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## **The Flesh of Creation: Notes on Maurice Merleau-Ponty**

### *Telesnost stvarjenja: Zapiski o Mauriceu Merleau-Pontyju*

*Abstract:* Unlike Emmanuel Levinas, who rewrites the concept of creation in general and – in his sense – transfers it from ontology to ethics, Maurice Merleau-Ponty does not deal with this central Christian concept in detail. But it seems to be possible to gain important impulses for the further development of the theological idea of creation from his philosophy as well. If one conceives his concept of the *flesh* – which he develops in late philosophy – as the concept of an ontology that goes beyond traditional metaphysics, conclusions – which redefine the Christian concept of creation – can be drawn from his book »The Visible and the Invisible« as well as from his lectures on natural philosophy.

*Key words:* Merleau-Ponty, nature, creation, flesh, ontology.

*Povzetek:* Za razliko od Emmanuela Levinasa, ki na novo in celovito opredeli pojem stvarjenja ter ga v skladu s svojim pristopom prenese iz ontologije v etiko, se Maurice Merleau-Ponty s tem osrednjim krščanskim pojmom ne ukvarja podrobneje. Toda zdi se, da lahko v njegovi filozofiji najdemo pomembne spodbude za nadaljnji razvoj teološke ideje stvarjenja. Če koncept *telesn*/*mesa*, ki ga razvije v svojem poznem filozofskem delu (še zlasti v delu »Vidno in nevidno« ter v predavanjih o filozofiji narave), dojemamo znotraj takšne ontologije, ki gre onkraj tradicionalne metafizike, lahko potegnemo sklepe, ki na novo opredeljujejo krščansko pojmovanje stvarjenja.

*Ključne besede:* Merleau-Ponty, narava, stvarjenje, telesnost, ontologija.

The term of Creation is a central theological concept for the three Abrahamic religions, that is for Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Of course, »creation« has been conceived differently in the respective religions and over time. In general, on the Christian side, the *creatio ex nihilo* is distinguished from the *creatio continua*. *Creatio ex nihilo* means that God's act of creation constitutes the turn from nothing to something, although the idea of the Zimzum in Jewish thinking also addresses the problem of how something can exist except from or »within« God, provided

that He is the only and sole reality to be imagined. Despite these and other difficulties, it seems to be evident in which perspective the act of creation of God is conceived; namely as an occurrence of being. The concepts »nothing« and »something« or »being« derive from an ontological terminology. This fact is made even more explicit by the second creation concept, the *creatio continua*, essential to the Christian conception expressing God's ongoing activity, which is that God does not allow the world to revert to nothingness, but keeps it being and thereby makes sure that the world will last through time. This is again an ontological statement about God and his relation to the world. For the ontological interpretation of the concept of creation, the long tradition of philosophical theology is characteristic, as well – for example that Thomas Aquinas philosophically comprehends God as the *ipsum esse subsistens*, which is the ground of the world's existence<sup>1</sup>, and that the question of God within philosophy is assigned to ontology.

In recent francophone phenomenology, the effort to think God »otherwise than being«<sup>2</sup> was made by Emmanuel Levinas who reflected creation no longer ontologically but ethically, that is, in the context of the Other and the I (Klun 2018). The connection of creator and creature as relation, due to which something is given existence, is no longer the center of attention (Levinas 1972, 120–121/74).<sup>3</sup> Rather, it is the person, who is under an ethical claim that emanates from the face of the *other* person and makes me permanently responsible for the other. Levinas thinks that we passively find ourselves in existence, without having caused our own existence (in an ontological sense). According to him, each person discovers furthermore an unprethinkable beginning in the face of every other human being, which cannot be grasped ontologically but has already made »me« responsible for him or her. God is not presented as the one who brings beings into existence, but as a trace in the face of the other person, which you can never capture. This situation radically transcends both phenomenology and ontology.<sup>4</sup>

Even if Maurice Merleau-Ponty takes an intellectual path different from Levinas', I think that a theology of creation can receive important impulses from his philosophy. That is why, in the following, I will try to take up a central idea of his late philosophy and to examine how his concept of a radicalized body-phenomenology, characterized by his concept of the *flesh*, could acquire meaning in terms of theology of creation. The frame of reference in this case remains an ontological one and is not abandoned in favor of an ethical one. However, Merleau-Ponty's

<sup>1</sup> Confer STh I, 11, 4 corpus, where Thomas reflects on the unity of God and states that God is in the highest degree both being, undivided and one. He is not determined by anything outside of himself: »Est enim maxime ens, in quantum est non habens aliquod esse determinatum per aliquam naturam, cui adveniat; sed est ipsum esse subsistens omnibus modis indeterminatum.«

<sup>2</sup> This is the title of Levinas' (1974) second main work: *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence*.

