine is ineffable—beyond all possible speech—and, therefore, beyond any possible sign. God, then, is simply the obverse, the negative of everything it is not, the shadow, as it were, cast by the discourse of created being, precisely, what God *is not*. Merleau-Ponty proposes to establish a "negative philosophy" where, removing God or replacing it with "being", ontology also becomes a *via negativa* or, as he says, "indirect". The expressed is only the double, the obverse, or the reverse, of what is not expressed—Σιγή, "silence", the abyss.

In a later working note from January of 1960, not included in the published version of *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty makes another reference to "negative theology:"

> It always assumes essentialist thinking—according to which there is something that in the last resort makes Being emerge—a necessary foundation, i.e., essential for [the] *there is* [*il y a*], a nail that anchors and establishes Being as absolutely opposed to Nothingness. Behind eminent Being there is a negative ontological base, as we say negative theology: demonstration of Being as what has surmounted, negated nothingness. This "not nothing" gives eminent Being only if we conceive of it starting with nothing. We must conceive of being from not nothing: non-hidden Being ([19] p. 50).[14]

To posit an origin—specifically an assertoric or positive one—that founds Being and puts it forward is, apparently, the mark of "essentialist thinking", which could be understood to code Hegelio-Sartreanism. Such a foundation establishes a Being that is purified of nothingness and, thus, opposes it absolutely. What if, however, behind Being there were no assertoric foundation but only a "negative ontological base"? In this case, Being does not come forth from a transcendental origin—it is not and cannot be founded on an *assertion* that would make it possible. Rather Being comes forth from a certain lack or lacuna, "negated nothingness", i.e., "not nothing", "non-hidden Being". In other words, Being would be the inverse, the "lining" or "envelope", as Merleau-Ponty liked to say, of an origin that gives Being only in its withdraw, concealment, and absence. The visible is only the shadow of the invisible that it is not.

Finally, there is this remark in Merleau-Ponty's 1961 course, "Philosophy and Non-philosophy since Hegel".

> It's not a matter of a fight between philosophy and its adversaries (positivism), but of a philosophy that wants to be philosophy by being non-philosophy—of a "negative philosophy" (in the sense of "negative theology"), which opens access to the absolute, not as "beyond", second positive order, but as another order that requires what is beneath, the double, accessible only through it—true philosophy mocks philosophy, is a-philosophy ([20] p. 173).

The negative is not "beyond" and not a "second positive order" as it is for the Hegelio-Sartrean understanding of it. The "positive" order requires another one that is its double, that is beneath it. Not removed (transcendent) with respect to it but where we only access the positive through the negative (and the negative through the positive). Where the negative is the invisible lining of the positive-visible, and where we proceed toward the

visible only through the invisible, by way of a specifically philosophical *via negativa*. This "negative philosophy" is "true philosophy" and is the other of "official philosophy" ([20] pp. 9, 93, 261), not "philosophical" but "a-philosophical". In this respect, we may very well describe negativity as the a-positive (and positivity as the a-negative).

