

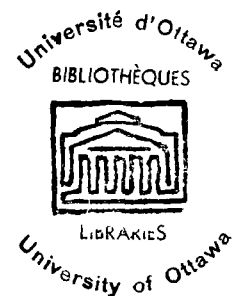
THE FOUNDATIONS OF SEXUALITY:
MAURICE MERLEAU-PONTY'S CONCEPTION
OF SEXUALITY AND ITS PLACE IN HIS
PHILOSOPHY

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INTRODUCTION

It is scarcely three-quarters of a century since Freud and his colleagues made sexuality the theme of psychological study in a radically new way. By disclosing its fundamental place in human life--personal, interpersonal, social, and cultural--psychoanalysis has effectively demanded a revision of the self-understanding of Western civilization, and has compelled anyone who wishes to understand human life to take sexuality into account seriously and at a comparable level of depth. Yet for the most part, philosophers have overlooked this dimension of experience. To be sure, many thinkers in the Western tradition have discussed love, marriage, and the family, in the context of their moral and political philosophies. But the question which has remained unasked or only partially asked concerns the roots or foundations of the whole complex structure of inter-personal and social relationships. For the most part, where they have not overlooked it altogether, philosophers have taken sexuality for granted as the biological substratum of economic, social, moral, and cultural life.¹ Sexual life has been

¹For instance, Aristotle in the Nicomachean Ethics and Politics; Engels in The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and The State.

relegated, explicitly or tacitly, to the level of "natural" behavior, below the threshold of the properly human, needing to be regulated by reason or customary morality, but essentially foreign to the rational and moral realm.

Yet, at the same time that the sexual dimension of human life is considered to belong to our biological heritage from nature, and to be particularly intractable to civilizing influences, our experience of it takes place within a framework of social institutions. If we take this term in a very broad sense, it includes a wide range of ways of organizing social life, from every-day rituals of politeness through customary modes of dress to the civil laws relating to marriage, and embraces a multitude of social attitudes, customary practices, moral concepts, and religious beliefs. Within this context, innumerable elements of life are given assigned meanings and values. These institutions, meanings, and values are always (at least in dynamic societies) in a state of gradual or abrupt transformation, and at times they are put in question in a seemingly radical way. Truly radical philosophical questioning, aiming to uncover their roots, would ask how the sexual world comes to be for us; what it means to say that the human being is a sexual or sexed being; what part sexuality has in the building up of the social world. Merleau-Ponty tells us that we naturally take the perceived world for granted and overlook the perceptual experience that gives it to us. The same can be

said of the interhuman world and the affective experience that initiates us into it and makes it present to us. Merleau-Ponty is rare among philosophers, in that he has taken up the challenge posed by Freud and the psychoanalytic movement, by integrating a treatment of sexuality into his philosophy in a systematic way. However, this aspect of his thought has been relatively neglected. In this thesis I shall consider Merleau-Ponty's conception of human sexuality, as he develops it in various works. The purpose of this investigation will be to examine what he says about sexuality; to determine the place which his treatment of this subject holds in the development of his philosophy as a whole; and to see what resources he offers for the further development of a philosophical understanding of the sexual dimension of human life. We shall be taking a sort of double view, seeing how Merleau-Ponty thinks sexuality "fits" into human existence, and how his theory of sexuality is articulated into the other aspects of his thought--into his thought as a whole. By considering the topic from this double-angle focus, I expect to show that it is of greater importance for an understanding of Merleau-Ponty than has generally been recognized. The approach that will be taken in this study seems to be invited by this passage from the beginning of the chapter

on "La temporalité" in Phénoménologie de la perception:

Nous pouvons dès maintenant dire de la temporalité ce que nous avons dit plus haut, par exemple, de la sexualité et de la spatialité: l'existence ne peut avoir d'attribut extérieur ou contingent. Elle ne peut être quoi que ce soit--spatiale, sexuelle, temporelle--sans l'être tout entière, sans reprendre et assumer ses "attributs" et faire d'eux des dimensions de son être, de sorte qu'une analyse un peu précise de chacun d'eux concerne en réalité la subjectivité elle-même. Il n'y a pas de problèmes dominants et de problèmes subordonnés: tous les problèmes sont concentriques. Analyser le temps, ce n'est pas tirer les conséquences d'une conception préétablie de la subjectivité, c'est accéder à travers le temps à sa structure concrète. Si nous réussissons à comprendre le sujet, ce ne sera pas dans sa pure forme, mais en le cherchant à l'intersection de ses dimensions.²

We could equally well say that to analyse sexuality is to have access through sexuality to the concrete structure of subjectivity. If this is so, then we may also suppose that by focusing our attention on Merleau-Ponty's conception of sexuality, we shall gain access to his philosophy through it. Examination of the very fact that he discusses it, and the way the discussion is integrated into his philosophy, ought to reveal something significant about the character of his thought. If all problems are concentric, then we should be able to enlarge our understanding of his thought by seeking access to it via his conception of sexuality.

Merleau-Ponty draws out the relationship of sexuality to the fundamental intentionality of human

²Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phénoménologie de la perception (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), p. 470, (hereafter cited as Merleau-Ponty, Phénoménologie).

existence. He offers resources for the philosophical investigation of sexuality in the context of his developing phenomenological perspective. In examining and assessing these resources, we are concerned with questions of foundations: Does sexuality have a purely "corporeal" basis in the narrowest sense? Is it founded on "quelque organe du plaisir anatomiquement défini," or is it "liée intérieurement à tout l'être connaissant et agissant"?

Further, what is the role of sexuality in relation to interpersonal and social life?

And what are the fundamental conceptions needed for a developed theory of sexuality?

As may be expected, Merleau-Ponty considers existing widely-held notions of sexuality--and of affectivity in general--to be insufficient. In Phénoménologie de la perception, he says that affectivity is ordinarily conceived of as

. . . une mosaïque d'états affectifs, plaisirs et douleurs fermés sur eux-mêmes, qui ne se comprennent pas et ne peuvent que s'exprimer par notre organisation corporelle.³

According to the usual conception, representations may come to replace the natural stimuli of pleasure and pain; but, all the same, "l'affectivité n'est pas reconnue comme un mode original de conscience."⁴ Merleau-Ponty contests the accepted notion of human sexuality as "un appareil réflexe

³Merleau-Ponty, Phénoménologie, p. 180.

⁴Ibid., p. 181.

autonome."⁵ Just as he criticises those conceptions of perception, movement, and speech which would reduce them to purely "corporeal" functions whose relationship to consciousness is an external one, so likewise he criticises conceptions of sexuality which would interpret it as a purely "corporeal" or instinctual function sequestered on a level "below" that of consciousness. As he maintains that the so-called higher intellectual functions are grounded in and integrated with perception, he also maintains that sexuality grounds and is integrated into interpersonal and social life.

This study will attempt to place the discussion of sexuality in its full context in Merleau-Ponty's thought. The first chapter will deal with his view of the relationship between phenomenology and the human sciences. It will constitute a necessary framework for the discussion of sexuality; we must see how psychology and philosophy are related, in order to appreciate his philosophical treatment of a topic of central importance in psychology.

The second chapter will deal with the view of sexuality presented in La structure du comportement⁶ and in Phénoménologie de la perception. In the latter work, he devoted a chapter--and one which is significantly placed in the work as a whole--to sexuality.⁷ Because it is a direct,

⁵Ibid., pp. 181-82.

⁶Maurice Merleau-Ponty, La structure du comportement, 3rd. ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1953), (hereafter cited as Merleau-Ponty, Structure).

⁷Merleau-Ponty, Phénoménologie, pp. ii-iii.

explicit treatment of sexuality as a dimension of human life, placed within the structure of a major work, the chapter on "Le corps comme être sexué" from Phénoménologie de la perception, must be considered as a kind of anchor point of this study. It can orient and guide us in our approach to Merleau-Ponty's other treatments of the topic. However, it would be a mistake to consider the discussion in Phénoménologie de la perception, even taken in its full context, as the definitive statement of Merleau-Ponty's view on sexuality, as a criterion, archetype, or "standard version" against which his other treatments must be matched. In his own description of his projected work, Merleau-Ponty describes Phénoménologie de la perception (with La structure du comportement) as accomplishing one stage of an overall plan.⁸ The book does not present the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, but one part or phase of it. Thus, while its chapter on sexuality is a text of special importance, we must be careful not to attribute to it the wrong kind of importance.

In order to bring to light more fully the place in Merleau-Ponty's thought of his conception of sexuality, and to make clear just what it is that a close study of this topic reveals about his thought, the chapter dealing with Phénoménologie de la perception will be followed by a comparison of Merleau-Ponty with Sartre. The discussion will bear on the treatments of sexuality in Phénoménologie de la

⁸Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Un inédit de Merleau-Ponty," Revue de métaphysique et de morale, 4 (1962): 401-9.

perception and in Sartre's L'être et le néant,⁹ in the light of the structure of both works and the place which the discussion of sexuality holds in each; the relation of that topic to others; and the philosophical concepts or principles that underlie or are brought out in the discussions of sexuality. It will deal in particular with the relation of the question of sexuality to that of the relationship with others as it appears in each work.

The development of the conception of sexuality after the period of Phénoménologie de la perception will be studied in a particularly interesting group of texts: the published version of Merleau-Ponty's Sorbonne courses, which deal mainly with child psychology, as well as with theoretical problems in psychology, and the relationship between philosophy and the sciences of man.¹⁰ In some of these lectures, aspects of sexual development are discussed, such as the Oedipus complex or the problems of adolescence. Merleau-Ponty's methodology is of particular interest. He brings together insights from several philosophical and scientific approaches--phenomenology, psychoanalysis, later Gestalt theory, historical materialism, cultural anthropology, and linguistics. He does this not simply in a spirit of eclecticism, but as a way of further developing and understanding

⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, L'être et le néant: Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), (hereafter cited as Sartre, L'être et le néant).

¹⁰ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Maurice Merleau-Ponty à la Sorbonne," Bulletin de psychologie, 236 (November 1964), (hereafter cited as Merleau-Ponty, "Sorbonne").

realities which existing methods could not adequately handle. One of his dominant interests in the Sorbonne lectures is the interaction of the individual, the interindividual milieu, and the social world--especially in the case of the child who is being initiated into the social world. A chapter of this study will be devoted to the role of sexuality in this interaction, and to the way in which Merleau-Ponty develops a method for describing and interpreting it. Here, as throughout this study, we shall maintain a double focus on the place of sexuality in human existence as Merleau-Ponty understands it, and the place of his conception of sexuality in his philosophy as a whole.

In Merleau-Ponty's unfinished work, Le visible et l'invisible,¹¹ his philosophical explorations of sexuality contribute significantly to the concept of 'flesh' in all its ramifications. There are few explicit references to sexuality in Le visible et l'invisible, and they are found mostly in the "Notes de travail." But, as the fifth chapter of this study will show, the conceptions of 'my flesh' and 'the flesh of the world,' and of the interchange between my body and the other's body, are profoundly indebted to the understanding of sexuality as the matrix of interindividual and social relations which is reached in Phénoménologie de la perception and in the Sorbonne courses. The presence of sexuality as a theme in Le visible et l'invisible is a latent presence, but not less significant for that.

¹¹Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Le visible et l'invisible (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), (hereafter cited as Merleau-Ponty, Visible).

The point of an examination of Merleau-Ponty's conception of sexuality, then, is not simply to see how he applies his philosophical framework to the study of this phenomenon, but also to see how his understanding of sexuality in turn influences the development of other aspects of his thought. Having followed out the development of his notion of sexuality, we shall be in a position to see what questions remain open, and in which directions it is possible to proceed further. For now, let us borrow some words from Merleau-Ponty (who himself was borrowing them). In Le visible et l'invisible, he says,

Ce que saint Augustin disait du temps: qu'il est parfaitement familier à chacun, mais qu'aucun de nous ne peut l'expliquer aux autres, il faut le dire du monde.¹²

Perhaps it must also be said of sexuality. If so, then rather than start out with a definition, let us see whether, by following out Merleau-Ponty's thought about this dimension of human life, we can help bring it to expression. The saying of Augustine, as Merleau-Ponty understands it, is not a confession of helplessness in the face of irrationality. Rather, it is an avowal that we cannot totally account for and sum up any of the mysterious realities that we encounter. The philosopher's task is not to transform everything into clear and distinct ideas, but to carry interrogation ever deeper into the latent dimensions of experience. The central affirmation of the present study is that Merleau-Ponty does precisely that in his interrogation of sexuality.

¹²Ibid., p. 17.

CHAPTER I

PHENOMENOLOGY AND THE HUMAN SCIENCES

The relationship between phenomenology and the sciences of man is an important question for Merleau-Ponty. He discusses it in several writings; and in much of his work, it is present in the background. In this chapter, I shall consider his various treatments of it in some detail.

Merleau-Ponty considered the question of phenomenology (or philosophy)¹ and the human sciences to be a major problem of contemporary thought. The problem arises when psychology, sociology, and history challenge the status of philosophy. Their critique, in sum, amounts to saying that since philosophy is subject to the same external conditioning as every other human knowledge or activity, it has no independent justification for its ideas. The truth of philosophy becomes wholly relative and contingent. Philosophy has no ground of its own to stand on. Moreover, it has nothing left to do, because the sciences now take over the task of explaining human

¹In some of his writings, Merleau-Ponty speaks of phenomenology; in others, of philosophy. In general, I have followed the model of the text in question at any given moment. As far as Merleau-Ponty's own philosophy is concerned, the two words are virtually equivalent: his philosophy is a phenomenology.

consciousness and human society. Some philosophers accept this critique, and make a niche for their discipline by devoting themselves to the clarification of scientific terminology, logic, and method. This is a valuable task, and one proper for philosophers to undertake; but if it is all they try to do, they implicitly assent to the judgment that science has definitive knowledge of reality. Some philosophers disregard the sciences of man, and continue their work in isolation from them. Others condemn them for applying to the human spirit a quantifying, objectifying method that fails to respect the freedom and uniqueness of human beings. At the same time, probably the majority of the scientists tend to look on philosophy as groundless speculation, and philosophical criticism of their methods, presuppositions or results as ignorant meddling and unscientific nonsense. Thus Merleau-Ponty speaks of a "régime de séparation" between philosophy and sociology: they keep their distance from one another, in a sort of cold-war attitude.²

The resulting situation is harmful both for science and philosophy. The sciences, refusing any rights to philosophy and withdrawing from all contact with it, are not able to discover their own foundations and ground themselves firmly; indeed, they are themselves

²Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Signes (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 123, (hereafter cited as Merleau-Ponty, Signes).

threatened by the very same reductivist critique they make of philosophy. At the same time, philosophy, rejected by the sciences and holding itself aloof from them, is deprived of the concrete knowledge they possess and risks becoming an abstract and purely formal discipline. This state of affairs, as Husserl explains in his Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften, amounts to a crisis not only of philosophy and of science, but of Western humanity. In bringing to light the essential unity of philosophy and the human sciences, Merleau-Ponty is seeking to restore the unity and coherence of our self-understanding.

La structure du comportement and Phénoménologie de la perception embody a conception of the relationship between philosophy and the human sciences which Merleau-Ponty develops in a fully explicit and detailed manner only later. In the first of these works, Merleau-Ponty undertakes to investigate the relations between consciousness and nature. He finds two main positions on that topic: empiricism, exemplified by behaviorist psychology; and intellectualism, exemplified by rationalist philosophy. His aim is to show the inadequacy of both these positions and to find a more satisfactory one. One might wonder whether such a confrontation between a philosophical position, on the one hand, and a psychological theory, on the other, is legitimate. How can we attempt to transcend the alternative offered by these positions, when they belong to different spheres of knowledge?

Merleau-Ponty is not simply confused about the proper method, scope and content of philosophy and of psychology. He has in mind an understanding of their relationship which his way of treating his topic reveals.

In the first three chapters, he interprets the findings and methods of the behaviorist and the Gestalt approaches in psychology. He finds that an explanation of the behavior of organisms in terms of linear, mechanical cause-effect relationships is not adequate to account for even the simplest phenomena, let alone higher and more complex behaviors. The Gestalt school's concept of form or structure, involving dialectical relationships both between the organism and its environment and within the organism itself, is much more satisfactory. Structure is not reducible to the parts or elements which are structured, and the parts depend on the structure in such a way that they cannot exist as independent wholes separate from it. This concept gives Merleau-Ponty a means of describing the human being which neither reduces him to a mere organism, nor makes him a compound of essentially heterogeneous physical and mental elements.

In the last chapter of La structure du comportement, Merleau-Ponty carries his discussion onto the strictly philosophical level. He wishes to establish a conception of the body-soul relationship which is neither reductivist nor dualist, and at the same time to establish a conception of consciousness which places it neither within the causal

network of natural events, nor completely outside the world, as a pure constituting source. He arrives at a philosophical position through his analysis and interpretation of psychological data and concepts; the first three chapters lead up to the last. He does not simply accept the results of psychological research as he finds them, or always take them in the same sense as the psychologist does. He reflects critically on both behaviorism and Gestalt theory, and draws conclusions from them which they do not draw themselves. Thus he exercises a high degree of autonomy with regard to science. At the same time, the scientific theories offer him a starting-point, content, and guiding clues for his reflections. He does not criticize scientific experience from a point completely outside it, but rather takes his start from within; and at no time does he suggest that scientific knowledge can be dispensed with or supplanted by philosophy. The relationship between them appears to be one of interdependence, within which the disciplines retain their proper functions and autonomy.

In Phénoménologie de la perception, again, the interpretation and criticism of psychological positions serves Merleau-Ponty as a way to approach the phenomenological level. In his view, submitting science to the phenomenological reduction does not mean simply leaving scientific findings out of account; it means suspending them in order to question them, examining them

to see if they can disclose meanings other than or deeper than their patent meanings, seeing if they can be interpreted in a sense other than the sense they have for the scientist who presents them, or for the philosopher when he confronts them in the natural attitude; seeing if they can guide philosophical reflection, or nourish it with content. Merleau-Ponty does not take psychological findings for granted, at their face value; nor does he philosophize in complete abstraction from them. The phenomenological attitude is not radically opposed to the "natural" attitude (within which science is carried out). It presupposes the natural attitude; reflection depends upon the prereflective.³ If phenomenology neither rejects nor naively accepts science, their relationship needs to be examined. It must be understood in terms of the relationship of each to the lived world, or lived experience. Science tends to take itself as primary or original experience, and to think that the way it sees its objects most truly reveals what they are. Thus psychology sees the human subject as a part of the natural world, enmeshed in the all-encompassing causal network; it takes this as an adequate view of the human being, and as the only one which is scientifically legitimate. But science is a second-order expression of the lived world, not original experience of it. Moreover, I am the subject for whom the

³Merleau-Ponty, Phénoménologie, p. iv.

world is world and science is science, and so I cannot be defined as an object in the world, wholly explained by science. Any viewpoint which overlooks this is insufficient.

Tout ce que je sais du monde, même par science, je le sais à partir d'une vie mienne ou d'une expérience du monde sans laquelle les symboles de la science ne voudraient rien dire. Tout l'univers de la science est construit sur le monde vécu et si nous voulons penser la science elle-même avec rigueur, en apprécier exactement le sens et la portée, il nous faut réveiller d'abord cette expérience du monde dont elle est l'expression seconde. La science n'a pas et n'aura jamais le même sens que le monde perçu pour la simple raison qu'elle en est une détermination ou une explication.⁴

Phenomenology is the bringing to light of the lived world, the thematizing of what we ordinarily live. It is closer to the lived world than science is.

Merleau-Ponty here establishes the autonomy of phenomenology with respect to science. It has its own task, and its own rights. He also established the autonomy and priority of the human subject with respect to science. This implies a limitation of science, a denial of it to the extent that science claims to possess the sole and sufficient viewpoint for knowledge of man and the world. We can infer from this that phenomenology has a critical and foundational role in relation to science; but whether science in turn has any positive contribution to make to phenomenology is not at all clear. In fact, psychology does contribute to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological investigation of perception. A reciprocal relationship is

⁴Ibid., pp. ii-iii.

possible, however, only if the distinctions between the disciplines are also made clear.

In "Le primat de la perception," which is a brief exposition of his principal theme in Phénoménologie de la perception, Merleau-Ponty states:

L'étude de la perception, poursuivie sans préjugés par les psychologues, finit par révéler que le monde perçu n'est pas une somme d'objets, au sens que les sciences donnent à ce mot, que notre relation avec lui n'est pas celle d'un penseur avec un objet de pensée et qu'enfin l'unité de la chose perçue, sur laquelle plusieurs consciences s'accordent, n'est pas assimilable à celle d'un théorème que plusieurs penseurs reconnaissent, ni l'existence perçue à l'existence idéale.⁵

The word 'unprejudiced' is important. Merleau-Ponty has in mind, I think, two prejudices. One is the "prejudice in favor of the world" (le préjugé du monde) of which he speaks in Phénoménologie de la perception: that is, the natural tendency to focus entirely on the object, overlooking perception, which gives it to us. The other is the assumption that the objects psychology deals with are like the objects of physical science, and can be studied by the same kind of method. The second prejudice is a corollary of the first: when we do take note of psychological phenomena, we tacitly assume that they are objects like the others.

The quoted passage presents several major themes of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception. He gives

⁵Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Le primat de la perception," Bulletin de la société française de philosophie, 4 (October, 1947), pp. 119-53, (hereafter cited as Merleau-Ponty, "Primat.")

credit for their initial discovery to psychologists. From their work he draws results which, he says, have a value beyond that of psychological description.⁶ Indeed, the psychologists who have described the perceived world in a way that he finds fruitful--the Gestalt psychologists--

" . . . n'ont jamais tiré de ces descriptions leurs conséquences philosophiques. . . . En fin de compte, ce qui est vrai, c'est le monde physique tel qu'on l'a toujours conçu et qui engendre notre conscience elle-même."⁷ It is the philosopher, reflecting on the results of psychological study against the background of the entire modern and contemporary development of philosophy, who draws out the further dimensions of meaning of the psychologists' discoveries. And, in turn, the philosophical conclusions reflect back onto psychology.

Merleau-Ponty's view of perception involves a view of the status of ideas. Both empiricism and rationalism cut perception off from ideas. Empiricism denies meaning to perception; rationalism establishes meaning on an autonomous foundation, wholly independent of perception. Neither does justice to the relationship between perception and meaning, which Merleau-Ponty states in these terms:

Le monde perçu serait le fond toujours présupposé par toute rationalité, toute valeur et toute existence. Une conception de ce genre ne détruit ni la rationalité, ni l'absolu. Elle cherche à les faire descendre sur la terre.⁸

⁶Ibid., p. 119-20. ⁷Ibid., p. 131.

⁸Ibid., p. 120.

There is no apodictic evidence, and no eternal truth.⁹ Yet truth is not valid for a moment only. Rather than timeless truth, we have "la reprise d'un temps par un autre temps."¹⁰ Although there is a difference between perception and intellection, there is an organic tie between them. This view of truth is not unscientific; scientific knowledge does not consist in superimposing a world of ideas on the perceived world, or setting up laws which are truer than the facts, or going "straight to the essence of things." Rather, it is "toujours savoir approché, et qu'il consiste à élucider un monde pré-scientifique dont on n'a jamais fini de faire l'analyse."¹¹ This conception of a knowledge which is neither eternal nor merely momentary holds good for psychology: it cannot claim the status of absolute, sovereign knowledge.

Psychology must remain true to our perceptual experience of others and ourselves. It must not belie experience in favor of an "objective" science modeled after the sciences of physical reality. Although it never completely shook off a scientistic ontology, Gestalt psychology showed how a faithful rendering of experience is possible. It overcame the apparently insoluble

⁹Merleau-Ponty does not observe the distinction which Husserl makes between apodictic and adequate evidence. Apodictic evidence is indubitable; adequate evidence is not only indubitable, but complete and exhaustive.

¹⁰Merleau-Ponty, "Primat," p. 128.

¹¹Ibid., p. 127.

conflict between objective psychology and introspective psychology, by showing that

. . . la structure, le Gestalt, la signification, ne sont pas moins visibles dans les conduites objectivement considérées que dans l'expérience de nous-mêmes, pourvu seulement que l'objectif ne soit pas confondu avec le mesurable.¹²

Objectivity with respect to man does not mean trying to explain him as "un entrecroisement de processus, de causalités," but rather, basing a science of human life on "la description des conduites typiques."¹³

A philosophy which reveals the consequences of a return to the perceived world does not threaten psychology; rather,

. . . cette attitude dégage au contraire la signification philosophique de ses découvertes. Car il n'y a pas deux vérités, il n'y a pas une psychologie inductive et une philosophie intuitive.¹⁴

Induction is a method for bringing typical behaviors to light; as such, it includes intuition. Intuition in turn works on the phenomena that scientific research brings to light. Psychology and philosophy represent different degrees of clarification of the same knowledge.

La psychologie et la philosophie se nourrissent des même phénomènes, les problèmes sont seulement plus formalisés au niveau de la philosophie.¹⁵

Does this give too much to psychology and take too much from philosophy? Does it compromise reality? Merleau-Ponty thinks not.

¹²Ibid., p. 132.

¹³Ibid., p. 132.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 132.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 132.

Quand les philosophes veulent mettre la raison à l'abri de l'histoire, ils ne peuvent oublier purement et simplement tout ce que la psychologie, la sociologie, l'ethnographie, l'histoire et la pathologie mentale nous ont appris sur le conditionnement des conduites humaines. . . . Ce qu'ils peuvent valablement exiger, c'est que jamais l'homme ne soit soumis à la fatalité d'une nature ou d'une histoire extérieures, et dépouillé de sa conscience.¹⁶

We are discovering that science itself is not necessarily an obstacle to the understanding of man. Since human subjects create science, it would be strange if science inevitably distorted, falsified, and degraded human beings whenever it studied them. But the danger of self-misunderstanding is always present, and not only to the psychologist. A certain way of interpreting science falsifies our experience, and this interpretation arises in part, at least, from a characteristic of perceptual experience itself, its straightforward orientation toward its objects. But in spite of their tendencies towards objectivism, the contemporary human sciences also offer indications of a truer conception both of experience, and of the scientific approach to it. They are beginning to disclose a dimension of being that lies beyond the scope of objectivistic science. This is the theme of Merleau-Ponty's article "Le métaphysique dans l'homme." In this article he

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 132-33.

declares that metaphysics,

réduite par le kantisme au système des principes que
la raison emploie dans la constitution de la science
ou de l'univers moral, . . .¹⁷

and contested by positivism, is reappearing at the horizon of the sciences of man. It takes account of a type of being that scientism knows nothing about. Psychology offers us the example of the Berlin, or Gestalt, school. Echoing "Le primat de la perception," Merleau-Ponty says that their work overturns the implicit ontology of science and compels us to revise our conceptions of scientific knowledge. In the realm of the psychological, we must recognize other relationships than those that are measurable, and redefine our notion of objectivity. But the Gestaltists, to the detriment of psychology, drew back from the consequences of their own work, and reaffirmed scientism: i.e., the belief that all phenomena are of the same type as those that physics studies, and that all knowledge is of the same type as that which physics achieves. Merleau-Ponty reiterates the philosophical implications which he draws from their discoveries:

. . . en révélant la "structure" ou la "forme" comme un ingrédient irréductible de l'être, elle remet en question l'alternative classique de l'"existence comme chose" et de l'"existence comme conscience," elle établit une communication et comme un mélange de l'objectif et du subjectif, elle conçoit d'une manière neuve la connaissance psychologique, qui ne

¹⁷Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Sens et non-sens, 4th. ed. (Paris: Editions Nagel, 1963), p. 145, (hereafter cited as Merleau-Ponty, Sens et non-sens).

consiste plus à décomposer ces ensembles typiques, mais plutôt à les épouser et à les comprendre en les revivant.¹⁸

Considering the other human sciences in turn, Merleau-Ponty finds corroboration for the conclusions he has reached concerning psychology. In linguistics, he finds that the conception of language as an object or thing is being supplanted (or at least counterbalanced) by the recognition of the speaking subject who lives his language. Yet language is not a pure product of consciousness, nor an abstraction. The dichotomy of language as thing and language as production of speaking subjects must be surpassed. The notion of Gestalt or structure can be of service, since it allows us to bring meaning and facts together.

Ni chose, ni idée, la langue, comme le psychisme, n'est accessible qu'à une méthode de "compréhension" qui retrouve dans la multiplicité des faits quelques intentions ou visées décisives . . .¹⁹

In setting out to establish sociology as a science, Durkheim recommended that the social be treated "comme une chose," as a thing. But we find that if the social is conceived as a thing, external to the individual, his relationship to it is incomprehensible. A society is not a thing, that is, a sum of mutually external parts;

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 150-51. ¹⁹Ibid., pp. 154-55.

it is a totality, ". . . où les phénomènes s'expriment mutuellement et admettent un même thème fondamental."²⁰ Once again, our notion of objective scientific knowledge must be revised. The social is intersubjectivity:

. . . à son plus haut point, la connaissance sociologique, comme la connaissance de quelqu'un, exige que nous reprenions, en nous guidant sur tous les indices objectifs, l'attitude humaine qui fait l'esprit d'une société.²¹

The historian has to pick his way carefully between the temptation, on the one hand, to adopt the standpoint of a Universal History, an absolutely objective knowledge having direct access to all times and finding meaning in all events; and, on the other hand, to take the point of view of scientism, reducing all events to the same level of "mere" fact and attributing no meaning to any of them. His task is to reawaken the past: to understand it in its own terms, and then to evaluate it. Through our own historical situation, we rejoin another, and perceive it as it was for itself. History, like sociology, presents us with a problem of communication.

Nous n'atteignons pas l'universel en quittant notre particularité, mais en faisant d'elle un moyen d'atteindre les autres, en vertu de cette mystérieuse affinité qui fait que les situations se comprennent entre elles.²²

The sciences of man are metaphysical in the sense that they reveal to us a dimension of being

²⁰Ibid., p. 158. ²¹Ibid., p. 158.

²²Ibid., p. 162.

(i.e., coexistence) and a type of knowing (i.e., communication) that we forget in the natural attitude. Objectivism is typical of the natural attitude and of science in its early stages. It takes for granted the standpoint of the absolute observer. But the knowledge of man by man is not pure contemplation; it is the taking up by one subject of the acts of another. It is not the positing of an object, but communication with a way of being. Metaphysics begins when we cease to be directed wholly towards the object, and become aware both of the subjectivity of our experience and of its truth value. There is a paradox here: my experience, precisely as mine, opens me to what is not myself. The metaphysical for Merleau-Ponty involves self-surpassing towards and communication with the being of others. Thus the universality of our knowledge is not guaranteed by a pure consciousness; rather, it is founded in our perception of things and our dialogue with others. The separation between the individual and the universal is bridged: "Ma vie m'apparaît absolument individuelle et absolument universelle."²³ So is the separation between fact and truth, provided that we do not insist on having absolute truth. Truth and value

. . . ne peuvent être pour nous que le résultat de nos vérifications ou de nos évaluations au contact du monde, devant les autres et dans les situations de connaissance et d'actions données . . .²⁴

²³Ibid., p. 165.

²⁴Ibid., p. 165.

Scientism and metaphysics conceived as a system are enemies, Merleau-Ponty says; but if metaphysics renounces system, and science becomes aware of the discrepancy between its formulas and the facts, they converge spontaneously.

Une science sans philosophie ne saurait pas, à la lettre, de quoi elle parle. Une philosophie sans exploration méthodique des phénomènes n'aboutirait qu'à des vérités formelles, c'est-à-dire à des erreurs. Faire la métaphysique . . . c'est chercher à penser jusqu'au bout les mêmes phénomènes que la science investit, en leur restituant seulement leur transcendance et leur étrangeté originaires.²⁵

But if metaphysics and science have such a relationship, it is necessary to rethink the classical distinction between induction and reflection. Perhaps they are not two kinds of knowledge, but one single knowledge, at different degrees of naïveté or of explicitness. Merleau-Ponty has expressed this same idea in "Le primat de la perception;" it is developed as a major theme in "Les sciences de l'homme et la phénoménologie."

In the texts we have considered so far, Merleau-Ponty has indicated a convergence between the human sciences and phenomenology, or philosophy. Both the philosopher and the scientist must pass beyond objectivism and find their source of truth in the world of perceiving and communicating subjects. The sciences of man point to the same realm of perception and communication which phenomenology studies. This world cannot be understood in terms of rigid distinctions between subject and object, fact and idea,

²⁵Ibid., p. 171.

perception and intellection. Thus philosophy, as well as psychology and the other human sciences, must rethink its fundamental concepts.

Their common ground in the intersubjective world is the basis of a close relationship between philosophy and the human sciences. The inspiration for affirming this relationship does not come from philosophy alone, but from reflection on the work of the scientists, and on the conclusions their work implies, even if they themselves do not draw them. In the three texts that remain to be considered, Merleau-Ponty takes up very explicitly the nature of the relationship between the way of knowing proper to phenomenology and the way proper to the sciences of man.²⁶ He defines his own position in relation to that of Husserl. In this thesis I shall not consider whether his interpretation of Husserl is correct. In his interpretations of others, Merleau-Ponty reveals the path of his own thought, and this is what I shall focus on.

The topic of "Les sciences de l'homme et la phénoménologie" is the development of Husserl's attitude toward the contemporary crisis of philosophy, the sciences of man, and science in general. The key theme is the relationship between the phenomenological procedure of Wesensschau and the scientific procedure of induction.

²⁶Merleau-Ponty, "Sorbonne," pp. 141-70; Merleau-Ponty, Signes, pp. 105-22 and 123-42; Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Les sciences de l'homme et la phénoménologie," Les Cours de Sorbonne (Paris: Centre de Documentation Universitaires), (hereafter cited as Merleau-Ponty, "Sciences.")

The crisis results from the attempt to explain all thought, including philosophy, as the product of psychological, social, and historical conditions. Philosophy loses its justification; and ultimately, the same critique turns back on the sciences as well, so that they also lose their foundations. Neither the scientists nor the philosophers have abandoned their disciplines because of these criticisms; they have, for the most part, ignored each other and carried on with their work in isolation and with much unsureness and lack of clarity. The only way to reestablish philosophy and science on firm ground is to overcome the separation between them. This task is not so impossible as it might seem; for the phenomenologists and the psychologists have failed to understand each other and to recognize how much their researches and their basic aims are in harmony. Merleau-Ponty will try to bring out this harmony, and to set forth compatible conceptions of philosophy and psychology. "Nous tâcherons d'aboutir à redéfinir une philosophie, une phénoménologie et une psychologie rigoureuses."²⁷

In the face of the radical skepticism and political irrationalism that result from reductivism, Husserl envisions the philosopher's task as the restoration of the distinction between true and false. This cannot be done by

²⁷Merleau-Ponty, "Sciences," p. 4; Merleau-Ponty, "Sorbonne," p. 142.

simply confronting psychologism, historicism, and sociologism with the opposite extreme of logicism. Logicism believes in a sphere of intrinsic truth completely removed from all contact with the concrete world and the life of the philosopher. But since philosophical thought does have roots, logicism, far from safeguarding the autonomy and worth of philosophy, simply provokes a return of reductivism. Husserl tries to find a way between these pitfalls.

Il tente, par une réflexion qui soit véritablement radicale, c'est-à-dire qui nous révèle les préjugés établis en nous par le milieu et par les conditions extérieures, à transformer ce conditionnement subi en conditionnement conscient, mais il n'a jamais nié qu'il existât et qu'il fût constant.²⁸

This reflection is the phenomenological reduction. As Merleau-Ponty interprets it, the reduction does not negate our ties with the world. In drawing back and becoming aware of them, we are no longer merely subject to them. We do not escape, via reflection, into a world of atemporal or eternal truths; but we do escape submersion in the moment. Philosophy is the science of the omnitemporal. It is essentially progressive.

Husserl sets himself the task of

. . . l'établissement d'une philosophie intégrale, qui soit compatible avec le développement de l'ensemble des recherches sur le conditionnement de l'homme.²⁹

²⁸Ibid., p. 7; *ibid.*, pp. 143-44.

²⁹Ibid., p. 10; *ibid.*, pp. 143-44.

He has to respect both facts and meaning. He does not wish to sacrifice science to philosophy, but rather to strengthen psychology by assisting it to fill the gaps in its method.

Merleau-Ponty sums up his problem:

Au moment où Husserl écrivait, il semblait y avoir conflit, entre les exigences d'une philosophie, exigences d'une intériorité rationnelle pure, et les exigences d'une psychologie considérée comme science de la détermination extérieure des conduites de l'homme.³⁰

Husserl must find a mode of knowledge which is neither deductive nor simply empirical: one in which a meaning, irreducible to the particular facts, is revealed through the psychological event. 'Wesenschau,' or 'intuition of essences,' is the name Husserl gives this mode of knowledge. It is not some magical insight; rather, it consists in a change in our attitude towards our experiences. Considered from without, experiences are particular, individual events determined by social and physical causes. But from another point of view, they take on a universal, intersubjective meaning. Instead of simply living the experience, I step back from it and distinguish the fact of my living it from that which is lived. The that which is not confined to or enclosed in this one experience; it is a meaning, a significance, which can be lived by me or by others in other experiences, and recognized as something which we share. The intuition of an essence is a knowledge that is

³⁰Ibid., p. 12; *ibid.*, p. 143.

concrete and universal at the same time.

Je dépasse ma singularité en tant que ma conscience n'est pas seulement une série de faits ou d'événements, mais que ces événements ont tous un sens. L'intuition des essences consiste simplement à reconquérir ce sens qui n'est pas encore thématiqué dans la vie spontanée.³¹

Intuition of essences would not be possible if consciousness were a thing among other things. But consciousness is not simply a part of being, alongside nature; it is

. . . le principe pour lequel tout être quel qu'il soit peut recevoir son sens et sa valeur d'être pour nous, et qui est donc le corrélatif de tout être quel qu'il soit.³²

It is disclosed by the phenomenological reduction. This act is a turning away from the spontaneous affirmations in which I naturally live, not in order to deny them, but to understand them by discovering and clarifying in myself the source of all the meanings that constitute the world and my empirical self.³³

Phenomenology, as Husserl envisions it, is a universal, radical reflection. Psychology, by contrast, is a science of facts, studying man in the world. Since it shares the natural convictions of common sense and of science--convictions which require philosophical elucidation--it does not have ultimate bearing. Reflection reveals that the subject who is situated in the world is also the one

³¹Ibid., p. 14; *ibid.*, p. 144.

³²Ibid., p. 14.

³³Merleau-Ponty, "Sorbonne," p. 144.

who thinks the world. While the empirical subject is a part of the world, the world itself is an intentional object for the transcendental subject. Consciousness, since it intends every possible object, cannot itself be defined as an object. Thus psychology, which takes consciousness as an object, cannot supplant philosophy. Moreover, by objectifying it, psychology deforms consciousness. The empirical, inductive study of consciousness remains blind unless eidetic intuition provides an understanding of the meaning or essence of consciousness. Thus a precise demarcation of the terrain of psychology and of phenomenology is made:

La connaissance des faits appartient à la psychologie; la définition des notions qui serviront à élaborer ces faits appartient, selon Husserl, à la phénoménologie.³⁴

Both must maintain their autonomy.

L'autonomie de la psychologie se manifeste par ceci que c'est elle qui est chargée de l'enquête sur les faits et sur les relations de fait; mais la signification ultime de ces faits et de ces relations n'est fournie que par une eidétique phénoménologique dans laquelle je dégage le sens ou l'essence de perception, d'image et de conscience.³⁵

Their different tasks guarantee the independence of each.

Merleau-Ponty presents and deals with two sorts of objection that can be made to Husserl's conception of eidetic psychology. The first is that it is simply a return to introspectionism. But introspection is the

³⁴Merleau-Ponty, "Sciences," p. 18.

³⁵Merleau-Ponty, "Sciences," p. 18; Merleau-Ponty, "Sorbonne," pp. 144-45.

perception of internal facts, observation of the empirical self. Phenomenological reflection is neutral with regard to the distinction between inner and outer. It discloses, not the empirical subject, but the transcendental subject which is prepersonal.³⁶ Thus the first objection rests on a misunderstanding of phenomenology. The second is more serious; Husserl had to come to grips with it in his writings after the Ideen. The difficulty is that an eidetic psychology which determines the fundamental categories of consciousness by reflection seems to leave empirical psychology with nothing to do except study details. Psychology gives us the causal relationships among phenomena, while the comprehension of phenomena belongs to philosophy. It appears that philosophy provides everything essential. But Wesenschau was supposed to be a procedure of knowing that would be at the same time linked to my experience and also universal. The notion of eidetic intuition which Husserl had developed at the period of the Ideen does not seem to fulfil these requirements.

Yet Merleau-Ponty can point to an intrinsic relationship between the grasp of facts and Wesenschau. He notes that for Husserl, knowledge of facts requires the seeing of essences, even if they are not made explicit. The essences disclosed by eidetic psychology are not exact essences, like those of mathematics; eidetic

³⁶The "Sorbonne" version says that introspection is the noticing of events taking place in me, while reflection is "un effort pour dégager le sens d'une expérience vécue." Merleau-Ponty, "Sorbonne," p. 146.

psychology is not a deductive but a descriptive science.

Il n'y a de définition constructive des différentes réalités dont s'occupe la psychologie; c'est au contact de l'expérience que ces réalités peuvent être connues, et pas autrement. Dès le début, donc, il faut établir un rapport étroit entre l'intuition eidétique et ce dont nous avons, en fait, l'expérience.³⁷

The intuition of an essence must begin with a perception.

Perception is the point of departure for Wesenschau; but it is not the source of its validity. Essential intuition is an intellectual recapturing, elucidation, or explication of what has been concretely experienced. It presupposes an individual exemplar:

. . . il n'est pas d'intuition de l'essence si le regard n'a pas la possibilité de se tourner vers l'individu correspondant, si l'on ne peut former pour l'illustrer une "conscience d'exemple".³⁸

The clarification of the exact relationship between this "conscience d'exemple" which is necessary to Wesenschau and the procedures usually called induction also reveals the relationship between phenomenological and empirical psychology.

Husserl was reacting against the nineteenth-century conception of induction, as found, for example, in the

³⁷Merleau-Ponty, "Sciences," pp. 27-28; Merleau-Ponty, "Sorbonne," p. 146.

³⁸Ibid., p. 28; *ibid.*, p. 147.

theories of John Stuart Mill:

. . . l'induction considérée comme un procédé par lequel, considérant une pluralité de faits et découvrant dans cette pluralité de faits un caractère commun, nous le mettons à part par abstraction et le considérons comme essentiel à l'égard de l'ensemble des faits dont nous sommes partis, ou encore l'induction comme une opération de tri qui permettrait de trouver la cause d'un phénomène parmi ses antécédents, en écartant seulement ceux qui ne sont ni constants ni inconditionnés. Pour Husserl, l'induction n'est pas et n'a jamais été cela.³⁹

Induction as scientists actually practice it does not conform to the Millian account. Galileo did not find his conception of falling bodies in the facts; he freely conceived the pure case of free fall, and verified this idea by showing that it illuminates the facts. Physicists make use of "fictions idéalisantes cependant fondées dans les faits." Induction as they practice it is a reading of essences, whether they recognize it as such or not. If we compare induction understood in this way with the intuition of essences, the difference is very small. Wesenschau is achieved by imaginative "free variation" of facts which are not grasped or posited as realities, while induction considers actual facts. But even in induction, imaginative variation is used: since every individual cannot be examined, interpolation provides values between those that are actually verified. Wesenschau, it turns out, is not a procedure peculiar to phenomenology; everyone performs it.⁴⁰

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 28-29; *ibid.*, p. 147.

