KNOWING OTHERS

KNOWING OTHERS:

MERLEAU-PONTY

AND

THE ARTICULATION OF DIFFERENCE

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis will explore three related concerns. First (Chapter 1), I discern some of the basic philosophical strategies at work in the Phenomenology of Perception. I will specifically discuss the teleological/ archaeological structure of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and his notion of "primordial unity". Second (Chapter 2), I will show how these strategies are manifest in his discussion of the other. And third (Chapter 3), I will consider some of the consequences of Merleau-Ponty's treatment of the other. In particular, I will examine his understanding of difference and plurality. A comparison with Hegel's master/slave dialectic will highlight some possible limitations of Merleau-Ponty's argument.

In short, I will answer the following questions: How is the other known, according to Merleau-Ponty, and just how *other* is this other?

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INTRODUCTION

How can I know that there are others, other consciousnesses, other minds which experience the world? Of course, this very much depends on what is meant by the 'other' and by 'consciousness'. Generally the other is understood by reference to oneself, as another self which is, however, not one's own. "In the last result, the actions of others are...always understood through my own"[1]. The problem of the other is a problem of an *alter ego*, another self. And so the question of how the other is known also depends on what is understood by the self. In addition, a theory of how the other is known to me should also be a theory of how I am known to the other.

Merleau-Ponty finds Cartesian philosophy and classical psychology incapable of dealing adequately with these sorts of questions. He writes that "[t]he existence of other people is a difficulty and an outrage for objective thought" (PP 349). This is primarily because "objective thought" (empiricism and intellectualism both)[2] conceives of

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[1]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), p 348. (Text hereafter referred to as "PP".)

[2]"Objective thought" conceives of a "universe perfectly explicit in itself" (PP 41); it is inspired by Descartes' demand for clarity and distinctness, and cannot, therefore, accommodate the tacit and ambiguous in experience. Merleau-Ponty understands "objective thought" to manifest itself in two fundamental forms: empiricism and intellectualism. The former needs no special introduction because Merleau-Ponty uses the term in a more or less traditional way. Intellectualism is, however, more specific than rationalism, empiricism's more commonly opposed term. Intellectualism is roughly a philosophy of consciousness which grounds all existence in the *cogito*; existence is understood to be constituted by the transcendental subject. Intellectualist thinkers include Descartes, Kant, and Husserl.

consciousness as being closed in on itself. Objective thought dichotomizes subject and object, the *for-itself* and *in-itself*, so that a subject (or self) can never be an object for an other, nor can an object be inhabited by a subject or bear traces of personal and social existence. Subject and object are so alienated from each other that the notion of an *alter ego* is self-contradictory: "How can the word 'I' be put into the plural, how can a general idea of the *I* be found, how can I speak of an *I* other than my own, how can there be other *I*'s" (PP 348). For Descartes the self is the *cogito* and is by definition reflexive, coincident with itself, self-knowledge. In classical psychology "the psyche, or the psychic, is what is given to only one person."[3] The cogito or psyche is the presence of self to self (a tautology). The problem of the other for Cartesian philosophy and classical psychology is the problem of a presence of a self to self for an other. In other words, the self is by definition hermetically sealed.

> It seems, in effect, that one might admit without further examination or discussion that what constitutes the psyche in me or in others is something incommensurable. I am alone able to grasp my psyche.... A consequence of this idea is that the psyche of another appears to me as radically inaccessible, at least in its own existence. I cannot reach other lives, other thought processes, since by hypothesis they are open only to inspection by a single individual: the one who owns them (CRO 114).

Of course, the self does not just 'own' its life of consciousness; it also 'owns' its body. The self needs to be reconciled not only with the other but also with the body.

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[3]M. Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relation with Others", trans. William Cobb, in The Primacy of Perception, ed. James M. Edie (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p 114. (Text hereafter referred to as "CRO".)

Descartes' cogito is cut off from its body as well as from the existence of others. If we define the subject as a private realm of consciousness present only to itself, then the subject is cut off from its body which exists publicly and can be perceived as an object by oneself and others. According to this approach, my psyche or cogito does not actually exist in the world; it is only somehow causally related to the world. Furthermore, the existence of the other for me is mediated by the other's embodiment in the world which I can perceive, and the relationship between the other's body and consciousness is also somehow mediated. It must be mediated if the body and consciousness are external to each other, yet still related. Our initial problem of the other is now complicated by the mind-body dichotomy. The two terms of self and other must be crossed with another pair: consciousness and body. We end up with

> a system of four terms: (1) myself, my "psyche"; (2) the image I have of my body by means of the sense of touch or of cenesthesia, which, to be brief, we shall call the "introceptive image" of my own body; (3) the body of the other as seen by me, which we shall call the "visual body"; (4) a fourth (hypothetical) term which I must re-constitute and guess at - the "psyche" of the other, the other's feeling of his own existence - to the extent that I can imagine or suppose it across the appearance of the other through his visual body (CRO 115).

With these levels of mediation it is no wonder that Descartes imagined himself in a world of automata - mere bodies, coats, and hats. According to this scheme, one does not perceive an embodied other; the other's body is perceived only as a sign of the other, and this sign must be judged and decoded. In fact, for Cartesians, perceptions of all kinds are nothing but occasions for judgement:

> Perception becomes an 'interpretation' of the signs that our senses provide in accordance with the bodily *stimuli*, a 'hypothesis' that the mind evolves to 'explain its impressions to itself' (PP 33).

