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THE EXISTENTIAL SUBJECT IN MERLEAU-PONTY

A thesis submitted in partial
fulfillment of the M.A.
requirements by John McKennirey

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John McKennirey, OTTAWA, Canada, 1984.

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Introduction

Merleau-Ponty writes disparagingly of the "philosophy of subjectivity" which, along with a profound dualism, characterized post-cartesian European philosophy. Few would argue with him that this philosophy of subjectivity and dualism is now passé. Nineteenth century ideas that have continued to hold currency in this century, for instance, are those which rejected the absolute or "pure" subjectivity of rationalism and idealism, expressing instead the depth to which subjectivity is implicated in (or 'infected by', to use a phrase of Merleau-Ponty) the non-subjective. This is consistent with the sustained contemporaneity of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche related to their critique of "pure" thought, and even more so with the abiding interest in Marx and Freud. Contemporary thought, and one may think of depth psychology, existentialism or structuralism, is preoccupied with the materiality of the spirit. For Merleau-Ponty this involves a sense of wonder and even "mystery" surrounding the notion of the spirit, and simultaneously it raises deep questions about assumptions concerning the ontology of the so-called "material" order itself. The surpassing of the great dualisms of body/soul, matter/spirit, determinism/freedom, subject/object, was for him based on the radical insight that these dichotomizations, and the insoluble problems they entailed, were the product of a mode of reflection rather than an existentially encountered bifurcated reality. Once this mode of reflection is recognized and superceded, one must begin to give new meanings to the realities intended by traditional concepts of matter and spirit, self and world. Although Merleau-Ponty rejects the philosophy of subjectivity, it is a serious mistake to conclude that he rejects or reduces the significance and the reality of subject-hood.

The eclipse of rationalist dualism, which was of utmost importance to Merleau-Ponty, left philosophy not only the task of reappropriating physical nature from which it had become almost totally alienated, but left it as well with an enormous vacuum around the notion of the subject. For, the bias of dualism was to overvalue the subject, the spirit, the noetic*. With Kant, for example, the operative but unreachably Ding-an-sich was separated from the phenomenal; with Hegel, objectivity became an externalizing moment in the dialectic of Geist. At least partly in reaction to this hyper-subjectivism, the initial phase of the rejection of dualism appeared as a rejection of subjectivism. For Marx and Freud, as well as for popular nineteenth century positivistic and scientivistic thinking, the "object" returned literally with a vengeance. The new objectivism more than displaced the pure subjectivity of the rationalists and idealists, it literally threatened the very basis of the notion of subjectivity altogether. Marx, said Merleau-Ponty contrasting him with Hegelian subjectivism, became a "positivist on the side of the object."
(Themes p. 59)

*For instance, in speaking of Hegel Merleau-Ponty said, "...in the definition of the absolute we saw the balance swing in favour of the Subject which thus gives an ontological priority to "interiority", and in particular dispossesses nature of its own concept, making exteriority a "febleness of nature"."
(Themes p. 58)

Merleau-Ponty is certainly opposed to subjectivism: to the presumption of "pure" thought; to the assumption of an absolute standpoint; to the pretension to complete knowledge. All of these absolutistic aspects of subjectivism he ascribes to the influence of the immediacy and transparency of thought to itself. But he resists the inclination to sweep away the individual subject as a reality and an ontological concept of primary importance. As much as he opposes subjectivism, there is no readiness in Merleau-Ponty to take up the dogma of naturalism or materialism. He did not abandon one abstraction to embrace another.

Yet, Merleau-Ponty's ontological writings abound with a rather naturalistic imagery, which sounds at times like a materialistic monism: "We are the world that thinks itself ..." (V & I p. 136 footnote). Does this reveal that fundamentally Merleau-Ponty accepts the idea of overturning subjectivism in the name of a new, perhaps more sophisticated, naturalistic philosophy? Has he given us another example of what Gabriel Marcel terms a "philosophy of immanence": a philosophy that asserts definitively that there is nothing more to Being than a finite, ontologically unidimensional, self-enclosed world, which produces subjectivity out of the same arbitrary dynamism by which it generates all of its other manifestations? Does Merleau-Ponty stress embodiment, for instance, because as bodies we are just one among other material things, and this fact above all reveals our true ontological status?

In such a philosophy of immanence individuality is clearly not ontologically grounded. Although individual subjects might exist, there would be no fundamental individuality in their substructures, i.e. in the structures of their being. The ontic structures of any form of objectivism are necessarily anonymous.

Now, one cannot deny that there is a profound anonymity in Merleau-Ponty's ontological writings appearing in themes such as Visibility or the Flesh of the World. For example, we read such statements as the following: "...this Visibility, this generality of the sensible in itself, this anonymity innate to myself that we have previously called flesh and one knows there is no name in traditional philosophy to designate it". (V & I p. 139) It is hardly surprising, therefore, that some commentators have found a radical non-subjectivism in Merleau-Ponty, a kind of naturalistic immanentism. The subject, in this view, loses its ontological place, retaining only a kind of numerical identity, and forfeiting any claim to ultimate subject-centered meaningfulness. One commentator writes:

We have discovered that (for Merleau-Ponty) subjectivity's individuality and the status it has within Being is that of a perspective or of one spatio-temporal clearing within a finite Being. Horror and despair result from such a recognition of ourselves because it implies that each of us is just one of an unbounded and dynamic multiplicity of similar perspectives that are all equally accidental, evanescent, and replaceable. (Mallin p. 259)

An individual's life is lived out in the context of the unconquerable contingency inherent in this position, which ultimately nullifies not only the meaningfulness of his actions, but the very reality of his self-hood. His "individuality" is reduced in significance to the incidental by-product of a physically located self-consciousness. That consciousness is itself a kind of spontaneous emission of light, a temporary illumination that exposes "self" and surroundings and then disappears. Its ontological identity is merely its spatio-temporal location, and its sense of self-hood is actually epiphenomenal rather than ontical, and should better be replaced by a species sense of self, "I" as "one of".

We admit that there are many individual passages in Merleau-Ponty that might serve to provide a source for this interpretation, as well as certain of his concepts such as "natural light", intersubjectivity, embodiment and so forth.

Yet, in a sense this is all too easy to be Merleau-Ponty. It is "easy" because, in our view, it results from slipping into one of dualism's ever present options. Dualism for Merleau-Ponty is not merely a chapter in the history of philosophy. It is as timeless as common sense, as timeless as what he calls the "perceptual faith", from which, indeed, it borrows its credibility. Admittedly, Merleau-Ponty speaks of the subject's anonymity, of ontological intersubjectivity, of subjective contingency, of situatedness, of the 'sedimented' self, and of embodiment. But, his intention is always to overcome the traditional dichotomies surrounding these aspects of subjective being. He shows how freedom exists precisely and essentially in a situation of constraints, how contingency is precisely the place we find the transcendence.

of subjective meaningfulness, how individuality is found in universality and intersubjectivity, how embodiment is an archetype of the transcending dynamic of Being.

What we believe can be shown as Merleau-Ponty's persistent intention throughout all his references to the subject is the drive to return to the existential subject, and to reestablish the place of this subject at the centre of philosophy. We argue that only if Merleau-Ponty's rejection of subjectivism is considered in parallel to his rejection of objectivism, will the true sense of the existential subject be obtained in a way that avoids confusion with objectivism. Ultimately, we feel, he exposes both subjectivism and objectivism as flights from existential subjectivity, whether by absolutizing subjectivity or by negating it. Absolute subjectivism is indeed as much an objectivizing abstraction as its antithetical counterpart. Both positions conceive of truth in terms of an escape from the confined perspective of the existing subject.

From the point of view of the traditional antinomies that originate in subject/object dualism, Merleau-Ponty's philosophical aims sound paradoxical. He is out to combine freedom and determinism, subject and object, contingency and significance, fact and essence, particular and universal. This seems at best paradox, even self-contradiction, at worst sheer futility. This is why it is so important to see the broad context in which Merleau-Ponty is working: first to see why he rejects dualism, what he rejects in rejecting it, and how he accounts for its radical source (Chapter One); second to see the

method by which he approaches reality in a non-dualistic way (Chapter Two);² third to see the terms in which he conceives Being (Chapter Three). On this basis one might provide a contextual account of the ontology of the individual subject (Chapters Four and Five).

In closing our introduction, it may be worthwhile to illustrate our topic with a concrete example, and one which Merleau-Ponty himself has supplied. In the collection, Sense and Non-Sense, there is an article on Cézanne ("Cézanne's Doubt") in which Merleau-Ponty addresses many central issues related to the Being of the individual subject.

Cézanne's life exhibited to a profound degree the paradoxes we have just mentioned. Indeed, these contradictions were present in him to such a depth that his personality could be described as schizoid. On the one hand, he showed acute alienation from others. He could not bear, it seems, even to be touched. Merleau-Ponty writes,

"His extremely close attention to nature and to colour, the inhuman character of his paintings (he said that a face should be painted as an object), his devotion to the visible world: all of these would then only represent a flight from the human world, the alienation of his humanity." (S & NS pp. 10, 11)

Yet his life was devoted to expressivity, to communication. From the perspective of his alienation, Cézanne produced a view of self and others through which one is able to perceive the human and the inhuman

more clearly. Cézanne's alienation thus served to illuminate and even to promote the intersubjective community which that alienation presupposed, which his art presupposed, and which was thus shown to be ontologically fundamental.

Cézanne's understanding of art revealed a similar paradox. In contrast to classical artists, he says of himself, "They created pictures; we are attempting a piece of nature." (S & NS p. 12) "The landscape thinks itself in me and I am its consciousness." (S & NS p. 17) How much the phrases resemble some of Merleau-Ponty's own expressions! Merleau-Ponty hastens to comment immediately, "Nothing could be farther from naturalism than this intuitive science. Art is not imitation, nor is it something manufactured according to the wishes of instinct or good taste. It is a process of expressing." (S & NS p. 18) In the process of expressing one achieves such a unity with what is expressed that one is justified in using such phrases as "the landscape thinks itself in me"; yet the two are not collapsed. What is expressed is not a neutral mirror image such as produced by the impact of light on a photographic film. What is painted, although utterly dependent upon the actual landscape, is simultaneously completely a product of the individual artist. Thus Merleau-Ponty comments on Cézanne's statement about "painting a face as an object": "Painting a face 'as an object' is not to strip it of its 'thought'." And then he adds these words of Cézanne, "I realize that the painter interprets it. The painter is not an imbecile." (S & NS p. 15)

Nature is not expressed through a kind of de-subjectivized, de-situated, neutral re-presentation of inert reality. Rather, from within nature one gives nature a voice to express itself through an individual interpretation that is both particular and universal. Thus, because the mediation of the individual is always at work in expression, there can never be a total expression of what exists once and for all. "Expressing what exists is an endless task," says Merleau-Ponty (S & NSp. 15). Only in the individual interpretation, and in Cézanne's case quite by distorting the natural presentation to the senses, does what exists emerge, or come forth, stand out, and become something to be seen and understood. Paradoxically, then, without the distortion of interpretation what is distorted would not be seen as it truly is.

In this essay Merleau-Ponty shows Cézanne's whole life as an instance of the even greater and farther reaching paradoxes of freedom and determinism, and of individuality and universality. Cézanne's life exhibited an extreme degree of what might be called predetermined conditioning - schizoid behavior from the time he was a child. Yet, says Merleau-Ponty:

"...the 'hereditary traits', the 'influences' - the accidents in Cézanne's life - are the text which nature and history gave him to decipher. They give only the literal meaning of his work. But an artist's creations, like a man's free decisions, impose on this given a figurative sense which did not pre-exist them. An imposed theme at the start, they became, when re-placed in the existence of which they are part, the monogram and the symbol of a life which freely interpreted itself." (S & NS p. 20).

Although predetermination is thus rejected, it would be equally mistaken to assume that Cézanne's freedom was "an abstract force which could superimpose its effects on life's 'givens'" (p. 20). No, Cézanne's freedom was as unique to Cézanne as was his given situation, as unique and as "determined". It was a specific freedom within a specific given, whose limits were tied up in the given as much as the given was there to be surpassed and to be transformed by the freedom. And, indeed, there is always human freedom only in this sense. Any other sense of it is abstraction. "Two things are certain about freedom," Merleau-Ponty adds, "that we are never determined and yet that we never change, since, looking back on what we were, we can always find hints of what we have become. It is up to us to understand both these things simultaneously, as well as the way freedom dawns in us without breaking our bonds with the world." (S & NS p. 21)

What develops within the specified and constrained freedom of an individual life, such as exemplified in Cézanne, is the emergence of an identity, an individuality, that is at once "creative", for it is the product of freedom, and yet "inevitable", for it is the product of freedom constrained. This is the life of an individual: neither the product of external causes, nor himself an absolute first cause, of which the externals of his life are but the products. "Here we are beyond causes and effects," says Merleau-Ponty, "both come together in the simultaneity of an eternal Cézanne who is at the same time the formula of what he wanted to be and what he wanted to do." (S & NS p.20) It is, furthermore, precisely from the depth of this individuality that Cézanne expressed the universality that makes him an artist:

"There is a rapport between Cézanne's schizoid temperament and his work because the work reveals a metaphysical sense of the disease: a way of seeing the world reduced to a totality of frozen appearances with all expressive values suspended. Thus, the illness, ceases to be an absurd fact and a fate and becomes a general possibility of human existence." (S & NS p. 20)

Even in "madness" there is deep meaning of universal significance. We feel that nothing could be farther from the "horror and despair" at the self recognition of subjectivity which we earlier cited as having been attributed to Merleau-Ponty's account of subjectivity. The inescapable meaningfulness of even human madness testifies against the idea that the individual is merely "one of an unbounded and dynamic multiplicity of similar perspectives that are all equally accidental, evanescent and replaceable." On the contrary, each individual's life, despite its contingency, includes a range of possibilities within which the subject is able to express the unlimited depths of his own existence, and in so doing to surpass the particularities of his given condition. This individuality, rather than a meaningless multiplicity, is linked to a universality, or truth, which provides the basis for communication and meaning.

Yet, how is it possible to think of subjectivity in the paradoxical terms in which Merleau-Ponty describes it? The subject is fully free and fully determined, fully creative self and fully anonymous structure. Merleau-Ponty's first answer, we suspect, might be to say that although it is difficult to conceive of subjectivity this way, it is, however, impossible to think of it the other way - i.e. through one of the forms of dualism. In, the Visible and the Invisible, he writes "It is a problem - and we will not avoid it -

how the sensible sentient can also be thought," and so he adds we must, "seek to form our concepts in such a way as to avoid the classical impasses." (V & I p. 131). To stretch a comparison, it is rather like the situation of the early Church struggling with the concept of the Incarnation: it becomes pointless to argue that the two natures cannot be held together if they definitely cannot be held apart. But if that is a first level of answer (for theology as well as for Merleau-Ponty) it is by no means the main answer. It simply points to the need for a new way of understanding. The central fact is that the reality one is confronting is an "intersection" or a "passing over" into each other of the two traditionally isolated dimensions. And this inter-penetration is not an external alternation, but a correlativity and a mutual ontological grounding. The reality one is confronting actually lies between the two familiar explanatory terms of subject and object, self and world:

There is indeniably something between transcendent nature, naturalism's being in itself, and the immanence of mind, its acts, and its noema. It is into this interval that we must try to advance. ("The Philosopher and His Shadow", Signs, p. 166)

Merleau-Ponty is not alone in searching out a new ground for philosophy. Having crested the hill of dualism, contemporary thought seems to have found itself almost speechless before the new horizon, as if it had entered a new country where little is familiar and identifiable. If the devils of the old thinking have been exorcised, still one fears to use their names again lest they come to haunt the new world. But without familiar categories one wonders

what is there. (Nor is the problem peculiar to philosophy. Physics, too, for example, has its share of deep perplexity caused by the realization of the inseparability of the observer and the observed and of the tentative and situationally dependent nature of its theoretical constructs. Are they really "objects", "bodies" of some kind, or, are they merely imaginary, merely "ideas" or is there a middle term between these two?)

Merleau-Ponty appears at the moment of this cresting of the hill of dualism. His work shows the effort demanded in giving expression to fundamentally new meanings. And part of the difficulty lies in the fact that the old meanings were far from entirely groundless. For, while the mode of reflection that produced the modern dichotomization may now be known, and the excesses of the dichotomy brought to light, nevertheless philosophy is still a question of men reflecting on the human condition and concerned with questions of self, world, knowledge, others. "La subjectivité est une de ces pensées en deçà desquelles on ne revient pas, même et surtout si on les dépasse." (Signes p. 194)

We are concerned specifically with this insurpassable subjectivity. Subjectivity was rather straightforward in dualism's accounts. Either the subject was ontologically sui generis and indeed was the only eternal and therefore ontologically grounded form of being, whose existence was explained by, and explicable only by, the creative act of a necessary and infinite Subject; or, the subject was ontologically nothing: an ontological mirage appearing on the surface of a material reality. The existence of this mirage was no more

nor less "meaningful" than that of any other process occurring within a dynamic of material processes. In this other side of dualism the objectivistic ontology is so completely presupposed that ontological questions of any kind are generally not even raised.

Merleau-Ponty rejects both these positions, these two positivisms. In either case he finds the subject has been disconnected ontologically from the world. This demands that he find a new 'place' for the ontology of the subject. It is somewhere other than the nowhere of positivistic empiricism ("naturalism's being in itself") and the everywhere of idealism or transcendental subjectivity (the "immanence of mind"). This ontological 'place' of the subject is what we propose to explore. We begin with his rejection of dualism and of its two ideal forms. No discussion of subjectivity for Merleau-Ponty should ignore this critical framework which clearly functions as a reflective starting point, in the sense that Merleau-Ponty explicitly intended his work as the dépassement of this impasse. We then move to Merleau-Ponty's transcendental method. Transcendental philosophy, we suggest, can be seen as the bridge from the modern era to the contemporary precisely because it was the bridge between the two elements of the modern dualism. Thirdly, we discuss the ontological context within which Merleau-Ponty's concept of the subject needs to be considered. In so doing we criticize a totally de-subjective interpretation of his ontology to which we are opposed. Finally, we offer an account of Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the subject that is based on the transcendence of existence.

Chapter One: The Critique of Dualism

a) Subjectivist and Objectivist Ontologies

The dual critique of philosophies of objectivism on the one hand, and transcendental "subjectivism" on the other hand, which occurs throughout Merleau-Ponty's work, is clearly crucial to his treatment of the subject. The former reduces the subject to the status of an object, while the latter elevates the subject to the status of the absolute, and both, in the final analysis, are a type of abstraction. Central to his criticism of these positions is Merleau-Ponty's discovery in both of a philosophical naiveté, an unawareness of the radical effect of reflection itself.

We find an excellent criticism of the objectivist ontology (which one might also call realism/materialism) in the section of the Visible and the Invisible, entitled "Science Presupposes the Perceptual Faith and Does Not Elucidate It." Science, of course, operates rather unconsciously within the context of the objectivist ontology. Merleau-Ponty begins by showing the inadequacy of this viewpoint even for giving an account of the objective order, the order of things which are "already out there". By its own lights, science has come to recognize that there can be no separation of the things and the observer, and it now, "should make the contact between the observer and the observed enter into the definition of the "real". (V & I p. 16) But science has not made this transition. It still "defines Being by the Being-object" (V & I p. 17) and treats lived experience as something to be overcome, a distorting, merely 'subjective' influence. Science continues to "confine lived experience within the order of 'representations', 'psychological' curiosities". (V & I p. 17) Thus, although

science has realized that the objective cannot be treated as separate from the subjective, nevertheless, it continues to view the objective as alone real, and the subjective as merely part of the problematic of the objective. This theoretical inconsistency with respect to the objective order is paralleled by an even more gross inconsistency in the scientific view of the subjective order.

The subjective order is totally 'de-ontologized', treated as ontologically invalid. The subject, to science and psychology, is an "invisible thing", an objectivized "inside". Such psychological notions as "representation", or "stimuli", or in Merleau-Ponty's polemical term "psychological curiosities", are further things within the thing that is the subject. The psychologist treats his subject matter no differently from the physicist, and both regard themselves implicitly, and unconsciously, as Absolute Spectators (V & I p. 19). Before this Absolute Spectator the 'subjective' and the 'objective', "are finally two orders of objects, to be known in their intrinsic properties by a pure thought which determines what they are in themselves." (V & I pp. 19, 20) The "Absolute Spectator", of course, is Merleau-Ponty's short-hand reference to the unexamined intentional structure of the objectivist viewpoint.

What is forgotten in this attitude, to use a particularly apt phrase of Merleau-Ponty, is the "situated and incarnate physicist," (V & I p. 15) which is indeed the only physicist there is. The implicit Absolute Physicist simply does not exist. There is no such being for whom his own body, with the full implications that being a body entails, together with his own historical and

intellectual tradition - in short, his full existential situation - is rendered irrelevant. There is no pure gaze which surveys the world and itself as perfectly transparent and fully intelligible, a gaze which proceeds from pure thought alone. More importantly, conceiving Being as something which is known by such a gaze, conceiving knowledge as something which approaches this abstract "seeing" as an ideal, this is a radical and significant error. The error essentially originates in a type of reflective naiveté.

