Gottlob Frege must certainly be considered to be a seminal figure in the formation of what came to be called “analytic philosophy.”¹ Frege had a profound influence on the “early” Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921),² which in turn had a profound influence on the logical positivism (or logical empiricism) of the Vienna Circle in the 1920’s and 30’s. Up to and including this period, analytic philosophy claimed that there are two primary sources of meaning, the formal truths of logic and the statements that could be verified empirically, with the meaning of words taken to be defined denotatively. The “later” Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* (1953),³ which challenges much of what was said in the *Tractatus* by claiming that the meaning of words must be tied to their use in a life activity, has influenced analytic philosophy since, for many analytic philosophers shifted to what was subsequently labelled “ordinary-language philosophy.” Here philosophy’s role is to clarify how language is ordinarily used, for the purpose of pointing out mistakes in this use. Yet many analytic philosophers still also appear to accept logical positivism (in general spirit if not to the letter⁴) as their underlying philosophical framework, as the background for their stress on formal (logical) analysis and the empirical justifications of the sciences.

Let us turn to a brief characterization of Frege’s philosophy, or at least to certain parts of it. Frege is often concerned with meaning because it is sentences with meaning, i.e., sentences that refer to objective states, that can be judged true or false. Thus, here, meanings (or, for Frege, thoughts) are equated to words that point to publicly observable objects, and these meanings (or thoughts) are taken to be objective because they are based on the objective sense data received from really existing objects.⁵ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, writing from a point of view deeply influenced by Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy, have the following to say about Frege’s thought.⁶
“Frege saw ideas as psychological, subjective, and private—essentially incommunicable and hence not a part of the public, shared meanings that are communicated through language. He took the senses, which go together to make up thoughts, not to have anything to do with human psychology, to be free of the subjective. Senses and thought, being nonpsychologicl, public, objective, and communicable, were capable of being meanings of linguistic expressions. This is what Dummett refers to as ‘the extrusion of thoughts from the mind.’ It lies behind virtually all of Anglo-American philosophy of language. Thoughts, freed from the mind, are objective; they are characterizable in terms of direct correspondences to things in the world . . . It is this Fregean notion of thought as objective and corresponding to things in the world that gives rise to the correspondence theory of truth as it occurs in Anglo-American philosophy of language.” (PF 250)

Thus, in Frege’s philosophy certain thoughts are taken to be objective because their meanings are simply taken to be their reference to objects; as such, they are taken to be freed from the subjective influences of the human mind and what Frege called ideas. The physical objects that language refers to and the ideal objects of mathematics and logic are objective, and thus their meanings are objective. Moreover, Frege takes this objectification of certain thoughts even further, as Lakoff and Johnson point out.

“As a mathematician and logician, Frege was excessively concerned with justifying mathematics as universal and absolute, transcending all time, place, and culture. His attack on ‘psychologism,’ the view that mathematics is the result of the structure of the human mind rather than an objective mind-independent reality, lead him to adopt a view of all meaning and thought as disembodied and formal . . . He thought of this universal, objective realm as containing such entities as senses (meanings), propositions, numbers, functions, and other formal structures.” (PF 440)

Frege is here clearly concerned with the mind-independent, objective status of thoughts and with the mind-independent, objective status of the relationship between thoughts, which he tends to model after mathematics. Lakoff and Johnson note that this entails the following: “just as in mathematical numbers can be accurately represented by sequences of written symbols, so concepts are seen as adequately represented by sequences of written symbols . . . just as mathematical calculation is mechanical (i.e., algorithmic), so is reasoning . . . just as numbers and principles of mathematical calculation are universal, so concepts and reason are universal” (PF 445, my bracket additions). Moreover, this mathematical model commits Frege to the following. “The symbols of a formal language, in themselves, are meaningless. A formal model needs to be interpreted to become meaningful . . . A state of the world consists of a set of entities, properties, and relations between these entities . . . States of the world can be modelled using set-theoretical structures . . . Meaning is a relationship between symbols of a formal language and entities in a set-theoretical model. Truth is a correspondence between a symbol sequence
indicating a predication in a formal language and a membership relation in a set theoretical model.” (PF 447) Moreover, as we have just seen, for Frege the relationship between thoughts is also taken to be objective, and thus (in the context of his philosophy) as mind-independent.7

We have just seen that what Frege calls meaning is to be understood as a third-person, objective process. Merleau-Ponty characterizes this sort of approach as follows: “I might be said to have sense-experience [i.e., Frege’s meaning] . . . to the extent that I coincide with the sensed. . .” In some scientific and philosophic circles, Merleau-Ponty proceeds, this sort of sense-experience is understood as pure sensation, which, in turn, is understood as “the experience of an undifferentiated, instantaneous, dot-like impact.”8 Merleau-Ponty proceeds to immediately state that this position cannot account for the meaning of human perception, for Gestalt psychology has shown that the simplest perception is a figure against a ground and is therefore an immediately meaningful gestalt whole for an experiencing subject (not a collection of discrete data passively and objectively received). Yet it is Merleau-Ponty who further and also stresses that the meaning of this perceived form cannot be accounted for as a third-person, objective process. The meaning of the perceived object must take into account the involvement of the aware, integrating, active, embodied perceiving subject. When, for example, the human subject perceives a Necker cube, which can be seen from above or below, the objective conditions remain the same for both observations. It is the integrating “interpretation” of the aware perceiving subject (not the conceiving subject) that shifts the meaning of the gestalt whole---which is irreducible to its isolated parts or to the passive reception of sense data. For Merleau-Ponty this means that the sensible qualities of the object cannot be understood simply as the mechanical effect of things outside the embodied, perceiving subject, but must be understood as the way the human body actively meets the world and is related to it as an aware, sensing, integrative whole (PhP 73-75). For Merleau-Ponty, then, meaning must be regarded as a co-creation of the forceful patterns of the perceptual world and the engaged, aware, embodied, interpreting perceiver, and this means that what Frege calls meaning and thought cannot be regarded as objective, with a simple correspondence of meaning (as the passive result of a third-person objective process) to the objective world as it is in-itself (a world, in fact, that is tacitly assumed to be formed by
objective thought, i.e., a world composed of conceptually conceived discrete units of matter in mechanical, external relationships to one another and to human perceivers as objects). The meaning of a word, then, from the perspective of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy, must be understood as referring to the quality of an object as it appears in the body’s active, aware, integrative perceptual encounter with the world, and, he adds, to how the object is used in a social context. This latter point certainly bears some resemblance to the later Wittgenstein, to his *Philosophical Investigations* and the “meaning as use” philosophy of language. Yet, even though the later Wittgenstein shifts to a much broader understanding of language then he held in his early *Tractatus* (which is similar to Frege’s position), and even though many followed his later work with the development of the so-called ordinary-language philosophy, and even though both the later Wittgenstein and these ordinary language philosophers touch base with this “social pragmatism” as it is found in Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy, neither recognizes (or takes very seriously), as Merleau-Ponty does, the human body’s active, aware, and even sensual, encounter with the world as an important source of meaning. Thus, instead of suppressing the “subjective” in order to claim that perception is passively objective, as Frege does, Merleau-Ponty argues that perception involves an active, aware, interested, integrating embodied subject that meets the world half way, with both the embodied subject and world contributing to the meaning of perceived objects, and yet with the world remaining the primary term. The perceiver is needed to account for the meaning of the perceived object/world, yet part of the meaning of this object is that it exists in its own right and runs beyond the perceiver both spatially and temporally. There is a transcendence (of the world) that is given within the context of the embodied subject’s perceptual immanence. Again, the perceptions of the embodied perceiver open upon a public field that runs beyond the perceiver both temporally and spatially, and yet we need to approach this field through our lived through perceptual experience, for its meaning cannot be constructed from the outside like bricks in a wall (PhP 21).