Traditionally the philosophical challenge of the other has been to figure out how to bridge the gap between the four terms sketched out above. Myself, my body, the other's body, and the other's consciousness: these are taken as milestones on the way to knowledge of the other. The route itself is not questioned. Husserl, for instance, tried to bridge these gaps in the fifth of his Cartesian Meditations. Merleau-Ponty's work on the constitution of the other is, in fact, a response to Husserl's attempt.

Husserl tried to reconcile the transcendence of the other with the cogito's sphere of immanence (*Eigensphäre*). His argument proceeds from the cogito to the other through our bodily insertions in the world. Ultimately he is not just trying to account for the existence of the other in the world; he is also trying to account for the intersubjectivity of the world itself - that is, a world which is given to and shared by many selves, and not just enjoyed by myself. The key to Husserl's argument is what he calls "analogical apperception" (see Cartesian Meditations, sect. 54). He requires this notion of apperception not only to account for others but also to account for the horizons of the objective world. For instance, Husserl uses this concept to explain how it is that we perceive an object as having a reverse side even if it is not explicitly given. These aspects are implicit in perception because they are *apperceived*. The other side of the object is not deliberately inferred. Instead our approach to the object is already motivated by past experience such that the object is given *as having a back*. The object is

assimilated or "paired" with other similar object perceived in the past. We apperceive because perception is always already motivated. For Husserl, the interiority of the other is given in a similar fashion. The other's body is perceived as already paired with mine, and I am, therefore, motivated to apperceive another consciousness, an alter ego. Although Husserl calls this "*analogical* apperception", the other is not inferred by an argument from analogy. In other words, my relation to my body is not brought in after the fact as a model with which to interpret an other's body; the other's body is already given as paired with mine. This pairing is as immediate as the sight of the other's body. The other's body is perceived precisely as a body-like-mine. This level of interpretation is primordial and irreducible. (Later we will see that this sort of primordial interpretation plays an important role in Merleau-Ponty's argument.)

Merleau-Ponty does not accept Husserl's argument because he judges it to beg the question.

> In the last resort, the actions of others are, according to this theory, always understood through my own; the 'one' or the 'we' through the 'I'. But this is precisely the question: how can the word 'I' be put into the plural (PP 348)?

The problem, as the commentator M.C. Dillon points out, is that "[t]here is a crucial difference between my apperception of the back of a physical object and my apperception of the consciousness of another human body"[4]. One can verify the back of an object,

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[4]M.C. Dillon, Merleau-Ponty's Ontology (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1988), p 116.

because, although it may not be explicitly given, one can in principle always bring it into view. In fact, an object is presumably given as three-dimensional only because it is paired with other objects whose backs were experienced at previous time. However, the other's *cogito* is in principle closed to my experience; an interiority cannot by definition be given from the outside. If the *alter ego* can never be given directly and is a contradictory notion, there is nothing to justify pairing my body with the other's. As Merleau-Ponty explains:

> If the sole experience of the subject is the one which I gain by coinciding with it, if the mind, by definition, eludes 'the outside spectator' and can be recognized only from within, my *cogito* is necessarily unique.... Perhaps we can say that it is 'transferable' to others. But then how could such a transfer ever be brought about? What spectacle can ever validly induce me to posit outside myself that mode of existence the whole significance of which demands that it be grasped from within (PP 373)?

However, it seems to me that the problem is not just that the pairing of the other's body with mine will never be justified by past verifications of this apperception. The problem is also that the *cogito* is not truly embodied; it is complete in itself and has no intrinsic connection to its body or any other external thing. In other words, if the *cogito* is our point of departure, then my embodiment is not available to be paired analogically with the other's body:

> [T]here is no opening, no 'aspiration' toward an Other for this self of mine, which constructs the totality of being and its own presence in the world, which is defined in terms of 'self-possession', and which never finds anything outside itself but what it has put there (PP 373).

The failure of Husserl's argument is symptomatic of traditional approaches to the problem of the other. According to these strategies, it is assumed that the other is secondary and derivative, and that the self can be taken for granted. Furthermore, these strategies do not fundamentally challenge the mind-body distinction. The terms involved in traditional philosophical and psychological analyses (myself, my body, the other's body, and the other self) are taken as facts which must be reconciled; this reconciliation is sought in reflection. The difficulty with this approach is more with the framing of the question than it is with any particular attempted answer. We should not assume the *cogito* because in many ways it creates the problem which it then proceeds to try to solve.

> Given the presuppositions with which that psychology works, given the prejudices it adopted from the start without any kind of criticism, the relation with others becomes incomprehensible for it (CRO 113).

A proper understanding of our knowledge of others requires that we ask the right questions. Instead of trying to reconcile the self and other selves, the mind and the body, Merleau-Ponty asks how it is that we have these terms to reconcile in the first place. He writes, "We must therefore rediscover, after the natural world, the social world, not as an object or sum of objects, but as a permanent field or dimension of existence" (PP 362). This signals a change in the strategy of approaching the problem of others. For Merleau-Ponty the problem is no longer just the problem of others; it is equally the problem of self and of the body. Perhaps we could apply what Merleau-Ponty says in another context (when discussing perceptual illusions): "Now here the data of the problem are not prior to its solution" (PP 36). Concerning the status of the terms of the problem,

Merleau-Ponty asks: what is the condition for the existence of 'facts' which require some sort of reconciliation? Merleau-Ponty's approach

> makes us put the world of the exact back into its cradle of consciousness, and asks how the very idea of the world or of exact truth is possible, and look for its first appearance in consciousness (PP 31).