⁴⁰ Merleau-Ponty, "Sorbonne," p. 147.

Merleau-Ponty admits that Husserl himself did not go so far. He admitted only a parallelism between inductive and essential knowledge, whereas Merleau-Ponty finds a fundamental homogeneity. But even the notion of parallelism is far from that of an eidetic psychology in which pure reflection achieves insight into the principles of every possible consciousness, our human consciousness being only a particular case. Parallelism means that, corresponding to every affirmation of empirical psychology, it should be possible to disengage an eidetic insight.

La réalité humaine ici apparaît comme le point d'insertion de la Wesenschau. C'est en prenant conscience de moi tel que je suis que je puis apercevoir des essences, et le possible et le réel ici ne se distinguent pas.⁴¹

In reflecting on Husserlian texts, Merleau-Ponty disengages the idea of an interweaving or reciprocal envelopment of psychology and phenomenology. Husserl himself, however, did not grant such a close relationship between empirical and eidetic psychology. Nor did he consider Gestalt psychology fundamentally different from other theories. It, too, misunderstands the originality of consciousness: to conceive it as a totality is still to conceive it as a thing. Merleau-Ponty understands Gestalt theory as a psychology in which everything has a meaning. It contributes

⁴¹Merleau-Ponty, "Sciences," p. 33; Merleau-Ponty, "Sorbonne," pp. 147-48.

a notion of an order and a meaning

. . . qui ne se produisent pas par application de l'activité de l'esprit à des matériaux extérieures à elle, la notion d'une organisation spontanée par delà la distinction de l'activité et de la passivité.⁴²

By clarifying certain facts, Gestalt psychology has perceived essential philosophical truths, even without knowing or intending it.

In the concluding pages of the first part of "Les sciences de l'homme et la phénoménologie," Merleau-Ponty says that the phenomenologists have felt that psychological knowledge was of a special kind: simultaneously reflection and experience. The essence is never sought for outside of the fact; it is accessible only through the situation in which it appears. Meanwhile, recent psychology⁴³ has been neither empiricist nor reflective:

. . . elle tend à se fonder comme lecture méthodique, en moi ou hors de moi, des phénomènes et de la signification des conduites.⁴⁴

On the basis of their own self-understanding, it is possible to affirm that phenomenology and psychology are compatible.

Part II of this course (found only in the Bulletin de Psychologie version) recapitulates the main argument of Part I, which is that contemporary psychology (in

⁴²Ibid., p. 37; *ibid.*, pp. 148-49.

⁴³Merleau-Ponty is referring chiefly to Gestalt psychology.

⁴⁴Merleau-Ponty, "Sciences," p. 56.

particular, Gestalt psychology) and phenomenology are converging in so far as each is overcoming the antinomies which have previously caused psychology and philosophy to define themselves in opposition to one another. The process of convergence is hindered, however, by the tendency of the psychologists to fall back into scientism and empiricism. Merleau-Ponty articulates his views through consideration of leading contemporary psychologists, such as Watson, Tolman, Koffka, Lewin, Guillaume, and Goldstein.

Consideration of Husserl's views on the other sciences of man leads Merleau-Ponty to conclusions like those already described. It also leads to further development of his idea of phenomenology.

History and linguistics are treated briefly in "Les sciences de l'homme et la phénoménologie," and at greater length in "Sur la phénoménologie du langage" and "Le philosophe et la sociologie." Merleau-Ponty tends to extend the word 'sociology' to cover all the sciences that deal with the world of human interaction, and to pass easily from discussion of one of these sciences to the others. Their common preoccupation with the social world, and the implications that has from a phenomenological standpoint, are of more interest to him than the differences among them. They all study the intersubjective world, the realm of communication among men. They all present to the philosopher the problem of understanding how truth can be

affirmed as universal when its realizations are concrete, particular, and variable.

Both philosophy and the sciences of man have access to social phenomena. Yet, Merleau-Ponty points out, between sociology and philosophy there is strict separation. (This is still true--most of all, perhaps, in North America.) The "myths" that philosophy is the authoritative affirmation of the autonomy of the mind, and that science and theory of science emerge entirely from facts, conspire to keep philosophy and sociology apart. Fortunately, the practice of scientists and of philosophers is less exclusive than their principles. Convergence between the disciplines is discernible, although their practitioners do not always recognize it. Merleau-Ponty credits Husserl with having seen that

. . . toutes les formes de pensée sont d'une certaine manière solidaires, qu'il n'y a pas à ruiner les sciences de l'homme pour fonder la philosophie, ni à ruiner la philosophie pour fonder les sciences de l'homme, que toute science secrète une ontologie et que toute ontologie anticipe un savoir et enfin que c'est à nous de nous arranger et de faire en sorte que la philosophie et la science soient toutes deux possibles.⁴⁵

If sociology is to be a science, it must not be divorced from philosophy. The sociologist's task is not merely to collect, but to understand facts. If scientism could deprive sociology of all recourse to meanings, it would prevent it from understanding its object. At the same

⁴⁵Merleau-Ponty, Signes, p. 123.

time, philosophy needs to be in contact with science. The philosopher thinks about his experience and his world; he must not forget what science says about the same experience and world. Science is

. . . un aménagement systématique, un exercice méthodique . . . de cette même expérience qui commence avec notre première perception.⁴⁶

In the light of what he said in the "Avant-propos" of Phénoménologie de la perception, one may wonder if Merleau-Ponty is here departing from his earlier position. Does he maintain the clear distinction between philosophy and the human sciences which he made there, or do they eventually merge, so that the distinction becomes blurred? His problem is precisely to delineate an intimate relationship in which each of the relata retains its own intrinsic character and its autonomy. The consequences for his conception of philosophy will be considered later in this paper.

When Merleau-Ponty reviews Husserl's thought on the problem of philosophical and scientific understanding of the social, he finds the same sort of development that takes place in Husserl's view of psychology.

Au point de départ, il revendique les droits de la philosophie dans des termes, tels que ceux du savoir effectif paraissent abolis.⁴⁷

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 128.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 128.

For example, we can understand the functioning of our own language only if we first construct a universal eidetic of language and a universal grammar, of which actual languages are particular, confused realizations. This eidetic of language is prior to empirical linguistics.

La pensée philosophique apparaissait comme absolument autonome, capable, et seule capable, d'obtenir la vraie connaissance par recours à des essences qui donnaient la clef des choses.⁴⁸

However, Merleau-Ponty questions whether the power of reflection is such as to allow us to pass from our own language to insight into the essence of all possible language.⁴⁹

Husserl's later views are considerably modified. Merleau-Ponty distinguishes two points of view on language: that of the observer regarding it as an object, and that of the speaking subject. Towards the end of his life, Husserl came to think that the task of phenomenology was to become aware of the speaking subject, who arrives at truth and universality,

. . . à travers une certaine situation linguistique et par l'exercice du langage.⁵⁰

The phenomenological attitude gives access to language in the present, in a linguistic community; it captures the

⁴⁸Merleau-Ponty, "Sciences," pp. 38-39; Merleau-Ponty, Signes, pp. 105-6 and 129.

⁴⁹Merleau-Ponty, "Sciences," pp. 39-40; Merleau-Ponty, "Sorbonne," p. 150.

⁵⁰Merleau-Ponty, "Sciences," p. 42.

lived experience of language. The scientific attitude sees language as an already existing thing, language in the past; it attains knowledge of language.⁵¹ If these two perspectives are firmly held apart, phenomenology can speak only about our experience of language, not about the being of language; it would have no ontological bearing. But in fact, the two perspectives overlap. Phenomenology and linguistics enter into communication.⁵²

Husserl passes, Merleau-Ponty says, from a conception of an external relationship between language and thought to that of an internal link.⁵³ The speaking subject is situated in language. We inhere in a system of speech which we use effectively because it is present to us as immediately as our body. The philosopher's task is not to determine beforehand all the possibilities of language.

La philosophie du langage . . . est la redécouverte
du sujet parlant en exercice . . .⁵⁴

The discussion of language leads to the same conclusion as the discussion of psychology: that concrete reality is the starting-point of our access to the universal. 'Concrete' and 'universal' are for Merleau-Ponty not opposites, in the sense of being external to and exclusive of one another. Their relationship is one

⁵¹Merleau-Ponty, Signes, pp. 109-110 and 131.

⁵²Ibid., p. 108.

⁵³Merleau-Ponty, "Sciences," p. 43.

⁵⁴Merleau-Ponty, Signes, p. 130.

of mutual implication and interdependence.

Nous ne nous affranchissons du particulier qu'en reprenant à notre compte une situation linguistique qui est à la fois et indissolublement limitation et accès à l'universel.⁵⁵

In recounting the development of Husserl's philosophy of language, Merleau-Ponty describes a reversal of the relations of actual and possible (i.e. ideal) and a transformation of the notion of reflection. Universal grammar no longer is prior to linguistic science, nor to particular languages; rather,

... . c'est sur l'effectuation de l'acte de parole, telle qu'elle est réalisée par l'écrit ou par la parole verbale, que se trouve fondée finalement la possibilité de l'existence idéale et de la communication des sujets dans une existence idéale indivise entre eux.⁵⁶

Reflection is not a passage out of the realm of the actual to another order, but a sharpened awareness that we are rooted in actuality.

Le passage par l'actuel est désormais condition absolue d'une philosophie valable.⁵⁷

As in the case of psychology, it appears that science spontaneously moves in the same direction as philosophy; certain linguistic investigations anticipate those of Husserl.⁵⁸

⁵⁵Merleau-Ponty, "Sciences," p. 42.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 44.

⁵⁷Merleau-Ponty, Signes, p. 132.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 132.

The treatment of history is similar. Husserl had begun by affirming the need for an eidetic of history. The facts alone do not determine the essence of (for example) religion, art, or law. Therefore, history cannot judge an idea, unless the historian surreptitiously draws the values by which he judges from the ideal sphere. He relies on a hidden and probably incorrect phenomenology. In Husserl's initial conceptions there is a clearcut hierarchy:

. . . il y a la réflexion sur les possibilités historiques qui est autonome et indépendante par rapport à la connaissance des faits historiques.⁵⁹

Accordingly, Husserl took a dim view (at least initially) of historicity and Weltanschauungsphilosophie. This philosophy answers to the need of governing a finite life; but a truly rigorous philosophy, founded absolutely, would respond to the problems of the present better than any philosophy that is limited to its own time.

Later, Husserl saw a closer connection between philosophical activity and historicity. He came to the idea of a "genesis of meaning." In the meaning of cultural realities there is a "sedimented history." Philosophy is located neither in events nor in eternity, but in an intentional (or dialectical) history.

⁵⁹Merleau-Ponty, "Sciences," p. 47; Merleau-Ponty, "Sorbonne," p. 150.

Il est de l'essence de certaines notions de ne pouvoir être atteints que moyennant une série de démarches qui sont successives, et par une sédimentation du sens qui fait que le sens nouveau était impossible avant sa date, et hors de certaines conditions de fait.⁶⁰

The way in which Husserl carries out the historical analysis in his Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften could well serve as an illustration of what Merleau-Ponty is saying here. There are many stages along the path of modern philosophy, as Husserl interprets it, at which the discovery of transcendentalism appears to be called for, but not yet possible, because of certain hindering conceptions that must first be clarified and removed.

The discussion of history (and of anthropology) again reveals situation as the factor which limits our knowledge of the world and others, and at the same time as our means of access to the world and others. Merleau-Ponty's conception of historical understanding centers around this notion. Being situated does not mean being enclosed in a time and place; we also have the means to go beyond our time and place, though never to the extent of leaving situatedness entirely behind. It makes no sense for the philosopher to claim timeless, absolutely universal knowledge; such a claim is all too vulnerable to a historical critique. The philosopher has to see what understanding of situation is compatible with philosophy,

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 49; *ibid.*, pp. 150-51.

and what understanding of philosophy is compatible with its being situated.⁶¹

Historical (and sociological and anthropological) understanding does not consist in taking the social, as it is revealed in past or alien societies, or in our own, as an object either of pure contemplation or of fact-gathering. It consists in communication with others. The world of history, sociology, and anthropology is the intersubjective world. In Husserl's last writings, as Merleau-Ponty interprets them, to think philosophically no longer means to depart from facticity and resort to pure ideas. It means to understand the past, for example,

. . . en vertu du lien intérieur qui existe entre lui et nous. La compréhension devient alors coexistence dans l'histoire.⁶²

Philosophy belongs to the living present

. . . à partir duquel se réanime tout le passé, tout l'étranger et tout l'avenir pensable.⁶³

To see the essence of a society means to enter into it affectively ("y glisser affectivement.")⁶⁴ To intuit the essences of a human community is to make the milieu of that society live again in one's thinking. History reveals the spirit of the time (Gemeingeist) to the philosopher.

⁶¹Merleau-Ponty, Signes, pp. 132-33.

⁶²Merleau-Ponty, "Sciences," p. 50.

⁶³Ibid., p. 50.

⁶⁴Merleau-Ponty, "Sciences," p. 51; Merleau-Ponty, "Sorbonne," p. 151.

It enables him to think the community of subjects. There is

. . .une communauté d'esprits coexistants les uns pour les autres et, de ce fait, revêtus d'un dehors par où ils deviennent visible.⁶⁵

The philosopher, too, takes part in the dialogue of subjects. All are situated, and all are constituting subjects. Merleau-Ponty appropriates Husserl's remark that "transcendental subjectivity is intersubjectivity," and makes it one of the basic insights and central themes of his own philosophy.⁶⁶

Merleau-Ponty finds in the later Husserl an appreciation of the value, meaning, and instructive power of historical and ethnographic facts which he had not recognized earlier. Husserl sees that the philosophical imagination, in its activity of free variation, cannot conceive every historical or social possibility. Reflection cannot ascend from experience of the philosopher's own society alone to the level of universal social structure. Citing a letter of Husserl to Lévy-Brühl, whose descriptions of primitive peoples had deeply impressed him,

⁶⁵Merleau-Ponty, Signes, p. 134.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 134.

Merleau-Ponty draws the conclusion that

. . . il faut une jonction entre l'anthropologie comme simple inventaire des faits et la phénoménologie comme simple pensée des sociétés possibles. Il faut que cette phénoménologie vienne au contact des faits, qu'elle réalise, comme l'a fait Lévy-Brühl, une organisation de ces faits, qu'elle les rende au lecteur tels qu'ils sont vécus par ceux qui sont vraiment pris dans ce contexte.⁶⁷

If the relationship to history and anthropology is indispensable, there are important consequences for philosophy. It is no longer exempt from the contingency of history. Philosophy

. . . doit assumer l'ensemble des acquisitions de la science, qui sont le premier mot de la connaissance, et avec elle, donc, le relativisme historique.⁶⁸

To establish the autonomy of philosophy in the face of the contingency of history, we have to redefine the relationship of philosophy and history:

Le rapport de la philosophie à l'histoire se transforme dans le mouvement même de réflexion qui cherchait à libérer la philosophie de l'histoire.⁶⁹

There is not a radical opposition between the natural attitude and the transcendental attitude. The perspectives of reflection and experience, the transcendental and the empirical, encroach on one another. Still, Merleau-Ponty does not maintain that the distinction between philosophy and the human sciences breaks down altogether, either in Husserl's view or in his own. The relationship he envisions

⁶⁷Merleau-Ponty, "Sciences," p. 51.

⁶⁸Merleau-Ponty, Signes, p. 136.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 133.

between them is not one in which they compete with one another; the affirmation of the claims of one does not involve the negation of the other. Yet it is not a "relationship" of mere indifference, the counterpart of competition. Philosophy does not stand on the same ground as science. Its autonomy is established not prior to but after positive knowledge, in a dimension proper to philosophy, where no positive science can contest it. History cannot dominate philosophy. When the philosopher recognizes that his thought is not unconditioned, he does not therefore hand over his rights to the sciences and empirical investigation. The same criticism, after all, applies to the sciences.

Les mêmes dépendances historiques qui interdisent au philosophe de s'arroger un accès immédiat à l'universel ou à l'éternel interdisent au sociologue de se substituer à lui dans cette fonction, et de donner valeur d'ontologie à l'objectivation scientifique du sociologue. Le sens le plus profond du concept d'histoire n'est pas d'enfermer en un point du temps et de l'espace le sujet pensant . . .⁷⁰

The historical sense discredits the idea of absolute thought, including the claim of history or sociology to be absolute. It undermines radical reductivism, as well as logicism; for reductivism implicitly claims to be absolute knowledge of whatever it reduces to historical or sociological facts.

Historical consciousness invites us to rethink the relationship between the mind and its object; this leads us

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 136.

to the discovery of what belongs properly to philosophy. The dimension of philosophy is that of coexistence. My thought inheres in its own historical situation and, through it, in other historical situations. The social, therefore, is not an object which I contemplate from outside. Knowledge of the social is knowledge of myself. The sciences of the social take for granted intersubjectivity-as-my-own; otherwise they could not intend their object. But at the same time, they forget it. As we have seen, it is at their horizons that they indicate the dimension of intersubjectivity, of the metaphysical.⁷¹ The proper task of philosophy is to be aware of intersubjectivity and make it an explicit theme. Philosophy does not have a domain of its own in the sense of a distinct, peculiar subject matter. It has, as was said above, a dimension proper to itself, within which it has a relationship to all subject matters. What distinguishes it from the sciences is a certain mode of consciousness of others, of nature, and of ourselves.

La philosophie n'est pas un certain savoir, elle est la vigilance qui ne nous laisse pas oublier la source de tout savoir.⁷²

This source is intersubjectivity which philosophy makes thematic. Thus philosophy is indispensable to the sciences

⁷¹Merleau-Ponty, Sens et non-sens, pp. 162-66.

⁷²Merleau-Ponty, Signes, p. 138.

of man:

Seule la conscience philosophique de l'intersubjectivité nous permet en dernier analyse de comprendre le savoir scientifique.⁷³

Thus the question of the relationship between philosophy and the sciences of man opens out into the question of truth and the status of philosophy. The radical understanding of historical inherence founds a new idea of truth. We are in the truth; the question is not whether we have access to truth, but how to define it. Similarly, in "Le primat de la perception," Merleau-Ponty has said that it makes no sense to ask whether perception reaches an existing world; the world is inalienably present, and perception is "le phénomène paradoxal qui nous rend l'être accessible."⁷⁴ So we come to understand likewise that truth is already given to us, in and through our situation. If I preserve the ideal of the absolute spectator, my concrete and finite situation appears as a source of error. But it is not inevitably that.

Mais si j'ai une fois reconnu que par elle je suis enté sur toute action et toute connaissance qui puisse avoir un sens pour moi, et qu'elle contient, de proche en proche, tout ce qui peut être pour moi, alors mon contact avec le monde social dans la finitude de ma situation se révèle à moi comme le point d'origine de toute vérité, y compris celle de la science, et, puisque nous avons une idée de la vérité, puisque nous sommes dans la vérité et ne pouvons pas en sortir, il ne me reste plus qu'à définir une vérité dans la situation.⁷⁵

⁷³Ibid., p. 140.

⁷⁴Merleau-Ponty, "Primat," p.124.

⁷⁵Merleau-Ponty, Signes, p. 137.

Another perspective on the question of truth and of the status of philosophy is presented in the concluding section of "Les sciences de l'homme et la phénoménologie." Merleau-Ponty offers a statement of Husserl's central problem in terms which seem to express, as well, a central problem of Merleau-Ponty's thought: that of finding a way between psychology and philosophy; or, expressed in more general terms, that of finding a way between the universal and the concrete, the absolute and the contingent:

Comment faire en sorte que notre pensée ne soit ni une pensée éternelle et sans racine dans le présent, ni un simple événement destiné à être remplacé demain par un autre événement, et par conséquent dépourvue de valeur intrinsèque.⁷⁶

This problem is insoluble so long as reflection and experience are taken to be alien to one another. But Merleau-Ponty tells us that Husserl's radical reflection

. . . découvre finalement derrière elle l'irréfléchi comme sa condition de possibilité.⁷⁷

In "Le primat de la perception" he defends his return to the unreflected in similar terms, saying that reflection should not pretend to be ignorant of its origins.⁷⁸ In

Phénoménologie de la perception he says:

J'ai commencé de réfléchir, ma réflexion est réflexion sur un irréfléchi, elle ne peut pas s'ignorer elle-même comme événement, dès lors elle s'apparaît comme une véritable création, comme un changement de structure de la conscience, et il lui appartient de reconnaître en deçà de ses propres opérations le monde qui est donné au sujet parce que le sujet est donné à lui-même.⁷⁹

⁷⁶Merleau-Ponty, "Sciences," p. 53.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 53.

⁷⁸Merleau-Ponty, "Primat," p. 55.

⁷⁹Merleau-Ponty, Phénoménologie, p. iv.

Again,

. . . la réflexion radicale est conscience de sa propre dépendance à l'égard d'une vie irréfléchie qui est sa situation initiale, constante et finale.⁸⁰

Reflective self-possession and insertion in a history are correlatives.

In Le visible et l'invisible, Merleau-Ponty takes up again the question of the status of science and of its relationships with natural perception, and with philosophy. We have a natural faith in the reality of the world, in our perceptual access to things; but when we try to elucidate this faith, we are confronted with obscurities. The outcome of the philosophers' attempt at elucidation is that

. . . l'évidence du monde, qui paraissait bien la plus claire des vérités, s'appuie sur les pensées apparemment les plus sophistiquées . . .⁸¹

These sophisticated ideas reveal the obscure and paradoxical character of perception and communication. Our certitude about the world and about others cannot be translated into formulas or theses. Yet at the same time, all of our truths rest on this primary certitude.⁸²

But does not science give us the true, i.e., the objective, in terms of which the confusions of the lived world can be explained? On the contrary, Merleau-Ponty says that science itself rests on the perceptual faith, and

⁸⁰Ibid., p. ix.

⁸¹Merleau-Ponty, Visible, pp. 17-18.

⁸²Ibid., pp. 27-28.

therefore cannot account for, explain, elucidate it. This is not to say that science has no meaning or validity. He is not arguing against the procedures and findings of science, but against a certain type of interpretation of science and of its relation to lived experience. His counterargument does not come solely from the side of philosophy; rather, Merleau-Ponty maintains that the sciences--specifically, physics--themselves raise the questions which he is pursuing.

What is being questioned is the "objectivist" interpretation of physics. This interpretation links the procedures and findings of the science of physics to an ontology, which Merleau-Ponty calls the "objectivist" ontology, and which consists essentially in the following principles:

1) That the true is the objective, in the sense of what has been or can be determined by the operations of physics.

2) That physics studies things in themselves--that it delineates the way things are, prior to scientific investigation of them.

3) That the scientist is an "absolute spectator" enjoying an overview of the world.⁸³

But in carrying out its investigations, contemporary physics has had to take account of the relations between the observer and the observed. The actual practice of the

⁸³Ibid., pp. 31-32.

science is not objectivist. This suggests that an objectivist ontology is no longer appropriate to physics. Yet many scientists hold such an ontology, and even interpret the most advanced ideas of physics in terms of it.

{L'ontologie du κοσμοθεωπος et de son corrélatif, le Grand Objet,} est néanmoins si naturelle, que le physicien continue de se penser comme Esprit Absolu en face de l'objet pur et de mettre au nombre des vérités en soi les énoncés mêmes qui expriment la solidarité de tout l'observable avec un physicien situé et incarné.⁸⁴

Some, at least, of those who continue to hold such an ontology admit that it is a matter of preference rather than a demand imposed by their science. In particular, Merleau-Ponty cites Einstein as an example.⁸⁵

The objectivist ontology does not arise solely, or even in the first place, out of science; although for a considerable period, this ontology and classical physics were highly compatible. It has its roots in the perceptual faith--in our original certitude of having access to things themselves. It rests on the perceptual faith.

(The perceptual faith is comparable to Husserl's "natural standpoint." We should note that precisely when this faith is operating, it is not formulated. To formulate it is already to be no longer living it immediately, but to have become aware of it, which implies the possibility of putting it in question. Merleau-Ponty had a marginal note about this in his manuscript, which

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 32.

⁸⁵Ibid., pp. 34-36.

the editor has given in a footnote.)

Science also rests on the perceptual faith. If we give our scientific formulations the value of an absolute Knowledge,

. . . c'est que l'opération pure de la science reprend ici à son profit notre certitude, beaucoup plus vieille qu'elle et beaucoup moins claire, d'accéder "aux choses mêmes" ou d'avoir sur le monde un pouvoir de survol absolu.⁸⁶

The philosopher, faced with this situation, cannot claim that the new physics provides proof for a new logic or a new ontology. This would be a task for the scientists, if for anyone. Noting that the scientists who maintain a Cartesian ontology willingly admit that this is a preference (like an artist's preference in matters of style), Merleau-Ponty poses an either-or. Either by science we mean a certain way of operating on the facts, a certain procedure of a cognition, of which the practitioners are the sole judges; but in this case they may not claim to decide what is. Or, science means to say what is--

. . . mais alors elle n'est plus fondée aujourd'hui à définir l'Etre par l'Etre-objet, ni à cantonner le vécu dans l'ordre de nos "représentations," et dans le secteur des curiosités "psychologiques;" il faut qu'elle reconnaisse comme légitime une analyse des démarches par lesquels l'univers des mesures et des opérations se constitue à partir du monde comme source, éventuellement comme source universelle.⁸⁷

Either way, the question of what is, is not solely decided by physics.

⁸⁶Ibid., pp. 32-33. ⁸⁷Ibid., p. 35.

The conclusion of this discussion of physics is this:

Nous aurons à montrer comment l'idéalisation physique dépasse et oublie la foi perceptive. Il suffisait pour le moment de constater qu'elle en procède, qu'elle n'enlève pas les contradictions, n'en dissipe pas l'obscurité et ne nous dispense nullement, loin de là, de l'envisager en elle-même.⁸⁸

We arrive at the same sort of conclusion if we consider the "subjective" order. The same involvement of the perceptual faith in the very science which is supposed to elucidate it is found in psychology as in physics.

Ce qui opère ici, c'est toujours la foi perceptive aux choses et au monde. La conviction qu'elle nous donne d'atteindre ce qui est par un survol absolu, nous l'appliquons à l'homme comme aux choses, et c'est par là que nous en venons à penser l'invisible de l'homme comme une chose.⁸⁹

The psychologist adopts the position of pure spectator. This is, according to Merleau-Ponty, a necessary phase in the development of psychology. Parallel to and in the same manner as physics, the domain of psychology is conceived as an order of objects to be known by a pure thought. And, as in physics, the development of knowledge eventually

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 36. ⁸⁹Ibid., p. 37.

calls this conception into question.

Après tout, ce physicien dont je parle et à qui j'attribue un système de référence, c'est aussi le physicien qui parle. Après tout, ce psychisme dont parle le psychologue, c'est aussi le sien. Cette physique du physicien, cette psychologie du psychologue, annoncent que désormais, pour la science même, l'être-objet ne peut plus être l'être-même: "objectif" et "subjectif" sont reconnus comme deux ordres construits hâtivement à l'intérieur d'une expérience totale dont il faudrait, en toute clarté, restituer le contexte.⁹⁰

In the psychology of perception, the objectivist ontology implies causal or functional relationships between the "conditions" of a perceptual experience and the perception itself. These hold, however, only in the laboratory situation, not in the concrete perceptual field of a given individual. The total determination of an individual's field at a given moment is/appears definitively meaningless,

. . . parce qu'il offre des structures qui n'ont pas même de nom dans l'univers OBJECTIF des "conditions" séparées et séparables.⁹¹

Examples are the "apparent width" of a road in the distance, or the disappearance of separate retinal images in depth perception. Merleau-Ponty is not denying the reality or necessity of the bodily conditions of perception. He is saying that the "conditions" cannot be taken as explaining the conditioned, because they are defined only by

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 38.

⁹¹Ibid., pp. 39-40.

reference to it:

. . . puisque les images ne se définissent comme disparates qu'à l'égard d'un appareil perceptif qui cherche son équilibre dans la fusion des images analogues, et que donc le "conditionné" conditionne ici la condition.⁹²

Merleau-Ponty is not opposing to the scientific facts an "interior" or "mental" order which "escapes" scientific determination (he makes comparable remarks in La structure du comportement), but arguing that the opposition of "objective" and "subjective," "interior" and "exterior," or "mental" and "material," is a false opposition. He is trying to show

. . . que l'être-objet, et aussi bien l'être-sujet, conçu par opposition à lui et relativement à lui, ne font pas alternative, que le monde perçu est en deçà ou au-delà de l'antinomie, que l'échec de la psychologie "objective" est à comprendre--conjointement avec l'échec de la physique "objectiviste"--non pas comme une victoire de l'"intérieur" sur l'"extérieur," et du "mental" sur le "matériel," mais comme un appel à la revision de notre ontologie, au réexamen des notions de "sujet" et d'"objet." Les mêmes raisons qui empêchent de traiter la perception comme un objet, empêchent aussi de la traiter comme l'opération d'un "sujet," en quelque sens qu'on la prenne.⁹³

If perception is ranked on the side of psychological or of transcendental consciousness, it could only know and possess itself, but could not open upon a world.

L'idée du sujet aussi bien que celle de l'objet transforment en adéquation de connaissance le rapport avec le monde et avec nous-même que nous avons dans la foi perceptive. Elles ne l'éclairent pas, elles l'utilisent tacitement, elles en tirent des conséquences. Et puisque le développement du savoir montre que ces conséquences sont contradictoires, il nous faut de toute nécessité revenir à lui pour l'élucider.⁹⁴

⁹²Ibid., p. 41.

⁹³Ibid., p. 41.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 42.

Why are the consequences contradictory? Because they are drawn in a form--that of the opposition between subject and object--which is not true to our original relationship with the world and ourselves. (In Phénoménologie de la perception, Merleau-Ponty himself is still working, much of the time at least, with the concepts of subject and object. While striving to overcome both objectivism and the notion of a self-enclosed subject, he is burdened with the traditional connotations of his terminology. In Le visible et l'invisible, he decisively rejects such formulations.) But it is the perceptual faith itself which gives rise to or at least makes possible this dichotomy. The first step is that, in our belief in the world, the world or the things as it were become dominant, take center stage, and the way in which their presence to us is effected goes unnoticed. The second step is that, when we notice the role of our body and our own experience, we treat them in a fashion parallel to that in which we treat the things of the world. Scientific objectification only carries the whole process to a higher degree.

Having made his point with regard to the theory of perception in general, Merleau-Ponty shows how the same difficulty of principle is raised by social psychology. Indeed, an objectivist social psychology could scarcely be possible. Social psychology studies ensembles that have no physical existence and operate on man as symbols

rather than as causes.

Du seul fait qu'on pratique la psychologie sociale, on est hors de l'ontologie objectiviste, et l'on ne peut y rester qu'en exerçant sur l'"objet" qu'on se donne une contrainte qui compromet la recherche. L'idéologie objectiviste est ici directement contraire au développement du savoir.⁹⁵

Particularly with regard to social psychology, the question of the status of "objectivist" thought arises. It is (as we have seen) ordinarily taken to be in some sense absolute, to reach things as they are in themselves. But this assessment cannot hold when we are dealing with social psychology, because objectivist thought itself arises and is exercised in a social context.

Puisque l'objet ici dans la psychologie sociale, c'est justement la société des hommes, les règles de la pensée "objectiviste" ne peuvent le déterminer à priori, elles doivent au contraire être vues elle-mêmes comme les particularités de certains ensembles socio-historiques, dont elles ne donnent pas nécessairement la clef.⁹⁶

This does not mean, however, that Merleau-Ponty is taking a "historicist" or "reductivist" view of objective thought. To recognize that it is not absolute and free of all inherence in a sociohistoric context is not to deprive it of all claims to more than a contingent and passing status in our knowledge.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 43. ⁹⁶Ibid., p. 44.

Bien entendu, il n'y a pas lieu non plus de postuler au départ que la pensée objective n'est qu'un effet ou produit de certaines structures sociales, et n'a pas de droits sur les autres; ce serait poser que le monde humain repose sur un fondement incompréhensible, et cet irrationalisme serait lui aussi arbitraire. La seule attitude qui convienne à une psychologie sociale est de prendre la pensée "objective" pour ce qu'elle est: c'est-à-dire comme une méthode qui a fondé la science et doit être employée sans restriction, jusqu'à la limite du possible, mais qui, en ce qui concerne la nature, et à plus forte raison l'histoire, représente plutôt une première phase d'élimination qu'un moyen d'explication totale.⁹⁷

Social psychology poses with particular sharpness the question of the relations between science, philosophy, and the perceptual faith. Precisely as psychology, it encounters the questions of the philosopher. It cannot simply class the realities it deals with--other men, the historical event--among "objects" or "stimuli." It requires an ontological elucidation of them. It is the business of philosophy to provide this.⁹⁸

Yet psychology (and also biology and physiology), although mechanist explanation is more obviously incompatible with them than with physics, cling more resolutely to the mechanist postulates. The reason for this seeming paradox is that in physics

. . . cette révolution de pensée . . . peut apparemment se faire dans les cadres ontologiques traditionnels, . . .⁹⁹

while in the sciences that deal with man, our standards of truth and reality are more directly implicated and seem more directly threatened by a fundamental change in our way

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 44.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 44.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 45.

of thinking about perception. But even so, physiology, biology, and psychology are already less mechanistic, less materialist, in their scientific practice than in their philosophizing. The "Cartesian" objectivistic idealization of the physical world, the human body, and the "psychic" has to be undone.

Ce n'est qu'en revenant à la foi perceptive pour rectifier l'analyse cartésienne qu'on fera cesser la situation de crise où se trouve notre savoir lorsqu'il croit se fonder sur une philosophie que ses propres démarches font éclater.¹⁰⁰

Thus, as we have already said, Merleau-Ponty is not bringing a criticism to bear on the sciences from outside. The crisis is an internal one, involving the sense which the scientists give to their own work and the foundations upon which they believe it rests. The philosopher is not excluded from taking note of this critical situation, nor from bringing his methods to bear on it.

Parce que la perception nous donne foi en un monde, en un système de faits naturels rigoureusement lié et continu, nous avons cru que ce système pourrait s'incorporer toutes choses et jusqu'à la perception qui nous y a initiés.¹⁰¹

Objectivist science--and objectivist philosophy--rested on and reinforced this belief for a long time. Merleau-Ponty has argued that contemporary advances in science undermine this belief and no longer permit us to rest in it, but

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 46.

¹⁰¹Ibid., pp. 46-47.

compel us to ask

. . . si, et en quel sens, ce qui n'est pas nature forme un "monde," et d'abord ce que c'est qu'un "monde" et enfin, si monde il y a, quels peuvent être les rapports du monde visible et du monde invisible.¹⁰²

This task of questioning the world and our relations with it--of returning to and elucidating the perceptual faith--cannot be carried out entirely by the scientists,

. . . parce que la pensée scientifique se meut dans le monde et le présuppose, plutôt qu'elle ne le prend pour thème. Mais il n'est pas étranger à la science, il ne nous installe pas hors du monde.¹⁰³

It seems, then, as if there is (once again) a convergence, in Merleau-Ponty's view, between science and philosophy. The questions are not addressed to science by philosophy from outside; rather, the philosopher, taking note of what the scientist is doing, brings to light a question which the very practice of science raises with respect to the self-understanding of science. This question cannot be answered entirely by the scientist (at least not qua scientist); the philosopher can and may address himself to it, because it is a question which, though implied in by scientific activity, lies outside the domain of scientific procedures and methods as such. On the other hand, although Merleau-Ponty does not say it in so many words, we may wonder whether philosophy by itself, without the lead/clue given by science, would have formulated the question--would even have been able to do so. Philosophy

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 47. ¹⁰³Ibid., p. 47.

does not, after all, draw its questions out of the thin air. And he does say that the philosopher's task is not to move outside the world; rather he must return to the experience of the world that precedes our scientific and philosophical distinctions, in order to elucidate their meaning.

We might say that the sciences take on more and more the form of philosophy, in the sense that the researcher can no longer situate himself and his operations outside of what he investigates by means of those operations; the difference between science and philosophy remains because science does not address itself explicitly and expressly to the themes of "the correlation of knowledge and being" and of "our belonging to the world prior to all science."¹⁰⁴ The philosopher's task is laid upon him not only by the demands of his own discipline--the demand for radicality--but also (and perhaps, in a scientific age, even more urgently) by science.

La philosophie n'est pas science, parce que la science croit pouvoir survoler son objet, tient pour acquise la corrélation du savoir et de l'être, alors que la philosophie est l'ensemble des questions où celui qui questionne est lui-même mis en cause par la question. Mais une physique qui a appris à situer physiquement le physicien, une psychologie qui a appris à situer le psychologue dans le monde socio-historique ont perdu l'illusion du survol absolu: elles ne tolèrent pas seulement, elles imposent l'examen radical de notre appartenance au monde avant toute science.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴Ibid., pp. 47-48.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., pp. 47-48.

The position presented in Le visible et l'invisible seems altogether consistent with that presented in the other works we have considered. Merleau-Ponty is concerned, as he was in the other works we have been considering, with the relationships among science, philosophy, and lived experience. The problem he is concerned about is not simply that of philosophy and science; their relationship can be understood only when the relationship of both to the perceptual faith is also understood. Merleau-Ponty is trying to understand a triadic constellation, rather than the dyad of science and philosophy; and the third member, perception, is the fundamental one. It would be well to keep this in mind in examining how he brings the insights of the human sciences into his investigation of sexuality, since it may turn out to be one of the characteristic features of his approach to this topic and, indeed, of his thought as a whole.

In the chapter "Interrogation et intuition" of Le visible et l'invisible,¹⁰⁶ Merleau-Ponty again takes up the question of fact and essence. This chapter is a double critique, directed at two forms of philosophy of intuition: Philosophies of essence, exemplified by Husserl, and philosophies of coincidence with the thing, exemplified by Bergson. Both make the fundamental error of failing to recognise that there is knowledge only if we are

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 142-71.

at a distance from the object. Philosophies of essence rest on the distinction or opposition between fact and essence, and the basis of Merleau-Ponty's criticism is that facts and essences are not opposites, but interchange and interact. The traditional dichotomy between them is a false one.

The attempt at universal doubt, Merleau-Ponty says, is ultimately futile because in order to doubt everything, it is necessary to affirm some fragment of being. Thus, from the question an sit, philosophy passes to the question quid sit: if there is a world, what makes it be a world? The pure gaze can apply itself only to

. . . quelque chose qui soit devant lui, sans restriction ni condition: à ce qui fait que le monde est monde, à une grammaire impérieuse de l'Etre, à des noyaux de sens indécomposables, des réseaux de propriétés inséparables.¹⁰⁷

Essences are this intrinsic meaning; they are the only legitimate or authentic being.¹⁰⁸ Through the question quid sit, philosophy detaches itself from all beings by changing them into their meaning. Science takes a first step in this direction, but does not go the whole way. In science, the facts are still preeminent; fact and reason overlap. Philosophy of essences claims to carry the reading of meaning to its conclusion, and thus to be the sole exact science.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 145.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 145.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 146.

Merleau-Ponty asks whether the question of essences is the ultimate question; for the essence and the pure spectator who sees it depend on the assumption that there is a world. Rather, experience is ultimate; essences arise out of it. Essences "come from" the activity of variation. To achieve a pure essence, one would have to be a pure, totally transparent spectator; one would have to withdraw to a ground of nothingness. But existence, duration, experience underlie ideation. The world is more fundamental than essences. The real is not a variant of the possible; rather, possible worlds and beings are like variants of the actual. In the end, the essence cannot be grasped definitively. It is possible to determine what is inessential, but not to define the essentiality of the essence.¹¹⁰

The pursuit of essences leads, paradoxically, back to the recognition of the primacy of that very being which essences were to explain, and to the recognition that pure essences are unattainable. This difficulty, Merleau-Ponty says, cannot be solved by declaring that although the essence is inaccessible, we have it in principle. This solution only leads to relativism.¹¹¹

The fact-essence split can exist only for a kosmotheoros, a pure detached spectator of the world. But, in actuality, I see the visible present from the

¹¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 147-51. ¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 151.

midst of it; I, the seer, am also visible. The seer is the sensible coming to itself, and the sensible is the seer's double; it is an extension of his own flesh. Since I am a visible seer in the midst of the visible, fact and essence emerge around my body. In the milieu of our life, and of our life of knowledge, the fact-essence distinction is rejected.¹¹²

Merleau-Ponty turns next to a theme which we have seen occupying him in "Les sciences de l'homme et la phénoménologie": the relationship between inductivity and Wesenschau. In that earlier discussion, we have seen that he finds a convergence between induction as the scientist really practices it (though not as Mill theorises about it) and Wesenschau as the phenomenologist really practices it, and as Husserl eventually begins to understand it. Inductivity and Wesenschau, Merleau-Ponty says now, are myths; it is time to reject them. Husserl never obtained a definitive, final Wesenschau

. . . qu'il n'ait ensuite reprise et retravaillée, non pour la démentir, mais pour lui faire dire ce que d'abord elle n'avait pas tout à fait dit . . .¹¹³

And no fecund research proceeds on the basis of pure induction, at least in the fields of psychology and social science.¹¹⁴ Facts and essences are abstractions; what there is, is a world, Being, the impossibility of non-sense or of ontological emptiness.¹¹⁵ Being is undivided

¹¹²Ibid., pp. 151-54. ¹¹³Ibid., p. 155.

¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 156. ¹¹⁵Ibid., pp. 156-57.

facticity and ideality. It is beyond classical existence and essence, and makes their relationship comprehensible.¹¹⁶

Instead of essences, abstract and separate from the world, we have functioning essences:

Dans une philosophie qui prend en considération le monde opérant, en fonction, présent et cohérent, comme il l'est, l'essence n'est pas du tout une pierre d'achoppement: elle y a sa place comme essence opérante, en fonction. Il n'y a plus d'essences au-dessus de nous, objets positifs, offerts à un oeil spirituel, mais il y a une essence au-dessous de nous, nervure commune du signifiant et du signifié, adhérence et réversibilité de l'un à l'autre, comme les choses visibles sont les plis secrets de notre chair, et notre corps, pourtant, l'une des choses visibles.¹¹⁷

The move into a sphere of essences is not a genuinely philosophical move. A question is not philosophical unless it aims at itself as a question at the same time that it aims at a state of affairs. The questioner is a being who questions himself; he is not nothing. But to enter a sphere of significations or essences is to distance oneself so far from Being and from the world that one no longer is of them. One pretends to be nothing. But to cut the questioner and the question off from Being is, in the end, not to question any more. Philosophical interrogation must not depart from the world; questions of essence are not more philosophical than questions of fact.¹¹⁸ "La dimension de la philosophie croise celle de l'essence et du fait."¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 157. ¹¹⁷Ibid., p. 158.

¹¹⁸Ibid., pp. 160-61. ¹¹⁹Ibid., p. 161.

Having examined the main texts in which Merleau-Ponty deals with the relationship between philosophy and the human sciences, we can now consider whether there is any change or development in his position; and if so, of what sort. There does, indeed, seem to be development in Merleau-Ponty's position. He does not change his view, in the sense of rejecting what he formerly held and making a different assertion instead. Yet there is a difference in the way he formulates and explicates his position at different periods, and the difference is more than merely verbal. Merleau-Ponty finds a new vocabulary, a new conceptual framework; his conceptions are held differently. Metaphorically, one might say that he has transposed and reorchestrated them. The most significant examples, in the present context, are the gradual replacement of the notions of 'fact' and 'essence' by those of 'dimension' and 'dimensionality of facts', and the shift from 'reflection' as the word which describes the central philosophical activity to 'interrogation.'