We have seen that in the context of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy that meaning is formed as the active, aware, sensing, human body meets the patterns of the perceptual world. This perceptual encounter is also the source of linguistic expression and meaning.
“All perception and all human action which presupposes it, in short every use of the human body, is already primordial expression. This means that perception is . . . the primary operation which first constitutes signs as signs. Perception makes what is expressed dwell in signs, not through some previous convention but through the eloquence of their very arrangement and configuration.”¹¹ (PW 78; see also ILVS 67)

Again, part of Merleau-Ponty’s point here is to stress the body’s active encounter with the world, and to stress that this is an important source of meaning for linguistic expression. He even compares linguistic expression to the artistic expression of the painter, for the painter prolongs the meaningful style that is already present in the perceptual act.

“Artistic expression thus takes up the fertile tradition of perception to continue it but is able to create new forms by sublimation of expressions and significations that open the way toward a new future. Artists are able to do this by taking up their past in order to use it as a means to express. What the artist lives can subsequently ‘become a signifying system.’ What we all live can become a means to express.” (PW 74-75)

Artistic expression, then, is a prolongation of the artist’s meaningful perceptual orientation or style, and it is this act of expression that helps us understand the expressions of others. “Signification occurs where we subject the given elements of the world to a ‘coherent deformation’”—where individuals perceptually open upon a common world and thus stylize and express it in particular ways. Here we find individuation from a common source but also the intersubjectivity of the common source. We are able to understand each other’s gestures because our gestures act in and open upon a common perceptual world in similar ways, like the gestures of painters. I am able to couple onto the gestures of others because we open upon a common perceptual world (our gestures meet in a common space) and, since we are similarly embodied, our gestures, i.e., our aware bodies, are capable of a sort operative intentional transgression. The other’s gestures can slip into mine, just as mine are capable of slipping into the gestures of others. Furthermore, this helps us along the path of forming more abstract and intersubjectivity available linguistic expressions. As Merleau-Ponty expresses it,

“when we compare language to mute forms of expression such as gestures or paintings, we must point out that unlike these forms language is not content to sketch out directions, vectors, a ‘coherent deformation,’ or a tacit meaning on the surface of the world . . . Language is not just the replacement of one meaning by another, but the substitution of equivalent meanings. The new structure is given as already present in the old, the latter subsists in it, and the past is now understood.” (ILVS 81; cf. PW 104ff)
Language is capable of great abstraction but achieves abstract expression primarily by integrating the variety of perceptual perspectives offered by the body’s multifaceted openness upon the world and by integrating the past with the present, frequently in ways that go beyond the past but that also enlightens it. A more detailed understanding of the relationship of language to perception was something Merleau-Ponty was moving toward in the later years of his professional life. In his posthumously published *The Visible and Invisible* he provisionally states the following: “however we are to understand it, the ‘pure’ ideality already streams forth along the articulations of the aesthesiological body, along the contours of sensible things, and, however new it is, it slips through ways it has not traced, transfigures horizons it did not open, it derives from the fundamental mystery of those notions ‘without equivalent,’ as Proust calls them, that lead their shadowy life in the night of the mind only because they have been divined at the junctions of the visible world.”

When considering even the most abstract definitions and constructions, like those of geometry or algebra, these ideas would be meaningless without the body’s perceptual orientation toward the world. Here in the incomplete *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty did not provide us with any examples of this sublimation of the perceptual in language. Yet, in his earlier notes, that came to be posthumously published as *Prose of the World*, he does: when we try to calculate the area of a parallelogram, we may first posit that it can be seen as two triangles, and from this structure we are able to derive, using the abstract symbols, what is needed for the calculation, the combined area of the triangles. Seeing the parallelogram as a combination of two triangles does not displace or negate the properties of the parallelogram. As we have just seen above (yet here offering the quotation from his earlier PW rather than ILVS), “this is not just a substitution of one meaning for another but a substitution of equivalent meanings, in which the new structure is latent in the old one while remaining present in the new. The past is not simply surpassed, it is understood . . .” (PW 104ff) Thus the significations of language are not just tied to specifics but can abstract from them to express common or general meanings. They can express a meaning that supersedes the specifics and yet that includes them. Thus, while language displays the ability to integrate specific meanings into more general orientations, both perception and painting remain content with tracing new forms “on the surface of the world.”
However, even though human beings have the capacity to take up multiple perspectives and to grasp a general meaning, human thought is not formed outside all human situations. Even the abstract language of geometry relies on a field of meaning already established or established with respect to another tradition. Galileo was able to unify the phenomena of acceleration and deceleration under one concept, giving the impression that he discovered an essence whose variations simply appear as examples of it. “But this signification [i.e., the essence] can in principle appear only through the concrete shapes which it unifies. That it appears to us on the basis of ‘particular cases’ is not an accident of its genesis with no essential effect. The signification is inscribed in its content, and if we tried to abstract the signification from the circumstances in which it appears, the signification would vanish before our eyes. The latter is not so much a signification over and above the facts which signify it as our means of passing from one fact to another or the trace of their intellectual generations.” This general truth or essence does not lie behind the particular cases the way reality supposedly remains behind appearances. The essence, in this case, would not generate new significations, for new significations will have a truth only insofar as we can experience them (PW 105; my bracket addition). Merleau-Ponty illustrates this point with the following example. “When Gauss remarks that the sum of the N prime numbers is equal to N/2 partial sums, so that is equal to N+1, and concludes with the formula N/2 (N+1) which applies to a whole series of numbers, what convinces him that he has found the essence and truth is that from this series he can see the derivation of the constant values he will reckon instead of calculating them” (PW 105-106). A story often retold about Gauss is that one of his childhood teachers instructed the class to add all the numbers from 1 to 100, one at a time, in sequence, as follows 1+2+3+4…99+100. The young Gauss, it is said, found a shorthand way to this long and tedious assignment, and did so rather quickly. As he played with different ways to arrange and calculate the numbers, he tried beginning with 1 and counting upward to 50, as well as beginning at 100 and counting downward to 51. When these lines were placed together as in illustration 1) below, he noticed that each column of numbers, when added together, produced the sum of 101, as in illustration 2) below.
Since there were 50 columns, the multiplication of 101 by 50 produced the sum of 5050, the same total achieved by the addition of each number to all the others in the one by one sequence requested by his teacher. Gauss’s insight produced the following formula: the sum of the $N$ numbers in sequence is equal to $\frac{N}{2} (N+1)$.\textsuperscript{13}