The language of "not nothing", even "negated nothingness", however, poses a problem. On one hand, if we are to overcome the "bad dialectic" of being absolutely opposed to nothingness, then we must reject the idea of a positive ground as well as an account of being and nothingness that would require thinking them as "pure". Therefore, we are brought to "not nothing" as the solution. It is unclear, however, (1) how "not nothing" is different from purified being, and (2) it seems to require the equiprimordiality of being and nothingness—the proposition that being is not and not being is, the very proposition that the Eleatic account attempts to subvert. I think there is a solution, however, and to see it, we must return to time. The solution consists of re-thinking the orders of "positivity" (being) and "negativity" (nothingness) and their manner of relating and entering into a dialectical relationship. What happens to "being" if its internal possibility requires "nothingness"? Likewise, what happens to "nothingness" if its internal possibility requires "being"? Here, the organizing concepts seem to be "*Ineinander*" (one inside the other), which Merleau-Ponty borrows from Husserl, and *chiasm*, borrowed from Paul Valery. Even this, however, seems insufficient since the nature of the *mélange* between the two terms could, in theory, be a mixture of two purities that, even in their mixture, never meet—like an emulsion of oil and water where the two elements remain separated even in their mixture. Merleau-Ponty seems to constantly be in the process of trying to think this *mélange* in the most radical way possible. How can we think this mixture *as mixture*, as "true" ambiguity, as "mutually contaminated" terms that, in principle, cannot be separated, while at the same time retaining their distinctness? I seriously doubt that I can solve this problem here or elsewhere, but it gives us a framework for thinking about negativity, positivity, and time across Merleau-Ponty's work. What-is does not come forth as the solid and perfect sphere, equal to itself in all cases, but rather entities are at best only partially expressed. Likewise, the absence that outlines presence is also, at best, "partial". If we do not like the images of incompleteness, we could also say "tenuousness". What comes into focus, even the possibility of focus, is something fragile because of its internal movement and dynamism—that what-is is ever "possibility" rather than "being". What is being, after all, other than the *sense* of what is, a tenuous eloquence always on the verge of noise? What is nothingness other than the dissolution and disintegration of this sense? "Articulateness" and "disarticulateness", in this way, name a temporal-ontological unfolding and process of integration—where sense is articulated because it carries within it what is non- or dis-articulated, and where this disarticulation is precisely the dissolution and disintegration of that sense. Integration and disintegration, articulateness and disarticulateness, are the "respiration" and pulse—not of being—but of the unfolding of the *il y a*, its φύω: its generation and decay, coming into being and passing away, its *becoming*, precisely what the Eleatic tradition refuses. Indeed, we were wrong to speak of "being" and "nothingness" at all since neither term is adequate. In place of these poles, we have partial phases of articulateness and disarticulateness, where one "dissolves" into the other, a back-and-forth Merleau-Ponty would compare to "respiration". For example, this famous passage from Merleau-Ponty's 1961 essay, "Eye and Mind:" "We speak of 'inspiration,' and the word should be taken literally. There really is inspiration and expiration of Being, respiration in Being, action and passion so slightly discernable that it becomes impossible to distinguish who sees and who is seen, who paints and what is painted" ([21] p. 358). There is a "pulsation" of what comes into focus, but it is not assertoric in nature. It is not the simple repetition of presences differentiated by a lacuna of nothingness which they are not. What comes into focus is rather the "other

side" of what has become blurred and indistinguishable. There is a "transition zone". This term is borrowed from photography and refers to the gradation that differentiates the plane of focus, what is foregrounded, from the background. When the focus changes and other objects, previously latent, become clearer, the objects that recede, that go out of focus, are not "annihilated". The "negativity" of Hegelio-Sartreanism, where the thing comes into focus only through a generative nihilation, does not seem appropriate. Rather, objects lose whatever relative "sharpness" or "clarity" they may have had and blur into a quasi-present, quasi-absent plane. In the text, this pulsation is taken to be an image of activity and passivity—and it is: my activity is the inverse of a simultaneous passivity, a process of phasing through states of relative sharpness and blurriness.

The problems and paradoxes of time dealt with here rest on the absolute opposition of pure being and pure nothingness. If non-being cannot be, then the past and future must be functions of the present/presence, since only the present "is". And so, the Augustinian account of time as present/presence is a function and descendant of the Eleatic account of being. In Merleau-Ponty, however, and beginning in *Phenomenology of Perception*, time is not thought from the point of view of the present/presence. It is, rather, thought from the point of view of articulateness and disarticulateness, integration and disintegration. Because time, already in this text, is the framework for thinking *Sinngebung*—the giving and coming into focus of sense, the inverse of a simultaneous and necessary lack of sense—its sharpness is possible only in virtue of its now-latent blurriness. Thanks to the passage of time, the world around me is composed of dynamic relationships of integrating-disintegrating: when the flower comes into focus and is integrated into the articulated presentation of its "being", the stem and leaves recede into a blurred and indistinct background of a double-image—the flower emerges precisely as the inverse movement of the withdraw and obfuscation of the rest of the plant. When my gaze turns to the leaf, there is a shift where now the flower recedes into indistinction and the leaf is integrated in and as its clarity and visibility. These shifts between clarity and indistinctness, integration and disintegration, structure all of my perceptual experience, and the rhythm of this experience, its passage, is precisely a function of time, where everything shifts between its integrative clarity—its coming into being—and its disintegrative obscurity. "Not nothing" does not refer itself back to an absolute being purified of nothingness; rather it refers to this process of distinction, articulation and eloquence whence the sense of things blossoms forth in a continuum that is always incomplete, that is to say, open. However, all articulation—all eloquence—is really only the inverse movement of its disintegration. As the flower visually integrates, the leaves and stem visually disintegrate. When the leaves integrate, the flower disintegrates, and so forth.

The eloquence of speech and musicality, from this point of view, are an integrative movement that is the inverse of their disintegration. The negative spaces between the phonemes or notes are not "empty" per se—"nothing"—they are the reverberations, resonances, and harmonics of what was said. Likewise, the phonemes and notes are neither "something" in the sense of a fully asserted being nor "not nothing" in the sense of a pure negation of "something". They are the other side of these harmonics, what the disintegrating movement brings together and consolidates precisely as it disintegrates. The negative movement of disintegration is the process by which sense becomes integrated, and the integrating movement is, at the same time, the process by which sense becomes dis-integrated, i.e., degrades into non-sense. The two movements are simultaneous and there cannot be one without the other—and yet they are bound, one within the other, by an ineluctable difference. The eloquence of speech and music, then, is simultaneously its dissonance and the consonance with which the *il y a* unfolds is only possible on this basis of this dissonance. And the opposite is also true.

