Gary Madison’s contribution to the philosophical discourse of the twentieth century has been of considerable magnitude. Given his prolific and multi-faceted works and conference presentations during his long and illustrious career, it is difficult to provide a consolidation of his consummate productivity within our twenty minute time allotment. His contribution consists of a dozen plus published volumes, over eighty works in refereed journals and books, and over one hundred conference presentations. A quite remarkable scholarly achievement indeed!

Within my limited time I will address three more or less specific topics that define the range and depth of Gary’s philosophical contributions: (1) His scholarship on the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty; (2) his engagement with the discourse on Postmodernity; and (3) his later research and publication in the general area of social and political philosophy.

Gary’s early book, *La phénoménologie de Merleau-Ponty*¹, was one of the first critical explications of Merleau-Ponty’s role in the development of what came to be called “existential phenomenology”—a rubric under which one could also justifiably list the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur. Gary was a veritable pioneer in introducing to the English-speaking world the important developments in existential phenomenology that were taking place on the Continent. Gary’s book on Merleau-Ponty’s classical work on the phenomenology of perception continues to stand as one of the most trustworthy renderings of the transformative understanding of the world of perception offered by Merleau-Ponty. Gary also has a clear grasp of the Husserlian and Heideggerian backgrounds that inform Merleau-Ponty’s new perspectives on the topic, and hence he is able to lay out the convergence of the backgrounds and show how they invoke an emerging

---

“existential phenomenology” that finds it inaugural moment in the thought of Merleau-Ponty. There is a genuine sense in which Merleau-Ponty’s project provides the historically decisive template of what has come to be referenced in current dictionaries and encyclopedia of philosophy as “existential phenomenology.”

In marking out the contours of this new turn in phenomenology by Merleau-Ponty, Gary is on the same page as is the contributor of the preface to this work—his mentor and later colleague, Paul Ricoeur. It was Ricoeur in particular who called the academic world’s attention to the importance of the shift in Husserl’s own philosophy from the earlier requirement of a focus on the data of experience as they present themselves (Zu den Sachen Selbst!) to the later demand in his Crisis of the European Sciences with its challenge for a “return to the lifeworld” (Rückgang auf die Lebenswelt). It is precisely within the tracks and traces of this move to a concrete lifeworld of functioning intentionality that a convergence with Heidegger’s Existentzontology opens up. Now it needs to be underscored that Gary’s account of the new configuration of existential phenomenology is not simply a matter of recording the ideas of the movers and shakers in the movement. His interpretive assessment of the contributions of Husserl and Heidegger, as well of that of Merleau-Ponty, is never that of a simple serial explication. Instead, it always displays a meticulous and imaginative scholarship coupled with measured critique.

The second general topic in Gary’s extensive philosophical contribution is his engagement with the discourse of Postmodernity. This extends over a number of books and articles. I would consider the centerpiece of his engagement with the postmoderns to be his 1988 book, The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity: Figures and Themes. As known by all scholars of twentieth century Continental thought, defining the meaning of “postmodern” becomes an exceedingly difficult venture. Defining the phenomenon is like trying to pin down a globule of mercury. It does indeed come in a variety of packages, and it surely is not accidental that the central discussion by Gary on the topic occurs in a work bearing the title The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity. This quite straightway should provide us with a clue that in Gary’s usage the meaning of what counts as postmodern takes on a quite specific configuration.

---
To begin with, I was struck by Gary's dedication page in the book: “To Paul Ricoeur and Hans-Georg Gadamer, from whom I learned what is vital, and to my graduate students over the years, from whom I have continued to learn what counts.” There are two aspects of this dedication that I find to be of singular importance. The first is that Ricoeur and Gadamer are going to provide the hermeneutical thread of Ariadne to lead us through the labyrinth, thus explaining the signifier of the adjective, “hermeneutical” in the book title. The other aspect involves that which is often neglected by authors of the academy, namely that it is from our students that we learn more than we realize or are willing to admit.

So to the Madisonian understanding of Postmodernity. Postmodernity, Gary tells us, “endeavors to overcome definitely modernism and the logocentric metaphysics of presence—in a certain direction.” This certain direction involves locating its traces in the phenomenological movement begun by Husserl and continued in the revisions of Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger. “The history of the phenomenological movement is the history of the progressive attempt to eradicate the traces still present within it of the very resilient metaphysics of presence, to exorcize the metaphysical ghosts that continue to haunt our discourse, the house of being, as Heidegger called it.” So the task before us becomes that of exorcising metaphysical ghosts! Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and specifically Ricoeur and Gadamer aid us in performing this ritual of exorcism. And here we might even include Husserl, but as Gary points out from time to time, contain qualifications of Husserl’s role need to be recognized. The principal contributions of the Husserlian legacy need to be characterized more as “late modern” than as “post-modern.”