This story illustrates what Merleau-Ponty’s is claiming here: that “Gauss can see the derivation of constant values he will reckon instead of calculating their sum.” From the context here we can determine that Merleau-Ponty means two things by the word “see.” First, that abstract calculations are meaningful because we can at some point intuitively grasp (or see, as in second illustration above) the outcome of the calculations. And secondly, that abstract formulas are meaningful because, at least at some point, they refer back to the perceptual world. I know, for example, that $3 \times 3 = 9$ because at some point I have seen a group of 3 things added to 3 things 3 times. Obviously, the human ability to think abstractly allows us to calculate very large numbers, and to do so without seeing the actual things that these numbers represent. We can multiply 3242 x 5546 and arrive at the sum 17980132, for example, without having to see what these numbers represent, such as people, cars, plants or animals. Merleau-Ponty thus does not deny the role of abstract thought and even a degree of autonomy to the calculations of the algorithm, since derived formulas can go straight to their own results without appealing, once again, to the intermediary steps that allowed their derivation. However, to be meaningful, at some point, these formulas must relate back to the world that we perceive. “Thus nothing limits our power to formalize, that is, to construct increasingly general expressions of the same fact. But however far one proceeds with formalization, its signification remains in suspension, actually means nothing, and has no truth at all unless we refer its superstructures back to a visible object. To signify, to signify something as a decisive act, is therefore accomplished only when that something’s constructions are applied to the perceived as the source of signification or expression” (PW 106). (Cf. PhP 385-386, 446-448, and VI 149ff)\textsuperscript{14}
As we have seen, there has been a tendency, at least among some in the analytic tradition, to give abstract ideas an objective status. That is to say, there has been a tendency to conceive definitions, axioms, logical principles, etc., as objective essences or ideals that already contain their own ideas and the possible relationships between them. In Merleau-Ponty’s view, as just observed, one should not consider ideas as having objective existence, for abstract ideas are a sublimation of a perceptual gestalt. In addition, the reflection and the intellectual abstraction that produces these ideas, if it is authentic, sees itself as coming second, as based on a prior perceptual experience. Moreover, one should not think that the possible relations of ideas are already contained in their definitions, for this would be true only if one were to draw a circle, for example, in the sand as a physical object. But the definition of a circle as an idea does not already contain all its possible relations (PW 122-129). Abstract knowledge like that found in mathematics and logic “advances like a crab,” Merleau-Ponty says, looking back at “its point of departure” (PW 128). Abstract knowledge is a reconstruction of the original definition that includes the original in it. Yet with abstract knowledge like mathematical algorithms “... we are dealing with a transcendence [from a definition toward an open possibility of meaning] and not a static identity [of a conclusion with its hypothesis], and here as in language [and in perception] truth is not an adequation but anticipation, repetition and slippage of meaning” (PW 129, my bracket additions). For Merleau-Ponty abstract thinking thus involves or uses the principle of identity: the conclusion is constructed with the hypothesis in mind, a construction that brings with it (and thus identifies with) the meaning of the hypothesis. Yet since there is something new, there is slippage beyond the original meaning. It is not just repetition.

Merleau-Ponty, of course, does not deny Aristotelian or symbolic logic, but, rather, insists that this abstract logic be placed back within the context of our lived-through embodied perceptual openness upon the world. The principle of identity, for example, must be understood as an abstract expression of the stable identity of perceptual objects, of a stable foreground that occurs in the context of an open spatial and temporal horizon. Moreover, the class concepts of formal logic (for example, that “All humans are mortal,” or, even more abstractly, that “All S is P.”) must be regarded as abstractions, as abstractions
drawn from our perceptual field, which is more open, ambiguous, less precise, even with overlapping boundaries and dialectically related parts (as we find in Gestalt perception). We should certainly use the tools of abstract, logical argument and the algorithms of scientific research, but we should also remember to always place these abstractions back within the context of the concrete lived through perceptual experience of embodied subjects, we should remember not to reify these abstraction, not to treat them as the principles of thought, or, even worse, the principles of reality. (More on this below.) Moreover, Merleau-Ponty’s point here is not to reduce the movement of abstract thought to perception but to insist that this movement is creative and that, at least at some point, to remain effective, must relate back to the structures of the perceived world (PW 122-129).15

Language, then, means little or nothing if it does not refer back to our perceived world, but . . . Merleau-Ponty immediately proceeds to qualify this point.

“The perceived object, with its viscous significations, has a twofold relation to what is understood. On the one hand, it is only the sketch or fragment of meaning which calls for a repetition that fixes the perceived object and finally makes it exist. On the other, the perceived object is the prototype of meaning and alone accomplishes the actual truth of what is understood. To be sure, if we are to understand the sensible as quality, it must contain everything we think, although almost nothing in human perception is entirely sensible, since the sensible is indiscernible. But there is also nothing that we can actually and effectively think without relating it to our field of presence, to the actual existence of the perceived object---and in this sense the field of presence contains everything.” (PW 106-107)

This statement illustrates what Merleau-Ponty means by his use of Husserl’s term fundierung. For Merleau-Ponty, this term means founding but in an open existential/phenomenological sense (not a logical sense, or in the sense of resting upon some statically given set of empirical data). Perception is the founding term in the relationship to linguistic expressions but, given the openness of perceptual experience understood as lived-through openness upon the field of world, a variety of linguistic expressions/interpretations are possible. Furthermore, there is no definitively correct expression, for no expression is ever complete and others always remain possible. Yet some, or even one, may well express more clearly than others, may well bring to light and express more precisely and articulately the perceptual field that remains more open and ambiguous. The existential/phenomenological fundierung must therefore be understood as a relationship, with a founding perceptual term suggesting certain
linguistic expressions that fold back upon the motivating perception in order to express it with greater precision and clarity. We must thus think of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy (especially with respect to the way that it treats the relationship of perception to language) as dialectical as well as an embodied existential phenomenology, for his focus is on the crossing into one another of the body and the world in the act of lived through perception, on the crossing into one another of perception and language, and, finally, on the crossing into one another of an individual’s act of speech with the acts of speech of others and with the social and linguistic institutions of his or her community.

