State University of New York at Stony Brook

Department of Philosophy

2014 Lecture Series

You are cordially invited to a lecture by

Ted Toadvine

University of Oregon

Lecture:

“The Elemental Past”

Ted Toadvine is Head of the Department of Philosophy and Associate Professor of Philosophy and Environmental Studies at the University of Oregon. He specializes in contemporary Continental philosophy, especially phenomenology and post-structuralism, and the philosophy of nature and environment. He is the author of Merleau-Ponty’s Philosophy of Nature (Northwestern, 2009), co-translator of Renaud Barbaras’s The Being of the Phenomenon (Indiana, 2004), and editor or co-editor of seven volumes, including The Merleau-Ponty Reader (Northwestern, 2007), Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself (SUNY, 2003), and Merleau-Ponty’s Reading of Husserl (Kluwer, 2002). His articles have appeared in such journals as Alter: Revue de phénoménologie, Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal, Husserl Studies, Investigaciones Fenomenológicas, Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology, Philosophy Today, Research in Phenomenology, and Tijdschrift voor Filosofie. Toadvine directs the Series in Continental Thought at Ohio University Press, is Editor-in-Chief of the journal Environmental Philosophy, and is a co-editor of Chiasmi International: Trilingual Studies Concerning Merleau-Ponty’s Thought. He serves on the Editorial Boards of several journals including Environmental Ethics, and is on the Boards of Directors of the Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology, Inc., the International Merleau-Ponty Circle, and the International Association for Environmental Philosophy, as well as on the Scientific Board of the Central European Institute of Philosophy. He is completing a manuscript titled Nature After Naturalism: A Phenomenology of the Immemorial.

Abstract:

In a 1951 debate that marked the beginnings of the analytic-continental divide, Maurice Merleau-Ponty sided with Georges Bataille in rejecting A. J. Ayer’s claim that “the sun existed before human beings.” This rejection is already anticipated in a controversial passage from Merleau-Ponty’s Phenomenology of Perception, where he claims that “there is no world without an Existence that bears its structure.” I defend Merleau-Ponty’s counterintuitive position against naturalistic and anti-subjectivist critics by arguing that the world emerges in the exchange between perceiver and perceived. A deeper challenge is posed, however, by Quentin Meillassoux, who argues that the “correlationism” of contemporary philosophy rules out any account of the “ancestral” time that antedates all subjectivity. Against Meillassoux, and taking an encounter with fossils as my guide, I hold that the past prior to subjectivity can only be approached phenomenologically. The paradoxical character of this immemorial past, as a memory of the world rather than of the subject, opens the way toward a phenomenology of the “elemental” past. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty’s descriptions of the absolute past of nature and the anonymity of the body, as well as Levinas’s account of the elements at the end of the world, I argue that our own materiality and organic lives participate in the differential rhythms of the elements, opening us to a memory of the world that binds the cosmic past and the apocalyptic future.

Thursday February 13th, 2014

5:00 pm

Harriman Hall 214

Reception to Follow

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