Naive reflection is reflection in which "the real becomes the correlative of thought" (V & I p. 30). In the case of the objectivist ontology, there is an unexamined reflective intentionality "to objectivise", to construe in objective terms. The real, correlatively, is simply presumed uncritically to be "objective". To the subjective field is relegated the unreal remainder: the magical, the mythical, the illusory, the ambiguous, the variable, the unmeasurable. Objectivism is both generated and maintained by this lack of self-reflection, the failure to include in the scope of reflection the subject who performs the reflection, and the act of reflection itself. Thus, there is a lack of advertance to the prereflective structures upon which the reflective structures of objectivism have been developed. This lack of self-awareness is the source of the irony of contemporary science, that it has finally recognized the inseparability of the observed and the observer but cannot make this explicit in its theoretical conception of reality. Thus, today, "the Physicist frames with an objectivist ontology a physics that is no longer objectivist," (V & I p. 25) and, "biologists ... are materialists only when they function as philosophers, and are much less so in the practice of their biology." (V & I p. 26).

The source of the outmoded objectivist ontology which acts as a hindrance to scientific theory and yet from which science has such difficulty in liberating itself, is not to be found in any "scientific" proof or necessity, but in a style of reflection which traces its origins to Cartesian, dualistic rationalism.

"At the same that it "idealized" the physical world by defining it by wholly intrinsic properties, by what it is in its pure being as an object before a thought itself purified, Cartesianism, whether it intended to do so or not, did inspire a science of the human body that decomposes that body also into a network of objective processes and, with the notion of sensation, prolongs this analysis into the "psychism". These two idealizations are bound up with one another and must be undone together. (V & I p. 26)

The two idealizations, of the mind as a "psychism" - a psychic object - and of the physical world as a pure object before a "thought itself purified", constitute together the comprehensive "idealization" or abstraction of objectivism. And they must be undone together.

Merleau-Ponty's criticism of the objectivist ontology is based on a central methodological critique to which in his criticism of subjectivism he gives much more intensive attention. And for obvious reasons. In the objectivist ontology both the subject and ontology itself are basically forgotten, left out. Such is its naiveté that an ontological grounding is simply not considered necessary. But the subjective ontology is philosophically advanced, and in following Merleau-Ponty's criticism of it we can see more fully the central critique he applies to both of these abstractions of subject and object.

In the essay, "Everywhere and Nowhere", Merleau-Ponty offers a general criticism of a range of philosophical concepts of the subject on the basis that they are grounded in a subject-object dichotomy, which, in one form or another, tends to make the subject an artificial absolute, which is ultimately an abstraction generated by reflection. Under the sub-title "The Discovery of Subjectivity", he writes,

"the kinship of philosophies of subjectivity is evident as soon as they are contrasted to the others. Whatever the discordancies between them, the moderns (i.e. subjectivists) share the idea that the being of the soul or subject-being is not a lesser being but perhaps the absolute form of being, and this is what our title is intended to indicate." (E & N p.)

A little farther on he summarizes his view of the essential features of all "philosophies of subjectivity":

There are at bottom only two ideas of subjectivity. - that of empty, unfettered and universal subjectivity, and that of full subjectivity sucked down into the world - and it is the same idea as can be clearly seen in Sartre's idea of nothingness which "comes to the world," drinks in the world, needs the world in order to be no matter what (even nothingness), and remains alien to the world in sacrificing itself to being." (E & N p. 154)

In either case, whether the conception of subjectivity is "empty, unfettered and universal" - and here we might think of transcendental subjectivity: Kant or Husserl - or "full subjectivity sucked down into the world," - and here we might think of Kierkegaard - the common element is the unbridgable gap that has been set between subject and the world. It is the fact that subject is always negation of world. This is apparent in the above quotation in which Merleau-Ponty says the two basic forms of philosophies

of subjectivity are after all one idea, illustrated by Sartre's concept of nothingness. It is the idea of a negativity or power of negation, which, despite an inseparable connection with the world, is, nonetheless, radically not "of the world" but alien to the world. The same point is described clearly in Merleau-Ponty's description of Greek philosophy in point of contrast to the philosophies of subjectivity. He says, "...For the Greeks the being of the subject or the soul is never the canonical form of being, that never for them is the negative at the center of philosophy, or charged with making the positive appear, assuming it and transforming it." (E & N p. 153) This contrast, of course, applies to the philosophies of subjectivity. They have set "the negative at the center of philosophy," and they have arrogated to the subject the ultimate ontological power, "making the positive appear, assuming it and transforming it."

What is accomplished within the philosophies of subjectivity is, at the most basic and general level, a process of two stages. First, there is the dichotomization of subject and world, of negative and positive, of for-itself and in-itself, of consciousness and the object of consciousness. Second, there is the restructuration of "what-is" based on the newly established absolute position of one pole of this dichotomy, subjectivity. Objective reality becomes the correlative of the subjective, and Being becomes Being-subject. An account of this process is incomplete, however, without explaining why it develops.

In turning to the subject to plumb its depths, in the philosophical encounter with self-consciousness, in looking to find what lies behind the

consciousness and of reflection, philosophers employed a reflection which itself was not reflectively called into question at the most radical level. - This deficiency leaves their reflection unaware that it transmutes what it focuses upon. Merleau-Ponty provides us an example (and a crucial one) of this reflective transmutation with reference to "perceptual faith". Perceptual faith for him is a pre-reflective, operative structure of the intentionality of perception which wordlessly assures us, without any intermediate stage of reasoning or representation, that it is a real, independent or transcendent world which we know directly through the experience of perception. But what becomes of perceptual faith in the transmutation of reflection? Merleau-Ponty says,

"The reflection retains everything contained in the perceptual faith: the conviction that there is something, that there is the world, the idea of truth, the true idea given. It simply reduces that crude (barbare) conviction of going to the things themselves - which is incompatible with the fact of illusion - to what it means or signifies. It converts it into its truth; it discovers in it the adequation and assent of the thought with thought, the transparency of what I think for myself who thinks it. The brute and prior existence of the world I thought I found already there by opening my eyes is only the symbol of a being that is for itself as soon as it is because appearing, and therefore appearing to itself, is its whole being - that is the being we call mind." (V & I p. 30)

This is the route by which the philosophies of subjectivity eventually arrive at Being as Being-subject, at subject as the condition of possibility of world, at self-consciousness as the archetype of knowledge. Reflection "works over" its objects in its own style, alters them after its own fashion, and takes as truth the "adequation and assent of thought with thought." Reflection assumes

own possession of self-presence as the principle, form, or arché of truth. In this transmutation truth loses its character of transcendence and becomes an immanence. But in point of fact, Merleau-Ponty argues, the notion of the true is operative before reflection ascribes it to its own style of truth, the style he describes as the "transparency of what I think for myself who thinks it." The operative notion of the true derives from perceptual faith, and in fact underlies reflection. But this operative structure is borrowed by reflection, as it were, in a way that is not itself submitted to reflection. Subsequently, this "borrowed" operative intentional structure of the true is transformed as we have indicated. The pre-reflective operative notion of truth inherent in perceptual faith does not however belong to the immanentism of reflection. It anticipates reflection and underlies reflection yet remains itself a pre or transreflective, existential structure. We will take up again this central methodological critique on several occasions in our following discussion.

b) Critique of Being-in-itself

The foregoing has been meant to provide a basic synopsis of the dual critique of objectivism and subjectivism so frequently encountered in Merleau-Ponty's writing. Indeed it is more than 'frequently encountered', it is virtually ever-present. The Phenomenology of Perception develops this motif on a succession of themes. Nor is it a matter for Merleau-Ponty merely of criticizing a certain style of thinking that emerged during a particular period in the history of philosophy. Dualism, to which both objectivism and subjectivism belong, is not a phase in the history of philosophy, unless one is referring to what Merleau-Ponty calls "ontological history" (V & I p. 186, 187). It is not something that one historical age can overcome such that subsequent ages will be unaffected. For, dualism has ontological sources. It fits well with what Merleau-Ponty writes in one of the Working Notes:

What I propose is not a "view" of history of philosophy; or else it is history, but structural; i.e. not the event of such and such a philosophy as a creation and a solution of "problems," but this philosophy situated within the hieratic ensemble of Being and the existential eternity, ..." (V & I p. 187)

To explain the term "creation" is inappropriate if it implies that philosophy invents its own themes, whereas, what philosophy gives expression to, for Merleau-Ponty, is a "latent" metaphysics inherent in the ontological structure of the Lebenswelt which constantly reveals itself through the "history of philosophy". The term "solution" is inappropriate because this process of philosophy is an ongoing process of an inner articulation within Being; and "problem" is inappropriate because the process is not one of solving problems, whose

meaning is defined by the particular philosophical constructs in which they arise, but it is a process of giving expression to a reality that inheres in expressivity yet escapes it. In other words, philosophy is not a linear progression, and certainly not the conceptual counterpart to a mathematical equation; but it is an ever-expanding appreciation of a Gestalt, the total Gestalt of the Lebenswelt. The themes that historically take shape in philosophy spring from an ontological condition that predates them and maintains their evocative presence. Historical or eternal? Philosophical themes are both, for these are again, like subject and object, two polarities that give meaning to each other, and which derive from an ontological situation that neither in itself fully captures. Merleau-Ponty writes as follows in the "Introduction" to Signs:

"Everywhere there are meanings, dimensions and forms in excess of what each "consciousness" could have produced, and yet it is men who speak and think and see. We are in the field of history as we are in the field of language or existence." (Signs p. 20)

Dualism is just such a meaning, in excess of what any one consciousness (such as Descartes, for example) could have single-handedly produced, yet inseparable from its actual presence in the consciousness of individuals and their expressions of it, now, in the future, and historically. From what, then, does dualism spring? What is its ontological source?

We have explained how both objectivism and subjectivism develop: first, by establishing a dualism, and second by making the real the correlative of either the objectivist or subjectivist pole of their reflective intentionality. However, we have not yet fully explained why they appear. In a chapter

entitled, "Le Préjugé Fundamental", Th. Geraets points out the following (in his Vers Une Nouvelle Philosophie Transcendentale), "En dépit de l'opposition apparemment absolue entre ces deux doctrines rivales, elles se définissent l'une et l'autre par rapport à un même point de départ." (Geraets p. 151) This common point of departure, the "préjugé fundamental", is a certain philosophical viewpoint which Merleau-Ponty calls "un regard distant et objectif." This is the viewpoint which originates, as we have mentioned, from the uncritical application at the reflective level of the perceptual faith of the natural attitude. The inescapable (and true within its own terms) belief that what is perceived is a real, independent existent is taken reflectively to signify the absence of any ontological inter-dependence with the perceiver. This founds the unreflected assumption of being in-itself which becomes the paradigmatic notion of Being. Being is in-itself. In the following passage Merleau-Ponty describes how the operative notion of Being in-itself is imported into the relationship of object to subject:

"On partait d'une monde en soi qui agissait sur nos yeux pour se faire voir de nous, on a maintenant une conscience ou une pensée du monde, mais la nature même de a monde n'est pas changée: il est toujours défini par l'exteriorité absolue des parties et seulement doublé sur toute son étendue d'une pensée qui le porte." (P.P. p. 49)

The inner relationship of subject and object, which one might call their mutual ontological dependence and which is all important to Merleau-Ponty, is in this manner deprived of all its depth, and indeed forgotten completely. The externality of the object is imputed to the subject and to the subject's knowledge of and relationship to the object. Being in-itself characterizes all. In objectivism this takes the form of defining the subject as an object among objects.

Subjectivism's adoption of Being in-itself is far more subtle and complex. Subjectivism appropriates Being in-itself by establishing the grounds within subjectivity itself to support this notion of Being. What was in objectivism an "outside" world in-itself, is transposed "inside", into structures of consciousness with an absolute status as fixed and determined as the outer world is assumed to be. The same assumption of reality operates, but now dependent upon a consciousness-in-itself as the ontologically founding correlate of a world-in-itself. Thus, Merleau-Ponty says, "the constituting consciousness becomes the correlative of a universe." (P.P. p. 50)

To reiterate, the common element in objectivism and subjectivism - the idea of Being as Being in-itself - lies in the uncritical shift of the perceptual faith to a reflective structure. Perception, thus, not in its own operation per se, but in lending its operative notion of Being unwittingly to reflection, leads to a false notion of truth, of Being and what it is to know Being. Uncovering this operation is the essential feature of the Merleau-Pontean critique of dualism. For Geraets it is "souverainement important" to expose this notion of Being in-itself which is at the root of both opposing ontologies - Being-subject and Being-object. He quotes the following passage from the Phenomenology of Perception in which Merleau-Ponty states unambiguously the philosophical critique that is required: "de reveiller la perception et de dejouer la ruse par laquelle elle se laisse oublier comme fait et comme perception au profit de l'objet qu'elle nous livre et de la tradition rationnelle qu'elle fonde." (P.P. p. 69)

Our concern here is the critique of dualism and its source. So far we have traced dualism to the misapplication of the perceptual faith at the reflective level, and to the operative domination of the notion of Being in-itself. But has this fully accounted for dualism? Or does it account only for the absolutization of either pole of the subject - object dichotomy? Why is it that either of the dualistic alternatives generally conceives itself as a dualism-in-resolution? Or perhaps we might say, as an imperialistic dualism? The self-appointed task of either position is systematically to appropriate the opposite pole to itself. But in this they tacitly acknowledge the fundamental significance of their opposite. While both objectivism and subjectivism are systematic abstractions that absolutize one or the other of the reflective poles, the duality that they presuppose, tacitly acknowledge, and explicitly try to overcome needs as much to be ontologically explained as their tendency to absolutism. The ontological ground of their absolutism is explained in the prereflective canon of Being in-itself, and the concomitant assumption of the view-point of the absolute spectator before whom the grasp of Being in-itself is a possibility. The absolutism is one thing, however, and the duality is another. This fundamental duality, which might be called a kind of hidden truth to dualism, finds its ontological explanation in existence and its profound intentional structure. Merleau-Ponty sees in the Husserlian notion of intentionality a deep significance that Husserl seems to have touched upon but which was not his preoccupation. One might say Merleau-Ponty was more faithful to the brute and intransigent reality of the

object term of the intentional structure than Husserl. Certainly, intentionality was of crucial significance to Merleau-Ponty:

"A notre sens, l'originalité de Husserl est au-delà la notion d'intentionnalité; elle se trouve dans l'élaboration de cette notion, et dans la découverte, sous l'intentionnalité des représentations d'une intentionnalité plus profonde, que d'autres ont appelée existence." (P.P. 141 n. 1)

Later we will discuss the notion of existential intentionality at length. But for now we want only to draw attention to the ontological écart which is its primitive truth. The subject/object duality may tend to become an abstraction, but it is not totally an arbitrary or artificial construct. Its source lies in the transcending dynamic of Being, the fact that within Being there is an eternal movement of standing out, of presenting, of dehiscence - splitting off and appearing. For Merleau-Ponty this is the ontological basis, for instance, of both time and space, which are transcendental structures of what one might call "Being-forth".

What is this "écart" this "dehiscence"? We might approach it through the example of vision discussed at length by Merleau-Ponty in the celebrated Chapter on the Chiasm in, The Visible and the Invisible. He puts the question before us by asking what is vision. First, we must recognize that to set an ontological gap between the visible and vision denies a phenomenological account of vision. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of vision reveals that one does not encounter in vision a sort of being of an opposite order, nor does one encounter in vision a being that is defined by the act of seeing:

"What there is then are not things first identical with themselves, which would then offer themselves to the seer, nor is there a seer who is first empty and who, afterward, would open himself to them - but something to which we could not be closer than by palpating it with our look, things we could not dream of seeing "all naked" because the gaze itself envelops them, clothes them with its own flesh. Where does it happen that in so doing it leaves them in their place, that the vision we acquire of them seems to come from them, and that to be seen is for them but a degradation of their eminent being." (V & I p. 131)

The ontological disjunction of visible and vision belies the perceptual encounter.

What is encountered in vision is encountered not through strange intermediaries called "visible qualities", but as a being. One meets the Etant as a visible. There is a full-scale ontology latent in vision in the sense that perception involves an ontologically significant encounter that escapes the immanence of mind and testifies instead to a coexistence of beings*.

How is this sense of a being transmitted if the visible thing remains, so to speak, within itself leaving only its detached qualities to be taken in by the seer? Or if, in the opposite interpretation, the visible is metaphysically the construct of the seeing subject, how then is its ontological density, its metaphysical opacity, its "objectivity", so clearly apparent and so profoundly affirmed in the act of seeing? Thus Merleau-Ponty asks of things seen: "How does it happen that my look, enveloping them, does not hide them, and, finally, that, veiling them, it unveils them?" (V & I p. 131)

* in the Working notes Merleau Ponty writes: "Everything comes down to this form a theory of perception and of comprehension that shows that to comprehend is not to constitute in intellectual immanence, that to comprehend is to apprehend by coexistence..." (V & I p. 188)

Merleau-Ponty's ontological answer to these questions is the shared Being of the visible and the seer. This we discuss later. But here we note the fact that seeing is an instance of Being both escaping itself and discovering itself. Merleau-Ponty says, "What we call a visible is, we said, a quality pregnant with a texture, the surface of a depth, a cross section upon a massive being, a grain or corpuscle borne by a wave of Being". (V & I p. 136) We interpret him here in the sense we have outlined above. A visible is not merely something identifiable, ie. a certain composition of visible qualities, but it is the self-expression of a being, an Etant. Its "qualities" are merely the particular words this being which we have met has spoken, if we may enter into metaphor.

Merleau-Ponty goes on to say, in continuation of the line we have just quoted,

"Since the total visible is always behind, or after, or between the aspects we see of it, there is access to it only through an experience which, like it, is wholly outside of itself." (V & I p. 136)

We interpret this to mean that in the experience of visibility a double transcendence is involved in which both the seer and the visible are wholly outside of "themselves". Merleau-Ponty continues:

"It is thus, and not as the bearer of a knowing subject, that our body commands the visible for us, but it does not explain it, does not clarify it, it only concentrates the mystery of its scattered visibility; and it is indeed a paradox of Being, not a paradox of man, that we are dealing with here." (V & I p. 136)

The paradox lies in the state of detachment within the context of ontological unity that vision is. And now we are approaching the ontological source of dualism, what we called its "hidden truth".

"For if the body is a thing among things, it is so in a stronger and deeper sense than they: in the sense that, we said, it is of them, and this means that it detaches itself upon them, and, accordingly, detaches itself from them." (V & I p. 137)

The fact that the body is a thing which happens to have eyes does not, of course, explain the mystery of vision. It merely localizes it or "concentrates" it as Merleau-Ponty says. The mystery lies in the simple and inexplicable fact that Being stands out from itself and forms itself in two modes: one offering itself to the other. Both constitute together Experience, in which a distance is created and simultaneously overcome, in such a way that there is illumination, appearing, articulation. This "mystery", the presence of Experience, is of central significance to Merleau-Ponty, and was so from his earliest writing onwards. Geraets writes as follows of Merleau-Ponty's first two major works (The Structure of Behavior and the Phenomenology of Perception):

"Il s'agit du problème de l'homme qui est à la fois objet parmi des objets et sujet, source de sens. C'est le problème fondamental que Merleau-Ponty, selon sa propre déclaration, se pose dans ces deux premiers livres." (Geraets p. 179)

Here we arrive at the basic origin of dualism; the fact that Being does contain a duality, and though the subject is not to be understood as one of its absolute poles, the subject is to be understood as a uniquely significant bearer of that duality. Hence G.B. Madison writes,

"Si le corps et l'âme ne sont pas deux substances ou deux ordres de réalité et doivent être "relativisés", Merleau-Ponty ne vise nullement à réduire l'un à l'autre. Ce refus d'un monisme pur et simple est d'une importance capitale et il faut bien le noter." (Madison p. 33)

Later he adds,

"L'existence humaine est donc une structure. Mais cette structure comporte une dualité, elle est dialectique - ce qui veut dire qu'elle se constitue de deux termes qui sont dans une implication mutuelle..." (Madison p. 34)

These two terms are, in traditional terminology, the objective and the subjective. And the relationship between the two is, Madison believes, the constant central preoccupation of Merleau-Ponty's thought, the whole of which he says could be called "une méditation prolongée et continue sur cette question." (Madison, n., p. 36)

It remains, in closing out this Chapter, to review its relevance to our central argument. An interpretation of Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the subject in which the individual subject loses its ontological status in place of fundamental anonymity should be suspected as a form of dualism. Such an interpretation may implicitly be based on a conception of individuality in terms of Being in itself: a purity of subjective identity. This Merleau-Ponty would indeed deny, but it is not necessarily the way in which to conceive of the individual. Or, individuality may be thought to be eliminated by the anti-dualism of Merleau-Ponty and his unitary or "one-world" ontology. The former makes a false assumption as to what subjectivity must signify, and the latter ignores the duality built into Merleau-Ponty's thought which his unitary ontology never denies.