This appears to be Merleau-Ponty's conclusion in the famous chapter *La temporalité* from *Phenomenology of Perception*. The first section I will consider is f. "Cohesion of time through the very passage of time". The problem is, having rejected the priority of the present/presence through his analysis of Husserl's time diagram in the preceding sections, he must now account for temporal coherence in terms of the *Ablauf*, time's flow or passage, that was posited as the organizing temporal principle.[15] Indeed, how could flow—understood in terms of becoming— itself be an organizing principle? Or as Merleau-Ponty puts it, "How can the temporal *ek-stase* not be an absolute disintegration in which the individuality of its various moments disappears?" ([14] p. 443) This is another way of posing the same problem that the absolute purity of being and nothingness, posited by the Eleatic tradition, attempts to solve: how can there be temporal passage, becoming, indeed disintegration, without becoming permanent chaos? How can there nonetheless be sense even though the passage of time undoes all? There is, after all, something and not nothing. Merleau-Ponty says, "This is because the disintegration undoes what the passage from the future to the present had done" and "[this] disintegration is forever the inverse or the consequence of its coming to maturity" ([14] p. 443). Maturation (integration) and disintegration are two moments of a temporal flow that maintains its own identity-in-difference (as well as the identity-in-difference, "integration" and sense of things) only as the negative of the disintegration and passage of that identity, its internal non-identity. Merelau-Ponty says, "Time maintains what it has caused to be, at the very time it expels it from being, because the new being was announced by its predecessor as destined to be, and because, for the latter, to become present was the same thing as being destined to pass away" ([14] p. 488). Time maintains what it brings forth, but it does so only in—and precisely as—its disintegrative movement—and again, integration and disintegration are two distinct yet simultaneous moments of a single temporal phenomenon. To become visible is premised on a simultaneous invisibility: not only the invisibles that constitute the background necessary for the being's figuration, but the invisibles of its "already passed" as well as the invisibles of its "decay yet to come". A life becomes such only by standing out against the background of its birth and death—and without birth and death, a life cannot be a life.

This is an elaboration of an earlier text in the same section, again given in reference to Husserl's diagram: temporal synthesis (integration) cannot be that of a transcendental consciousness where time's unity and coherence are a result of a subject that *thinks* time. Rather, temporal synthesis is an auto-synthesis. Time is not constituted but auto-constituting. However, what kind of synthesis is self-integrating? The answer is "transition synthesis", a concept borrowed from Husserl (*Übergangssynthesis*)[16] where integration is a function of the transition (passage) between temporal ecstases. Merleau-Ponty describes this in a lengthy passage:

> What there is in reality, is not a past, a present, a future, not discrete instants A, B, and C, nor really distinct *Abschattungen* [profiles] . . .. The springing forth [*jaillisement*] of a new present does not cause a settlement [*tassement*] of the past and an upheaval [*secousse*] of the future: the new present is the passage of future into the present, and of the former present to the past; it is as a single movement from one end to the other that time begins to move. The "instants" . . . *do not exist* in succession but differentiate themselves from each other. . .. When we pass from [instant] B to C, there is something like a rupture, a disintegration of B into B', and of A into A'; and C itself which, when it was about to arrive, was anticipated by a continuous emission of *Abschattungen*, has no sooner arrived than it begins to lose its substance. . .. [Temporal ecstases] are interconnected, not by a synthesis of identification, which would congeal [*figerait*] them at a point in time, but by a

> transition-synthesis (*Übergangssynthesis*), in so far as they emerge [*sortent*], one from the other, and each of these projections is merely one aspect of the total rupture [*éclatement*] or dehiscence ([14] pp. 442–443).

