ABSTRACT
               This paper asks in turn: (1) What is phenomenology?
(2) What is a phenomenology of communication? and (3) What is a
phenomenology of human communication? The progressive application of
the three questions represents an explicit use of the
phenomenological method, involving description, reduction and
interpretation. The phenomenological reduction of the conscious
experience of human communication yields the conclusion that
rhetorical ethics (speech acts) are the relation between persons and
their lived worlds. The phenomenological interpretation leads to the
conclusion that human communication is a sign of conscious experience
and, conversely, that the union of consciousness and experience
constitutes human communication. In other words, our rhetoric
generates our ethics; our conscious experience communicates the
person we are and the world we live. (AA)

THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF HUMAN COMMUNICATION AS A RHETORICAL ETHIC

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1. <u>Good and Bad Ambiguity</u>.

The Collège de France is a French institution. The college embodies an attitude about the consciousness of the academic savant and the common person alike. The college maintains various academic chairs and on the death of a colleague, the collegium elects a new Professeur to assume the vacant chair. Yet such a Professeur does not teach, he or she is admitted into the college for purposes of research and to deliver from time to time public lectures free to those who care to listen. The Collège de France is for me an examplar of the familiar paradox in human communication that intellectuals and ordinary persons describe as "rhetorical ethics," or is it "ethical rhetoric?"

The college exists for the benefit of the popular mind, yet the public instills in the college a healthy appreciation for the process of scholastic integrity. Maurice Merleau-Ponty sensed this paradoxical obligation in 1953 when he assumed the Chair of Philosophy at the Collège de France. At that time he said to his Parisian audience: "The philosopher is marked by the distinguishing trait that he possesses <u>inseparably</u> the taste for evidence and the feeling for ambiguity. When he limits himself to accepting ambiguity, it is called equivocation. But among the great it becomes a theme; it contributes to establishing certitudes rather than menacing them. Therefore it is necessary to distinguish good and bad ambiguity."[1]

I find the problem of good and bad ambiguity in the communication theory and praxis we call <u>rhetorical ethics</u>. Rhetorical ethics is, I submit, an experience of good ambiguity; whereas, the linguistic turn made real as <u>ethical rhetoric</u> may well be viewed as a case of bad ambiguity.[2] How and why this is so requires a phenomenological analysis which uncovers the presuppositions in human discourse, rather than a behavioral analysis which restrictively confirms the assumptions as products of consensus. As Frederick Sontag argues, "In its existence between the

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actual and the possible worlds, ethics as a theoretical enterprise is doomed

both to contingency and to the same lack of finality that characterizes all

existence. The value norms involved are neither contingent nor subject to

change, but the context for their application is. Ethics transcends the actual

world, and, just because it does, it eludes fixed expression. The number of

ethical norms is actually finite and stable, but the possibles to which they

apply are not. This indicates both the fixed [rhetorical ethics] and the un-

stable [ethical rhetoric] element in all ethical pronouncements."[3]

I propose to accomplish this phenomenological analysis by entertaining

three basic questions that bear directly on the conscious relationship that

unites rhetoric and ethic in the human act of speaking. The questions that

I set myself are these: (1) What is phenomenology?, (2) What is a phenomenology

of communication?, and (3) What is a phenomenology of human communication? The

progressive answer to each of these questions reflects a research methodology

practiced by such existential phenomenologists as Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice

Merleau-Ponty, Karl Jaspers, and Martin Heidegger among others. It is a

methodology with an American tradition as well and includes what William James

called pragmatism and later radical empiricism.[4] The phenomenological method

is what Charles Pierce referred to as semiotic and more recently what I have

called speech act phenomenology.[5] All these perspectives echo Edmund Husserl's

quest for a return to "rigorous science" where analysis [acta: that which is

done] focuses on conscious experience [capta: that which is taken], rather

than on hypothetical constructs [data: that which is given] which is a world

view (weltanschauung) promoting ethical crisis, i.e. the failure of value norms.

This failure is best known as Thomas Kuhn's notion of "paradigm crisis" and

Jurgen Habermas' thesis on "legitimation crisis."[6]

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2. Phenomenology.