<sup>3</sup> In the following quotations the first page number is that of the English translation, the second one is that of the source text. The books of Merleau-Ponty are cited according to the abbreviation list at the end of the text.

<sup>4</sup> Confer Levinas (1984, 269): »La théologie traite imprudemment en termes d'ontologie l'idée du rapport entre Dieu et la créature. /.../ La notion de transcendant nous place au-delà des catégories de l'être, si les notions de totalité et d'être se recouvrent.«

conception of flesh, if one reads it ontologically, contains a break with traditional ontology insofar as reality is not seen through materiality but through corporeality. Merleau-Ponty does not put the concept of life at the center of his reflections, as Michel Henry does when he speaks of »incarnation« (Henry 2000) and he especially has an interest to re-interpret Christology. In contrast, Merleau-Ponty starts from the concept of the body, which in his late philosophy he extends to reality as a whole, by developing it to the concept of the flesh that grounds reality as a whole.

Before applying Merleau-Ponty's ontology, based on his concept of the flesh, to the Christian idea of creation and deriving implications for theology, it is essential to analyze relevant passages of »The Visible and the Invisible« and some of the lectures at the Collège de France on »The Nature«.

## 1. Nature and Creation

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In his dispute with René Descartes, Merleau-Ponty states that the recourse to the Christian idea of the infinite, which was applied to God, has fundamentally changed the understanding of the relationship between God and nature, and thus also between God and creation. Namely, nature is split into a *natura naturans* and a *natura naturata*, so that the world (*natura naturata*) has lost the moment of the creative, which is reserved for God alone (*natura naturans*). Thus, the earth was not only godless, but also degraded to a mere product, while God was no longer found in the world, but was elevated to the sole creator (N, 10/28). As Christopher Ben Simpson rightly points out with reference to Merleau-Ponty's collection of essays with the title »Signes«, Merleau-Ponty sees the deficiency of such an idea of creation as »acosmism« (Simpson 2014, 101; 108). If creation is reduced to mere material, according to Merleau-Ponty, not only is God's immanence in the world lacking, but also the creative power of nature. Nature is only a *natura naturata*, but not a *natura naturans* anymore.

The endeavor of Merleau-Ponty is opposed to this conception of nature, which in his opinion has been induced by the Christian idea of creation, – a philosophy of nature emanating from liveliness and »wildness«. In addition, with his concept of flesh, he highlights an ontology that recalls human corporeality and generalizes it to the flesh of reality. In this way the ontological part of the conceptual relation between nature and creation is addressed. I believe that the concept of the flesh, if it is taken ontologically, sheds new light on the question of creation. With this thesis, I follow Andreas Nordlander, who maintained »that this ›flesh‹ may be addressed as ›creation« (Nordlander 2011, 355), and I will try first to highlight some moments of the term *flesh* of the late philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, important for an ontology of creation.

## 2. Flesh as an Ontological Factor

According to Merleau-Ponty's further development of Husserl's phenomenological approach and his emphasis on corporeality the question arises if he has only exchanged the concept of consciousness with that of corporeality. But such an insinuation does wrong to Merleau-Ponty, not only because it restricts his position, but also because already in his book »Phenomenology of Perception«, he wants to parallelize the constitutional consciousness and the subject to the body and the world and not to replace it. Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the reciprocity of the subject and the world by asserting:

»The world is inseparable from the subject, but from a subject which is nothing but a project of the world, and the subject is inseparable from the world, but from a world which the subject itself projects. / Le monde est inséparable du sujet, mais d'un sujet qui n'est rien que projet du monde, et le sujet est inséparable du monde, mais d'un monde qu'il projette lui-même.« (PP, 499–500/491)

He adds at this point that the subject, with its tendency to transcend towards the world, prefigures its form. (PP, 500/491–492)

In this period of his philosophy, Merleau-Ponty, although he imagines a unity between the I and the world, writes that the relationship is an inclined plane, since the world receives its final destination from the subject. Although he conceives the subject as bodily, Merleau-Ponty thinks that it constitutes the opposite in order to gain a relationship to it. Thus, constitution is indeed separated from the mere consciousness, because it is unthinkable without the body, but the so-conceived subject determines the world to a greater extent than it itself is determined by the world.