Without belaboring Merleau-Ponty's dialogue with Husserl's time diagram from the *Zeitbewußtsein* lectures, we can highlight some significant motifs found in this text. The first notable thing is Merleau-Ponty's denial that there even are the temporal ecstases of "past", "present", and "future", at least insofar as we understand these to be fully distinguishable. The temporal profiles are rather intrinsically connected, and we cannot have one without the others. What there is, rather, is a unified phenomenon of *passage*, where the ecstases of past, present, and future are names for temporal points of view that look out onto a single phenomenon. Because there are no distinct ecstases, using the word "succession" in reference to this phenomenon is not entirely accurate. "Succession" is usually understood to be a series of distinct units, and if there actually are no distinct units, there can be no temporal succession as such. This is clearly a very radical claim. If there is no temporal succession, how do we account for time as *passage*—if not passage as succession, then passage as what? Rather than succession, there is a "rupture" or "disintegration" of temporal profiles, one into the other, where one emerges out of the other in simultaneity. This "continuous emission" of temporal ecstases is precisely a movement of integration–disintegration. The disintegration of the future is the integration of the present; the disintegration of the present is the integration of the past, which in turn disintegrates into temporally sedimented moments, which, in turn, integrate the present and the future. The first one describes the passage from protention to primal impression; the second the passage from primal impression to retention. The retentions, in turn, integrate the present, the present integrates the future.

Furthermore, according to the text, this passage is not the work of a transcendental consciousness that posits, accomplishes or "thinks" this movement but it is, rather, autosynthetic. There is no external principle to this passage—rather it is *the passage itself* that is the principle of integration. This means that the "synthesis"—that time both accomplishes and itself is—occurs only as the inverse of its own διαίρεσις (division, splitting), what Merleau-Ponty describes as *éclatement* (rupture, explosion) and dehiscence (the splitting open of a wound or seed pod). Understood in this way, Merleau-Ponty can conclude that temporality "is nothing but a general flight out of the Itself [*hors du Soi*], the one law governing these centrifugal movements, or again, as Heidegger says, an *ek-stase*" ([14] p. 487). The reference to *Sein und Zeit* here is notable. Heidegger introduces this in section 65, "Temporality as the Ontological Meaning of Care", where he says, "*Temporality is the primordial 'outside-of-itself' in and for itself*. We therefore call the phenomena of the future, the character of having been, and the Present, the '*ecstases*' [*Ekstasen*] of temporality" ([24] p. 377). It comes from the ancient Greek, ἔκστασις, which means "displacement" as in "out of place" or even "out of joint"—somewhere other than where it is supposed to be. It can also refer to the experience of a kind of mental displacement or out-of-jointness, which is where the usual sense of "ecstasy" comes from. It seems to be this sense of displacement, impropriety, and disjointedness that Merleau-Ponty has in mind referencing this passage. Because there is no succession of "nows,' because time's eloquence is only the inverse of its disintegration, there is no "proper place" of time. Whatever sense of "being on time" or "being present" we have is only the inverse of time's fundamental displacement. A passage from *The Visible and the Invisible* seems to re-iterate this sense of negativity as "dismemberment":

> where its absence counts in the world (it is "behind" the visible, imminent or eminent visibility, it is *Ur-prasentiert* [originally presented] precisely as *Nichtur-prasentierbar* [not originally present], as another dimension) where the lacuna that marks its place is one of the points of passage of the "world". It is this negative

> that makes possible the vertical world, the union of the incompossibles, the being in transcendence, and the topological space and the time in joints and members, in dis-junction and dismembering ([1] p. 228).

"Originary presence" is another dimension of what is "not present", where the lacuna, the gap, articulates the world and its visibility. This negative is the principle of transcendence, being out of place and out of joint, never coinciding but being in every case "late". The joints between things, the connections, are at the same time "disjunctions" where the σύνθεσις, the bringing together of things, is always at the same time their "dismemberment".

Transition synthesis, finally, still following Merleau-Ponty's discussion of time in *Phenomenology of Perception*, is identified with "the movement of a life" in a later section of *La temporalité*, h., "Constituting time and eternity". As transition synthesis, time is non-localizable. It is not only that we should, with Bergson, avoid spatializing concepts of time but that, as auto-synthetic, time is "eventual" in the sense that its phenomenality, its "visibility", is nowhere other than its own event, its own happening. This event is not that of presence but that of a life that is lived. Merleau-Ponty puts it this way:

> The synthesis of time is a transition synthesis; it is the movement of a life which unfolds, and there is no other manner of effectuating it than of living this life; there is no place of time; it is time which carries itself and launches itself forward. Time as indivisible thrust and as transition alone can make possible time as successive multiplicity, and what we place at the origin of intra-temporality is a constituting time ([14] pp. 446–447).