Phenomenology is the name for a historical movement born in Germany with Husserl, Jaspers, and Heidegger, sustained in France by Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, and De Baeuvoir, and complemented by a growing community of American scholars in the human sciences. This movement locates its purpose and direction in the theory and praxis we call conscious experience, i.e. the relation between a person and the lived world (lebenswelt) which he or she inhabits (zeitgeist). As a theory, phenomenology concerns itself with the nature and function of consciousness. Since consciousness is a human phenomenon, phenomenology is properly described as an attitude or philosophy of the person. In short, the descriptive adjective "existential" is now implicit in the term "phenomenology." As praxis, phenomenology operates with an investigative methodology that explains experience. The application of the methodology has the same range of explication that the problematic of "experience" has. In short, phenomenology is a historical movement, it is a philosophy in the existential tradition, and it is a research methodology exemplifying a philosophy of science. In subsequent sections I will take up the nature of that philosophy, especially as it applies to the human science of communication.

Phenomenological method is a three step process that is synergistic in nature. This is to say, the methodology entails each step as a part in a whole, yet the very entailment makes the whole larger than the sum of its parts. In other words, relations are created between "parts" and these relations become new "parts" to be added into the total scheme. All consciousness is synergistic in this way since the moment that you move from step one to step two, you have simultaneously invented (experience) the relationship between steps one and two. The generated relationship is a presence where there was none originally, i.e. an absence (an infrastructure which promotes the "presence"). In a contem-

porary sense we usually refer to this presence/absence phenomenon as the coincidence of consciousness and experience which is metaphor and metonymy. The classical name for this synergistic process is rhetoric where the joining of arguments (i.e. the joining of the object of experience and the object of consciousness) compels judgment (i.e. either perception or expression). This synergistic process was formalized by Aristotle in his "syllogism."⁷ But a word of caution here, Aristotle literally formalized conscious experience by making data out of capta: human utterances are formalized [made to conform to value norms], i.e. reified, into abstractions, i.e. statements which are also propositions. This is why a theory constructionist is always warned about material truth as a reality check (conscious experience) on logical argument (only the form of conscious experience). Epigrammatically, we are being warned that rhetorical ethics cannot be equated with ethical rhetoric; to do so is to create a "paradigm crisis" or failure of experience, or, to promote a "legitimation crisis" or failure of consciousness.

The first step in phenomenological method is description. The usual technical name is appropriately phenomenological description. Rather than a mere truism, phenomenologists insist on the adjective "phenomenological" to remind us that we are dealing with capta, conscious experience. Singular use of the term "description" allows our thinking to slip into hypothetical constructs, into the creation of abstractions. This bad ambiguity of created abstraction (formal multiplicity) can be avoided by intentionally making the description come back to conscious experience. Husserl originally called this the epoché or "bracketing" of conscious experience. The idea is that our thinking should establish brackets around the experience to be described, not so much to isolate the experience "in" brackets as to keep external presuppositions

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(what is "outside" the bracket) from influencing our description. At this point,
I believe that we can see that phenomenological description is rhetorical in
nature; there is an intentional control (acta) imposed on thinking and that
control reflects an objective value, in a word an "ethic." Husserl's rigorous
scientist would call this description a truly objective fact of human communi-
cation where data, capta, and acta merge.

The second step in the phenomenological method is definition, or technically,
it is referred to as the phenomenological reduction. The overt goal of this
step in the methodology is to determine which parts of the description are essen-
tial and which are not. In other words, we want to find out exactly what parts
of the experience are truly part of our consciousness and which parts are merely
assumed. The purpose of this second step is to isolate the object of conscious-
ness--the thing person, emotion, etc. that constitutes the experience we have.
The usual technique for accomplishing the phenomenological reduction is called
imaginative free variation.[8] This procedure consists of reflecting on the parts
of the experience and systematically imaging each part as present or absent in
the experience. By contextual comparison you are able to reduce the description
to those parts that are essential for the existence of the consciousness of ex-
perience (gestalt). The description thus becomes a definition, but in the pheno-
menological sense that my consciousness is based directly on my experience, not
a conception of what my experience may be (which is the analytic method of crisis
science). We must also recall that the phenomenological method is synergistic
so that the phenomenological reduction permits a more precise phenomenological
description. In short, there is a geometric logic of inclusion operating as we
move from description to reduction in the phenomenological method.