After all, we may be doomed to failure if we take as our starting point the reconciliation of terms which are initially conceived as external to each other and as sharing no internal dynamic. Merleau-Ponty investigates a world that is prior not only to the other but prior even to the articulation of the self. He does not construct a conception of the unity of the world by means of reflection; rather he discovers that this unity is primordial and is, in fact, already the condition of the meditation on the other insofar as the other is already given, not produced by reflection. In other words, we must retrace the emergence of the other. Merleau-Ponty draws on developmental psychology in this 'archaeological' project. In fact, he even uses the phrase "psychological reflection" (PP 31) as an equivalent for the term "phenomenology". Psychology (especially gestalt and child psychology) provides a glimpse into the primordial underpinnings of knowledge and experience. These foundations are buried deep in our developmental history. "Consciousness must be faced with its own unreflective life in things and awakened to its own history which it was forgetting" (PP 31). The philosopher M.C. Dillon puts it succinctly when he writes,

> the world prior to the emergence of the other is...an infantile world which corresponds to a quality of experience that is lost with the development of the reflective awareness of perspectival differences between my experience

> and that of others: if the world of syncretic sociability is to be retrieved, it cannot be done by meditative reduction and static analysis; rather, it requires a genetic phenomenology, an ontogenetic investigation that is the phenomenological counterpart of developmental psychology[5].

Like Kant, Merleau-Ponty searches for the conditions of experience and knowledge, but unlike Kant the conditions he finds are not logical categories which constitute the specific structural possibilities of experience. Kantian categories are more or less accessible to reflection and we can find them near the surface of experience. By contrast, Merleau-Ponty must unearth his conditions because they are far below the surface. The conditions he discovers are obscure because they are themselves the grounds of all specific and determinate experience.

Merleau-Ponty's work on the other cannot be extricated from the core of his thought because, as it turns out, the unity which Merleau-Ponty offers as the ground of the self-other distinction is so primordial as to precede all distinctions and articulations. As it happens, the ground of the recognition of the other is also the ground of all experience. We must, therefore, examine Merleau-Ponty's conditions of experience.

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My purpose is not to isolate Merleau-Ponty's argument as to how the other can be known, but to place his argument in the context of his phenomenology as a whole. My concerns will be three-fold. First (Chapter 1), I intend to discern some of the basic philosophical strategies at work in the <u>Phenomenology of Perception</u>. I will specifically

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[5]Dillon, p 119.

discuss the teleological/ archaeological structure of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and his notion of "primordial unity". Second (Chapter 2), I will show how these strategies are manifest in his discussion of the other. And third (Chapter 3), I will consider some of the consequences of Merleau-Ponty's treatment of the other. In particular, I will examine his understanding of difference and plurality. A comparison with Hegel's master/slave dialectic will highlight some possible limitations of Merleau-Ponty's argument.

In short, I hope to answer the following questions: How is the other known, according to Merleau-Ponty, and just how *other* is this other?

Chapter 1.

THE ONE & THE MANY

> I am in communication with one being, and one only, a vast individual from which my own experiences are taken, and which persists on the horizon of my life as the distant roar of a great city provides the background to everything we do in it.
>
> -Merleau-Ponty (PP 328)

Intellectualism and empiricism take their cues from Descartes especially insofar as they can be seen to have adopted his image of knowledge as an edifice built up by its parts. Descartes begins his first Meditation with these words:

> Several years have now elapsed since I first became aware that I had accepted, even from my youth, many false opinions for true, and that consequently what I afterwards based on such principles was highly doubtful; and from that time I was convinced of the necessity of undertaking once in my life to rid myself of all the opinions I had adopted, and of commencing anew the work of building from the foundation[6].

Descartes imagined knowledge to be constructed from the ground up by its parts. The foundation is composed of particular units of experience like the rest of the edifice. Descartes makes it his project to justify these epistemological building blocks, and then to do the same for the actual construction of a body of knowledge.

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[6]Rene Descartes, "Meditations", quoted from Philosophic Classics ed. Walter Kaufmann (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p 26.

Intellectualism and empiricism both have roots in the Cartesian tradition and are also inspired by the image of knowledge as an edifice with foundations. For instance, they both seek a bedrock as the basis on which to construct perceptual knowledge. Clarity and distinctness will guarantee that the foundations are sound and indubitable; at this level, the object of perception will be transparent, its meaning self-evident. In either case, this groundwork will be composed of parts. It is in the synthesis of these parts (in judgment or interpretation) that we risk error. Judgments must be analyzed and the elements justified. Interpretations must be excavated so that nothing is assumed and everything made explicit.

Of course, empiricism and intellectualism differ as to the nature of these building blocks of experience. Empiricism takes the sense-datum to be its irreducible unit, while intellectualism understands this foundation to be composed of intentional elements (*Stoffe* or *hyle* for Husserl) which are somehow constituted and given to oneself as already meaningful.

Merleau-Ponty takes aim at the empiricist theory of perception as expressed in what he calls the "constancy-hypothesis". According to this hypothesis, the perceiver and the perceived are bridged by the physiology of the sense-organs.

> The objective world being given, it is assumed that it passes on to the sense-organs messages which must be registered, then deciphered in such a way as to reproduce in us the original text (PP 7).