Standing out against the invisible profiles of birth and death, past and future, we are as much condemned to live as we are condemned to freedom (Sartre) or condemned to sense (Merleau-Ponty). In other words, a life unfolds only in its temporal passage. Death, the possibility of the disintegration yet to come, can only ever be one side of a life that was lived, no matter how long or how short. And likewise, a life in every case comes on the heels of the event (or advent) of its birth. Life, then, is only the "transition" between these two disarticulate poles, past and future, birth and death. As transition, life too is auto-constituting, and I am condemned to live the life I have been born into—it will unfold in its own simultaneity, because of and in spite of my decisions. There is no external, transcendental principle that makes a life possible. The unfolding of its sense is not the consequent thought or even "accomplishment" of some prior or a priori "thinker". Whatever meaning it has does not come from on high but is autochthonously brought forth only in the living of it. This is why no one's life ever is or has a "perfect moment"[17]—not because of a radical, unconditioned freedom, but because we will live through our lives (or our lives will live through us). As Paul Valery says in *Introduction to the Method of Leonardo da Vinci*:

> No thought is such that it destroys, and concludes, the power of thinking—there is no given position of the bolt which closes the lock forever. And there is no thought that is, for thought, a resolution born of its very development, and like a final harmony from this permanent dissonance ([14] p. 421).

2. Conclusions: The Primal Scream

The concept of negative, disarticulate time, I think, organizes the various texts and motifs we find across Merleau-Ponty's works, at least from *Phenemonology of Perception* to the projects under way at his death, including *The Visible and the Invisible* and his lectures. On the one hand, we can bring this to bear more precisely on his account of speech and sense-genesis, specifically in reference to the theme of the "first word"; on the other hand, we can bring it to bear on the theme of *le cri*—the cry, shout or scream.[18] In the first case,

there is a footnote in *Phenomenology of Perception* where Merleau-Ponty remarks: "what we say here applies only to originary speech—that of the child uttering its first word, of the lover revealing his feelings, of the 'first man who spoke', or of the writer and philosopher who reawaken the primordial experience beneath these traditions" ([14] p. 487). In the 1948 essay, "Cezanne's Doubt", he remarks:

> [The artist] speaks as the first man spoke and paints as if no one had ever painted before. What he expresses cannot, therefore, be the translation of a clearly defined thought, since such clear thoughts are those which have already been uttered by ourselves or by others . . . There is nothing but a vague fever before the act of artistic expression, and only the work itself, completed and understood, is proof that there was something rather than nothing to be said . . . the artist launches his work just as man once launched the first word, not knowing whether it will be anything more than a scream [*cri*]. . . The meaning of what the artist is going to say does not exist anywhere—not in things, which as yet have no meaning, nor in the artist himself, in his unformulated life. It summons one away from the already constituted reason in which 'cultural men' are content to shut themselves, toward a reason which contains its own origins ([26] p. 40).

If time is the vehicle of both the world's sense as well as its non-sense, then expression, which includes the life that is lived, is a function of time's passage. This seems to follow from what Merleau-Ponty has said about transition synthesis. The λόγος as word is, in this case, the articulation and integration of a scream—the first word (for the child, for the painter) does not result from a transcendental origin that organizes its sense; it emerges as the negative, the disintegrative sense of the scream. In the same way that a life unfolds only in its living, expression and sense are also temporal events of passage, the shadow of an unexpressed non-sense. Likewise, the sense of the world and expression is never underwritten by a transcendental origin that would guarantee and secure it. Sense and expression are, "like a step taken in the fog" ([26] p. 8), precarious institutions that must be maintained in "repetition" and sedimentation. The λόγος exists only when there is speech and expression, and without them, there can only be silence and chaos. The λόγος as reason is, similarly, the negative, the articulation and integration of an un-reason that is in every case its double. All rationalities are thus haunted and threatened by the specific forms of irrationality that they produce and from which they emerge. Like the life that is lived, sense and reason are born—in speech, in action—and are thrown towards the essential possibility of their disintegration.

The precarity of expression and reason is borne out in the few references Merleau-Ponty makes to Hermes Trismegistus and the "scream [*cri*] of light". In his final published work, "Eye and Mind", he notes, "Art is not skillful construction, skillful artifice, the skillful relation, from the outside, to a space and a world. It is truly the 'inarticulate scream [*cri*],' as Hermes Trismegistus said, 'which seemed to be the scream of the light'" ([21] p. 370). In an earlier draft of a chapter from *The Visible and the Invisible*, he remarks:

> There is no alternative between lived experience and the spoken unless one omits the articulation of lived experience, organization around a tacit sense, the sensorial fields where every individual is already a variant of a dimension, an exemplar of an a-logical essence, what Hermes Trismegistus has called "the scream of light" in order to reduce lived experience to pure muteness and contiguity, and if one omits, moreover, the presuppositions of speech, the establishment, for example, of a linguistic field that envelops every possible being in the order of the nameable and expressible. If, on the contrary, one knows how to find in both orders these institutions of the same thought, then there is no longer a choice between them: from lived experience to the spoken there is agreement through reversal, chiasm

> and one can say, with Husserl, that philosophy is 'still mute experience, that it is a matter of bringing to pure expression its proper sense,' that is, that philosophy speaks and that its speech leans against silence, that it speaks from the inside of being and not from on high or from afar, that it speaks especially of itself, that is to say, of speech, that it speaks like the trees grow, like time passes and like human beings speak ([20] p. 246).