The third step in the method is interpretation. In a general sense this
third step is an attempt to specify the "meaning" that is essential in the re-

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duction and description of the conscious experience being investigated. The technical name for this operation is variously _semiotic_ or _hermeneutic_ _analysis_. More recently, it is simply called _phenomenological_ _interpretation_. Semiology is the study of sign systems or codes, so a hermeneutic semiology is the specification of the value relationship that unites the phenomenological description and reduction. For example, think of a conscious experience of rhetoric--a human utterance. You might describe such an experience as hearing a speech. You may further reduce this experience to your consciousness of being persuaded by the words you heard. Finally, you might interpret this experience as a commonplace belief you have (consciousness). The commonplace is a code, it is the value-- conscious experience--that functions as the relationship in the description and reduction: The speech given to you which is taken (_data_ for you is always _capta_ in _acta_). It may be apparent now why a "rhetorical ethic" is good ambiguity (it is the conscious experience of the person) and why in contrast "ethical rhetoric" is bad ambiguity (it is the reification of the person as a conscious experience-- it may be the legitimation of a negative value, e.g. prejudice by stereotype, or a positive value, e.g. teaching by example).[9]

Interpretation entails definition just as definition entails description, so the value or meaning that is the essence of conscious experience accounts for the way in which we are conscious and the way we experience. Put another way, we discover that the conscious experience that each of us knows as subjectivity (person) is linked to intersubjectivity, i.e. interpersonal relationships which define persons. However, before we can explore this facet of being a person, we need to examine the phenomenological nature of communication.

3. A Phenomenology of Communication.

A phenomenological definition of communication necessarily requires that our analysis proceed through a phenomenological description, reduction, and

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interpretation. First the description. What is communication? At a minimum,
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it is an ecosystem in Anthony Wilden's sense of the term.   That is, communication
is the name for the reversible relationship between an organism (person) and its
environment (lived world). At its most sophisticated level this relationship is
one of language (langage). Language is, of course, an analogue system in which
semantics (capta), syntactics (data), and pragmatics (acta) are constituent parts
(a code) each relating to the other as a matter of degree. In other words, seman-
tics is the meaning in language where language is a function of structure (syntax)
and use (pragmatics). Likewise syntactics is the meaning in language where lang-
uage is a function of content (semantics) and use (pragmatics). Finally, prag-
matics is the meaning in language where language is a function of structure
(syntax) and content (semantics).

Our second step of analysis is the phenomenological reduction of the des-
cription we just generated as a conscious experience of "communication." When
we consider that language is a key feature of communication and that language is
an analogue, we see immediately the nature and function of communication is one
of degree. In fact one can easily imagine the organism and environment reversing
natures and functions. For example we can take the human personality and the
human body as a case in point. Descartes to the contrary, the human body and
personality often reverse themselves. Personality distress becomes body dis-
function in a psychosomatic state of involuntary paralysis, and conversely,
body distress becomes personality disfunction in a psychopathic state as suicide.

The language function of degree variation in the lived world (ecosystem)
in more familiar terms is what we would call a social dialect (langue) of lang-
uage. The social dialect is surely language (langage), but it is language in
its reversible form of constant degree variation. We are quite aware of this

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variation when you think about it. Semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic nature

and function reverse themselves In linguistics these reversals are known

semantically as metaphor and metonymy shifts, syntactically as paradigm and

syntagm shifts, and pragmatically as diachronic and synchronic shifts. Thus

the key feature of linguistic communication is that it is a process. More

specifically let me remind you that our phenomenological description indicated

communication as a language state, while the phenomenological reduction disclosed

that language only appears or is conceived of as a state. The language presence

in consciousness is a process experience. So we discover that our original des-

cription of communication as synonymous with language is an inappropriately

assumed abstraction.

Perhaps an illustration of the communication process would be helpful.