There is certainly for Merleau-Ponty an aspect to the individual that is anonymous or "objective". But there is equally an aspect that is conscious self-identity and self-determination or "subjective". Moreover, these aspects

do not exist as if held together in a kind of vise - the body - but for which they would fly apart. Precisely the contrary. Bodily existence is their perfectly symmetrical mutuality. The anonymous subject-structure and the self exist in an ontological interdependence, in a single mode of Being which is intentional existence itself.

In one of the Working Notes, anonymity and self-hood are discussed together under the headings, "perceiving subject, speaking subject, thinking subject".

First, anonymity:

"The perceiving subject, as tacit, silent Being - as (Etre-à) which returns from the thing itself blindly identified, which is only a separation (écart) with respect to it - the self of perception as "nobody", in the sense of Ulysses, as the anonymous One, buried in the world and that has not yet traced its path." (V & I p. 201)

Superimposed upon this anonymous perceiving subject, and, of course, being also the same subject, is the speaking subject: no longer blind to itself, no longer silent. The subject of perception alone is "nobody" or Everyman, or the anonymous "one", but these characterizations do not apply to higher levels of the vertical Being of the subject. At the next level is the "speaking subject".

This is the subject who is engagé, by nature, but not yet self-reflexive:

"Speaking subject: it is the subject of a praxis. It does not hold before itself the words said and understood as objects of thought or ideates. It possesses them only by a Vorhabe which is of the same type as the Vorhabe of place by my body that betakes itself unto that place."

In the speaking subject the primordial écart is further developed to include not merely the phenomenal realm of appearance, as in perceiving, but

also the opened realm of meaning created by the possibility of significant action; and for this entire realm of meaning the arché is language. Language provides the "home", the "medium" for interpretative meaning. Yet despite a degree of freedom with respect to the given, the speaking subject remains enclosed by its situation; it lives within a horizon defined by its assumed and given world. Both its internal structures and the structures of what is for it now a world, as well as the marvellous symmetry of these two, all these "possess", as it were, the subject at this level. Thus, it acts "from within" and "out of" these objectivities, and yet on this basis originates new meanings and new deeds.

Moving to the level of the "thinking subject" extends the distancing from the given even further. It does not remove the subject from his fundamental insertion in the world, his situation of praxis, but it transforms this praxis by self-reflection, self-questioning, self-doubt, and self-transcendence. This generates a "ferment", and Merleau-Ponty asks:

"...the question is: What is this ferment? This praxis-thought? Is it the same being that perceives and that speaks? Impossible that it not be the same. And if it is the same, is this not to re-establish the "thought of seeing and of feeling" the cogito, the consciousness of ...?" (V & I p. 202)

What a struggle these lines represent! Merleau-Ponty leaves off this particular meditation at this point, having brought himself again to grips with the position he is most determined to overcome. If the thinking-subject stands in a determining relationship to the anonymous subject of perception, and to the speaking subject of praxis, does this reduce experience ultimately to the "thought of seeing and of feeling", i.e. to the position of transcendental

subjectivity? Does the verticality of subject-Being imply the ontologically independent cogito, the Sinngebung of the "consciousness of". The question, here, as ever, is how to think the compatibility of the anonymous subject and of the self-determining cogito without inevitably concluding with only one or the other. While Merleau-Ponty does not push the attempt further in this passage, his entire philosophy is devoted to this end. In this particular Working Note, although we do not hear his resolution of this task, nevertheless we can see how clearly he perceives both the anonymity of the subject as well as its meaningful identity, and how unwilling he is to part with either position. In our next chapter we will attempt to describe how Merleau-Ponty sets about approaching the elusive middle-term in a non-dualistic way. The purpose of this chapter has been to clarify Merleau-Ponty's rejection of dualism, but also to show the incorporation within his thought of a fundamental duality which is rooted in the écart within Being, source of the self-manifestation of Being.

Chapter Two: Transcendental Method

Introduction

To this point we have been primarily preoccupied with what the subject is not for Merleau-Ponty, examining his critique of the intellectualist (subjectivist) and the empiricist (objectivist) accounts of subjectivity. We now begin our positive account of Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the subject with an examination of his philosophical method. We will find here, again, the almost disturbing collapse of traditional antinomies. This produces a type of congruence of thought and fact that seems to invite the interpretation that philosophy for Merleau-Ponty must leave reason behind and discover itself as a byproduct of the dynamism of the world. Such an interpretation of Merleau-Ponty on reason corresponds to an interpretation of Merleau-Ponty on the subject. Addressing the question of methodology, and disagreeing with this interpretation, is indispensable for us in moving forward to Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the subject.

The dramatic breadth of Merleau-Ponty's method, which reaches out in two opposing directions to reconcile them, can be exemplified by two virtually opposite summary interpretations of his philosophical goal. Remy Kwant, in closing out a chapter devoted to Merleau-Ponty's method (in his first book on Merleau-Ponty, which notably did not include reference to The Visible and the Invisible) writes:

"In the light of these remarks (on the meaning-giving function of the body as Kwant interprets it in the Phenomenology of Perception), it is hardly surprising that Merleau-Ponty does not make "being" the main theme of his philosophical thought. His philosophy is a philosophy of meaning rather than of being." (Kwant p. 64)

On the other hand, G.B. Madison writes,

La pensée est l'autoréalisation et l'auto-expression de la chair, de l'Être." (Madison p. 193) And, "C'est l'Être qui s'exprime en l'homme, et le langage, dit Merleau-Ponty, est la maison de l'Être." (Madison p. 197)

The former view is one that seems to be highly subjective, a kind of translocation of the Husserlian transcendental ego into the body; while the latter seems, at the cursory level, to be highly objective, la pensée conceived as the anonymous product of the dynamism of Being.

In Madison's view a profound shift occurred within Merleau-Ponty's thought which would account for these dramatically varying interpretations, ascribing them to early and later stages in Merleau-Ponty's philosophical development. It is not our intention to enter the debate on this point (see Geraets/Madison). We do wish to say, however, that in the explicitly ontological later writings of Merleau-Ponty in which Being emerges as a constant theme it is not at the expense of the emphasis on meaning which Kwant found so central in the early works. Merleau-Ponty's is not a philosophy of Being rather than a philosophy of meaning to paraphrase Kwant. We also argue that although a certain desubjectivization of truth is indeed part of the methodological goal of Merleau-Ponty, the larger goal is to arrive at a concept of truth that is genuinely subjective, and not a disguised objectivity. Thus, we agree with Madison when he writes:

"Tout l'effort du dernier Merleau-Ponty était de dépasser le subjectivisme et l'immanentisme d'une philosophie de la conscience pour situer la subjectivité dans le "champ de l'Être" et pour penser notre existence comme "l'Être parlant en nous", mais il ne voulait le faire qu'en restant fidèle à l'expérience et qu'en retrouvant l'Être au coeur même de la subjectivité" (Madison p. 205)

Our point is, that the particular subjectivization of truth which Merleau-Ponty wished to overcome was precisely a false subjectivization, indeed a disguised objectivism.

a) Hyper-reflection

From our foregoing analysis of Merleau-Ponty's critique of objectivism, we know that the object of reflection for Merleau-Ponty must, in a sense, be treated not as an object at all. In this sense: although the object of reflection will stand out in the reflective act as an objectification, nonetheless, this object status, and the corresponding status of the subject as a non-implicated absolute observer, should not be supposed to be ontological. Furthermore, and this with far reaching ramifications, the attainment of ever-increasing degrees of objectivity is not considered by Merleau-Ponty to be the way of truth*, precisely on account of his refusal to grant ontological status to the objectification of the objects of reflection

It is Merleau-Ponty's genius to have recognized the hidden objectivism in idealism and transcendental subjectivism, and in surpassing both to have begun to develop a philosophy based on the methodological appropriation of the existing subject.

*It is ultimately as a result of this revolutionary methodological position that Merleau-Ponty's "philosophy of ambiguity" aroused such debate (cf. "Deuxieme Entretien Privé", transcript of a discussion with Merleau Ponty following the presentation of "L'homme et l'adversité" (1951).

Having begun with these rather sweeping statements, a closer inspection is in order. We might begin by examining a few lines from Merleau-Ponty's analysis of time in the Phenomenology of Perception, for this directly relates to his understanding of subjectivity and to the methodological approach it depends upon.

"To analyse time is not to follow out the consequences of a pre-established conception of subjectivity, it is to gain access, through time, to its concrete structure. If we succeed in understanding the subject, it will not be in its pure form, but by seeking it at the intersection of its dimensions. We need, therefore, to consider time in itself, and it is by following through its internal dialectic that we shall be led to revise our idea of the subject."
(PP pp. 410-411)

Merleau-Ponty alludes to much in these few words. First, the fact that the analysis does not consist in drawing out the consequences of pre-established conceptions is, in fact, a reference to the general critique of the objectivist and subjectivist positions which constantly interpolate themselves, almost insidiously, into reflection. The new level of reflection presupposes this basic critique, which could be considered an aspect of the Merleau-Pontyean "reduction". It is worth saying that these "pre-established conceptions", which Merleau-Ponty intends very consciously to avoid, are themselves as much hidden operative notions as they are reflective tools for those who operate within their meanings.

Merleau-Ponty's approach, he tells us, will be "to gain access through time to its concrete structure." Here we see the debt to the phenomenological reduction, the "return to the things themselves." Equally, however, in the notion of "access through time," we see the interdependency he recognizes between the approach taken and the thing approached. But perhaps this is too

polarizing an expression. What we see is that his starting point begins en deçà "on the inside" of what he is about to analyse. It is not by reconstructing time by thought that we attain to its structures - by this method Merleau-Ponty has warned us we only attain to the structures of thought applied to time. Instead we must begin within our own temporality, letting time as we 'exist' within it reveal itself before a non-manipulative searching, a searching that does not pre-structure by ontologizing its reflective intentionality. And this must characterize all our philosophical reflection, which does not come to its basic questions from the "outside", but finds itself, the reflecting or interrogative subject, already situated within them, and finds their structures already situated within it. This notion of the "en deçà" will become one of the most important themes in our concluding chapter containing our description of the subject for Merleau-Ponty.

What one arrives at through this "internal" method, or at least, what one "interrogates" and finds the outlines of, are not ideational systems, whether basically rooted in the objectivist or the subjectivist context, but what Merleau-Ponty calls "concrete structures". They are concrete in contrast to logical or ideational structures. What we move towards regarding the subject is the intersection or the point of coincidence of these concrete structures, a point from within which, in fact, the structures are identified. We do not "revise our idea of the subject" by reconsidering a subject constructed by thought to be what it must be of necessity according to thought. We cannot take a direct, detached, pure approach to the subject, obtaining it in toto by a single self-reflective idea, which would give us the subject "dans sa forme pure." On the contrary the subject finds itself primordially

in and through the world in a nexus of concrete structures. It finds the world and itself simultaneously in an inner cohesion: first in the sense that it is always already situated in the world, literally a part or fragment of the world, and second, in the sense that it finds itself as subject by reference to the world, i.e. as être-au-monde, in an ontological interdependence with the world. The "concrete structures" of the subject are also the concrete structures of the world. And, this pre-reflective unity with the world is fundamentally the source of the subject's knowledge of the world.

"From whom would I, who am in the world (suis au monde), learn what it is to be in the world if not from myself, and how could I say that I am in the world if I did not know it." (V & I p. 32)

Attaining to this pre-reflective or 'silent' knowledge that precedes its own expression, residing not in any particular expression, but in expressivity itself, or, more fully, in the existent structures of the chiasm or intertwining of subject and world which is the Lebenswelt, this is the methodological objective of Merleau-Ponty. It requires a reflection which is doubly reflective, taking into account not only its initial objects, such as, for example seeing and what is seen, but also taking into account the fact that a polarity is always introduced by the reflective act itself. The new "hyperreflection" must go beyond this polarity to discern - in a type of reflection that is as intuitive, poetic and "passive" as it is analytic, rigorous and active - the presupposed and underlying structures of revelatoriness that give rise to perception or to primary reflection. Merleau-Ponty describes the approach of hyper-reflection as follows in the Visible and the Invisible:

"In other words we are catching sight of the necessity of another operation besides the conversion to reflection, more fundamental than it, of a sort of hyper-reflection (sur-réflexion) that would also take itself and the changes it introduces into account." (V & I p. 38)

A little later he adds these words:

This reflection must plunge into the world instead of surveying it, it must descend toward it such as it is instead of working its way back up toward a prior possibility of thinking it - which would impose upon the world in advance the conditions for our control over it. It must question the world, it must enter into the forest of references that our interrogation arouses in it, it must make it say finally, what in its silence it means to say..." (V & I p. 38&39)

In these passages we can see clearly and beautifully expressed the openness of Merleau-Ponty's approach, its quality of strenuous effort arriving at a revelatory passivity that one might be tempted even to call "mystical" in a certain sense. In the sense, that is, that it does not make a frontal assault on Being, seeking to comprehend it totally within a system of characteristics, terms, definitions and relationships; but instead approaches it by a negative passage, a careful attention not to attribute to Being what are in fact the constructs of thought, but to search out the truth that it bears in its own prereflective silence, pregnant with meaning and source of all meaning. Merleau-Ponty wrote in the "Working Notes" in 1959,

One cannot make a direct ontology. My "indirect" method (being in the beings) is alone conformed with being-"negative philosophy" like "negative theology." (V & I p. 179)

The role of philosophical reflection is, while remaining a distancing and identifying act of self-consciousness, to penetrate the objectivistic reflective intentionality. This objectivising intentionality might be called the "natural" or perhaps better the "naive" reflective intentionality, for it has borrowed unwittingly the unreflected natural attitude of perceptual faith. It thus treats its objects according to the operative perceptual ontology of Being in-itself*. Philosophy, however, should aim to reach a level of reflective consciousness which is both below "naive" reflection, and also above it. It is below because philosophy's aim is to obtain its objects as they are before the transmutation of naive reflection. It is above because philosophy should take itself, as reflection, and the changes that reflection introduces, into account. The result is a higher reflective consciousness**. It is important that, for Merleau-Ponty, the critique of reflection does not lead philosophy to fade into the night of pre-reflective consciousness, but rather raises pre-reflective consciousness to reflective awareness. A few texts can help us to elucidate these ideas further. Concerning what we are calling "naive" reflection, we find these lines in Merleau-Ponty's essay on Husserl,

*We earlier defined naive reflection as "reflection in which the real becomes the correlative of thought" - p. 13.

**Attaining to this hyper-reflection (sur-réflexion) is what we would call the Merleau-Pontyean reduction. And we would contrast it with the Husserlian reduction in this sense. Husserl's reduction aims at overcoming the naive participation in the world of the natural attitude which loses sight of the phenomenon as such and hence misses the intentional noetic-noematic relationship. Merleau-Ponty's "reduction" aims primarily at overcoming the naive participation of reflection in its objects (which parallels that of perception in its objects), through which it loses sight of itself as reflection and misses the objectivizing relationship it installs in Being. In short, the Husserlian model of knowing remains an ocular model, and seeks a higher form of "seeing"; while Merleau-Ponty's model of knowing remains a reflective model and seeks a higher form of reflective understanding.

"The Philosopher and His Shadow":

There is indeed an I which makes itself 'indifferent', a pure 'knower', in order to grasp all things without remainder — to spread all things out before itself — and to 'objectify' and gain intellectual possession of them. This I is a purely 'theoretical attitude' which seeks to 'render visible the relationships which can provide knowledge of being as it comes to be.' But it is just this which is not the philosopher, just this attitude which is not philosophy." (Signs p. 162)

This "I" is, in another Merleau-Ponty formulation, the Absolute Spectator, who has ontologically forgotten his own existence and defined himself in terms of a unidirectional relationship to the objects. We recall an earlier cited passage in which Merleau-Ponty said that we must,

"délouer la ruse par laquelle la perception se laisse oublier comme fait et comme perception au profit de l'objet qu'elle nous livre et de la tradition rationnelle qu'elle fonde." (P.P. p. 69)

Here, however, it is reflection rather than perception which performs this ruse and which lets itself be forgotten as the fact of reflection to the advantage of the object which it offers us apparently untouched. It is precisely because reflection operates this same "disappearing act" as perception (from which the "trick" was adopted) that Merleau-Ponty says above that perception founds the rationalist tradition.

We see also in the first passage cited above that the reflection that forgets itself and becomes "pure knower" is essentially an objectifying intentionality. In this mode philosophy is a matter of "rendering visible (and we may read here for Merleau-Ponty "objective") the relationships which can provide knowledge

of being as it comes to be". Here Merleau-Ponty has cited a passage from Husserl. For Merleau-Ponty himself, philosophy involves surpassing this objectivistic reflection, rather than applying it to the question of Being.

Ironically, Merleau-Ponty finds the inspiration for his own concept of the role of philosophical reflection also in Husserl, but in a way which he feels Husserl did not develop deeply and extensively enough. Merleau-Ponty writes the following in the same essay cited above:

"To reflect (Husserl said in Ideen I) is to unveil an unreflected dimension which is at a distance because we are no longer in it in a naive way, yet which we cannot doubt that reflection attains, since it is through reflection itself that we have an idea of it. So it is not the unreflected which challenges reflection, it is reflection itself." (Signs p. 161)

This refers to what we have above called going below naive reflection and also rising above it. What is revealed through reflection on the unreflected, and which challenges the supremacy of reflection, is nothing less than the world as experienced, the lived world. What is uncovered is the "interval" between subject and object which philosophy must reach in order to rediscover being.

"There is undeniably something between transcendent nature, naturalism's being in itself, and the immanence of mind, its acts and its noema. It is into this interval we must try to advance." (Signs p. 166)

This is the uncharted land of the Lebenswelt, and this domain - neither a domain of thought nor of "things", nor of an opposition between these two - is the ontological "home" of the subject for Merleau-Ponty.

b) The Lebenswelt: Transcendental Realism

We have now often referred to the role of perception in relation to the distorting effect of "naive", or objectivizing reflection. This should not lead us to overlook the positive virtue of perception for Merleau-Ponty. It is not, after all, perception itself that leads to philosophical error, but the misapplication of perception's intentional structure to reflection. In fact, perception itself, when it is not taken uncritically as the norm of truth for reflection, reveals, and serves as a paradigm for, our pre-reflective relationship to the world. In a brief but highly revealing text (the unpublished prospectus written by Merleau-Ponty at the time of his candidacy to the College de France, 1952) - Merleau-Ponty says the following about the depth of what is revealed in the act of perception:

I find in the perceived world a new type of relation between the mind and truth. The evidence of the perceived thing lies in its concrete aspect, and in the very texture of its qualities and in the equivalence among all its sensible properties - which caused Cézanne to say that one should be able to paint even odors. Before our undivided existence the world is true; it exists. The unity, the articulations of both are intermingled. We experience in it a truth which shows through and envelops us rather than being held and circumscribed by our mind." (Primacy of Perception p. 6)

We might contrast this "new type of relation between the mind and truth" with the "old type". Truth was conceived as existing "for" the mind, as the correlative of mind, and the structures of mind were ipso facto the structures of truth. The realm of truth belonged to the mind: "held and circumscribed by our mind." Thus the transcendental structures, i.e. the underlying conditions of the possibility of signification, were structures of mind. If, in this view, it may have seemed too presumptuous to claim that the transcendental structures of mind were conditions for Being, at least, it was argued, they

were conditions for meaning. Attendant upon this distinction was a divorce between meaning (or truth) on the one hand, and, on the other hand, existence or Being. This, of course, became the stumbling block and eventually the scandal of transcendental philosophy.

The "new type of relation between mind and truth", which Merleau-Ponty finds exemplified in perception, is one wherein "we experience ... a truth which shows through and envelops us rather than being held and circumscribed by our mind." Truth thus breaks out of cognitional immanence, the confinement to mind, and remains its proper stature as transcendence. Does this mean, then, that there are no transcendental structures for Merleau-Ponty? And what does it make of philosophical method? Where previously the self-analysis of mind was all that was required to obtain truth, and absolute truth at that, how is truth now to be known, and what kind of truth will it be?

First, the fact that truth is transcendent does not mean for Merleau-Ponty that there are not transcendental structures. Indeed, on the contrary, it makes possible for the first time the proper identification of transcendental structures. Transcendental reflection generally is born of the realization that both in the appearing (phenomenal) and in the ordering (noumenal) of Being there is involved a radical "suitability", a fundamental co-relation between that which is "out there" and that which is "in here", between that which is beyond and that which is behind, between the "là" and the "en deçà". The prolonged meditation on this fundamental, and wonderful, correlation which is

the history of transcendental thought, has brought philosophy back to a recognition of the "corporeality" of thought, the ancient concept of logos, which was lost since the dawn of rationalism. As did Merleau-Ponty in his essay "Everywhere and Nowhere" (cited earlier) so H.G. Gadamer in his Truth and Method, also returned to the Greeks for an example of a concept of truth not confined to subjectivism. It seems to us that these words of his could be echoed by Merleau-Ponty:

When it is a question of understanding the supra-subjective powers that dominate history, the Greeks have something over us, for we are entangled in the knots of subjectivism. They did not seek to base the objectivity of knowledge on subjectivity. Rather their thinking always saw itself as an element of being itself....the dialectic, this expression of the logos, was not for the Greeks a movement performed by thought but the movement of the object itself that thought experiences. (Truth and Method p. 417)

Again Gadamer's thinking seems to take the path of Merleau-Ponty when he adds:

"We are simply following an internal necessity of the thing itself if we go beyond the idea of the object and the objectivity of understanding, towards the idea of the coordination of subject and object." (Truth and Method p. 418)

In abandoning the idea of truth as the correlate of mind, as object before subject, Merleau-Ponty does not reject in any sense the idea of what Gadamer here calls the "coordination of subject and object." This "coordination", which is the root of transcendental philosophy, rather becomes for Merleau-Ponty the central "mystery" of knowledge, because it is a coordination across transcendence, not an inner logic of mind. Truth resides in the standing-out of existence; the "light" of presence; the temporal openness of past, present and future; the distancing structure of space; the revelatory experience of

visibility, or tangibility, or thought itself. All these existential structures provide a window on Being. These are existential transcendental structures. They are structures of "thinking...as an element of being", of "logos not as a movement performed by thought but the movement of the object itself that thought experiences" (to return to Gadamer's words).