For the empiricist, discrete data which correspond to individual qualities in the objective world are transmitted by the sense-organs. "Hence we have in principle a point-by-point

correspondence and constant connection between the stimulus and the elementary perception" (PP 7). The relationship between sensations must be constructed by judgment and by association; the sense-data do not themselves provide clues to their interpretation. Furthermore, sensations are simple units and can, therefore, only be received as already explicit. There can be no ambiguity in sensation because there is no complexity. Either one receives a particular sense-datum explicitly and in its entirety or one does not receive it at all. Consequently, empiricism cannot conceive of a specific role for attention. One may direct one's attention, but the subject's intention in doing this will not in any way inform perceptions themselves. Taking notice of the world is not an act; when one attends to an object, one becomes transparent to it and passively registers its qualities.

> Since 'bemerken' or taking notice is not an efficient cause of the ideas which this act arouses, it is the same in all acts of attention, just as the searchlight's beam is the same whatever landscape be illuminated. Attention is therefore a general and unconditioned power in the sense that at any moment it can be applied indifferently to any content of consciousness (PP 26).

Attention gives one nothing other than sensations which are not yet shaped by interpretation. Attention does not, then, have a specific role in perception because, for empiricism, perception is nothing but attention. One cannot attend to perceptual experience to a greater or lesser degree; attention and perception do not admit of degrees.

Intellectualism also conceives of experience as constructed from the ground up. According to intellectualism, our knowledge is constituted by the subject. Experience is always mine, a sphere of immanence (*Eigensphäre*). All experience must be constituted

by me or it fails to register with me. Accordingly, one cannot experience anything *as* tacit; experience is constituted by me or not at all. Experience cannot be ambiguous, because this ambiguity would have to be constituted by me and would, therefore, be explicitly constituted as such and thus unambiguous. I am in a 'situation' (or field of experience) only insofar as I have already painstakingly constructed my horizons piece by piece. The world consists of determinate experiences which I constitute.

> Analytical reflection [intellectualism], it is true, breaks with the world in itself, since it constitutes it through the working of consciousness, but this constituting consciousness, instead of being directly apprehended, is built up in such a way as to make possible the idea of an absolute determinate being. It is the correlative of a universe, the subject possessing in absolutely completed form all the knowledge which is adumbrated by our actual knowledge (PP 40).

Intellectualism claims to discover the bedrock of experience in these completely determinate parts. The world is immanent and, therefore, determinate, or it cannot be experienced at all.

Intellectualism, then, cannot conceive of a specific role for attention any more than can empiricism. The condition of experience for intellectualism is that it be constituted by the fully conscious self. Attention in perception does not give of degrees because it is already implied by the intellectualist notion of experience. Either one pays attention in the course of perception or one does not perceive at all. Intellectualism and empiricism grant attention such a general role that it no longer retains a specific character:

> But, in a consciousness which constitutes everything, or rather which eternally possesses the intelligible structure of all its objects, just as in empiricist consciousness which constitutes nothing at all, attention remains an abstract and ineffective power, because it has no work to perform (PP 28).

If we must choose between intellectualism and empiricism then we are forced to choose between a consciousness which is all or nothing. In the case of intellectualism, consciousness actively constitutes experience and is, therefore, wholly involved in it. In the case of empiricism, consciousness passively receives experience and cannot interpret without risking error. In either case, consciousness cannot be more or less involved with the constitution of experience. These two conceptions also share an understanding of experience as composed of determinate units. One thoroughly digests the whole of a unit or one does not experience it at all. Consequently, empiricism and intellectualism cannot conceive of "consciousness *in the act of learning*" (PP 28).

> Empiricism cannot see that we need to know what we are looking for, otherwise we would not be looking for it, and intellectualism fails to see that we need to be ignorant of what we are looking for, or equally again we should not be searching (PP 28).

Essentially, then, empiricism and intellectualism do not allow for the distinction between foreground and background in experience, between the focal and the tacit; they cannot allow for the experience of the present *as* withdrawn. For instance, neither can account for teleological structures in which whatever is to be achieved or developed is already anticipated but not yet accomplished: "neither attaches due importance to that circumscribed ignorance, that still 'empty' but already determinate intention which *is*

attention itself" (PP 28). Nor do these philosophical strategies allow for experience of the ambiguous which calls to be explicated. In other words, empiricism and intellectualism are incapable of conceiving of an absence which enters into the constitution of experience; they both share a 'metaphysics of presence'.

Gestalt psychology is a challenge to empiricism and intellectualism because it resists a reduction to this 'metaphysics of presence'. The gestalt nature of perception, for instance, cannot be understood as an effect of the construction of perceptual units (the gestalt, by definition, exceeds the sum of its parts). Nor is the gestalt determinate throughout. Gestalts cannot be accounted for without an understanding of the figure-field (or horizonal) structure of perception.

For instance, if an object is to appear as distant, according to the logic of intellectualism and empiricism, this distance must be evident in the object itself. Otherwise, the distance will be a product of judgment and this distance will not itself appear in the phenomenal realm. Yet gestalt psychology discovers a disparity between the isolated retinal image of the distant object and the object as perceived in context:

> [T]he objects interposed between me and the thing upon which I fix my eyes are not perceived for themselves; they are nevertheless perceived, and we have no reason for refusing to recognize that this marginal perception plays a part in seeing distance, since, when the intervening objects are hidden by a screen, the distance appears to shrink (PP 48).

The object is perceived as distant only because it is given as a figure in a field; distance can be given only as a gestalt. The *distant* object is not discretely perceived. It is distant only to the extent that it is shot through with indirect perceptions of indeterminate objects

surrounding it. The figure is already relational; its relationship to its field is not constructed after the fact because the field enters into the very constitution of the figure. Furthermore, the margins of perception are determined as such because of the particular figure which is highlighted. Field and figure determine each other reciprocally. A perceived object is, therefore, not thoroughly determinate because it is constituted as much by what is implicit in its field or horizon as by what is explicitly given. An object is perceived as a mixture of presence and absence.