The conscious experience of communication is always a triadic relation of

semiology among semantics, syntactics, and pragmatics. At any one time and

place we focus on one of the three factors, but the other two are ever present

as context. In short, we have a variation on the organism environment theme.

A specific linguistic example will help here. In careful discourse we can use

the word "statement" to indicate a semantic function, the word "sentence" to

name a syntactic function, and the word "utterance" to specify a pragmatic

function. All these function names are related by one nature which we usually

name by the word "proposition." It does not matter what word we may choose at

a given moment since the others are its context--this is the nature and function

of an analogue, i.e. to set a boundary. The words "sentence," "utterance,"

"statement," and "proposition" all have the same sense but are capable of

distinct reference; each can have the same reference but a different sense

as Frege demonstrated a century ago.[11]

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The third step of the phenomenological analysis is the interpretation or hermeneutic semiology. At this point we have discovered that our conscious experience of communication is language (langage) in its analogue status as a social dialect (langue). What is the meaning, the value contained in this description and definition? Jaspers calls it "the will to communicate,"[12] Merleau-Ponty describes it as "being condemned to meaning"[13] (having critiqued Sartre's theme of "being condemned to choosing"[14] as a failure of hermeneutic analysis), and Heidegger calls it simply "talk."[15]

Most of us would use the word "speech" to describe the meaning state, while "speaking" descibes the functional character (performance) of the conscious experience we call communication. But we must recall that state and process have an infrastructure, an implicit relationship that we have previously observed only as the explicit relation called "language" and "social dialect." The infrastructure between "speech" and "speaking" is the same as the link between experience and consciousness. So just as we would use the expression conscious experience, we discover <u>speaking speech</u>. Our conventional name for the conscious experience of speaking speech is the <u>speech act</u> or variously, the <u>act of speaking</u>. In short, the hermeneutic semiotic of communication is the speech act.

We are now ready to take up the question of human communication. You may remember that except for two illustrations, human behavior has not been discussed in our phenomenological analysis of communication. I make this point since I, along with Husserl, believe in rigorous science. In other words, the phenomenological analysis of communication which I just completed, may on careful analysis apply to what we know of animal communication (zoosemiotic) and machine communication (cybernetics).

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4. A Phenomenology of Human Communication.

We began this essay by noting that the phenomenological method is synergistic, that the method reflects back on itself in a constant refinement of directed consciousness. By now it should be apparent that the three questions posed at the start are an explicit use of the phenomenological method, namely, phenomenological description (What is phenomenology?), phenomenological reduction (What is a phenomenology of communication?), and phenomenological interpretation (What is a phenomenology of human communication?). Each of these questions has itself been subjected to description, reduction, and interpretation. This repetition of method is what Merleau-Ponty calls the radical cogito and it is what Heidegger has in mind with his daseinsmassig. Simply put, the process being utilized is one of reversibility, of converting consciousness into experience and vice versa. In a linguistic example, the process is illustrated by the conversion of one part of speech into another. I think one example will make the point: "Speaking." Is it a noun or a verb? To decide your conscious experience is the product of a phenomenological description, reduction, and interpretation which generates the appropriate answer in the situation.

Now let us take up a specific answer to the question: What is a phenomenology of human communication? At the level of phenomenological description our conscious experience of human communication is just where our analysis of communication per se ended, i.e. the speech act. When the ecosystem of organism and environment is made the object of human conscious experience, we have not organism, but human being, and not environment, but life world (lebenswelt). A life world is no less than what, where, when, how, and why a person lives. The discovery of the speech act as a relation between person and life world is also the location of a rhetorical ethic. It takes little analysis to perceive

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that there is a relation between speech and act, just as there is a ratio
between rhetoric and ethic. What we are describing is the highest content and
form of communication, namely, the co-presence of digital and analogue relation-
ships. Let us take the "speech act" first. As an object of analysis, a speech
act is an analogue; any given speech act will be by degree like any other speech
act. At the same time any given speech act stands in contrast to any other
speech act--a digital relation exists here. A parallel description exists in
the case of a "rhetorical ethic." Discourse may be perceived as exemplifying
a rhetorical ethic because the rhetoric is in degree like all other ethical
behaviors. At the same time the rhetorical ethic is a digital relationship in
which the rhetoric (like the speech) stands apart from the value or ethic generated
(like the act). The General Semanticits have made a profession out of telling
us not to confuse our digits with our analogues, but in so doing they have asked
us to keep persons and life worlds apart. This is functional advice, but it is
not natural for a human being. Why not? The answer requires that we move to
the second methodological step, the phenomenological reduction of human communi-
cation.