These are indeed conditions of the possibility of meaning, but these conditions are the existential structures of the world as lived, the Lebenswelt. The transcendental, for Merleau-Ponty, does not belong to mind but to the Lebenswelt and to existence. Thus, Merleau-Ponty says in his Prospectus of 1952,

"Our enquiries should lead us finally to a reflection on this transcendental man, or this "natural light" common to all, which appears through the movement of history - to a reflection on this Logos which gives us the task of vocalizing a hitherto mute world. Finally, they should lead us to a study of the Logos of the perceived world which we encountered in our earliest studies in the evidence of things."

The subject as "transcendental man", as the "natural light", these expressions can lead us in reviewing this chapter and relating it to our central theme. We have observed that the access to Merleau-Ponty's positive concept of subjectivity will be gained through his philosophical method. We described that method as revolutionary, because unlike previous philosophical approaches - whether empiricism, rationalism, idealism or transcendental subjectivism - its canon of truth was not the attainment of ever increasing degrees of objectivity. On the contrary, Merleau-Ponty traces the epistemological canon of objectivity to the misapplication of the operative intentional structure

inherent in perception shifted to the field of reflection. Indeed, deeper reflection on perception itself reveals that objectivity is not its proper structure. Objectivity, that is, in the sense of the dichotomization of subjective and objective fields, and the attribution to the latter of the status of Being-in-itself (which functions, explicitly or implicitly, as the canonical norm of Being) is a child of reflection not of perception. But in order even to reach this deeper understanding of perception, in which one finds that perception reveals "a new type of relation between mind and truth", one must effectively achieve what Merleau-Ponty calls sur-réflexion (hyper-reflection). The french term sur is more exact than the English term "hyper" because "hyper" has connotations of a greater degree of intensity; whereas "sur" properly expresses the aspect of a higher viewpoint, a reflection which includes the act and intentionality of reflection itself within its scope. What is revealed about perception through sur-réflexion is the fact that in perception knowledge which is truly transcendent occurs. In fact, it is the actual transcendence of the objects of perception - their "texture" as not the immanent objects of mind, not things projected or in any other way sustained by mind, but separate realities - it is this texture of ontological transcendence vis à vis the subject, that is the absolutely fundamental and pre-reflective message which is carried through in the knowledge that perception is. And this ontic message is coterminus, virtually synonymous, with the intentional structure of the perceiving subject called by Merleau-Ponty the perceptual faith. Thus, the knowledge gained in perception is both utterly "subjective", in the sense of being perspectival, conditional on the situation of the subject; bounded by the limits of the subject and formed within the inner structures

of the subject; and at the same time it is absolutely "objective", in that it is knowledge of a transcendent reality which neither presents itself as, nor is fundamentally experienced as in any way a product of the subject or as in any ontological sense dependent on the subject.

The philosophical method of Merleau-Ponty, we said, aims partly at a certain desubjectivization of the notion of truth, but absolutely not in order to replace it with an objectivization. Indeed, the most fundamental critique, the revolutionary critique, in Merleau-Ponty's philosophical method, is precisely its surpassing of the operative philosophical canon of objectivity. Even his critique of philosophical subjectivism, as present in idealism and transcendental subjectivity, is at bottom a critique of their objectivistic notion of Being as in-itself, and of truth as detached and complete determinateness.

It is absolutely vital to bear this methodological context in mind when one reads Merleau-Ponty describe philosophy as the self-expression of Being. The tendency otherwise is almost irresistible to find this a return to objectivism. We read, for example:

"les choses se trouvent dites et se trouvent pensées comme par une parole et par un penser que nous n'avons pas, qui nous ont." (Signes p. 27)

Superficially, this sounds like a form of naturalism, pure and simple. Does it not seem that Merleau-Ponty is here stating that the source of speech and of thought lies precisely in their non-subjectivity, in their origin outside of the subject, in their Being-in-itself, which simply sweeps the subject along? The reason we resist this interpretation is because it runs totally counter, (a) to

the fundamental critique of dualism and objectivism and (b) to the central goal of Merleau-Ponty's philosophical method which is to overcome the canon of objectivity, and the notion of Being-in-itself. We are led, therefore, to search for an interpretation of the above cited phrase and the many others similar to it, which is more consistent with Merleau-Ponty's overall philosophical approach.

It might be added here that the thematization of his philosophical method, and indeed of thought itself more generally, was not performed extensively by Merleau-Ponty himself. In addressing Merleau-Ponty's method (describing it as a penetration to the preconscious without articulating it as a 'thing') Remy Kwant writes,

"The philosopher himself makes use of it (his method) but does not describe it, although here and there he gives a few brief and very incomplete indications." (Kwant p. 35)

Along the same lines G.B. Madison observes:

Merleau-Ponty ne s'est jamais intéressé à la pensée intellectuelle pour elle-même. Quand il la considère, c'est toujours du point de vue de son fondement et de son origine... il est évident aussi que ce qui l'intéressait le plus c'était toujours, non pas la pensée pour elle-même, mais sa place dans notre existence de sujets charnels." (Madison, p. 257)

Merleau-Ponty was clearly preoccupied to bring to the fore the "origin of truth", the primary storehouse of meaning, namely the prereflective union of subject and world, constituted in existential transcendental structures. Thus, he was concerned with the very possibility of philosophy as a form of genuine transcendent knowledge, seeking to clarify the fundamental relationship of expression to Being. The thematization of intellectual structures was not only something that did not interest or inspire Merleau-Ponty, it was even for him

historically a source of philosophical distraction and error. Mistaking reflective structures for the basic structures of meaning had caused the pre-reflective structures of signification to remain hidden. Given this preoccupation of Merleau-Ponty, reflective structures did not for him present a central importance. Their relationship to truth was downplayed, almost from active to passive (though that is far too strong an expression). Madison puts the role of reflection for Merleau-Ponty very succinctly when he writes

La conscience intellectuelle n'est donc pas donatrice,
mais libératrice de sens." (Madison, p. 257)

Despite this change in emphasis and role, it is clear that Merleau-Ponty did not see philosophy as a kind of natural product of the Lebenswelt, one among all the other manifestations of the dynamism of Being. That would eliminate its transcendency, this time from the side of the object rather than of the subject. He struggles with this issue in the following passage which we cite from the Working Notes.

Iteration of the Lebenswelt: we are making a philosophy of the Lebenswelt, our construction (in the mode of "logic") makes us rediscover this world of silence. Rediscover in what sense? Was it already there? How can we say it was there since nobody knew it before the philosopher said it -- But it is true that it was there: everything we said and say did and does involve it. It was there precisely as non-thematized by the very statements that describe it: for the statements as such will in their turn be "taken back" by the Lebenswelt, will be comprehended in it rather than they comprehend it -- are already comprehended in it insofar as they imply a whole Selbstverständlichkeit -- But this does not prevent philosophy from having value, from being something else and more than the simple partial product of the Lebenswelt, enclosed in a language that leads us on. Between the Lebenswelt as universal Being and philosophy as a furthermost product of the world, there is no rivalry or antimony: it is philosophy that discloses it. (V & I p. 170)

Philosophy gives expression to a world of silence, that is to the prereflective structures of the Lebenswelt which it reveals through thematizing them. But this work itself is not merely a "partial product" of the Lebenswelt, which indeed would make philosophy collapse totally into the Lebenswelt and leave the Lebenswelt undisclosed. The reason given why there is no antimony between philosophy as a "furthermost product" and the "Lebenswelt as universal Being" is because "philosophy discloses it (the Lebenswelt)." What is the obviously profound significance of this 'disclosing'? The question is taken up later on in the Working Notes and addressed in this way:

Philosophy, precisely as "Being speaking within us," expression of the mute experience itself, is creation. A creation that is at the same time a reintegration of Being: for it is not a creation in the sense of one of the commonplace Gebilde that history fabricates: it knows itself to be a Gebilde and wishes to surpass itself as pure Gebilde, to find again its origin. It is hence a creation in a radical sense: a creation that is at the same time an adequation, the only way to obtain an adequation.

This considerably deepens Souriau's views on philosophy as supreme art: for art and philosophy together are precisely not arbitrary fabrications in the universe of the "spiritual" (of "culture"), but contact with Being precisely as creations. Being is what requires creation of us for us to experience it." (V & I p. 197)

Painstakingly Merleau-Ponty is continuing to open the new ground, the interval between Being-object and Being-subject. In this case he is opening an interval between philosophy as "pure Gebilde" or "arbitrary fabrication", and, on the other hand, philosophy as merely an adequation, merely a continuation. He wants to show that "the only way to obtain an adequation", i.e. to obtain a true disclosure of Being, is through creation, i.e. through a transcendent act of

expression, which is something else than and more than that out of which it has sprung and to which it gives voice. As creation, philosophy is "subjective" and particular, a certain construction on things. But because it recognizes this fact about itself philosophy is able to catch sight of and express, within the context of its particularity, something which underlies it, the origin of any and all expression, namely the transcendental structures of Experience (including reflection). If philosophy were merely a partial product of the Lebenswelt it would not attain the transcendence demanded for knowledge. For, all knowledge requires both detachment and return. The first is its creation, the second is its adequation. We may recall here our introductory discussion of disclosure through distortion in the art of Cézanne.

There is a great deal of relevance of this discussion of philosophy and philosophical method to our principal thesis that within Merleau-Ponty's philosophy one finds a place for the individual subject. Indeed the subject is the locus of the self-transcendence of Being that philosophy discloses. As such the subject also cannot be understood as "a partial product of the Lebenswelt". The transcendence of knowledge testifies to the transcendence of the subject. The same respect for transcendence that marks Merleau-Ponty's philosophical method we will now find reflected in his understanding of the subject. Indeed G.B. Madison comments that what marks the distance between Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger,

c'est finalement l'insistance de Merleau-Ponty sur la valeur propre et irréductible de la subjectivité."
(Madison p. 263)

Chapter Three - The Ontological Context

Introduction

The most profound apparent contradiction to our thesis of a "true subject" in Merleau-Ponty's ontology derives from aspects of that ontology itself. Before moving to this point, however, we have considered it important first to outline Merleau-Ponty's critique of objectivism and subjectivism showing the ontological origin of these two archetypal themes, and second to give some account of the method by which Merleau-Ponty opens up an ontological 'interval' between the two. We argued that in both this basic critique and this method Merleau-Ponty is relentlessly striving against a radical polarity introduced through reflective consciousness; and striving for a recovered unity of subject and world which respects the transcendence of each with respect to the other, in such a way that both the transcendence and the unity are compossible. The task of our first chapters, then, has been to set the context within which we will interpret Merleau-Ponty's ontology and situate the individual subject in it. This contextual approach is necessary to obtain a coherent interpretation of the subject for Merleau-Ponty because he actually devoted little attention himself to the explicitation of the ontology of the individual subject as such.

John Sallis points out that The Phenomenology of Perception was mainly devoted to the full development of the critique of objectivism, and of the subject/object dichotomy:

In the Phenomenology of Perception Merleau-Ponty takes it as his task to undo that objectification accomplished by modern thought. ...Thus, the intent is to make the entire objective order collapse and thereby reinstate the world as perceived and the perceptual subject in their primordial unity...

The Phenomenology of Perception is, hence, a radical critique of that conception of being which, in Merleau-Ponty's view, has dominated modern thought -- namely, that conception according to which being is understood as objectivity. (Sallis, Phenomenology and the Return to Beginnings, pp. 53-54)

This philosophical critique in the Phenomenology of Perception contained an implicit ontology. In the Visible and the Invisible Merleau-Ponty began to express in a new language and in positive terms what was formerly approached more indirectly, particularly through the combination of traditional opposites. Here, in this new unitary ontology, there may be a strong temptation to conclude that the subject has been finally eradicated. And in one sense that is undoubtedly true.

Merleau-Ponty uses the term "flesh", for example, to designate the unity of world and subject; and the term "chiasm", or "encroachment" to describe the inner relationship of the world and the subject. But the fundamental accomplishment here is that this unity of "opposites" is now explicitly and systematically grounded in an ontology - in a reference to the common Being which underlies both world and subject. This is apparent, for instance, in the following account of the relationship of the body to things: "If it (the body) touches them and sees them (things), this is only because, being of their family, itself visible and tangible, it uses its own being as a means to participate in theirs; because each of the two beings is an archetype for the other, because the body belongs to the order of things as the world is universal flesh." (V & I p. 137)

The subject is not only radically oriented towards the world, (*être-au-monde*) (as was clearly thematic in The Phenomenology of Perception), but it is of the world. The ontological question has come to the forefront. The Being of the subject includes what Sartre calls the in-itself, but for Merleau-Ponty there is no pure in-itself nor a pure for-itself. Rather, we might say the subject is the world appearing to itself. Because the subject is "of" the world - ontologically identical with it - it can and does know the world. Its articulated knowledge of the world is based on a pre-articulated ontological unity. The colours of the world are seen, its textures felt, its events experienced, all because the world is not ontologically "other", not radically alien to the subject; rather because the world is radically, and pre-reflectively one with the subject; hence it is primordially familiar, or, as it were, silently known to the subject. Being which is shared by the world and the subject is neither Being-subject, nor Being-object; rather Being-subject and Being-object are the two extreme abstractions of the self-revelatory ek-stase that is Being. Merleau-Ponty provides us with the notion of the "flesh" as the image or archetype for this self-revelatory ek-stase, which combines the density of the object with the luminosity of the subject.

In order to discuss the structures of the subject articulated by Merleau-Ponty within this new ontology in a way that preserves the ontological integrity of the individual subject, which we believe was always Merleau-Ponty's intention, we want to consider more fully certain central concepts. The notion of ek-stase just mentioned, which expresses the Being of the subject, is closely related to the notions of "presence" and of "Gestalt", which play an important role for Merleau-Ponty from the Structure of Behavior through to the Visible and the Invisible. The ontology of the subject should be considered with regard to these two concepts.

a) Gestalt Ontological Structure

In his earliest major work (The Structure of Behavior), Merleau-Ponty criticized the empiricist understanding of perception and behavior. He argued that empiricism's discrete hypothetical constructs connected by causal relationships (e.g. sense data and sensory receptors) were essentially related only externally, leaving unexplained the actual phenomena of experience, which combine the external and the internal. Moreover, these constructions were a conceptual imposition upon the lived reality of experience, which, in fact, they systematically ignored, namely, the pre-analytic wholeness from which each of the subsequently analysed terms actually derive their identity. The primordial is the unified structure of experience and meaning, the Gestalt, which is greater than the sum of its subsequently analysed parts. The empiricist analysis into parts loses the very context in which these parts are precisely identifiable as 'parts' - i.e. it loses the whole structure. As for the so-called laws of causality, which for empiricism are the basic explanatory principles and the basic structures of reality, they are neither given in pre-analytic experience, nor are they apt concepts for the inner relationship that characterizes the unity of immanence and transcendence which constitutes experience. It is therefore paramount to realize that the causal law is the tool of reflection not a part of nature. "La loi est instrument de connaissance et un objet de connaissance." (S.C. p. 157)

The Gestalt requires a new ontology, fundamentally different from the exteriority and the objectivism of empiricism. Merleau-Ponty criticized the Gestalt psychologists themselves for considering the Gestalt to be a kind of higher order of objectivism, a complex of interrelated

objective relationships. This conception remained rooted in notions of external causality. A return to causality, no matter the degree of sophistication, still left the inner structure of meaning uncomprehended. This inner structure, form or Gestalt, even though it is given in experience, is not an object among others. "La forme n'est pas un élément du monde, mais une limite vers laquelle tend la connaissance physique." (S.C. p. 53) Gestalt here seems described as an object for knowledge in opposition to an element of the world. Indeed, in this early critique Merleau-Ponty takes recourse to an almost intellectualist position to expose the deficiencies of the empiricist/objectivist account. He is still here working within the context of the dualism he wishes to overcome.

Nonetheless, even at this early point in his thought, Merleau-Ponty was clearly convinced that the objective determination of Being, and its attendant duality of subjective and objective realms (generally leading to the suppression of one or the other), was something imposed on reality. Reality itself was indivisible in this way, and demanded a non-objective ontology. Because Being itself is originally and pre-reflectively something indivisible, it makes no sense to reduce its phenomena to objective "causes" and to consider this process of transmutation to the objective level an "explanation". In fact, to do so is precisely the opposite of explanation. For what happens in this pretence of explanation is simply the losing sight of what is purported to be explained. Merleau-Ponty insists on the contrary that the higher levels of behavior — the "psychic" as above the "vital", and the "spiritual" as above the "psychic" -- have their own meaning, which in fact subsumes the meanings of the lower levels and thoroughly transforms them. He is opposed, therefore, to Freud's effort to reduce higher levels of conscious

behavior to the terms of the unconscious. In opposition to Freud's universal logic of libido (the "vital" level) Merleau-Ponty insists: "les actes spirituels ont leur sens propre et leurs lois intérieures". (S.C. p. 195) And he adds that the higher levels of meaning include and reshape the meanings of the lower levels:

L'avènement des ordres supérieurs, dans la mesure où il s'accomplit, supprime comme autonomes les ordres inférieurs, et donne aux démarches qui les constituent une signification nouvelle. (S.C. 195)

This psychological anti-reductionism was carried over in Merleau-Ponty's later works in his understanding of Being, as involving transcending levels irreducible to a single "objective" level, i.e. the idea of "vertical" Being. A "horizontal" concept of Being would essentially involve a leveling down, "explaining" all the levels of Being in terms of one objective plane. The point is, first, that this one objective plane does not exist, except as constructed by objectivistic reflection; and, second, that the structure of what does exist is not that of discrete unities connected by causal laws. What exists inheres in the form of an ontological Gestalt, characterized by the transcendence of the Gestalt with respect to its "objective" parts.

In thinking through the notions of time and space as well as those of remembering and forgetting, Merleau-Ponty returns in The Visible and Invisible to the importance of the notion of Gestalt. In his Working Notes he refers specifically to the character of the Gestalt as transcendence:

"For in fact space does not comprise points, lines anymore than time does. Understand that the Gestalt is already transcendence: it makes one understand that a line is a vector, that a point is a centre of forces — There are neither absolute lines, nor points nor colours in the things....

A little later on he adds:

We have to pass from the thing (spatial or temporal) as identity, to the thing (spatial or temporal) as difference, i.e. as transcendence, i.e. as always "behind", beyond, far-off... the present itself is not an absolute coincidence, without transcendence; even the Urerlebnis involves not total coincidence, but partial coincidence, because it has horizons and would not be without them -- the present, also, is ungraspable in the forceps of attention, it is an encompassing." (V & I p. 195)

It is absolutely crucial to bear this transcendence of the Gestalt in mind when Merleau-Ponty speaks of Being, and to bear in mind that he is always speaking in this context of "vertical" Being. For it is in this context that he places his accounts of "Being having us rather than we having Being" which otherwise sound so antithetical to the concept of the self-determining individual. We can see this directly in the section of the "working note" preceding the above quotation:

I said: the openness to the world such as we rediscover it in ourselves and the perception we divine within life (a perception that at the same time is spontaneous being (thing) and being self ("subject")) -- ... It is necessary to make understood how that (or any Gestalt) is a perception "being formed in the things"... That is that the things have us, and that it is not we who have the things. That the being that has been cannot stop having been... That language has us and that it is not we who have language. That it is being that speaks within us and not we who speak of being." (V & I p. 194)

What Merleau-Ponty rediscovers, in the "openness to the world" is, at the same time, "spontaneous being and being self." In this context -- which is that of a Gestalt -- he says, "the things have us and it is not we who have the things." Far from reducing the individual subject to a primordial anonymity, this "being that speaks within us", is, like any Gestalt, always escaping any reduction to unidimensional, objective parts. In fact, the transcendence of Gestalt

renders all of its elements irreducible, for all participate in the transcendence which the Gestalt is. It is due to this transcendence that there are "neither absolute lines, nor points nor colours in the things", for, nothing within the Gestalt of experience can be reduced to these isolated abstractions and be claimed to exist as such. Nor can the subject be reduced either to a thing, no more than to a pure spirit, but he too exists in the fullness of a Gestalt.

b) Presence: Ontological Function

The reason we wish to pay particular attention to the notion of presence for Merleau-Ponty is that the subject must always be understood in relation to the appearing of Being, to what Merleau-Ponty refers to as the "inaugural there is", or as the "field of presence". The subject is, as we have just quoted, the "openness to the world as we rediscover it in ourselves". This is clearly evident in the discussion of temporality, which is for Merleau-Ponty structurally identical with subjectivity (see Sallis, "Temporality"). Both the subject and temporality are a movement within Being which establishes presence, which produces a "clearing", to use the term favoured by Samuel Mallin. In the constant movement beyond self, on the basis of who he is but towards what he will become, within which movement the subject both recognizes and realizes himself in a never-completed unfolding, he is essentially temporal in structure. On the other hand, if we were to consider temporality itself without the aspect of subjective self-presence - that is, without the sense of intentionally leading on to a future already partly anticipated on the basis of a present, which carries the past with it in varying degrees of presence - we would not be addressing temporality in any lived or experienced sense. Temporality without subjectively introduced historicity is reduced to an objectivized, and hypothetical, abstraction of succession.