In his book »The Visible and the Invisible«, and in the accompanying work notes, Merleau-Ponty seeks to overcome this asymmetry. He first points out that the visible body loses its own visibility just as little as the world being seen. This may seem strange, because Merleau-Ponty assumes that the ability of seeing is part of the world non-alive, too. To illustrate this, he refers to the experience of painters. These feel, as he believes, »looked at by the things / regardé[es] par les choses«, so that »the seer and the visible reciprocate one another and we no longer know which sees and which is seen / voyant et visible se réciproquent et qu'on ne sait plus qui voit et qui est vu«. (VI, 139/183)

What connects the two areas is the fact that they are both flesh. Merleau-Ponty asks rhetorically: »Where are we to put the limit between the body and the world, since the world is flesh? / Où mettre la limite du corps et du monde, puisque le monde est chair?« (VI, 138/182). This phrase means that there is an *intertwining/entrelacs* (VI, 138/182) between the world and the subject conceived as a body. However, the boundary between them does not blur because both were composed of the same matter, which would miss not only the concept of the body but

also the concept of the world. Nor is the world simply the body of the subject. If so, corporeality would be thoroughly misunderstood. Rather, Merleau-Ponty thinks of flesh as the principle of unity not only of the consciousness and the body – so to say, not only within the ego –, but also between the subject as a body and the world. He calls this connection *chiasm*, which is characterized by the fact that the relation »to see – to be seen« is reversible (*reversibility/réversibilité*).<sup>5</sup>

But how is flesh, which forms the reason for the mentioned chiasm, to be recognized more exactly? Merleau-Ponty does not think of a matter-mind-dualism and, moreover, wants to overcome a substance ontology. Subjectivity and objectivity can no longer be clear because of the facts of chiasm and reversibility. They apply both to the person *and* to the world. Flesh »is not matter, is not mind, is not substance / n'est pas matière, n'est pas esprit, n'est pas substance« (VI, 139/184) – as Merleau-Ponty declares. Rather, he compares it with the concept of the *element/l'élément* of early Greek philosophy and wishes flesh to be comprehended »in the sense of a general thing / au sens d'une chose générale« (VI, 139/184), in which the perception and the perceived cannot be distinguished yet. So, flesh is not material that can be grasped empirically, but an ontological principle that logically precedes the subject-object-division. Merleau-Ponty tries to define it as »a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an ›element‹ of being. / principe incarné qui importe un style d'être partout où il s'en trouve une parcelle. La chair est en ce sens un ›élément‹ de l'Être.« (VI, 139/184)

Flesh is understood here as a principle of being that is incarnated in everything and from which the difference between perception or knowledge on the one side and reality or world on the other side exclusively arises. But as a principle it is not without purpose but indicates the way in which a difference can arise from the flesh. For being is not equal to being, but each shape of »to be« has its own *style*, which is shown and realized in the concrete differentiation of the subject-object-split. As the example of vision, which gave the title to the last book of Merleau-Ponty, shows, the visible and the invisible come together in the flesh. However, their dissociation never takes place in the same way, but always happens newly and differently, and dictates how the appearance of the visible occurs. The visible is never completely visible but remains invisible at the same time. The same thing takes place vice versa for the invisible: the visible and the invisible interpenetrate differently at any point and their relationship is never determined in the same way.

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. his working notes from November 1960, where he writes: »The chiasm, reversibility: /.../ one no longer knows who speaks and who listens. Speaking-listening, seeing-being seen, perceiving-being perceived circularity (it is because of it that it seems to us that perception forms itself *in the things themselves*) – Activity = passivity. / Le chiasme, la réversibilité: /.../ on ne sait plus qui parle et qui écoute. Circularité parler-écouter, voir-être vu, percevoir-être perçu (c'est elle qui fait qu'il nous semble que la perception se fait *dans les choses mêmes*) – Activité = passivité.« (VI, 264–265/318) Similar in his notice on the 16<sup>th</sup> of November 1960: »chiasm my body – the things, realized by the doubling up of my body into inside and outside – and the doubling up of the things (their inside and their outside) / chiasme mon corps-les choses, réalisé par le dédoublement de mon corps en dedans et dehors, – et le dédoublement des choses (leur dedans et leur dehors).« (VI, 264/317)

In his late philosophy, Merleau-Ponty does not only think of perception in the context of the flesh. Flesh is not only an element of cognition but, as mentioned above, also »an ›element‹ of being / un ›élément‹ de l'être« (VI, 139/184). That means that different dualisms in the flesh find a unity principle that already contains the two sides in the form of intertwining and therefore is able to let them separate each other. This ontological principle of unity, however, is not an erratic block, but is determined by *chiasm*, *intertwining*, *being subsequent*, *duplication* and *reversibility*, that is, it is able to let differences emerge in different ways. The mode of such differentiation results in the different *style* to be, which is generated again and again.