Our task at this point is to specify what relationship in conscious experience
is essential to both an analogue and a digital form of the speech act (or rhetorical
ethic). Since an analogue is always an exemplar in a set, we know that the ana-
logue relation between one speech act and another is a matter of degree. No matter
whether I focus on "speech" or "act," one is by degree contextual to the other.
In recent years we have discovered this phenomenon as the harmony between verbal
and nonverbal systems. In fact, we no longer use the specious digital designation
of "verbal or nonverbal communication systems." We merely, but appropriately, use
one analogue name: semiotic system. The point is this, no matter how I approach

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the conscious experience of the speech act (or rhetorical ethic) it will be an analogue about itself. In short, the analogue speech act is always a meta-communication as well as a communication.

Now what can be said about the digital speech act? Because a digit is always a self contained set (in contrast to another set or its absence), we understand that the digital relation between one speech act and another is a matter of type or kind, i.e. a difference of sets or categories. If I focus on "speech" then it is not "act" and vice versa. Speech scholars used to call this phenomenon the conviction/persuasion dichotomy. If you have one, you did not have the other. Some people, philosophers in particular, argue that the same point applies to rhetorical ethics. That is, if you have rhetoric, you do not have ethics and vice versa. Such a position is tenable only if you specify rhetorical ethics as never stating an analogue relation. In other words, a strict digital logic compels us to say that rhetoric and ethic are two categories and have two equal combinations: one is "rhetorical ethics" and the other is "ethical rhetoric."

What is interesting in this busy work of digital logic is the discovery that in either combination the category "rhetoric" is about the category "ethic" or conversely. Merleau-Ponty expressed this discovery by saying that all human communication whether verbal or not is a gesture, Sartre on the other hand called it the gaze. Out another way, speech is about an act while an act is about speech; a person lives a world and the world is what a person lives. The digital speech act is likewise always a metacommunication about communication.

Our phenomenological reduction of the conscious experience of human communi-cation yields this result: Rhetorical ethics (speech acts) are the relation between (the "about") persons and their lived worlds. The implications of this

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reduction, that analogue and digital speech acts are both metacommunicative (both about person's life worlds) leads us to the third methodological step, the phenomenological interpretation.

By attempting to determine the hermeneutic semiology inherent in human communication, we are necessarily asking what value is to be found, what meaning generated by observing that the speech act (acta) defines the person (capta) and lived world (data) as "about" each other, as metacommunicative. Let us look at these relationships as conscious experiences. A person communicates and generates a lived world. Such a person literally expresses a world; the person comes to inhabit the speech uttered (we all believe what we say!). And, the world in which a person lives communicates to the person. Such a world expresses the person, or more appropriately expressed, the person perceives a world. So we find that expression and perception are the same functional relationship (an analogue) specifying degrees of difference in consciousness. However, the same relationship separates (digital) the expression and the perception as (naturally) different experiences.

The union of consciousness and experience, analogue and digit, expression and perception, person and lived world constitutes human communication. The Stoic philosophers called this relationship of conscious experience the lekton, the sign that held discourse and reason together in all human behavior (logos). We would describe the lekton of logos as the speech act which is the same phenomenon as a person in a lived world. In summary, human communication is a sign of conscious experience and conversely. Such is the phenomenological interpretation of human communication.

