Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Nature
Ted Toadvine
Northwestern University Press (2009)

Abstract
In our time, Ted Toadvine observes, the philosophical question of nature is almost entirely forgotten—obscured in part by a myopic focus on solving "environmental problems" without asking how these problems are framed. But an "environmental crisis," existing as it does in the human world of value and significance, is at heart a philosophical crisis. In this book, Toadvine demonstrates how Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology has a special power to address such a crisis—a philosophical power far better suited to the questions than other modern approaches, with their over-reliance on assumptions drawn from the natural sciences. The book examines key moments in the development of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of nature while roughly following the historical sequence of his major works. Toadvine begins by setting out an ontology of nature proposed in Merleau-Ponty's first book, _The Structure of Behavior._ He takes up the theme of the expressive role of reflection in _Phenomenology of Perception,_ as it negotiates the area between nature's own "self-unfolding" and human subjectivity. Merleau-Ponty's notion of "intertwining" and his account of space provide a transition to Toadvine's study of the philosopher's later work—in which the concept of "chiasm," the crossing or intertwining of sense and the sensible, forms the key to Merleau-Ponty's mature ontology—and ultimately to the relationship between humans and nature.

Keywords
Philosophy of nature  Human ecology Philosophy
Categories

Environmental Philosophy in Philosophy of Biology
Human Nature in Metaphysics
Maurice Merleau-Ponty in Continental Philosophy
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Maurice Jean Jacques Merleau-Ponty (French: [mɛ̃.ɛ̃.ɛl lo pɔ̃tiː]; 14 March 1908 – 3 May 1961) was a French phenomenological philosopher, strongly influenced by Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. The constitution of meaning in human experience was his main interest and he wrote on perception, art, and politics. He was on the editorial board of Les Temps modernes, the leftist magazine established by Jean-Paul Sartre in 1945. It is hoped that a critical purchase can be developed on Merleau Ponty's quest for a new conception of nature, rethinking of the body, and the contemporary significance of a philosophy of nature. Programme. All sessions will take place in room S0.10 (Social Studies Building). 9.30 am Coffee & Registration, outside room S0.10. 10.15 am - 11.30 am Robin Durie: Nature from the Perspective of Immanence. break. 11.45 am - 1.00 pm Alberto Toscano (Greenwich): Micro-Phenomenology as Anti-Phenomenology, or, The Case of Whitehead. 1.00 pm - 2 pm Lunch. 2.00 pm - 3.15 pm Howard Caygill (Goldsni