In "Les sciences de l'homme et la phénoménologie," the relationship between sciences and philosophy is closely connected with the relationship of fact and essence. In order to substantiate the convergence of the contemporary sciences with phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty must make clear the interdependence of the factual and the essential orders, and (correspondingly) the kinship between induction and Wesenschau. Ultimately, however, the terminology

of fact and essence is not wholly satisfactory to Merleau-Ponty. Like the terminology of subject and object (about which something will be said in a later chapter), it carries too many connotations that are at odds with what Merleau-Ponty wants to say. The words 'fact' and 'essence' suggest opposites; 'essence' connotes abstractness, and 'fact' suggests blind facts. Gradually, Merleau-Ponty replaces the notion of 'essence' by that of 'dimension.' Facts are dimensional. 'Dimension,' to be sure, is not simply a synonym for 'essence.' The significance of the notion is that every fact is related to other facts, has a meaning and gives access to existence. The difference between the natural sciences or the human sciences and philosophy is that in the latter, the questioner questions himself and his questions. His interrogation is addressed not merely to himself as an individual, but to the questioning being and to the activity of questioning. There has been a gradual change of emphasis in Merleau-Ponty's conception of philosophical activity, whose intrinsic character he no longer expresses as 'reflection,' but as 'interrogation.' It is true that Merleau-Ponty's notion of reflection has stressed questioning of the prereflexive, rather than possession of it, from the first; in Le visible et l'invisible, this emphasis is made clear and explicit by the working out of the notion of interrogation as the properly philosophical activity.

CHAPTER II

SEXUALITY AND EXISTENCE

Sexuality in *La structure du comportement* and in *La phénoménologie de la perception*

Merleau-Ponty has given a prominent place in his major completed work to a discussion of sexuality. The chapter of *Phénoménologie de la perception* entitled "Le corps comme être sexué" holds a pivotal place in that work, contributing in particular to the following chapter on speech and to the chapter on "Autrui et le monde humain." By way of introduction to the consideration of that discussion, we shall first examine the texts in *La structure du comportement* that deal with sexuality, in their relationship to the overall intentions of that work. We shall then examine "Le corps comme être sexué" in order to see what conception of sexuality Merleau-Ponty presents there; how it is integrated into the work as a whole; and how, if at all, it differs from the conception indicated in *La structure du comportement*. The succeeding chapter of this study will carry further our consideration of the place in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of his notion of sexuality by comparing his treatment of this topic with Sartre's.

La structure du comportement contains no discussion of the sexed body or of sexual behavior as a topic in itself; but Merleau-Ponty mentions sexual behavior in several places. His remarks in each instance are intended to illustrate, reinforce, or develop his general theses about behavior. Though they do not amount to a complete theory of sexual behavior or of the sexed body, they indicate the sort of conception that is consistent with the notion of behavior presented in this work. In order to appreciate the import of these passages, it will be necessary first to summarize Merleau-Ponty's aims in La structure du comportement and the conception of behavior which he develops; and then to examine each of the relevant passages in the context in which it appears. In the course of this examination, it will become apparent what conclusion may justifiably be drawn.

In the "Introduction," Merleau-Ponty states that his aim is to understand the relationships of consciousness and nature. By nature, he means

. . . une multiplicité d'événements extérieurs les uns aux autres et liés par des rapports de causalité.¹

He has found his contemporaries in France offering two solutions to this problem. One, the criticist solution, considers nature as an objective unity, constituted before consciousness, so that nothing is foreign to consciousness. The other, the realist solution, treats consciousness as a

¹Merleau-Ponty, Structure, p. 1.

part of the world, connected with things and events in the world by causal relationships. Whether it identifies consciousness with occurrences in the brain, or takes it to be a cause or force or substance which exists in addition to the body and brain, the ultimate meaning of the theory is the same. The solutions as Merleau-Ponty sets them out appear to be exhaustive: either consciousness is part of the world, or the world is an objective unity before consciousness. But he does not find either of them satisfactory. Therefore, he proposes to reformulate the problem in such a way as to sidestep the classical alternatives and open up the possibility of a new solution. In order to avoid the prejudgments implicit in traditional terminology, he adopts the term 'behavior' (comportement) from the American psychologists, though using it in accordance with his own understanding. He intends to examine behavior as it gives itself to perception. The carrying out of this examination involves a criticism of the classical solutions. In the first three chapters of the book, he addresses his criticism chiefly to the materialist version of realism, since it is the predominant position in biology and psychology. As a counterpoint to this criticism he develops his own notion of behavior.

Merleau-Ponty finds the notion of form or structure, introduced by the Gestalt psychologists, valuable in elucidating behavior. The attempt to explain it in causal terms ends in contradictions and confusion. To a

perceiving consciousness, behavior exhibits, not correlations of the kind proper to the physical sciences, but structures or forms--that is to say, meaningful unities which are not made up of isolable parts. The living organism is in relationship with its environment which Merleau-Ponty calls 'dialectical': organism and environment are moments of a total system. The organism does not receive passively and react automatically to stimuli from its surroundings; it establishes its own response levels, responds to the total situation, organizes its own milieu. Within the organism, too, the relationship of parts to the whole is dialectical. An organism cannot be analyzed into real parts. It is not a thing, but a structure.²

Structure is exhibited on various levels, and at each level there is a complete reorganization of what is present on previous levels. Functions belonging to a lower level are suppressed as autonomous functions, but preserved and reintegrated in a higher structure. Merleau-Ponty applies the notion of form to human behavior, including spiritual activities. There are not different substances or types of being--physical, living, spiritual--rather there are different orders, each characterized by the highest level of structure or integration that it ordinarily reaches. Regarding the human order, this has the consequence that a clear-cut

²Ibid., chap. 1 and 2.

distinction between "soul" and "body" is not possible. Consciousness inheres in an organism; that is, its history and the dialectical stages it has passed through are present to it. The notions of soul and body have to be relativized; each level of integration is soul in relation to the previous one, body in relation to the next.³

The human behavior which assumes central importance is perceptual behavior, since it is through perception that we are in our environment, in the world. In order to ground his conception of perception and of the relations of soul and body, Merleau-Ponty must place his conception of behavior in a philosophical framework. He must relate it philosophically to the classical solutions. His questioning of realism raises the problem of whether he can avoid the criticist position; thus in the final chapter he must show the relationship of his conception of behavior to the realist-or-criticist alternative, distinguish his position from the criticist position, and suggest the ways in which his account of behavior leads to a reinterpretation of transcendental philosophy.⁴

With this statement of Merleau-Ponty's intentions and his execution of them as a background, we can consider the passages in which he mentions sexual behavior.

The first reference to sexual conduct is found in the second chapter. Merleau-Ponty is arguing that there

³Ibid., chap. 3. ⁴Ibid., chap. 4.

is not a one-to-one correspondence between certain areas of the brain and certain nervous functions. Different regions of the brain are not specialized to receive specific contents so much as to organize or structure the contents received and the activity of the organism. In particular, with regard to the central cortex, he says that certain behaviors depend on it

. . . non qu'ils soient faits des mêmes mouvements élémentaires qui auraient là leurs fiches ou leurs commandes, mais en tant qu'ils sont de même structure, se laissent classer sous une même idée, se situent au même niveau humain.⁵

He refers to Schneider, a brain-injured patient studied by several psychologists. Among other disturbances of normal functioning, Schneider is unable to exercise sexual initiative, and unable to handle numbers. These two problems, apparently quite different, result (along with all his others) from a single, well-defined cortical lesion. In Merleau-Ponty's interpretation, they are fundamentally troubles of the same type. What Schneider has lost is the ability to go beyond the concrete here-and-now and the clearly defined demands of the moment; he cannot relate himself to possibilities:

Les initiatives sexuelles normales et le maniement lucide des nombres, également compromis dans le cas de S . . . , n'ont en commun aucun mouvement élémentaire, aucune partie réelle, ils ne se laissent comparer et même définir qu'au moyen de certains prédicats "anthropomorphiques": on pourra dire par exemple que ces deux comportements sont des "adaptations au virtuel."⁶

⁵Ibid., p. 79. ⁶Ibid., p. 79.

This shows that the functioning of the central region of the cortex must be understood as

. . . une activité globale capable de conférer à des mouvements matériellement différents une même forme typique, un même prédicat de valeur, une même signification.⁷

The next reference to sexual behavior is found in the third chapter, in a footnote on page 162. The point being made in the passage to which the footnote is attached is that the relationships between an organism and its environment cannot be explained in the terms that are applicable to a physical system and its surroundings. They are not causal relationships, either unidirectional or even reciprocal. They are relationships of an original type in which the organism itself structures its milieu, in virtue of its own internal norm. This means that the behavior of an organism cannot be understood in terms of anatomy and the physical sciences. It can be understood only in terms of the vital meaning which it has for the organism. Merleau-Ponty states:

La valeur biologique d'un comportement ne se reconnaît pas purement et simplement aux organes qu'il utilise, elle ne peut pas se comprendre dans le langage de l'anatomie.⁸

⁷Ibid., p. 79.

⁸Ibid., p. 162.

Here he adds a footnote, as follows:

Il faudrait renoncer une fois pour toutes à considérer le système nerveux, par exemple, comme "supérieur" en soi au système sexuel: dans le fonctionnement de l'organisme, on ne peut les séparer, ni par conséquent subordonner l'un à l'autre. La vie sexuelle normale est intégrée à l'ensemble du comportement. Les lésions corticales qui, avons - nous vu, peuvent entraîner en même temps que des troubles gnosiques, une chute de l'amour sexuel à la sexualité, montrent que le système sexuel chez le normal n'est pas autonome. A travers un ensemble organique anatomiquement défini peuvent se réaliser des actions de niveau variable.⁹

A few pages later there is another comment, again related to the idea that vital phenomena possess an original, irreducible character. When we perceive living organisms, we apprehend structures. This apprehension of structures cannot be explained by any theory of projection or of association. Such theories presuppose what they are trying to explain; the immediate apprehension of structures is the condition of all judgments of recognition and all associations of ideas. The example which Merleau-Ponty offers as an illustration of his point is that of the notions of "male" and "female."

La connaissance commune contient par exemple une notion riche et confuse du "mâle" et de la "femelle" qui connote certaines constantes de la conduite, une attitude reconnaissable bien au delà du comportement sexuel proprement dit. Il est peu probable que cette notion se constitue dans l'expérience de chacun de nous par le rapprochement inductif d'un grand nombre de faits isolés, vraisemblables au contraire qu'elle a été lue d'un seul coup et révélée dans une expression de visage, dans un geste . . . comprendre ces entités biologiques, ce n'est pas noter une série de coïncidences empiriques, c'est relier l'ensemble des

⁹ Ibid., p. 162.

faits connus par leur signification, découvrir en tous un rythme caractéristique, une attitude générale envers certaines catégories d'objets, peut-être même envers toutes les choses. Il faut donc en ce sens dépasser le mécanisme.¹⁰

Next there is a brief reference, farther on in the same chapter, in a discussion of the interrelationships of the vital, the physical, and the spiritual orders. They cannot be understood as substances; they are neither independent of nor reducible to one another.

L'avènement des ordres supérieures, dans la mesure où il s'accomplit, supprime comme autonomes les ordres inférieures et donne aux démarches qui les constituent une signification nouvelle . . .¹¹

With regard to the physical and the somatic, he says:

Il ne s'agit pas de deux ordres de faits extérieures l'un à l'autre, mais de deux types de rapports dont le second intègre le premier.¹²

Even the vital actions with which biology deals do not exist as such in man:

Réorganisés à leur tour dans des ensembles nouveaux, les comportements vitaux disparaissent comme tels. C'est ce que signifie par exemple la périodicité et la monotonie de la vie sexuelle chez les animaux, sa constance et ses variations de l'homme.¹³

Therefore it is not possible to speak of the body in general and of life in general, but only of the animal body and the human body, of animal life and human life; "et le corps chez le sujet normal . . . n'est pas distinct du psychisme."¹⁴ Merleau-Ponty adds some remarks about

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 170-71. ¹¹Ibid., p. 195.

¹²Ibid., p. 195. ¹³Ibid., p. 195.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 195-96.

the notion of spirit:

L'esprit n'est pas une différence spécifique qui viendrait s'ajouter à l'être vital ou psychique pour en faire un homme. L'homme n'est pas un animal raisonnable. L'apparition de la raison et de l'esprit ne laisse pas intacte en lui une sphère des instincts fermées sur soi. Des troubles gynosiques qui affectent l'attitude catégoriale se traduisent par la perte des initiatives sexuelles.¹⁵

A final, fleeting reference is found in the fourth chapter. Making the point, once again, that soul and body are not external to one another, hence not separable, he says that "la dialectique proprement sexuelle transparaît d'ordinaire à travers une passion."¹⁶

From these passages we can derive the outlines, at least, of a conception of sexual behavior compatible with the general notion of behavior Merleau-Ponty presents in La structure du comportement. The sexual sphere is not a separate, autonomous, self-enclosed sphere of behavior. It does not belong to an instinctive level which, while remaining distinct, can be controlled "from above" by higher functions. In man we do not find different substances, or types of being, or "layers" external to one another, with different behaviors belonging to different levels. Rather, we find the totality of behavior being restructured, reorganized, on each level, with all the specific behaviors being affected by the achievement or failure of integration on any level. In sexual behavior we see, not a biological function, but a human function in

¹⁵Ibid., p. 196. ¹⁶Ibid., p. 226.

which vital functioning is suppressed as autonomous but preserved in a higher structuration. Sexuality is integrated into the whole of human life, and appears as a clearly defined, separate type of behavior only in a state of disintegration. It is because sexuality is more than a biological "fact" that in recognizing a person as male or female we grasp a meaning rather than piecing together a number of individual data. In sum, in La structure du comportement, Merleau-Ponty presents (however sketchily) a conception of sexuality as expressive of human meaning. Since sexual functions are widely looked on as the most natural functions, in which the biological most insistently asserts itself against or independently of the human, Merleau-Ponty's view implies a radical rethinking of the relationship between the "human" and the "natural." His conception of the sexed body in Phénoménologie de la perception also reflects just such a rethinking.

Phénoménologie de la perception contains a chapter dealing with the sexed body: "Le corps comme être sexué." The chapter is not simply an application of conclusions already gained to the question of human sexuality. It has an integral role in the work as a whole; it represents an important step in the development of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of l'être-au-monde. The very title of the chapter indicates the orientation of the discussion.

Merleau-Ponty's intention in Phénoménologie de la perception, if it may be summed up briefly, is to show that

the relationship of consciousness and the world is established in perception. For him, perception is an act not of knowledge, but of existence. One could say that existence is intentional, in the sense that to exist is to exist towards others and towards the world; perception is the enactment, so to speak, of this existing towards. It is through perception that we come to the world, and to ourselves in the world. Phénoménologie de la perception represents Merleau-Ponty's effort to establish perception as the focus of our original relationship with the world, and as the ground in which even such apparently free and self-sustaining acts as the cogito are rooted. In the "Avant-propos" he says that phenomenology is a philosophy

. . . pour laquelle le monde est toujours "déjà là" avant la réflexion, comme une présence inaliénable, et dont tout l'effort est de retrouver ce contact naif avec le monde pour lui donner enfin un statut philosophique.¹⁷

The first part of the work, "Le corps," is devoted to recovering that "contact naif" by presenting the body as the medium or vehicle of our communication with the world.

We normally aim straight at objects in the world, rather than at perception, which gives them to us. As Merleau-Ponty has said in La structure du comportement, it is natural for consciousness to misunderstand itself, since its function is to point beyond itself and to

¹⁷Merleau-Ponty, Phénoménologie, p. i.

reveal things.¹⁸ As a result, when we do begin paying attention to perception, we read into perceptual experience what really belongs to the perceived world, and so we misunderstand both. Merleau-Ponty calls this tendency a prejudice.¹⁹ Whether it manifests itself as empiricism or as intellectualism, it treats perception as if it were part of the objective world, and thus deprives it of its original character. Merleau-Ponty wishes to rediscover perception. To do so, he will interrogate objective thought in the hope of finding there clues that will lead back to the phenomenal field, whence we can then find our way back to the transcendental field.

He begins his interrogation by examining the constitution of the body as objective, since that is a decisive moment in the genesis of the objective world. An object is defined as existing partes extra partes, and therefore as admitting only external relationships, both among its parts and between itself and other objects. But the conception of the human body as an object is inadequate. The study of various abnormal bodily phenomena (such as the phantom limb) reveals, not causal relationships, but the movement of being towards the world.

¹⁸Merleau-Ponty, Structure, p. 236.

¹⁹Merleau-Ponty, Phénoménologie, p. 34. For a discussion of the fundamental prejudice, see: Theodore Geraets, Vers une nouvelle philosophie transcendente (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), pp. 150-71.

Le corps est le véhicule de l'être au monde, et avoir un corps c'est pour un vivant se joindre à un milieu défini, se confondre avec certains projets et s'y engager continuellement.²⁰

I am conscious of my body via the world, and at the same time, I am conscious of my world through the medium of my body. My body, therefore, is not an object in the world. Indeed, I experience it in a way that is completely incompatible with its being an object. My body is always present; and I perceive it from an invariable perspective. Moreover, the body is experienced in an ambiguous way; it can touch itself touching, "catch itself" in the act of knowing. It is an affective object, not given simply in representations; and its movements have an originary character. These characteristics of the body are not facts, but metaphysical necessities. My body places me in the world; it imposes on me a point of view on the world. We are concerned with a possibility of consciousness itself:

Avant d'être un fait objectif, l'union de l'âme et du corps devait donc être une possibilité de la conscience elle-même et la question se posait de savoir ce qu'est le sujet percevant s'il doit pouvoir éprouver un corps comme sien.²¹

In his discussion of spatiality and motricity, Merleau-Ponty establishes that the corps propre is not a thing in objective space. I move my body "in" space before I know my body and space as objects. Objective space presupposes corporeal space. Spatiality is the body's

²⁰Merleau-Ponty, Phénoménologie, p. 97.

²¹Ibid., p. 113.

manner of realizing itself as a body. The body is our way of acceding to the world. Through action, in which the spatiality of the body is accomplished, the body dominates space and time. The acquisition of habits reveals that the body comprehends; habit expresses our power to expand our being in the world. In studying the spatiality of the corps propre, we learn a new sense of the word 'sense.'

L'expérience du corps nous fait reconnaître une imposition du sens qui n'est pas celle d'une conscience constituante universelle, un sens qui est adhérent à certain contenus. Mon corps est ce noyau significatif . . .²²

The body is a meaningful unity, an "ensemble de significations vécues."²³ The themes of our body as our way of being in the world, and of a sense or meaning established in the body, are carried on and developed further in the chapter on "Le corps comme être sexué."

Merleau-Ponty finds that the consideration of sexuality offers the possibility of understanding better how beings can exist for us. It lets us see the fundamental dimensions of bodily existence more vividly even than does the consideration of spatiality. At the beginning of the chapter, he reiterates his general aim and relates the present discussion to it in these words:

Notre but constant est de mettre en évidence la fonction primordiale par laquelle nous faisons exister pour nous, nous assumons l'espace, l'objet ou l'instrument, et de décrire le corps comme le lieu de cette appropriation.²⁴

²²Ibid., p. 172.

²³Ibid., p. 179.

²⁴Ibid., p. 180.

When we consider space and the perceived thing, the natural world gives itself as existing in itself, beyond its existence for me; the act of transcendence by which I open myself to the world steps aside in favor of the world.

Si donc nous voulons mettre en évidence la genèse de l'être pour nous, il faut considérer pour finir le secteur de notre expérience qui visiblement n'a de sens que pour nous, c'est-à-dire notre milieu affectif.²⁵

Affectivity, he says, is usually conceived as a mosaic of self-enclosed states, and not recognized as an original mode of consciousness. In Merleau-Ponty's view, however, it is not only an original mode of consciousness, but one the study of which will carry forward his investigation of the body in a unique way.

Referring to the case of Schneider, he finds that the patient's loss of sexual initiative is due neither to a failure of representations, nor to a weakening of reflexes. Schneider does not spontaneously seek sexual contact. He responds only to direct stimulation, and does not carry the sexual act through of his own accord. Not only visual perceptions, but tactile stimuli as well, have lost their sexual meaning for Schneider. Since all his troubles arise from a circumscribed lesion in the occipital sphere, it might be supposed that his reflex reactions would be released rather than weakened. As this is not the case, it is clear that neither representations nor automatic responses--for neither have been damaged--are

²⁵Ibid., p. 180.

the essential locus of sexuality. Schneider's disturbances reveal a vital zone in which the person's sexual possibilities are elaborated. In Schneider's case, the inner powers (puissances internes) of the organic subject have been weakened and no longer support a normal sexual life. It is not the content (representations or reflexes) but the structure of erotic experience that has been altered.

Chez le normal, un corps n'est pas seulement perçu comme un objet quelconque, cette perception objective est habitée par une perception plus secrète; le corps visible est sous-tendu par un schéma sexuel, strictement individuel, qui accentue les zones érogènes, dessine une physionomie sexuelle et appelle les gestes du corps masculin lui-même intégré à cette totalité affective.²⁶

Schneider has lost the power of projecting before himself a sexual world, of placing or maintaining himself in a sexual situation. Tactile stimuli no longer "say" anything to his body. All this indicates to Merleau-Ponty that sexuality cannot be understood within the classical thought-framework.

On devine ici un mode de perception distinct de la perception objective, un genre de signification distinct de la signification intellectuelle, une intentionnalité qui n'est pas la pure "conscience de quelque chose."²⁷

Erotic perception aims through a body at another body. It takes place in the world, not in a consciousness. The sexual meaning (signification) of a spectacle is not

²⁶Ibid., p. 182. ²⁷Ibid., p. 183.

established on the level of representation.

Un spectacle a pour moi une signification sexuelle . . .
quand il existe pour mon corps . . .²⁸

There are two important points to be made about what Merleau-Ponty is saying here. One is that he is reinterpreting sexuality; instead of being "le type de la fonction corporelle," it is in his view an original intentionality. Desire is blind comprehension, but it is comprehension of one body by another, and not a self-enclosed instinctual reaction. The other point is that at the same time, and in a reciprocal fashion, he redefines intentionality. Its fundamental meaning is no longer that of a "pure conscience de quelque chose." In Schneider's sexual deficiencies we find evidence of

. . . une intentionnalité qui suit le mouvement
général de l'existence et qui fléchit avec elle.²⁹

As he cannot place himself in a sexual situation, neither can he place himself in an affective or an ideological situation. His entire world is affectively neutral, and he is no longer able to think about politics or religion. Merleau-Ponty has already spoken of this intentionality in the chapter on spatiality, saying that

²⁸Ibid., p. 183. ²⁹Ibid., p. 183.

. . . la vie de la conscience--vie connaissante, vie du désir ou vie perceptive--est sous-tendu par un "arc intentionnel" qui projette autour de nous notre passé, notre avenir, notre milieu humain, notre situation morale, ou plutôt qui fait que nous soyons situés sous tous ces rapports. C'est cet arc intentionnel qui fait l'unité des sens, celle des sens et de l'intelligence, celle de la sensibilité et de la motricité. C'est lui qui se "détend" dans la maladie.³⁰

He takes this idea up again when he says:

Nous redécouvrons à la fois la vie sexuelle comme une intentionnalité originale et les racines vitales de la perception, de la motricité et de la représentation en faisant reposer tous ces "processus" sur un "arc intentionnel" qui fléchit chez le malade et qui chez le normal donne à l'expérience son degré de vitalité et de fécondité.³¹

Sexuality, then, is not an autonomous cycle.

Elle est liée intérieurement à tout l'être connaissant et agissant, ces trois secteurs du comportement manifestent une seule structure typique, elles sont dans un rapport d'expression réciproque.³²

The relationship of reciprocal expression between sexuality and the other sectors of behavior is explicated by Merleau-Ponty farther on in "Le corps comme être sexué," and receives fuller treatment in the Sorbonne courses. We shall discuss it in both contexts, because it is one of the most significant points in his conception of sexuality.

Merleau-Ponty discerns a convergence between his conclusions and the findings of psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalytic research does not explain man by his sexual infrastructure Merleau-Ponty sees a sort of double

³⁰Ibid., p. 158. ³¹Ibid., p. 184.

³²Ibid., p. 184.

reinterpretation in the psychoanalytic approach to sexuality. Psychoanalysis, he says, finds in sexuality relationships and attitudes which previously were considered to belong to consciousness. But this does not amount to reducing psychology to biology; rather, psychoanalysis discovers a dialectical movement in supposedly "purely corporeal" functions and reintegrates sexuality into human life. On the one hand, what was formerly thought to be "above" or on a "higher" level than the sexual is now discovered in sexuality; on the other, sexuality is more than a corporeal function. Merleau-Ponty finds in psychoanalysis, and adopts, a reinterpretation of sexuality which is consonant with his reinterpretation of perception. If it is regarded as a merely bodily function, "higher" functions can be either posited as altogether distinct from it, or reduced to it. Merleau-Ponty wants neither dualism nor reductivism, since both lead to antinomies. In order to establish an essential link between sexuality (or perception) and the "higher" levels of functioning, while preserving the original character of each level, he has to criticise the notion of a purely corporeal function or activity. This he has already done in La structure du comportement, as well as in the "Introduction" of Phénoménologie de la perception. Neither perception nor sexuality is that; in each case, we find meaningfulness already present. Psychoanalysis is not alien to the phenomenological method; on the contrary,

Freud himself has said that every human act "has a meaning (sens).³³" Psychoanalysis seeks the meaning of the event, rather than its mechanical conditions. Freud himself does not identify the sexual with the genital. The libido is not for him an instinct;

. . . elle est le pouvoir général qu'a le sujet psychophysique d'adhérer à différents milieux, de se fixer par différentes expériences, d'acquérir des structures de conduite. Elle est ce qui fait qu'un homme a une histoire.³³

In the sexuality of a person is projected his original manner of being with regard to the world. Sexual symptoms at the origin of a neurosis symbolise a whole attitude. A person's sexual history is the elaboration of a general form of life. Both Merleau-Ponty's investigations and the researches of psychoanalysis lead to the discovery of the existential meaning of sexuality: the question is not whether or not human life rests on sexuality, but what we understand by sexuality.

La psychanalyse représente un double mouvement de pensée: d'un coté elle insiste sur l'infra-structure sexuelle de la vie, de l'autre elle "gonfle" la notion de sexualité au point d'y intégrer toute l'existence.³⁴

(This is precisely what Merleau-Ponty has already done with the notion of perception.) But this leaves us with a problem. If sexuality is a manner of being in the physical and interhuman world, does that mean that all existence has a sexual significance; or, conversely, that every sexual phenomenon has an existential significance? In

³³Ibid., p. 185. ³⁴Ibid., p. 185.

other words, what is the relationship of sexuality to the whole of life? Neither of the formulations just given satisfies Merleau-Ponty. Existence is not an abstraction, "un autre nom pour désigner la vie sexuelle."³⁵ Nor is sexuality merely a reflection of existence. An effective life may be accompanied by, may even profit from, the impairment of sexuality; equally, the sexual aspect of a person's life may draw to itself the general current of life at the expense of other aspects.

Sexuality is not simply submerged in existence. It is not only a sign, but a privileged sign, and we need to understand why. The problem is one we have encountered before. In perception, there are no "sense data," and yet the words 'see' and 'hear' have a meaning. The specialised regions of the brain do not function in isolation, and yet the location of a lesion makes a difference in the patient's disorder. The problem we have to do with is that of the relationship between personal or human existence and biological existence. This relationship is (like the relationship between the various regions of the brain and the functioning of the whole) one neither of externality and independence, nor of absorption and identity.

³⁵Ibid., p. 185.

. . . l'existence biologique est embrayée sur l'existence humaine et n'est jamais indifférente à son rythme propre. Celà n'empêche pas . . . que "vivre" (leben) soit une opération primordiale à partir de laquelle il devient possible de "vivre" (erleben) tel ou tel monde, et que nous devions nous nourrir et respirer avant de percevoir et d'accéder à la vie de la relation, être aux couleurs et aux lumières par la vision, aux sons par l'ouïe, au corps d'autrui par la sexualité, avant d'accéder à la vie de relations humaines. Ainsi la vie, l'ouïe, la sexualité, le corps ne sont pas seulement les points de passage, les instruments ou les manifestations de l'existence personnelle: elle reprend et recueille en elle leur existence donnée et anonyme.³⁶

The relationship of leben to erleben, of sexuality and body to personal existence, is best described by the terms 'expression' and 'meaning' (signification). However, these terms must be explicated critically, in the light of the experience of the body.³⁷ Merleau-Ponty takes neurotic symptoms (e.g., aphonia; "forgetting") and sleep as clues to the right understanding of them. The principal example to which he refers is that of a girl (whose case is reported by Binswanger) who was forbidden to see the young man she loved. She suffered from sleeplessness, lost her appetite, and finally lost the power of speech. Her aphonia is not a sexual symptom in the narrow sense. Speech is the bodily function most closely related to existence with others; therefore, aphonia represents a refusal of coexistence.³⁸ The girl's history included earlier occurrences of the same symptom, on occasions when

³⁶Ibid., p. 186. ³⁷Ibid., p. 187.

³⁸Ibid., p. 187.

coexistence was threatened by the imminence of death; it also included a particular sensitivity of the mouth and throat, connected with the oral phase of sexuality.

Ainsi à travers la signification sexuelle des symptômes, on découvre, dessiné en filigrane, ce qu'ils signifient plus généralement par rapport aux dimensions fondamentales de l'existence.³⁹

The body is not merely an external sign of the modalities of existence. The sign is inhabited by its meaning; in a certain way it is what it represents. Aphonia is not merely a "demonstration" of, but is the refusal of coexistence.

This is not, however, a deliberately willed refusal. In neurotic symptoms we do not find a deliberate choice of something which is expressly known. Both the symptom and the cure are worked out on a level below that of objective knowledge and deliberate will. The sufferer from aphonia and the man who "loses" a book given him by his estranged wife have withdrawn from the region of their body and their life which is connected with the situation that causes their suffering. Sleep, too, offers an example of the limits of will and consciousness. I cannot decide to sleep, I can only lie down quietly and wait for sleep to descend. In all these cases, the body, instead of offering itself to the person's conscious acts and decisions, lapses into generality. Conscious, objective knowledge and deliberate acts depend on this availability of our

³⁹Ibid., p. 188.

body, of our memories, of the various regions of our life.

Nous découvrons . . . que les messages sensoriels ou les souvenirs ne sont saisis expressément et connus par nous que sous la condition d'une adhésion générale à la zone de notre corps et de notre vie dont ils relèvent. Cette adhésion ou ce refus placent le sujet dans une situation définie et délimitent pour lui le champ mental immédiatement disponible, comme l'acquisition ou la perte d'un organe sensoriel offre ou soustrait à ses prises directes un objet du champ physique.⁴⁰

The sleeper, in one way, the neurotic patient in another, withdraws to a greater or lesser degree from active participation in the world by withdrawing from active engagement in the body and allowing the body to lapse into its anonymous functions. But this prepersonal life of the body also maintains our connection with the world and makes possible our return from sleep or illness. My body offers the possibility for my existence to abdicate; but if it can close itself to the world, my body is also what opens me to the world and places me in a situation.

Mais justement parce qu'il peut se fermer au monde, mon corps est aussi ce qui m'ouvre au monde et m'y met en situation.⁴¹

The role of my body is to transform an "interior" phenomenon into a factual situation.

Si le corps peut symboliser l'existence, c'est qu'il la réalise et qu'il en est l'actualité.⁴²

We see in the body, then, a prepersonal, anonymous current of life which personal life takes up into itself as its

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 189. ⁴¹Ibid., p. 192.

⁴²Ibid., pp. 191-92.

sign and expression. Bodily existence founds the possibility of a genuine presence to the world.⁴³ If the body expresses existence, it does so in the same way that speech expresses thought. Merleau-Ponty's statement of this anticipates his treatment of speech in the next chapter, and is reminiscent of his comparison of the unity of the body to the unity of the work of art in the previous chapter, "La synthèse du corps propre."⁴⁴

En deçà des moyens d'expression conventionnels, il faut bien . . . reconnaître une opération primordiale de signification où l'exprimé n'existe pas à part l'expression et où les signes eux-mêmes induisent au dehors leurs sens. C'est de cette manière que le corps exprime l'existence totale, . . . parce qu'elle se réalise en lui. Ce sens incarné est le phénomène central dont corps et esprit, signe et signification sont des moments abstraits.⁴⁵

The body and existence presuppose each other; neither can be reduced to the other.

Ni le corps ni l'existence ne peuvent passer pour l'original de l'être humain, puisque chacun présuppose l'autre et que le corps est l'existence figée ou généralisée et l'existence une incarnation perpétuelle.⁴⁶

Existence cannot be reduced to the body or to sexuality, nor sexuality to existence, because existence is not an order of facts.

What, more precisely, does Merleau-Ponty mean by 'existence'? His concern, in La structure du comportement and Phénoménologie de la perception, has been to show that

⁴³Ibid., p. 193.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 176-77.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 193.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 194.

the classical philosophical formulas of 'for-itself' and 'in-itself,' pure subject and pure object, are inadequate to describe behaviour--in particular, human perceptual behavior--and to reformulate the questions in a more adequate way. He finds that behavior, perception, the body, the perceived world, belong neither to the order of the in-itself nor to that of the for-itself. For what cannot be understood in those terms, Merleau-Ponty uses the word 'existence.' He equates that notion with 'être-au-monde',⁴⁷ and with Husserl's fungierende Intentionalität⁴⁸. In the chapter on sexuality in Phénoménologie de la perception, he connects the notion of existence with that of the 'arc intentionnel' which places us in our relation to our world. This arc intentionnel is not manifested only at the level of vital functioning (in the sense of La structure du comportement); it carries our whole life, organic, affective, intellectual, moral. Biological existence points to, is connected with, is assumed by and realises personal, properly human existence. This word does not refer to a particular range or category of facts. Existence, says Merleau-Ponty, is the "milieu équivoque" in which facts communicate, ". . . le point où leurs limites se brouillent, ou encore leur trame commune."⁴⁹

⁴⁷Merleau-Ponty, Structure, p. 136.

⁴⁸Merleau-Ponty, Phénoménologie, p. 141.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 194.

Accordingly, the "facts" of sexual life belong within the framework of existence. In sexuality, the metaphysical is already present. All the phenomena of sexual life have a metaphysical meaning; that is, they concern man as consciousness and as liberty.⁵⁰ Modesty and immodesty, for instance, express the dialectic of the plurality of consciousnesses; they involve the metaphysical structure of my body as object for the other and subject for me. Sexual experience is the experience of the human condition itself.⁵¹

Merleau-Ponty's discussion of this point is phrased in terminology that is quite Sartrean.⁵² The entire passage seems to reflect Sartre's influence, although his way of thinking is (as the next chapter of this study will argue) very different from that of Merleau-Ponty. The Sartrean influence is something of a foreign element. For example, Merleau-Ponty says:

L'homme ne montre pas ordinairement son corps, et, quand il le fait, c'est tantôt avec crainte, tantôt dans l'intention de fasciner. Il lui semble que le regard étranger qui parcourt son corps le dérobe à lui-même ou qu'au contraire l'exposition de son corps va lui livrer autrui sans défense, et c'est alors autrui qui sera réduit à l'esclavage. La pudeur et l'impudeur prennent donc place dans une dialectique du moi et d'autrui qui est celle du maître et de l'esclave: en tant que j'ai un corps, je peux être réduit en objet sous le regard d'autrui et ne peux compter pour lui comme personne, ou bien, au contraire, je peux devenir son maître et le regarder à mon tour, mais cette maîtrise est une impasse, puisque, au

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 194. ⁵¹Ibid., p. 195.

⁵²Ibid., pp. 194-95.

moment où ma valeur est reconnue par le désir d'autrui, autrui n'est plus la personne par qui je souhaitais d'être reconnu, c'est un être fasciné, sans liberté, et qui à ce titre ne compte plus pour moi. Dire que j'ai un corps est donc une manière de dire que je peux être vu comme un objet et que je cherche à être vu comme sujet, qu'autrui peut être mon maître ou mon esclave, de sorte que la pudeur et l'impudeur expriment la dialectique de la pluralité des consciences et qu'elles ont bien une signification métaphysique.⁵³

The point of this would seem to be that a sort of behavior which might be attributed to social custom or to a purely individual psychological reaction actually reveals and is connected to the fundamental structures of bodily being and of being with others. But the way in which the point is developed is, as we have remarked, characteristically Sartrean and somewhat at odds with Merleau-Ponty's conception of the body. A further example will make this more clear:

L'importance attachée au corps, les contradictions de l'amour se relient donc à un drame plus général qui tient à la structure métaphysique de mon corps, à la fois objet pour autrui et sujet pour moi.⁵⁴

This certainly suggests that the two-sided structure of the body as Sartre describes it is also considered to be a fundamental structure by Merleau-Ponty. However, we have seen enough of his conception of the body as it is stated in La structure du comportement and in earlier chapters of Phénoménologie de la perception to know that the Other's body is not in the first instance an object for me, nor my body for the Other. What he is aiming at

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 194-95.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 195.

in this passage may perhaps be seen in these words:

La violence du plaisir sexuel ne suffirait pas à expliquer la place que tient la sexualité dans la vie humaine et par exemple le phénomène de l'érotisme, si l'expérience sexuelle n'était comme une épreuve, donnée à tous et toujours accessible, de la condition humaine dans ses moments les plus généraux d'autonomie et de dépendance.⁵⁵

A few lines farther on, he states that,

. . . devant la pensée, étant un objet, le corps n'est pas ambigu; il ne le devient que dans l'expérience que nous en avons, éminemment dans l'expérience sexuelle, et par le fait de la sexualité.⁵⁶

If these words represent his view, and are harmonious with the general tendency of his conception of the body, then there seems to be an inconsistency within the entire passage in question. A description which places the body as object at the heart of the sexual dialectic, and takes the clearcut subject-object duality of the body as the primary locus of the emergence of the metaphysical, seems out of keeping with the notion of ambiguity that we have just cited. This is not to say that the description is not accurate; but, as Merleau-Ponty argues in the chapter "Autrui et le monde humain" (which we shall examine presently), the experience it describes is of a type that can take place only on the level of the cogito, and therefore presupposes a more fundamental experience. As Merleau-Ponty says, the metaphysical is not localised on the level of "consciousness," in the sense of intellectual

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 195.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 195.

or constituting consciousness.⁵⁷ But the example he has chosen does involve the level of consciousness, and so it is not the most appropriate to illustrate the emergence of the metaphysical in sexuality. In his Sorbonne courses on child psychology, Merleau-Ponty traces sexuality back to the stages of life before the cogito is effected. By showing unequivocally that in early childhood sexuality is already the vehicle of relations not only to other persons but to society and culture, Merleau-Ponty adds a valuable further dimension to his conception of sexuality, one the need for which is manifested in the somewhat problematical passage we have just examined.

In spite of the difficulties it presents, the import of this passage is clear enough. Merleau-Ponty is speaking of the metaphysical in relation to sexuality. What does he mean by this? In the most literal meaning of the word, the metaphysical means that which is beyond nature. This, of course, does not imply either supernaturalism or spiritualism. 'Nature' in this context means what is given on the vital level,⁵⁸ and the metaphysical is the dimension of being that cannot be reduced to the "natural" givens. "Beyond nature," however, does not mean 'apart from nature,' on the level of intellect or pure consciousness.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 195.

⁵⁸See Merleau-Ponty, Structure, chap. 3, for the meaning of 'vital.'

La métaphysique--l'émergence d'un au-delà de la nature--n'est pas localisée au niveau de la connaissance: elle commence avec l'ouverture à un "autre," elle est partout et déjà dans le développement propre de la sexualité.⁵⁹

'The metaphysical' seems to be another term for 'existence.' It calls attention to a particular aspect of Merleau-Ponty's conception of existence: that those phenomena which are "below" the level of existence proper already indicate it, and that existence is realised only in and through the "givens" which it assumes. But this returns us to the problem of the relationship between sexuality and the whole of existence. If we generalise the notion of sexuality, can we still talk about sexuality as such? To resolve this difficulty, we must avoid thinking of sexuality in terms of the content of certain representations. Both the philosophers of consciousness and the philosophers of the unconscious make this error; the former conceive of sexuality in terms of distinct representations and manifest content, the latter in terms of latent content.⁶⁰ But sexuality is not a matter of representations at all. Nor is it a distinct and self-contained area of life. It is constantly present to human life as an atmosphere.⁶¹

De la région corporelle qu'elle habite plus spécialement, la sexualité rayonne comme une odeur ou comme un son.⁶²

⁵⁹Merleau-Ponty, Phénoménologie, p. 195.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 196. ⁶¹Ibid., p. 196.

⁶²Ibid., p. 196.

Just as I can "know" where the parts of my body are and what they are doing without being expressly conscious of them, sexuality likewise can "motivate the privileged forms of my experience" without being the object of an express act of consciousness. Existence and sexuality diffuse into each other, so that it is impossible to characterise an act or a decision as "sexual" or "not sexual." There is a principle of indeterminacy in human existence; it is impossible to delimit what comes to us from "nature" and what from liberty. This indeterminacy is intrinsic to existence,

. . . en tant qu'elle est l'opération même par laquelle ce qui n'avait pas de sens prend un sens, ce qui n'avait qu'un sens sexuel prend une signification plus générale, le hasard se fait raison, en tant qu'elle est la reprise d'une situation de fait.⁶³

This movement of consciousness taking up and transforming a situation of fact is what we call transcendence. Precisely because it is transcendence, existence never surpasses anything definitively, including sexuality. Nothing that belongs to existence is accidental; sexuality is not a fortuitous content of our experience.

L'existence n'a pas d'attributs fortuits, pas de contenu qui ne contribue à lui donner sa forme, elle n'admet pas en elle-même de pur fait parce qu'elle est le mouvement par lequel les faits sont assumés.⁶⁴

Traditionally, philosophy has treated thought as essential to man, while considering the body, or at least the details of its organisation, to be contingent--sexuality most of all.

⁶³Ibid., p. 197. ⁶⁴Ibid., p. 198.

But in order to speak about human existence, Merleau-Ponty says, we have to change our usual understanding of the notions of necessity and contingency. We cannot say that some things are contingent in man and others are necessary. If we define man by his experience--"c'est-à-dire par sa manière propre de mettre en forme le monde"⁶⁵--then none of the "functions" which contribute to his experience are contingent.

Puisque, . . . toutes les "fonctions" dans l'homme, de la sexualité à la motricité et l'intelligence, sont rigoureusement solidaires, il est impossible de distinguer dans l'être total de l'homme une organisation corporelle, que l'on traiterait comme un fait contingent, et d'autres prédicats qui lui appartiendraient avec nécessité.⁶⁶

Everything is necessary, including both reason and our upright stature or the possession of an opposable thumb; "la même manière d'exister se manifeste ici et là."⁶⁷

Everything is contingent in man,

. . . en ce sens que cette manière humaine d'exister n'est pas garantie à tout enfant humain par quelque essence qu'il aurait reçu à sa naissance et qu'elle doit constamment se refaire en lui à travers les hasards du corps objectif . . . il n'y a dans l'existence humaine aucune possession inconditionnée et pourtant aucun attribut fortuit.⁶⁸

Human existence is the changing of contingency into necessity by the act of taking it up (l'acte de reprise).⁶⁹

The relationship of mutual expression between sexuality and existence can be further clarified in the

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 198.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 198.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 198.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 199.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 199.

light of this notion of reprise. It is in being assumed by personal existence that sexuality becomes an expression of existence; it is in assuming the contingencies of human life and transforming them into its expressions that existence is realised.