5. Communication Legitimation.

By way of drawing to a conclusion, I would like to take up a small portion of classical history that bears on rhetorical ethics. We are all familiar with the Greek stases or states of affair. The Greeks invented the stases to solve

digital problems, to distinguish : what (data), how (capta), and why (acta).
We have retained this mode of thought, this digital logic. We variously call
it analytic thinking, problem solving, or "scientific method." However, we
do our Greek forebearers a disservice because in our fascination with the stases
we have forgotten the lekton, the sign which holds the stases together (the ana-
logue containing the digit). The digital logic is rhetorical in application.
We analytically ask: What is known? How is it known? Why is it known? The
analogue logic, the missing lekton in contemporary thinking, is the ethic--the
human value. We call this analogue logic synergistic thinking, problem stating,
and "rigorous" or truly "empirical" science. Thus we need to phenomenologically
ask, as did the Stoics: What do I know? How do I know? Why do I know? A rhetorical
ethic is a conscious experience and the method for knowing that experience is phe-
nomenological.

In contrast, an ethical rhetoric starts with an assumed value, that is,
answers to the questions "What is known by us, How is it known by us, and Why
is it known by us" always depend on consensus of either experience or conscious-
ness, but rarely reflect conscious experience. A person who attempts to live
in such a world of consensus encounters what Gregory Bateson describes as the
double bind, equally good but conflicting signs in communication.[16] The ethical
rhetoric of the double bind drives persons and worlds crazy; we call it respectively
"insanity" and "war" where the double bind is an agreement (analogue) to disagree
(digit). Put another way, perception and expression are communicated as different
kinds of experience, rather than the experience of different levels of conscious-
ness. My final contention, then, is that the phenomenology of human communication
is by definition a rhetorical ethic and in consequence a good ambiguity. As Jurgen
Habermas confirms, "Learned rules of purposive-rational action [ethical rhetoric]
supply us with skills, internalized norms [rhetorical ethics] with personality
structures."[17] In other words, our rhetoric generates our ethics, our conscious

experience communicates the person we are and the world we live. As Merleau-Ponty correctly suggests, "The world is not what I think, but how I live. I am open to the world, I have no doubt that I am in communication with it, but I do not possess it; it is inexhaustable."[18]

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FOOTNOTES

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2. The nature of this "linguistic turn" is specifically discussed by Jacques
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3. Federick Sontag, The Existentialist Prolegomena: To a Future Metaphysics
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4. Merleau-Ponty, In Praise of Philosophy, p. xi. See Richard L. Lanigan,
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10. Anthony Wilden, System and Structure: Essays in Communication and Exchange (London: Tavistock; New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

11. Gottlob Frege, "Sense and Reference (A Translation of Frege's Ueber Sinn und Bedeutung)," trans. Max Black, Philosophical Review 57, no. 3 (May, 1948): 207-230. First published in 1892.

12. Karl Jaspers, Philosophy, 3 vols., trans. E.B. Ashton, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). First published as Philosophie in 1932, Berlin: Springer-Verlag.

13. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962). First published as Phénoménologie de la perception in 1945, Paris: Éditions Gallimard. Note: This translation contains many fundamental errors.

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14. Jean-Paul Sartre, _Being and Nothingness_, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956). First published as _L'Être et le Néant_ in 1949, Paris: Éditions Gallimard.

15. Martin Heidegger, _Being and Time_, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962). First published as _Sein und Zeit_ in 1927, Tubingen: Neomarius Verlag.

16. Gregory Bateson, _Steps to an Ecology of Mind_ (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972).

17. Jurgen Habermas, _Toward a Rational Society: Student Protest, Science, and Politics_, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971). (Bracket inserts are mine.)

18. Merleau-Ponty, _Phenomenology of Perception_, p. xvii. (My translation.) See Larry Shinner, "A Phenomenological Approach to Historical Knowledge," _History and Theory_ 8, no. 2 (1969): 260-274. On the necessary ethical nature of method in phenomenology, see Richard M. Zaner, "On the Sense of Method in Phenomenology" in Edo Pivcevic, ed., _Phenomenology and Philosophical Understanding_ (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975); and, the discussion of "communication ethics" in Jurgen Habermas, _Legitimation Crisis_, op. cit. Less generally know to American readers is the "communication ethic" advanced by Karl-Otto Apel. English translations on this theme include "Communication and the Foundations of the Humanities," _Acta Sociologica_ 15, no. 1 (1972): 7-26, and, _Analytic Philosophy of Language and the Geisteswissenschaften_ (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1967).