

For “Horizons of Phenomenology” Conference, 2018

In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty claims that objects themselves consist of, and are present in, every possible perspective anyone could have on them (see e.g. *PoP* 71). Notably, for Merleau-Ponty, the perspectives present in the horizontal structure of the object include perspectives that differ not only in terms of their spatiotemporal positioning but in terms of their socio-historical positioning as well. Merleau-Ponty’s perspectival realism takes on a new significance when we consider that the infinitude of perspectives on an object, all of which present a real aspect of the object, are not only spatio-temporal but also socio-historical in nature.

In this paper, I will discuss Merleau-Pontyan perspectival realism and its consequences for feminist standpoint theory. Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis on the rich human context in perspectival perception can provide a perceptual basis for differences in epistemic access to certain social facts. A Merleau-Pontyan realist view can resolve the tension between the two key tenets of standpoint theory: that differences among perceivers can produce different pictures of the world for those perceivers, and that the social facts being perceived by women are facts about a real external world that we all share.