We must not, however, understand this 'absence' to be pure nothingness; this is the mistake of intellectualism and empiricism. Although horizons are not determinately present, neither are they empty. Horizons contain *dormant* figures which are implicit in objects which are perceived. A landscape, for instance, "comes to life and is disclosed, while the other objects recede into the periphery and become dormant, while, however, not ceasing to be there" (PP 68). The surrounding world is implicit in an object. While the figure-field structure makes objects possible insofar as it allows them to be distinguished from their environment, it also allows the environment and its structure to be announced in the object.

> In other words: to look at an object is to inhabit it, and from this habitation to grasp all things in terms of the aspect which they present to it. But in so far as I see those things too, they remain abodes open to my gaze, and, potentially lodged in them, I already perceive from various angles the central object of my present vision (PP 68).

An object is perceived with its horizon and, therefore, with perceptual possibilities that are not yet realized. These possibilities reflect back on the central object in such a way

as to enrich its dimensions. "One phenomenon releases another, not by means of some objective cause, like those which link together natural events, but by the meaning which it holds out" (PP 50). Phenomena do not succeed each other because they are folded up inside each other; perception gives us a "flow of phenomena" (PP 50). According to gestalt psychology there are no units of experience to be digested by the understanding. The determinate perceptions which one might offer as the building blocks of experience are figures only against an indeterminate background. Furthermore, because the margins of a gestalt are ambiguous, one cannot claim to perceive various distinguishable gestalts. As soon as one tries to focus on the limit of a gestalt's horizon its horizon recedes. One could not experience the seams of two separate gestalts since they would be indeterminate at the margins and would melt into each other. A gestalt's limit cannot be given because it extends into infinite indeterminacy and "horizons are always open" (PP 330). Figures do not spring into their fields unannounced; they arise out of their fields and are, therefore, always anticipated. If experience always flows out of itself, if it unfolds from its horizons, then there can be no real breaks in experience.

> The tacit thesis of perception is that at every instant experience can be co-ordinated with that of the previous instant and that of the following, and my perspective with that of other consciousnesses - that all contradictions can be removed, that monadic and intersubjective experience is one unbroken text - that what is now indeterminate for me could become determinate for a more complete knowledge, which is as it were realized in advance (PP 54).

Any horizon opens up into the world or what Merleau-Ponty calls the "horizon of all horizons" (PP 330).

> My point of view is for me not so much a limitation of my experience as a way I have of infiltrating into the world in its entirety. When I see the horizon, it does not make me *think* of that other landscape which I should see if I were standing on it, nor does that other landscape make me think of a third one and so on; I do not *visualize* anything; all these landscapes are already there in the harmonious sequence and infinite unfolding of their perspectives (PP 330).

The world is always there as "the universal style of all possible perception"[7] and provides a unified backdrop for all experience. I am only able to synthesize two perceptions, for instance, because "they are both extracted from one and the same perception of the world, which consequently cannot admit of the same discontinuity" (PP 329). Every experience arises out of a primordial unity of the world. The unity of experience is the prior condition of particular experiences. All perspectives arise out of each other and, therefore, present no difficulty in being synthesized. Instead of a succession of experiences, the manifold is given by means of what Merleau-Ponty calls a "transition-synthesis":

> I do not have one perspective, then another, and between them a link brought about by the understanding, but each perspective *merges into* the other and, in so far as it is still possible to speak of a synthesis, we are concerned with a 'transition-synthesis' (PP 329).

Experiences flow into and out of each other in such a way that they are only relatively distinguished, but never delimited.

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[7]M. Merleau-Ponty, "The Primacy of Perception and its Philosophical Consequences", trans. James M. Edie, in The Primacy of Perception (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p 16.

Merleau-Ponty has turned the Cartesian project on its head. Knowledge is not a edifice which is built from the ground up; we are acquainted with the unity of the world before we are able to distinguish determinate 'facts'. If knowledge is an edifice, we are aware of its architectural style long before we conceive of its construction and foundation.

> This unity [of the world] is comparable with that of an individual whom I recognized because he is recognizable in an unchallengeably self-evident way, before I ever succeed in stating the formula governing his character, because he retains the same style in everything he says and does (PP 327).

According to Merleau-Ponty, our experience proceeds from the one to the many, from the primordial unity of the world to the articulation of difference within this horizon.

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But are we not still entitled to ask what the foundation for our acquaintance with the world is? If our perception is limited by perspective, how is the world as a whole given to us before its particulars? We may presuppose the world, but how and why do we come to presuppose it in the first place? Or as Merleau-Ponty himself puts it:

> [H]ow is it possible for me to experience the world as a positively existing individual, since none of the perspective views of it which I enjoy exhaust it, since its horizons are always open, and since moreover no knowledge, even scientific knowledge, provides us with the invariable formula of a *facies totius universi* (PP 330)?

Perhaps we cannot answer these questions to the skeptic's satisfaction. After all, these questions already betray the prejudices of objective thought with its rationalist insistence in epistemological foundations. However, we may at least partially be able to respond to these challenges. Merleau-Ponty writes that

> [t]here is always something confronting [us], a being to be deciphered, an *omnitudo realitatis*, and the foundation of this possibility is permanently laid by the first sensory experience, however narrow or imperfectly it may be. We have no other way of knowing what the world is than by actively accepting this affirmation which is made every instant within us (PP 328).