### 3. Merleau-Ponty's View of Creation

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Before attempting to draw some conclusions from this ontology of the flesh for a Christian understanding of creation, I would like to outline Merleau-Ponty's general criticism of the concept of creation. This will demonstrate why Merleau-Ponty rejects the ontology that, in his opinion, determines the theological concept of creation. His criticism targets primarily two points, which, he believes, are wrong. On the one hand, he dislikes the already mentioned separation between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*, which René Descartes carried out and which led to the elimination of the creative element in all the created. In his lectures at the Collège de France, he speaks of the fact that nature no longer possesses any interior, but only represents the external realization of the rationality of God (N, 10/27). For Merleau-Ponty, this means that the concept of creation allows nature to be recognized as a lawful system that enables the natural sciences to be based on a deterministic conception of nature. »Nature as a system of laws renders the presence of forces interior to it superfluous; the interiority is wholly within God. / La Nature comme système de lois rend la présence de forces qui lui soient intérieures superflue; l'intériorité est toute en Dieu« (N, 10/28). That is why, according to Merleau-Ponty, the Christian conception of creation and the scientific determinism go hand in hand. According to both complementary views, nature has no creative power in it, because all of it is reserved for God. In other words: Creator is only God, not the world; and God is not in the world, but strictly separated from it. As historical evidence that this interpretation of creation met resistance even within Christianity, Merleau-Ponty refers to the French worker priests who, in his judgment, wanted to show that God cannot be positioned exclusively outside the world (N, 138/184–185).

On the other hand, Merleau-Ponty starts with his criticism of the term *contingency*. He conceives this one – as Andreas Nordlander (Nordlander 2011, 230–233) worked out – in a double sense. On the one hand, it is the *relative* contingency of the world, through which the world is open to new sense and to the appearance of hitherto unknown meaning. This *semantic* contingency is contrasted with *absolute* contingency, which the world regards as being unnecessary in its existence

and which must be understood ontologically. Merleau-Ponty correlates both forms of contingency in such a way that »an affirmation of divine creation as a response to the enigma of ontological contingency implies a denial of intra-mundane relative contingency« (231). This is because a created world for Merleau-Ponty is a determinate world in which the prevailing natural laws make it impossible to freely shape reality. Convinced, however, of the possibility of semantic creativity within the world, Merleau-Ponty, by implication, rejects the creation of the world by God. For the sake of semantic openness and freedom in the world, which cannot be described scientifically, he denies the creation of the world by God – according to Descartes' opinion, which was criticized by him.

In his inaugural lecture »Éloge de la philosophie« at the Collège de France (15<sup>th</sup> of January 1953), in which he deals with Henri de Lubac and Jacques Maritain and their Christian understanding of contingency, Merleau-Ponty introduces philosophy as a mode of thinking which must take a definite position against the theology of creation, because there, giving sense is reserved exclusively for God. The contingency of the world, and astonishment that there is anything at all, have no other importance than to deduce an eternal being from it:

»For theology recognizes the contingency of human existence only to derive it from a necessary being, that is, to remove it. Theology makes use of philosophical wonder only for the purpose of motivating an affirmation which ends it. / Car la théologie ne constate la contingence de l'être humain que pour la dériver d'un Être nécessaire, c'est-à-dire pour s'en défaire, elle n'use de l'étonnement philosophique que pour motiver une affirmation qui le termine.« (EP, 44/53)

This strict rejection of the concept of creation stems, in particular, from the fact that Merleau-Ponty again grasps the implicit contingency as the world's determination and sees a creator God as a distraction from the creativity of the world. He contrasts the theological idea of creation with the philosophical esteem of a world that freely develops. Because of the creative dimension of reality, the contingency of the world must be recognized without misusing it for the derivation of a God of creation.