The examination he has made of sexuality leads Merleau-Ponty to affirm that it is not separable from our human existence because our body is a "moi naturel,"

. . . un courant d'existence donnée, de sorte que nous ne savons jamais si les forces qui nous portent sont les siennes ou les nôtres--ou plutôt qu'elles ne sont jamais ni siennes ni nôtres entièrement.⁷⁰

The discussion of the sexed body in Phénoménologie de la perception is followed by a chapter on "Le corps comme expression et la parole." Merleau-Ponty sees an intrinsic relation between the subjects of these two chapters. The notion of meaning, or of an act of signifying, is the link. The discussion of sexuality has reaffirmed the discovery of a power of signifying in the body. This provides a basis for a treatment of expression and speech which can go beyond the traditional dichotomies:

Nous avons reconnu au corps une unité distincte de celle de l'objet scientifique. Nous venons de découvrir jusque dans sa "fonction sexuelle" une intentionnalité et un pouvoir de signification. En cherchant à décrire le phénomène de la parole et l'acte exprès de signification, nous aurons chance de dépasser définitivement la dichotomie classique du sujet et de l'objet.⁷¹

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 199.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 203.

This indicates how thoroughly his conception of the sexed body is integrated into his thought.

The ambiguity of existence, which the investigation of sexuality forcefully reveals, underlies Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of the cogito and of liberty. Existence never comes into complete possession of itself. A pure cogito cannot account for finitude, facticity, opacity; for Merleau-Ponty, the true cogito is not a totally transparent act of reflection. It recaptures, not itself, but the unreflected; it recaptures a life which is not spread out before itself, but lived.⁷² Likewise, freedom is not absolute and self-sustaining. It is freedom in situation, in the sense that freedom has its roots, its intrinsic condition, in the situation, and is not simply limited by it from without.⁷³

In Phénoménologie de la perception we find a conception of sexuality which is worked out as one phase in the development of a conception of existence. Merleau-Ponty has, so to speak, rehabilitated sexuality; he has argued that in human life it is not an instinct, not a purely vital behavior, but belongs to the properly human sphere and expresses the human condition. In La structure du comportement the treatment of sexuality does not play an integral role in the development of the work.

⁷²Ibid., pp. 437, 438, 446, 447 and 452.

⁷³Ibid., pp. 517-20.

Merleau-Ponty has a philosophical interpretation of sexuality, and takes occasion to make use of it in clarifying and illuminating certain points; but the structure and import of the work as a whole would not be impaired if those passages were excised. This could not be said of Phénoménologie de la perception; as we have seen, an important phase of the book's entire argument is carried out in the chapter on "Le corps comme être sexué." As for the content of his conceptions of sexuality in the two works, they seem compatible; but the later conception differs significantly from the earlier. The difference does not lie only (or even primarily) in the fact that the later notion is much more completely filled out, but rather in the philosophy in which each finds a place. True, in both works Merleau-Ponty is arguing simultaneously against the realist and the criticist or intellectualist interpretations of experience; in both works he maintains that sexuality is integrated into the whole of human life, rather than being a "lower" function narrowly associated with the sex organs; in both works he conceives of the unity of the human being as a dialectical unity in which the different aspects are neither isolable and independent, nor reducible to one another. But in Phénoménologie de la perception the notion of existence has a prominent place, whereas in La structure du comportement it scarcely enters at all. Indeed, it is the ever-present theme of the later work, and in describing

sexuality as an expression of existence, Merleau-Ponty has not simply added an element to his earlier conception, but completely reoriented it. The more fully developed conception of l'être sexué does not contradict the earlier notion; but it most certainly goes beyond it.

CHAPTER III

SEXUALITY AND THE RELATION WITH OTHERS:

MERLEAU-PONTY AND SARTRE

We have considered Merleau-Ponty's conception of sexuality in Phénoménologie de la perception. Perhaps it will be possible to appreciate more fully its significance in that work if we compare his treatment with that of another philosopher. A revealing comparison can be readily made. Jean-Paul Sartre was closely associated with Merleau-Ponty for a number of years; and his important work, L'Être et le néant, contains a discussion of sexuality. A comparison of his approach with that of Merleau-Ponty may help bring into focus the full philosophical significance which Merleau-Ponty's discussion has in the context of Phénoménologie de la perception.

The comparison is not most effectively made by simply comparing the two passages specifically dedicated to sexuality. The treatments differ in both content and method; moreover, the topic of sexuality is situated very differently within the two works in question. The larger context must be taken into account. Basic differences between Merleau-Ponty's and Sartre's philosophy become visible when the way in which sexuality is related to other

issues in their thought is examined. In particular, the topics of the body and of the relation with others are relevant.

Sartre discusses the body and sexuality in the framework of the relation of being-for-itself with the Other. After investigating the structures of being-for-others, he reaches the point at which it becomes necessary to investigate the body: I become an object for the Other, and the Other becomes an object for me, as body. Then, after investigating the body-for-me and the body-for-others, he turns to the concrete relations with others. One of these concrete relations is desire. It is in terms of desire that Sartre discusses sexuality: as a mode of affectivity, that is, rather than as a biological phenomenon. He considers the concrete relations with others to be original relations which enclose within themselves the structure of being-for-others, rather than particularisations of the original relation with others. He establishes the structure of being-for-others prior to considering the body or the concrete modes of relation; the latter need to be investigated in order to complete our understanding of being-for-others.

Merleau-Ponty, on the other hand, deals with the body, including the dimension of sexuality, before discussing the Other. The latter discussion forms part of his treatment of the perceived world. This arrangement of the different topics suggests what an examination of the

text reveals to be the case: that the relationship with others is founded in a relationship of bodies. It must be noted, however, that Merleau-Ponty's idea of body is different not only from traditional philosophical and psychological notions of body, but also from Sartre's idea. Some of these differences will come to light in what follows.

We shall consider Sartre first: not only because L'être et le néant appeared before Phénoménologie de la perception, but because in his chapter "Autrui et le monde humain," Merleau-Ponty defines his position in contrast to one which, although he does not name its author, can only be Sartre's. Therefore, it seems reasonable to take up Sartre's views first.

Sartre places his discussion of the body within the framework of the relationship with the Other.¹ When he takes up this latter topic, he has already established the ontological structures of the for-itself.² But, he says, we can discover other structures or further dimensions of being-for-itself. Remaining in the attitude of reflective description, we discover that the for-itself is also for-others. This brings us face to face with an intractable problem of traditional philosophy: the problem of solipsism.³ Sartre reviews some of the most significant

¹Sartre, L'être et le néant, part 3.

²Ibid., part 2. ³Ibid., pp. 275-84.

attempts that have been made to overcome this problem: in particular, those of Kant, Husserl, Hegel, and Heidegger. Although the philosophers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have made considerable advances over the traditional approach to the problem of solipsism, they all share the fundamental error, which undermines their best efforts, of conceiving of the relation with the Other in terms of knowledge. They want to know how I know that others exist, or that the body which I see houses a mind like my own. To put the problem in terms of knowledge, however, is to consider the Other as an object. This has two consequences which make the escape from solipsism impossible. First, I never have anything better than probable knowledge of the Other; knowledge is by definition only probable. But without evidence of the Other, I have not overcome solipsism. Second, the Other of whom I must have evidence is not the Other-object, but the Other-subject. So long as I conduct the search as a search for knowledge of the Other's existence, I am doomed to fail in my quest, because I am seeking the wrong thing. Only if I can show that I have evidence of the Other-as-subject is solipsism overcome.⁴

The point is not to prove that others exist. I do not need proof of the Other's existence, because I am already sure of it. What I really need is to see how the

⁴Ibid., pp. 284-310.

Other is present to me, to see what kind of evidence I have of the presence which I affirm. I grasp the Other in an original mode of apprehension which makes him present as a subject, and it is this original grasp which Sartre wants to anatomise.⁵

In his critique of other philosophers' attempts to solve the riddle of solipsism, Sartre points out several contributions which they have made, and which must be part of any definitive solution. I am-not the Other, and the Other is-not me; but this negation must be conceived as an internal, rather than an external, one.⁶ I am dependent on the Other at the level of being; that is, the Other's presence must touch me in my being.⁷ Finally, my encounter with the Other must be seen as irreducibly contingent; his existence cannot be deduced from the structures of the for-itself.⁸ To these elements of a theory of the Other, Sartre adds that my primary relation with the Other is not one of knowledge.⁹ He then turns to the cogito to see what it reveals about my relationship with the Other. He extends the cogito beyond the scope of the earlier discussions in L'être et le néant,¹⁰ while remaining in the attitude of reflective description.

⁵Ibid., pp. 307-308. ⁶Ibid., pp. 285-88.

⁷Ibid., pp. 293-94. ⁸Ibid., pp. 304-307.

⁹Ibid., pp. 300-301. The principal points are summed up on pp. 307-310.

¹⁰Sartre, L'être et le néant, pp. 308-309.

Although he has already said that my encounter with the Other-object is not my primary encounter with him, Sartre deals first with the case of seeing another human in my world. This is not just another object, alongside the objects I see. The addition or subtraction of a thing makes no difference to the relations among the other things. When a human appears, however, all the relations among things shift. Heretofore, everything centered around me; I unfolded my distances and established the relationships among things. With the entry of another person, my world decenters itself and "flows" toward him. It escapes me. His transcendence establishes distances, establishes relationships among things, which are not my distances or my relationships.¹¹ But the transcendence which I perceive is a transcendence-transcended: I surpass the possibilities of the Other toward my own possibilities. The flow of the world away from me is fixed; the decentration is a decentration of a world which is still mine. That the Other is indeed another "I" and not an automaton is only probable. This relationship with the Other is not the fundamental encounter. It can be understood only by reference to another encounter, in which the Other is given to me truly as Other, that is, as subject.¹² The fundamental encounter is the encounter with the Other's look directed at me. I feel my transcendence being

¹¹Ibid., pp. 310-13.

¹²Ibid., pp. 313-15.

transcended, my possibilities being fixed; I feel myself becoming an object in the world of the Other who looks at me.¹³ My world is now decentered, and this time the decentering is total: my world flows away from me altogether and reorganises itself as the world of the Other. If I become an object, it can only be for a subject. Therefore, the Other is not in my world, but beyond it.¹⁴ I cannot apprehend him directly; what I apprehend is my becoming-an-object for him.¹⁵ This event has an affective modality: shame or fear. It is in shame or fear that I experience the presence of the Other as subject.¹⁶

I am never an object for myself; even in reflection, the scission of reflecting and reflected never becomes a separation such as that between subject and object, for-itself and in-itself. When I experience myself as an object for the Other, I do not know this object.¹⁷ The Other bestows on me a self which I cannot grasp, which I do not have-to-be, and yet which I must assume. I recognise this self as my self, for the Other. Since I cannot know it, and since it is not chosen by me as one of my possibilities, this self is alienated from me.¹⁸ I assume this me-object as mine, and in so doing, I refuse to be the Other. The Other, however, refuses to be me; his

¹³Ibid., pp. 315-19. ¹⁴Ibid., pp. 328-31.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 330. ¹⁶Ibid., pp. 320, 326 and 335.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 334. ¹⁸Ibid., p. 345.

objectification of me is his refusal of me. Thus, to assume my "me" as mine is the same thing as to refuse to be the Other, and this is equivalent to refusing the Other who refuses me, or refusing his refusal of me.¹⁹ The Other both alienates me from myself and bestows a further dimension of being on me; hence the tension inherent in being-for-another. This alienated-me is an exterior which separates me from the Other.²⁰

There are several points to note. One is that the look by which the Other freezes me into objectivity is not to be understood as the operation of his physical eyes. In being looked at, I experience the subjectivity of the Other. His eyes, if I looked at them, would be objects. His look nihilates his eyes, which become the surpassed ground of the look. The relation with the Other is not effected through the medium of my body and the Other's body; that would make it an external relation.²¹ Another point to notice is that the Other is constituted as Other by a negation--a double negation--which I operate upon myself.²² Moreover, a new dimension of my being has been disclosed: that of being-for-another.²³ This dimension cannot be deduced from the structures of the for-itself with which we are familiar. The presence of the Other is a fact, an

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 344-45. ²⁰Ibid., p. 346.

²¹Ibid., pp. 315-15, 335-36. ²²Ibid., p. 345.

²³Ibid., p. 347.

irreducible fact. It has, however, the same kind of "necessity of fact" as has my own existence, in that it is revealed to me indubitably in the cogito.²⁴ The upsurge of the Other is thus not an isolated happening; indeed, from the moment that I am present to myself, the Other is present to me. The Other is neither one nor many; number belongs to objects. The Other, in my fundamental encounter, is a prenumerical subject.²⁵

My refusal of the Other's refusal of me--or, looked at from the other side, my affirmation of my self--already introduces us to the second moment in my relation with the Other. In fixing me and transcending my possibilities towards his own, the Other threatens my freedom and spontaneity. In appropriating myself, I reassert my freedom. I transcend his transcendence and apprehend him as an object. This moment was already present, hidden, in the previous one. And in turn, the second moment is precarious. The possibility remains that the Other will in turn tear his freedom away from my gaze and reaffirm it, at my expense. The Other-object constantly refers to the Other-subject whose upsurge is in principle possible at any instant. Each moment of the relation is unstable, harbors the other moment hidden within it, and motivates its appearance.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 342 and 358.

²⁵Ibid., p. 344.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 347-48.

So far, we have considered this relation from one side only. But the relation of the for-itself with the Other is unlike that of the for-itself with the in-itself in a very important respect: for-itself and in-itself differ not only in their individuality, but in their mode of being; whereas between me and the other for-itself there is no difference so far as our mode of being is concerned. Therefore, we are reciprocally related, and form a totality. Whatever happens on one side happens on the other, so that the relation can be described from either direction.²⁷

What part does my body or the body of the Other play in this? Sartre says that our bodies are not the instrument and cause of the relation between myself and the Other; it would be an external relation if they were. He has been able to describe the ontological structures of the for-itself-for-another and of the relations between myself and the Other without appealing to the body; we do not, in Sartre's account, have to know what the body is first in order to know what sort of relations they are. Yet our understanding cannot be complete without an investigation of the body, my own and that of the Other; for the Other is an object for me, and I am an object for the Other, as body.²⁸

If a relation with the Other mediated through his body and mine would be an external relation, that can only

²⁷Ibid., p. 344. ²⁸Ibid., pp. 363-64.

be because Sartre conceives of the body--to be precise, of the body-for-others--as an outside which the Other sees. We already know, too, that when I see the Other-object, his subjectivity is not present to me. Other-object and Other-subject are mutually exclusive, and there is no mediating term between them, no transition, but only an explosive reversal from one to the other. We shall return to this question of the body as an outside, because we shall need to see whether Merleau-Ponty shares this conception.

A relation effected through the medium of bodies, then, would not answer the requirements Sartre has set for an account of my relations with another "I". The fundamental relation is constituted by a reciprocal internal negation: I have to be myself as not-being the Other who has to not-be me, and vice versa. Yet the body is involved in the relation; in order to go further, Sartre must consider how. He says:

Nous avons appris que l'existence d'autrui était éprouvée avec évidence dans et par le fait de mon objectivité. Et nous avons vu aussi que ma réaction à ma propre aliénation pour autrui se traduisait par l'appréhension d'autrui comme objet. En bref, autrui peut exister pour nous sous deux formes: si je l'éprouve avec évidence, je manque à le connaître; si je le connais, si j'agis sur lui, je n'atteins que son être objet et son existence probable au milieu du monde; aucune synthèse de ces deux formes n'est possible. Mais nous ne saurions nous arrêter ici: cet objet qu'autrui est pour moi et cet objet que je suis pour autrui, ils se manifestent comme corps. Qu'est-ce donc que mon corps? Qu'est-ce donc que le corps d'autrui?²⁹

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 363-64.

In considering the body, Sartre discusses first the body-for-me, which he distinguishes carefully from my body taken as object. When I grasp my own body as an object, I am actually reading onto my body what I know about the Other's body. All the confusions in our attempts to understand the body philosophically arise from the tendency to confound the lived body with the Other's body. It is impossible to understand how a consciousness can be "joined to" an object-body. We must abandon the standpoint of the Other's body and turn instead to the lived experience of my own body. My own body-for-me, then, is not in the first instance a thing in the world among other things. I do not know my body-for-itself, but live it. The lived body belongs to the For-itself. On the other hand, when I touch or see parts of my own body, it is the same as if I touched or saw another's body, or another touched or saw mine. The two aspects of the body, the aspect of being-for-itself and that of being-for-another, are on different and incommunicable levels of being, and irreducible one to the other.³⁰

C'est tout entier que l'être-pour-moi doit être corps et tout entier qu'il doit être conscience: il ne saurait être uni à un corps. Pareillement l'être-pour-autrui est corps tout entier; il n'y a pas là de "phénomènes psychiques" à unir au corps; il n'y a rien derrière le corps. Mais le corps est tout entier "psychique."³¹

So we must begin our consideration of the body with the

³⁰Ibid., pp. 365-68.

³¹Ibid., p. 368.

body-for-itself, taking our being-in-the-world as our starting-point.

The for-itself does not survey the world without perspective. It has a determinate point of view to which all the things of the world are related. That the for-itself exist is contingent; that it have the particular point of view which in fact it has, is also contingent; but that it have a point of view is a matter of ontological necessity.

C'est cette double contingence, enserrant une nécessité, que nous avons appelé la facticité du pour-soi.³²

As Sartre has explained earlier, the for-itself nihilates the in-itself in transcending towards its possibilities. The nihilated in-itself is not left behind once and for all, but remains at the heart of the for-itself as its original contingency. The for-itself is sustained by this contingency which it surpasses towards its possibilities--and which it has to surpass continually, since the in-itself continually recaptures it. The for-itself can never know, but is always haunted by, its contingency.³³

The body is not distinct from the situation of the for-itself. Since the body is the point of view which the for-itself has on the world, the contingency of the for-itself is reflected in the particular, contingent order in which the world appears to me. The body, thus, is

³²Ibid., p. 371.

³³Ibid., pp. 121-27.

not a given which I can know. It is the surpassed. I escape it in nihilating myself; it is what I nihilate. It is necessary that the for-itself be body,

. . . c'est-à-dire que son échappement néantisant à l'être se fasse sous forme d'un engagement dans le monde.³⁴

But in another sense, the body manifests--is--my contingency.

Detailed discussions of sensation and of action allow Sartre to reach some further, important conclusions about the body-for-itself.³⁵ Both in sense perception and in action, my body appears as a center of references. The things in the world refer to each other, and all refer to a central point, a center of reference which bestows a definite orientation on them. This center of reference is indicated by all the visible things, by all the instruments; it is indicated as being-in-the-midst-of-the-world. However, I cannot apprehend it, for the reason that it is what I am. For itself, the center of reference of all objects is a non-object; otherwise, we should fall into an infinite regress, since that object would refer to another center of reference, which in turn . . . and so forth. I am in the midst of the world, as the unknowable center of reference of the world. It is not that my body is first for me, and that it then reveals the world to me; on the contrary, it is the world which indicates my body to me.

³⁴Ibid., p. 372.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 372-90.

. . . si je suis au milieu du monde c'est parce que j'ai fait qu'il y ait un monde en transcendant l'être vers moi-même; et si je suis instrument du monde c'est parce que j'ai fait qu'il y ait des instruments en général par le projet de moi-même vers mes possibles. Ce n'est que dans un monde qu'il peut y avoir un corps et une relation première est indispensable pour que ce monde existe. En un sens le corps est ce que je suis immédiatement; en un autre sens j'en suis séparé par l'épaisseur infinie du monde, il m'est donné par un reflux du monde vers ma facticité et la condition de ce reflux perpétuel est un perpétuel dépassement.³⁶

My body, then, is the surpassed; it is the point of departure which I am and which I surpass towards what I have to be. To be in the world and to have a body are one and the same thing.

Le corps pour moi n'est donc nullement une addition contingente à mon âme, mais au contraire une structure de mon être et la condition permanente de possibilité de ma conscience comme conscience du monde et comme projet transcendant vers mon futur.³⁷

If my body is given to my consciousness as my point of view on the world, I must recognise that it is different from anything else I might call a point of view. If I am looking at a landscape from a gazebo, or at the moon through a telescope, I can also look at the gazebo or the telescope. But there is no point of view that I can take on my body; I cannot draw back and get a perspective on it.

. . . le corps ne saurait être pour moi transcendant et connu; la conscience spontanée et irréfléchie n'est plus conscience du corps. Il faudrait plus dire . . . qu'elle existe son corps.³⁸

³⁶Ibid., p. 390.

³⁷Ibid., p. 392.

³⁸Ibid., p. 394.

The body belongs to the structures of non-thetic self-consciousness, but cannot be simply identified with this consciousness. Non-thetic consciousness is consciousness (of) self as the foundation of its own nothingness; the body is what it surpasses and nihilates in making itself consciousness. The body is what consciousness is without having to be it, and through which it passes in order to be what it has to be. Consciousness (of) the body is consciousness of its contingency--non-thetic consciousness of the manner in which it is affected.

La conscience du corps se confond avec l'affectivité originelle.³⁹

The for-itself exists his facticity. It haunts him. His body is perpetually present to his consciousness, non-thetically, as a sort of taste of himself: this is what Sartre calls nausea.⁴⁰ This nausea has its counterpart, as we shall see, in my apprehension of the body of the Other.

The body-for-others can be described either in terms of how my body appears to the Other or of how the Other's body appears to me. Sartre describes the appearance of the Other's body to me, for the sake of convenience. Towards the beginning of the discussion, he sums up the principles which emerge from all that he has said so far about the relation with Others:

³⁹Ibid., p. 395.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 404.

Nous avons montré dans le précédent chapitre que le corps n'est pas ce qui me manifeste autrui d'abord. Si, en effet, la relation fondamentale de mon être à celui d'autrui se réduisait au rapport de mon corps au corps de l'autre, elle serait pure relation d'extériorité. Mais la liaison à autrui est inconcevable si elle n'est pas une négation interne. Je dois saisir autrui d'abord comme ce pour quoi j'existe comme objet; le ressaisissement de mon ipséité fait apparaître autrui comme objet dans un second moment de l'historialisation antéhistorique; l'apparition du corps d'autrui n'est donc pas la rencontre première, mais, au contraire, elle n'est qu'un épisode de mes relations avec autrui et, plus spécialement, de ce que nous avons nommé l'objectivation de l'autre; ou, si l'on veut, autrui existe pour moi d'abord et je le saisis dans son corps ensuite; le corps d'autrui est pour moi une structure secondaire.⁴¹

It is clear from this that Sartre conceives of the body in terms of exteriority. My lived body is not exterior; but so soon as the Other sees me, he bestows on me an outside. This outside is my body-for-the-Other; or, looking at the relation from the other direction, the Other's body perceived by me, is an exterior. This exterior cannot reveal the Other's subjectivity; therefore, Sartre can only treat the body of the Other as a secondary structure of my experience of the Other. This is one of the points on which a comparison of Merleau-Ponty's and Sartre's positions will be illuminating.

What, then, of the Other's body for me? The structures are already known to us from Sartre's treatment of being-for-others. The Other, as we have seen, appears in my world as a transcendence-transcended and as a secondary center of reference which is indicated laterally

⁴¹Ibid., p. 405.

by the instruments in the world. It is within the nexus of indications of the Other as an instrument that the Other's body appears.

Ainsi, autrui est d'abord indiqué par les choses comme un instrument. Moi aussi, les choses m'indiquent comme un instrument et je suis corps, précisément en tant que je me fais indiquer par les choses. C'est donc autrui comme corps que les choses indiquent par leurs dispositions latérales et secondaires. Le fait est même que je ne connais pas d'ustensiles qui ne se réfèrent secondairement au corps de l'autre.⁴²

The Other's body is a point of view on which I can take a point of view, an instrument which I can use with other instruments. It is indicated by and indicates other instruments; and it indicates my body. Likewise, the Other's senses for me are senses known as knowing. The Other's body is radically different from my body-for-me, which is why it is such a mistake to try to understand my own body from what I know of the Other's body. They are not in the same order of being.⁴³

The Other's body is his facticity. This facticity, which he experiences as the taste of himself, I grasp as flesh. In transcending his transcendence, I apprehend the facticity from which it emanates. I apprehend his taste of himself as he exists it. The flesh is the pure apprehension of presence; the apprehension of it is a particular type of nausea.⁴⁴ This facticity of the body is central in Sartre's account of sexual desire.

⁴²Ibid., p. 406. ⁴³Ibid., pp. 406-408, 365-66.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 408-11.

The Other's body is given to me as center of reference in a situation, and as what is perpetually surpassed; but it does not refer me to a subjectivity. As we have already seen, a radical reversal of the experience is required in order for the Other's transcendence-transcending to be present to me. Sartre says:

Ainsi, le corps d'autrui est-il toujours "corps-plus-que corps," parce qu'autrui m'est donné sans intermédiaire et totalement dans le dépassement perpétuel de sa facticité. Mais ce dépassement ne me renvoie pas à une subjectivité: il est le fait objectif que le corps--que ce soit comme organisme, comme caractère, ou comme outil--ne m'apparaît jamais sans alentours, et doit être déterminé à partir de ces alentours. Le corps d'autrui ne doit pas être confondu avec son objectivité. L'objectivité d'autrui est sa transcendance comme transcendée. Le corps est la facticité de cette transcendance. Mais corporéité et objectivité d'autrui sont rigoureusement inséparables.⁴⁵

If we look at this description from my point of view, we discover as well the third ontological dimension of the body. Besides my body-for-me and my body-for-the-Other, I exist for myself as a body known by the Other. Here, as before, the structures have already been established in Sartre's discussion of being-for-Others. We now look again at the same structures, only now we understand them in terms of the body. This is a sort of amplification of what we already know; but none of the principles are changed. We learn, for example, that when the Other looks at me, I am touched not only in my transcendence, but in my facticity as well.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 418.

En particulier je me sens atteint par autrui dans mon existence de fait; c'est de mon être-là-pour-autrui que je suis responsable. Cet être-là est précisément le corps. Ainsi, la rencontre d'autrui ne m'atteint pas seulement dans ma transcendance: dans et par la transcendance qu'autrui dépasse, la facticité que ma transcendance néantise et transcende existe pour autrui . . .⁴⁶

The meeting with the Other reveals my body as an outside which escapes me and is given in-itself to the Other, and for which nonetheless I am responsible. Others have a point of view on me which I can never have. Others can utilize my body as an instrument. My body is alienated from me. Here we meet again the relation with the Other which has already been described, only now it is amplified and enriched.⁴⁷

My body's being-an-object-for-the-Other is not an object for me; it is experienced as the flight of the body which I exist. The Other's knowledge can be brought into play, and my body be made an object for me, only on the reflective level. This reinforces the difference between the lived-body-for-itself and the objective conception of the body which we tend to substitute for it, and which then makes it impossible to understand the body at all.⁴⁸

The question of sexuality comes up in the chapter of L'être et le néant entitled "Les relations concrètes avec autrui." At the beginning of the chapter, Sartre

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 419. ⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 420-21.

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 421-22.

states his intentions: the relationship of the for-itself with the in-itself in the presence of the Other must be studied in its concrete forms in order to complete our understanding of the three modes of being and their relations, and thus to be able to sketch a theory of being in general. He says of these concrete relations:

Elles ne sont pas de simples spécifications de la relation fondamentale: bien que chacune enveloppe en elle la relation originelle avec autrui comme sa structure essentielle et son fondement, elles sont des modes d'être entièrement neufs du pour-soi. Elles représentent, en effet, les différentes attitudes du pour-soi dans un monde où il y a l'autre.⁴⁹

My concrete relations with the Other are governed by my attitudes with respect to the object which I am for the Other. There are two attitudes possible: either I can attempt to make an object of the Other, thus nullifying his transcendence and destroying my objectivity for him; or I can attempt to capture his transcendence. Each of these attempts must fail; the failure of either motivates the adoption of the other. Indeed, each is contained in germ in the other. They make an inescapable circle. And since the relations are bilateral and reciprocal, they are essentially relations of conflict.⁵⁰ "Le conflit est le sens originel de l'être-pour-autrui."⁵¹

Among the relations in which I attempt to make an object of the Other, one is desire. The discussion of this

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 428.

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 428-31.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 431.

attitude requires that Sartre take up the question of sexuality.⁵² Like Merleau-Ponty, he removes sexuality from the level of biology to that of ontology. Sexuality, he says, has usually been taken as contingent. He grants that sexual differentiation lies within the domain of facticity. But this does not settle the fundamental question:

. . . la sexualité est-elle un accident contingent lié à notre nature physiologique ou est-elle une structure nécessaire de l'être-pour-soi-pour autrui?⁵³

Are we sexual beings because we have a sex; or do we have a sex in the biological and physiological sense because we are, in the first place, essentially sexual beings? A question posed in these terms can be decided only by ontology.⁵⁴

It is not the Other's physical sexual characteristics that reveal him as a being having sex.

L'appréhension première de la sexualité d'Autrui, en tant qu'elle est vécue et soufferte, ne saurait être que le désir; c'est en désirant l'Autre (ou en me découvrant comme incapable de le désirer) ou en saisissant son désir de moi que je découvre son être-sexué; et le désir me découvre à la fois mon être-sexué et son être-sexué, mon corps comme sexe et son corps.⁵⁵

Thus, to decide the nature and ontological rank of sex, we must first study desire: what it is, and what is desired.

⁵²Ibid., pp. 447-69. ⁵³Ibid., p. 453.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 453. ⁵⁵Ibid., p. 453.

Desire, Sartre says, is neither desire of pleasure nor of the sexual act; desire must be defined by its transcendent object. This object is a body: not a body as a purely material object, but a body in situation, and having consciousness as a property:

Un corps vivant comme totalité organique en situation avec la conscience à l'horizon: tel est l'objet auquel s'adresse le désir.⁵⁶

Desire is a mode of subjectivity. The one who desires exists his facticity in a different way than is the case in any other mode of consciousness. Instead of fleeing its facticity towards its possibles, the for-itself is invaded by facticity, sinks into its facticity: ". . . l'être qui desire, c'est la conscience se faisant corps".⁵⁷

Consciousness makes itself body in order to apprehend the desired body. But why should consciousness attempt to do this? Desire aims at the Other's body as flesh, that is, as the pure contingency of presence.

. . . dans le désir, je me fais chair en présence d'autrui pour m'approprier la chair d'autrui . . . Ainsi le désir est désir d'appropriation d'un corps en tant que cette appropriation me révèle mon corps comme chair. Mais ce corps que je veux m'approprier, je veux me l'approprier comme chair . . . Le désir est une tentative pour deshabiller le corps de ses mouvements comme de ses vêtements et de le faire exister comme pure chair; c'est une tentative d'incarnation du corps d'Autrui.⁵⁸

It is in the caress that the "double incarnation réciproque"⁵⁹ takes place. Incarnation, for Sartre, means that

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 455.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 458.

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 458-59.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 460.

consciousness has chosen itself as desire, that is, has chosen to project itself towards the possibility of being absorbed by, reduced to, its body. The for-itself desires to be revealed as flesh by means of and for another flesh; and to become flesh in order to reveal the Other as flesh. But why? What is the motive or meaning of desire?

We should recall that desire is one of the modes of being-for-itself-for-another in which the for-itself attempts to transcend the freedom of the Other.⁶⁰ Desire is not the simplest and most straight-forward of these attempts. On the contrary, it arises out of the failure of the direct objectifying look (which destroys the Other's freedom and thus deprives me of his evident presence) and of indifference to Others; or it might also arise out of the failure of one of the modes in which the for-itself tries to assimilate the Other's freedom--in particular, out of the failure of love. In any case, desire is the attempt to make an object of the Other without destroying the Other's subjectivity.⁶¹ It attempts to do this by ensnaring the Other's subjectivity in his flesh. Instead of surpassing his facticity, the Other sinks into it; his consciousness plays on the surface of his flesh. The Other's body is no longer an instrument indicated by the world; nor is my body, since the Other's body can be revealed to me as flesh only if my body is revealed as

⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 448 and 451.

⁶¹Ibid., pp. 462-63.

flesh. The world, too, does not remain unchanged, but is modified into a world of desire, in which things are apprehended as presences rather than as instruments.

Tel est l'idéal impossible du désir: posséder la transcendance de l'autre comme pure transcendance et pourtant comme corps; réduire l'autre à sa simple facticité, parce qu'il est alors au milieu de mon monde, mais faire que cette facticité soit une appréhension perpétuelle de sa transcendance néantisante.

Mais à vrai dire la facticité de l'Autre (son pur être-là) ne peut être donnée à mon intuition sans une modification profonde de mon être-propre.⁶²

Desire involves the incarnation of myself for myself; of the Other for me; and of the Other for himself, in his own eyes; and this in turn involves my incarnation in the eyes of the Other. Desire, like every mode of the relation with the Other, is a double reciprocal relation.⁶³

Desire, for Sartre, is a degradation of consciousness. "Le désir est défini comme trouble."⁶⁴ Desiring consciousness is troubled as water is muddied. It sinks into facticity. The sexual aspect of the body is not primarily its sex organs per se, but rather, lies in the possibility of consciousness to immerse itself in its facticity in order to reveal another consciousness as immersed in its facticity, and vice versa.⁶⁵

And like every relation with the Other, desire is doomed to failure. There are two sources for the failure of desire. One is pleasure. Desire persists only so long

⁶²Ibid., pp. 463-64. ⁶³Ibid., pp. 465-66.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 456. ⁶⁵Ibid., pp. 465-66.

as it is lived non-thetically. Pleasure motivates the appearance of a reflective consciousness of pleasure. As soon as reflective consciousness enters, the incarnation of the Other is lost sight of, and the whole relationship breaks down.⁶⁶ The other source of failure is desire itself, to the extent that it is a desire of appropriating the Other's incarnated consciousness. To take or appropriate is to become an instrument, and to apprehend the Other as an instrument, in the midst of the world, and in a situation. As soon as this happens, the reciprocity of incarnation is again broken. That reciprocity of incarnation is the proper goal of desire, and can be attained only fleetingly; it contains the motives of its own destruction. The failure of desire may motivate a passage to sadism, to masochism, or to love.⁶⁷

Sartre had posed the question, at the beginning of his discussion of desire, whether sexuality is a biological phenomenon, or whether the for-itself is sexual in its very being. In summarizing his discussions of desire and related attitudes, he says:

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 467.

⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 467-69.

Nous n'avons pas voulu, par ces quelques remarques, épuiser la question sexuelle ni surtout celle des attitudes envers Autrui. Nous avons voulu, simplement, marquer que l'attitude sexuelle était un comportement primitif envers Autrui. Que ce comportement enveloppe nécessairement en lui la contingence originelle de l'être-pour-autrui et celle de notre facticité propre, cela va sans dire.

Mais qu'il soit soumis dès l'origine à une constitution physiologique et empirique, c'est ce que nous ne saurions admettre. Dès qu'il "y a" le corps et qu'il "y a" l'Autre, nous réagissons par le désir, par l'Amour et par les attitudes dérivées que nous avons mentionnées. Notre structure physiologique ne fait qu'exprimer symboliquement et sur le terrain de la contingence absolue la possibilité permanente que nous sommes de prendre l'une ou l'autre de ces attitudes. Ainsi pourrions-nous dire que le Pour-soi est sexuel dans son surgissement même en face d'Autrui et que, par lui, la sexualité vient au monde.⁶⁸

All the concrete patterns of conduct among people include sexual relations as their skeleton,

. . . parce que les attitudes que nous avons décrites sont les projets fondamentaux par quoi le Poursoi réalise son être-pour-autrui et tente de transcender cette situation de fait.⁶⁹

It is impossible to respect the Other's freedom; by my very existence, I limit his freedom, as he limits mine. Every attitude towards the Other breaks down and gives way to a diametrically opposed attitude, in an endless circle. There is no possibility that I and the Other can stand on a plane of equality, where the recognition of his freedom would entail the recognition by him of my freedom. This is the origin of the notions of guilt and sin. I experience my objectification and

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 477. ⁶⁹Ibid., pp. 477-78.

alienation before the gaze of the Other as a fall from grace; and I am guilty also when I make an object of the Other. The experience of the futility of all attempts at relation with the Other can motivate the for-itself to hate, that is, to pursue the death of the Other. But hate, too, is doomed to frustration, because even if I could destroy all others, I could never bring it about that the Other would never have been, and so I am permanently a being-for-itself-for-others.⁷⁰

Sartre concludes his discussion of being-for-others by taking up the question of Mitsein. Is there not a we-subject (nous-sujet)? His analysis of the experiences to which appeal is made leads him to the conclusion that, while there is a nous-objet, which arises when being-for-others is modified by the entrance of a Third as witness of myself and the Other, the nous-sujet is experienced only in the psychological order, and has no ontological standing. We are left with the image of Medusa as the emblem of the relation with the Other.⁷¹

We cannot make the most fruitful comparisons between Sartre's and Merleau-Ponty's conceptions of sexuality without introducing Merleau-Ponty's approach to the problem of Others. This is all the more true in that he is, in the chapter of Phénoménologie de la perception devoted to that topic, responding in part to Sartre's

⁷⁰Ibid., pp. 479-84.

⁷¹Ibid., pp. 484-502.

handling of the same problem. The most important point of comparison may well be that, whereas Sartre places his discussions of sexuality and of the body within the framework of the relation with the Other, Merleau-Ponty takes up the latter question after having established his theory of the body and of sexuality. As Sartre handles these problems and their interrelations, the order of presentation reflects the order of ontological primacy. The structures of the for-itself and its relations to the in-itself are established. It is necessary that the for-itself be body, but we do not discover this necessity until we discover that the for-itself has an outside. We cannot deduce this from the internal structures of the for-itself; we can discover it only in the light of the irreducible fact of the existence of Others. The existence of Others is contingent. So is the discovery of myself as object, as having an outside, as body. Without Others, I would never be an object; I would never become aware of the possibility of having an outside, I would never know myself. These discoveries are all contingent; but my body, my objectivity, my idea of myself "as others see me," though dependent on the fact of the Other's existence, are realisations of the structures of the for-itself that are already discovered in the more restricted cogito of the earlier chapters. And, as Sartre's theory of the relation with the Other depends on his account of the structures of the for-itself, likewise, his conception of the body and of sexuality is

founded on his account of the relation with the Other.

Merleau-Ponty's procedure is the opposite. He deals with the body first, including sexuality as one of its dimensions. His aim, as we have seen, is to show the roots in perception of all modes of experience. He must show that the body itself has a power of expression, a power of transcendence; there is a bodily intentionality which is assumed by and founds the higher levels of intentionality. His chapter on sexuality contributes to this argument. He wants to show that the supposedly biological function par excellence can be adequately understood only in terms of existence. He also wants to establish the foundation of speech in the body's expressive and communicative power.⁷² Moreover, it is in the chapter on sexuality that he lays the foundation of the relation with Others, which he develops in a later chapter. We shall look at this chapter now, with the purpose of seeing how it depends on what he has established in the chapter on sexuality, and how he responds to Sartre's theory of the existence of the Other.

There is, to begin with, a difference in how they define the problem. Sartre sees the difficulty against which his arguments will be brought forward as that of solipsism; Merleau-Ponty, although he speaks of solipsism, uses the term 'communication' more frequently. Sartre is concerned with how I can have evidence of the existence

⁷²Merleau-Ponty, Phénoménologie, p. 203.

of the Other; Merleau-Ponty is concerned with whether and how I can have an interchange with the Other in a shared world. If an answer to the problem of solipsism is provided by showing that I have evidence of the Other's existence, then Sartre has provided one: the extended cogito reveals that I have an indubitable experience of the presence of the Other as subject. But if one wants an account of how I and the Other can be copresent, rather than present and absent in alternating moments; or if one wants a theory of the Other which will lead to an account of the social world, then Sartre not only does not provide this: his theory makes it impossible. He overcomes solipsism at the price of founding all relationships on conflict. Indeed, since my subjectivity and that of the Other can never be affirmed together, his overcoming of solipsism is formal and empty.

The core of Merleau-Ponty's criticism of Sartre (whom he does not name, but whose position he is clearly addressing in several paragraphs of the chapter "Autrui et le monde humain") is that the conflict-relation really arises on the level of the cogito and presupposes coexistence on the unreflected level. It is only when I have performed the cogito that I can posit myself and the Other as distinct and opposed beings.⁷³ This criticism makes full sense only if we consider the several important

⁷³Ibid., p. 408.

differences between the philosophies of Merleau-Ponty and of Sartre which are involved in it. One of the most important is that, while Sartre conceives of the relations of the subject with the world and with others in terms of nihilation or negation, Merleau-Ponty conceives of them in terms of interpenetration, intertwining, or intersection. For Sartre, the for-itself and the in-itself are radically opposed in their mode of being, and it is this which makes relation of the for-itself to the in-itself possible. For Merleau-Ponty the image of radical opposition is not appropriate. His notion of the "phenomenal field" is intended to overcome the subject-object dichotomy. Likewise, for Sartre, I and the Other, though not different in our mode of being, stand in a relation of radical opposition. At any moment, one of us must be subject and the other object. For Merleau-Ponty, again, radical opposition is not the appropriate model on which to conceive the fundamental relation with the Other. This is not a question simply of preferred metaphors; it is a question of basic ontological options. Sartre, at bottom, is a logical and ontological dualist; Merleau-Ponty's philosophical effort has been not merely to overcome dualism, but to go beyond the tradition of the dualism-monism antinomy.

The basic concern of Merleau-Ponty in the chapter "Autrui et le monde humain" is the cultural or social world. The question that engages him is how a social world can

exist for me, and how I can exist in it. This is a world formed by the entrance of human behaviors into the natural world, changing the meanings of the things encountered there and creating objects marked by human action and giving off an atmosphere of humanity. This implies both a multiplicity of Egos and a sort of generality expressed by the word "one" (on).⁷⁴ Merleau-Ponty takes the body of the Other as his starting-point for the question concerning the social-cultural world. The constitution of the Other will not completely clarify the constitution of society, but is a necessary foundation for such a clarification:

Le premier des objets culturels et celui par lequel ils existent tous, c'est le corps d'autrui comme porteur d'un comportement. Qu'il s'agisse des vestiges ou du corps d'autrui, la question est de savoir comment un objet dans l'espace peut devenir la trace parlante d'une existence, comment inversement une intention, une pensée, un projet peuvent se détacher du sujet personnel et devenir visibles hors de lui dans son corps, dans le milieu qu'il se construit. La constitution d'autrui n'éclaire pas entièrement la constitution de la société, qui n'est pas une existence à deux ou même à trois, mais la coexistence avec un nombre indéfini de consciences. Cependant l'analyse de la perception d'autrui rencontre la difficulté de principe que soulève le monde culturel, puisqu'elle doit résoudre le paradoxe d'une conscience vue par le dehors, d'une pensée qui réside dans l'extérieur, et qui, donc, au regard de la mienne, est déjà sans sujet et anonyme.⁷⁵

Sartre has interpreted the "nous-objet" as a modification of being-for-others and the "nous-sujet" as a purely psychological experience with no ontological significance.⁷⁶

⁷⁴Ibid., pp. 398-401. ⁷⁵Ibid., p. 401.

⁷⁶Sartre, L'être et le néant, p. 506.

Merleau-Ponty appears to have a different conception of the possibility of coexistence.