As the title of Gary’s book indicates, it is hermeneutics that is going to play the decisive role in moving into the direction of Gary’s format. And hence his dedicating the book to Gadamer is quite understandable. But how, then, does the dynamics of a “hermeneutics of Postmodernity” play itself out? How is this to be distinguished from the mélange of other forms or types of Postmodernity that became part of the philosophical discourse of the twentieth century? To this question Gary provides a straightforward answer in his Prologue when he tells us that “phenomenological hermeneutics differs from other forms of postmodernism in that it does not seek

---

4 Ibid., xiii.
5 Ibid.
merely to deconstruct the traditional metaphysical knows of ‘knowledge’ and ‘truth’; it seeks to provide *alternatives* to them.”

What are we to understand by these other kinds of postmodernism for which hermeneutical Postmodernity provides the alternative? Here also one finds a straightforward reply by Gary. It is those versions of postmodernism that overloaded the deconstructive requirement (Heidegger’s *Abbau* that was appropriated by Derrida and some of his fellow countrymen) with excessive conceptual weight being placed on difference (Derrida’s *différance*), heterogeneity, incommensurability, rampant indeterminacy and undecidability, dissensus, paralogy, and a war on totality and metanarratives—all of which at times moved in the direction of an aesthetical textualism with its announcement of the death of the author and a mindless nihilism of the vanquished subject. Gary’s hermeneutical postmodernism will have none of this. Hermeneutical Postmodernity neither quiets the voices of reason, nor the quest for an engaged speaking and acting subject in search of truth. The rejection of a logocentric metaphysics of presence and the abandonment of the modernist epistemological claims for truth based on representational theories of knowledge does not entail that one ought be done with reason, truth, and knowledge in every sense conceivable.

After the dismantling of logocentric epistemological and metaphysical protocols, the phoenix of hermeneutical Postmodernity emerges from the ashes as an embodied speaking and acting hermeneutical subject, with a non-representational understanding of the world in which it moves about with other knowledge-seeking embodied human subjects. The truth about the fabled *Abbau*, deconstruction, in hermeneutical Postmodernity resides in the recognition that *no complete* deconstruction—a deconstruction without retrieval—is possible.

The third topic that I have designated as an essential component of Gary’s philosophical contribution includes his later research and publications in the general area of social and political philosophy. And here I find his 1998 volume, *The Political Economy of Civil Society and Human Rights*[^7], to be a trend setting landmark on the principal issues at stake in the globalization of social and political thought. The central project that Gary undertakes in this work is a retrieval of the concept of civil society pruned of its manifold historical distortions. The scope of the project is extensive. It offers, Gary informs us, “an

[^6]: Ibid., xv.
overall interpretive account of the social world." His underscoring “interpretive account” straightway reminds one of his earlier work on hermeneutics and alerts the reader that his new project will be a continuation of his previous explorations of hermeneutical Post-modernity. But it will be such with an accentuated focus on the resources of a practical philosophy that employs what he refers to as a communicative rationality that enables one to set forth political principles to guide one’s vision of a liberal democracy.

This liberal democracy, however, does not have recourse to the traditional modernist concept of rationality that continues to make purchases on logocentric epistemological and metaphysical premises in its search for foundationalist grounding. This modernist notion of reason falls away with the introduction of a praxis-oriented hermeneutical reason. Contra the radical postmodernism that announces the bankruptcy of logos, Gary is of the mind that a deconstruction of logocentric scaffolding does not entail an elimination of rationality in every sense you please. In the wake of the deconstruction, resources for a new phronesis are brought to the fore, whereby discernment and critique of existing state of affairs comports their own insights, awaiting neither an epistemic grounding in criteria determined in advance by a theory of judgment (Urteilstheorie) arising from below nor an over-arching and wholly transcendent logos principle descending from above.

With these hermeneutical, communicatively textured, insights of practical reason, Gary sketches the broader outlines of his project—his interpretive account of the social world. Reminiscent of the Weber/Habermas grammar of culture-spheres, but clearly not following Weber’s and Habermas’s conceptual rendering of the grammar, Gary sketches the structure of his envisioned revised notion of civil society as comprising three “orders” of human agency. These orders consist of (1) the moral-cultural—which has truth as its basic agenda item; (2) the political—geared to the establishment of justice; and (3) the economic—dealing with the production and exchange of goods leading to prosperity and well-being. The immanent dynamic that drives these three orders is a communicative reason that informs the principles of freedom and human rights in each of the three orders. Citizens of civil society can be free only if human rights are legitimated across the spectrums of the moral-cultural, the political, and the economic. Such is the face of Gary’s revisited and revised liberal democracy.

It is these three general foci of Gary’s philosophical voice in the discourse of twentieth century continental philosophy—critical scholarship on Merleau-Ponty in particular but also on the con-
tributions of Ricoeur and Gadamer; assessment of the positive and negative facets of postmodernity; and a wide ranging interpretive account of the social world—that highlight his quite remarkable contribution to his chosen discipline and to enhancing the philosophical life in the philosophical community at large, and especially at the university where he spent the greater part of his professional career, and where he now enjoys the status of “professor emeritus.” He is now an emeritus Dasein, as are so many of his longtime colleagues and friends. And this requires that he come to terms with the meaning of “to be emeritus.” This is itself a challenging task, which in many cases has the meaning of “to be emeritus” slide into a virtual meaning of “to be deceased”! We however who have known Gary well over the years have some confidence that such will not happen with Gary Madison.

cschrag@purdue.edu