Temporality and subjectivity are inseparable: Il faut comprendre le temps comme sujet, et le sujet comme temps." (PP p. 438) In this perfect congruity we see that before Merleau-Ponty had yet introduced the term "chiasm", he had already conceived of an ontological overlapping of what traditional metaphysics - certainly any metaphysics on the Newtonian model - distinguishes and separates with utmost determination. While there may be subjective states of time for Newton, they must clearly be distinguished from Absolute Time, just as subjective senses of distance and space are distinct from Absolute Space. For Merleau-Ponty, however, spatiality and temporality are modes of Being that are utterly meaningless outside of a reference to subjectivity. The notion of Absolute Space or Absolute Time is, for him, the carry-over of lived space and lived time, but which has been cut-off from the subjectively situated context in which the notions found their original meaning. To maintain space and time as Absolutes, moreover, an Absolute and equally abstract Subject must also somehow be introduced, whether explicitly or implicitly. Thus, inadvertently and covertly, absolute de-subjectivization results in absolute subjectivization, for the realm of absolute objectivity requires an absolute subject to lend it the meaning that otherwise it would lack altogether.

The so-called objective or absolute determinations of space and time are in fact thoroughly infused with subjective reference, just as, conversely, subjective notions such as freedom and cognition are thoroughly penetrated by objective dimensions of opacity and constraint. Our point in all this is, of course, to stress that when one is considering the desubjectivization of the subject which Merleau-Ponty presents, one must also bear in mind his

de-objectivization of the object. If it is true for Merleau-Ponty that the subject is a fragment of the world in which the world experiences itself, and that this is central to his notion of presence, it is also true that the world is thoroughly de-objectivized in the traditional sense. For it is his ultimate intention that the notions of the world experiencing itself and at the same time the individual subject uniquely experiencing the world should not be considered as antinomies. Presence contains exactly this paradox.

Merleau-Ponty speaks of "time which knows itself," and refers to time as the "archetype of the relationship of self to self" (P.P. 487). In these phrases, perhaps, we can begin to see that a radically new ontology is emerging outside of the context of the traditional subject/object antinomy. The notion of presence for Merleau-Ponty implies what one might call a non-Parmenidean understanding of the world, a relief in the plenitude of Being; in effect one begins to leave behind the long assumed norm of Being as Being in-itself.

Merleau-Ponty quotes Claudel:

"Time is the means offered to all that is destined to be to come into existence in order that it may no longer be."

And he immediately adds,

It (time) is nothing but a general flight out of itself, the one law governing its centrifugal movements, or again, as Heidegger says, an ekstase" (PP p. 419).

A little later in this discussion he adds:

"The past therefore is not past, nor the future future: It exists only when a subjectivity is there to disrupt the plenitude of Being in itself, to adumbrate a perspective, and introduce non-being into it." (PP p. 421).

One might say that in presence, by means of the transcendencies of space and time and visibility and all the other transcendental structures of experience, the plenitude of Being has been disrupted. But one might also say that the very idea of Being as plenitude, or better as only a plenitude, needs to be overcome in order to account for presence. The being of the subject as ek-stase, the subject's ex-istence, is not the peculiar mode of being of an ontological anomaly. It is, rather, universally significative of Being itself.

"When we speak of the flesh of the visible, we do not mean to do anthropology, to describe a world covered over with all our own projections, leaving aside what it can be under the human mask. Rather we mean that carnal being, as a being of depths, of several leaves or several faces, a being in latency, and a presentation of a certain absence, is a prototype of Being, of which our body, the sensible sentient, is a very remarkable variant, but whose constitutive paradox already lies in every visible... Since the total visible is always behind, or after, or between the aspects we see of it, there is access to it only through an experience which, like it, is wholly outside of itself. It is thus, and not as the bearer of a knowing subject, that our body commands the visible for us, but it does not explain it, does not clarify it, it only concentrates the mystery of its scattered visibility; and it is indeed a paradox of Being, not a paradox of man, that we are dealing with here." (V & I p. 136)

The constitutive paradox of presence -- "the presentation of a certain absence", lies in the fact that something appears only because in another sense it remains hidden. What is present appears as long as it does not completely fill the field of presence, but remains at a distance so that it can be delineated. It appears under an aspect. What is present is only partially present. Furthermore, this characterizes not only the subjective perspective but Being.

Being itself is always in the form of "the presentation of a certain absence." Being reveals itself as a latency of what is but is also not yet, or not completely present. This latency is very clearly the ontological ground of temporality, for instance, and it is also the ontological ground (the only ontological ground) of the subject.

c) Chiasm

The notion of presence of the 'there is' (le 'il y a') is the fundamental factum of experience. It is the most basic, pre-thematized account of Being as we exist within it. It is the pre-reflective state par excellence, not yet bifurcated into subject and object, not yet having chosen, through reflection, to characterize what-is in terms of one or other of those poles. Thus, Merleau-Ponty repeatedly returns to the notion of presence, to the "miracle" of the "il y a", in order to describe the ontological structures of the "lived-world". There can be no doubt that what he finds disclosed in presence is as much a primordial subjectivity as a primordial objectivity; but perhaps it would be more accurate to say a primordial chiasm of these two, more fundamental than either alone; and a chiasm that does not reduce either to the other.

The last few pages of formal text of The Visible and the Invisible are written under the heading "Presence". There we may read the following:

"Let us therefore consider ourselves installed among the multitude of things, living beings, symbols, instruments and men, and let us try to form notions that would enable us to comprehend what happens to us there. Our first truth — which prejudices nothing and cannot be contested — will be that there is presence, that "something" is there, and that "someone" is there." (V & I p. 160)

Presence, the "first truth -- which prejudices nothing and cannot be contested" thus includes fundamentally a "someone" as well as a "something". In the passage just prior to this section on presence, Merleau-Ponty has written:

Like the natural man, we (in philosophy) situate ourselves in ourselves and in the things, in ourselves and in the other, at the point where, by a sort of chiasm, we become the others and we become world. Philosophy is itself only if it refuses for itself the facilities of a world with one sole entry as well as the facilities of a world with multiple entries, all accessible to the philosopher. Like the natural man, it abides at the point where the passage from the self into the world and into the other is effected, at the crossing of the avenues." (V & I p. 160)

The world with "one sole entry" is, of course, intellectualism (transcendental subjectivity, idealism) rooted in the Absolute Subject; the world with "multiple entries" is the world of empiricism, subsisting in "objects". Both these worlds are facilely "accessible to the philosopher" in the sense that the philosopher stands apart from them and surveys them with impunity and with consummate mastery. Why not, they are his creations. But the world of the philosopher for Merleau-Ponty is neither of these abstract constructs, but the inter-penetration of self and things, which is life -- the same world as lived by the "natural man" (or man in the natural or pre-reflective attitude). This inter-penetration, this chiasm, is the ontological source of presence, and its structure is the Gestalt.

With respect to the world, the "one world" (as Merleau-Ponty sometimes says), the philosopher does not stand apart but stands within. He is of his world; he lives his world; and he shares in its opacity, its half-known and half-unknown future, its half-remembered and half-forgotten past, its latency, its "presentation of

a certain absence". Rooted thus, the products of philosophy can never be complete, comprehensive and determinate expressions. As mentioned, this ontological situation is the source of an irremedial ambiguity of philosophy. Yet, the situatedness of the philosopher, though a constraint on universality, provides at the same time the means for what Merleau-Ponty calls "ontology from within", a universal within a particular.

To see a world in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour. (William Blake, "Auguries of Innocence")

In more than one sense the philosopher for Merleau-Ponty is bound to the "natural" world. First, because the phenomenological reduction of Husserl can never be fully realized. The perspective of the Absolute Spectator is the operative ideal of naive reflection, not a experiential possibility, nor a methodological model. Second, as we have been indicating, the objective of the philosopher is not to separate himself from the pre-reflective world of the natural man, but to reapproach that very familiarity and to illuminate what is most taken for granted, the fact and the structures of the lived world. The transcendence of the subject within immanence, which constitutes his incarnate being, also makes possible knowledge of Being "from the inside". This transcendence within immanence produces and extends an illumination throughout Being, which philosophy takes as its theme.

In the inner relationship of self and world, Being manifests itself to itself. Perhaps this inner correspondance and inner revelation lies in the thought behind Blake's poem cited above and which continues in these words

The wild deer, wandering here and there,
Keeps the Human Soul from Care.

The Caterpillar on the Leaf
Repeats to thee thy mother's grief.

The origin of truth is neither a movement unidirectionally from subject to world (intellectualism), nor unidirectionally from world to subject (empiricism). Truth originates rather, in the mutual interpenetration of self and world and other. Thus the world (Blake's "grain of sand", the "hour", the "wild deer", the "caterpillar") speaks a constant, innerly resonating, and unlimited message to the subject, a message in which the subject senses the sound of his own voice.

Chapter Four: Reversibility-Existential Intentionality

The preceding discussion of general aspects of the ontology of Merleau-Ponty was meant to allow us to address in a full context the central concept for his ontology of the subject: reversibility. In this chapter we shall first consider the question of ontological anonymity; second, we shall discuss the question of transcendental positivism; third, based on our critique of these two interpretations of Merleau-Ponty, we shall address the profoundly original conjunction of method and metaphysics which is expressed in the concept of reversibility, and which forms the basis for Merleau-Ponty's radically innovative ontology of the subject.

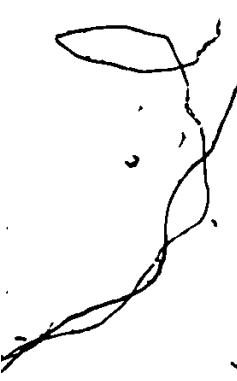
a) Ontological Anonymity

Samual Mallin interprets Merleau-Ponty's ontology as fundamentally desubjective or anonymous. Individual subjectivity is essentially a futile epiphenomenon of consciousness, which has, as it were, no real home in Being.

Mallin writes:

We have discovered that subjectivity's individuality and the status it has within Being is that of a perspective or one spatio-temporal clearing within a finite Being. Horror and despair result from such a recognition of ourselves because it implies that each of us is just one of an unbounded and dynamic multiplicity of similar perspectives that are all equally accidental, evanescent, and replaceable. In a Being that expresses itself in an oscillating and perpetually changing multiplicity and that is inexhaustible and incompleteable, the greatest role that we can attribute to ourselves is that of a radically contingent and particular manifestation of Being. My Being is thus permeated by chance and contingency, and from the metaphysical point of view, I have as little intrinsic significance, purpose and importance as objects within my field have for me." (Mallin, p. 259)

This position approximates the famous existentialism of the absurd, the philosophy of personal meaninglessness often associated historically with a rootless defeatism of post-war Europe. But in our view, apart from the question of whether this was ever more than a popular eclectic philosophy, this is not the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty.



Mallin says that for Merleau-Ponty, "from the metaphysical point of view, I have as little intrinsic significance, purpose and importance as objects within my field have for me." In contrast, however, Merleau-Ponty himself writes as follows concerning the very origin of the metaphysical point of view: "Metaphysics begins from the moment when, ceasing to live in the evidence of the object -- whether it is the sensory object or the object of science -- we apperceive the radical subjectivity of all our experience as inseparable from its truth value." (Sense and Non-Sense, p. 93) Metaphysics for Merleau-Ponty is not some kind of super-objectivity in which the "I" loses its intrinsic significance. On the contrary, metaphysics occurs in thought when the radical presence of the "I", the unique individual "I", is "apperceived" as extending throughout all knowledge and as co-constitutive of knowledge with its objects. Merleau-Ponty says:

From the moment I recognize that my experience, precisely in so far as it is my own, makes me accessible to what is not myself, that I am sensitive to the world and to others, all the beings which objective thought placed at distance draw singularly nearer to me. Or, conversely, I recognize my affinity with them; I am nothing but an ability to echo them, to understand them, to respond to them. My life seems absolutely individual and absolutely universal to me. This recognition of an individual life which animates all past and contemporary lives and receives its entire life from them, of a light which flashes from them to us contrary to all hope -- this is metaphysical consciousness, whose first stage is

surprise at discovering the confrontation of opposites and whose second stage is recognition of their identity in the simplicity of doing." (Sense and Non-Sense, p. 94)

It is precisely because my life is my own that the object which is not myself appears before me in its transcendent otherness, although the actual fact that it does so appear is beyond or beneath explanation (Merleau-Ponty frequently uses the word "mystery" here). As for other subjects, the fact that the other, while remaining other, can, nevertheless, reach me communicatively produces "a light which flashes from them to us contrary to all hope". Individuality is not accidental to this light, but utterly essential. The fact that "my life seems both absolutely individual and absolutely universal" is not merely paradoxical, it is the indispensable condition of the presence of Being. For instance, Merleau-Ponty says: "We will arrive at the universal not by abandoning our particularity but by turning it into a way of reaching others, by virtue of that mysterious affinity which makes situations mutually understandable." (Sense and Non-Sense, p. 92) To return to our contrast with Mallin, then, "from the metaphysical point of view" the "I" does not lose its significance for Merleau-Ponty, but discovers it whenever Being is experienced in the compressed universality of individual experience and understanding.

Merleau-Ponty strongly asserts the ontologically fundamental significance of individuality, and definitely relates it to the appearing of Being itself. Furthermore, it is only partly true to assert, as Mallin does, that "Being expresses itself in "an oscillating and perpetually changing multiplicity that is inexhaustible

and incompleteable." For Mallin this suggests that within such a Heraclitean flux there is nothing more than total contingency. If this were so, however, not only would there be no meaningful character to the individual, but there would be no enduring truth value within Being itself. Truth, in just the same way as the individual, would amount to no more than what Mallin says is "the greatest role that we can attribute to ourselves, namely, "a radically contingent and particular manifestation of Being."

Merleau-Ponty, however, while recognizing the ever changing dynamic of Being, and the contingency of each individual perspective (hence the ambiguity that surrounds all expression -- its simultaneous universality and particularity), does not view either of these facts as antithetical to meaningful individuality or to enduring truth. Indeed, he is concerned to break down this very opposition. He is concerned with a truth that endures but is not static, and with an individuality that develops within contingency. Thus he writes as follows in his essay entitled "Hegel's Existentialism":

If we do not despair of a truth above and beyond divergent points of view, if we remain dedicated to a new classicism, an organic civilization, while maintaining the sharpest sense of subjectivity, then no task in the cultural order is more urgent than re-establishing the connection between on the one hand, the thankless doctrines which try to forget their Hegelian origins, and on the other, that origin itself."
(Sense and Non-Sense, p. 63)

Definitely this is the program of Merleau-Ponty, this new organic, growing, classicism that "maintains the sharpest sense of subjectivity" while it pursues "a truth above and beyond divergent points of view."

To abandon the individual at the ontological level does irreparable damage to the notions of truth and intersubjectivity at the same time. The latter becomes a mere collectivity of units - what Mallin calls a "multiplicity of spatio-temporal clearings all equally accidental evenescent and replaceable."

The image of intersubjectivity becomes that of a herd, a species membership and a species identity. As for truth, as we have already commented, it is likewise reduced to a mere caricature of its original, native meaning, becoming no more than a passing phenomenon ruled by chance. These, indeed, are the conclusions of Mallin himself:

"It (consciousness) thus has no "ego", substantial identity, of self hood in itself and lacks the purpose or intrinsic meaning that such natures would possess." (Mallin, p. 261)

"... and perhaps the most that sociality can achieve is the creation of new terms of inauthentic and herd-like existence which can help individuals better escape their otherness by more easily mistaking their sediments for absolute truths and eternal values. This vision of absurdity is multiplied immensely when the subject realizes that this life is the activity of Being itself, or similarly, that there is nothing more to Being than the flux and the world that we find within ourselves." (Mallin, pp. 261-262)

Although Merleau-Ponty criticises the philosophies of subjectivity (as we discussed in Chapter One), he has most emphatically not moved to this position. On the contrary, he is in search of a Truth, a Reason, that persists dynamically through all the variations of the flux of Being in time, and of an intersubjectivity that is as ontologically fundamental as the individual subject, while it constitutes a unity across the transcendence of true otherness.

This thrust to the universal while not denying the particular or the situational is not an embrace of absurdity. It is, rather, Merleau-Ponty's concept of existentialism. Mallin, however, it seems to us, always interprets the particular, the contingent, the situational character of Merleau-Ponty's thought as somehow overcoming and displacing the universal, and thus leading to the pronouncement of absurdity. For example, a certain observation by Merleau-Ponty on death - "consciousness of life, taken radically, is consciousness of death" (Sense and Non-Sense, p. 66) - is interpreted by Mallin as confirming Merleau-Ponty's view of the futility and absurdity of human existence (Mallin, p. 259). A further examination of the context of this comment (the article, "Hegel's Existentialism") however, reveals precisely the opposite intention. Merleau-Ponty says of the French existentialists that they are not "arrested at an awareness of death". He then explains:

And so I live not for death but forever, and likewise, not for myself alone but with other people. A more complete definition of what is called existentialism than we get from talking of anxiety and the contradictions of the human condition might be found in the idea of a universality which men affirm or imply by the mere fact of their being and at the very moment of their opposition to each other, in the idea of a reason immanent in unreason, of a freedom which comes into being in the act of accepting limits and to which the least perception, the slightest movement of the body, the smallest action, bear incontestable witness." (Sense and Non-Sense, p. 70)

Indeed, Merleau-Ponty mildly criticizes Heidegger in the same article precisely for not stressing enough the affirmation of the individual, which alone prevents intersubjectivity from sinking into anonymous co-existence, and which places the onus on us as individuals, arising from the consciousness of selfhood which is related to the consciousness of our own death, to "get a new grip on our fortuitous existence":

"...Even in Heidegger, consciousness of death is not authentic life; the only attitude which does not deceive us is the one which also has a place for the fact of our existence. The decision we must make is to accept death, but that cannot be separated from the decision to live and to get a new grip on our fortuitous existence. As for the existence of the other and the historicity which results, Heidegger does not deny it. It has apparently been forgotten that the last part of Sein und Zeit is devoted to the notion of history. One might even say that what Heidegger lacks is not historicity but, on the contrary, an affirmation of the individual: he does not mention that struggle of consciousness and that opposition of freedoms without which co-existence sinks into anonymity and everyday banality" (Sense and Non-Sense, p. 69).

Mallin's interpretation of Merleau-Ponty has more than a particular interest for us. It has a universal aspect. It seems to us it arises from a failure to appreciate the profound significance in Merleau-Ponty's development towards a new framework beyond subjectivism and objectivism. He approaches this goal by various means, sometimes expressing subjective notions in objective language, other times expressing the objective in subjective terms. Thus he attempts to convey a reflection focussed upon: "that point where the passage from the self into the world and into the other is effected... where by a sort of chiasm, we become the others and we become world" (V & I p. 160).

Interpretations which lean towards the objective, stressing the occasions when Merleau-Ponty describes subjective notions in objective language, we think, tend to show the effect of the traditional operative notion of Being as Being in itself, and of the whole objectivistic and dualistic context. Perhaps this tendency is betrayed by Mallin himself in a phrase already quoted above: "Consciousness, thus, has no "ego", substantial identity, or selfhood in-itself..." While, properly understood, this is true for Merleau-Ponty, it does not mean that identity, ego, selfhood have no Being, or are not ontologically fundamental. Such a conclusion follows only on the assumption that Being is Being in-itself.

Another strong potential source for misinterpreting Merleau-Ponty lies in what we previously called the paradoxical nature of the principal insight that he is developing. As we have illustrated several times in this discussion, the individual is indispensable to the revelation of the universal, freedom exists in the context of limit and constraint, subjective identity is founded in ontological intersubjectivity. In commenting on Sartre ("A Scandalous Author") Merleau-Ponty wrote:

He (Sartre) became aware that all attempts to live apart were hypocritical because we are all mysteriously related, because others see us and so become an inalienable dimension of our lives -- become, in fact, ourselves. The bonds of blood or species count for nothing: each of us is generic at our most individual, since our freedom waits for the recognition of other people and needs them to become what it is." (Sense and Non-Sense p. 45)

When Merleau-Ponty says we become the others or we are the others, he does not mean to imply that we are no longer ourselves; nor when he says that "we are the world" does he mean to imply that we are not individuals. To treat these as expressions of a simple equivalence completely defeats his purpose. Ontological intersubjectivity and ontological individuality are necessary for each other. They are what we might call "co-existencies". And the same is true of world and self -- ontologically they demand and found one another. But for that very reason they are not equatable, nor is one reduced to the other. Thus, when Merleau-Ponty says "each of us is generic when we are most individual", he is not denying that we are radically individual. The notion of Gestalt is very useful here, as we see in several comments by Merleau-Ponty on the Gestalt of language.