Although Sartre makes a careful distinction between the Other's objectivity and his body (which is the facticity of his transcendence-transcended), he also says that the body and the objectivity of the Other cannot be separated. He places the Other's body on the side of the object. Again, although he says that the Other's body is perceived in a different manner than any thing, he has placed it on the side of the transcended as against free subjectivity. There is nothing in common between my lived body and my body-for-the-Other; they are on different levels of being. Merleau-Ponty has established in earlier chapters the notion of "le corps propre" in the sense of my lived body, that is, my phenomenal body active in my phenomenal field. The Other's body is not in the first instance an object for me, any more than my own is; it is a perceived body which I encounter in my phenomenal field.

Si ma conscience a un corps, pourquoi les autres corps n'"auraient-ils" pas des consciences? Evidemment, cela suppose que la notion du corps et la notion de la conscience soient profondément transformées. En ce qui concerne le corps, et même le corps d'autrui, il nous faut apprendre à le distinguer du corps objectif tel que le décrivent les livres de physiologie.⁷⁷

It is true that Sartre says something rather like this. But for Sartre, because he conceives of the Other's body in terms of objectivity, that body never is "inhabited" by

⁷⁷Merleau-Ponty, Phénoménologie, p. 403.

a consciousness; consciousness either nihilates it or vanishes from it. The closest the Other's body comes to being inhabited by consciousness is the incarnation of desire.

Merleau-Ponty compares the perception of the Other with reflection: not with reflection understood as constituting what it apprehends, but as a re-effecting of the perception on which it is turned.

Quand je me tourne vers ma perception et que je passe de la perception directe à la pensée de cette perception, je la ré-effectue, je retrouve une pensée plus vieille que moi à l'oeuvre dans mes organes de perception et dont ils ne sont que la trace. C'est de la même manière que je comprends autrui. Ici encore, je n'ai que la trace d'une conscience qui m'échappe dans son actualité et, quand mon regard croise un autre regard, je ré-effectue l'existence étrangère dans une sorte de réflexion.⁷⁸

The Other is given to me much in the same way that I am given to myself. Not only are arguments by analogy not necessary to prove the perception of the Other; these arguments depend on what they set out to establish.⁷⁹ My consciousness, my lived body, and the phenomenal body of the Other as I perceive it are elements of a system of which the Other is the completion. The relation among them is an internal one. But this view depends on a reinterpretation of the Other's body:

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 404. ⁷⁹Ibid., p. 404.

Mais si le corps d'autrui n'est pas un objet pour moi, ni le mien pour lui, s'ils sont des comportements, la position d'autrui ne me réduit pas à la condition d'objet dans son champ, ma perception d'autrui ne le réduit pas à la condition d'objet dans mon champ.⁸⁰

If neither I nor the Other are to be reduced to objects, it is because neither I nor the Other is entirely and absolutely an apodictically grasped self. In reflection I find an anonymous and prepersonal subject in a world which is not spread out before me in the manner of an object. In this world, the Other's behavior can also figure. If I am not a privileged spectator of the world, then the presence of another whom I perceive and who perceives me is not ruled out. Merleau-Ponty seems to be responding to Sartre's description of the entry of the Other into my world when he says:

En réalité, autrui n'est pas enclos dans ma perspective sur le monde parce que cette perspective elle-même n'a pas de limites définies, qu'elle glisse spontanément dans celle d'autrui et qu'elles sont ensemble recueillies dans un seul monde auquel nous participons tous comme sujets anonymes de la perception.⁸¹

As Sartre describes it, my perception of an Other in my perceptual field causes my world to be decentered and to recenter itself around the Other; but there is no interpenetration of perspectives. In Merleau-Ponty's description, too, the perception of another living, acting body causes my world to be no longer solely mine; but the implications of this are quite different than they are for Sartre. I and the Other--at this level, my body and the

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 405.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 406.

body of the Other--come to live in the same world, whereas it is questionable whether the notion of a shared or common or same world can be given any meaning in Sartre's terms. The essential point to note is that the body of the Other is not a secondary structure for Merleau-Ponty; rather, intersubjective relations are founded on intercorporeal relations.

J'éprouve mon corps comme puissance de certaines conduites et d'un certain monde, je ne suis donné à moi-même que comme une certaine prise sur le monde; or, c'est justement mon corps qui perçoit le corps d'autrui et il y trouve comme un prolongement miraculeux de ses propres intentions, une manière familière de traiter le monde; désormais, comme les parties de mon corps forment ensemble un système, le corps d'autrui et le mien sont un seul tout, l'envers et l'endroit d'un seul phénomène et l'existence anonyme dont mon corps est à chaque moment la trace habite désormais ces deux corps à la fois. Ceci ne fait qu'un autre vivant et pas encore un autre homme. Mais cette vie étrangère, comme la mienne avec laquelle elle communique, est une vie ouverte.⁸²

This openness means that the living being in question projects itself into its milieu in cultural objects. One of these, very important in the perception of the Other, is language. Dialogue is the creation of a common ground, the carrying out of a common operation of which neither participant is the sole creator.

Il y a là un être à deux, et autrui n'est plus ici pour moi un simple comportement dans mon champ transcendantal, ni d'ailleurs moi dans le sien, nous sommes l'un pour l'autre collaborateurs dans une réciprocité parfaite, nos perspectives glissent l'une dans l'autre, nous coexistons à travers un même monde.⁸³

⁸²Ibid., p. 406.

⁸³Ibid., p. 407.

Solipsism is not, in Merleau-Ponty's eyes, a problem that appears in our primordial relations with others. It is a problem for highly developed consciousness. Children have no difficulty about communication. They are not aware of themselves or of others as private subjectivities, limited to a certain point of view on the world. Their way of thinking is not simply outgrown when they become able to effect the cogito. The "pensées barbares du premier âge" have to remain as an indispensable acquisition underlying adult thought, if a single, intersubjective world is to exist for adults.

Avec le cogito commence la lutte des consciences dont chacune, comme dit Hegel, poursuit la mort de l'autre. Pour que la lutte puisse commencer, pour que chaque conscience puisse soupçonner les présences étrangères qu'elle nie, il faut qu'elles aient un terrain commun et qu'elles se souviennent de leur coexistence paisible dans le monde de l'enfant.⁸⁴

It seems that he must have Sartre in mind. For Sartre, the "lutte des consciences" underlies whatever relationships may be achieved. He makes his point against solipsism and the argument from analogy at the expense of posing conflict as the original meaning of being-for-others. Merleau-Ponty is presenting the counterclaim that the "lutte des consciences" is not the primordial, but a secondary, experience. It begins only with the cogito, and presupposes a prior coexistence.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 408.

Nevertheless, solipsism poses difficulties which Merleau-Ponty has to take seriously. On the one hand, in giving up the idea of an Ego, a Cartesian "I", do we not also give up the Other, the Alter-ego? On the other hand, replacing the notion of an "inner experience" by that of behavior does not save us from the same fundamental difficulty we faced before. After all, the Other lives his behavior and his world while for me they are only appresentations. Even a common project is lived differently by me and by the friend with whom I pursue it.

Nos consciences ont beau, à travers nos situations propres, construire une situation commune dans laquelle elles communiquent, c'est du fond de sa subjectivité que chacun projette ce monde "unique."⁸⁵

The conflict between myself and the Other is already there on the unreflected level. "La coexistence doit être en tout cas vécue par chacun"³⁶ and that is as much as to say that it is not really coexistence. I find the Other's behaviors in the world; but this, like any affirmation, bears witness to a self that is in contact with itself prior to any of its acts. This self, present to itself, is the condition of any communication; but it also seems to render a solution to the problem of communication impossible. How could I find such a presence of self to self outside, in my perceptual field?⁸⁷ Moreover, if the existence of the Other is a fact, it is a fact for me, which I have to

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 409.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 410.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 411.

live in order for it to count as a fact. There is a lived solipsism which cannot be surpassed.⁸⁸ An appeal to communication in God is of no help; in the end, the love of another in God becomes God's love of himself through me.⁸⁹

Having pushed the difficulties posed by solipsism as far as possible, Merleau-Ponty returns to the inescapable fact that others exist for me. He reiterates his basic point that the problem of solipsism arises, and can only arise, on the ground of an already-established communication.

J'échappe à tout engagement et je dépasse autrui en tant que toute situation et tout autre doit être vécu par moi pour être à mes yeux. Et cependant autrui a pour moi au moins un sens de première vue . . . Les consciences se donnent le ridicule d'un solipsisme à plusieurs, telle est la situation qu'il faut comprendre. Puisque nous vivons cette situation, il doit y avoir moyen de l'explicitier. La solitude et la communication ne doivent pas être les deux termes d'une alternative, mais deux moments d'un seul phénomène, puisque, en fait, autrui existe pour moi.⁹⁰

Again, he compares the perception of an Other with reflection: its object cannot wholly escape it, since we know of the object only through the perceptual or the reflective experience.⁹¹ If my experience did not give me the Other, I could not speak of solitude or of the Other's inaccessibility. Understanding of both problems arises from the same source:

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 411.

⁸⁹Ibid., pp. 411-12.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 412.

⁹¹Ibid., pp. 412-13.

Le phénomène central, qui fonde à la fois ma subjectivité et ma transcendance vers autrui, consiste en ceci que je suis donné à moi-même.⁹²

That is, I find myself already situated in a natural and social world; and, since I find myself in it, this situation is not imposed on me from without. My freedom and my insertion in the world are not distinct one from the other. There is a truth in solipsism. I can withdraw from the social world to the natural world; from the natural world to my thinking nature. But this very possibility attests to my insertion in a world with others. Even the construction of a solipsistic philosophy supposes a community of subjects to whom I address myself.⁹³

At this point, again, Merleau-Ponty takes up a line of argumentation which seems to be directed against Sartre.

Autrui ou moi, il faut choisir, dit-on. Mais on choisit l'un contre l'autre, et ainsi on affirme les deux. Autrui me transforme en objet et me nie, dit-on. En réalité le regard d'autrui ne me transforme en objet, que si l'un et l'autre nous nous retirons dans le fond de notre nature pensante, si nous nous faisons l'un et l'autre regard inhumain, si chacun sent ses actions, non pas reprises et comprises, mais observées comme celles d'un insecte. C'est par exemple ce qui arrive quand je subis le regard d'un inconnu. Mais, même alors, l'objectivation de chacun par le regard de l'autre n'est ressentie comme pénible que parce qu'elle prend la place d'une communication possible.⁹⁴

Again, the suggestion is that Sartre's description of the relation with the Other is in fact a description of a

⁹²Ibid., p. 413.

⁹³Ibid., p. 414.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 414.

secondary relation which presupposes life with others on the unreflected level.

Even the refusal to communicate is, for Merleau-Ponty, a form of communication: a true solipsism is impossible. The moment that I act (even if the act is that of philosophical meditation), I am in contact with others. The whole of the philosopher's science is founded on his natural opinion that others are his partners (consortes).

La subjectivité transcendentale est une subjectivité révélée, savoir à elle-même et à autrui, et à ce titre elle est une intersubjectivité.⁹⁵

It turns out that, for Merleau-Ponty, communication is real, but not absolute; there is a truth of solipsism, but it is not the whole truth nor the fundamental truth. It is perception that gives me others; I find them in the perceived world, and the perception of others, like all perception, makes promises it does not always keep.

Dès que l'existence se rassemble et s'engage dans une conduite, elle tombe sous la perception. Comme toute autre perception, celle-ci affirme plus de choses qu'elle n'en saisit: quand je dis que je vois le cendrier et qu'il est là, je suppose achevé un développement de l'expérience qui irait à l'infini, j'engage tout un avenir perceptif. De même quand je dis que je connais quelqu'un ou que je l'aime, je vise au-delà de ses qualités un fond inépuisable qui peut faire éclater un jour l'image que je me faisais de lui. C'est à ce prix qu'il y a pour nous des choses et des "autres," non par une illusion, mais par un acte violent qui est la perception même.⁹⁶

The social world is not an object or sum of objects, but a dimension of existence. We are in contact with the

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 415.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 415.

social "du seul fait que nous existons"⁹⁷ and prior to all objectification.

Merleau-Ponty has attempted to show a basis for the social in the body--a communication and an expression of meaning, an intentionality, an existing towards others, which is established in the body at a level "below" and at a time earlier than that of explicit communication, and of failure of communication. The social world involves a "reprise" of what is established at this prior level. The chapter on "Le corps comme être sexué" makes an essential contribution to the chapter on "Autrui et le monde humain," because it is there that he has explored the fundamental level of communication. He has argued that the body comprehends--even though blindly--the body of another; there is an intentionality of the body.

(Nous devons) nous nourrir et respirer avant de percevoir et d'accéder à la vie de relation, être aux couleurs et aux lumières par la vision, aux sons par l'ouïe, au corps d'autrui par la sexualité, avant d'accéder à la vie de relations humains.⁹⁸

The life of relation with others presupposes the mutual presence of bodies through sexuality. It is significant that he does not appeal simply to the perception of others. The other person, and even the body of the other, is not simply an object for me; my encounter with the Other takes place in the sphere of affectivity. Rather than being a special case of the perception of an object, the affective

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 415.

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 186.

apprehension of the Other enables us to understand better how objects come to be for us.

Si donc nous voulons mettre en évidence la genèse de l'être pour nous, il faut considérer pour finir le secteur de notre expérience qui visiblement n'a de sens que pour nous, c'est-à-dire notre milieu affectif. Cherchons à voir comment un objet ou un être se met à exister pour nous par le désir ou par l'amour et nous comprendrons mieux par là comment des objets et des êtres peuvent exister en général.⁹⁹

For Merleau-Ponty, sexuality establishes an opening towards others, although it is one that can also be blocked.

The point of this comparison between Merleau-Ponty and Sartre has been to throw into relief certain features of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy which come into play in his theory of sexuality, and to gain a clearer view of the place of the chapter on sexuality in Phénoménologie de la perception. We may safely draw the conclusion that Merleau-Ponty's discussion of sexuality has a more integral place in his book than Sartre's has in his work. The "concrete relations with others," which Sartre calls primary relations, consist in the playing out on the concrete level of the fundamental attitudes towards the Other--really, towards my objectification by the Other--which are established on the basis of the necessary structures of being-for-itself. It does not seem that anything essential to Sartre's conception of existence is contributed by that discussion. By contrast, Merleau-Ponty's chapter on sexuality contributes to the development

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 180.

of his conception of existence and its dimensionality; establishes affectivity as a mode of intentionality; contributes to the chapter on speech by showing that the body has an expressive and communicative power of its own, prior to speech, which is taken up and exercised on a new level; and also contributes to the chapter on the social world by explicating this bodily copresence and communication.

In the course of the chapter on the Other, Merleau-Ponty further develops the notion of the body which he has been setting forth. He and Sartre both distinguish between the lived body and the object-body; but, as we have seen, Sartre fundamentally conceives of the Other's body-for-me, and my body-for-the-Other, as an object, albeit an object different from any other. The difference, for Sartre, is that the experience of the Other's body refers to another, more fundamental experience: that object-body can at any moment explode, so to speak, and become the nihilated ground of another subjectivity which will transcend mine. Merleau-Ponty offers a notion of the perceived body which is not an object: not the opposite of a subject, not something defined as that which I am not, and not spread out before my consciousness as its correlative. My body and the body of the Other can inhabit the same world. When I perceive the Other, I do not transcend and fix his intentions, nor he mine. Instead, there is a transference of intentions between my body and

the Other's. In mimicry, in dialogue, he can take up my intentions, and I can take up his. My world is decentered by the appearance of the Other; but our perspectives intersect, rather than being mutually exclusive. There is a shared perceived world, on the basis of which all "higher" levels of communication are possible.

CHAPTER IV

THE GENESIS OF SEXUALITY: MERLEAU-PONTY'S

SORBONNE COURSES

We have seen that, for Merleau-Ponty, sexuality is a dimension of existence. It would be inaccurate to say that it has more than a merely psychological significance, because he considers all psychological facts to have more than a "merely psychological" significance. Every fact is dimensional; that is, it embodies a meaning and has to do with existence. Sexuality has a metaphysical significance. It expresses existence; indeed, it is a privileged sign of existence.¹

Why does Merleau-Ponty call it a privileged sign? The discussion in Phénoménologie de la perception does not afford us an answer to this question; it is incomplete in itself. Just as the chapter on "Autrui et le monde humain" in that work presupposes what is established in the chapter on "Le corps comme être sexué" regarding the expressive and communicative power of the body (and also places that chapter in a new light, showing more fully how sexuality is inherently involved in the relation with

¹Merleau-Ponty, Phénoménologie, p. 186.

others), so the chapter on sexuality needs to be supplemented. In particular, it requires further investigations into the development of sexuality. In Phénoménologie de la perception, only adult sexuality is considered; but the sexuality of the adult is the culmination of a lengthy history, whose importance the psychoanalysts have taught us to appreciate. In several of the courses on child psychology which he gave at the Sorbonne, Merleau-Ponty takes up the question of the development of sexuality. It is to these courses that we shall turn for further illumination; they add significantly to his theory.

Although ostensibly they are courses in psychology, the Sorbonne lectures contain a wealth of material of genuinely philosophical interest. They are concerned with questions of method, with the character of psychology as a science, the relationship of psychology to the other human sciences, the assessment of the contributions of various theories to the understanding of the child. They are texts in which philosophical themes of major importance, vitally connected with the whole of Merleau-Ponty's thought, are worked through in the context of psychological and sociological problems.

Before taking up the question of sexuality in particular, we must consider some points of method. In "Méthode en psychologie de l'enfant,"² and in "L'enfant vu

²Merleau-Ponty, "Sorbonne," pp. 109-40.

par l'adulte,"³ Merleau-Ponty takes up some special difficulties in the psychological investigation of children. In "Méthode en psychologie de l'enfant," he also discusses the characteristics of a truly scientific psychology. We shall look first at his idea of psychology.

Merleau-Ponty criticises the notion that statistical generalisation is the essential factor in rendering psychology scientific. We have seen him contrast the Millian theory of induction with the Galilean method of idealisation.⁴ A scientific law does not represent a least common denominator of all the actual cases, it does not express what is left over when all the idiosyncratic features in the cases have been abstracted; rather, it expresses that which is comprehensible in the concrete phenomena. In "Méthode en psychologie de l'enfant," he takes up these themes again. He finds that Lewin's methodology, which shares the Galilean approach, is more truly scientific than a narrowly conceived statistical approach. He distinguishes two senses of the concept of 'generality':

Le concept de "généralité" a deux sens: soit qu'on examine un grand nombre de cas dispersés; et la généralité est autant plus grande que ces cas sont plus pauvres;--soit que la généralité s'obtienne en parvenant au centre du phénomène concret: l'on a alors à faire à une "généralité essentielle."⁵

³Ibid., pp. 260-94.

⁴Chapter I of thesis, pp. 35-36.

⁵Merleau-Ponty, "Sorbonne," p. 116.

The statistical method takes a mean as representative of a wide range of facts and phenomena. It fails, however, to explain why the phenomena occur. The use of mathematical instruments is not in itself sufficient to give research a scientific character; nor do laws understood merely in the sense of abstract generalities suffice for science. The shortcoming of the statistical approach is that it is superficial. It focusses on performances, on consequences, rather than on "la totalité du devenir de l'enfant,"⁶ "l'état général de sa conduite,"⁷ whereas "Il n'y a de vérité qu'à partir du moment où l'on a atteint le centre de la personnalité."⁸ Statistical analysis is valid, provided that it is properly applied. Before we can establish an average, we have to have some principle which tells us that the different items really belong together. A genuinely scientific method in psychology must be inspired by the Galilean approach in physics.

Il ne s'agit pas d'une imitation extérieure; il faut refaire pour la psychologie ce qui a été fait par la physique, ce qui ne veut pas dire faire la même chose, mais avoir une méthode aussi féconde . . .⁹

The essential principle of "Galilean" thought is the homogenisation of the field of research. Rather than classifying physical events according to where they took place or in what kinds of bodies, Galileo placed them all in the same series; he saw the physical universe as

⁶Ibid., p. 117. ⁷Ibid., p. 117.

⁸Ibid., p. 117. ⁹Ibid., p. 117.

homogeneous. "Au lieu de penser par classe, il faut penser par série."¹⁰ The same method is applicable in psychology. This does not mean that diversity of facts is to be sacrificed; rather, it can be understood. The facts of masculine and feminine, normal and abnormal, child and adult, civilised and "primitive" psychology all belong to the same universe. In every case, what we find are responses to the problem of living a human life.

La psychologie scientifique existera quand on sera à même de comprendre les différentes vies . . . comme des systèmes parallèles répondant au même problème par des moyens différents, comme des logiques parallèles.

Il en résulte pour la statistique qu'il faut passer de la moyenne au "cas pur" (Lewin) dans lequel les différents faits observés sont ceux qui ont véritablement un rapport intrinsèque, essentiel . . .¹¹

"Il ne faut donc pas coller au général, mais au central."¹² The relationship between fact and essence, between the particular and the general, is seen differently. A scientific psychology ". . . abandonne le clivage entre la généralité d'une essence intelligible et la particularité du fait."¹³ The individual is no longer irrational, the exception is no longer a scandal, as they were for Aristotle.

At the same time, a scientific psychology must not abandon the concepts of teleology, of oriented activity. This does not mean that it must envisage a natural teleology,

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 117.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 118.

¹² Ibid., p. 118.

¹³ Ibid., p. 118.

inscribed in the individual, but rather a teleology in a situation to which it responds.¹⁴ The situation includes the elements in the environment that provoke a response from the organism. It is the common result of internal experiences and external givens, the mediation between the objective and the subjective.

La situation est donc essentielle pour connaître l'individu, l'organisme en question, car elle est au point de jonction du dehors et du dedans.¹⁵

Galileo was able to relate concrete phenomena to his laws because he conceived the dynamics of the phenomena in relation to the situation.¹⁶ The vectors that determine the dynamics of the phenomenon are determined by the concrete fact, the object, and the situation. This allows for a generality which is not abstract.

Special difficulties of method arise in child psychology, because the particular situation of the child makes misunderstandings possible. Merleau-Ponty discusses these in "Méthode en psychologie de l'enfant" and in "L'enfant vu par l'adulte." Drawing on Lévi-Strauss' ideas, he contests the belief that the child has a nature or mentality alien to the adult's. The difference between the child's mind and the adult's is that the child has not yet received his social shaping and formation.¹⁷ He has not yet been initiated into the society and its ways of

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 118-19. ¹⁵Ibid., p. 119.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 119. ¹⁷Ibid., p. 111.

thinking, acting, and feeling. His "mentality" is polymorphous and indeterminate, open to the structuring influences of any society. But he is in a given, particular society; and each society forms its own image of the child, an image which reflects the society itself. As we treat the child in accordance with our idea of him, the child becomes what we think he is; and our idea of the child reflects our unspoken conception of ourselves as adults.

. . . on peut dire qu'en psychologie de l'enfant, avant même qu'il y ait une science psychologique, les faits sont toujours interprétés, parce qu'ils sont l'expression d'un rapport noué entre l'adulte et l'enfant. Le fait est toujours aussi une conception qui atteste ce qu'est l'enfant, mais en même temps comment l'adulte le pense, le traite.¹⁸

Thus, although the child is in a different situation from the adult, at the same time he is in relationship with adults. His ways of thinking and being are not alien to ours. The observations we make of the child reveal, not a nature in itself, but the child's reactions to adults and the relationship he has with them. Child psychology, then, becomes the study of adult-child relationships, and of the entire social milieu in which the child lives.

The study of child psychology therefore involves the study of sociology, of history, of anthropology. The child has to be seen in the total social and historical context. This study cannot be purely theoretical. Since

¹⁸Ibid., p. 112.

observation affects the observed subject, our study has to take into account our interactions with the child. For this reason, Merleau-Ponty states that pedagogy is not an application of child psychology; it is child psychology.

Toute théorie est en même temps pratique. Et inversement toute action suppose des rapports de compréhension.¹⁹

Throughout the lectures on child psychology, the questions of the relationship of the individual to society, and of the various sciences to one another, are continuing themes. Merleau-Ponty draws on the insights of psychoanalysis, Gestalt psychology, historical materialism, cultural anthropology, and sociology to explore the problems of child psychology. The way in which he brings different disciplines to bear on these questions does not bespeak mere eclecticism, but a definite philosophical position on the intrinsic relationship between individual and milieu and, correspondingly, on the relations of the various human sciences.

In Merleau-Ponty's conception, psychology must orient itself around the child's affective life. In "Méthode en psychologie de l'enfant," he says:

Une psychologie de l'enfant qui serait surtout une psychologie de la connaissance de l'enfant serait très artificielle . . . dans les analyses du corps propre, et dans l'image spéculaire, on a trop souvent voulu interpréter ici le développement comme un développement de la connaissance. En fait, il s'agit d'une annexion par l'enfant de son image, d'une prise de possession de son corps et ces opérations vitales sont dans un rapport étroit avec la vie affective.²⁰

¹⁹Ibid., p. 260.

²⁰Ibid., p. 116.

Similarly, in the course "Les relations avec autrui chez l'enfant,"²¹ Merleau-Ponty addresses himself to the affectivity of the child. Relations with others have an affective, not a purely cognitive or perceptual, foundation. Affectivity is not subordinated to cognitive functions; indeed, knowledge depends on affectivity:

. . . perception et connaissance, chez l'enfant, sont soustendus par une fonction plus profonde qu'elles, et qui est en rapport étroit avec l'affectivité.²²

There is a relationship between the way a child perceives and the way he lives with others in his familial and social milieu.²³

The same is true for language. The child does not learn to think the system of language, but to handle a linguistic instrument, to make a conduct his own. " . . . et ici encore, la connaissance est effet plutôt que cause."²⁴ We see here the notion of an "arc intentionnel," which appears in Phénoménologie de la perception,²⁵ or at least a kindred notion.

As we have seen in Merleau-Ponty's discussion of sexuality in Phénoménologie de la perception, he does not consider affectivity to be a matter of purely "internal"

²¹Ibid., pp. 295-336. ²²Ibid., p. 295.

²³Ibid., pp. 295-97. ²⁴Ibid., p. 295.

²⁵Merleau-Ponty, Phénoménologie, pp. 183-84.

or "subjective" reactions. Affectivity has an original character, and is of utmost importance in our understanding of the social world. In short, affectivity is not subordinate to cognitive functions. The affective dimension of a child's life interacts with perception and knowledge; there is, as the studies of Frenkel-Brunswik show, a relationship between the child's way of perceiving and his way of living among others. Cognitive functions and social structuration are not causally related; rather, they are moments of a whole: the individual in situation at a certain moment of history.²⁶ Merleau-Ponty offers examples to show how the development of understanding and the acquisition of language are linked to affectivity. The type of perception and of cognition that the child exhibits reveal the way in which he takes up and readjusts his place in the family constellation.²⁷

Thus, in examining sexuality and sexual development, we will be concerned not with the child's knowledge of sexual matters, but with his/her life as a member of a familial and social world.

Development

The notion of development is an idea of central importance in the lectures we are dealing with. We shall take it as a nucleus around which to organise our examination of them. Our main interest, of course, is in

²⁶Merleau-Ponty, "Sorbonne," pp. 295-97. ²⁷Ibid., p. 29

sexual development; in these and other courses, Merleau-Ponty deals with intellectual and social development as well, and we shall touch briefly on the inter-relations of different aspects of the child's development.

The problem of development has several aspects. One is the question of the relationship between bodily and psychical factors. Does bodily maturation cause psychological maturation, as the necessary and sufficient cause, unilaterally operating? Are the two processes parallel? Is psychological development a matter of cognitive maturation?

Another aspect is the relation of past to present and future. Is development fundamentally additive, that is, does it consist of quantitative changes, along with qualitative uniformity? Are there abrupt breaks between stages, or genuine transitions?

A third problem is the orderliness of development. How is it that development goes in a definite direction and reaches a goal? Is the goal intrinsic and determined beforehand? If so, how is abnormal development accounted for; and, indeed, what is the meaning of the notion of normality?

Finally, is development a process internal to the organism, hermetic and self-enclosed; or does it take place in dynamic interaction with the milieu? This last question directs us to a consideration of the relationship between the individual and society.

Each of these questions brings to the fore an aspect of the entire problem of development; none can be answered in isolation, without regard to the others.

The above are general questions about development. Since we are dealing specifically with sexual development, the concepts of the Oedipus complex, puberty, and infantile sexuality will be of particular importance to us. Indeed, from an investigation of them we will gain leading insights into Merleau-Ponty's notion of the place of sexuality in human existence.

The course entitled "Psycho-sociologie de l'enfant"²⁸ centers around the notion of development. Merleau-Ponty examines different conceptions, compares concepts of individual development with concepts of history, and considers the relationships between the individual and the sociohistorical milieu. Development, he says, is a paradoxical notion because it implies neither absolute continuity nor absolute discontinuity. He criticises two conceptions of development which do not adequately convey its character. One--the mechanistic conception--sees development as the addition of homogeneous elements. The other--the idealist conception--sees it as a succession of stages without transition. Nothing in the child's psyche prepares for the adult personality, which emerges suddenly at the age of maturity.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 203-25.

La première conception nie tout changement qualitatif et structural à l'intérieur d'un développement. La seconde nie qu'il y a transition entre l'état d'enfant et l'état d'adulte.²⁹

The mechanistic concept is a purely additive or quantitative conception of development. It does not recognise in the organism's responses to stimuli any internal initiative in the organism itself. The socialisation of the child is simply a matter of the social milieu imprinting itself on the child. The idealist conception understands development as a process of maturation according to an internal timetable. It recognises that there is a "prise de conscience" in development, but interprets this as primarily an intellectual comprehension.

Selon l'attitude idéaliste, tout développement est porté par une série d'actes d'idéalisation qui interviennent en rupture absolue avec ce qui précède.³⁰

This is the flaw that Merleau-Ponty finds in the theories of Piaget. The idealist and mechanistic conceptions of development manifest the same fundamental inadequacy; for each fails to show a genuine transition from one phase of development to another.

The Gestaltists and certain psychoanalysts have come much closer to recognising the true character of development. According to the dialectical conception of development, to which the Gestaltists have contributed, the emergence of new forms is motivated by the previous phases, rather than simply following or superseding them. Each new

²⁹Ibid., p. 203.

³⁰Ibid., p. 204.

step is prepared for by previous acquisitions. A process of self-transformation takes place. Neither maturation (as with the idealists) nor learning (as with the mechanists) alone accounts for development; they are correlatives. We do not have to choose between quantitative and qualitative change; quantity is transformed into quality. In this process, there is reciprocal action between "inside" and "outside." Psychoanalysts such as Wallon share this dynamic conception: in sexual development they see an interaction between the libido and the parental milieu.³¹

Having presented the dynamic conception of development, Merleau-Ponty proceeds to discuss the relationship of psychology and sociology in the child's development. There are actually three dimensions which interact: the individual; the interindividual milieu (the family, in particular); and the society. Some investigators--e.g., Moreno and the psychoanalysts--look at matters from the point of view of interpsychology and do not introduce the institutional into their analysis of the individual realm. On the other hand, the sociologists (e.g., Lévi-Strauss) consider only the institutional; they consider men to be ruled by the laws of kinship and society, whether they know it or not; there is no provision in their theory for a lived integration of the social structures into the personality. The culturalists (American cultural

³¹Ibid., pp. 204-205.

anthropologists) have tried to integrate these two points of view.³² Once again, Merleau-Ponty places face-to-face two conceptions which he finds less than adequate, and then presents an example of the sort of integration that is necessary to overcome the insufficiencies of each theory and to make the most of whatever valuable insights each may contain.

From this point, Merleau-Ponty carries out a three-way comparison among the Gestalt view of perception, the historical-materialist view of history, and the psychoanalytic view of psychogenesis. The essential point he wants to make regarding the Gestaltists emerges from a comparison between their view of the transition from perception to understanding³³ and that of Piaget.³⁴ There is agreement on one essential point: that a decentration, or dis-equilibrium and reequilibrium, is necessary in order for there to be intelligence. But Piaget treats it as an absolute decentration that results in a non-situated thought; whereas the Gestaltists consider the decentration to be relative, the inverse of a new centering. Thought remains situated; otherwise, there is no structure.³⁵

The historical materialist interpretation of history also emerges as the integration of two one-sided interpretations. The causal conception sees history as

³²Ibid., p. 205. ³³Ibid., pp. 210-16.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 205-210. ³⁵Ibid., p. 216.

the fortuitous convergence of events which come together without having any internal connection. This is like the mechanistic conception of individual development, in that it is a view of events as having merely an additive relationship.³⁶ The teleological conception considers history to be directed either by the intentions of those who live the events, or by the intentions of Providence. This is, of course, an idealist position, akin to the idealist conception of development.³⁷ The Marxist conception is, in Merleau-Ponty's view, the only one that gives what is due both to the role of consciousness in history, and to the contingency of facts.³⁸ Marxism attributes to certain groups--different ones at different times--a historical mission. This notion of a historical mission involves two elements: the situation, and the consciousness of the situation which the "privileged" group has. The notion of situation is that of a meaning immanent in the facts. The facts at any given moment are not merely a fortuitous aggregation. At the same time, their meaning is not simply given in them. It is immanent and implicit. It has to be achieved, and if people do not become aware of this meaning and act to bring it about, the historical development will be annulled and fall into chaos and disorder. In the Marxist conception,

³⁶Ibid., p. 216. ³⁷Ibid., p. 216.

³⁸Ibid., pp. 216-17.

. . . les hommes font leur histoire, mais à partir de situations données. Elle n'est ni une création "ex nihilo," ni le simple reflet de la situation préexistante.³⁹

In this conception men are not merely "objects" but essentially subjects of history.

Ce n'est ni la conscience seule, ni l'économie seule, mais l'homme en situation (en particulier, dans sa situation économique), c'est-à-dire le sujet conscient, agissant au contact de faits concrets dans lesquels son rôle est essentiel, qui est le moteur de l'histoire.⁴⁰

The future is not contained in the past, but is inscribed in it in outline; in this conception of history both the newness of the future and its connection with the past are respected.

Merleau-Ponty then proceeds to apply the insights about history deriving from the previous discussion to the question of psychogenesis. It might be objected that the analogy between history and individual development is not justified; or that, in any case, it is only an analogy. But if we consider the interrelationships among the individual, the interindividual milieu, and society, which are internal relationships, we can see that the analogy between history and psychogenesis must be understood as one arising from the phenomena themselves and their interrelationships, and not as an arbitrary analogy imposed from without.

³⁹Ibid., p. 217.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 217.

The problem of psychogenesis is considered from two angles: the relationship of the body's evolution to psychological evolution (by analogy with the relation between economy and ideology); and the rationality of development, which allows it to have a certain order and meaning.⁴¹ With regard to the first point, Merleau-Ponty says that the body is a necessary but not a sufficient driving force (moteur) for development. Impetuses (poussées) of somatic origin are necessary if development is to take place. But the growth of the body, by itself, does not account for development in the full sense. The physiological event has to be assumed in a human way; psychological maturation has to be joined to the body's drive (pulsion); otherwise an incomplete or pathological transformation may result, as in the case of the historical event when the appropriate prise de conscience is not achieved. He refers with approval to Simone de Beauvoir's statement that the body cannot be put either in the first place or in the second.⁴² The somatic element subtends development but the psychic element, without being efficacious by itself, gives the development its meaning.

En somme, l'essentiel du développement est la restructuration par laquelle une situation corporelle est assumée en vue de réaliser un nouveau type de vie.⁴³

⁴¹Ibid., p. 217.

⁴²Ibid., p. 217.

⁴³Ibid., p. 217.

Thus neither the bodily nor the psychical aspect is self-sufficient in development; they are interdependent. The interdependence is not of a causal type; it belongs in the order of meaning.

Development can fail. Just as historical materialism allows for both meaning and unmeaning in history, the theory of development which Merleau-Ponty has put forth allows for both successful and unsuccessful outcomes. We may recall what he says in Phénoménologie de la perception:

Tout est contingence dans l'homme en ce sens que cette manière humaine d'exister n'est pas garantie à tout enfant humain par quelque essence qu'il aurait reçue à sa naissance et qu'elle doit se refaire en lui à travers les hasards du corps objectif.⁴⁴

In the presence of contingency and before the possibility of chaos, what driving force (moteur) makes possible the frequent attainment of a normal development? This question is considered in relation to three particularly important and interesting phases: the passage from the pregenital to the genital stage (since he later uses 'genital' to refer to adult sexuality, the term 'phallic' would perhaps be better here);⁴⁵ the decline of the Oedipus complex and the passage to the latency period;⁴⁶ and puberty.⁴⁷ In all these cases, somatic development by itself is not enough to explain the passage from one phase of development

⁴⁴Merleau-Ponty, Phénoménologie, p. 199.

⁴⁵Merleau-Ponty, "Sorbonne," p. 218.

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 218-219. ⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 219-221.

to another.⁴⁸ There is no innate finality. Neither do external circumstances alone bring about the transition. The child is integrated into the culture, which is mediated by his parents, with whom he identifies and who serve as his models. To understand the orderliness of development, we have to take into account the social milieu of the child. From the beginning, the child lives in a cultural atmosphere, because the way that adults treat him and behave towards him reflects the society's idea of the child. The Oedipal path, for instance, is indicated to him by the surrounding cultural atmosphere. The course of development is not laid down beforehand in nature; nor does it arise ex nihilo. The child proceeds from Gestaltung to Gestaltung under the guidance of the culture.⁴⁹ The question of development interlocks with the question of the connections between individual psychology and interpsychology. Every fact of individual psychology, Merleau-Ponty says, is a fact of social psychology. The social is internal to the individual, and the individual to the social. The individual has been in a social world since birth; and at the same time, individual initiatives can modify the typical attitudes of the society. There are no frontiers: everything is individual and everything is social.⁵⁰

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 218.

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 218-19.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 219.

The child's development, then, is guided by his culture. This might suggest that normality is defined solely in terms of cultural norms. But Merleau-Ponty finds the culturalist conception which defines the normal as whatever is in accord with the culture, insufficient; it does not take into account cultural change, which implies reference to another norm. He does not at this point attempt to offer a definitive statement about normality.⁵¹

The analogy between the psychoanalytic conception of sexuality and the historical materialist conception of the economy which Merleau-Ponty draws in the Sorbonne courses was already a part of his thought in Phénoménologie de la perception. In a lengthy footnote at the end of the chapter on the sexed body,⁵² he says that historical materialism, like psychoanalysis, is not bound to its "causal" formulations and can be presented in another language.

Il consiste tout autant à rendre l'économie historique qu'à rendre l'histoire économique.⁵³

The economy is not a closed cycle of phenomena, but

. . . une confrontation des forces productives et des formes de production qui n'arrive à son terme que lorsque les premières sortent de leur anonymat, prennent conscience d'elles-mêmes et deviennent ainsi capables de mettre en forme l'avenir.⁵⁴

⁵¹Ibid., p. 219.

⁵²Merleau-Ponty, Phénoménologie, pp. 199-202.

⁵³Ibid., p. 199. ⁵⁴Ibid., p. 199.

The prise de conscience is a cultural phenomenon--and so psychological motivations are introduced into the framework of history. Historical materialism takes account of the latent content of history, that is, ". . . les relations interhumaines telles qu'elles s'établissent effectivement dans la vie concrète."⁵⁵ It deals with the living subject, ". . . l'homme en tant que productivité, en tant qu'il veut donner forme à sa vie . . ."⁵⁶ The notion of an exclusively economic causality is to be replaced by that of a manner of existing which is manifested both by the economy and by ideas.

Le matérialisme historique n'est pas une causalité exclusive de l'économie. On serait tenté de dire qu'il ne fait pas reposer l'histoire et les manières de penser sur la production et la manière de travailler, mais plus généralement sur la manière d'exister et de coexister, sur les relations interhumaines. Il ne ramène pas l'histoire des idées à l'histoire économique, mais les replace dans l'histoire unique qu'elles expriment toutes deux et qui est celle de l'existence sociale.⁵⁷

The existential interpretation of economics raises the same question as the existential interpretation of sexuality: when we "inflate" ("gonflons") the notion of economy, and admit psychological and moral motives into the struggle of economic forces, what precise meaning can we assign to the word 'economy'? If economic relations are not expressed in the mode of Mitsein, is the mode of

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 200.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 200.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 200.

Mitsein expressed in economic relations? It seems that either the drama of coexistence has a purely economic meaning (signification), or the economic drama has only an existential meaning--but this would be a return to spiritualism.⁵⁸

The existential conception of "expression" and "meaning" applies here, and allows us to get past the alternative. An existential theory of history is ambiguous; but the ambiguity is in the things (dans les choses). It is only in revolutionary situations that economic relations show up clearly and are expressly perceived as decisive for history.⁵⁹ But economic relations are efficacious only if they are lived and taken up by a human subject. Because the actors give their actions a human significance, history is permanently equivocal; there is no pure economic causality. The economy plays a part in the total and concrete existence of society.

Economic situations, though they are not causes, have a power of motivation:

Si l'existence est le mouvement permanent par lequel l'homme reprend à son compte et assume une certaine situation de fait, aucune de ses pensées ne pourra être tout à fait détachée du contexte historique où il vit et en particulier de sa situation économique. Justement parce que l'économie n'est pas un monde fermée et que toutes les motivations se nouent au coeur de l'histoire, l'extérieur devient intérieur comme l'intérieur devient extérieur, et aucune composante de notre existence ne peut jamais être dépassé.⁶⁰

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 200. ⁵⁹Ibid., pp. 200-1. ⁶⁰Ibid., p. 201.

Just as our life breathes a sexual atmosphere, without any single content of consciousness being "purely sexual" or entirely non-sexual,

. . . de même le drame économique et social fournit à chaque conscience un certain fond ou encore une certaine imago qu'elle déchiffrera à sa manière, et, en ce sens, il est coextensif à l'histoire.⁶¹

A free act is not an unmotivated act; freedom consists in taking up a factual situation and giving it a sense beyond its proper sense.

La pensée est la vie interhumaine telle qu'elle se comprend et s'interprète elle-même. Dans cette reprise volontaire, dans ce passage de l'objectif au subjectif, il est impossible de dire où finissent les forces de l'histoire et où commencent les nôtres, et la question ne veut rien dire à la rigueur, puisqu'il n'y a d'histoire que pour un sujet qui la vive et de sujet que situé historiquement.⁶²

This passage echoes what Merleau-Ponty says of the body in the main part of the chapter; and, considered in relation to that passage, it sheds some light on the idea of the "natural me":

Pourquoi notre corps est-il pour nous le miroir de notre être, sinon parce qu'il est un moi naturel, un courant d'existence donnée, de sorte que nous ne savons jamais si les forces qui nous portent sont les siennes ou les nôtres--ou plutôt qu'elles ne sont jamais ni siennes ni nôtres entièrement.⁶³

The relationship of what is properly "ours" to the body and to history is of the same kind; thus both from "within," from our own body, and from "without," from our sociohistorical situation, forces bear on us which we may

⁶¹Ibid., p. 201.

⁶²Ibid., p. 202.

⁶³Ibid., p. 199.

assume as our own; forces which are neither wholly our own nor wholly alien to us.

The same kind of unity of multiple dimensions which is found in the body and in action also appears in the social event:

La conception du droit, la morale, la religion, la structure économique s'entresignent dans l'Unité de l'événement social comme les parties du corps s'impliquent l'une l'autre dans l'Unité d'un geste ou comme les motifs "physiologiques," "psychologiques" et "moraux" se nouent dans l'Unité d'une action . . .⁶⁴

It is impossible to reduce either interhuman life, or individual life, to one single order of meaning. But in each case, one of the orders of meaning can be considered dominant. The philosopher cannot show which interpretation--e.g., the economic or the ideological--best takes possession of a particular set of facts, but can only show that such knowledge is possible.⁶⁵

Here, Merleau-Ponty points out clearly the analogy between the relationship of individual personal life to the body and sexuality, and the relationship of history and society to the economy; in the Sorbonne courses he shows more fully how these two relationships intersect because of the mutual interpenetration of the individual and society.