The only answer we can give the skeptic is that we know the world because we affirm it at every instant. We have an unshakeable faith in the world. We may question this faith, but we can never really dislodge ourselves from the world; the skeptic only succeeds in deferring his faith in the world, never ultimately challenging it. We cannot answer the skeptic's questions directly, but we can show their futility.

Descartes and Merleau-Ponty both recognize that there can be no direct and unproblematic appeal to the objective world. We only have phenomena to deal with, so we must bracket things as they are in themselves. If we bracket the objective world, there is the danger that we will be unable to distinguish the real from the illusory. On the one hand, all appearances are indubitable as appearances, such that the illusory is no less true than the real.

> It has often been said that consciousness, by definition, admits of no separation of appearance and reality, and by this we are to understand that, in our knowledge of ourselves, appearance is reality: if I think I see or feel, I indubitably see or feel, whatever may be true of the external object (PP 294).

On the other hand, there would be nothing to keep us from considering all phenomena as *mere* appearances, and, therefore, illusory. Because, for Descartes, knowledge is built up from its foundation in individual phenomena, this challenge to the experiential unit threatens to undermine experience as a whole. (Merleau-Ponty, on the other hand,

accepts the indeterminacy of phenomena without calling into question the existence of a world, because the world is not grounded in particular phenomena, and is prior to them. This point will be discussed at greater length below.)

Skepticism justifies its challenge by pointing out that the truth of a real perception is not presented in that perception any more than illusion is perceived at the time as inherently false: "[I]t is the nature of illusion not to present itself as such" (PP 295). If we cannot distinguish the real and the illusory, then "my illusions should be perceptions with no object or my perceptions true hallucination" (PP 294).

Skepticism, however, fails to see that illusions are not experienced *as* false because they are only experienced retrospectively: "We know that there are errors only because we possess the truth, in the name of which we correct errors and recognize them as errors" (PP 295). Illusion cannot be divorced from its correction; the very notion is, in some sense, already a neutralization of error. Illusion is the sublation (*Aufhebung*) of perceptual error. One commentator writes,

> [I]n strict accordance with the Hegelian dialectic, the veridical perception presupposes, preserves, and transforms the "truth" of the first [the illusion] at the same time that it negates it[8].

Because it can be recognized only retrospectively, it is the truth of a non-truth, the rehabilitation of truth in the acknowledgement of error.

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[8]Samuel B. Mallin, Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p 209.

Thus understood, the possibility of illusion cannot threaten the reality of the world insofar as in this possibility we anticipate the recognition of greater truth, not the collapse of perception itself. Illusion is possible only against the backdrop of a world which we accept on faith. The discovery of illusion is always in the service of this world. Of course, perception can serve as evidence of past illusion only if we grant that our perceptions are at some other time trustworthy. The skeptic may want to question whether these perceptions are also illusions, but in doing so, the skeptic will need to posit some other perception which will in turn show us to have been again deceived. And these perceptions will only be able to serve this purpose if they are taken to be self-evident and veridical. Skepticism continually defers our faith in the world, although it is precisely this faith which it presupposes in the notion of illusion. The logic of skepticism, therefore, falls in upon itself. Skepticism both posits and precludes the possibility of the world, our perceptions of which we know to be true. It does so by placing the moment of dis-illusionment always beyond our reach in some absolute future. Skepticism could never accept an actual dis-illusionment because this would demand faith in the world as it appears to us. Skepticism can be thorough only at the risk of undermining the terms of its own critique.

We cannot guarantee particular perceptions beyond a shadow of a doubt, but then neither can we doubt the existence of the world as a whole. In fact, we can only question the veracity of a particular perception in the name of the world, the coherence of which we implicitly trust. In principle we could pursue the truth of a perception indefinitely:

"perception entails a process of making explicit which could be pursued to infinity" (PP 343).

The truth of a perception cannot be located at any particular moment in that process.

> We are now in a position to make up our minds about the question of evidence, and to describe the experience of truth. There are truths just as there are perceptions: not that we can ever array before ourselves in their entirety the reasons for any assertion (PP 395).

We can only verify a particular perception by referring (or deferring) to another perception, which is, however, also subject to the same doubt which put the first perception into question.

This does not mean that experience cannot yield truth, but that the truth of experience is never fully constituted:

> The actual possession of the true idea does not, therefore, entitle us to predicate an intelligible abode of adequate thought and absolute productivity, it establishes merely a 'teleology' of consciousness which, from the first instrument, will forge more perfect ones, and these in turn more perfect ones still, and so on endlessly (PP 395-6).

Any experience is open to doubt because every experience opens up to an endless network of past experiences and future possibilities such that any final verification cannot ultimately be achieved. We have an immediate faith in the veracity of our perceptions ("seeing is believing") because we take for granted the whole field in which perceptions are given.

> Which is why, as Descartes maintained, it is true both that certain ideas are presented to me as irresistibly self-evident *de facto*, and that this fact is never valid *de jure* (PP 396).

We can begin to see that that which allows us to investigate the truth of a perception is also that which allows us to doubt perception: namely, faith. Anything we perceive is open to doubt or verification. As we have seen, neither option ultimately precludes its opposite. The possibility that what we see is actually otherwise is predicated on the possibility of an illusion being replaced by perceptions which are themselves not doubted, but are given as self-evident. Similarly, the perceptual evidence which vouches for a thing's existence is not itself verified, but is taken for granted. Experience is never fully guaranteed nor wholly dubitable. This is because we do not originally *judge* our experience to be veracious or illusory. We understand before we explain what and how we understand, and we understand because we have a "primordial faith" (PP 409) in experience. Gary Madison writes that

> the ground of the possibility of perceptual and intellectual meaning, is to be found in the primitive fact, itself without grounding, that man is "thrown" into the world and that the world appears to him as though by miracle[9].