While Merleau-Ponty recognizes the tendency in some to attribute an independent, objective existence to concepts, since this is the way we experience the world perceptually, and since this perceptual “habit” is carried to our experience of concepts, for it appears that the concepts exist prior to our thinking about them, he nevertheless insists that the meanings and concepts of language and symbols have no independent, objective existence (as Frege maintained). Since Merleau-Ponty does not accept the objective existence of concepts, he does wonder how it is that we are to understand the ontological status of the meaning that is generated by formal logical and mathematical thinking, the prime examples of conceptual thinking.

“It is clear that the ‘properties’ of the series of integers are not ‘contained’ in that series. Once the series is clear of the perceptual analogy which makes ‘something’ (etwas überhaupt) of the mathematical expression, it is at each moment nothing but the ensemble of relations established within it plus an open horizon of relations that can be constructed. This horizon is not the mode of presentation of a self-contained mathematical entity; at every moment, there is really nothing in heaven or on earth but the known properties of the integer. One may say, if one wishes, that the unknown properties are already operative in the ensemble of objects which embody the numbers. But that is only a manner of speaking. One is trying to express by it that everything that will be revealed about numbers will also be true of numbered objects, which is quite certain but does not entail any preexistence of the truth.” (PW 125)

What exists, in this case, is a set of symbols that possess and refer to meanings. In addition, these meaningful symbols bear a certain relation to one another, and given these meaningful relations, given the terms and how we have defined them, other meanings may be implied, if they are developed by an aware subject. The meanings exist with their symbols as long as they are borne by aware subjects. They do not have an independent or objective existence. How do these significations exist when no one is using the language that they depend upon for their existence? We are obliged, Merleau-Ponty says, “to introduce an
essential mutation in speech, namely, the appearance of writing. It is writing which once and for all translates the meaning of spoken words into ideal being, at the same time transforming human sociability, in as much as writing is ‘virtual’ communication, the speaking of x to x which is not carried by any living subject and belongs in principle to everyone, evoking a total speech.”16 Thus, these meanings have a continued existence because they persist in written language. They have no existence if no one is using the symbols that carry their meaning, yet they can be reignited if these symbols are taken up again by aware subjects.17

To proceed to a consideration of essences, what Merleau-Ponty says of rationalism is applicable to, at least to some extent, the formal requirements of the early form of analytic philosophy. Both seek rational essences, the essence of what it is to exist, the essence of language, etc.18 Both seek the necessary conditions for the existence of being, for the existence and proper use of language, etc. Yet, we should ask, with Merleau-Ponty, can existence and linguistic function be grasped in abstract rational essences? No, for something exists prior to the essence that the essences are trying to grasp, for essences do not exist independently of existent things. Kant’s famous refrain states: If the world is to exist, then certain conditions must necessarily be present. “But,” Merleau-Ponty asks, “whence do we get the hypothesis . . . that there is a world?” There must be a prior knowledge beneath the essence that the essence relies upon but does not grasp (VI 109). Moreover, essences do not give us the necessary conditions for all possible being. They give us particular ways of being, and, if they do possess any universal value, it is because they make sense of an experience that is similar in embodied human beings as they open upon a shared world, and not that they preexist in the mind, in nature or in some realm of ideas (VI 109-110).

Yet, some might well object to Merleau-Ponty that he is using essences to express this claim. Yes, Merleau-Ponty says, and yet he proceeds to state the following: an essence “only survives my own intuition of the moment and is valid for me as a durable truth because my own experience interconnects within itself and connects with that of others by opening upon one sole world . . .” (VI 110) For Merleau-Ponty consciousness is not a private awareness of one’s own interior but a relation to the world. He does
not adhere to the representational theory of consciousness that much of Modernist and analytic
philosophy has followed since Descartes (with the mind most directly aware only of its own interior
representations). Consciousness is *ekstase*, i.e., it is an active transcendence toward the world. It is the
opening upon a field, a spatial and temporal field. Moreover, time is also an *ekstase*, for the present is an
active leaping out of itself toward the past and the future. Since consciousness fuses with temporality,
consciousness (especially perceptual consciousness, which is primordial) opens to a field (both spatial and
temporal) that runs beyond it, that open it to the experiences of others, to other possibilities. This leads
Merleau-Ponty to conclude the following:

“Every ideation, because it is an ideation, is formed in a space of existence, under the guarantee of my
duration, which must turn back into itself in order to find there the same idea I thought an instant ago and
must pass into the others in order to rejoin it also in them. Every ideation is borne by this tree of my
duration and their durations...; behind the idea, there is the unity, the simultaneity of all the real and
possible durations, the cohesion of one sole Being from one end to the other. Under the solidity of the
essence and of the idea, there is the fabric of experience, this flesh of time...” (VI 111)

Merleau-Ponty states explicitly that it is this “fabric of experience,” this “flesh of time” that connects each
individual with the world and others, also prevents us from penetrating “into the hard core of being”:

“My incontestable power to give leeway, to disengage the possible from the real, does not go so far as to
dominate all the implications of the spectacle and to make of the real a simple variant of the possible; on
the contrary, it is the possible worlds and possible beings that are the variants and are like doubles of the
actual world and actual Being.” (VI 111-112)

These comments are undoubtedly aimed at rationalist philosophies in general, at Modernist philosophy
even more generally (including analytic philosophy), i.e., at the general tendency to frame everything in
abstract rational categories and to ignore that which cannot as meaningless---and, of course, at Husserl’s
eidetic reduction in particular. For Husserl, the reflective subject begins with a concrete experience of a
particular thing, and then varies this thing in the imagination to find its essential structure. Once this
essence is discovered, it will then be used to fix the possibility of all the variations for this particular
object. Thus, once the essence is defined, it provides the necessary conditions for the appearance of the
particular object under consideration. Here, for Husserl, as for analytic philosophy, essence determines
existence and the possibility of existence. Here the real is a variant of the possible---which is determined
by the essence. Merleau-Ponty, however, has just argued that the real is not a variant of the possible, but
that it is the possible that is a variant of the real. By starting with a concrete experience of a concrete thing, we can reflect (we do have some leeway) in order to compare the object to other objects and to compare our experience to other experiences and the experiences that occur to other subjects. This allows us, with the assistance of language of course, to form a provisional, “working essence,” something that can be used to at least temporarily guide our behavior in our attempt to adapt to each other and the world together. What this really allows us to determine is the inessential, what does not belong to the essence of the object or experience. Strictly speaking, to determine what is typically thought of as the essential by the early analytic philosophers, the reflecting knower would have to be outside of all situatedness, outside of all time and space, outside one’s own incarnate duration, which would be impossible, and which is the very thing that gives one access to the world and things and the possibility of forming at least some idea of a “working essence.”

