
What is carnal hermeneutics? If anyone who regularly reads this Journal came across the expression for the first time and had to venture an opinion, he or she would likely think in terms of Heidegger. *Being and Time* famously distinguishes the “hermeneutical as” from the “apophantic as” (1927, p. 158). Consider a tool, for example a hammer. Heidegger recognizes two ways to interpret the hammer as a tool, a use-object. One way is to reach out a hand, pick up the hammer, and drive nails with it. The other way is to formulate a proposition: “The hammer is for driving nails.” The first interpretation, the existential-hermeneutical as, is for Heidegger the more primordial disclosure of the tool. The other, apophantic, intellectual, theoretical interpretation is secondary. The “hermeneutical as” is bodily and practical, and so here Heidegger could conceivably be advocating a carnal hermeneutics. That would be a mode of interpretation which is *carried out* by the body or in which the body at least leads the way.

Yet this book on carnal hermeneutics for the most part disparages Heidegger. The final paper in the collection even calls Heidegger’s analysis of Dasein “one of the most disembodied philosophical constructions out there” (p. 309). I believe the readers of the Journal will all recognize the superficiality of this common aspersion. The analysis of Dasein is an account of disclosedness. What is utterly original and phenomenological about Heidegger is his claim that disclosedness is *not* a matter of disembodied rationality; it is primarily a matter of moods, the bodily attunement to things. For Heidegger, the world is disclosed (a) primarily through moods, (b) secondarily through discourse (language for Heidegger, despite what he says about the apophantic as, is revelatory and is not just given to us so we can communicate things already revealed), and (c) thirdly, I emphasize thirdly and lastly, through rational understanding, which for the most part only makes explicit what has already been disclosed at lower levels.

Thus Heidegger’s position in *Being and Time* is entirely in line with Merleau-Ponty’s doctrine of the primacy of perception over thought. Only the terms are somewhat different, since Heidegger uses “perception” in the pejorative sense of Merleau-Ponty’s “analytic perception.” Merleau-Ponty states explicitly that the body is the subject of perception. Heidegger is not so explicit that the body is the subject of disclosedness, but, to consider the most general structure of the world as disclosed by Dasein, the priority of the ready-to-hand over
the present-at-hand obviously corresponds to a priority of the body and praxis over reason and theory.

As understood in the book under review, carnal hermeneutics is not so much an interpretation carried out by the body but is an interpretation of (objective genitive) the body. I received the impression that the contributors, by no means outsiders to phenomenology, believe the body has been neglected—even by Merleau-Ponty! So carnal hermeneutics is an attempt to restore the balance and give the body its due. For instance, instead of concentrating on the effect of solitary confinement on the psyche, let us describe its effect on the body.

There is no denying that hermeneutics has historically been taken as a matter of interpreting the meaning of texts and only texts. Yet there is meaning also in embodiment, and carnal hermeneutics stakes out this realm for interpretative research. In the formulation of the editors of the volume, the theme is “the surplus of meaning arising from our carnal embodiment, its role in our experience and understanding, and its engagement in the wider world” (p. 1). The general intention is certainly to be applauded by phenomenological psychology, and the various papers, written by what practically amounts to a who’s who of contemporary continental philosophy (including Edward Casey, Jean-Louis Chrétien, Michel Henry, Julia Kristeva, Jean-Luc Marion, Dermot Moran, Jean-Luc Nancy, and David Wood), are of course original and insightful. Also, the topics taken up are of as wide a scope as can be imagined, from human bodily disability to divine incarnation in the Eucharist. The papers are concrete, the writing is clear, and the scholarship impressive. Readers of the Journal of Phenomenological Psychology will learn a great deal from the volume. I am left with a lingering doubt, however, as to whether they will find here the same descriptive power as that already achieved in Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of the body. But that is hardly cause for surprise, for in this regard who can hold a candle to Merleau-Ponty?

All of the papers are relevant to phenomenological psychology, some more so than others, but one is of special significance. It is the paper by Dermot Moran, “Between Vision and Touch: From Husserl to Merleau-Ponty” (pp. 214–234). What Moran does is to trace the path from the Second Book of Husserl’s Ideas to the later Merleau-Ponty with respect to the notion of the reversibility of the senses. It is clear that the analyses in Ideas II of the “double sensations” of touch are foundational for Merleau-Ponty’s own doctrine of the incipient reflection that occurs at the sensory level: touch (almost) touching itself, vision (almost) seeing itself. Moran’s original contribution is to bring out the role of the psychologist David Katz in this path from Husserl to Merleau-Ponty.