The life that is lived and all expressivity are the "the scream of light" that emerges from the "permanent dissonance" of being. "Like time passes", this primal scream is the shadow and invisibility of the λόγος, the word and reason, that haunts it. The scream becomes word and madness reason and each, in turn, disintegrates into the disarticulate "origin" that it already was or that it carried with it or that, at every instance, made it possible.

Beauvoir concludes her review of *Phenomenology of Perception* by stating, "One of the main merits of this book is that it's convincing. Another one of its merits is that it does not ask us to force ourselves. On the contrary, it suggests that we embrace the very movement of life that is belief in the things of the world and in our own presence" ([5] p. 164). Lefort says, in his forward to *The Visible and the Invisible*, which is at the same time an homage to his recently deceased friend and mentor,

> The intention [of the *The Visible and the Invisible*] is to direct the reader toward a domain which his habits of thought do not make immediately accessible to him. It is a question, in particular, of persuading him that the fundamental concepts of modern philosophy—for example the distinctions between subject and object, essence and fact, being and nothingness, the notions of consciousness, image, thing, which are in constant use—already implicate a singular interpretation of the world and cannot lay claim to a special dignity when our intention is precisely to go back to face our experience, in order to seek the birth of meaning ([1] pp. xxvi–xxvii).

The habits of the everyday, the concepts of modern philosophy, carry with them and in every case implicate a philosophical outlook, whether they mean to or not. These abstractions, which nonetheless structure and articulate the unfolding of experience in the everyday, become destabilized by a certain kind of thinking that endeavors to express something else—"the movement of life", "belief in things in the world and in our own presence", "experience", "the birth of meaning", etc. There are surely many other ways Merleau-Ponty and others have attempted to name this… whatever it is that common sense, the obvious, the power of public opinion, ideology, indeed, what even philosophy forgets. Whatever we want to call it—silence, this mute experience—Merleau-Ponty's works seem organized around this most fundamental of philosophical projects: to say what has not been said and, perhaps, what is not permitted to be said; to make visible what is as of yet unseen, indeed, the childish audacity to not only say "I am here" but also to imagine a present and a future that the wisdom of both common sense and the philosophers tell us is impossible. I do not think this audacity is unique to Merleau-Ponty, but I think Beauvoir was right—we indeed find it in his works—as we find it in any philosopher worthy of the name and worth reading. If we are going to read and interpret philosophy, I think we do ourselves a disservice if we do this with any other aim than to make this audacity, unique to each thinker, as visible as possible, and I doubt very much that organizing an interpretation around "breaks" or even "development" helps this process. The expression of philosophical audacity, rather, takes the form of *desquamation*, shedding one's skin, a process that never ends in a fully developed "system" but, where, in each case, one becomes disarticulated in the midst of the primal scream.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1 Sixteen if we count from Merleau-Ponty's death in 1961. *The Visible and the Invisible* was published posthumously in 1964.

2 The "philosophy of negativity" refers specifically to Sartre and probably to Hegel as well; not to be confused with what Merleau-Ponty calls "negative philosophy," which will be the focus here.

3 I don't want to belabor this question as it stands in set theory and philosophy of mathematics. On the other hand, zero *does* have cardinality in the sense that it represents a set with zero members. Eleatism, and the theories of time we find in Aristotle and Augustine (and others), I think assume the non-cardinality of zero, i.e., nothingness. Because nothingness is not, it cannot be counted. This is, of course, a matter deserving more attention than can be given here.

4 In the *Timaeus*, the eponymous character gives this definition of time—χρόνος—in his description of the origins of the kosmos: [The mythological creator of the cosmos] designed to make it resemble its pattern [παράδειγμα] still more closely. Accordingly, seeing that the pattern is an eternal organism [ζῶον ἀίδιον], He set about making this Universe, so far as He could, of a like kind. But inasmuch as the nature of the organism was eternal, this quality was impossible to attach in its entirety to what is generated; wherefore He planned to make a moveable image of Eternity, and as He set in order the Heaven, of that Eternity which abides in unity He made an eternal image, moving according to number [ἀριθμὸν], even that which we have named time [χρόνον] ([7] 37d-e).

5 Aristotle discussion of "void" occupies a substantial set of chapters in Book IV of the *Physics*, and the discussion is too involved to go into here. Suffice it to say that Aristotle denies the existence of void, which I think is quite uncontroversial. It also seems evident, however, that the discussion the denial of void is an important reason why, later, time is conceptualized in terms of the present. If there is no void, we can only speak of what is, i.e., what is present now.