In general, what Frege and other Modernists have done is treat logic as a metaphysics: they tacitly project rational essences and abstract logical principles back into nature and assume that nature is a manifestation of, and thus must follow, these rational essences and logical principles, or they at least assume that what must be taken seriously about nature must fit within abstract rational categories. For Merleau-Ponty rational essences, logical principles, and mathematical rules are not “objective.” They do not exist outside the human mind in the way that Frege seemed to think. Rational essences, logical principles, and mathematical rules are not independently existing meanings that already contain all their own conceptual relations. The idea of the essence of a circle, as we have seen above, does not already include all possible ideas that can be derived from it, and, as we have seen Merleau-Ponty express above, an idea that can be derived from the definition of the circle “advances like a crab turned toward its point of departure.” The new ideas reconstruct the original and do so in new ways. The new ideas are possible based on the old or the original but they remain a human creation. Yet, the new ideas are not arbitrary, for they are based on what is originally given, which are linguistic definitions formed by abstraction from our lived through and open perceptual encounters with the world. In addition, and along the same lines, as we have already witnessed above, the principle of identity must not be regarded as arbitrary, for it is loosely
based on our perceptual encounter with objects in the world, on stable foregrounds that, it must be
stressed, occur in an open and unfixed horizon. For Merleau-Ponty there is presence and identity but
within the context of an openness, within the context of absence and difference. Stable perceptual (as well
as linguistic and even formal) foregrounds always occur in the context of open and implied horizons (PW
122-129).

Overall, then, the criticism of analytic philosophy can be summarized as follows. The early version,
which professed to grasp the essence of language, should be criticized for being way too narrow, as the
“later” Wittgenstein himself claimed. Language does much more than point to discrete objects with
nouns, in an attempt to describe a relationship between them. Language, Wittgenstein realizes, can also
tell stories, make a joke, create and test a hypothesis, etc. Moreover, it is now widely accepted (even in
the analytic tradition, and as Merleau-Ponty has argued) that words do not occur as isolated units but only
as part of a web of connections, as part of a multitude of relationships of a linguistic and cultural field
(which, in turn, Merleau-Ponty would insist, attempts to make sense of gestalt relationships of our
perceptual field). It appears that Irving Copi attempts to save some of this early version of analytic
philosophy of language by claiming that some order can be given to the vast number of uses of language
by placing them into three general categories: descriptive, expressive, and directive. By thus
differentiating between these uses Copi proposes that logicians can focus on the descriptive use of
language, thereby maintaining the denotative function of simple nouns. Yet, Copi does admit that it is
difficult to maintain the distinctions between these three categories and that there is no mechanical way to
do so.

Merleau-Ponty would undoubtedly agree that it is difficult to maintain these distinctions, for it is
not difficult to see that in his work that the perceptual, the affective, and even the prescriptive are
intimately connected, since he treats the human organism as an organic, gestalt whole. We have seen that
for Merleau-Ponty we must not completely separate the subjective and objective, for to a certain extent
they occur together and overlap. We have subsequently seen that a word’s meaning is the quality that an
object takes on as we bodily interact with the world as aware, interested subjects and that it takes on in
various social contexts that help frame our wide range of natural and social/cultural needs. Moreover, and most generally, within the context of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy, the early version of analytic philosophy wrongly describes language as a third person, objective process, and wrongly assumes that the characteristics of formal logic appropriately capture the characteristics of nature and language, in the sense that logic provides the necessary formal conditions for the appearance of any natural and linguistic event, yet with the empirical providing the information regarding the actually occurring events. Within the general context of logical positivism, with the general claim that there are two sources of meaning, the formal relations of logic and objectively confirmed empirical data, this empirical data provides the basis for the class concepts (or the information about the individuals in a set, which assumes the grasping of a common attribute) that are formally manipulated within the context of “objective” principles of logic. Contrarily, we have seen Merleau-Ponty claim that in order to properly understand logic (and language) we must see it as an abstract tool that must be placed back into the context of open and even ambiguous lived through experience as a whole. All ideas appear in a context, including the historical and cultural environment within which the ideas were developed. Commenting favorably on Piaget’s stand against logicism, on his objection that logicism “reduces unique thought to a series of elemental operations,” Merleau-Ponty states that, first of all, “we must find again the fact of thought, living and acting, the unique motor of our thought’s operations. Two tasks remain: we must add to logic a logic of totalities [of gestalt wholes with interconnected and mutually implicating parts] and redefine logic in a manner that is no longer a sort of reality model but a living portrait of factual thought.” Merleau-Ponty continues:

“The second way to resolve the problem is to envision what the effective function of thought is. We come to see that the definition does not exhaust all the elements of the real . . . Living and interesting thought is not within definitions; we must try to construct concepts (put the two terms in relation) by relation to life [and not just by contingent external association or simply by the internal meaning of concepts, established by definitional fiat]. The problem does not pose itself in relation to the principle of noncontradiction. The effective functioning of our thought permits this principle to realize itself in a much more nuanced and complex manner. It is for us to observe a cohesion in lived phenomena more than to engage in a rigorous confrontation of logical terms. We seem to now be at the antipodes of logicism.”

Merleau-Ponty’s comments here regarding Piaget’s and logic are reminiscent of his earlier Phenomenology of Perception. In the Preface he states the following. “Probably the chief gain from
phenomenology is to have united extreme subjectivism and extreme objectivism in its notion of the world or of rationality.” We have seen above that meaning is formed as the lived through human body comes together with the forceful perceptual patterns of the world, as the subjective and objective come together and meet. Yet, this coming together does not represent a complete union, for a complete collapse into one another would render experience impossible. With this union there must also be separation and difference. There are subjective and objective poles of experience that meet in the middle, so to speak, and cross into one another. Yet this crossing into one another still preserves a distance. There is a perceptual presence but this presence occurs in the context of an open spatial and temporal perceptual field. Perceptual presence (a foreground) occurs in the context an absence, in the context of an implied and open horizon. Thus, phenomenological rationality is the overlapping or blending of perceptual perspectives that involve both the subject and the world and that leaves open future possibilities, possibilities that are perceptual, not logical. The perceptual blending of perspectives follows the principles of lived through gestalt perception, not the principles of abstract logic, or, for that matter, the principles of the mere association of isolated empirical events. Merleau-Ponty proceeds. “Rationality is precisely proportioned to the experiences in which it is disclosed. To say that there exists rationality is to say that perspectives blend, perceptions confirm each other, a meaning emerges. But it should not be set in a realm apart, transposed into absolute Spirit, or into a world in the realist sense.” Rationality is established in and through experience. It is not already established, certainly not in some sort of ideal realm, or in the mind, or, for that matter, in nature in itself---certainly not as the abstract principles of Aristotelian or symbolic logic, which are human creations, abstractions from our lived through perceptual encounter with the world. Again, Merleau-Ponty proceeds. “The phenomenological world is not pure being, but the sense which is revealed where the paths of my various experiences intersect, and also where my own and other people’s intersect and engage each other like gears. It is thus inseparable from subjectivity and intersubjectivity, which find their unity when I either take up my past experiences in those of the present, or other people’s in my own.” Phenomenological rationality is formed where my perceptual perspectives meet and blend, with each other and with those lived through by others, as we actively encounter the world together. Thus,
a rational truth involves three primary relationships, the relationship between the embodied subject and the world, the relationship between embodied subjects as we actively engage with the world together, and the relationship between present experiences with those previously lived through in the past. If this is true, and if we are aware of this truth, then “for the first time, Merleau-Ponty says, “the philosopher’s thinking is sufficiently conscious not to anticipate itself and endow its own results with reified form in the world.”