However, this view of contingency seems to have changed in »The Visible and the Invisible« and with the concept of the flesh presented there. Although Merleau-Ponty assigns the possibilities of creativity to the flesh, he also conceives it as an ontological approach. Now, *semantic* contingency no longer excludes *ontological* contingency: »In a word, what was previously absolutely contingent is now seen to be rooted in being« (Nordlander 2011, 236). As the contingency of giving sense is no longer arbitrary or totally free but is connected back to the ontological structure of the flesh, it is no longer absolutely optional or chaotic. Merleau-Ponty himself maintains in »The Visible and the Invisible« that the »The flesh (of the world or my own) is not contingency, chaos, but a texture that returns to itself and conforms to itself. / La chair (celle du monde or la mienne) n'est pas contin-

gence, chaos, mais texture qui revient en soi et convient à soi-même.» (VI, 146/192)

Moreover, according to a note from the 17<sup>th</sup> of January 1959, he does not want to think of the infinite as an idealized infinity beyond the world, but as an openness and as the infinite of the »Lebenswelt«. The infinite is now – as he says – »meaning or reason which *are* contingency / sens ou raison qui *sont* contingence« (VI, 169/223). Contingency is no longer structurally or chaotically uncertain. Rather, it is now thought of as an ontological imprint and even identified with reason. The flesh itself has a structure that, although not determinate, provides a framework for meaning as a style and as a changing mode of being. Merleau-Ponty locates the flesh as an initial ontological determination, so to speak, between determinism and chaos, conceding the freedom of giving sense, but without allowing it to slip off into arbitrariness.

#### 4. Consequences for the Theology of Creation

Initially Merleau-Ponty defended contingency against the theological conception, which he thought would misunderstand the world as determinism, as completely indeterminate. Now he develops this concept in the way that the flesh and the accompanying style of being have a basal structure. On the one hand, this opens a gap recognizing that the contingent world can also be thought of as created. For the world is no longer self-determined but has ontological conditions that pre-determine its evolution. On the other hand, however, the Cartesian conception of creation, according to which every creativity is to be found in God alone, is further rejected. For the world, insofar as it is grounded in the flesh, is itself, according to Merleau-Ponty, creative. By following these considerations, the following formula is no longer out of range: the »flesh as *creation* and the flesh as *creative*« (Nordlander 2011, 355) are the same.

If one admits that Merleau-Ponty's late philosophy opens the door to creation, one must concede while the concept of creation that becomes relevant now must be different from the one he criticized. Because this one separated God from the world so that the world was not given its own creative power. Finally, I would like to take up a few moments of the ideas shaped by Merleau-Ponty and to phrase some consequences for the Christian concept of creation. In doing so I am not occupied by apologetic attempts<sup>6</sup>, but want to emphasize the innovative force of his reflections.

First of all, it has to be noticed that the concept of creation according to Merleau-Ponty would have to receive an incarnational moment.<sup>7</sup> This does not mean that God is separate from the world since creation is incarnated in Jesus Christ,

<sup>6</sup> This impression is made when reading Simpson (2014) and sometimes when reading Nordlander (2011). For a different criticism of Simpson see Vogelsang (2016, 162f.).

<sup>7</sup> For Merleau-Ponty and the concept of incarnation in general, see Vogelsang (2016, 160–163).

and in this way He overcomes the hiatus between transcendence and immanence – even though the Second Divine Person was involved in creating the world. Rather, the incarnational element is already to be asserted *for the creation itself*. Beyond salvation history, the style of being in the world is always incarnational, that is, it is bodily. What Merleau-Ponty pointed out most prominently for human corporeality and asserted beyond Husserl's constitutional activity of consciousness, is that the concept of the flesh becomes a universally ontological determination that is a fundamental feature of every reality and *always has been*.

The flesh of the world is indeed a principle of ontological unity which already contains the difference in itself. Because the opposites in it are not »sublated« in the Hegelian sense, but intertwined and mutually interpenetrated, differences can arise which are ever new, and which allow being to be carried out differently. Being proves to be creative, because it never resembles in the repetition of its existence, but always performs differently and therefore is always new. Sense not yet known is generated again and again. The contingency of the created world does not only mean that it is possible not to be, but always to be both different and new. In this sense, according to Merleau-Ponty, creation must be reflected as incarnational.

