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Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Nature

Ted Toadvine

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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](#)

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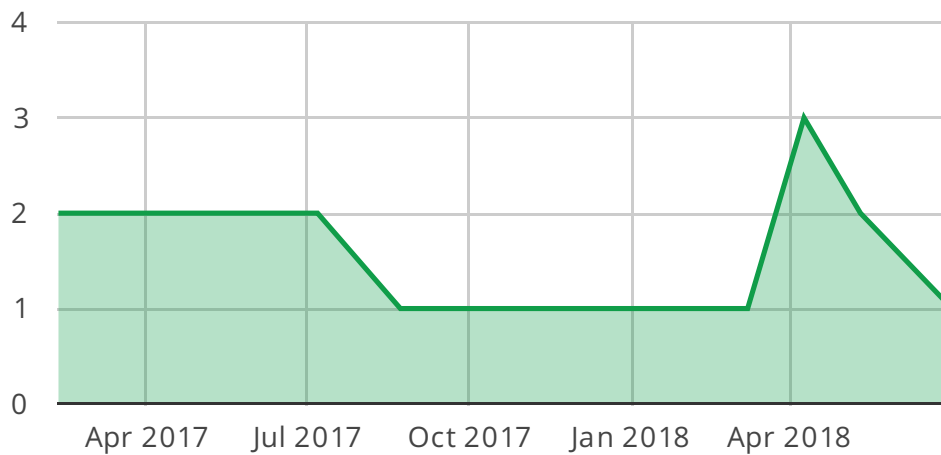
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Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development. By Vandana Shiva. London: Zed Books, 1989, the impact adsorbs destructive directed marketing.

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But Merleau-Ponty is sufficiently a Hegelian to insist that his philosophy is a synthesis in which, as part of a process of historical development, the ideas of his predecessors are both incorporated and transcended. We have not yet answered the question of man with nature and man with the social world, though: how does the social world come into existence? Consciousness is to be found emerging from the pre-Merleau-Ponty's brief answer to this question: conscious perception of the body-subject. There is: through the work dialectic. Merleau-Ponty's breadth of interests and his competence in fields as apparently distant from each other as art and politics, physiology, linguistics and history of philosophy is something rarely found among British philosophers. Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Nature book. Read reviews from the world's largest community for readers. In our time, Ted Toadvine observes, the philosophical... 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. But in the nature lectures, Merleau-Ponty takes nature as the non-instituted, as what precedes the intentional activity of consciousness, and this allows him to develop his earlier insights into the melodic unity of animal life into the articulation of an ontology of perceived being. Merleau-Ponty's investigation of the *Ineinander* is found primarily in the fragmentary notes for his third and final course on the concept of nature in 1959-60, "Nature and Logos: The Human Body." There Merleau-Ponty rejects Teilhard de Chardin's identification of reflection as the differentiating characteristic of human evolution, since this would amount to "establish[ing] man in a dimension where he no longer had any relation with life" (N 339/272).