Again, rationality is not already established (or objectively established, as Frege maintains) but remains to be established in our lived through experience, but this does not mean that we cannot use already established rational principles as tools. Yet these tools must always return to our lived through experience for their renewal, confirmation and adjustment. (PhP xix-xx, see also PW 106; see also PhP 384ff and VI 149ff)

This view of rationality provides us with a suitable alternative to the analytic version witnessed above, for it escapes its shortcomings, its reification of formal rationality, its tabula rasa empiricism coupled with its search for necessary conditions and rational essences, and, in addition, helps provide a more plausible explanation of an engaged human rationality—and does so without slipping into what has now been labeled postmodernism. The later version of analytic philosophy, i.e., the later Wittgenstein of the Philosophical Investigations, and the so-called common language philosophy that followed this text, as well as most postmodernist continental philosophy, are in many ways quite similar to Merleau-Ponty’s focus on the use of language in practical, social context. Yet all seem to lack Merleau-Ponty’s concern for the body’s sensual encounter with the world, and none adequately takes this encounter into account when theorizing about the source of linguistic meaning.

We have seen logical positivism assert that the two sources of meaning are the formal truths of logic and the empirically verifiable statements about the world, that it is logic that provides the necessary conditions for the existence and empirical appearance of things and events. Yet, as we have just seen, this is a form of metaphysics, for it projects its ideal logical principles back into nature or at least applies them to the nature of appearances. Contrarily, we have seen Merleau-Ponty argue that logical principles are human creations, abstractions from our lived through perceptual encounter with the world. Lived through
perceptual experience is not just a manifestation of ideal logical forms. We should start with lived through perceptual experience and use abstract forms of thought as tools to help clarify experience, but these tools must continually be placed back into the context of this lived through, and open, perceptual experience.

We have seen that for Merleau-Ponty that meaning is first formed as the active, embodied subject comes together with the forceful perceptual patterns of the world. This is the first chiasm, or crossing into one another, of which he speaks. The second is the chiasm between perception and linguistic gestures of speech, for, as we have seen, perception suggests certain linguistic interpretations, just as these interpretations fold back the perceived in order to articulate it more precisely. The third chiasm helps us understand what Merleau-Ponty means by the “ensemble of relations” mentioned above, for it is the chiasm between linguistics expressions and the meanings that these expressions articulate. These meanings do not exist without the linguistic expressions that articulate them; they have no independent existence, and this means that the linguistic expressions are not meaningless signs, for they express a meaning, just as a cry in the dark expresses a call for help.

“What we mean is not before us, outside all speech, as sheer signification. It is only the excess of what we live over what has already been said. With our apparatus of expression we set ourselves up in a situation the apparatus is sensitive to, we confront it with the situation, and our statements are only the final balance of these exchanges. Political thought itself is of this order. It is always the elucidation of a historical perception in which all our understandings, all our experiences, and all our values simultaneously come into play—and of which our theses are only the schematic formulation.” (ILVS 83).

This, then, is what we must get to or get back to. This lived through embodied openness upon the perceptual field of the world, with others, is the authentic way to understand human experience and to ground human knowledge (which is fundamentally an open yet stable relationship between oneself and one’s past, between oneself and the world, and between oneself and others). This is also the authentic way to attempt to understand political experience and to ground political reason. We must first live the world as active, interested, embodied subjects along with other active, interested, embodied subjects. Then, within this context, we must attempt to express our experience and our needs in dialog with others in order to improve our situations, in order to successfully adapt to (or more successfully adapt to) the world and each other. Moreover, we should use here the epistemological category “accuracy” and the logical
category “comprehension,” for the theoretical categories that most accurately and meaningfully describe experience as we actually live it are the ones that we should accept.25

One of the models that Jean-François Lyotard looks at for the justification of knowledge claims may perhaps be called the “techno-efficiency model.”26 Since empirical knowledge is limited in its reach (both microscopically and macroscopically), he says, technology has played an important role in extending this reach, to the point, however, where truth becomes equated with efficient performance. Here, in increasing technological environments, truth is what works most efficiently, with truth linked not only to technical efficiency but also to commerce and profitability, and ultimately to those who control large sums of money. Research becomes funded to increase efficiency and profit, and it is funded by those who benefit the most from increased profits, wealthy investors. Lyotard stresses that when this sort of system dominates, as it does in advanced industrial and postindustrial societies, education becomes dominated by the training of managers and workers in what has since been label STEM skills, the scientific, technological, engineering and mathematical/logical skills that are needed for commercial, technological societies to run efficiently. In this environment, skills are provided by education rather than the education of the whole person who can think and act creatively and critically in the context of a democratic society as a whole (PC 47-53). Or, insofar as creativity and critical thinking are encouraged, they are encouraged only in a way that makes the system more efficient. Much of recent philosophy in the Modernist tradition, of which analytic philosophy is a part, can certainly be seen as working within the context of this techno-efficiency model, with its prioritizing of STEM education.27 Again, the paragraph immediately above offers Merleau-Ponty’s alternative, as does the paragraph immediately below.