The two questions of the relationship between corporeal and psychological factors, and of order and direction in development, are studied in relation to the

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 202.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 202.

Oedipus complex and puberty in "Méthode en psychologie de l'enfant" and in "Psychosociologie de l'enfant." In "Méthode en psychologie de l'enfant," Merleau-Ponty points out a change in Freud's understanding of two crucial transitions: the passage from the Oedipus complex to the latency phase, and puberty.⁶⁶ Freud presents two hypotheses about the disappearance of the Oedipus complex. One is the hypothesis of an innate calendar in the organism: the complex disappears in the way that baby teeth do. The libido, in this case, has preestablished phases and a fixed goal. The other is that the complex gives way because it has been frustrated. It extinguishes itself because it is unsuccessful. Thus the child's experiences are important in the outcome of the Oedipal conflict. The libido, in this hypothesis, is ". . . une force disponible pouvant réaliser différents attachements."⁶⁷ Freud, Merleau-Ponty says, wants to combine the two explanations rather than to choose between them. Along with the corporeal growth and the internal dynamic of psychological phenomena, Merleau-Ponty suggests a third factor, the social milieu:

. . . la libido n'est pas seulement de nature psychique individuelle; il faut l'intégrer au développement des facteurs sociaux.⁶⁸

⁶⁶Merleau-Ponty, "Sorbonne," pp. 122-23 and 218.

⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 123, 218. ⁶⁸Ibid., p. 123.

The Oedipus complex, then, does not disappear solely because of the child's relations with the mother or father, but because of changes in the entire family constellation, and in the parents' relation to the structures of the larger society.

Psychoanalysis sees the Oedipal phase as an anticipation of puberty, in which the child is involved in an adult affective situation; and sees puberty as a replaying of the Oedipal conflict, but now as a real involvement in adult life. Meanwhile, during the latency period, the child's emotional, intellectual, and moral resources have developed considerably; but the problem he/she faces is a lived problem which cannot be solved by solely intellectual means.⁶⁹

The same two basic questions are raised concerning puberty: what is the relationship between the psychical and the physiological; and how is it that development takes a definite direction, rather than being chaotic? As we have seen, history presents a similar problem, that of the relation between material phenomena and phenomena of consciousness.

La puberté véritable exige que la puberté du corps et la puberté psychologique se recouvrent l'un l'autre.⁷⁰

Merleau-Ponty quotes Hélène Deutsch as likening the completion of puberty to a successful revolution.⁷¹ The

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 124. ⁷⁰Ibid., p. 123.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 123.

concept of Gestalt, or form, is useful here:

La "gestalt" est un ordre qui s'établit spontanément par l'interaction des éléments en présence sans destin préétabli. Les conditions étant données, il y a arrangement, équilibre relatif, original par rapport aux forces antérieures.⁷²

The theory of form allows us to rethink the problems of development which psychoanalysis poses, without having recourse to an entelechy. Merleau-Ponty has generalised the original notion of Gestalt as a perceptual form and made of it a notion applicable in any context in which ordered yet contingent change is to be understood.

Examination of Deutsch's conception of puberty (disclosed both in "Psychosociologie de l'enfant"⁷³ and in "Méthode en psychologie de l'enfant"⁷⁴) allows us to make our ideas about psychological development more precise.

Deutsch maintains that the onset of menstruation cannot in itself be taken as the criterion of puberty; the way in which the girl integrates this event into her psychological life is essential. The corporeal factor is in constant rapport with psychological life. This is not a merely external joining together, but a reorganization of affective life.

⁷²Ibid., p. 124. ⁷³Ibid., pp. 219-21.

⁷⁴Ibid., pp. 122-26.

Le facteur corporel existe, mais est en quelque sorte aveugle. Le développement sexuel n'est pas la simple explication d'un facteur qui serait la libido.

Il existe un rapport constant avec la vie psychique du sujet: Freud fait encore intervenir le milieu culturel et la tradition (coutumes, langage.) Quant au mécanisme du développement, il ne consiste pas seulement en un soudure (association extérieure), mais en une conversion des acquisitions de la connaissance en chose sentie et vécue, donc en un remaniement total de la vie affective afin d'y faire apparaître quelque chose qui corresponde vraiment aux significations sur lesquelles l'enfant s'est jeté avec l'avidité de l'imaginaire. Le développement n'est pas le fait du corps tout seul, ni du culturel tout seul. (Le sexuel isolé, c'est le pathologique.) Dans cette double situation, il y a élaboration d'un type de conduite qui cherche un équilibre, lequel ne se trouve pas par simple addition. Ce qu'il faut, c'est trouver un vrai présent entre l'anticipation et la régression, un présent qui soit amorce de l'avenir, mais un présent plein et non anticipé.⁷⁵

Successful development, then, consists in the reintegration of affective life in response to the guidance of the cultural milieu, and triggered by bodily growth. The reintegration does not consist in the superimposition of cognitive or intellectual phenomena on corporeal phenomena. Intellectual knowledge is not the same thing as integration of the new functions.⁷⁶

Il existe donc un rapport singulier entre le corps et le sujet total. Le corps doit être considéré comme un miroir, l'expression du psychisme de tout le sujet, l'expression d'une histoire psychologique. Le développement anonyme du corps n'est rien tant qu'il n'est pas intégré à son histoire psychologique.⁷⁷

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 221.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 126.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 126.

The question of the relationship of the corporeal to the psychological in psychosexual development is further clarified by a discussion of the Freudian characterology in "Les relations avec autrui chez l'enfant." Freud has explained character development in sexual terms, relating various types of adult character to the phases of infantile sexuality. Merleau-Ponty probes the meaning of this. He points out that in the pregenital phase we do not find sexuality in the restricted sense of the term. Adult sexuality is not yet present, and it is an error to project it into the child. The child has a relation to the Other and to the sexual traits of the Other, but the relation is borne by other corporeal systems than the genital. The mouth, for instance, is not sexualised in the adult sense; Freud meant to show that it is

. . . le véhicule d'une affectivité qui, chez l'adulte, sera plus ou moins génitale.⁷⁸

Furthermore, the genital phase itself is not defined solely by genital activity. It is a phase of oblativity, of giving. Mature and harmonious genital activity is assimilated with the tenderness learned during the latency period and is integrated into relationships with another person. A non-oblative genital activity would be paranormal.⁷⁹

Thus Merleau-Ponty finds Freud to be saying that both the infantile and the adult phases of sexuality are

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 314.

⁷⁹Ibid., pp. 314-15.

defined not by the activity of a particular bodily apparatus as such, but by the individual's affective relations with others and the bodily resources through which they are established. He states:

Il s'en faut de beaucoup que Freud ait voulu expliquer la conduite par le sexe; celui-ci sert de porteur à la relation avec autrui.⁸⁰

Freud does not mean to explain traits of character by the functioning of certain parts of the body: it is not the body as a material mass, but the body as bearer of a typical attitude, the body integrated into a human life, which is important. In psychoanalysis, the relation between psyche and body is one of symbolisation: the mouth is the symbol of reception; the anus of conservation; the genital organs, of oblation. Psychoanalysis does not try to explain the psychical by the corporeal, nor treat the body as a mere instrument. "Pour la psychanalyse, ce qui est original, c'est la structure du corps, comme emblème de la vie."⁸¹ Just as one's body is not a cause, one's past is not a fatality determining one's present and future. The relationship of what goes before to what follows is one of integration. Citing Abraham, Merleau-Ponty says that character is constructed and reconstructed after childhood. The present remains open.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 315.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 315.

Aucune donnée de notre passé ne continue d'exercer son rôle sans être reprise et modifiée par la suite de notre vie.⁸²

It is when integration is not realised that regression occurs. Childhood is a point of departure. It gives us themes; the sense we confer on the childhood givens is not determined beforehand. The adult inherits a tendency toward a certain type of problem, but how he resolves his problems is not predestined. One's behavior is always related to the past, but more than one solution is available. On the other hand, the past is not annulled or suppressed by the present. It is surpassed only relatively; Merleau-Ponty finds appropriate the Hegelian formula "preserve in transforming." The past does not determine the present; but neither is it left behind.⁸³

Then what is normal? We have encountered this question before; the present reply adds to what we have already considered. Citing Abraham again, Merleau-Ponty puts forward the notion that there is no single standard of normality, no "juste milieu." As in modern physiology, individual norms have to be recognised. The standard of normality becomes integration or self-coherence. A particular conduct is normal after one particular past, but would not be normal in someone whose past was different.⁸⁴ Merleau-Ponty discusses Freud's essay on

⁸²Ibid., p. 315. ⁸³Ibid., p. 315.

⁸⁴Ibid., pp. 315-16.

Leonardo da Vinci. Freud, he says, is not explaining da Vinci's art by his psychological genesis. Everything in the adult bears a relationship to childhood;

. . .il y a cependant quelque chose qui échappe au passé: c'est le pouvoir signifiant que ces éléments ont reçu dans Léonard da Vinci . . .⁸⁵

It seems as if the artist turns even his abnormalities to the profit of his art. Merleau-Ponty does not accept the idea that Freud abases man by seeking him in his childhood. The adult artist is not visible in the child unless one already knows his artistic work. Freud does not lower the adult, but exalts the child, by showing that activities which were formerly considered purely corporeal have psychological importance. The digestive tract is also a way of entering into relation with the world. Freud took the child seriously: "Freud a voulu remplacer l'enfant dans le courant de l'existence dont le corps est le véhicule."⁸⁶ This brings us back to the conception of the relation of body and existence which we have met in Phénoménologie de la perception.

The Individual and Society

We have found, in considering the problem of development, that it is inseparable from the problem of the child's relations with his social milieu. Development is not a hermetic process. It is not controlled entirely from within by some innate teleology. Development takes

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 316.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 316.

place in a social context, in interaction with others. As Merleau-Ponty suggests in "Psychosociologie de l'enfant," the view of development he maintains requires that psychology and sociology be seen as reciprocally related, rather than as mutually external and even in competition.⁸⁷ There are two inseparably related questions to be explored: that of the relationship of the individual to the close interindividual milieu and to the larger social context; and that of the various social and behavioral sciences to one another. Plainly, one's concept of society and one's theory of the human sciences will be connected. Merleau-Ponty's position is that the individual and social dimensions interpenetrate, with the close interindividual milieu acting as the mediating factor. The child is integrated into the society by his parents, who embody and introduce to the child the values and tensions of the society. The child's development proceeds along lines indicated by the culture; each phase of development requires the integration of new relations with the milieu. The individual and the society are totalities that penetrate each other. Accordingly, the sciences that deal with the individual psyche and with the society cannot be carried on in isolation one from the other; they, too, must interpenetrate. In Merleau-Ponty's eyes, the great contribution of the

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 219.

American cultural anthropologists is that they have appreciated the mutual relevance of individual and of social factors.

We have already noted that he considers psychology to be properly oriented toward affectivity, to which he gives a fundamental importance in these courses. The relation with others is established primarily on the affective level. In "Les relations avec autrui chez l'enfant," he considers how this relation is initially established.

We have seen that, for Merleau-Ponty, solipsism is ultimately an impossible thesis (however genuine may be some of the problems it raises), because the very recognition of solitude or estrangement presupposes the experience of coexistence, as the recognition of error implies an experience of truth.⁸⁸ We have seen also that his assertion of a primordial communication makes sense only because he has established in earlier chapters of Phénoménologie de la perception, and especially in the one on sexuality, that there is a power of expression and communication in the body, subtending and available to be assumed by personal life. In "Les relations avec autrui chez l'enfant," he treats specifically the child's initial state of "precommunication" with the world and the

⁸⁸Merleau-Ponty, Phénoménologie, pp. 412-44.

gradual development of his awareness of his own body, and of the other's body as other.⁸⁹

Classical psychology, as Merleau-Ponty says, bases its approach to this problem on certain assumptions. The most fundamental is the notion of the "psychism" as that which is given only to one. It follows, of course, that the psyche of the Other is strictly speaking inaccessible to me. However, it is revealed indirectly through corporeal appearances. I grasp my own body through cenesthesia, or inner sensation; my consciousness of my own body is impenetrable to the Other. Thus in understanding the perception of an Other, we have four terms to deal with: my body as an object for the Other; myself who perceive my own body; the Other's body which I see; and the Other's feeling of his own existence. The last term is in principle not directly accessible to me. I deduce it by an analogy: as the first term is to the second, so the third term must be to the hidden fourth term. There are difficulties in this account, not the least of which is that the child responds to Others long before he is able to carry out such an argument by analogy. On the basis of the classical theory, imitation by the infant of another's gesture--such as the smile, to which babies reply in kind at a very early age--would be impossible. It must be, then, that the child has other means of recognising the

⁸⁹Merleau-Ponty, "Sorbonne," pp. 298-304.

Other's body. To understand what they are, we have to reformulate the concepts of classical psychology. The notion of the psyche (psychisme) has to be replaced by that of behavior (conduite), that is, meaningful actions. The child (here Merleau-Ponty cites Guillaume) imitates not another person, but his behaviors. Because he can perform them himself, the child recognises them as the behaviors of a person.⁹⁰

The notion of cenesthesia must also be reformulated, or replaced by the notion of the postural or bodily schema: ". . . un schéma qui comporte le rapport à la position de mon corps dans le milieu ambiant."⁹¹ The notion of internal sensations supposes that the body is felt from inside. The notion of postural schema is a notion of a sense of the body in the world. If my awareness of my own body is an awareness of its relations with my surroundings, and if I perceive the Other in my surroundings, then transference between my body and the Other's is comprehensible.

Si mon corps n'est plus seulement connu par une masse de sensations strictement individuelles, mais comme un objet organisé par rapport à l'entourage, il en résulte que la perception de mon corps peut être transférée à autrui et l'image d'autrui peut être immédiatement "interprétée" par mon schéma corporel.⁹²

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 298. ⁹¹Ibid., p. 298.

⁹²Ibid., p. 298.

We now have a system not of four but of two terms, my behavior and the Other's behavior, which form a whole. Husserl had such a conception, says Merleau-Ponty; for Husserl the perception of the Other is a phenomenon of coupling (accouplement):

. . . je perçois le corps d'autrui et je sens en lui les mêmes intentions que celles qui animent mon propre corps et réciproquement.⁹³

Starting with a distinction between Self and Other, one can never perceive an Other; this perception is possible if psychogenesis begins with a condition in which the child is not aware of himself as a separate being. This condition is not communication properly speaking, but a sort of precommunication, an anonymous collectivity, an "existence à plusieurs." The Self or "me" is virtual and latent. Bit by bit, I become aware that my body is closed on me, and the Other appears in his isolation. The individualised consciousness, the objectification of my body and the Other's body, the constitution of myself and the Other as "human beings" in a reciprocal relationship, come well after the first stage.⁹⁴

Merleau-Ponty has previously investigated primordial communication in Phénoménologie de la perception. The very young infant does not distinguish between his own body and his surroundings. Even the adult never becomes completely individuated; the merging,

⁹³Ibid., p. 299.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 299.

crossing-over, between Self and Other is constantly renewed. The difference between infancy and adulthood is that the primordial state is not communication, but precommunication. It is a state of indifferentiation. This state is the necessary foundation of communication; but the very notion of communication implies that differentiation has taken place, on the foundation of the original state of global envelopment in the milieu.

The child's perception of his own body and of the Other's body are analogous and complementary operations. However, they do not proceed at the same rhythm. Perception of the corps propre comes first. The development is not additive, but proceeds from equilibrium to disequilibrium and then to a new equilibrium.⁹⁵

A large section of "Les relations avec autrui chez l'enfant" deals with examples illustrating development from birth to three years; detailed study of them is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, one discussion is of particular interest, and that is the mirror image.⁹⁶ The child's image in the mirror fascinates him because it lets him see himself "from outside," as others see him; it makes him aware of his being as an object. This awareness, as we see in Phénoménologie de la perception, reveals the metaphysical structure of human existence.⁹⁷

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 299. ⁹⁶Ibid., pp. 300-2.

⁹⁷Merleau-Ponty, Phénoménologie, pp. 194-95, 263.

The central problem of the course "L'enfant vu par l'adulte" is the place of the child in the social milieu. The course deals with pedagogy, that is, with the image which adults form of the child, and according to which they treat the child.⁹⁸ The question of whether psychoanalysis can be extended to the study of social life is important here. As an example, Merleau-Ponty refers to Totem and Taboo, in which Freud traces social institutions back to an original murder of a father by his sons, the resulting guilt being institutionalised in enduring social forms. Merleau-Ponty maintains that Freud's conception of a social schema established by analogy with individual history has no historical foundation.⁹⁹

We might ask how Merleau-Ponty can criticise Freud's procedure in Totem and Taboo, when he has himself drawn on history for a means of understanding psychological development. The difference is that, in his comparison of the historical materialist conception of history and the psychosociological conception of child development, Merleau-Ponty is pointing to analogous structures and processes; whereas Freud is positing a cause-effect relationship between a psychological phenomenon (Oedipal rivalry-murder-guilt) and sociohistorical events (the institution of kingship). The interrelationship

⁹⁸Merleau-Ponty, "Sorbonne," pp. 260-61.

⁹⁹Ibid., pp. 261-62.

between the individual and the social dimensions is not causal for Merleau-Ponty; that is, it is not a unidirectional relationship in which one element is essentially reducible to the other. His analogy is instructive because, while the individual and the society are not separate and independent entities, neither is one explicable in terms of the other.

But Merleau-Ponty finds two conceptions of psychoanalysis, a narrow one and a broad one, intermingled in the work both of Freud and of his successors.¹⁰⁰ The more narrowly conceived psychoanalysis, found in Freud's earlier works, reduces behavior to its sexual components. There are three points in this reduction. First, adult behavior is seen to rest on a childhood prehistory; second, this prehistory remains unconscious; and finally, this infantile consciousness is sexual in nature.

In his second period, Freud maintained a broad concept of psychoanalysis. On this view, the infantile prehistory does not remain inert in the adult. It is constantly recreated in the present. The "complex" is a trauma which has never been surpassed, but is continually reenacted. Further, in this broad conception the notion of the "unconscious" gives way to that of ambivalence: that is, something which is lived and felt (presenti), but not known (ignoré). Finally, sexuality is understood in

¹⁰⁰Ibid., pp. 262-63.

a wide sense. Freud distinguishes the "genital" (whatever relates to the sexual organs and their functioning) from the "sexual,"

. . . c'est-à-dire de tout investissement affectif, impliquant également le génital, mais le débordant largement.¹⁰¹

Taking sexuality in a broad sense does not mean that a pansexual interpretation of psychological phenomena is introduced. Rather, the notion of corporeality has been generalised.

. . . il ne s'agit pas d'explication pansexuelle, mais d'une généralisation de la notion de corporalité, de conscience du corps. Par la suite, Freud emploie le terme, de "sexuel-agressif," indiquant par là que la sexualité est liée à un rapport général du sujet avec autrui.¹⁰²

We have seen in Phénoménologie de la perception that Merleau-Ponty regards sexuality as a carrier of the fundamental intentionality of the person, as an expression of existence and a privileged form of the relation with others. That conception of sexuality is highly compatible with what he calls the broad conception of psychoanalysis.

Examples of this broader interpretation can be found in the notions of projection, identification, and fixation. Considered as phenomena of alienation from the Other, they have a metagenital sense. The psychoanalytic notions are deepened. Merleau-Ponty cites Lacan's interpretation of the child's narcissism: the child is fascinated by his mirror image because he experiences the

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 263.

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 263.

contrast between his body as others see it and his own image of it--the contrast between myself as object and myself as subject. This, as we have seen in Phénoménologie de la perception, is an experience that places us on the metaphysical level. The phenomena of modesty and immodesty, he has said, reflect this same double apprehension of myself as subject and as object.¹⁰³ In this broader psychoanalytic view, corporeality is larger than sexuality:

Ainsi la "corporalité" dépasse la "sexualité" qui peut être considérée comme un cas majeur, la sexualité est importante en tant qu'elle est le miroir de nos relations avec le corps. Nous voyons donc que la sexualité intervient à titre de composante par rapport à la corporalité; or la conduite ne peut être explicable par elle seule.¹⁰⁴

Another reinterpretation of the narrower psychoanalytic view concerns jealousy. Freud maintained that a woman's jealousy over her husband's affair with another woman could be explained in terms of a homosexual attachment of the wife to the other woman. Merleau-Ponty maintains rather that the married woman, through her identification with her husband, is connected to every being to whom he is attached. Thus she feels herself to be present in his amorous relations with another person, whether she wants to be or not, and that is the source of her suffering.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 300.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 263.

Cette interprétation dépasse largement la sphère "sexuelle" et attire l'attention sur un phénomène général: toute relation humaine est rayonnante, elle "déborde" sur l'entourage.¹⁰⁵

Here again, we find that the phenomena cannot be understood in terms of a reductive psychoanalytic explanation; they are on the human, or metaphysical, plane; they are multidimensional. This interpretation is in accord with the one presented in "Le métaphysique dans l'homme."¹⁰⁶

The relationship of historical materialism to the problems of pedagogy is studied in reference to Engels' Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State. Merleau-Ponty sees in Engels' work a tendency to explain human phenomena--specifically, familial and social relationships--too narrowly in economic terms, just as in the narrower psychoanalytic approach they are explained too strictly in sexual terms. He finds in Hegel, as we shall see, a corrective to Engels' formulation. Engels interprets the subjection of women as a consequence of the instituting of private property in place of clan property consequent upon the invention of the plow. But, Merleau-Ponty says, Engels does not explain why people should want private property. Hegel connects the idea of property to the consciousness of a fundamental property: one's body.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 263.

¹⁰⁶ Merleau-Ponty, Sens et non-sens, p. 162.

Ce corps nous est précieux en tant que moyen de nous affirmer, il est une figure concrète de notre force. La propriété privée n'en est que l'expansion; si l'homme se sent solidaire de son corps, l'idée de propriété se conçoit très bien.¹⁰⁷

This consciousness of one's body as one's own is an ultimate human creation: man ceases to feel himself an integral part of the clan, separates himself from collective anonymity, affirms his individuality with all the extensions of his body. Technical invention presupposes this self-affirmation; with successive generations, invention becomes the condition for self-affirmation.¹⁰⁸

According to Engels, man makes woman a slave for his house; but again, Merleau-Ponty does not think he has given an adequate account of why this special relationship between husband and wife arises. Again he finds a guiding insight in Hegel, who says that this is a consequence of the new affirmative-aggressive attitude of the man. Its significance is not solely economic, but human:

. . . dans son projet d'affirmation totale, aggressive, l'homme se crée un témoin permanent de sa supériorité.¹⁰⁹

Invention and the subjection of woman arise from the same source: neither of these consequences need nor can be reduced to the other. Family structure and economic structure arise from the same intention of man.

"Superstructure" and "infrastructure" support one another.

¹⁰⁷Merleau-Ponty, "Sorbonne," p. 264.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 264. ¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 265.

Indeed, the "superstructures" have a force of their own, because they express a human attitude.¹¹⁰ When he uses the word 'human' in this passage, Merleau-Ponty seems to have in mind the dimensionality and irreducibility of the phenomena: the human is what transcends any single dimension and bestows multiple meanings on every phenomenon of life.

The conclusion Merleau-Ponty draws regarding historical materialism is consonant with the one he reaches concerning psychoanalysis. What is valuable in Engels' ideas, he says, is that he sees that economic phenomena have a human meaning.¹¹¹ The importance of this is that if other phenomena are reduced to the economic, everything is seen as really only economic; an idealist formulation would free other phenomena from determination by the economic, but would leave the latter only economic; whereas, in the conception Merleau-Ponty is setting forth, all phenomena are interdependent and all phenomena have a human meaning, so that the economic is not only economic, as the sexual is not only sexual. The pattern here is the same as in La structure du comportement and Phénoménologie de la perception, where he argues that both empiricism and idealism regard perception (or speech, or bodily gestures) as devoid of meaning, and that the positions he argues for recognise their inherent

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 265.

¹¹¹Ibid., p. 265.

meaningfulness.

The notion of 'meaning' is intimately connected with that of 'structure.' The phenomena which have a meaning, for Merleau-Ponty, are those that are integrated into a structure. Integration is both horizontal and vertical: each element of a structure is in a relation of interdependence with the other elements, and each 'level' of structure is interdependent with the levels that found it and the levels it founds. In the primary sense of the word, meaning is found in human behaviors and cultural phenomena.

The economic infrastructure (like the sexual or libidinal "infrastructure" of the personality) does not constitute a unique causality. In any human phenomenon, it is equally impossible to eliminate (abstraire) its economic meaning and to subordinate all the other meanings to it. A broadly conceived historical materialism, like a broadly conceived psychoanalysis, will recognise the relationship of reciprocal determination among different phenomena.¹¹² Here again, we see the same parallel between the human meaning of the economic and the human meaning of sexuality which is drawn in the note at the end of the chapter on sexuality in Phénoménologie de la perception.

We have considered the corporeal foundations of the child's relations with others, and have seen once

¹¹²Ibid., p. 265.

again the inseparability of individual development and of social relations in Merleau-Ponty's thought. In the course, "Psychosociologie de l'enfant," he develops this theme quite fully.¹¹³ The thought of Freud and the Freudians, usually considered to be centered around individual and familial psychology, developed in the direction of recognising a reciprocal relationship between psychology and sociology. In his late works, such as The Future of an Illusion and Civilisation and its Discontents, Freud recognises a collective superego which forms an original linkage among the members of society. This collective superego consists in an introjection of common social values. It neither supplants nor is reducible to the parental superego; psychological and sociological phenomena are not reducible to one another, and neither parental nor social values play the sole part in forming the superego. Indeed, parental and social influences overlap:

Les parents jouent un rôle essentiel quant à la transmission des valeurs sociales, mais leur rôle même de parents leur vient de la société. Nous arrivons à une généralisation de la notion du surmoi qui devient l'expression d'un drame culturel, historique, originel.¹¹⁴

Correlations between neuroses and social phenomena are valid provided neither is reduced to the other.¹¹⁵

Neither separation of the psychological and the

¹¹³Ibid., pp. 222-25. ¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 222.

¹¹⁵Ibid., pp. 222-23.

sociological into distinct spheres, nor reduction of one to the other: if both these possible distortions are denied, then what is the mode of relationship between the social and the psychological? It is not rivalry, but "un enveloppement réciproque."¹¹⁶ It is a difficult relationship to clarify, because the individual is a totality and the society is also a totality. Thus there is a totality within a totality--indeed, two totalities each within the other, because,--as we have seen--Merleau-Ponty finds the social within the individual, who in his development integrates the cultural values that surround him with the impetus coming from his own bodily and emotional energy, and who also contributes to the carrying on and/or modification of the society's values.

On comprend ainsi la nécessité d'efforts convergents vers une seule réalité qui mêle corps, âme, société, parce que ici et là il s'agit de "phénomènes de totalité." Mais l'ambiguïté demeure, car individu et société sont deux totalités; il y a donc une totalité dans une totalité et double perspective. La psychologie ne devra plus être une psychologie des facultés, elle doit nous apprendre à connaître l'homme affecté dans tout son être par n'importe quel choc physique ou psychologique.¹¹⁷

Culturalism, exemplified by Mead and Kardiner, has in Merleau-Ponty's view made a considerable contribution towards understanding the relationship between the individual and society. On the one hand, they recognise the psychological and the institutional as two aspects of a single structure; the psychical is not only a

¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 224.

¹¹⁷Ibid., p. 225.

"vécu individuel," but a "vécu intersubjectif généralisé." Every culture has a basic personality structure which forms what is prepersonal in us. There is a dimension "between" the psychic monads and physical space, the subject and object or mind and extension, of classical psychology. This dimension is an "anthropological space," ". . . peuplé de caractères humains qui flottent autour de nous et auquel tous participent."¹¹⁸ The subject confronting reality is not only a knower, as the monadic individual would be. The child's relations with his mother are not relations of knowledge, but of experience. This experience is fleshly (charnel). A two-sided relationship is involved, in which our body is the vehicle of our relations with others. Merleau-Ponty quotes Margaret Mead to the effect that the body teaches the ways of the body. That remark is reminiscent of Merleau-Ponty's statement in Phénoménologie de la perception, that "il y a une 'compréhension' érotique . . . le désir comprend aveuglément en reliant un corps à un corps."¹¹⁹

Ainsi, entre l'enfant et sa mère, il existe un rapport charnel qui favorise l'identification immédiate à la mère. Or, c'est là notre première initiation sociale. Le mérite du culturalisme est donc de fournir une conception concrète du lien social, qui ne supprime pas la réalité de l'individu.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 225.

¹¹⁹ Merleau-Ponty, Phénoménologie, p. 183.

¹²⁰ Merleau-Ponty, "Sorbonne," p. 225.

Merleau-Ponty gives detailed attention to the topic of parent-child relations in contemporary society in "L'enfant vu par l'adulte."¹²¹ The discussion of these leads to a consideration of the universality of the Oedipus complex.¹²² Problems inherent in the formulation of this question lead in turn to a discussion of the contributions of the culturalists.¹²³

Parent-child relations begin even before the birth of the child. The birth of a human being, says Merleau-Ponty--referring to Husserl's comments--constitutes a problem which is difficult to think about.¹²⁴ A living being passes from the condition of an organism to that of a subject, a "pour soi." The pregnant woman lives this problem in a primitive manner. Her relationship to her own body is altered. Merleau-Ponty refers to this as a "major mystery," and as a problem belonging neither to the order of matter nor mind, but of life:

Ainsi, d'une part, son propre corps lui échappe, mais, d'autre part, l'enfant qui naîtra est bien un prolongement de son corps à elle. Durant toute sa grossesse, elle vit ce mystère majeur qui n'est ni de l'ordre de la matière ni de l'ordre de l'esprit, mais de l'ordre de la vie.¹²⁵

Pregnancy is always accompanied by mixed feelings,

. . . car il y a toujours conflit latent entre sa vie personnelle et l'invasion de ce qu'il faut bien appeler l'espèce.¹²⁶

¹²¹Ibid., pp. 265-68. ¹²²Ibid., pp. 268-76.

¹²³Ibid., p. 277. ¹²⁴Ibid., p. 265.

¹²⁵Ibid., p. 265. ¹²⁶Ibid., p. 265.

All the distresses (angoisses) of the woman are reawakened, as well as her childhood conflicts. Her relations with her own mother, her husband, and the child are involved. The attitudes of both parents, the father as well as the mother, are ambivalent both before and after the child is born. (It is worth remarking that in his descriptions of pregnancy, Merleau-Ponty appears to be much influenced by Simone de Beauvoir's presentation in Le deuxième sexe. This tends to distort his interpretation towards the negative side, because--in spite of her vigorous attacks on the concept of a feminine nature and on biological determinism--Beauvoir in fact sees the female body as intrinsically a hindrance to transcendence, in a way that a male body is not, and sees female functions as burdens and hindrances.¹²⁷

We are dealing with a human experience: a mystery in the order of life, and a human relationship.

La relation de mère à enfant n'est que pour une part assez faible relation instinctive: c'est une relation humaine.¹²⁸

It is not established once and for all by the simple biological facts of parenthood:

¹²⁷ Simone de Beauvoir, Le deuxième sexe, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1949).

¹²⁸ Merleau-Ponty, "Sorbonne," p. 266.

En fait, le rapport adulte-enfant est toujours difficile dans l'humanité, puisque toute circonstance remet en question la totalité de ce rapport.¹²⁹

While the mother's relationship with the child has a very obvious bodily foundation, it is a human relationship, which means that it is not determined by natural factors. The father's relationship, likewise, belongs to the human level:

Nous pouvons dire que l'identification du père avec son enfant est une construction: en ce sens qu'elle n'est pas inscrite dans la destinée, mais constitue une décision de liberté. Cela ne signifie pas qu'elle soit arbitraire: c'est une réalisation humaine créée par la vie commune.¹³⁰

What is the meaning of the word 'human' in this context? It seems above all to carry the sense of a relation in which liberty is engaged, which means that the relation is not established either by an imposed destiny nor arbitrarily, but by taking up and bestowing meaning on a situation: in this case, the situation of having a child.

The notion of identification plays a leading role, both overt and tacit, in Merleau-Ponty's presentation of the relations of adult to child and of the child to others in his milieu, as psychoanalysis helps us to understand it. Besides continuing his dialogue with Freud, he also draws on Lacan, in particular on his reworking of the notion of the complex.¹³¹ A prolonged discussion of the

¹²⁹Ibid., p. 267. ¹³⁰Ibid., p. 267.

¹³¹Ibid., pp. 269-72.

Oedipus complex and of the Malinowski-Jones controversy about the universality of that complex¹³² is followed by a discussion of the work of the American culturalists.¹³³

Relations between adult and child can never, Merleau-Ponty remarks, be on a plane of true equality. The adult's duty is to see that the child's liberty is transgressed as little as possible. This observation, which might appear to be a moral admonition, is directly relevant to the question of identification. Because the memories of their own childhood are still with them, the parents experience a double identification. They identify with their own parents, from which stems authoritarian and repressive behavior; and they identify with their children, from which stems complicity and solidarity (conduite de complicité, de solidarité). Usually there is fluctuation between these two attitudes, resulting in ambivalence. It is therefore necessary to describe the stages adults have lived through as children, by which their adult behavior towards children is influenced.¹³⁴

Merleau-Ponty finds that Lacan has revised and broadened the psychoanalytic concepts in a way congenial to his own way of thinking. The complex is understood not as an unhealthy formation, but as the key to every normal formation. The complex is defined as a stereotyped

¹³²Ibid., pp. 270-77. ¹³³Ibid., pp. 277-88.

¹³⁴Ibid., p. 268.

attitude to certain situations. It is a group (ensemble) of traits that appear whenever analogous situations arise. The human factor transforms and complicates the instinctual base. The familial complex is the totality (ensemble) of attitudes typical of the human family--attitudes which sometimes generate progress, and sometimes neuroses.

The various complexes are presented, in accordance with this interpretation, in terms of the human meanings they bear. We shall consider only one of them at present, the Oedipus complex. Although Merleau-Ponty criticises Freud's account of the formation of the Oedipus, Electra, and castration complexes, he maintains that the essential points must be retained. He cites Lacan's interpretation:

L'importance du complexe d'Oedipe consiste en ce qu'il réalise pour la première fois une objectivation du monde pour l'enfant, en ce qu'il l'aide à concevoir un monde extérieur, distinct de lui-même. Sa vie ultérieure dépendra de la façon dont cette objectivation se sera produite. Ainsi, le complexe d'Oedipe, selon Lacan, a deux fonctions: une négative, de répression, et une positive, de sublimation et de formation.¹³⁵

The repressive function is achieved by the prohibitions associated with the Oedipus complex. These prohibitions lead to the formation of the superego. Lacan thinks, however, that prohibitions going back to an earlier stage in the child's life have already given rise to an archaic superego.

¹³⁵Ibid., p. 271.

The positive, sublimating function of the Oedipus complex involves identifications which lead to the formation of an ideal self, a "conscience."

(Le complexe) assure la constitution de l'idéal masculin ou féminin que l'enfant voudrait atteindre; mais cette formation ne se réalise évidemment pas sans conflits.¹³⁶

Is the Oedipus complex universal? The interest of this question lies not so much in the answer "yes" or "no" as in the considerations that lead one to ask it and the way in which one sets about answering it (or seeing whether and how it can be answered). The sources to which Merleau-Ponty principally refers in his discussion of this problem are Freud's Totem and Taboo, and the Malinowski-Jones controversy over the Oedipus complex. He criticises Freud, saying that his thesis is not founded on historical analysis, and presents Malinowski's arguments against Freud. Sexual repression is not absent in matrilineal societies, where the Oedipal constellation is not found; the prohibition against incest exists in those societies also; and while the Freudian thesis of the original parricide depends on the universality of the Oedipus complex, there are societies in which that complex does not exist.¹³⁷ On such an interpretation the Oedipus complex is a result of the structure of our society. But even so, it can be asked whether the Oedipus complex does not assure a better development of culture in those

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 271.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 271.

societies where it exists (this is Lacan's point). In societies where the Oedipus complex and the paternal imago lose their force, it is suggested, there is a stagnation or degeneracy because the mother-fixation and the associated tendencies towards death are not as effectively overcome. Merleau-Ponty presents as a counterpoint to this view the one which maintains that civilisation ought to achieve

. . . la réintégration de la femme dans la société productrice, l'abandon de l'oppression masculine et l'utilisation de toutes les valeurs de la condition féminine . . .¹³⁸

Malinowski's studies, particularly of the Trobriand Islanders, led him to propose a radical alternative not only to the theory of the Oedipus complex, but to fundamental principles of psychoanalytic theory and practice:

Partant de ces faits, Malinowski veut prouver que le "complexe d'Oedipe" est une formation historique liée à l'organisation patriarcale d'une société. Il préconise une nouvelle organisation psychanalytique qui consisterait à rechercher les complexes propres à chaque société au lieu des seules formations oedipiennes.¹³⁹

The essence of the Malinowski-Jones controversy, as Merleau-Ponty sees it, is this:

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 271.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 276.

Les Freudiens affirment que la structure psychologique est cause de la civilisation. Malinowski remplace la causalité psychologique par une causalité sociologique et tient le complexe d'Oedipe pour un produit de la civilisation. Mais il est évident que l'un et l'autre sont inséparables et interfèrent. Il faut construire une psychanalyse et une sociologie qui ne soient pas conçues en termes de causalité: c'est l'orientation de la nouvelle psychanalyse anthropologique, le culturalisme, qui tend vers un dépassement, une synthèse des données classiques.¹⁴⁰

Psychology and sociology, psychoanalysis and anthropology, have to come together in a synthesis, because neither the individual's psychological history nor the structures of the society can be reduced to an effect of the other.

Merleau-Ponty conceives of causality as an external relationship. When he denies causality, he is not denying every sort of connection between one event or phenomenon and another; he is denying an external, efficient relationship, and affirming an internal relationship. He is also denying a unidirectional relationship and affirming a reciprocal one. Since the individual is internal to the society, and the society is internal to the individual, their relationships to one another cannot be described as causal; and the sciences dealing with each cannot stand in a unidirectional relation of priority.

Merleau-Ponty turns finally to the work of the culturalists. He begins by contrasting the notion of a collective consciousness, a basic notion in French

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 276-77.

sociology since Durkheim,¹⁴¹ with the American culturalists' conception of the social factor, which derives rather from Hegel's idea of objective spirit. The collective consciousness is conceived as an entity distinct from individual consciousness. The objective spirit is the projection of the human spirit into its surroundings as it is revealed in its creations and institutions.¹⁴² It is distinguished from the subjective spirit, that is, the human spirit as each one grasps it in himself. Once again, Merleau-Ponty is criticising a conception of an external relation and favoring instead a conception of an internal relation between individual and society. Indeed, the "collective consciousness" is not only separate from individual consciousnesses, it is a hypothesis. The social factor as the culturalists conceive it is, by contrast, a reality.

Cette conception est très différente de celle d'une conscience collective. Elle vise non une entité hypothétique, mais les faits, les réalisations humaines, l'empreinte de ses intentions qui marquent toutes ses créations . . . C'est la "culture," envisagée sous son aspect de sédimentation des activités humaines: elle imprègne le nouveau-né dès le premier jour; constamment, le cadre où vit l'individu le sollicite à reprendre les attitudes qui ont contribué à former ce cadre . . .¹⁴³

The influence of the social on the individual is thus not merely hypothetical. The conception of the social which

¹⁴¹Merleau-Ponty, Signes, pp. 143-57.

¹⁴²Merleau-Ponty, Phénoménologie, pp. 398-401.

¹⁴³Merleau-Ponty, "Sorbonne," p. 277.

the culturalists present is an intersubjective concept; that is, a concept of identification of each individual with the others.

Considering the principal ideas of the structuralists, as presented by Kardiner, we can see why Merleau-Ponty finds them congenial. The idea of a basic personality, which he finds akin to Marx's idea of the "class man" (individu de classe), fits in well with his conception of the initiation of the child into cultural norms which his immediate milieu carries out. As well, the pattern of the society is conceived in a dynamic, dialectical manner. Merleau-Ponty seems to consider the culturalists' conception of the child's initiation into the society and his development to adulthood broader and more inclusive than that of Freud. He says:

. . . il s'agit d'étudier la chaîne des intégrations qui lient l'individu à la société et le portent à assumer la structure institutionnelle de son milieu. D'où l'importance donnée à l'éducation des enfants, mais sans admettre que l'évolution ultérieure d'un individu puisse dépendre uniquement de son enfance. C'est donc une conception différente de celle de Freud: L'enfance n'est pas considérée comme l'installation de certains complexes dans un individu, qui joueront pour lui le rôle d'un destin, mais comme l'initiation à un certain milieu de culture. Les conflits étudiés par la psychanalyse correspondent à une des constellations affectives réalisées par l'histoire, tous les aspects de sa vie contribuent à la former et sont en rapport les uns avec les autres; chaque élément d'une culture est significatif de l'ensemble, même lorsque les différents faits ne semblent avoir aucune relation entre eux.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 277-78.

The psychoanalytic conflicts are not the sole determinant of the individual's history nor of the structures of the society. For this reason, the question of whether the Oedipus complex is universal or not, posed just as it is in the Jones-Malinowski controversy, is not a well-formulated question. It rests on a misconception about the relation between the individual and society. The problem it points to would have to be approached from a different angle, within a different framework. A theory which would respect both the interdependence of social and individual factors, and the originality and specificity of each, might provide a basis for the resolution of this and similar controversies. However, Merleau-Ponty does not attempt to reformulate the question of the Oedipus complex on the basis of his own view of the interpenetration of the social and the psychological.

The same insertion of the individual into a concrete social milieu and the corresponding penetration of the individual by social values appear again in the discussion of Margaret Mead in "Méthode en psychologie de l'enfant."¹⁴⁵ The point emphasized is that masculinity and femininity, which might seem to depend primarily on corporeal factors, cannot be understood except in terms of interpersonal relations. Mead shows that the development of a masculine or feminine personality structure

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 119-22.

depends not only on the child's relations with the mother, but on the structures of interpersonal relations within the society at large, and on the society's relations to the natural world. There is no such thing as masculinity or femininity in the sense of a fixed, universal essence. Each society elaborates its own correlative masculine and feminine types.

Mead, says Merleau-Ponty, generalises the psychoanalytic concepts, approaching them from the perspective of an anthropologist. Her interpretation is not really alien to psychoanalysis, since in Freud himself there is a conflict between a naturalistic (anatomistic, physiological) and a psychological interpretation of sexuality.¹⁴⁶ The type of interpretation Mead gives is exemplified by her treatment of the Oedipus complex. For Freud, ". . . la situation oedipienne est le pivot central et unique en ce qui concerne la civilisation humaine."¹⁴⁷ For Mead, on the other hand, the oedipal situation is simply a particular solution to a universal problem. The problem is posed in all societies by the fact that children, small and weak, are closely associated with adult life. Children and parents identify with each other: the child sees his future in his parents, while they see their past in him. The arrival of a child provokes a change in the parent's relationship. Entering into the midst of adult relationships, the child has a premature sexual

¹⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 119-20. ¹⁴⁷Ibid., p. 120.

life, before he has the capacity for procreation. Freud saw this problem only within the framework of the Oedipal situation; Mead has brought Freud's insight out and generalised it. And yet she accords the Oedipus complex a sort of privilege among family structures. It is not an illness (mal), but the condition of a character formation: to pass out of childhood, which consists in the immediate gratification of desire, and to learn to renounce one thing for the sake of another, the person has to pass through the Oedipus complex.¹⁴⁸

Here, as in "L'enfant vu par l'adulte," Merleau-Ponty refrains from deciding about the universality of the Oedipus complex and about its value to a civilisation. He hesitates to decide about the Oedipus complex because the question has been posed in terms of a framework of thought which he does not accept: in terms of the assumption that either the individual psyche or the society, either psychology or sociology, is prior to and is the cause of the other. He does not accept this alternative. We have seen that he recognises a relation of mutual interference as the genuine one; but he does not attempt to resolve the question of the Oedipus complex in the light of this conception.