6 Repetition of the same, where "same" designates the same of presence/the present. In Deleuze, where repetition is the repetition of difference, we get a concept of time very different from the Parmenidian-Augustinian tradition. That, of course, will have to be taken up elsewhere.

7 We can also think about how the positive concept of time underwrites empiricist epistemology. It seems important that Hume, for example, identifies the vivacity of the sense impression with its presence to the mind (in the present) and that, likewise, the idea is a faded copy of the impression that loses its vivacity precisely by being past. It would be interesting to bring this into dialogue with Deleuze's reading of Hume in *Empiricism and Subjectivity*. To what extent does a transcendental empiricism presuppose or challenge the positive concept of time? All of this would have to be taken up elsewhere.

8 The view supported here is at variance with most interpretations of Merleau-Ponty, time, and musicality. The emphasis is typically placed on the various references we find across Merleau-Ponty's text to singing, voice, melody and so forth—and of course there are many texts that support this. According to this prevailing approach, Merleau-Ponty is placed within a "consonant" tradition of thinking. There are, however, also numerous references to *le cri*—the cry, shout, or scream, in Merleau-Ponty. I don't think Merleau-Ponty (or any thinker) is under an obligation to use consistent imagery, and I suspect that, in the end, Merleau-Ponty was a thinker of both consonance as well as dissonance. See, for example, Jessica Wiskus, [12] and Ted Toadvine [13].

9 I go into more detail addressing Merleau-Ponty's theory of sense-genesis in Whitmoyer, K. [4]; See especially chapter 4, "*Le sentir du sens*".

10 "Diacritic" come from the Greek, Διαίρεσις, which we recognize from Aristotle. The prefix, δια-, refers to both a separation as well as a mutual relationship. The stem, αἱρέω, means "to grasp." So we get the image of something being torn in opposite directions. The gloss added by Merleau-Ponty is that the positive and oppositional poles, the thing being torn in two, is as much of a function of the splitting open as it is the poles. Indeed, the two poles only become poles in virtue of the splitting between them.

11 This appears to be a reference to aphorism 56 of *Beyond Good and Evil*. Kaufmann suggests either "a vicious circle made of God" or "God is a vicious circle." See Nietzsche, F. ([16] p. 68).

12 The "return to Σιγή, the abyss" references Paul Claudel's *Art poétique*. The full passage reads: "Time is the means offered to all that which will be to be, in order to be no more. It is the Invitation to death, to each phrase to decompose in the explanatory and total harmony, to consummate the speech [*parole*] of adoration in the ear of Sigé [silence], the Abyss." Translation by the author. See Claudel, P. ([17] p. 61).

[13] Some work on the significance of negative theology for 20th Century French philosophy has been done. See, for example, Bradley, A. [18]. The book mostly focuses on Derrida. Merleau-Ponty is mentioned once but there is no discussion of the references to negative theology in *The Visible and the Invisible*.

[14] Quoted by Barbaras, R. ([19] p. 50); also by Kaushik, R. ([15] p. 377). Compare to this passage in *The Visible and the Invisible*: "On the one hand, one seeks being and nothingness in the pure state, one wishes to approach them as closely as possible, one aims at being itself in its plenitude and nothingness itself in its vacuity, one presses the confused experience until one draws the entity and the negentity out of it, one squeezes it between them as between pincers; beyond the visible one trusts entirely in what we think under the terms of being and nothingness, one practices an 'essentialist' thought which refers to significations beyond experience, and thus one constructs our relations with the world" ([1] p. 86).

[15] I have discussed Merleau-Ponty's reading of the time diagram in detail elsewhere. See Whitmoyer, K. [4] "Temporality Disparue" as well as Whitmoyer, K. [22]. I've removed most of the explicit reference to the temporal moments represented on the time diagram as A, B, and C for the sake of readability and to foreground aspects of this text that I think are important beyond Merleau-Ponty's engagement with Husserl.

[16] Husserl mentions this concept explicitly in *Erfahrung und Urteil* although Merleau-Ponty does not cite a text. See Husserl, E. ([23] pp. 213, 224, 229, 230).

[17] In Sartre's *Nausea* the character Anny, at least for a while, conceptualizes her life in terms of "perfect moments." See Sartre, J.-P. [25].