In the remarkable essay “Eye and Mind,”28 Merleau-Ponty’s states that one of his primary concerns is a fundamental reevaluation of Modernist metaphysics and ontology, especially as represented by Descartes’ coordinate grid system and the geometrical portrayals of Renaissance painters, but, we should add here, also by at least some analytic philosophers, and by the techno-efficiency model. By analyzing the modes of geometric representation that he finds in both Descartes’ work and in Renaissance painting, and by comparing them to the multifarious and elastic modes of representation of modern painters such as
Cezanne, Klee and Matisse, Merleau-Ponty makes the case for variable and open-ended forms of representation and for a multifaceted and open-ended Being. It is clear, though, that he here seeks to broaden the notion of rationality and not eliminate it. “Eye and Mind” also offers a brief assessment of the instrumental form science had taken in the middle of the 20th Century. (This is very close to the techno-efficiency model just discussed above.) This form of science, Merleau-Ponty claims, manipulates the world, and does so with great virtuosity, yet it gives up fully living in the world and comes face to face with it only on rare occasions. Merleau-Ponty is thus cognizant and appreciative of the power of science to successfully manipulate the world using algorithms and operational definitions, though he cautions that we must from time to time place these instruments within the fuller context of human life as it is lived. If this is not done, he says, it is likely that human beings will also become the manipulandum of an instrumental formula, robbing us of our full humanity. Moreover, as we have seen above, we now see here in his last published essay, not only must science return to the lived “there is” of the world, but it must also return to the lived “there is’ of the world as a public phenomenon, as a phenomenon that is experienced inter-subjectively. Our primordial and public openness upon being will hopefully help us reveal the “brute fabric of meaning” along with the brute fabric of being.29

Looking at this lived through and public openness upon the world epistemologically, we should state that Merleau-Ponty’s frequent mode of argument is to compare theories and how each theory accounts for the facts, i.e., accounts for that which is typically lived through by most. To offer a specific example, when considering the fact of the experience of a phantom limb, Merleau-Ponty shows that neither the rationalist nor the empiricist can provide a theoretical account for the experience as it is lived through by a range of patients. Rationalism fails because the patient still feels the missing limb even though he or she knows that the limb is no longer present, and empiricism fails because the patient still feels the missing limb even though the neurological pathways of the limb are no longer present and thus, obviously, are no longer able to send impulses up and down the leg. However, the theory of the lived body is able to provide a plausible explanation, for the lived body’s habitual being-in-the-world, a
habitual orientation with all limbs intact, seeks to maintain certain favored orientations, even if a limb is missing. (See PhP 76-89)

Merleau-Ponty’s epistemological approach here comes between Modernism and Postmodernism. He breaks with Modernism because he prioritizes perceptual experience over abstract thought. He prioritizes lived through perceptual experience over this experience already conceptualized in abstract categories. Or, to state this more clearly, within the context of a fundierung relationship, we have perception as the primary term that suggests certain linguistic and conceptual expressions but we also have the expressions and concepts folding back upon the perceived in order to articulate it more precisely.

We have perceptual patterns suggesting certain theoretical explanations, and it is the theoretical explanations that best makes sense of the perceptual patterns that we should accept. Thus, in breaking with Modernism, with the world already formed by already abstract thought, Merleau-Ponty still maintains that there is a “rational” criteria for the evaluation theories. We should accept the theory that most clarifies the perceptual patterns unfolding before us in our lived through experience, and, moreover, this is how his philosophy breaks with postmodernism, for theories are not merely a free play of language but must make sense of our experience as it is lived through by the human body. The human body, he says, is a “measurant” of the world. It “measures” the world as it attempts to adapt to it as meaningfully as possible. (VI 249) Yet, there is something there to measure the measurant. It is the world itself that ultimately determines whether or not the measurant is correct. It is the world itself that determines whether or not the linguistic, conceptual explanation is correct.

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1 I must say, though, that I am frequently reminded of John Lock when I read certain works by Frege, especially Locke’s distinction between primary and secondary qualities. For both Locke and Frege there are both primary and secondary qualities. For both philosophers, properties exist in the object that are really in the object and are mind independent in the sense that they escape subjective distortion introduced by the biases of particular perceivers. For Locke, perceived primary qualities (such as extension, number, and movement) are taken to be directly caused by the properties of the objects in-themselves. Similarly, for Frege, what he labels “meanings” or “thoughts” are taken to be objective, for they refer directly to objective states. With Locke, we also see a move toward the mathematization of nature. Both geometry (extension) and mathematics (number), coupled with motion and
mechanical impact, can be used to reveal and predict what happens objectively in the world. And, of course, for both philosophers there are qualities that are experienced by subjects that are not objective.


4 See Richard Creath, “Logical Empiricism” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2017, where he states the following: “. . . by 1970 the movement was pretty clearly over—though with lasting influence whether recognized or not.” And: “. . . the movement had left a legacy and . . . ‘the spirit which inspired the Vienna circle’ persisted. It still does.” And: “. . . the spirit of the movement still has its adherents . . . There are many who want to find a natural home within a broad conception of science . . . for logic and mathematics . . .” [https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/logical-empiricism/](https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/logical-empiricism/).


7 This paragraph was drawn from my *Merleau-Ponty in Contemporary Context: Philosophy and Politics in the Twenty-First Century* (New Brunswick, Transaction Publishers, 2013, now with Routledge), 132. Regarding Frege and the dominance of analytic philosophy, along with logical positivism, I should report that this was my experience (which was probably typical for most students at state universities in the U.S.) as an undergraduate philosophy major at SUNY Buffalo in the late 1960s and early 1970s, that is to say, the philosophy department was dominated by this sort of analytic philosophy. Students where taught to appeal to the sciences for “factual information,” yet this mode of thinking (i.e., science as inductive reasoning) was almost never studied, for philosophy used a different form of knowledge, formal deductive reasoning. The logic classes that I took focused on deductive logic only, with the assumption, I suppose, that courses dealing with the philosophy of science [offered far less frequently] would deal with inductive reasoning. In my opinion, formed from my experience as a philosophy student and later as a philosophy faculty, philosophy departments would probably better serve students if logic classes started with inductive reasoning, which is common in daily life, proceeding then to Aristotelian deduction, and finally to symbolic logic. In most philosophy classrooms we were generally taught to look at the formal structure of an argument and, more critically, to evaluate it by using the formal principles of deductive logic and especially, to defeat an argument, to find a counter example to the stated logical form that demonstrated that the form was illogical. Fortunately, in those days, the department also offered courses, but not many, dealing with existentialism, phenomenology, American pragmatism (usually Pierce, James and Dewey, but not Mead), and, even less frequently, an occasional course dealing with the philosophy of the early Marx, which bore some similarity to both existentialism/phenomenology and American pragmatism. These alternative courses placed in relief, at least to some extent, the thought and methods of analytic philosophy, to the extent that students were able to see that it was not the only way to do philosophy. Yet, this was but a glimpse. What dominated (and still does) was formal deductive logic. Again, it is my opinion that philosophy departments would serve students far better if these different ways of doing philosophy (along with still others) were taught in greater balance.


9 See Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 187, where he states: “If we consider only the conceptual and delimiting meaning of words, it is true that the verbal form with the exception of endings—appears arbitrary. But it would no longer appear so if we took into account the emotional content of the word, which we have called above its ‘gestural’ sense, which is all-important in poetry, for example. It would then be found that the words, vowels and phonemes are so many ways of ‘singing’ the world, and that their function is to represent things not, as the naive
onomatopoeic theory had it, by reason of an objective resemblance, but because they extract, and literally express, their emotional essence.”

