

# Exploring Process Theology

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Session

### Merleau-Ponty Primer

***Phenomenology of Perception*** (French: *Phénoménologie de la perception*) is a 1945 book about [perception](#) by the French philosopher [Maurice Merleau-Ponty](#), in which the author expounds his thesis of "the primacy of perception". The work established Merleau-Ponty as the pre-eminent philosopher of the body, and is considered a major statement of French [existentialism](#).

### Summary

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Merleau-Ponty attempts to define [phenomenology](#), which according to him has not yet received a proper definition. He asserts that phenomenology contains a series of apparent contradictions, which include the fact that it attempts to create a philosophy that would be a rigorous science while also offering an account of [space](#), [time](#) and the world as people experience them. (Wikipedia)

**Constancy Hypothesis(empirical)** there is a constant point to point correspondence between physical aspects of a stimulus sensation and the psychological attribute that results from the sensation.

**Perception** has more to do with the context and relations that are relevant to the stimulus complex. Perception is relationally determined rather than just atomically determined.

**Intellectualism** fails to do the same thing as well it falls into a similar trap that it results in the determinate atoms as cause for perception. Idealists propose that the reality we perceive is a projection from the mind, a representational view of perception.

Both intellectualism and empiricism are concerned with how we come to know what we are perceiving. Merleau-Ponty asserts that perceptual experience should focus on the gestalt, which takes into account the whole of the figures against the ground and accounts for the indeterminate and ambiguous contextual aspects found in our phenomenal experience.

Focus on how it is sensed, sensing is, "the living communication with the world that makes it present to us as a familiar place of our life."

Embodied point of reference contains space and time.

Affordances are relative to the behavioral abilities of the animals that perceive them.

**Perception is a flow of experiences** that implicate and execute each other just as much in simultaneity as they do in succession. Perception is ambiguous in that it is composed of relevant figures of a part of a background of other relevant figures.

**A lived space is an experience of spatiality** of that which expresses our being firmly set within the world. This lived space can include not only our current landscape but also mythical and abstract spaces.

**Mythical phenomenon as a genuine presence** rather than a mere representation. What we perceive, we in turn create meaning from.

'Myth is a projection of existence and an expression of the human condition.

### Discussion Questions:

1. Do you think there is an objective truth outside of our perception, but can be discovered?
2. Do you think that our soul/mind is the basis of this reality?
3. Do our senses show us reality or just our perception of reality?
4. Do our senses and thoughts matter more than reality?
5. What matters most for Ponty and existentialists?

# Introduction to Process Theology

## Philosophy of Organism

Prehension - is the action of grasping or seizing or act of awareness.

Actual entity - is only a momentary instance.

Eternal object - The past becomes an eternal object and it no longer goes and changes. But rather, it serves to be prehended by the creatively active press.

Concrescence - integration of past actual occasions or the production of novel togetherness

Ingress - is the act of entering: entrance.

Disjunctive diversity the ability of singularities to refuse toprehend other actual entities.

Actual entities are distinguishable from each other when they are able to choose what is relevant to positively prehend and bring into their subjective unity.

Negative prehension is still a relationship which creates distinct occasions of experience.

Conjunctive prehensions are actual entities which are positively prehended and include many subjective unities which are relevant to each other.

Nexus – society of many singularities that positively prehend each other due to their relevance to each other

God is essential component; God cannot be extracted.

God is partially temporal, called one, creativity, many and ultimate.

Creativity is the ultimate principle because it introduces novelty into the constitution of actual entities.

Each actual entity is a novel complex unity of locations of experience.

Term creative advance to illustrate God's relationship with the universe. God as the principle for novelty and creativity enacts the advance from disjunction to conjunction.

“The many become one and are increased by one”

“God as creative principle does not refer to a real being, rather God as creativity is the character of every occasion of experience both eternal objects and actual entities

Occasions of experience and God hold an equal metaphysical footing. God exists as a social being in a dynamic non-linear interaction with the universe.

Supernaturalism is rejected because it supposed there is a reality that can be abstracted from the universe. Whitehead's God cannot be abstracted from the universe and vice versa. Rather God and entities are co-creators. They each have a dipolar nature, they have a physical pole and a mental pole, but not separate and distinct substances. Whitehead says they are distinguishable but at the same time inseparable. Actual entity is not a substance but rather it is a process. God's physical pole and mental pole are characterized as the consequent nature and the primordial nature

Whitehead's ultimate lays out his concept of God as an ontological principle that is presupposed by his other three categories, categories of existence, categories of explanation, and the categorial obligation. The ontological principle states that "it is the principle that everything is positively somewhere in actuality and in potency, everywhere. This ontological principle insists on the existence of God as a necessary agent for eternal objects. God is an agent of comparison for eternal objects. Agency of comparison only exists in actual entities. Actual entities have the ability to compare and contrast, that is positively and negatively prehend eternal objects and other actual entities into their subjective unity. Eternal objects along cannot perform this act of prehension, so God, therefore, serves as an agency for eternal objects.

"God is the primordial creature" Primordial refers to fundamental nature for creative advance of actual entities. The character of God is that of a creature that is always in concrescence and never in the past. This is termed the consequent nature of God. God has objective immortality because of the primordial nature. The consequent nature occurs as a result of the physical prehensions of the derivative actual entities. God's reality is social, such that God needs the universe. Prehension ensures that the world is part of God and that God is part of the world. This is panentheism. Occasions of experience can be considered fragments of God, such that they are parts within God, but are not necessarily illustrative of the whole. "Wholes do not necessarily share the characteristics of their parts" If there are evil parts, this does not mean that God as a whole is evil. God and the creatures are co-creators which gives autonomy and agency to the creatures. God is able to feel all the possibilities for a situation, but only the creatures as subjective unities have the ability to choose which possibilities are prehend. God then acts as allure for feeling, but the creatures have final agency when it comes to deciding how to act. This illustrates how Whitehead deals with the problem of evil, since God is not all powerful, God does not have the ability to prevent evil. The creatures and God share power to co-create the world. God does not force but rather persuades creatures through the sense of appetite. "All physical is accompanied by an appetite for or against its continuance, an example of appetite of self-preservation." The lure of God manifests itself as a appetite for self-preservation or to thirst for relevant and novel forms to be prehend. Relevance has to do with the togetherness of forms which constitute an actuality. God serves as an agent of determining relevance in the relevance of eternal objects to be prehend. Whitehead's main concern when creating his metaphysical scheme was not to prove the existence of God but rather to a coherent and logical cosmological that is adequate and applicable. He realized as he was creating the scheme that our creative agent would have to exist to serve as a guide for relevance and comparison for eternal objects. God was then deemed as a necessary component for the creative advance of the universe. Whitehead's argument for God is constructed to ultimately explain why process metaphysics needs the concept of God for the overall coherence of the scheme. He proposes we shouldn't have blind faith in religious experience, but neither should we discount the possibility of religious experience to disclose aspects of our human experience. We must look at any scientific venture as progress and not as finality.

Discussion questions:

1. Does God for you have to be separate from the universe, be the universe, or in and above the universe?
2. Where does evil come from and does God have the power to stop every type of evil?