Mead's three types of mother-child relationship (symmetrical, complementary, reciprocal) allow us to move

¹⁴⁸Ibid., p. 120.

onto a wider plane than that of familial relations. Each of the types corresponds to the type of relationship existing among adults in the society in question. In symmetrical relationships, each is for the other what the other is for him/her; there is cooperation and equality. In complementary relationships, the mother protects and dominates the child, who receives and submits; there is a spirit of competition. This type is found in societies where the relationship of the child to the mother's breast is highly accentuated. Reciprocal relationships are founded on exchange of benefits rather than on relationships of being. They are found in societies where cleanliness training is highly accentuated. Because of the attention given them by adults, the child's excretions become important in his eyes; they become a gift he gives his parents. This reciprocal relationship defines the fundamental pattern of human relations.¹⁴⁹

These concepts, Merleau-Ponty says, allow us both to interpret the facts of pregenital sexuality and to perceive the analogies between mother-child relations, adult-adult relations, and man-nature relations in a society. Mead wants to show

. . . que les rapports entre homme et femme, à l'intérieur d'une société et les rapports mère-enfant sont à la fois cause et effet l'un de l'autre.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹Ibid., p. 120.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., p. 121.

Each generation tends to reproduce the same structures. Merleau-Ponty summarises Mead's presentations of several "primitive" societies, and then sums up his conclusion:

Le rapport masculinité-féminité est un élément dans un tissu total qui comprend mère-enfant, rapport de la société en question et de la nature, rapport avec l'étranger, et en général le rapport interhumain, comme il existe dans cette société.

Il n'y a pas lieu de parler du masculin et du féminin car chaque civilisation élabore un certain type de masculinité corrélatif avec un certain type de féminité, selon son mode d'existence. Mais à l'intérieur d'une société donnée il y a un stéréotype sexuel.¹⁵¹

We see again, in the discussion of Mead, the notion of interplay among the individual personality, the familial constellation, and the structures of society. "Les relations avec autrui chez l'enfant" also develops this theme.¹⁵² The child's relations with his parents are important because the parents are the mediators of the child's relations with the world. As the child's relations with his parents develop, a system of relations with others is formed. The infrastructure of familial relationships can influence the further development of relationships with others. But more has to be said. Merleau-Ponty wishes to show that there is a mediation, a middle term, between individual psychical life and collective or social life. This mediating factor is culture.¹⁵³ Without such a concept, the demonstration of interdependence between

¹⁵¹Ibid., p. 122. ¹⁵²Ibid., pp. 328-30.

¹⁵³Ibid., p. 329. Culture: ". . . l'ensemble des attitudes tacitement recommandées par la société ou les différents groupes dans lesquels nous vivons."

the individual-psychological and the social remains purely formal. "La culture et l'intégration à la culture donnent un sens concret aux relations entre le psychisme et le social."¹⁵⁴ Culture is a conception of the world which is inscribed in artifacts and in language. It is communicated to children by their parents. Familial conflict is an initiation into cultural contradictions.

Tout le monde culturel avec lequel l'enfant a déjà des relations, induit un certain mode d'existence (style d'une société). Grace à la conduite des parents envers l'enfant, celui-ci se trouve immédiatement en contact des phénomènes collectifs. Une culture devrait être considérée comme un conception du monde qui s'inscrit jusque dans les ustensils ou les mots les plus usuels. D'un tel point de vue, il faut admettre à la fois une explication historique et sociale de la psychanalyse, et une psychanalyse de l'histoire des faits sociaux.¹⁵⁵

An open conception of psychoanalysis and an open conception of the social, in which neither interpretation excludes the other, are necessary.

The introduction of the notion of culture is important because it provides the medium or mediating factor between the individual and the society. The individual does not have to enter directly and immediately into the entire range of social life in order to learn the ways of the society. At an age when the child is too young and dependent on his parents to enter into the life of the society at large, the values, attitudes, ways of doing things, possibilities of relationship which that

¹⁵⁴Ibid., p. 329.

¹⁵⁵Ibid., p. 329.

particular society makes available are present to the child within familial life. The culture is present not only in the parents' attitudes and actions, which might be the result of personal peculiarities, but in language; in utensils; and in the aspects of adult-adult and adult-child relationships which are dictated by the society and its structures. When the child emerges from the family setting, he has already acquired the "style" of the society. He is able to comprehend features of its life that he has not yet encountered directly, and to learn his way around in new situations, somewhat as a musician who knows the style of a composer can enter into a new work of his more easily than into a work in an unfamiliar style.

In "L'homme et l'adversité," a paper presented during the period in which the Sorbonne courses were given,¹⁵⁶ Merleau-Ponty includes an account of Freud's contribution to human self-understanding in the present century. In this discussion of the significance of Freud's work, we can see how much Merleau-Ponty's own conception of sexuality is indebted to Freud, and how much his way of looking at Freud has been influenced by his phenomenological perspective.

Merleau-Ponty discerns in Freud the same passage from a mechanistic notion of the body to the notion of

¹⁵⁶Merleau-Ponty, Signes, pp. 284-308.

flesh, or animated body, which the twentieth century has to a large extent achieved.¹⁵⁷ The concept of instinct provides an example. Freud's work overturns the notion of

. . . un dispositif intérieur à l'organisme, qui assure, avec un minimum d'exercice, certaines réponses adaptées à certaines situations caractéristiques de l'espèce.¹⁵⁸

In this sense, there is no sexual instinct in man. A "normal" adult sexuality is the result of a long and difficult history. Even the infant's attachment to the parents, which is the beginning of this history, is not an instinctive, but a spiritual attachment.¹⁵⁹ Similarly, although the transition to genitality may be a necessary condition of the transformation of infantile possessiveness to adult love, it is not a sufficient guarantee. The essence of the passage to adulthood lies in the attainment of a love

. . . soutenu par une tendresse qui fait crédit, qui n'exige pas à chaque instant de nouvelles preuves d'un attachement absolu, et qui prend l'autre comme il est, à sa distance et dans son autonomie . . .¹⁶⁰

The child's way of loving is totally demanding. His initially possessive, absolutist relations with others are accomplished by way of the least discriminating and articulate bodily regions and functions. Infantile sexuality is defined not by the bodily organs as portions of matter, but by the mode of relationship that is incarnated

¹⁵⁷Ibid., p. 287. ¹⁵⁸Ibid., p. 288.

¹⁵⁹Ibid., pp. 288-89. ¹⁶⁰Ibid., p. 289.

in them.

Ainsi la sexualité et plus généralement la corporéité que Freud considère comme le sol de notre existence est un pouvoir d'investissement d'abord absolu et universel . . .¹⁶¹

The understanding of corporeity which Merleau-Ponty here attributes to Freud is fully consonant with his own.

Freud, then, does not reduce behavior to underlying corporeal mechanisms. If psychical facts have a meaning, there are no purely corporeal mechanisms; there is no "lower" part of human life. Likewise, Freud does not reduce adult behavior to the causality of childhood.

Au moins autant qu'il explique la conduite adulte par une fatalité héritée de l'enfance, Freud montre dans l'enfance une vie adulte prématurée, et par exemple dans les conduites sphinctériennes de l'enfant un premier choix de ses rapports de générosité ou d'avarice avec autrui. Au moins autant qu'il explique le psychologique par le corps, il montre la signification psychologique du corps, sa logique secrète ou latente.¹⁶²

Sexuality and the body are not causes or instruments, but ". . . le véhicule, le point d'appui, le volant de notre vie."¹⁶³ No available philosophical notions suffice for thinking the body's relations to life as a whole, " . . . son embrayage sur la vie personnelle ou l'embrayage de la vie personnelle sur lui."¹⁶⁴ (Thus in Le visible et l'invisible, Merleau-Ponty will build around the word 'flesh' a new vocabulary especially designed to express these relationships.) The body is enigmatic. It is part

¹⁶¹Ibid., p. 289.

¹⁶²Ibid., p. 290.

¹⁶³Ibid., p. 290.

¹⁶⁴Ibid., p. 290.

of the world, and also the habitat of ". . . un désir absolu d'approcher autrui et de le rejoindre dans son corps aussi . . ." ¹⁶⁵ With psychoanalysis, the spirit passes into the body as the body passes into the spirit. Thus both notions, 'body' and 'spirit,' must be revised. Merleau-Ponty finds the psychoanalytic attempts to reformulate the notion of spirit less satisfying than when the body is in question. The problem the psychoanalysts face is that of accounting for the osmosis between the body's anonymous life and the personal life of deliberate acts and express cognitions. Freud introduces the notion of the unconscious--a notion which, as Freud himself lets it be understood, remains a provisional designation for something which still needs to be formulated correctly. (Merleau-Ponty refers to Freud's Essais de psychanalyse.) Merleau-Ponty says that Freud is approaching what others have more aptly called ambiguous perception, and that this is the direction in which understanding of this "consciousness" should be pursued. ¹⁶⁶

He concludes that Freud has understood better and better the spiritual function of the body and the incarnation of the spirit. He finds evidence for this in Freud's notion of the "sexual-aggressive" relation to others as the fundamental given of our life. Since aggression is directed toward a person rather than toward

¹⁶⁵Ibid., p. 290. ¹⁶⁶Ibid., p. 290.

a thing,¹⁶⁷ the intertwining of sexuality with aggression indicates that sexuality also involves a relationship of person to person, that " . . . le sexuel est notre manière, charnel puisque nous sommes chair, de vivre la relation avec autrui."¹⁶⁸ The connection of sexuality with identification comes out very clearly in these lines:

Puisque la sexualité est rapport à autrui, et non pas seulement à un autre corps, elle va tisser entre autrui et moi le système circulaire des projections et des introjections, allumer la série indéfinie des reflets reflétants et des reflets réfléchis qui font que je suis autrui et qu'il est moi-même.¹⁶⁹

Freud's understanding of sexuality and corporeity, as Merleau-Ponty describes it, is close to Merleau-Ponty's own conception. The psychoanalytic interpretation of human experience has guided Merleau-Ponty's understanding of sexuality; at the same time, his own basic philosophical orientation has guided his interpretation of psychoanalytic doctrines.

Conclusion

Let us summarize these findings and draw some conclusions from them. Sexuality, as it is examined in these courses, has a special importance, which can best be seen if we look first at the family. The family is the

¹⁶⁷Perhaps we might add that when aggression is shown toward a thing, the thing symbolizes a person: for instance, a child kicks her sister's favorite toy.

¹⁶⁸Merleau-Ponty, Signes, p. 292.

¹⁶⁹Ibid., p. 292.

milieu in which the individual is integrated into the society, and the attitudes of the society are integrated into the individual personality. Indeed, the society is present in the family, because the parents embody social and cultural values. They play their roles as parents in the way expected of them by the society. They are not merely transmitters of attitudes and values; they live them, and their roles in the family have an intrinsic relation to their roles in the society at large. Merleau-Ponty's idea of the family is integrally connected with his idea of the interpenetration of psychology and sociology. His consideration of the family as the pivot-point between individual and social life entails a view of the individual and the social as mutually interpenetrating. Correspondingly, the disciplines which study individual and social phenomena must also interpenetrate and interact.

The conflicts of the society, then, are already present to the child in the conflicts between his parents; within each of them (e.g., conflicting identification of the parent with his/her own parents and with the child); and between the parent and the child. The relationship, it must be stressed, is not a causal one, and is not unidirectional. Individual history and the history of the society are, rather, in a relationship of mutual envelopment.

Intrafamilial relationships are relationships of identification. The spouse identifies with the other

spouse (Merleau-Ponty's refutation of Freud's explanation of a wife's jealousy); the parent identifies with the child, and with his/her own parents; the child identifies with the parents, and with the older or younger child towards whom jealousy is felt. The theme of identification brings us back to the problem of self and other. In Phénoménologie de la perception, Merleau-Ponty says that all our relations with others, including those of alienation, are founded on an original communication, which is established in childhood and is never wholly superseded. Even the effectuation of the cogito does not mean we have surpassed this primordial communication, because the cogito itself presupposes it. This primordial communication is corporeal in character. Literally, the child begins by being incorporated in the mother's body. Even after birth, separation is not complete. The child does not have an awareness of himself as a separate being; the boundaries between body and world are not yet defined. Correspondingly, there is an easy transferability between the child and others. At quite an early age, a baby responds to a smile by smiling; the explanation of this and other behaviors, as we have seen in "Les relations avec autrui chez l'enfant," is to be found in the coexistence of behaviors in the same milieu, and not in an impossibly precocious subjective self-awareness and objective cognition of others.

The child's original relation with others is corporeal and affective. In the Sorbonne courses, the conception of lived perception which Merleau-Ponty presents in Phénoménologie de la perception is further enriched by the fuller development of the relationship between perception and affectivity. Perception, language, social relationships all are seen to be rooted in affectivity. This notion takes on great importance in the Sorbonne courses. It approaches very closely to the notions of existence and of the intentional arc which appear in Phénoménologie de la perception. Affectivity might perhaps be defined as the mode or style of a person's relations with others, or with his world as a whole. Such relations are not neutral; different ways of living them are possible. For Merleau-Ponty, objective perception, with the object at a distance (so to speak) from the subject, is not primary and fundamental, but is grounded in a lived involvement of the "subject" in his milieu. The identification and transference of intentions that constitute the primordial relation with another person are established at a pre-objective stage, and accordingly at a pre-subjective stage as well. Throughout the child's development, cognition is effect rather than cause of affective integrations.

As sexuality is understood by Merleau-Ponty, it does not depend on corporeal determinants alone; on the contrary, interindividual and social factors are equally

important. Sexuality as a dimension of life has a special relationship to the genital organs; but 'sexual' is not simply synonymous with 'genital.' The scope of the sexual is larger than that, implicating the person's affective life. At the same time, corporeality is not reducible to sexuality; "la corporéité dépasse la sexualité."¹⁷⁰ Merleau-Ponty calls sexuality the mirror of our relations with the body. He seems to mean by this metaphor that the general character of bodily existence is manifested and can be discerned in sexual life, although the two cannot be equated. Nor is affectivity equated with sexuality. At the beginning of the present chapter, the question was posed of why Merleau-Ponty calls sexuality a privileged sign of existence. From our consideration of certain of the Sorbonne courses, a formulation of what sexuality is for Merleau-Ponty emerges: sexuality is a privileged sign of existence because it is the dimension of existence in which the integration of corporeal and affective life is potentially most fully realised, the archetype or prime example of this integration. Sexuality has at its disposal special corporeal resources which, however, mature slowly and come into play after most of the other bodily systems and, in fact, at about the same time that the person is beginning to be able to exercise adult intellectual and moral

¹⁷⁰Merleau-Ponty, "Sorbonne," p. 263.

capabilities. But the affective energy on which all relationships are borne is present and operates from infancy. The child's affectivity exploits the corporeal resources that are available to him: in earliest infancy, for example, the mouth, which is the focus of his relationship to his mother at the same time that it is the organ of nourishment; indeed, precisely because it is the organ of nourishment at a stage of life when that is the overwhelmingly dominant need. Thus it is legitimate to speak of infantile sexuality, even though the genital organs are not yet functioning as they will in adulthood, because the young child's affectivity seizes on and utilises whatever corporeal resources are most available, are the focus of important experiences, and the focus of adult attention. (E.g., in societies where toilet training is very permissive, the adults do not place great importance on the child's excretions, so the child does not place great importance on them either, and the excretory organs do not become a principal means of establishing and expressing his relations with the world.)

We can see, also, why the Oedipus complex is crucial: the child enters into adult relationships in which he cannot really participate; he has desires for which he has not adult bodily resources. This means that his desires are not the same as the adult's: instead of reading adult sexuality into the child's situation, the

latter must be understood in its own terms. Merleau-Ponty also cites with approval Margaret Mead's interpretation that the Oedipus complex is one culture's version of a universal problem: that the child is small and weak in a world of adults and has not the means to make his way in that world.¹⁷¹ In particular, he has not the corporeal resources to express and achieve integration of his corporeal and his affective life in the form of an intimate relationship with another person.

¹⁷¹Ibid., p. 120.

CHAPTER V

SEXUALITY AND FLESH

We must now give special attention to Merleau-Ponty's unfinished, posthumously published work, Le visible et l'invisible, in the light of our investigations so far.¹ My intention in the present chapter is to argue that the exploration of the problem of sexuality in the earlier works makes a specific and important contribution to the direction his thought takes in Le visible et l'invisible, and especially in the section "L'entrelacs--le chiasme."² It is here that Merleau-Ponty develops the notion of flesh, for which, as he tells us, traditional philosophy has no name.³ We shall first look at what he says about the flesh, and then examine the connections of this conception with the themes of Phénoménologie de la perception and of the Sorbonne courses. It will become clear that Merleau-Ponty's conception of the flesh--my flesh, the flesh of the world, and intercorporeity--is indebted to his reflections on sexuality and the relation with the Other.

¹L'oeil et l'esprit and the preface which Merleau-Ponty wrote for Hesnard's L'oeuvre de Freud will also be discussed, in relation to Visible.

²Merleau-Ponty, Visible, pp. 172-204.

³Ibid., p. 183.

We should note that "L'entrelacs" does not give a final and definitive account of the flesh. Merleau-Ponty says:

C'est une question, et nous ne l'éviterons pas, de savoir comment le sentant sensible peut être aussi pensée. Mais, ici, cherchant à former nos premiers concepts de manière à éviter les impasses classiques, nous n'avons pas à faire acception des difficultés qu'ils peuvent offrir quand on les confronte avec un cogito qui, lui-même, est à revoir.⁴

The question of thought, the question of the cogito, is here left open. It would be premature to answer, now, the questions posed concerning the body by a cogito which must itself be reexamined. To say that is not to foreclose the question of thought.

Oui ou non, avons-nous un corps, c'est-à-dire non pas un objet de pensée permanente, mais une chair qui souffre quand elle est blessée, des mains qui touchent? On le sait: des mains ne suffisent pas pour toucher, mais décider pour cette seule raison que nos mains ne touchent pas, et les renvoyer au monde des objets ou des instruments, ce serait, acceptant la bifurcation du sujet et de l'objet, renoncer par avance à comprendre le sensible et nous priver de ses lumières.⁵

Merleau-Ponty presents a notion--that of flesh--by which he aims at overcoming the subject-object dichotomy and the consciousness-body dichotomy. The flesh is articulated into my flesh and the flesh of the world; my flesh and the flesh of the Other; my flesh touching/seeing/hearing and my flesh tangible/visible/sonorous, audible. The flesh is the sentant sensible; and it is no mere

⁴Ibid., p. 180.

⁵Ibid., p. 180.

coincidence that the two aspects go together: that there is a sensible which senses, that the sentant should be sensible also. Each, as we shall see, implies the other. I, the seer, am not alien to the visible world; rather, I am of it.

He begins by referring to seeing and speaking as experiences in the exploration of which philosophy may find new instruments, new resources to replace those, provided by reflection and intuition,⁶ which now must be rejected. Seeing offers itself as an example: the visible and the seer are interdependent. The relation between them is so intimate that it seems as if our vision of the things comes to us from them. The gaze envelopes them, "les habille de sa chair," yet leaves them in their place.⁷

Le regard . . . enveloppe, palpe, épouse les choses visibles. Comme s'il était avec elles dans un rapport d'harmonie préétabli, comme s'il les savait avant de les savoir, il bouge à sa façon dans son style saccadé et impérieux, et pourtant les vues prises ne sont pas quelconques, je ne regarde pas un chaos, mais des choses, de sorte qu'on ne peut pas dire enfin si c'est lui ou si c'est elles qui commandent.⁸

Touch gives a clue to the understanding of this "prépossession du visible."⁹ Since I move my hands in such a way that they feel the textures of smooth and rough, there must be a kinship between my exploratory

⁶Ibid., pp. 17-74, 142-71. ⁷Ibid., pp. 172-73.

⁸Ibid., p. 175. ⁹Ibid., p. 175.

movements and what I touch which makes the former "l'initiation et l'ouverture à un monde tactile."¹⁰ But this is possible only if my touching hand is also tangible (for instance, by the other hand): if it opens on a tangible being of which it is also part.¹¹ Thus, for Merleau-Ponty, reflexivity of the body upon itself and the revelatory relationship of my flesh with the things of the world are interconnected, mutually implicated.

Par ce recroisement en elle du touchant et du tangible, ses mouvements propres s'incorporent à l'univers qu'ils interrogent, sont reportés sur la même carte que lui; . . .¹²

The same is true for vision. Merleau-Ponty approaches the recroisement of vision and the visible by way of that of vision and touch. The tangible has visible existence, and the visible is cut out in the tangible.

Puisque le même corps voit et touche, visible et tangible appartiennent au même monde.¹³

The visible and the tangible are two complete maps, but do not merge into one. Hence, Merleau-Ponty says,

Puisque la vision est palpation par le regard, il faut qu'elle aussi s'inscrive dans l'ordre de l'être qu'elle nous dévoile, il faut que celui qui regarde ne soit pas lui-même étranger au monde qu'il regarde.¹⁴

The one who sees is of the visible. It is the flesh that makes vision possible. We see the things themselves, and

¹⁰Ibid., p. 176. ¹¹Ibid., p. 176.

¹²Ibid., p. 176. ¹³Ibid., p. 177.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 177.

at the same time are separated from them "de toute l'épaisseur du regard et du corps"; the distance and the proximity are synonymous.

C'est que l'épaisseur de chair entre le voyant et la chose est constitutive de sa visibilité à elle comme de sa corporéité à lui; ce n'est pas un obstacle entre lui et elle, c'est leur moyen de communication . . . L'épaisseur du corps, loin de rivaliser avec celle du monde, est au contraire le seul moyen que j'ai d'aller au coeur des choses, en me faisant monde et en les faisant chair.¹⁵

In the part of Le visible et l'invisible called "Interrogation et dialectique,"¹⁶ Merleau-Ponty has argued that Sartre's philosophy makes vision ultimately impossible: the infinite distance between the look and the object becomes an absolute coincidence between them, whereas vision calls for a presence at a distance, with planes and horizons. Now he explains that the medium or "element" of this presence at a distance is flesh--the flesh of the seer and the flesh of the world. For vision, a reversal is required, by which one of the visibles is capable of seeing them.¹⁷

The visible, the body, in order to be capable of vision, must be a being of two dimensions: a sensible for itself, that is, a sensible inhabited by a touch and a vision. This is what makes the things accessible:

¹⁵Ibid., p. 178. ¹⁶Ibid., pp. 75-141.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 178.

. . . l'être charnel, comme être des profondeurs, à plusieurs feuillets ou à plusieurs faces, être de latence, et présentation d'une certaine absence, est un prototype de l'Etre, dont notre corps, le sentant sensible, est une variante très remarquable, mais dont le paradoxe constitutif est déjà dans tout visible. . .¹⁸

The body unites within itself the properties of being a thing among things and of being what sees and touches them: unites not by mere juxtaposition, but because each calls for the other.

Si le corps a cette double référence, ce ne peut être par un hasard incompréhensible. Il nous enseigne que chacun appelle l'autre. Car, si le corps est chose parmi les choses, c'est en un sens plus fort et plus profond qu'elles: c'est, disons-nous, qu'il se détache sur elles et, dans cette mesure, se détache d'elles . . . S'il les touche et les voit, c'est seulement que, étant de leur famille, visible et tangible lui-même, il use de son être comme d'un moyen pour participer au leur, que chacun des deux êtres est pour l'autre archétype, que le corps appartient à l'ordre des choses comme le monde est chair universelle.¹⁹

With the phrase 'chair universelle,' Merleau-Ponty indicates the central theme of "L'entrelacs--le chiasme." He has maintained always, from the time of La structure du comportement, that the human body is not a material thing, and cannot be understood by applying to it the methods and concepts that apply to things. Moreover, he has maintained that the perceived world is not primarily a world of things or objects (understood either as objects of sense, or as objects of a constituting consciousness). This central insight of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy has

¹⁸Ibid., p. 179.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 181.

been developed now to the point that the world and our bodies are both understood as flesh. 'Flesh' is not a concept that serves to distinguish the human body from the world; rather, it is a concept by which Merleau-Ponty expresses the communication, the mutual inherence, of body and world.

Between the world and the body there is a reversible relationship. Merleau-Ponty goes on to say that the metaphor of two "leaves" of the body is not, after all, adequate. He offers others: the sensed body and the sentient body are like obverse and reverse, or like the two segments of a circle. The point is to reject both the picture of the body in the world and the seer in the body; and that of the world and the body "in" the seer, as in a box.²⁰ "Où mettre la limite du corps et du monde, puisque le monde est chair?"²¹ Neither my body nor the world can be said to be in the other.

Mon corps comme chose visible est contenu dans le grand spectacle. Mais mon corps voyant sous-tend ce corps visible, et tous les visibles avec lui . . . il y a deux cercles, ou deux tourbillons, ou deux sphères, concentriques quand je vis naïvement, et, dès que je m'interroge, faiblement décentrés l'un par rapport à l'autre . . .²²

Between my seeing body and my seen body, there is neither total coincidence, nor mere juxtaposition. Nor is there any question of a consciousness for which my visible body

²⁰Ibid., p. 182. ²¹Ibid., p. 182.

²²Ibid., p. 182.

becomes an object. The image of two circles, vortices, or spheres which shift slightly off center when I interrogate myself conveys this subtle relationship. The sentient is not foreign to the sensible; but neither is the sentient just another sensible thing.

Il y a vision, toucher, quand un certain visible, un certain tangible, se retourne sur tout le visible, tout le tangible dont il fait partie, ou quand soudain il s'en trouve entouré, ou quand, entre lui et eux, et par leur commerce, se forme une Visibilité, un Tangible en soi, qui n'appartiennent en propre ni au corps comme fait ni au monde comme fait-- . . .²³

The two form a couple more real than either. The seer, caught up in the visible, sees himself and is looked at by the things. The fundamental narcissism of vision consists in this:

. . . être vu par le dehors, exister en lui, émigrer en lui, être séduit, capté, aliéné par le fantôme, de sorte que voyant et visible se réciproquent et qu'on ne sait plus qui voit et qui est vu.²⁴

In L'oeil et l'esprit,²⁵ Merleau-Ponty takes the activity of painting as a clue to the relationship of seer and world. When he says what painting is not for Descartes, he is at the same telling us what it is for himself: ". . . une opération centrale qui contribue à définir notre accès à l'être . . ."²⁶

²³Ibid., p. 183. ²⁴Ibid., p. 183.

²⁵Maurice Merleau-Ponty, L'oeil et l'esprit (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), (hereafter cited as Merleau-Ponty, L'oeil).

²⁶Ibid., p. 42.

Here, just as in Le visible et l'invisible, we find that vision and movement are intertwined, that the visual and spatial worlds are intertwined.

C'est en prêtant son corps au monde que le peintre change le monde en peinture. Pour comprendre ces transsubstantiations, il faut retrouver le corps opérant et actuel, celui qui n'est pas un morceau d'espace, un faisceau de fonctions, qui est un entrelacs de vision et de mouvement . . .

Tout ce que je vois par principe est à ma portée, au moins à la portée de mon regard, relevé sur la carte du "je peux." Chacune des deux cartes est complète. Le monde visible et celui de mes projets moteurs sont des parties totales du même Etre.²⁷

Here, too, we find that the painter can paint only because he belongs to the visible; he is not a mere spectator.

Puisque les choses et mon corps sont faits de la même étoffe, il faut que sa vision se fasse de quelque manière en elles, ou encore que leur visibilité manifeste se double en lui d'une visibilité secrète . . . Cet équivalent interne, cette formule charnelle de leur présence que les choses suscitent en moi, pourquoi à leur tour ne susciteraient-ils pas un tracé, visible encore, où tout autre regard retrouvera les motifs qui soutiennent son inspection du monde? Alors paraît un visible à la deuxième puissance, essence charnelle ou icône du premier. Ce n'est pas un double affaibli, un trompe-l'oeil, une autre chose.²⁸

And painting is not a mere recording of what is there. It is a peculiar form of interaction with the visible. Merleau-Ponty refers, as he does also in Le visible et l'invisible, to the painter's feeling that the things look

²⁷Ibid., pp. 16-17.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 21-22.

at him, even more than he looks at them.²⁹ He adds:

Ce qu'on appelle inspiration devrait être pris à la lettre: il y a vraiment inspiration et expiration de l'Etre, respiration dans l'Etre, action et passion si peu discernables qu'on ne sait plus qui voit et qui est vu, qui peint et qui est peint.³⁰

In paintings themselves, Merleau-Ponty says, "on pourrait chercher . . . une philosophie figurée de la vision . . ." ³¹ Such a philosophy will fail if, like Descartes' Dioptric, it is

. . . le bréviaire d'une pensée qui ne veut plus hanter le visible et décide de le reconstruire selon le modèle qu'elle s'en donne.³²

Merleau-Ponty finds the mirror, which appears in so many interior scenes, emblematic of vision. Like every technical object,

. . . le miroir a surgi sur le circuit ouvert du corps voyant au corps visible . . . Le miroir apparaît parce que je suis voyant-visible, parce qu'il y a une réflexivité du sensible, il la traduit et la redouble. Le fantôme du miroir traîne dehors ma chair, et du même coup tout l'invisible de mon corps peut investir les autres corps que je vois. Désormais mon corps peut comporter des segments prélevés sur celui des autres comme ma substance passe en eux, l'homme est miroir pour l'homme. Quant au miroir il est l'instrument d'une universelle magie qui change les choses en spectacles, les spectacles en choses, moi en autrui et autrui en moi.³³

²⁹Merleau-Ponty, Visible, p. 183.

³⁰Merleau-Ponty L'oeil, pp. 31-32.

³¹Ibid., p. 32. ³²Ibid., p. 36.

³³Ibid., pp. 33-34.

In the mirror, artists recognise

. . . la métamorphose du voyant et du visible, qui est la définition de notre chair et celle de leur vocation.³⁴

In the "Notes de travail" in Le visible et l'invisible, Merleau-Ponty has a brief note on the mirror:

La chair est phénomène de miroir et le miroir est extension de mon rapport à mon corps. Miroir-réalisation d'un Bild de la chose, et rapport moi-mon ombre-réalisation d'un Wesen (verbal): extraction de l'essence de la chose, de la pellicule de l'Etre ou de son "Apparence"--. . .³⁵

The mirror is a means of access to "la structure métaphysique de notre chair."³⁶ Merleau-Ponty's interest in the mirror is of long standing. In his courses on child psychology, for instance, he discusses the role of the mirror-image in the child's relationship with others and with himself. It is the mirror image which first reveals to the child that he has an "outside" on which others can take a point of view: which first reveals to the child his visibility.³⁷

The reciprocity of seer and seen, in these passages we have been discussing, is intrinsically connected with the reciprocity of self and other. We have already become acquainted with the reciprocity of ego and alter ego in Phénoménologie de la perception and in the Sorbonne

³⁴Ibid., p. 34.

³⁵Merleau-Ponty, Visible, p. 309.

³⁶Merleau-Ponty, L'oeil, p. 33.

³⁷Merleau-Ponty, "Sorbonne," pp. 300-2.

courses, as well as with Merleau-Ponty's "dialectical" conception of perception in La structure du comportement and Phénoménologie de la perception. The texts from Le visible et l'invisible and from L'oeil, however, suggest a refocussing of these notions. It seems as if Merleau-Ponty has come to conceive of the relationship of body and world along the same lines as he has already conceived of interindividual relations. This point will be developed further as we proceed in this discussion of Le visible et l'invisible.

Let us return to that work. Merleau-Ponty is developing the notion of flesh:

C'est cette Visibilité, cette généralité du Sensible en soi, cet anonymat inné de Moi-même, que nous appelions chair toute à l'heure . . .³⁸

The flesh is not matter nor mind nor substance, but an 'element' of Being. In the ancient notion of 'element,' Merleau-Ponty finds an alternative to such notions as 'matter,' 'spirit,' and 'substance,' which he has long since had to reject because of the connotations with which they are weighed down. The term means a "general thing," halfway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, ". . . sorte de principe incarnée qui importe un style d'être partout où il s'en trouve une parcelle."³⁹

³⁸Merleau-Ponty, Visible, p. 183

³⁹Ibid., p. 184.

The element of flesh is what makes the fact be a fact, and at the same time, what makes the fact have meaning. (Here again, we see that for Merleau-Ponty, meaning and facticity are not opposed or alien to each other, but interconnected.) Flesh is an ultimate notion, thinkable in itself. This conception of flesh makes possible the understanding of intercorporeity.

. . . s'il y a un rapport à lui-même du visible qui me traverse et me constitue en voyant, ce cercle que je ne fais pas, qui me fait, cet enroulement du visible sur le visible, peut traverser, animer d'autres corps aussi bien que le mien.⁴⁰

If one of my hands can touch my other hand touching,

. . . pourquoi, touchant la main d'un autre, ne toucherais-je pas en elle le même pouvoir d'épouser les choses que j'ai touché dans la mienne?⁴¹

But is the reversibility between my two hands also found between my hand and that of another? My two hands, my two eyes, are the hands, the eyes, of one same body; that is why, though each has its own tactile or visual experience, they can touch or see the same things. This synergic body is not an object, given to one sole consciousness, and my "consciousness" is not the synthetic unity of my "consciousnesses of"; my "consciousness" ". . . est soutenue, sous-tendue, par l'unité pré-reflexive et pré-objective de mon corps."⁴² Each vision, each touching, is bound to every other; the little

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 185.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 185.

⁴²Ibid., p. 186.

private world of each is surrounded by the others;

. . . et tous ensemble sont un Sentant en général devant un Sensible en général. Or, cette généralité qui fait l'unité de mon corps, pourquoi ne l'ouvrirait-elle pas aux autres corps?⁴²

In the handshake, as when I touch my own hand, I feel myself both touched and touching. Synergy among different organisms is possible if sensibility is understood

. . . comme retour sur soi du visible, adhérence charnelle du sentant au senti et du senti au sentant. Car recouvrement et fission, identité et différence, elle fait naître un rayon de lumière naturelle qui éclaire toute chair et non pas seulement la mienne.⁴⁴

The reversibility of the visible and of the tangible opens to us an intercorporeal being. Merleau-Ponty says, summing up what has been established so far:

Il y a un cercle du touché et du touchant, le touché saisit le touchant; il y a un cercle du visible et du voyant, le voyant n'est pas sans existence visible; il y a même inscription du touchant au visible, du voyant au tangible, et réciproquement, enfin il y a propagation de ces échanges à tous les corps de même type et de même style que je vois et touche,--et cela par la fondamentale fission ou ségrégation du sentant et du sensible qui, latéralement, fait communiquer les organes de mon corps et fonde la transitivité d'un corps à l'autre.⁴⁵

From the way Merleau-Ponty puts it here, it seems that neither intracorporeal communication--the reflexivity of my own body with itself--nor transitivity from one body to another can be considered primary. Each implicates the other, in a reciprocal relationship, founded in the

⁴³Ibid., p. 187.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 187.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 188.

"fission ou ségrégation du sentant et du sensible."

The fission of the sentient and the sensible which we discover when we examine vision or touch is only a kind of shadow or reflection of what we find when we see other seers:

Dès que nous voyons d'autres voyants, nous n'avons plus seulement devant nous le regard sans prunelle, la glace sans tain des choses, ce faible reflet, ce fantôme de nous-mêmes, qu'elles évoquent en désignant une place parmi elles d'où nous les voyons: désormais, par d'autres yeux nous sommes à nous mêmes pleinement visibles; cette lacune où se trouvent nos yeux, notre dos, elle est comblée, comblée par du visible encore, mais dont nous ne sommes pas titulaires; . . . Pour la première fois, le voyant que je suis m'est vraiment visible . . .⁴⁶

The other body is a seeing-visible, a touching-tangible, a sentient-sensible. Because the visible is the surface of an inexhaustible depth, it is open to other visions than my own.⁴⁷ When I see the other seer, I see that I am seen; I see my own visibility answered, my vision made visible, by a vision like my own. It is on the basis of my own seeing that I recognise the other's seeing:

. . . certes, . . . pour faire entrer en compte une vision qui n'est pas la nôtre, c'est inévitablement, c'est toujours à l'unique trésor de notre vision que nous puisons, et l'expérience donc ne peut rien nous enseigner qui ne soit esquissé en elle.⁴⁸

My own seeing makes the other's seeing visible to me; at the same time, it is the other's seeing that truly answers my own, enlarges the visible for me, and teaches

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 188-89.

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 188-89.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 188.

me fully the part of the body in its exchange with the world.

Pour la première fois aussi, mes mouvements ne vont plus vers les choses à voir, à toucher, ou vers mon corps, en train de les voir et de les toucher, mais ils s'adressent au corps en général et pour lui-même (que ce soit le mien ou celui d'autrui), parce que, pour la première fois, par l'autre corps, je vois que, dans son accouplement avec la chair du monde, le corps apporte plus qu'il ne reçoit, ajoutant au monde que je vois le trésor nécessaire de ce qu'il voit, lui.⁴⁹

This passage is somewhat cryptic. No doubt, the unfinished state of the manuscript is largely responsible for that. It is important that we decipher what Merleau-Ponty is saying here.

Although my vision of things and my own visibility correspond, I do not truly see what I am until I see the other seer. I see myself in the other.⁵⁰ But, more than this, the whole world becomes sensible in another way, not possible without the other seer. Merleau-Ponty has referred to the ". . . illusion solipsiste qui est de croire que tout dépassement est dépassement par soi."⁵¹ If that is an illusion, then is there a dépassement, a surpassing, which is accomplished by or through another? It seems that my own sole vision is surpassed by the other's vision, even though I can only take account of his vision by drawing upon my own. When I see/touch things

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 189.

⁵⁰Merleau-Ponty L'oeil, p. 34.

⁵¹Merleau-Ponty, Visible, p. 189.

and discover my own visibility/tangibility, my movements go to my body only as it sees and touches the things. The implication is that the body has more to offer than what it exchanges with the sensible things. It can give all it has only in the exchange with another body; and its exchange with the other body enters the circuit of its exchange with the world, so that its relations with things--and with itself--are also affected. When the other body is there, I reach out to the body in general, be it mine or the other's.

It is necessary to untangle a bit the passage

. . . parce que, pour la première fois, par l'autre corps, je vois que, dans son accouplement avec la chair du monde, le corps apporte plus qu'il ne reçoit, ajoutant au monde que je vois le trésor nécessaire de ce qu'il voit, lui.⁵²

What body "apporte plus qu'il ne reçoit"? My body? The other's body? The body in general? What is the more which it gives? Whence does it receive what it receives? From the world? From the other body? And does 'monde' here refer to the world in which the other body already is found, or to a "solipsist" world in which I encounter only things?

Merleau-Ponty seems to be speaking of the other's body: by the other's body, I see that the other's body gives more than it receives, by adding what it sees to the world that I see. He has spoken of "l'unique trésor de

⁵²Ibid., p. 189.

notre vision;"⁵³ now he speaks of "le trésor nécessaire de ce qu'il voit, lui." Why 'nécessaire'? Necessary for what? For the fullness of my vision and of my world. When I see the other seer, what he sees--his visible--is added to my visible, to my world. The visible which belongs to my vision, and to which I belong, is enriched by the visible that belongs to the other vision; when I see the other seer, his visible--since I see his seeing--becomes my visible as well. Not only things, but my body, including those parts of it I cannot see, become fully visible. The other body gives more than it receives because its interchange with the visible things is not (so to speak) a purely private exchange, within a closed circuit.⁵⁴ The other body gives to my visibles a dimension which they do not otherwise have, the dimension of their visibility (realised, and not merely virtual) for another vision than my own.

When the other seer appears, then, my movements address themselves not only to my own body or to the visible/tangible, but primarily to body in general, as such, be it mine or that of the other. The encounter with the other body, and with my own body reflected by the other body, opens me to the generality of body and thus to the flesh, which is an element of Being. Inter-corporeal reflexivity has an ontological significance.

⁵³Ibid., p. 188.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 322; see Appendix.

The suggestion is that intercorporeity is not only founded in, but also founds, the visible. The primary visible/tangible is the other seer, the other body, the other sentient-sensible. Other visibles do not answer to my vision only, nor to the other's vision only; I and the other each give to the visibles, and to the other seer, the gift of our vision of them.

Much earlier, Merleau-Ponty had conceived this idea. In "Le primat de la perception," he says:

De même que mon corps, comme système de mes prises sur le monde, fonde l'unité des objets que je perçois, de même le corps d'autrui, en tant qu'il est porteur des conduites symboliques et de la conduite du vrai, s'arrache à la condition de l'un de mes phénomènes, me propose la tâche d'une communication vraie, et confère à mes objets la dimension nouvelle de l'être intersubjectif ou de l'objectivité.⁵⁵

Here already we find the idea that the body of the other does not only appear in my world, but cooperates with my body in its interaction with the world. By its behaviors, the other living body does not only show itself to be different in kind from the things that surround me, it radically affects my relationship with them. My "objects" are not fully objective, not fully real, for me until they are objects for another subject; that is, for intersubjectivity. The body of the Other has in some sense a primary status with regard to things.

⁵⁵Merleau-Ponty, "Primat," p. 125.

In the "Notes de travail" in Le visible et l'invisible there are a few passages that give more light on this point. We find that the perception of others is not in any simple sense prior to my conception of the world. The world and others are perceived conjointly. That is the import of a note in which Merleau-Ponty comments on Husserl's inquiry as to how the world can have a Seinssinn other than that of my intentional object. In this inquiry is introduced the Fremderfahrung Analyse, which is not temporal genesis;

. . . la transcendance objective n'est pas postérieure à la position d'autrui: le monde est déjà là, dans sa transcendance objective, avant cette analyse, et c'est son sens même qu'on va expliciter comme sens . . . Donc l'introduction d'autrui n'est pas ce qui produit "la transcendance objective": autrui en est un des index, un moment, mais c'est dans le monde même que se trouvera la possibilité d'autrui.

Les "autres purs" (qui ne sont pas encore des "hommes") introduisent déjà une Nature dont je fais partie.⁵⁶

Merleau-Ponty is commenting on Husserl; but it seems clear that he also agrees with the latter's point.

Merleau-Ponty reiterates that things do not presuppose man; yet they cannot be understood except through the interrogation of perception.

⁵⁶Merleau-Ponty, Visible, p. 226.

Dire que les choses sont des structures, des membrures, les étoiles de notre vie: non pas devant nous, étalées comme les spectacles perspectifs, mais gravitant autour de nous.