The world can neither be doubted nor rationally proven because it is given as a fact in which we have faith.

So far we have worked out Merleau-Ponty's argument for the unity of the world as the ground of all experience. However, there is a unity of subject and object even more primordial than the unity of the world. We must be careful when talking about experience not to assume a gulf between the subject and object. After all, Merleau-Ponty

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[9]G.B. Madison, The Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty: A Search for the Limits of Consciousness (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1981), p 165.

writes that "[e]very perception takes place in an atmosphere of generality and is presented to us anonymously" (PP 215). Experience is not, at least initially, *given to us*: "if I wanted to render precisely the perceptual experience, I ought to say that *one* perceives in me, and not that I perceive" (PP 215). One might also say that perceptual experience is an irreducible relationship of *presence*: that which is present is related to the one for whom it is present. Neither term can be fully extricated from the relationship. That is to say that the subjective and the objective are not separate realms. Just as the objective world is conceivable only as given in perception, the subject is nothing apart from its orientation within and towards the world.

> The essential point is clearly to grasp the project towards the world that we are. What we have said above about the world's being inseparable from our views of the world should here help us to understand subjectivity conceived as inherence in the world (PP 405).

Or as Merleau-Ponty also writes, "The world is wholly inside and I am wholly outside myself" (PP 407).

Subject and object originally coincide in perception; only in subsequent reflection does this split become evident. In other words, perception is originally unreflective. We may think about perception, but in no way can thought about perception coincide with perception itself. Consciousness of perception is parasitic on the original unreflective perception. "Sight is achieved and fulfils itself in the thing seen" (PP 377) and, therefore, "in whatever sense we take 'thought about seeing', it is certain only so long as actual sight is equally so" (PP 376). By definition, perception involves both subject

and object ("To see is to see something" - PP 374); subject and object are intertwined in perception. Reflection on perception concerns this relationship, but it is removed from it because it draws the subject and object apart. In the unreflective perception, the perceiver coincides with the perceived, and the subject is thus anonymous. As M.C. Dillon puts it, "the phenomenon presences itself to anyone who would witness it"[10]. I do not perceive, instead *one* perceives, or simply put, *there is a presence.* One may direct one's gaze, but the gaze itself is not initiated by the perceiver. In the gaze there is contact between the perceiver and the perceived which is unreflective and primordial.

Though subject and object are intertwined and mutually determine each other, they are not completely coincident either. The *relation* of subject and object is primordial, but this relation requires a degree of tension between these two terms. In other words, subject and object exist only by virtue of the tension or contact between them. Because it is this tension which is primordial, the terms do not collapse into a monism (which cannot contain within itself such a dynamic relation). This is why reflection can grasp the unreflective experience. Such experience is given as a relation and, therefore, subject and object are tacitly present. There is in every experience a tacit cogito (immanence) just as there is a tacit object (transcendence).

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[10]M.C. Dillon, p 104.

Up until this point, this chapter has for the most part been concerned with Merleau-Ponty's archaeology or "genealogy of being" (PP 54). That is, we have been concerned with Merleau-Ponty's argument for a primordial unity which underlies existence. First, we uncovered the world's unity as a "horizon of all horizons" (PP 330), and then we went even further to reveal the 'primordial contact' of this world with the one who perceives it. At a certain point, however, our archaeology must revert to a teleology: when we arrive at the bedrock of 'primordial contact' we discover that subject and object, although inextricable, are still in tension. In other words, Merleau-Ponty does not trace the "genealogy of being" back to a monism. The subject and object distinction is always tacitly present in experience, as is the manifold of the world. At this archaeological level we find ourselves thrown back to the articulation of difference.

For example: consciousness is intertwined with the perceived world in such a way as to be a function of it.

> Both universality and the world lie at the core of individuality and the subject, and this will never be understood as long as the world is made into an ob-ject. It is understood immediately if the world is the *field* of our experience, and if we are nothing but a view of the world (PP 406).

Nonetheless, we cannot dispose of the notion of consciousness: "[w]e do not say that the *notion* of the world is inseparable from that of the subject" (PP 408). Clearly, we can always find the *cogito* in experience. Descartes discovered an 'I think' underlying all experiences because *part* of the truth of experience is its immanence for the subject. Self-consciousness is thus prefigured in experience; the tacit cogito can always be discovered.

The subject is nothing other than this attachment to the world, therefore, any experience of the world is already tacitly subjective.

> One day, once and for all, something was set in motion which even during sleep, can no longer cease to see or not to see, to feel or not to feel, to suffer or be happy, to think or rest from thinking, in a word to 'have it out' with the world (PP 407).

There is experience only in so far as there is a subject which 'has it out' with the world. This 'primordial contact' is then a primordial tension; it is a dynamic which must be played out.

> 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 effects, but as a situation, once created, inevitably leads to some outcome (PP 407).

Experience is teleological because it must be unfolded; it is a "passage from the indeterminate to the determinate" (PP 31), from the tacit to the explicit. With our very first experience we encounter a world, not simply particular qualities or objects. This world is not, however, fully determinate; it exists as an outline or horizon. Our first experience must, therefore, initiate a teleological movement: if I first experience a world, but one not determinately present, then this experience is already transcendent and throws me outside this first experience to others which follow.