In the essay "The Metaphysical in Man", Merleau-Ponty stresses that language is not the "possession" of the subject. The subject does not exert a kind of ontological, meaning-giving dominion over language. Rather he is himself shaped and conditioned by his language which, in this sense, possesses him. Yet language does not exist apart from the subjects who speak it; and, thus, in this sense, it is their possession and the emanation of their subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Neither abstraction - possession or possessor - is real, rather the Gestalt of language is primordial:

"Just as psychology, torn between the "objective method" and "introspection", finally reached equilibrium in the idea of a form of behavior accessible both from the outside and from within, so linguistics finds itself confronted by the task of going beyond the alternative of language as thing and language as the product of speaking subjects. Language must surround each speaking subject like an instrument with its own inertia, its own demands, constraints and internal logic, and must nevertheless remain open to the initiatives of the subject (as well as to the bruté contributions of invasions, fashions and historical events), always capable of the functional substitutions which give this logic its lurching gait. Perhaps the notion of Gestalt, or structure, would here perform the same service it did for psychology, since both cases involve ensembles which are not the pure manifestations of a directive consciousness, which are not explicitly aware of their own principles, and which nevertheless can and should be studied by proceeding from the whole to the parts" (Sense and Non-Sense p. 88).

The individual must also be considered as such a Gestalt, neither entirely self-directive, not the product of external forces, neither without true knowledge nor capable of complete explanation, neither without pre-given structures nor yet defined by those structures. In fact, Merleau-Ponty compares language with the individual when he writes (shortly after the above passage):

"Being neither thing nor idea, language, like individual consciousness, can be approached only by a method of "comprehension" which finds amid the multiplicity of facts a few intentions or decisive aims. The "profound and in a way secret facts upon which rest the construction of a language." (Sense and Non-Sense, p. 88)

A language, like an individual, has an identity behind its multiplicity of expressions, which emerges in "a few intentions or decisive aims"; language shows an individuality which does not destroy its abundantly obvious universality; it contains a latency which makes it inexhaustible, always more than the sum of its sedimentations, its defined meanings. For the understanding of language there are two traditional abstract poles: language as thing -- an objectivity which possesses us; and, on the other hand, language as idea -- an objectivity which we possess. For the individual the version of the same objective polarity is between anonymity -- an objectivity produced by the world, and pure subjectivity -- also essentially an objectivity but which explains and sustains the world. In all these polarities the canonical norm is Being in-itself. The Gestalt, however, is not a mode of Being in-itself - but a mode, if we may coin a term, of Being-beyond-itself.

To return to the origin of this digression, the failure to appreciate the ontological Gestalt structure and the tendency to assume Being as in-itself, is what we suspect lies behind interpretations of the ontology of Merleau-Ponty as being radically desubjective. In the context of Gestalt, the paradoxical nature of Merleau-Ponty's ontology becomes more comprehensible. Because it reveals that he is not arguing that two opposites must coexist, but that what exists has been split into two opposites out of an original coalescence now lost to view in the

bifurcated vision of the analysis. In this context we are not surprised to find that Mallin does not attribute much significance to the differentiation of the Visible and the Invisible:

It should be noted that Merleau-Ponty maintains that there is no ontological distinction between the visible and the invisible, and that the most one can do to separate them is to characterize the invisible (structure) as the "obverse" of the visible (cf. VI 149, 151, 152). To this extent the title that was chosen for The Visible and the Invisible is somewhat misleading. (Mallin, fn. p. 252)

Of course, Merleau-Ponty maintains no "ontological distinction" between the visible and the invisible. What would "ontological distinction" imply, if not a dualism? To characterize the invisible simply as "structure" (which Mallin seems to consider as almost an equatable term) and to treat it as a kind of unseen framework to the visible, is, however, far too complete an equating of the two, which for us obscures the fact that for Merleau-Ponty the visible and invisible, as an inseparable nexus, constitute, as it were, the 'form' of Being. Any interpretation of Merleau-Ponty which tends to minimize the significance of the invisible in its own right must fail to see how far indeed from Rationalism Merleau-Ponty has removed himself. With Merleau-Ponty we are far far from Descartes and the necessary progression of clear and distinct ideas. We are returning, by a long and circuitous route, to recovering the sense of mystery, of awe, of wonder, of participation in an encompassing logos within which western philosophy was born in antiquity, and in which Medieval philosophy found a kindred spirit. While this does run counter to the pure subjectivity and near deification of individuality characteristic of rationalism and idealism, it does not end up in the ontological anonymity of 19th and 20th century versions of objectivism.

b) Transcendental Positivism

Thomas Langan describes how Husserl follows the same path as Hegel, based on what Langan terms "the ultimate presupposition of Hegelianism"... the assumption that what is is scientifically intelligible" (Langan, p. 5). Langan says of Husserl:

This rendered him insensitive to just those aspects of experience that appear to challenge such a principle. Ideen I is permeated with the confidence that, once the essence of the transcendental acts of intentional consciousness has been uncovered, we shall know just how our experience is composed and shall thus hold the key to Being itself, in all its clarity and absoluteness." (Langan, p. 5)

Though Hegel had long been criticized (for example by Marx and Kierkegaard) for having elevated thought to Being, yet the question as to whether Being was totally, or partially, or not at all meaningfully related to the structures of intelligibility was not so easily overcome. Philosophers (such as Husserl in Langan's view) continued the search for complete explanation, and seemed incapable of accommodating partial understanding without moving rapidly from there to subjective relativity and thus to non-truth. In this sense their deliberate movement was always away from "subjectivity" and towards "objectivity", even when the passage was accomplished through some form of absolute or transcendental subjectivity. The latter is what we mean by transcendental positivism. It was steadily the intention of Merleau-Ponty, however, to regain for philosophy the existential subject, and to place this living subject, and not any absolutized substitute, at the centre of the notion of truth. This intention itself, however, precisely because it contains a dual critique, can be mistaken for either one of the opposites it is meant to replace. It can be seen as desubjectivization, as it seems to have for Mallin, or as complete deobjectivization. In Langan we can see the question of this latter interpretation being considered.

Langan gives a clear account of Merleau-Ponty's move away from "pure" (absolute or intellectualist) subjectivity in these words:

Even before Being and Nothingness had been written, The Structure of Behavior had laid the groundwork for Merleau-Ponty's central contribution - the notion of an existent who, instead of being conceived as self-transparent pour-soi and self-creative negative will, too much outside of being for one to speak of its opening on to being, is of the world as well as genuinely in it. Incarnated, living, meaningful matter, intention ineluctably involved with a resisting adversité, the existent is a 'part of being turning back on itself.'" (Langan, p. 10).

Clear as this is in stating Merleau-Ponty's movement from the absolute subject towards the existential subject, yet it conceives the existential subject in terms that are, for us at least, rather excessively contra-subjective: "incarnated, living, meaningful matter". (This use of the word "matter" is telling, for "la chair" is most definitely not matter, even modified as "living and meaningful.") Langan subsequently directs a major critique against this concept of subjectivity.

Langan seems inclined to the view that Merleau-Ponty has developed an ontology that leaves no room for the individual as such, though his interpretation is far more tentative on this score than Mallin's. Langan writes:

...Indeed, when the reprise is regarded as a fold in Being, the subject primordially conceived as corps propre is scarcely distinguishable from its objects and from its world." (Langan, p. 166)

..But in overcoming the traditional opposition of subject and object through merging both in the moment of consciousness, the existential phenomenologist's meditation, as we suggested a moment ago, achieves such an ontological unity that it sometimes seems that, despite the fact that every figure is the result of the historical initiatives of Ego, the Ego itself is nothing but the accumulation of results of such acts sedimented as nature and second nature." (Langan, p. 167)

For Langan, it seems to us, the sense of the "reprise" or the "fold in Being" conveys primarily the sense of a unidimensional or horizontal Being which simply turns in on itself. We find here the tendency again for the desubjectivistic aspect of Merleau-Ponty's ontology to become predominant. As we have said, Merleau-Ponty's intention is at once to desubjectivize pure subjectivity and to deobjectivize pure objectivity. But, we feel, due to the pervasiveness of the assumption of Being as in-itself, his work has the tendency to be taken primarily in its mode of desubjectivization. Thus, for us, Langan's observation that, "the subject becomes scarcely distinguishable from its objects and from its world", needs to be tempered by the all important addition that it is a transformed and deobjectivized world that is here intended. Furthermore, not only is there the tendency to overlook the transformed concept of world which Merleau-Ponty puts forward, but there is the allied tendency to minimize the significance of the notions of "latency" and the "invisible".

Langan adds the following to what he has above called Merleau-Ponty's "blurring of distinctions" between subject and world and subject and other:

This blurring of distinctions is based in another difficulty: Everything in this philosophy of *le corps propre* is reduced to the existential and to the historical accumulation of the results of existential acts. (Langan, p. 168)

What Langan seems to mean here, and in his earlier phrase that, "the Ego itself is nothing but the accumulation of results of such acts sedimented as nature and second nature", is that for Merleau-Ponty both the subject and meaning are restricted to the contingency of a blind unfolding of events, accreting cumulatively and with some degree of consciousness, but essentially a development without fundamental or

transcendent meaning, or reference beyond the immediate. This is very close to the position which Mallin described in the words, "there is nothing more to Being than the flux and the world we find within ourselves" (Mallin p. 262).

Langan continues the above passage in these words:

But that accumulation (of the results of existential acts) itself is effective only to the extent the present act succeeds in taking it in hand, and since its finitude permits it to do so only with partial success, the effectiveness of a tradition resides partly in our decision to "play the game," not to break the spell critically, to throw ourselves into the "as if" of a merely presumptive unity. It is disturbing to have to admit that we cannot presume to be simply anything without hypocrisy or to know anything without its ultimately slipping through the limits imposed on it in order to grasp it and to recognize that the only possession of truth that can be considered a success is the application of an idea in practice which will be proven adequate to the always restricted situation by its success in surviving the future. Indeed, the critique of reason is consummated! (Langan, pp. 168-189)

This is indeed a Critique of Reason (the title of Langan's book) but, to our mind, it is not Merleau-Ponty. In fact, these words seem addressed first to Sartre, ("it is disturbing to have to admit that we cannot presume to be simply anything without hypocrisy"), somewhat to Kant ("the limits imposed on it in order to grasp it"), and latterly to Marx ("the application of an idea in practice which will be proven adequate to the always restricted situation by its success in surviving the future"). The fact that they do not fit Merleau-Ponty is somewhat apparent even to Langan, himself, for (albeit rather tentatively) he exonerates Merleau-Ponty partially from this position:

Such realizations are disturbing, to be sure, insufficient perhaps for the secure life we believe we might like to lead, and fatal to all belief in the objectivity of any structures, but what if that is the way things are? ... Merleau-Ponty's critique, like Kant's, would bring it (i.e. "common sense with its belief in the objectivity of

things") back into its proper, i.e. practical, bounds by indicating that belief in the objectivity of things is simply a matter of hiding the contingency of our encounter with the world under the results of higher acts, of residing securely in the familiar world without enquiring what it is that really grounds it.

At least it is towards this conclusion that the transcendental viewpoint seems to be tending, but perhaps the best reason for refusing to capitulate too readily is the fact that Merleau-Ponty himself - from the first to the last, sees and attempts to resist the dangers inherent in such a position. (Langan p. 169)

There are several points we wish to draw out here. First, for Langan clearly a "critique of reason" is identical with the destruction of the belief in objectivity; second he sees Merleau-Ponty, like Kant, as undermining the sense of immediacy with which the objectivity of things is given, and of attributing objectivity to "higher acts", implying that what grounds the familiar world of objectivity is ultimately (for Kant and Merleau-Ponty) revealed to be subjectivity. Certainly it is fair to say that Merleau-Ponty "attempts to avoid the dangers inherent in such a position". But it is even fairer to say that Merleau-Ponty is working against such a position and espousing another. First, Merleau-Ponty is concerned to demonstrate, contrary to the assumption of Langan, that reason must not be identified as a drive to objectivity, analogous to "commonsense with its belief in the objectivity of things"; second, Merleau-Ponty acknowledges the validity of objectivity as something arising naturally out of the transcendent encounter with the world in perception and he is concerned to preserve the transcendence of knowledge to which this testifies (and therefore also objectivity in this sense); and thirdly, he is not grounding the objectivity of the familiar world of experience in an unfamiliar one constructed by reason residing in transcendental structures. Rather he is seeking to uncover the latent logos (which is the transcendent opposite of something merely "subjective") inherent in the familiar world itself.

Returning to the question of individuality, when Langan suggests that for Merleau-Ponty, "everything is reduced to the existential and to the historical accumulation of the results of existential acts", he has given us an exclusively "positivistic" interpretation. Notably absent is the mention of latency, of the invisible, of the en déca, of the encompassing, of the Gestalt, of presence and of its co-extensive absence. This missing factor, which shows up as well in certain of Langan's references to the existent (subject) as "merely a fold in Being", suggests a lack of appreciation of the non-positive, of the non-Parmenidean, aspect to the concept of Being for Merleau-Ponty. Langan criticizes Merleau-Ponty for having made an attack on reason which precedes in this manner: First Merleau-Ponty is interpreted in terms which we are calling transcendental positivism, that is as having located truth or reason in the realm of transcendental subjective immanence; second, and worse yet, Merleau-Ponty has undercut the objective validity of this realm by removing its rational integrity and replacing it with a basically contingent sedimentation of subjective acts. Langan seems to find that both the transcendental viewpoint and this anti-rationalism threaten the notion of objectivity, hence his words. "Indeed, the critique of reason is consummated". We wish only to stress the importance of the basic fact that Merleau-Ponty's is not a positivist philosophy, neither positivistic rationalism nor positivistic transcendental subjectivism, nor positivistic empiricism or naturalism. Appreciating the originality of Merleau-Ponty's transcendentalism depends on firmly rejecting a positivistic interpretation of it.

c) Reversibility: Existential Intentionality

It is quite right for Langan to want to distinguish Merleau-Ponty from Kantian transcendental philosophy (even though Langan seems to have doubts that this

is possible), just as it is quite right to say that Merleau-Ponty's thought is transcendental. In our view, however, Langan does not do full justice to the radical distinction between Merleau-Ponty's transcendental philosophy and previous transcendental philosophy, and he tends to aim the same criticisms against both (hence he entitles his book, Merleau-Ponty's Critique of Reason with a deliberate Kantian parallel). In this last section we wish to discuss directly what one might call Merleau-Ponty's transcendental ontology. We will focus our reflections on the concept of "reversibility", which Merleau-Ponty once refers to in the Visible and the Invisible as "the ultimate truth" (V & I p. 155).

Intentionality in the Husserlian sense of "consciousness of...." is meant to convey the insight that there is never an empty consciousness and that there is never an "object" outside of consciousness, an "object" pure and simple. What is "there" is always an inseparable conjunction of consciousness and its objects. All objects are objects qua objects for consciousness; all consciousness is consciousness of something. But intentionality conveys more than this. It also conveys the sense of a mutual conformity. Objects cannot be objects unless they conform to the demands of consciousness; just as consciousness, to achieve consciousness of an object, must conform itself to the demands of the object.

It seems Merleau-Ponty's dissatisfaction with Husserl, from whom he drew constant inspiration, could be put in these terms: that Husserl conceived intentionality fundamentally as a subjective structure. For Husserl the intentional structure involves a noetic and a noematic

relationship, the former referring to the structures of consciousness, the latter to the structures of the object, and the noetic/noematic relationship being accessible to transcendental reflection. But in this very accessibility, this pure lucidity of the noetic/noematic relationship before transcendental reflection, we can see that all the terms are set within the framework of self-consciousness. Or, we might say, the noetic/noematic construct is itself, at bottom, a strictly noetic construct. It never breaks out of the noetic field. The noetic pole defines, for Husserl, the very noetic/noematic relationship, and thus eliminates the actual transcendence of what should be meant by the 'noematic'. Along these lines, Langan writes as follows of Merleau-Ponty's criticism of Husserl:

The problem is once again that of The Phenomenology of the Spirit: the tendency to give little more than lip service to the noema's opposing opacity, disparities and uncertainties, and, while paying loud tribute to the patient and painful work of Spirit, to reduce its opposing otherness to itself" (Langan, p. 5).

The problem is how to bring together thought and existent without adopting the framework of either exclusively. We have already described how Merleau-Ponty was determined to overcome the great dualities of body/soul, matter/spirit, determinism/freedom, subject/object by showing that these dichotomizations, and the insoluble problems they entail, are the product of a mode of reflection, and not the result of an existentially encountered, bifurcated reality. Transcendental philosophy can be seen, for Merleau-Ponty, as providing the bridge from the rationalist era of dualism to his form of existentialism, precisely because it bridged the yawning chasm that separated the traditional dualities. The transcendental notion of intentionality, which Husserl so brilliantly pioneered,

was able to span the gulf between subject and object, idea and existent. In Merleau-Ponty it thus not only linked in a fundamental way what was before isolated and problematic, but eventually undercut the presupposition on which this isolation had been maintained. Intentionality revealed the subjective structuration of knowledge, and of the lived world, and thus put into question the identity of Being and succeeding formulations of the known. Simultaneously, it focused reflection upon the structures and implications of reflection itself and its products. Transcendental philosophy evolved a steadily increasing awareness of intentionality, which grew from what in Hume and even Kant seems to have been an almost unrecognized assumption, to what became, through phenomenology, the wonder-inspiring revelation and the burning question. Intentionality is the key concept in the contemporary perception of unity in reality which hitherto was philosophically bifurcated.

The concept of reversibility, we suggest, is nothing less than the all important transcendental concept of intentionality, conceived ontologically. And it is for this reason, we believe, that Merleau-Ponty calls it the ultimate truth. It is truth not so much because it connects idea and existent, it does more than this; it is "ultimate truth" not because it bridges two otherwise separate worlds, but because it provides the new paradigm for reflecting on the one world. Because of this concept of reversibility, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, as we have before suggested, could be called a transcendental realism in contrast to transcendental idealism or subjectivism.

This may become clearer if we consider the example of a specific "transcendancy", such as visibility. For Merleau-Ponty one should not say that there are things seen and, on the other hand, seers, the two entirely distinct from one another. What makes the things seen visible to the seer, and what makes the seer sensible to the things seen is not some quality in the seer or in the seen or even apart from these two. The original fact of seeing derives from the ontological unity of the two.

"It suffices us for the moment to note that he who sees cannot possess the visible unless he is possessed by it, unless he is of it, unless, by principle, according to what is required by the articulation of the look with the things he is one of the visibles, capable, by a singular reversal, of seeing them - he who is one of them" (V & I p. 135).

What there is, primordially, rather than a dichotomy of seer and seen, is what one might call the transcendental fact of Visibility, the nature of which is this "singular reversal".

Merleau-Ponty takes great pains to stress that this transcendental fact of reversibility, as manifest in Visibility, does not reside in the subject, nor in the object, but has, as it were, a life of its own -- in the manner (we suggest) of the Gestalt. And furthermore this Gestalt - structure of reversibility, this supra-subjective and supra-objective encountering and coalescing, is the fundamental factum of the Lebenswelt -- rather than the superimposed subject/object polarity. We read, for example:

"One should not even say, as we did a moment ago, that the body is made up of two leaves, of which the one, that of the "sensible," is bound up with the rest of the world. There are not in it two leaves or two layers; fundamentally it is neither thing seen nor seer only, it is Visibility sometimes wandering and sometimes reassembled." (V & I p. 138)

Reversibility describes the complementarity in Being of what is "there" and what is "not there". It refers to the existential progression of experience in which positive Being as presence dissolves constantly into absence but into an absence that is never nothingness, and from a positivity that is never self-contained fullness.

It is, we think, of crucial importance in understanding the notion of reversibility to bear in mind its close relationship to the notions of latency, of presence and absence, of the visible and the invisible. Reversibility, perhaps more than any other single concept of Merleau-Ponty, can lead one to the objectivistic interpretation we have consistently opposed. If subject and object are simply "reversible" does this not mean that there is ultimately only one mode of Being? Given the omnipresence of the presumption of objectivity derived from the constantly operative perceptual faith, this "one mode of Being" will tend always to be taken as the mode of Being of the perceptual object. When the concept of reversibility leads Merleau-Ponty to such observations as "we are the world that thinks itself" (V & I-p. 136), are we not lead, almost instinctively, to find this pantheistic, or panspiritistic; to find it a kind of naturalism? Yet, to recall Merleau-Ponty's words cited in our Introduction, "nothing could be, farther from naturalism," because it is precisely the underlying objectivistic concept of "nature" that he is cutting away.