[18] For example, As Merleau-Ponty notes in the 1961 course, "Cartesian Ontology and Ontology Today," Klee's colors emanate as though through profound natural phenomena, "exhaled in the right spot," like a patina or moisture—"inarticulate scream [*cri inarticulé*] . . . that seemed to be the voice of light" (Hermes Trismegistus)" ([20] p. 99); also in a draft of a chapter from *The Visible and the Invisible*, "exemplar of an alogical essence, what Hermes Trismegistus called 'the scream [cri] of light'" ([20] p. 246). Merleau-Ponty also makes reference to the same remark by Hermes Trismegistus in "Eye and Mind:" "Art is not construction, artifice, industrious relation to a space and to a world of the outside. It is truly the 'inarticulate scream,' as Hermes Trismegistus said, 'which seemed the voice of the light.' And, once there, it awakens in ordinary vision dormant powers, a secret of preexistence" ([21] pp. 370–371, trans. Modified).

References

1. Merleau-Ponty, M. *The Visible and the Invisible*; Lefort, C., Ed.; Lingis, A., Translator; Northwestern University Press: Evanston, IL, USA, 1968.
2. Merleau-Ponty, M. *The Primacy of Perception*; Edie, J.M., Ed. and Translator; Northwestern University Press: Evanston, IL, USA, 1964.
3. Barbaras, R. *The Being of the Phenomenon*; Toadvine, T.; Lawlor, L., Translators; Indiana University Press: Bloomington, IN, USA, 2004.
4. Whitmoyer, K. *The Philosophy of Ontological Lateness: Merleau-Ponty and the Tasks of Thinking*; Bloomsbury: London, UK, 2017.
5. de Beauvoir, S. A Review of Phenomenology of Perception by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In *Philosophical Writings*; Simons, M.A., Timmerman, M., Mader, M.B., Eds.; Timmerman, M., Translator; The University of Illinois Press: Chicago, IL, USA, 2004.
6. Aristotle. *Physics, Volume I: Books 1–4*; Wicksteed, P.K., Translator; Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, USA, 2013.
7. Plato. *Timaeus*; Bury, R.G., Translator; Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, USA, 1999.
8. Augustine. *Confessions*; Sheed, F.J., Translator; Hackett: Cambridge, UK, 1993.
9. Hume. *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and the Principles of Morals*; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2000.
10. Kirk, G.S.; Raven, J.E.; Schofield, M. Parmenides, fr. 8. In *The Presocratic Philosophers*; Kirk, G.S., Raven, J.E., Schofield, M., Eds.; Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, 1983.
11. Critchley, S. Heidegger's Being and Time Part 8: Temporality. The Guardian. 2009. Available online: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2009/jul/27/heidegger-being-time-philosophy (accessed on 25 September 2024).
12. Wiskus, J. From the Body to the Melody: 'Relearning' the Experience of Time in the Later Merleau-Ponty. *Avant Trends in Interdiscip. Stud.* **2018**, *9*, 129–140. [CrossRef]
13. Toadvine, T. Singing the World in a New Key: Merleau-Ponty and the Ontology of Sense. *Janus Head* **2004**, *7*, 273–283. [CrossRef]
14. Merleau-Ponty, M. *Phenomenology of Perception*; Routledge & Kegan Paul: London, UK, 1945.
15. Kaushik, R. Where is Negation in Merleau-Ponty's Ontology? *Res. Phenomenol.* **2021**, *51*, 372–393. [CrossRef]
16. Nietzsche. *Beyond Good and Evil*; Kaufmann, W., Translator; Vintage: New York, NY, USA, 1989.
17. Claudel, P. *Art poétique*; Gallimard: Paris, France, 1984.
18. Bradley, A. *Negative Theology and Modern French Philosophy*; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2004.
19. Barbaras, R. *Desire and Distance*; Milan, P.B., Translator; Stanford University Press: Stanford, CA, USA, 2006.
20. Merleau-Ponty, M. *The Possibility of Philosophy*; Whitmoyer, K., Translator; Northwestern University Press: Evanston, IL, USA, 2022.
21. Merleau-Ponty, M. Eye and Mind. In *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*; Johnson, G., Ed.; Northwestern University Press: Evanston, IL, USA, 1993; pp. 121–149.

22. Whitmoyer, K. The Disarticulation of Time. *J. Br. Soc. Phenomenol.* **2015**, *46*, 213–232. [CrossRef]
23. Husserl, E. *Experience and Judgment*; Churchill, J.S.; Ameriks, K., Translators; Northwestern University Press: Evanston, IL, USA, 1975.
24. Heidegger, M. *Being and Time*; Macquarrie, J.; Robinson, E., Translators; Blackwell: Oxford, UK, 1962.
25. Sartre, J.-P. *Nausea*; Alexander, L., Translator; New Directions: New York, NY, USA, 2007.
26. Merleau-Ponty, M. *Sense and Non-Sense*; Hubert, L.D.; Dreyfus, P.A., Translators; Northwestern University Press: Evanston, IL, USA, 1964.