

Abstract 5:

The relevance and potential of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology in autism research

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In recent years, research in sensorimotor differences in autism has drawn attention to the crucial role played by subtle disturbances in motor and sensory systems in the everyday difficulties experienced by autistic individuals. But how should we understand these bodily disturbances? A main assumption in my master's thesis, *A Phenomenology of the Autistic Body* (RUC, 2016), is that the body cannot be exhaustively grasped as a physical object: rather - as the French philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) argued - subjectivity is embodied and the body is necessarily subjective.

Applying this idea in autism research means attempting to understand the subjective dimension or *1st person perspective* of bodily symptoms in autism. The philosophical tradition of phenomenology, of which Merleau-Ponty is a classical proponent, provides elaborate analyses of subjectivity and embodiment of potential interest to psychology; in my talk I will indicate how to use philosophical phenomenology to understand of bodily symptoms in autism. I will also touch on the relevance of this view with respect to early intervention and clinical practice.