The accurate understanding of reversibility demands that we recognize that it is not a positivistic, naturalistic concept. It is not a simple equivalency of subject and object, as if to say that either can appear as the other in a different guise. This is clearly revealed

when Merleau-Ponty makes it plain that reversibility is never total, never a kind of perfect alternation of two determinate poles. Reversibility is intrinsically incomplete; it is never fully realized or accomplished. Indeed, if it were, it would no longer be reversibility but its antithesis, namely plenitude; just as full presence without any absence ceases to be presence and becomes simply a state. Merleau-Ponty discusses the example of touching (V & I pp. 147, 148). In the body the touched is also the touching -- this is reversibility. But the touching does not touch itself as touching, but always, only, as touched. The toucher can be touched and the seer can be seen, and indeed this is the ontological basis of experience, but touching is never touched and seeing is never seen. Merleau-Ponty says this:

...We spoke summarily of a reversibility of the seeing and the visible, of the touching and the touched. It is time to emphasize that it is a reversibility always imminent and never realized in fact. My left hand is always on the verge of touching my right hand touching the things, but I never reach coincidence: the coincidence eclipses at the moment of realization...

Later he adds that this non-coincidence is not a "failure":

For if these experiences never exactly overlap, if they slip away at the very moment they are about to rejoin, if there is always a "shift", a "spread", between them, this is precisely because my two hands are part of the same body, because it moves itself in the world, because I hear myself both from within and from without. I experience -- and as often as I wish -- the transition and the metamorphosis of the one experience into the other, and it is only as though the hinge between them, solid, unshakeable, remained irremediably hidden from me. But this hiatus between my right hand touched and my right hand touching, between my voice heard and my voice uttered, between one moment of my tactile life and the following one, is not an ontological void, a non-being: it is spanned by the total being of my body and by that of the world; it is the zero of pressure between two solids that makes them adhere to one another (V & I p. 148).

Clearly we should not think that the "hinge which remains irremediably hidden" is merely some sort of psych^h-physiological phenomenon, a characteristic of the body. A few sentences later Merleau-Ponty makes plain that this hiddenness is of universal and fundamental ontological significance: "We touch here", he says, "the most difficult point, that is, the bond between the flesh and the idea, between the visible and the invisible armature which it manifests and which it conceals" (V & I p. 149). And the essentially difficult aspect, that which makes this "the most difficult point" is the fact that the invisible cannot be made visible. We cannot force the secret out; we cannot expose that which makes the invisible invisible, and turn it inside out, turn it all into visibility. Contrasting literature, music and experience with the science of Lavoisier and Ampère, Merleau-Ponty says:

The difference is simply that the invisible, these ideas, unlike those of that science, cannot be detached from the sensible appearances and be evicted into a second positivity.... But it is as though the secrecy wherein they lie and where the literary expression draws them were their proper mode of existence. For these truths are not only hidden like a physical reality which we have not been able to discover, invisible in fact but which we will one day be able to see facing us, which otherwise, better situated, could already see, provided that the screen that masks it is lifted. Here, on the contrary, there is no vision without the screen: the ideas we are speaking of would not be better known to us if we had no body and no sensibility; it is then that they would be inaccessible to us. (V & I p. 150)

The invisible that we are here grappling with is as much part of reversibility as is that which becomes visible through this reversibility. Indeed, Being should not be identified as the visible, as if the Being of the invisible awaited fullness as visibility. Rather, Being might be likened to a source of light which itself is not illuminated by the light and remains a seen/unseen,

and the edge of an immeasurable darkness. Though Being is constantly manifesting itself, it is never to be identified conclusively with any manifestation. All manifestations emerge and recind in a process of disclosure that is always a disclosed-undisclosed, a known-unknown.

"It is therefore not a de facto invisible, like an object hidden behind another, and not an absolute invisible, which would have nothing to do with the visible. Rather it is the invisible of this world, that which inhabits this world, sustains it, renders it visible, its own and interior possibility, the Being of this being." (V & I p. 151)

In our concluding chapter, which we devote to a description of Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the individual subject, we will return to this unseen wellspring of what is seen, to this silence out of which all speech or music flows, to this Being that it not only "là" but also and ever "en déça".

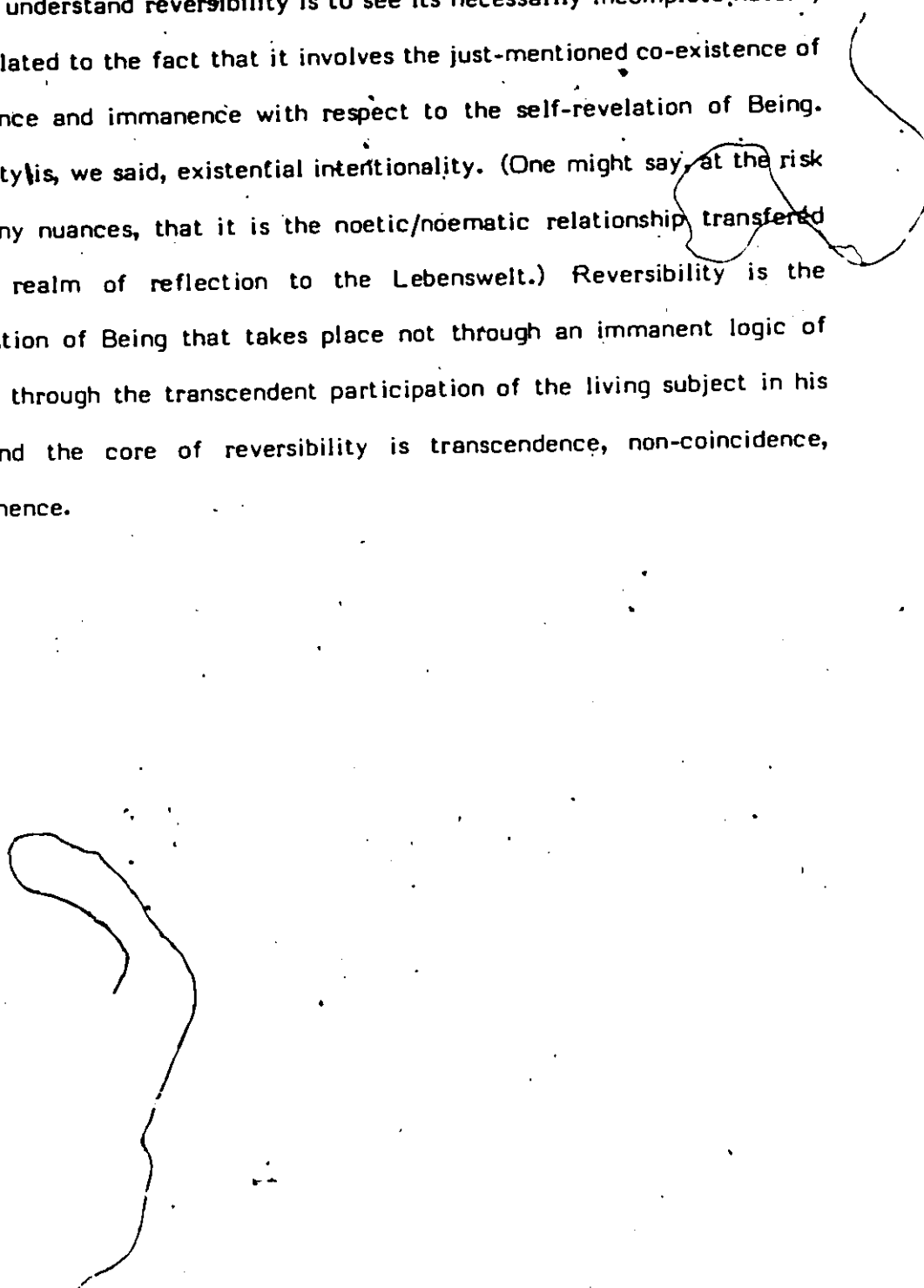
This Chapter on reversibility has been devoted to Merleau-Ponty's ontology as also a transcendental philosophy. We began, in our discussion of ontological anonymity, by considering the possibility that the ontology of the Lebenswelt had eliminated the possibility of an ontologically grounded subject. The question is whether what Merleau-Ponty sometimes refers to as the Weltlichkeit of Geist ("Working Notes") is taken to the point that Geist loses any transcendence with respect to Welt. We find this is not so. The Geistlichkeit of Welt is as fundamental as its inverse; indeed, Merleau-Ponty mentions the need to describe a "universe of Geist", which resembles, metaphorically, a "second nature" (V & I, p. 167). We saw that Merleau-Ponty situates subjectivity and individuality not on the periphery

of truth with a problematic relationship to truth (which is what develops when truth is objectivised and subjectivity discretised); rather he situates the individual incarnate subject at the heart of truth, at the opening of Being*. Finally, in this first section, we underlined the impossibility of grasping the role and ontological situation of the subject in positivistic terms, and briefly indicated its relationship to the "invisible".

If, at the conclusion of the first section of this chapter, the possibility of an ontologically grounded subject for Merleau-Ponty had been defended, it remained to consider whether Merleau-Ponty has given us another version of traditional transcendental thought, only de-rationalized. This we took up under the heading "transcendental positivism", and we approached the question from the point of view of its inherent objectivism, and its neglect of the existential subject. We argued that Merleau-Ponty's transcendental viewpoint was not based on a tacit assumption of truth as a form of naive objectivity, nor on the goal of grounding such an objectivity in structures of an absolutized subjectivity, whether necessarily and rationally structured or not. Rather, we argued that Merleau-Ponty's goal was to arrive at a truth that is fundamentally related to the existential subject. While in this sense truth is immanent, nonetheless it remains transcendent with respect to the subject. (This is the Lebenswelt Logos.) Again we emphasized the need to abandon the methodological and ontological canon of objectivity and to give full attention to the "invisible", the non-positivistic character of Merleau-Ponty's ontology.

*"It is matter of understanding that truth itself has no meaning outside of the relation of transcendence, outside of the Ueberstieg towards the horizon - that the "subjectivity" and the "object" are one sole whole, that the subjective "lived experiences" count in the world, are part of the Weltlichkeit of the "mind", are entered in the "register" which is Being, that the object is nothing else than the tuft of these Abshattungen." (V & I, p. 185)

Finally, we addressed Merleau-Ponty's transcendental position directly by focusing on the concept of reversibility. Reversibility, again, is liable to lead one either to the naturalistic position, or to the transcendental subjectivism, depending on which positivism one might be starting from. Central, therefore, to properly understand reversibility is to see its necessarily incomplete nature, which is related to the fact that it involves the just-mentioned co-existence of transcendence and immanence with respect to the self-revelation of Being. Reversibility is, we said, existential intentionality. (One might say, at the risk of too many nuances, that it is the noetic/noematic relationship transferred from the realm of reflection to the Lebenswelt.) Reversibility is the self-revelation of Being that takes place not through an immanent logic of Geist, but through the transcendent participation of the living subject in his world. And the core of reversibility is transcendence, non-coincidence, non-immanence.



Chapter Five: The Existential Subject

a) Invisibility

In the Introduction to Being and Time Heidegger writes these preliminary comments:

What is it that phenomenology is 'to let us see'? What is it that must be called a 'phenomenon' in a distinctive sense? What is it that by its very essence is necessarily the theme whenever we exhibit something explicitly? Manifestly, it is something that proximally and for the most part does not show itself at all: it is something that lies hidden, in contrast to that which proximally and for the most part does show itself; but at the same time it is something that belongs to what thus shows itself, and it belongs to it so essentially as to constitute its meaning and its ground.

Yet that which remains hidden in an egregious sense, or which relapses and gets covered up again, or which shows itself only 'in disguise', is not just this entity or that, but rather the Being of entities... (Heidegger, Being and Time, p. 59)

For Merleau-Ponty, as for Heidegger, the 'return to the things themselves', the phenomenological project "to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself" (to use Heidegger's language - p. 58) is ultimately an ontological project. Again as for Heidegger, the movement from phenomenology to ontology for Merleau-Ponty was accompanied by a corresponding shift of focus from the phenomenal field of what is presented to the ontical and hidden field of what it is that is presenting itself; and the concern thus developed with what lies beneath the field of phenomenological analysis as the ground of the structures it reveals. With both philosophers, the non-present/presence of Being became a central theme for ontology. Heidegger showed a particular concern with how Being was hidden, disguised and even

forgotten, and with / how it should be revealed, rediscovered and reappropriated. Merleau-Ponty saw that the invisible/visible character of Being was not a deficiency in understanding or perception, but the essential character of ontologically revelatory experience.

"To see is, as a matter of principle, to see farther than one sees, to reach a latent existence. The invisible is the outline and the depth of the visible. The visible does not admit of pure positivity anymore than the invisible does. ("Introduction", Signs, pp 20-21)"

"The invisible is the limit or degree zero of visibility, the opening of a dimension of the visible. There can be no question here of a zero in every respect or of an unrestricted being." (Signs, p. 23)

It is not realistic to attempt to say in a word what Merleau-Ponty meant by the visible/invisible nexus. These two terms do not denote one particular element of his ontology, but stand as the overarching symbol of his ontology as a whole.

The invisible is not a "zero in every respect" because it is always a seen-unseen, a known-unknown, "the opening of a dimension of the visible."

And the visible is never "an unrestricted being", for it is always, in a sense, symbolic* - bespeaking the depths that are its "latent existence".

* This appreciation of the symbolic character of the Lebenswelt, the appreciation of its half-hidden half-seen depths, is in fact the way in which Merleau-Ponty characterizes thought:

Knowledge and communication sublimate rather than suppress our incarnation, and the characteristic operation of the mind is in the movement by which we recapture our corporeal existence and use it to symbolize instead of merely to coexist." ("An Unpublished Text" in The Primacy of Perception, p. 7)

At the same time, however, as the visible and the invisible must not be ontologically dichotomized (e.g. along the lines of the Sartrean in-itself/for-itself), neither should they be ontologically identified, as though the invisible were merely an unseen visible.

"World and Being: their relation is that of the visible with the invisible (latency) the invisible is not another visible ("possible" in the logical sense) a positive only absent" (V & H, p. 251).

The invisible cannot be captured in the visible. "It is always, to use Heidegger's phrase, "that which remains hidden in an egregious sense." The invisible is, if this can be said in a non-intellectualist sense, the inner truth of the visible; it is a core which, while essentially self-manifesting, is never fully laid bare. The source of this tension between hiddenness and self-expressivity is that the invisible and the visible together symbolize the transcendence intrinsic to Being. To highlight this transcendence, we might say that for Merleau-Ponty, Being should be conceived of as Act rather than State. All objectivistic notions of Being - we have discussed how absolute subjectivism is a disguised objectivism - conceive of Being as in-itself, and Truth as the full and complete "adequation", in complete determinateness, to the totality of Being. But for Merleau-Ponty, Being is not a totality in-itself, and Truth is not the perfect adequation in thought to this self-enclosed reality. Being is Act; it moves beyond itself, and thus shows itself archetypically in the incarnation of intentionality, "flesh".

We have already discussed how fundamental is the notion of presence. While Merleau-Ponty may search for the pre-reflective, and the pre-thematic, he does not search for the pre-expressive as if there were something prior to presence. One searches with a heuristic anticipation of what one expects, knows in some way in advance, about what is to be found. Being, as the object of Merleau-Ponty's search, is ineluctably present and expressive, it is ineluctably meaningful. Being is always becoming Word, giving voice to itself. Meaning is not superimposed on Being. There is, rather, a fund of meaning in the heart of the lived world, which is inseparable from its Being -- the "Lebenswelt logos". To this Merleau-Ponty wishes to give expression. This inexhaustible fund of meaning is the invisible of the visible:

"Meaning is invisible, but the invisible is not the contradictory of the visible: the visible itself has an invisible inner framework (membrure), and the invisible is the secret counterpart of the visible, it appears only within it, it is the Nichturpresentierbar which is presented to me as such within the world - one cannot see it there and every effort to see it there makes it disappear, but it is in the line of the visible, it is its virtual focus, it is inscribed within it (in filigree)" (V & I, p. 215)

Presence, Merleau-Ponty has said, is primordial. But presence is dependent upon absence. Something "is there" because somehow it has been torn away from totality and been made to stand out - thus the distortions of Cezanne served not to hide but to reveal. There is always a partial quality to presence, an aspectual character. It requires distancing, separation. The first form of presence is perception, in which the first dehiscence occurs. That which is "out there" is almost violently torn away from what is "in here", and the most pervasive of the hidden intentional structures, the perceptual faith, seems to divide Being in two: perceiver and perceived, self and world, subject and object. The object appears as what is present,

the subject what is absent. Objectivity is positivity, subjectivity is negativity. The philosophy of subjectivity, however, recognized the positivity in subjectivity, and this was its genius. However, in expressing that positivity, subjectivism remained within the dichotomy of perceptual intentionality and simply reversed it: subjectivity is positivity, objectivity is negativity.

Merleau-Ponty's ontology, however, holds that this powerful dehiscence which seems to split Being, if it is closely and phenomenologically examined, actually manifests a co-presentation of self and world in which each is utterly indispensable ontologically to the other, both sharing a common ontological situation. But, more profoundly, it is realized, once reflection ceases to operate according to the polarity of subject/object, that this dehiscence is not some accident of natural history, but it is Being in its act of being. In the words of G.B. Madison (who discusses Merleau-Ponty's notion of Being at length):

L'Être serait finalement la genèse et l'avènement même du monde et de la raison, et il serait ainsi non pas un fait, un fondement, un sol, mais un abîme, une source spontanée, éternelle et inépuisable de transcendance."
(Madison, p. 158)

This transcendence of Being underlies what we have previously discussed concerning Gestalt, presence, ek-stase, reversability; and it is extremely important in clarifying what for Merleau-Ponty is the Being of the individual. Some prior clarification of transcendence, however, might assist us at this point.

b) Transcendence

The meaning of the term is not all all easy to pin down, for it tends to move along a continuum with an expanding scope. To begin with, in its most restricted sense, it denotes a genuine otherness, describing the fact that a particular being is not contained within or entailed by an other. The transcendence of one to the other implies a radical break of the other with respect to the ontological continuum of the one; the other is not an extension or product of the one; it is not com-prehended by the one.

The full meaning of transcendence, however, includes more than this restricted sense. The term's significance expands beyond the above adjectival sense which pertains to a relationship between beings, or orders of beings, and it takes on a substantive or nominal sense pertaining to a being itself.

↳ "Transcendent" in this larger sense comes to mean that which is essentially indefinable, unconfined, open. Transcendent Being is always being-towards-further-being. There is an inner orientation "beyond", which refers not only to a specific relationship, but takes on a general sense to refer to an intrinsic and essential ontological orientation (teleology) of surpassing. Transcendence in this substantive sense is always self-transcendence. This is the sense in which G.B. Madison uses the term when he says that, for Merleau-Ponty, "L'Etre n'est pas un fondement ou un substrat, mais un abîme, un fonds inépuisable et insondable de transcendance." (Madison, p. 262) He adds that Being is, "une histoire téléologique éternelle, une téléologie paradoxalement sans télos, sans fin" (Madison, p. 263).

In Merleau-Ponty's writings one can find various gradations of the sense of transcendence, from the simple adjectival transcendence of the object of

perception relative to the subject as affirmed in the perceptual faith, to the profound substantive transcendence of Being itself, revealed in the self-revelatory and dynamic Being of all beings, and in a special way in the Being of the Self. Commenting on Sartre in the Working Notes, Merleau-Ponty writes:

I take my starting point where Sartre ends, in the Being taken up by the for-itself -- It is for him the finishing point because he starts with being and negativity and constructs their union. For me it is structure or transcendence that explains, and being and nothingness (in Sartre's sense) are its two abstract properties. For an ontology from within, transcendence does not have to be constructed, from the first it is, as Being doubled with nothingness, and what is to be explained is its doubling (which, moreover, is never finished) -- (V & I. p. 237).

The terms visible and invisible are phenomenologically more accurate than such terms as positive and negative, and their ontological neutrality makes them much more apt for Merleau-Ponty to describe the doubling-over of Being. It is clear, moreover, that the visible/invisible nexus is not an impossible combination (such as subject/object or for-itself/in-itself) but an unbreakable whole, and this indissoluble relationship is a description of the transcendence of Being. For Merleau-Ponty, transcendence came to refer to the very heart of his ontological aim to recover the unity in Being between its too mutually-referring dimensions. We find the term used frequently in the Working Notes and with the utmost significance. Thus, for example, we find this brief statement indicative of the profound meaning of transcendence for Merleau-Ponty:

The positive and the negative are the two "sides" of a Being; in the vertical world, every being has this structure....

Against the doctrine of contradiction, absolute negation, the either or — Transcendence is identity within difference. (V & I p. 225)

Every being has this two-sided structure, this duality (not a dualism); and what surplants the doctrine of separation, opposition, contradiction between these two sides, is the notion of transcendence. This places transcendence in place of the opposition of subject and object, and at the centre of the "identity within difference" which is the central theme of Merleau-Ponty's ontology. Transcendence accounts for the vertical world, which cannot be reduced to one objective level of Being.