Ces choses-là ne présupposent pas l'homme, qui est fait de leur chair. Mais leur être éminent cependant ne peut être compris que par qui entre dans la perception, et se tient avec elle à leur contact-distinct-- . . .⁵⁷

In the context of a discussion of soul and body, we find this note concerning intercorporeity and the intermonde:

La sensibilité des autres c'est "l'autre côté" de leur corps esthésiologique. Et cet autre côté, nichturpräsentierbar, je peux en avoir le soupçon par l'articulation du corps d'autrui sur mon sensible, articulation qui ne me vide pas, qui n'est pas une hémorragie de ma "conscience," mais qui au contraire me redouble d'un alter ego. Autrui naît dans le corps (d'autrui) par porte à faux de ce corps, son investissement dans un Verhalten, sa transformation intérieure dont je suis témoin. L'accouplement des corps, c'est-à-dire l'ajustement de leurs intentions à une seule Erfüllung, à un seul mur où ils se heurtent de deux côtés, est latent dans la considération d'un seul monde sensible, participable par tous, qui est donné à chacun.⁵⁸

Why does Merleau-Ponty speak of the "accouplement des corps" as the adjusting of their intentions to one single Erfüllung, which implies unity, and then--in an apparently contradictory metaphor--to one single wall against which they hurl themselves from opposite sides, which implies separation? The visible which is visible both for me and for the other does, in fact, both join and separate us. My body and the other's body both join and separate us. Without the one single Erfüllung, I and the Alter Ego would not communicate; but if there were pure coincidence

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 273.

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 286-87.

between myself and the Alter Ego, we would not be Other to each other; there would be only one Ego.

This remark on the chiasm is also relevant to our questions:

Le chiasme au lieu du Pour Autrui: cela veut dire qu'il n'y a pas seulement rivalité moi-autrui, mais co-fonctionnement. Nous fonctionnons comme un corps unique

Le chiasme n'est pas seulement échange moi autrui (les messages qu'il reçoit, c'est à moi qu'ils parviennent; les messages que je reçois, c'est à lui qu'ils parviennent) c'est aussi échange de moi et du monde, du corps phénoménal et du corps "objectif," du percevant et du perçu: ce qui commence comme chose finit comme conscience de la chose, ce qui commence comme "état de conscience" finit comme chose.⁵⁹

The last note quoted indicates, in the way it is phrased, that Merleau-Ponty was thinking of the exchange between myself and the other as the prime instance of the chiasm. He says as much in another note:

On se sent regardé . . . parce que sentir son corps c'est aussi sentir son aspect pour autrui. Il faudrait ici chercher en quel sens la sensorialité d'autrui est impliquée dans la mienne: sentir mes yeux c'est sentir qu'ils sont menacés d'être vus-- Mais la corrélation n'est pas toujours ainsi du voyant au vu, ou de parler à entendre: mes mains, mon visage aussi sont du visible. Le cas de la réciprocité (voyant vu), (touchant touché dans le serrement de mains) est cas majeur et parfait, où il y a quasi réflexion (Einfühlung), Ineinander, le cas général est ajustement d'un visible pour moi à un tangible pour moi et de ce visible pour moi à un visible pour autrui-- . . .⁶⁰

These passages indicate the special importance which the relation with the other takes on in Merleau-Ponty's later thought. Returning to "L'entrelacs--le chiasme," we

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 268.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 299.

shall explore the significance of his conception of sexuality in the development of this trend.

Continuing his description of the meeting of seer with seer, Merleau-Ponty says:

Pour la première fois, le corps ne s'accouple plus au monde, il enlace un autre corps, s'y appliquant soigneusement de toute son étendue, dessinant inlassablement de ses mains l'étrange statue qui donne à son tour tout ce qu'elle reçoit, perdu hors du monde et des buts, fasciné par l'unique occupation de flotter dans l'Etre avec une autre vie, de se faire le dehors de son dedans et le dedans de son dehors. Et dès lors, mouvement, toucher, vision, s'appliquant à l'autre et à eux-mêmes, remontent vers leur source et dans le travail patient et silencieux du désir, commence le paradoxe de l'expression.⁶¹

Again, we are faced with problems in interpreting these important, but far from transparent, lines.

The repetition of the phrase 'pour la première fois,' which occurs here for the fourth time within a single page, stresses the special and unique character of the body-body interchange. The other's body is described as ". . . l'étrange statue qui donne à son tour tout ce qu'il reçoit . . ."⁶² The exchange between body and body is evenhanded: each gives what it receives and receives again what it gives. This is clear enough. But why does Merleau-Ponty say that "le corps ne s'accouple plus au monde"? Why does he speak of the body as "perdu hors du monde et des buts"? What does he mean by

⁶¹Ibid., p. 189. ⁶²Ibid., p. 189.

. . . l'unique occupation de flotter dans l'Etre avec une autre vie, de se faire le dehors de son dedans et le dedans de son dehors?⁶³

We can gain some clarification, again, by referring to

"L'oeil et l'esprit." Speaking of paintings, he says there:

Les animaux peints sur le paroi de Lascaux n'y sont pas comme y est la fente ou la boursofflure du calcaire. Ils ne sont pas davantage ailleurs. Un peu en avant, un peu en arrière, soutenus par sa masse dont ils se servent adroitement, ils rayonnent autour d'elle sans jamais rompre leur insaisissable amarre. Je serais bien en peine de dire où est le tableau que je regarde.⁶⁴

The painting is not here as is the surface on which it is painted; but neither is it elsewhere. In Le visible et l'invisible, he says the same thing about the body:

Ce que nous appelons chair, cette masse intérieurement travaillée, n'a de nom dans aucune philosophie. Milieu formateur de l'objet et du sujet, ce n'est pas l'atome d'être, l'en soi dur qui réside en un lieu et en un moment uniques: on peut bien dire de mon corps qu'il n'est pas ailleurs, mais on ne peut pas dire qu'il soit ici ou maintenant, au sens des objets . . .⁶⁵

The body's presence is not that of a thing, an object; the mode of presence of a painting instructs us about the mode of presence of the body. The drawing, the painting, the image, and the body--mine and the other's--do not belong to the in-itself.

⁶³Ibid., p. 189.

⁶⁴Merleau-Ponty, L'oeil, pp. 22-23.

⁶⁵Merleau-Ponty, Visible, p. 193.

Le mot d'image est mal famé parce qu'on a cru étourdimement qu'un dessin était un décalque, une copie, une seconde chose, et l'image mentale un dessin de ce genre dans notre bric-à-brac privé. Mais si en effet elle n'est rien de pareil, le dessin et le tableau n'appartiennent pas plus qu'elle à l'en soi. Ils sont le dedans du dehors et le dehors du dedans, que rend possible la duplicité du sentir, et sans lesquels on ne comprendra jamais la quasi-présence et la visibilité imminente qui font tout le problème de l'imaginaire.⁶⁶

In saying that my body makes itself the outside of the other body's inside and the inside of its outside, Merleau-Ponty is referring to the double relationship of the sentient-sensible, not merely with the sensible, or with itself in the circuit that passes through the sensible, but with the other sentient-sensible and with itself through the other carnal body. In this relationship, my outside has an inside which is the other's vision, the other's touch. The other's outside, reciprocally, has an inside which is my vision, my touch. The painting is present in the same way; its metaphysical structure is analogous to that of our flesh.⁶⁷ A consideration of painting helps us to see that the notions of an interiority which is mine only and of an Other which is wholly exterior are utterly inadequate.⁶⁸

Merleau-Ponty has established in the chapter on sexuality of Phénoménologie de la perception that the body possesses a power of expression and communication which founds the expression and communication of which speech is

⁶⁶Merleau-Ponty, L'oeil, p. 23. ⁶⁷Ibid., p. 33.

⁶⁸Merleau-Ponty, Visible, pp. 262-63; see Appendix.

the vehicle. In Le visible et l'invisible, again, we find that intercorporeality is the matrix of thought and speech; intercorporeal communication is the beginning of expression.

Et dès lors, mouvement, toucher, vision, s'appliquant à l'autre et à eux-mêmes, remontent vers leurs source et, dans le travail patient et silencieux du désir, commence le paradoxe de l'expression.⁶⁹

A very remarkable feature of the lines just quoted and of the entire passage is the highly metaphoric language in which it is written--and, in particular, the erotic character of the language--which ceases to be altogether metaphoric when Merleau-Ponty speaks of "le travail patient et silencieux du désir." He is not simply indulging in poetic imagery. If we recall the Sorbonne courses, we will remember that he has there made affectivity the foundation of the relation with others, and given sexuality a special status as the privileged dimension in which affectivity and corporeality find (or, at least, may find) integration. Before then, in Phénoménologie de la perception and even as early as La structure du comportement, he had stated that one body knows another in desire.

Les actes de pensée ne seraient pas seuls à avoir une signification, à contenir en eux la prescience de ce qu'ils cherchent; il y aurait une sorte de reconnaissance aveugle de l'objet désiré par le désir et du bien par la volonté.⁷⁰

In the passage from Le visible et l'invisible that is in question now, the erotic language is consistent with

⁶⁹Merleau-Ponty, Visible, p. 189.

⁷⁰Merleau-Ponty, Structure, p. 187.

Merleau-Ponty's tendency to move sexuality to a central position. This is exemplified also in a note of November 1959 on the self-other problem:

Le rapport moi-autrui à concevoir (comme le rapport inter-sexuel, avec ses substitutions indéfinies . . .) comme rôles complémentaires dont aucun ne peut être tenu sans que l'autre le soit aussi: masculinité implique féminité etc. Polymorphisme fondamental qui fait que je n'ai pas à constituer l'autre devant l'Ego: il est déjà là, et l'Ego est conquis sur lui . . .⁷¹

The sexual relationship, which Merleau-Ponty considers fundamental, is not to be conceived primarily as a one-to-one relationship. In discussing the child's initiation into the social world through the family, he has pointed out that the infant is born into a network of existing relations: between the two parents, between the parents and their other children, among the older brothers and sisters. Moreover, the parents' relations with other persons, who are perhaps not immediately present in the child's environment, also affect the parent-child relationship. The mother's relationship with her own mother is but one example.⁷²

In a lengthy footnote in Le visible et l'invisible,⁷³ he states explicitly that the one-to-one relationship of self and other is founded in the relationship with others, and that this structure is found in infancy, in child-parent

⁷¹Merleau-Ponty, Visible, p. 274.

⁷²Merleau-Ponty, "Sorbonne," p. 265.

⁷³Merleau-Ponty, Visible, p. 113.

relationships. The context is a discussion of Sartre's treatment of the problem of the Other. Philosophers of the negative, Merleau-Ponty says in the footnote, always pose the problem as that of the Other. The Other is not an other, but the not-me in general. But perhaps the problem of the Other is a special case of the problem of others:

Peut-être même faudrait-il renverser l'ordre coutumier des philosophies du négatif et dire que le problème de l'autre est un cas particulier du problème des autres, la relation avec quelqu'un toujours médiatisée par la relation avec des tiers, que ceux-ci ont entre eux des relations qui commandent celles de l'un et celles de l'autre, et cela, si loin que l'on remonte vers les débuts de la vie, puisque la situation oedipienne est encore triangulaire.⁷⁴

This is not a matter of psychology only--of the content of the relations with others--but of philosophy, that is, of its form and essence:

. . . si l'accès à autrui est entrée dans une constellation des autres . . . , il est difficile de soutenir que l'autre soit, sans plus, la négation absolue de moi-même, car de négation absolue, il n'y en a qu'une, elle absorbe en elle-même toute négation rivale.⁷⁵

If there are others, rather than one unique Other, then another does not contest my life, but rather, is ". . . la variante préférée d'une vie qui n'a jamais été seulement la mienne."⁷⁶ The sense of the problem of others is changed. It becomes the problem of

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 113. ⁷⁵Ibid., p. 113.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 114.

. . . l'initiation à une symbolique et une typique des autres dont l'être pour soi et l'être pour autrui sont des variantes réflexives, et non les formes essentielles.⁷⁷

In this footnote we see clearly the place of sexuality at the base of interpersonal and social relationships, and the philosophical import of the investigation of sexuality.

In the succeeding paragraphs of "L'entrelacs--le chiasme," Merleau-Ponty moves to consider the reflexivity of voice and hearing, as the point of insertion of speaking and thinking. We shall not follow this discussion, since our purpose is not to attempt an exegesis of the whole of Le visible et l'invisible, but simply to indicate the contribution of Merleau-Ponty's developing conception of sexuality to his philosophy of the flesh.

We can, perhaps, better appreciate what is special in Merleau-Ponty's account of the Other's body if we compare it with Husserl's account. In the Cartesian Meditations,⁷⁸ Husserl says that the other ego is appresented in an associative pairing with my ego. This associative pairing of ego and alter ego is founded upon a transferability between my body and the other body

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 114.

⁷⁸ Edmund Husserl, Cartesianische Meditationen (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff), 51-54, pp. 141-49, (hereafter cited as Husserl, Cartesianische Meditationen).

present to me in my field of perception. This is a spatial-perceptual transferability or exchangeability. I am here, and the other is there. However, I am able to move about, and change any there into a here. If I went where the other is, that there would become my here, and conversely. Since I have this possibility, I apperceive the there where the other is as the here of an ego like mine. I apperceive the other as having the spatial modes of appearance that I should have if I were there.

Husserl's description of the apperception of the other has none of the erotic tonality of Merleau-Ponty's description. Husserl, moreover, explicitly mentions emotions as belonging to the "higher psychic sphere."⁷⁹ By contrast, the fundamentally affective character of the relation with the Other has been established by Merleau-Ponty in Phénoménologie de la perception and in the Sorbonne courses. The perception of the Other is affective perception; and the perception of the Other is the matrix and model of all perception. In Le visible et l'invisible, although Merleau-Ponty describes first the seeing and touching of the world and then that of the other body, it is plain that the coupling of body with body is the type of the coupling of body with world.

The body, in Le visible et l'invisible, is understood in terms of the new concept of flesh. It is

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 149.

true that there is a precedent for Merleau-Ponty's conception of la chair in Husserl's distinction (already available in common German usage) between Körper and Leib, the material thing and the living body. But "la chair" in the sense of 'my body' is not merely a living body, it is primarily an affective, one could even say an eroticised, body;⁸⁰ and my flesh is not flesh in an alien world of noncarnal things. If the world is visible and tangible to me, if I am the seeing-visible and the touching-tangible, then the world must also be flesh. The flesh is the element of reversibility between sentient and sensible, between inside and outside--the interchange I make with myself, with things, and with the other.

Le visible et l'invisible represents the making explicit of a tendency which was present in Merleau-Ponty's thought from the beginning, and which sets him apart from most philosophers. Ordinarily, one finds that the problem of the Other is introduced as a special case of the problem of the world or the object. The philosopher describes how the world is given to the subject, and then introduces the Other as an additional--often, to be sure, a disturbing--element in the world. The Other may be a special case, but his presence is explained on the basis and in terms of the presence of other things. Their modes of presence serve as the model according to which the

⁸⁰This point will be discussed shortly.

presence of the Other is explained. Or not explained; for the other person, who is not an object like other objects, becomes highly problematical when described in the same terms in which objects are described. Sartre provides an example; for, although he insists that the Other is not a thing, and is not known, his discussion remains within the framework established by his treatment of the solitary for-itself in the world. We have seen in a previous chapter of this study⁸¹ that Sartre does not overcome solipsism, if our criterion for the surpassing of solipsism is that another subject can be present with me in my world.

In Le visible et l'invisible, Merleau-Ponty definitively reverses this approach to the problem of the Other. Instead of the presence of the world being the model on which the presence of the Other is conceived and explained, the relation with the Other becomes the model or archetype on which the presence of the world to me and my presence to the world is to be understood. It is, after all, from the mutual presence of persons that the metaphor of flesh is taken.

Insight into the primitive and original character of the perception of others appears early in Merleau-Ponty's work. In La structure du comportement, the perception of others is his most telling counterexample to

⁸¹Chapter III above, pp. 112-57.

the theories that interpret perception abstractly, whether in terms of sensations or of representations.

La perception est un moment de la dialectique vivante d'un sujet concret, participe sa structure totale, et, corrélativement, elle a pour objet primitif, non pas le "solide inorganisé" mais les actions d'autres sujets humains . . . La perception commençante a le double caractère de viser des intentions humaines plutôt que des objets de nature ou que les qualités pures (chaud, froid, blanc, noir) dont ils sont porteurs,--et de les saisir comme des réalités éprouvées plutôt que comme des objets vraies.⁸²

The child's perception is a particularly revealing instance. It attaches itself to faces and gestures first of all.⁸³ The child enjoys linguistic consciousness and consciousness of others before being conscious of auditory or visual phenomena as such.⁸⁴ Indeed, inchoate perception is not a distinterested cognitive speculation; the study of it brings psychology into rapport with psychoanalysis.

Comme la perception commençante est, beaucoup plus qu'une opération cognitive et désintéressée, un contact émotionnel de l'enfant avec les centres d'intérêt de son milieu, c'est sur l'exemple du freudisme que nous voudrions préciser les rapports de la dialectique proprement humaine avec la dialectique vitale.⁸⁵

Here is adumbrated the notion of perception that we see developing through Merleau-Ponty's subsequent work. In working out the implications of a notion of perception as rooted in affectivity, he eventually goes far beyond the

⁸²Merleau-Ponty, Structure, p. 180.

⁸³Ibid., p. 180. ⁸⁴Ibid., p. 186.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 191.

position of La structure du comportement; but it is nonetheless recognisable as the starting-point of his entire path. What is peculiar to Le visible et l'invisible is that something which to a great extent has been implicitly or obliquely expressed becomes explicit. A new means of expression has been found, in which this insight can come to the foreground.

Merleau-Ponty's previous discussions of the relation with the Other, and especially his discussions of sexuality, have led in this direction. In the chapter "Le corps comme être sexué" from Phénoménologie de la perception, we see that bodies exercise a fundamental power of communication which expresses the intentionality of existence and founds speech and the social world. In "Autrui et le monde humain," the notion is developed of a fundamental communication based on the transference of intentions between my body and that of the Other. I need no argument from analogy to recognise the Other; it is because I am able to take up in my body the intentions of the Other, embodied in his gestures, and because I see my intentions taken up in his body, that I recognise him as an alter ego.

This transference of intentions, as it is described in Phénoménologie de la perception, is expanded in the Sorbonne courses into a concept of identification. Identification is a very important phenomenon, because it lies at the base of all relations with others. It has, as

we have seen, a bodily basis. It plays its central role in the relations of child to child (e.g., in sibling jealousy); child to adult (e.g., the Oedipus complex); adult to child (parental ambivalence); adult to adult (relationships between spouses). Relations with others have a fundamentally affective character. Affectivity is not superadded to a perceptual apprehension of the Other; rather, perception of the Other is essentially an affective perception. Identification is a basic phenomenon of affectivity. We have seen that cognition and action are borne upon an "intentional arc"; that cognition is subtended by a function intimately linked with affectivity. In Le visible et l'invisible, we read this: "Comme la chose, comme autrui, le vrai luit à travers une expérience émotionnelle et presque charnelle . . ."⁸⁶ And, as we have seen, sexuality has a privileged place in Merleau-Ponty's account of affectivity; it is in sexuality that affective life and corporeal life have the possibility of being most fully integrated. For this reason, sexuality is a privileged expression of existence. The significance of all this for the understanding of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is that the sexual relationship takes on a heuristic importance in his thought. It gradually becomes the paradigm of every relationship, be it with objects, with others, with truth.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 29.

This movement of sexuality into a key position indicates the increasingly close relationship of Merleau-Ponty's thought with psychoanalysis, to which the "Préface" to Hesnard's L'oeuvre de Freud et son importance pour le monde moderne attests.⁸⁷ The question of phenomenology and psychoanalysis could well become the subject of extensive and detailed study. We shall raise only a few points that are directly connected with the theme of the present study.

Merleau-Ponty indicates, in the "Préface" to Hesnard, an evernarrowing convergence between phenomenology--his own as it develops, and Husserl's as it is more deeply understood--and psychoanalysis, at least as it is interpreted by some of its practitioners, and by some readers of Freud. It is hard to imagine a phenomenology which had continued to be ". . . la nouvelle philosophie de la conscience qu'elle croyait être d'abord,"⁸⁸ approaching ever closer to psychoanalysis, even if the latter should wholly adopt the "déviation idéaliste" of which Merleau-Ponty speaks with disapproval.⁸⁹

⁸⁷Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Préface" to A. Hesnard, L'oeuvre de Freud et son importance pour le monde moderne (Paris: Payot, 1960), pp. 1-5, (hereafter cited as Merleau-Ponty, "Préface").

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 7. ⁸⁹Ibid., p. 9.

But, as he tells us,

A mesure que Husserl passe à l'exécution de son programme, il amène au jour des fragments d'être qui déconcertent sa problématique: ni le corps qui est "sujet-objet," ni le passage du temps intérieur, qui n'est pas un système d'actes de conscience, ni autrui, qui naît par prélèvement sur moi ou par expansion de moi, comme Eve naquit d'un côté d'Adam, ni l'histoire, qui est ma vie en autrui et la vie d'autrui en moi, qui est par principe comme autrui un "objet" inexact, ne se laissent ramener sous la corrélation de la conscience et de ses objets, de la noèse et de la noème.⁹⁰

A phenomenology faced with these discoveries has to descend into its own subterranean regions, and thus converges more than ever with Freudian research.⁹¹ The relationship between them is not of the explicit to the implicit, the clear to the obscure.

L'accord de la phénoménologie et de la psychanalyse ne doit pas être compris comme si "phénomène" disait en clair ce que la psychanalyse avait dit confusément. C'est au contraire par ce qu'elle sous-entend ou dévoile à sa limite,--par son contenu latent ou son inconscient--que la phénoménologie est en consonance avec la psychanalyse . . . elles se dirigent toutes deux vers la même latence.⁹²

Would the outcome of this convergence, this rapprochement, be the eventual identification of phenomenology with psychoanalysis? There are no grounds in Merleau-Ponty's writings for thinking so; if they move toward the same latency, they do so along different paths, from different starting points, and have different resources for uncovering it. Indeed, phenomenology by itself could not have

⁹⁰Ibid., pp. 7-8. ⁹¹Ibid., p. 8.

⁹²Ibid., p. 9.

discovered what psychoanalysis reveals.

C'est la psychanalyse qui a dévoilé l'infrastructure oedipienne de la science, de la technique, de l'entendement "occidental." C'est elle qui nous a rendu nos mythes.⁹³

Paul Ricoeur, in his work on Freud, discusses the relationship between phenomenology and psychoanalysis, and cites with approval Merleau-Ponty's "Préface" to Hesnard's book.⁹⁴

Further insight into Merleau-Ponty's view of psychoanalysis is offered by a note on the philosophy of Freudianism.⁹⁵ The note points out that a causal interpretation of Freud--"il est sculpteur parce qu'il est anal . . ."--is not illuminating. Rather, an ontological interpretation is required.

Il s'agit de comprendre que le rapport avec les fèces est chez l'enfant une ontologie concrète. Faire non une psychanalyse existentielle, mais une psychanalyse ontologique.⁹⁶

The notion of overdetermination means that every being can be stressed as an emblem of Being, and must be read as such. Freud shows us that a character is fixed

. . . par investissement dans un Etant de l'ouverture à l'Etre,--qui, désormais, se fait à travers cet Etant.⁹⁷

⁹³Ibid., p. 8.

⁹⁴Paul Ricoeur, De l'interprétation: essai sur Freud (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1965).

⁹⁵Merleau-Ponty, Visible, pp. 323-24.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 323. ⁹⁷Ibid., p. 323.

The philosophy of Freud is a philosophy of the flesh, not of the body. The psychoanalytic and psychological concepts need to be thought in terms of the flesh: in terms, that is, of differentiations of a single, massive adherence to Being. Rather than a hierarchy of orders or levels, based on the distinction between individual and essence, there is, Merleau-Ponty says,

. . . dimensionnalité de tout fait et facticité de toute dimension--Cela en vertu de la "différence ontologique"--. . .⁹⁸

The note suggests that Freud's thought, in concerning itself with certain facts, indicates or opens up a dimension of being, and thus calls for an ontology.

The influence of psychoanalysis on the development of Merleau-Ponty's thought is plainly affirmed by André Green:⁹⁹

Nous posons l'hypothèse que la pensée psychanalytique a joué un rôle déterminant dans le dernier virage de Merleau-Ponty.¹⁰⁰

We may ask whether there is really a virage, a turn, in Merleau-Ponty's late work. The continuities which this study has traced from La structure du comportement and Phénoménologie de la perception to the Sorbonne courses, and from these to Le visible et l'invisible, might better

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 324.

⁹⁹André Green, "Du comportement à la chair: itinéraire de Merleau-Ponty," Critique 20 (1964); pp. 1017-1046, (hereafter cited as Green, "Du comportement à la chair").

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 1032.

justify the use of the terms 'development' or 'unfolding.' But Green's attribution of a determining role to psycho-analytic thought is clearly correct. His article considers the character of this "rôle déterminant" and the points of convergence and divergence between Merleau-Ponty and Freud. Green points out, quite aptly, that

Merleau-Ponty emploie les mêmes termes lorsqu'il s'agit de parler du monde de la chair et du monde freudien.¹⁰¹

In this illuminating and interesting article, there is a point which I think merits particular scrutiny, in the light of the conclusions that have so far been drawn in this study. It has to do with the libidinal body. One of the significant resemblances which Green finds between Freud and Merleau-Ponty lies in a feature of their method of thought: "la contestation de l'unité totalisante."¹⁰¹ In Merleau-Ponty, the world of the flesh puts totality in question.

Parce que ce monde se sépare d'une certaine façon du reste (avec lequel il est en rapport de jonction-disjonction), et aussi parce que ce monde n'est manifestement pas homogène; la vision, le toucher sont deux modes d'être qui renvoient certes l'un à l'autre et à une communauté d'expériences mais ils restent hétérogènes entre eux.¹⁰²

(In saying that the world of the flesh "se sépare . . . du reste," Green poses a dichotomy between the world of the flesh and the non-carnal world which is not altogether appropriate; Merleau-Ponty's definitive step in Le visible

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 1033.

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 1037.

et l'invisible is the explicit extension of the notion of flesh to the whole world.)

Freud, in similar fashion, maintains constantly the distinctness of the various drives:

Freud ici se rappelle encore à notre souvenir lorsqu'il affirme à de nombreuses reprises que les pulsions sont toujours d'abord partielles, scopiques, sado-masochiques, etc., distinctes les unes des autres.¹⁰³

In defining the difference between the two thinkers, Green says something which is very surprising:

Ici se dresse, il faut bien l'avouer, toute la différence entre Merleau-Ponty et Freud. Tandis que pour Merleau-Ponty le corps est aussi un corps libidinal, un corps qui désire, pour Freud le corps est avant tout corps libidinal. La séparation d'une sphère à part dans le moi est liée à l'effet sur la psyché du désir dont l'expérience se vit à partir des zones érogènes et dont les types d'activité se constituent comme autres dans l'organisation du vécu et le statut du sujet. Le monde sexuel est fondu dans l'ensemble du monde corporel chez Merleau-Ponty. La métaphore de l'accouplement husserlien--qui est de pure forme--continue de survivre chez Merleau-Ponty. Le rapport sexuel est pour lui une des modalités de cette "Kopulation où deux intentions ont une seule Erfüllung."¹⁰⁴

On the basis of our examinations of sexuality in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, the question arises whether the opposition between a characterisation of the body as "avant tout libidinal" and as "aussi libidinal" is appropriate. In Phénoménologie de la perception and in the Sorbonne courses, Merleau-Ponty is confronted with the problem that sexuality is linked to a particular ensemble of bodily organs, and defines a particular sphere of life;

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 1037.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., pp. 1037-1038.

and that, at the same time, it pervades the whole of life, encroaching on other spheres, so that it is impossible to draw clear boundaries between the sexual and the non-sexual. He addresses this problem with the aid of the notions of 'dimension,' 'sign,' and 'expression'; but the relation of the sexual to the other dimensions of existence remains somewhat mysterious. Sexuality is a distinguishable force, yet it is interwoven with the other dimensions of our life: with freedom, for example, as in the discussion of Leonardo da Vinci's childhood in relation to his art, in "Le doute de Cézanne."¹⁰⁵ In the Sorbonne courses, sexuality is comprehended as the crystallisation of affectivity within the most accessible corporeal resources, as the foundation of interindividual and social life ("la sexualité contrefort ou nervure des relations humaines");¹⁰⁶ in Le visible et l'invisible, it serves as the model for, and the heuristic clue to the full development of, the notions of flesh and of chiasm. The importance of the sexual relation in Merleau-Ponty's thought is not sufficiently recognised in calling it ". . . une des modalités de cette "Kopulation où deux intentions ont une seule Erfüllung."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Sens et non-sens, 5th. ed. (Paris: Editions Nagel, 1966), pp. 15-42.

¹⁰⁶ Merleau-Ponty, "Préface," p. 6.

¹⁰⁷ Green, "Du comportement à la chair," p. 1038.

The metaphor of Kopulation, accouplement may be purely formal in Husserl; but Merleau-Ponty gives it its full weight, so that the original phenomenon from which the metaphor is derived cannot be considered merely one of a series having the same formal structure. The note from which Green quotes this phrase concerns the relationship of visible and invisible:

Un certain rapport du visible et de l'invisible, où l'invisible n'est pas seulement non-visible (ce qui a été ou sera vu et ne l'est pas, ou ce qui est vu par autre que moi, non par moi), mais où son absence compte au monde (il est "derrière" le visible, visibilité imminente ou éminente, il est Urpräsentiert comme Nichturpräsentierbar, comme autre dimension) où la lacune qui marque sa place est un des points de passage du "monde." C'est ce négatif qui rend possible le monde vertical, l'union des impossibles, l'être de transcendance, et l'espace topologique et le temps de jointure et membrure, de dis-jonction et dé-membrement,--et le possible comme prétendant à l'existence (dont "passé" et "futur" ne sont qu'expressions partielles)--, et le rapport mâle-femelle (les deux morceaux de bois que les enfants voient s'ajuster d'eux-mêmes, irrésistiblement parce que chacun est possible de l'autre), et l'"écart," et la totalité par dessus les écarts,--et le rapport pensé-impensé (Heidegger)-- et le rapport de Kopulation où deux intentions ont une seule Erfüllung.¹⁰⁸

In this passage, Merleau-Ponty explicitly places the male-female relationship within an ontological framework. The relationship of visible to invisible of which he speaks here is to be understood broadly as the relationship of what is given directly, originarily, to what is Urpräsentiert as Nichturpräsentierbar. This is the fundamental ontological relationship which makes possible

¹⁰⁸Merleau-Ponty, Visible, p. 281.

all the structures of the world. This relationship is exemplified in the male-female relationship. It is worth noticing that the relationship is reversible: neither male nor female is identified as "visible," while the other holds the place of the "invisible." Each is the possible, the "other dimension," of the other.

Thus, in Merleau-Ponty's late writings, his conception of sexuality has been greatly deepened and has been ever more fully integrated with the other aspects of his philosophy.

CONCLUSION

In his approach to sexuality, Merleau-Ponty provides resources for further philosophical investigation. He also leaves topics open for further study: there are questions which arise in the context of Merleau-Ponty's treatment of sexuality, but find no response there. He directs his attention to the roots and beginnings of sexual life and of the interhuman world, but not to the interpersonal sexual encounter, nor to the question of sexual duality. These are surely lacunae in his treatment: how can a philosophical discussion of sexuality not come to grips with the question of the character of the sexual encounter, and not come to grips with the question of sexual duality? His work examines the foundations of sexuality, but not its possible expressions or modes of manifestation in relationships. He tells us that sexuality is assumed by personal existence, but does not offer any sustained discussion of the structures of personal sexual relationships. On the other hand, De Waelhens and Buytendijk have both described the sexual encounter, but without undertaking the exhaustive examination of the roots of sexuality that Merleau-Ponty carries out.¹ It is

¹Alphonse de Waelhens, Existence et signification, 2nd ed. (Louvain: Editions Nauwelaerts, 1967),

worthwhile to ask what account of sexual relationships can be developed on the basis of his foundations, and how it would compare with others' accounts; but this topic must await further study.

Again, Merleau-Ponty barely touches on the question of sexual duality. Most of what he says about sexuality does not involve the fact that there are two sexes. In the Sorbonne courses, sexual differentiation and the relations of the sexes are implicitly present in discussions of the Oedipus complex; and there are a few brief references to the question of masculine and feminine "natures." All this, however, does not add up to a treatment of the topic. Sartre, in his discussion of desire, says that whether the persons are of the same or different sexes is not relevant to the analysis; desire is not founded on sexual differentiation. To be sexed is a necessary structure of the for-itself-for-another; it is a structure which is revealed in concrete relationships with an Other, and specifically, in desire. But being sexed, for Sartre, does not primarily mean being male or female. It means being able to become flesh--to immerse one's consciousness in one's corporeity--in order to make an Other become flesh and thus to capture the Other's consciousness. The actual structure of the sex organs is purely contingent. It is not clear, from the available evidence, that Merleau-Ponty would accept Sartre's formulation; but

pp. 191-211; F. J. J. Buytendijk, Woman: A Contemporary View (Baltimore: Newman Press / Association Press, 1956).

neither does he accept the idea that bodily differences, as such, are the cause of sexual relationships. The question that presents itself is whether sexuality necessarily involves duality, at least on the biological level. For Sartre, biology is a sphere of facticity, of contingency. For Merleau-Ponty, since existence is the transformation of contingency into meaning, bodily differences between male and female must be invested with a human significance; but he does not explicitly formulate this question.

He makes a few references to the relationship of male and female in the "Notes de travail" of Le visible et l'invisible. There, he is not speaking in terms of interpersonal relationships, but of ontological structures: the écart between visible and invisible. This implies that sexual duality is to be understood in terms of the necessary structures of being. But what is the relationship of the interchange of one body and another body tout court to that of one sex and the other sex? These questions cannot be answered definitively in terms of the materials Merleau-Ponty has left us to work with. They require further elaboration of his concepts and methods, and enrichment from other sources.

A further question arises, concerning the relationship between affectivity and sexuality. Merleau-Ponty comes near to identifying them, by implication at least, in Phénoménologie de la perception. In the Sorbonne

courses, he draws a distinction between them, while maintaining that they are closely linked. He understands affectivity as the style of a person's being-in-the-world, and sexuality as a particular and privileged mode of corporeal realisation of affectivity. Sexuality finds its principal expressive resources in the genital organs in adulthood, and in other bodily centers during infancy; but its meaning extends far beyond the specific corporeal functions to which it is related. Sexuality is not identified with affectivity, although it has a privileged status with regard to affectivity; similarly, genitality is not identified with sexuality, although it has a privileged status with regard to sexuality. The problem which arises is how a notion which has been generalised in the way that Merleau-Ponty has generalised those of affectivity and sexuality can at the same time retain a specific meaning. Unless it keeps a specific meaning, in generalising it, one does not succeed in saying anything. So we must ask: in extending affectivity from a particular, delineated sector of life to an all-pervasive character of the fundamental intentionality of existence, has Merleau-Ponty deprived it of specific meaning? And in extending sexuality beyond the bounds of genitality, and making it into a privileged sign of existence, has he deprived it of the very specificity of meaning which in the first place makes such an extension (at least apparently) significant? Has he made the notions both of

affectivity and of sexuality so general that the question of the precise relationship between them loses all sense?

Merleau-Ponty was surely not unaware of these difficulties. The notion of 'dimension' seems to be intended as a means of dealing with this sort of problem. He finds completely unacceptable the picture of the human being as a mere sum of essentially independent parts. But absorption of every phenomenon under the heading of existence, in an undifferentiated way, is equally unacceptable to him. Existence has articulated structures; its "parts" are both differentiated and connected. Merleau-Ponty needs a way of saying that everything is connected with everything else, or at least that nothing is altogether disconnected from everything else, without homogenising everything. The spatial metaphor of dimension is intended to express the kind of relationship of differentiation and connection which is in question. No single dimension of a tangible thing expresses the whole thing; yet each dimension pervades the entire thing. Similarly, no dimension of existence expresses existence exhaustively; yet no dimension subsists apart from the others. Each dimension cuts across the others, and gives access to the whole of existence. This concept is intended to convey the character of the relations among different aspects of existence. It is also intended to convey the relationship of "facts" to existence. There are no bare, isolated facts. Every fact is dimensional; that is, it gives

access to and places one in a dimension, just as any particular point of a solid has dimensional coordinates. In the light of the notion of dimension, the generalised and specific meanings of affectivity and of sexuality can perhaps be reformulated and the relationship between affectivity and sexuality made more precise and explicit. However, this also is a question for future study.

In sum, Merleau-Ponty's approach to the sexual dimension of human life leaves a number of unsettled questions. It has the merit of being thoroughly integrated into his philosophy, and thus of being deeply founded rather than superficial and adventitious. The full test of its value will be how far it can be developed and how fruitfully it can be used, both to shed light on the questions Merleau-Ponty leaves open or ambiguous, and to ask further questions which he has not posed.

APPENDIX

Merleau-Ponty, Visible, p. 322:

"Autrui"

Ce qui est intéressant, ce n'est pas un biais pour résoudre le "problème d'autrui"--

C'est une transformation du problème

Si l'on part du visible et de la vision, du sensible et du sentir, on obtient de la "subjectivité" une idée toute neuve: il n'y a plus des "synthèses" il y a un contact avec l'être à travers ses modulations, ou ses reliefs--

Autrui n'est plus tellement une liberté vue du dehors comme destinée et fatalité, un sujet rival d'un sujet, mais il est pris dans circuit qui le relie au monde, comme nous-mêmes, et par là aussi dans circuit qui le relie à nous--Et ce monde nous est commun, est intermonde--Et il y a transitivity par généralité--. . .

Merleau-Ponty, Visible, pp. 262-63:

Il faut finalement admettre une sorte de vérité des descriptions naïves de la perception: κοσμοθεωροζ ou simulacra etc. la chose donnant d'elle-même des perspectives etc. Simplement, tout cela se passe dans un ordre qui n'est plus celui de l'Etre objectif, qui est l'ordre du vécu ou du phénoménal qu'il s'agit justement de justifier et de réhabiliter comme fondement de l'ordre objectif.

On peut prétendre que l'ordre du phénoménal est second par rapport à l'ordre objectif, n'en est qu'une province, quand on ne considère que relations intramondaines des objets. Mais dès qu'on fait intervenir autrui et même le corps vivant, l'oeuvre d'art, le milieu historique, on s'aperçoit que l'ordre du phénoménal doit être considéré comme autonome et que, si on ne lui reconnaît pas cette autonomie, il est définitivement impénétrable.

Merleau-Ponty, Visible, pp. 262-63 Cont'd.

Autrui, non pas comme "conscience," mais comme habitant d'un corps, et à travers lui, du monde. Où est autrui dans ce corps que je vois? Il est (comme le sens de la phrase) immanent à ce corps (on ne peut l'en détacher pour le poser à part) et pourtant, plus que la somme des signes ou des significations véhiculées par elle. Il est ce dont elles sont toujours image partielle et non exhaustive,--et qui pourtant s'atteste en entier en chacune d'elles. Toujours en cours d'incarnation inachevée--Au-delà du corps objectif comme le sens du tableau est au-delà de la toile.

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RESUME

THE FOUNDATIONS OF SEXUALITY:
MAURICE MERLEAU-PONTY'S CONCEPTION
OF SEXUALITY AND ITS PLACE IN HIS
PHILOSOPHY

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by

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Merleau-Ponty's conception of sexuality is an integral element of his philosophy and, as such, provides a way of access to the understanding of his thought. He is rare among philosophers in giving sexuality a central place, and this aspect of his thought has been little explored. This study takes up a two-fold question: what is Merleau-Ponty's conception of sexuality; and what is its place in his philosophy?

Sexuality is ordinarily a topic of study for psychology. To see how a philosophical treatment is possible, Merleau-Ponty's notion of the relationship between philosophy and the sciences of man must be investigated. Philosophy and science are distinct; the distinction between them is not one of subject matter, but of the level on which they approach it. Science rests on and takes for granted our being in the world (both the cultural and the natural world), which perception effects. Philosophy questions this acceptance, not to deny but to understand it. At the same time, they are related. Merleau-Ponty reexamines Husserl's formulation in terms of fact and essence. Since every fact gives access to meaning, and since every essence or meaning can be exemplified, he finds less difference than Husserl does between induction and essential intuition. In their approach to phenomena, philosophy and contemporary science converge;

each makes an indispensable contribution to the other.

In La structure du comportement there is a conception of sexuality; but it is a marginal topic. Sexuality is not an autonomous "lower" function, but has a properly human meaning. This notion is developed more fully in Phénoménologie de la perception. The chapter on sexuality is important in the work as a whole. Merleau-Ponty reinforces the notion of lived perception as the original milieu in which objects come to be for us by inquiring how affective objects are given. This chapter also contributes to the foundation of the chapters on speech and on the relation with others. The body has a power of expression and communication which precedes the expressivity of speech and founds interpersonal communication. This power is manifested in affectivity. Affectivity is intentional; it places us in relationship with others and with the world. To establish this, Merleau-Ponty considers sexuality. Study of pathological cases reveals that sexual difficulties are connected with difficulties in the "higher" order: freedom and the life of relation with others are implicated in disturbances of sexual life. This means that sexuality as a "natural" function is taken up by personal existence and given a properly human meaning; conversely, existence is realised in sexuality. Sexuality is an expression, a "privileged sign," of existence.

Comparison with Sartre points up the role of the conception of sexuality in the Phénoménologie. Sartre discusses sexuality in L'être et le néant, under the heading of desire.

Desire is one of the concrete relations with the Other. It must be understood not as a biological phenomenon, but ontologically, in terms of the essential structures of **being-for-itself**. Sartre first establishes these structures; then he introduces the Other as a subject for whom I am an object, and whom I attempt to objectify. The "third ontological dimension" is being-for-itself-for-another. It is here that the body enters the description: the Other is object-for-me as a body, and I am for-myself-as-object-for-another as a body. Desire is the attempt to ensnare the Other's subjectivity in his flesh by becoming flesh oneself. Sartre establishes the dialectic of relations with the Other first, and then discusses sexuality. By contrast, Merleau-Ponty's treatment of relations with the Other draws on his discussion of sexuality. In the chapter "Autrui et le monde humain" in the Phénoménologie, he maintains that communication on the level of the Ego presupposes a primordial communication founded on the copresence of perceiving bodies in the phenomenal field and the transference of intentions from one body to another. This argument depends on the earlier discussion of the body's power of communication.

Sexuality is an important theme in Merleau-Ponty's courses on child psychology at the Sorbonne. In these courses, dealing with the child's development and his relations with others, he reworks the notions of perception and affectivity. Affectivity is seen as the principal carrier of the current of existence. The relationship with others therefore takes on major importance. The perception of others is not a special

case of perception in general, but the most basic perception. It does not posit an object distinct from the subject; rather, it involves identification and transference of intentions between perceiver and perceived. Affectivity is realised corporeally, through different bodily resources at different stages of life. Sexuality is not identified either with affectivity or with corporeality. It is the special relationship of affectivity to the bodily resources that are most available; it offers the possibility for the fullest integration of affectivity and corporeality. From this perspective, the notion of infantile sexuality has a meaning, without projecting adult feelings into the child.

This conception of sexuality helps us to understand Le visible et l'invisible. In that work, especially in the section "L'entrelacs--le chiasme," Merleau-Ponty takes the relationship of body with body as the paradigm of the relationship of body with world. The relation with others, as it is worked out in the discussions of sexuality in the Sorbonne courses, becomes the model for the relation of the seer with the visible. The very notion of flesh, which Merleau-Ponty applies to the world as well as to the body, suggests that his conception of sexuality provides us with an important clue to the understanding of his philosophy.