Secondly, the time of creation is to be reconsidered – it cannot be asked further when the date of the creative act should be exactly estimated. But creation in the view of Merleau-Ponty must be thought of as *eternal*. Eternity does not mean that something lasts infinitely long, but that the world ever emerges anew from the same origin, which is not a past origin that could be historically distanced. In this sense, time is a »Stiftung«, as Merleau-Ponty maintains using a German term, which he assumes from Husserl (VI, 267–268/321). In a work note from November 1960, he explains this idea in such a way that he – like the flesh – also perceives time as a chiasm and, consequently, states: »Then past and present are *Ineinander* [sic!], each enveloping-enveloped – and that itself is the flesh. / Alors passé et présent sont *Ineinander* [sic!], chacun enveloppé-enveloppant, – et cela même est la chair.« (VI, 268/321)

With this specification of time, the everyday distinction between past and present and their outcome from the inner time consciousness is exceeded. Time is not constituted, but takes place carnally out of itself and is, so to speak, the genesis of the becoming explicit of the differences within the chiasm. The time conceived in this way prescribes a direction, which is not the time arrow, but the style of the being's self-realization. Merleau-Ponty calls this time »[e]xistential eternity / [é]ternité existentielle« (VI, 267/321). Consequently, the time of creation is existential eternity and not the time of consciousness.

Thirdly, the idea of *creatio continua* also changes with this concept of time. It no longer primarily describes that the created is kept in existence and does not fall back into nothingness. Such a view of creation would once again ascribe all activity to God, while the world remains passive. In contrast, *creatio continua* must be interpreted as the continuation of the creative action of God by the world it-

self. The created is so not only open to new meanings attributed to it from outside, but in itself there can be found a moment of freedom that generates sense and gives rise to it. The idea of *creatio continua* is no longer a matter of describing that to be is to endure within time, but that the process of creation itself determines time permanently.

That is why the adjective »creative« attains a transcendental meaning, admittedly not in the sense of Kant as a condition of the possibility of knowledge, but – in the sense of classical ontology – as a universal ontological quality which belongs to all beings. This provision does not only express that created nature does not cease to be *natura naturans*, but also asserts that reality as a whole remains creative at any time. For example, not only the emergence of new life, but also any work of art (Delcò 2013) are founded ontologically and enabled by the flesh of the world.

Finally, it should be noted that Merleau-Ponty's approach opens a third way beyond the conventional concept of creation and the theory of evolution. Merleau-Ponty criticizes not only the Christian idea of creation, but also the Theory of Evolution. He argues that Darwin eliminates the creative force of the world like a concept of creation that sees nature primarily subjected to its own laws. In his lectures on »Nature«, Merleau-Ponty refers to Darwin's findings as »[r]eturned finalism / [f]inalisme retourné«, in which the »determinations/déterminations« are »as rigorously prescribed as by finalism / aussi rigoureusement prescrites que par le finalisme« (N, 244/309). In the theory of evolution – in his opinion – there is only a »causal explanation or no explanation / explication causale ou pas d'explication« (N, 245/310).

Merleau-Ponty is, as he says in a work note of 1960, »not a finalist / pas finaliste« (VI, 265/318; 265/319), but he is no Darwinist either. In my opinion, he tries to understand creativity as a trans-causal event that cannot be recorded by laws – whether they are finalistic or evolutionary. The ongoing development of the world is rooted in a different ground of being, which he calls flesh. It helps that being achieves its own style, which contains a moment of freedom that neither the classical logic of creation nor Darwin's evolutionary logic can account for. The dispute between conventional creation theology and evolutionary biology is therefore idle and for nothing. What it is all about can only be rethought with the help of the ontology of the flesh.

To me, these four impulses from the late philosophy of Merleau-Ponty seem to be essential for the ongoing theory formation concerning a Christian theology of creation: (1) Creation has to be recognized as incarnational, right from the start; (2) its time property has to be conceptualized as existential eternity; (3) creativity has to be reformulated as a transcendental – in the classical sense of this term – principle of the world; (4) and, finally, the contrast between theology of creation and evolutionary biology seems to become obsolete on the basis of a new ontology of the flesh.

Perhaps Merleau-Ponty's considerations can be made useful for a new theology of creation, not for an ethical, but for an ontological one.

## Abbreviations

- EP – Merleau-Ponty 1953 [Éloge de la philosophie].  
 N – Merleau-Ponty 1995 [*La Nature*].  
 PP – Merleau-Ponty 1945 [*Phenomenology de la Perception*].  
 VI – Merleau-Ponty 1964 [*Le Visible et l'Invisible*].

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