10 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 179, 403. For an excellent discussion of how, in Merleau-Ponty’s thought, the individual as an active agent interacts with social institutions, see Nick Crossley, “Phenomenology, Structuralism and History: Merleau-Ponty's Social Theory” in *Theoria* 103 (2004): 88-121. See especially the section entitled “Institution, Situation and Structuration,” 96-99.

11 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, trans. John O’Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973). Referred to in the text as PW. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence” in *Signs*, 39-83. Referred to in the text as ILVS. When appropriate, I will here present the two texts together, since the published “Indirect Language and The Voices of Silence,” originally published in 1952, is basically a condensed essay length version of the posthumously published book length manuscript, written in 1951, that comes to be entitled *The Prose of the World*. The passages that will be cited in many cases appear in both texts, frequently with no changes at all, sometimes with only minor changes. Overall, the two texts make the same point: that the logos or structure of perception gives rise to and is sublimated in the logos of language. For Claude Lefort’s statement regarding the probable date of the writing of *The Prose of the World* see his editor’s introduction to this text, xiv ff.


14 Much of the above three paragraphs has been excerpted from my *Merleau-Ponty in Contemporary Context* (New Brunswick, Transaction Publishers, 2013), 93-95.

15 This paragraph and the one immediately above have been excerpted from my “Merleau-Ponty’s Concept of Reason,” *Journal of Philosophical Research* 19 (1994): 109-125, with some revision.


17 This, of course, presumes some sort of dictionary or Rosetta Stone, if the language is no longer spoke, to link it to a living language.

18 Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 1, opens with a quote from Augustine’s *Confessions*. The quote is undoubtedly an elliptical reference to Wittgenstein’s own “picture theory of language” as he presented it his earlier *Tractatus*. The quote is followed by this sentence: “These words, it seems to me, give us a particular picture of the essence of human language. It is this: the words in language name objects — sentences are combinations of such names. — In this picture of language we find the roots of the following idea: Every word has a meaning. This meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands.” See also *Philosophy of Language: The Big Questions*, 85-86, my italics.

19 The above three paragraphs have been excerpted from my *Merleau-Ponty’s Last Vision* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2000), See 17-19. Some minor changes have been made.

20 Andrew Bachhuber, for example, in his *Introduction to Logic* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1957), stresses that the principles of logical inference rest upon the principles of identity and noncontradiction (122-132, 138). Moreover, these principles were taken to be self-evident (5-6) and as representing the very structure of reality (123). Moreover, the insistence by logical positivists that formal meaning provides the necessary conditions for the possibility of the meaningful appearance of things and events indicates that reality must be understood in the context of the principles of formal logic. Now, certainly, analytic philosophers are fully aware of Godel’s incompleteness theorems (first published in 1931), basically that formal systems could not establish a set of axioms that were both consistent and complete. Yet, of course, logic is still adhered to (and taught) with the belief that logical systems are
still possible, and even necessary, even if they are not complete. However, if we accept that no single logical system is both consistent and complete, then no single logical system can be taken to represent the essence or entirety of nature.


23 The formation of class concepts has always been a problem for *tabula rasa* empiricism. If we perceive particulars, and if perception is passive, how are we to understand the formation of general class concepts? As Merleau-Ponty says, against psychologism. i.e., the idea that the content of human conscious is the result of external casual events, that human knowledge presupposes that we turn back on the events and grasp a meaning in them. See Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of facts and essences given together: “The visible can thus fill me . . . only because I who see it do not see it from the depths of nothingness, but from the midst of itself” (VI 113). And this means that “facts and essences can no longer be distinguished . . . because . . . the alleged facts, the spatio-temporal individuals, are from the first mounted on the axes, the pivots, the dimensions, the generality of my body, and the ideas are therefore already encrusted in its joints” (VI 114). “We never have before us pure individuals, . . . nor essences without place and without date. Not that they exist elsewhere, beyond our grasp, but because we are experiences, that is, thoughts that feel behind themselves the weight of the space, the time, the very Being they think . . .” (VI 115)


25 This paragraph has been excerpted, with some revision, from my “Further Considerations on Alienation,” *Philosophy Today* 58 (Spring 2014): 241-263. See also my *Merleau-Ponty in Contemporary Context*, 17-29.


27 It now sometimes seems that philosophers are to perform only Locke’s role of gardeners for the sciences and logic, removing the “irrational” weeds that hinder the growth and efficiency of science and technology. Of course, I am not claiming here that all analytic philosophers simply act within a cultural and philosophical status qua, or that analytic philosophers only act as “gardeners” for the sciences and logic, yet the general support for this view as well as for logical positivism has certainly been the dominant philosophical trend for the last century in both Britain and the United States.


“Science manipulates things and gives up living in them. Operating within its own realm, it makes its constructs of things; operating upon these indices or variables to effect whatever transformations are permitted by their definition, it comes face to face with the real world only at rare intervals. It is, and always has been, that admirably active, ingenious, and bold way of thinking whose fundamental bias is to treat everything as though it were an object-in-general—as though it meant nothing to us and yet was predestined for our ingenious schemes” (121).

“But classical science clung to a feeling for the opaqueness of the world, and it expected through its constructions to get back into the world. For this reason it felt obliged to seek a transcendent or transcendental foundation for its operations. Today we find—not in science but in a widely prevalent philosophy of the sciences—an entirely new approach. Constructive scientific activities see themselves and represent themselves to be autonomous, and their
thinking deliberately reduces itself to a set of data-collecting techniques which it has invented. To think is thus to test out, to operate, to transform—the only restriction being that this activity is regulated by an experimental control that admits only the most ‘worked-up’ phenomena, more likely produced by the apparatus than recorded by it” (121-122).

“To say that the world is, by nominal definition, the object x of our operations is to treat the scientist’s knowledge as if it were absolute, as if everything that is and has been was meant only to enter the laboratory. Thinking ‘operationally’ has become a sort of absolute artificialism, such as we see in the ideology of cybernetics, where human creations are derived from a natural information process, itself conceived on the model of human machines. If this kind of thinking were to extend its dominion over humanity and history; and if, ignoring what we know of them through contact and our own situations, it were to set out to construct them on the basis of a few abstract indices (as a decadent psychoanalysis and culturalism have done in the United States)—then, since the human being truly becomes the manipulandum he thinks he is, we enter into a cultural regimen in which there is neither truth nor falsehood concerning humanity and history, into a sleep, or nightmare from which there is no awakening” (122).

29 I have excerpted some of this paragraph, with some changes, from my Merleau-Ponty’s Last Vision. The phrases quoted are from Merleau-Ponty’s “Eye and Mind,” Smith translation, 122-123.