A certain relation between the visible and the invisible, where the invisible is not only non-visible (what has been or will be seen and is not seen, or what is seen by an other than me, not by me), but where its absence counts in the world (it is "behind" the visible, imminent or eminent visibility, it is Urprasentiert precisely as Nichturprasentierbar, as another dimension) where the lacuna that marks its place is one of the points of passage of the "world". It is this negative that makes possible the vertical world, the union of the impossibles, the being in transcendence...." (V & I pp 227-228)

This "union of impossibles" is precisely the collapse of the antinomies which we have so often discussed. Their union occurs within the context of the vertical world not reducible to the lowest common level of objective Being, but constituted by ascending levels of meaning and of Being, the higher comprehending or including the lower, and transforming the lower by integration within the higher. This union in ontological verticality describes "being in transcendence". What is "there" always signifies within itself that it extends beyond what is there into an infinite horizon. Thus the urprasentiert, the original present, includes the not-originally-presentable, that which in its ultimate sense, its original meaning,

cannot be made present (the Nichturpräsentierbar). There is no temporal or philosophical journey which at its end will unveil this mystery: like the "dark lady" of Shakespeare's sonnets, whose identity is precisely not to have her identity revealed but always to have it intimated.

The invisible is there without being an object, it is pure transcendence, without an ontic mask. And the "visibles" themselves, in the last analysis, they too are only centred on a nucleus of absence." (V & I p. 229)

In this concept of the visible-invisible, this known-unknown, Merleau-Ponty has helped to do for philosophy something similar to what the concept of the irrational numbers did for mathematics. He extends the framework of understanding to encompass what was before the limit of comprehensibility. The surd (the square root of 2), which was a stumbling block and a stopping-point, became in mathematics the beginning of a higher and broader viewpoint as to what a number was and could be. So, the appropriation of the invisible leads philosophy beyond the immanence of rationalism, idealism and their counterpart, empiricism. It leads beyond positivism in all these forms. To extend our comparison, all these forms of positivistic thought might be compared to the set of natural numbers as if that set of numbers were accompanied by the assertion that they were the only "real" numbers.

We have said that transcendence pertains to the self in a special sense. In showing how this is so, we shall round out our account of the ontology of the subject for Merleau-Ponty. First, then, there is the transcendence of all beings. As we have repeatedly argued, Merleau-Ponty's desubjectivization of the subjective field was accompanied by a de-objectivization of the objective field. The latter becomes "the flesh of the world". And within this context, individual things lose their objectivistic sense of being monads or atoms of Being, to become instead expressions of Being, sharing fully in its transcendence.

"a spatio-temporally individuated this is an Unselbständig: there are only radiations of (verbal) essences, there are no spatio-temporal indivisibles. The sensible thing itself is borne by a transcendency." (V & I p. 260)

As an aside we might ask if science itself has not repeatedly discovered through its history of successive stages of explanation, arising eventually in response to variations in phenomena, deeper and far more complex levels of explanation are constantly required of even the smallest and most elemental "object". Must not science itself come to admit (perhaps rather timidly) that there is absolutely no reason to believe that this process will ever come to an end? If so, what becomes of its tenacious belief in solid matter? in "spatio-temporal indivisibles" to which it so earnestly wishes to ascribe all "explanation"?

In a series of cryptic notes written in January, 1960, Merleau-Ponty includes this phrase, "Transcendence, synonym of incarnation" (V & I p. 229). "Incarnation" expresses the ontological unity of self and world also denoted

by the term "flesh", by the "chiasm" or overlapping or interpenetration of these two ontological dimensions. The incarnation is "synonymous with transcendence" because the ontological unity of self and world is no more an in-itself of naturalism, than it is a in-itself of idealism. The ontological unity of self and world is, as we have previously discussed, an existential intentionality. It is the transcendence of Being which manifests itself to itself in the structure Merleau-Ponty calls reversibility, "the ultimate truth".

We have seen that this reversibility itself is not to be understood as an alternation of one state to another, but on the contrary that it is a never complete mediation. It is an ontologically primordial intentional structure, an "opening" within Being, which serves to shed light on Being and to diffuse throughout Being its own inherent meaning. It is experienced not only in perception and understanding, but more basically in deliberate and significant action.

Let us again hear Merleau-Ponty speak of this reversibility (from his last "Working Note" of 1960):

"The body always presents itself "from the same side" -- (by principle: for this is apparently contrary to reversibility).

It is that reversibility is not an actual identity of the touching and the touched. It is their identity by principle (always abortive) -- yet it is not ideality, for the body is not simply a de facto visible among the visibles, it is visible-seeing, or look. In other words, the fabric of possibilities that closes the exterior visible in upon the seeing body maintains between them a certain divergence (écart). But this divergence is not a void, it is filled precisely by the flesh as the place of emergence of a vision, a passivity that bears an activity --" (V & I p. 272)

The fact that "the body always presents itself from the same side" is apparently contrary to reversibility only if reversibility is conceived as ~~identity~~, as interchangeability. But this is not so. There is always that which remains (as it were) un-reversed. As we said earlier, touching per se is never touched, seeing per se is never seen. Thus, the "visible-seeing", the "look", as mentioned in the above passage, is never "simply a de facto visible among the visibles." The body always "presents itself from the same side", and that "side" is the this side, which Merleau-Ponty elsewhere calls "indéclinable" (PP. p. 459). It is the Self. And it cannot be removed from its place "this side" of all objectification, despite the fact that it constantly manifests itself and testifies to its existence. It remains intrinsically wrapped up with the notions of invisibility, transcendence, and silence.

c). Being en deça

In the Phenomenology of Perception Merleau-Ponty addressed this Being which remains en deça under the term the "tacit cogito":

"Behind the spoken cogito, the one which is converted into discourse and into essential truth, there lies a tacit cogito, myself experienced by myself. But this subjectivity, albeit imperious, has upon itself and upon the world only a precarious hold. It does not constitute the world, it devines the world's presence round about it as a field not provided by itself...." (P.P. pp 403, 404)

Though he does amend his expression of the tacit cogito, these same ideas are carried over into the Visible and the Invisible. There is a lengthy Working Note presented under the heading, "Touching-touching

oneself; seeing-seeing oneself; the body, the flesh as Self." In this note Merleau-Ponty takes up the necessity of the Self and of the presence of the self to self in order for there to be any presence whatsoever. But this contact of self with self is not a direct givenness, but a concomitant givenness, a parallel presence which accompanies the presence of everything to which the self is oriented.

"the corporeal schema would not be a schema if it were not this contact of self with self (which is rather non-difference) (common presentation to...)." (V & I p. 255)

Merleau-Ponty also makes clear in this Note, as he had in the Phenomenology of Perception, that this self experienced in concomitant self-presence is absolutely non-objectifiable:

"To touch and to touch oneself (to touch oneself: touched-touching) They do not coincide in the body: the touching is never exactly the touched... Something else than the body is needed for the junction to be made: it takes place in the untouchable. That of the other which I will never touch. But what I will never touch he does not touch either, no privilege of oneself over the other here... The untouchable is not a touchable in fact inaccessible... It is a true negative, ... an original of the elsewhere, a Selbst that is an Other, a Hollow." (V & I p. 254)

The self-presence of the self is not the positivity of the self-presence of idealism, i.e. a self-positing self presence in which, ultimately, the self coincides with itself. Rather the self, for Merleau-Ponty, is absent even to itself; even to itself it is Other; and yet it is this transcendence without ceasing to be self.

"My invisibility for myself does not result from my being a positive mind, a positive "consciousness", a positive spirituality, an existence as consciousness (i.e. as pure appearing to self), it comes from the fact that I am he who: I) has a visible world i.e. a dimensional body,

and open to participation; 2) i.e. a body visible for itself; 3) and therefore, finally, a self-presence that is an absence from self--" (V & I p. 250)

In this irremedial invisibility, this self-hood that is not self-coincidence, we are able to see most clearly the way in which, despite their ontological unity, the subject is never "of" the world in the same sense "as" the world. The flesh of the world, the flesh of the body (which is existential reversibility) and the self that "inhabits" the body are distinguishable, even though they should not be ontologically isolated or hierarchially ordered.

"The flesh of the world is not explained by the flesh of the body, nor the flesh of the body by the negativity or self that inhabits it--the 3 phenomena are simultaneous--

The flesh of the world is not self-sensing (se sentir) as is my flesh -It is sensible and not sentient --" (V & I p. 250)

The sense of Self functions to refer all that is "visible" to the invisible which lies behind it, and which appears, though remaining half-hidden, through the visible. In this function the sense of Self is the ultimate testimony to the transcendence of Being. It exposes the radical verticality in Being. In its own irreducible transcendence which is co-present with all presence it constantly counteracts the naive inclination to the assumption of Being as Being-in-itself. Operatively the sense of Self reveals the fundamental situatedness of all perception and understanding; and refers the basic factum of the situation to a centre which, by opening up Being as the realm of my possibility, draws out the significance of its inherent meaning in a universality that is rooted in the particular.

The event of my birth has not passed completely away, it has not fallen into nothingness in the way that an event of the objective world does, for it committed a whole future, not as a cause determines its effect, but as a situation, once created, inevitably leads on to some outcome. There was henceforth a new "setting", the world received a fresh layer of meaning. In the home into which a child is born, all objects change their significance; they begin to await some as yet indeterminate treatment at his hands; another and different person is there, a new personal history, long or short, has just been initiated, another account has been opened." (PP. p. 407)

In the Phenomenology of Perception, as in the Visible and the Invisible, Merleau-Ponty showed a clear conception that to say "My body is made of the same flesh as the world" (V & I p. 248) is not to equate the being that is en deçà, "on this side", with the beings that are "there", before it, around it, in which it lives. The subject is, in one sense, "of" the world, but in another sense he is not.

It seems, however, that Merleau-Ponty came to feel that his first account of the tacit cogito was too much conceived along subject/object lines, with the cogito, albeit tacit, still functioning as a transcendental ego, projecting meaning into the world. If so, this was not what Merleau-Ponty ultimately intended to convey.

John Sallis presents a cogent and convincing account of Merleau-Ponty's rejection of the notion of the tacit cogito on the grounds that it was a return to pure immanence, or pure subjectivity:

"The point is that with the tacit cogito Merleau-Ponty retains a kind of pure interiority, pure immanence,

behind experience; he retains just that which, on the other hand, he proposes to abolish... With the tacit cogito he retains, behind transcendence, "a retreat of non-being." (PP. p. 400) (Sallis, p. 66)

Sallis goes on to say that the abandonment of the tacit cogito is related to Merleau-Ponty's "radical integration of subjectivity into the movement of transcendence" (Sallis, p. 67). In the Visible and the Invisible, Sallis says, subjectivity is understood as "an intertwining with the world, an intertwining behind which there remains no subjective retreat of non-being" (p. 67)

While agreeing that there is for Merleau-Ponty "no subjective retreat of non-being", we nevertheless believe that a caution is in order. It seems to us, regarding the tacit cogito, that in a certain sense Merleau-Ponty does most deliberately wish to "retain that which he proposes to abolish", as Sallis puts it. Merleau-Ponty refers to a "retreat of non-being" as the "Self" (in the Chapter on the cogito in the Phenomenology of Perception), but in the context of contrasting consciousness of particular thoughts with the consciousness which, like a shadow we might say, accompanies and refers to thinking in general. The word "being" in this case, seems to be used to convey a meaning that is common at this stage of Merleau-Ponty's writing (and the capital "B" is not used), i.e. the often pejorative sense of something particular, self-contained, defined, enclosed; in short, being in-itself. The Self is definitely "not-being" in this sense. And it is, of course, important not to regard the tacit cogito as a thing. It might better be regarded as a continuous, silent act of consciousness. This is why Merleau-Ponty takes pains to contrast it, both here and later in the Working Notes, with the spoken cogito; and why he says that this very act of putting into words the perpetual silent companion of consciousness forces it out of our grasp.

"The cogito at which we arrive by reading Descartes is, then, a spoken cogito, put into words and understood in words, and for this very reason not attaining its objective, since that part of our existence which is engaged in fixing our life in conceptual forms, and thinking of it as indubitable, is escaping focus and thought...

...I should be unable even to read Descartes' book, were I not, before any speech can begin, in contact with my own life and thought, and if the spoken cogito did not encounter within me a tacit cogito." (PP p. 402)

In The Visible and the Invisible, where Merleau-Ponty begins to confer on Being a meaning distinct from being in-itself, the elusive presence of the self intended by the phrase "tacit cogito" is preserved in many new terms which we have already cited, such as "my invisibility", "the self-presence that is an absence from self", "the negativity or self that inhabits the flesh of the body", the "untouchable - true negative, an original of the elsewhere, a Selbst that is an other, a Hollow"? These phrases are all taken from the very text, that is, in which Merleau-Ponty supposedly "rejects" the notion of the tacit Cogito.

What Merleau-Ponty has abolished is the "pure" subject, but he certainly wishes to retain the self, the existential subject, which Sallis in a later passage calls "the full integration of reflection (self-consciousness) into transcendence." (Sallis p. 88) If we accept this phrase transcendence here should be taken not in its narrower sense (which seems to be the sense in which Sallis uses it) but in its broadest sense, i.e. the self-transcendence of Being.

The criticism of the tacit cogito which one finds in the Working Notes is, we feel, related to the general comment on the Phenomenology of Perception which one also finds there: "The problems posed in Ph. P. are insoluble because I start there from the "consciousness" - "object" distinction --" (V & I p. 200) The tacit cogito (the prereflective contact of self with self) was originally framed too much in a subject versus object context. However, we should note that following the famous paragraph in the Working Notes beginning, "What I call the tacit cogito is impossible", the next paragraph begins, "Yet there is the world of silence, the perceived world, at least, is an order where there are non-language significations." (V & I p. 171) The pre-reflective world of perception, the world of silence, still relates within its silence to a self, to a self prior to language, not meaning-giving but revealing and sharing pre-linguistic meaning. There is no abandonment of this silent self, of silent consciousness. Although in speech the subject begins immediately to structure through language and reflection, nonetheless, it always carries in its silent self the antithesis to the absolutism of such structurings. This is its own silent self-awareness concomitant in all presence. Why does Merleau-Ponty not abandon this concomitant awareness

of self? It is because this is the fundamental datum on the basis of which one must reject the false absolutism of both objectivism and subjectivism, based on the notion of an Absolute Spectator. Even perception is prone to the fatal inclination, as we have discussed, of forgetting itself as intentional structure and of naively taking its polarized intentionality as canonical of Being.

With life, natural perception (with the savage mind) is perpetually given to us the wherewithal to set up the universe of immanence -- And yet this universe tends of itself to become autonomous, realizes of itself a repression of transcendence -- The key is in this idea that perception qua wild perception is of itself ignorance of itself, imperception, tends of itself to see itself as an act and to forget itself as latent intentionality, as being at -- Same problem: How every philosophy is language and nonetheless consists in rediscovering silence." (V & I p. 213)

The existential counterweight to this "imperception" that haunts not only perception but reflection as well, is the silent consciousness of self. Thus it is not strange to hear Merleau-Ponty include the following comment on the "rejected" notion of the tacit cogito among his Working Notes regarding the planning of his future opus:

"Therefore very important, from the introduction on, to introduce the problem of the tacit cogito and the language cogito. Naiveté of Descartes who does not see a tacit cogito under the cogito of Wesen, of significations -- But naiveté also of a silent cogito that would deem itself to be an adequation with the silent consciousness, whereas its very description of silence rests entirely on the virtues of language," (V & I p. 179)

This "silent consciousness" is not, as Sallis profoundly points out, a "pure interiority" or a "retreat into non-being". Its silence does not, that is, derive from immanence, rather from transcendence.

That which is always "on this side" of the body, which is my invisibility, if it were an immanence would become the subjectivity of intellectualism. The immanence of the subject of intellectualism is precisely what permits its objectification, its transmutation into the totality of a "subjective" correlative of an in-itself universe. But the subject for Merleau-Ponty is "the self-presence that is an absence from self." The "rediscovery of silence" is not a retreat into non-being, but an escape from immanence. The silence itself stems from the fact that the Being of the subject is to be beyond itself, outside of its own grasp, "located" in the Gestalt of the Lebenswelt, whose meaning it mediates and generates, through speech and action. Ironically, the discovery of the silent self is the break with immanence and the most profound of all the encounters with the transcendence of Being.

d) The Existential Subject

All objectivism, whether it be of the empiricist or intellectualist school, treats subjectivity as immanence. This neglect of transcendence, however, is constantly, operatively contradicted in perception, which is one reason Merleau-Ponty speaks of the "primacy of perception". In the essay "The Primacy of Perception" Merleau-Ponty tells us that perception is paradoxical:

Thus there is a paradox of immanence and transcendence in perception. Immanence, because the perceived object cannot be foreign to him who perceives; transcendence, because it always contains something more than what is actually given. And these two elements of perception are not, properly speaking, contradictory. For if we reflect on this notion of perspective, if we reproduce the perceptual experience in our thought, we see that the kind of evidence proper to the perceived, the appearance of "something", requires both this presence and this absence." (Primacy, p. 16)

The same paradox of immanence and transcendence is archetypal of the incarnate being, the existential subject. The great importance of perception is to reveal the transcendence within the immanence of experience. Thus, Merleau-Ponty says:

By these words, the "primacy of perception", we mean that the experience of perception is our presence at the moment when things, truths, values are constituted for us; that perception is a nascent logos; that it teaches us, outside all dogmatism, the true conditions of objectivity itself; that it summons us to the tasks of knowledge and action. It is not a question of reducing human knowledge to sensation, but of assisting at the birth of this language..." (Primacy, p. 25)

The "birth of this language", this "nascent logos" is, indeed, the escape from immanence that philosophy, if it is to overcome its scandalous decline into irrelevance, must appropriate. Only in the affirmation of transcendence within knowledge, and, more fundamentally, within the subject, can one find the "remedy to skepticism and pessimism":

Here as everywhere else the primacy of perception - the realization, at the very heart of our most personal experience, of a fecund contradiction which submits this experience to the regard of others - is the remedy to skepticism and pessimism. If we admit that sensibility is enclosed within itself, and if we do not seek communication with the truth and with others except on the level of a disembodied reason, then there is not much to hope for." (Primacy, p. 27)

This transcendence of which we are speaking is precisely the opposite of "disembodied reason", or for that matter of disembodied science. These disembodied ideologies belong to immanence. Transcendence is rather self-existing beyond self in others and in the world -- real, ontological participation in a truth, in an intersubjective community, in a world, all of which are equally not confined within their own immanence, but which share in a common self-transcending Being:

"Just as I grasp time through my present and my being present, I perceive others through my individual life, in the tension of an experience which transcends itself."
(Primacy, p. 27)

The silence of the being that is en *déça*, the "silent consciousness", the ultimate meaning intended by the "tacit cogito", derives, we said earlier, not from immanence but from transcendence. It is, to use metaphor, the very passageway out of immanence. It demonstrates the inadequacy of immanence; for, it is not the silence of nothingness, but the silence of the invisible, the hidden, the "not-yet", the emerging, the coming to be - not yet fulfilled, not yet understood, not yet experienced. And, indeed, never to be fully and finally so. This is similar, in a sense, to Marcel's use of the term "mystery". Mystery, he says, should not denote the absence of meaning, but an excess, a superabundance, which is incomprehensible because inexhaustible; but certainly not contra-comprehensibility or contra-rationality. Thus, the silence described by Merleau-Ponty is not emptiness, but the point at which presence and absence converge and diverge, where expression originates and also runs up against its limit.

The subject is this point, the opening of Being. Merleau-Ponty situates the subject not as encompassing Being within itself, nor as an epiphenomenon tenuously shimmering on the periphery of Being, but as an active force in the centre of Being. The subject is fundamental to the self-disclosure and self-transcendence of Being. Situated thus, the subject's knowledge, albeit perspectival, provisional, finite is nonetheless real. His freedom, albeit constrained, is nonetheless significant and effective. By overcoming objectivism, and through his seminal notion of the visible/invisible nexus, Merleau-Ponty establishes the ground for an ontology of the subject

which avoids the positivism of empiricism or intellectualism, while not leading into pure irrationality and negativity. Our self-hood may exceed our own comprehension, because it is preeminently "invisible", but that does not leave it meaningless or empty of Being, but shows its place at the heart of Being in transcendence.

"I am not simply a constituted happening; I am not a universal thinker. I am a thought which recaptures itself as already possessing an idea of truth (which it cannot at each moment wholly account for) and which is the horizon of its operations. This thought, which feels itself rather than sees itself, which searches after clarity rather than possesses it, and which creates truth rather than finds it, is described in a formerly celebrated text of Lagneau. Should we submit to life or create it, he asked. And he answered: "Once again this question does not pertain to the domain of the intellect; we are free and, in this sense, skepticism is true. But to answer negatively is to make the world and the self unintelligible; it is to decree chaos and above all to establish it in the self. But chaos is nothing. To be or not to be, the self and everything else, we must choose" (Cours sur l'existence du bien). I find here, in an author who spent his whole life reflecting on Descartes, Spinoza and Kant, the idea - sometimes considered barbarous -- of a thought which remembers it began in time and then sovereignly recaptures itself and in which fact, reason, and freedom coincide." (Primacy, p. 22)

END

The Existential Subject in Merleau-Ponty
John McKennirey

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Abbreviations in Text

S.C.

P.P.

P.P.

S + NS

Signes

Signs

Primacy

V & I

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