We can put this another way: each experience already harbours an internal contradiction insofar as we "operate within being" (PP 330) and expect the world to be evident in isolated particulars.

> [B]elief in the thing and the world must entail the presumption of a completed synthesis - and yet this completion is made impossible by the very nature of the perspectives which have to be inter-related, since each one of them, by virtue of its horizons, refers to other perspectives, and so on indefinitely. There is, indeed a contradiction, as long as we operate within being, but the contradiction disappears...if we operate in time, and if we manage to understand time as the measure of being (PP 330).

The world is given in each experience only insofar as these experiences exist as a single teleological thrust.

In other words, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological excavations do not reveal a static or monistic Being (like Spinoza's), but a dynamic movement. His archaeology, therefore, reverses itself and becomes a teleology, and this latter movement is characterized by the progressive articulation of difference: "I am...one single 'living cohesion', one single temporality which is engaged, from birth, in making itself progressively explicit" (PP 407). Merleau-Ponty's teleology and archaeology do not cancel each other out, because this articulation of difference proceeds from within primordial unity.

> The miracle of consciousness consists in its bringing to light, through attention, phenomena which re-establish the unity of the object in a new dimension at the very moment when they destroy it (PP 30).

All difference is announced even before it is explicitly articulated. Plurality is encountered only by a process of gradual differentiation. Merleau-Ponty's teleology unfolds from within; the movement is not towards a transcendent Being. To put it another way, the teleological 'beyond' is always already circumscribed and immanent in being. Merleau-Ponty writes,

> We experience...concrete acts of taking up and carrying forward by which, through time's accidents, we are linked in relationships with ourselves and others. In short, we experience a *participation in the world*, and 'being-in-truth' is indistinguishable from being-in-the-world (PP 394-5).

The manifold of experience comes to be articulated only as the manifold of a single unified existence, and conversely, the gestalt of existence is indeterminate, and, therefore, demands to be articulated in its manifold.

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Merleau-Ponty did not himself use the term "hermeneutic" in his work, but his work can certainly be read as a hermeneutical philosophy. Interpretation, after all, plays a central role in this teleological movement from indeterminacy to articulation, from unity to the recognition of difference. Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is hermeneutical insofar as he understands interpretation to be primordial rather than epistemologically secondary.

We recall that objective thought is characterized by a conviction that the world is explicit and determinate in itself (PP 41). In its empiricist form, the world is already constituted and we need only discover it by means of our senses. In its intellectualist form, the world must ultimately be clear and distinct for consciousness insofar as consciousness has itself constituted this world. Merleau-Ponty writes that,

> the image of a constituted world where, with my body, I should be only one object among others, and the idea that of an absolute constituting consciousness are only apparently antithetical; they are a dual expression of a universe perfectly explicit in itself (PP 41).

Thus objective thought cannot tolerate the experience of ambiguity. At least, ambiguity is, for it, not a proper experience in the sense that it does not express anything about the

world: objective thought conceives of ambiguity as a failure of experience. Thus when we find it necessary to interpret it is because we are confused or in error. According to objective thought, we can eliminate the need for interpretation by analyzing our experience into the units which comprise it: sense-data in the case of empiricism, and *hyle* in that of intellectualism. In principle at least, ambiguity must always give way to clarity and distinctness. For Merleau-Ponty, however, there can be no appeal to the 'raw stuff' of experience; there is no such determinate 'matter' to ground the world.

> Pure sensation, defined as the action of *stimulus* on our body, is the 'last effect' of knowledge, particularly of scientific knowledge, and it is an illusion (a not unnatural one, moreover) that causes us to put it at the beginning and to believe that it precedes knowledge (PP 37).

Interpretation is primordial; it has no limit such as sense-data. There can be no doubt that Merleau-Ponty's is a hermeneutic philosophy.

With our first experiences we encounter only a 'something': "I know only that there is, in the most general terms, something to be perceived, and of those remote regions I possess only the style, in the abstract" (PP 331). We face the world as a concrete individual: "There is always something confronting [us], a being to be deciphered, an *omnitudo realitatis*, and the foundation of this possibility is permanently laid by the first sensory experience" (PP 328). The world as a whole is never completely laid out before us. Nonetheless, our first perception announces this world. We do not hypothesize the existence of the world. Whatever the particular occasion of this encounter, we perceive it *as* an announcement of the world. Out of this

indeterminate setting, particular figures gradually emerge and differences are articulated. The infant does not first perceive things and gradually construct a world out of them. On the contrary, the infant first perceives a world within which objects, qualities, and perspectives may later be articulated. If differences are discovered within the world, they are announced in advance (though they are still indeterminate). New experiences will be given in terms of the already familiar; in other words, they will be given as interpreted. We perceive according to the rule of metaphor: the novel is given *as* the familiar. Everything is, at least initially, experienced *as* something else, something similar. No experience is unanticipated.

This is to say that we do not live in a nominalist universe. For instance, a child does not acquire the general and abstract meaning of a word by gradually extending its sense to incorporate more particularities. The child does not first learn nouns as proper names. Instead, the child acquires a noun as a general concept which only subsequently admits of particular instances.

> When the child...says "hand"...this means his father's hand as well as the hand represented by a photograph or his own hand. This seems to presuppose a kind of abstraction, a recognition of the same object in a plurality of cases (CRO 149).

We are not faced with irreducible difference onto which we try to fit our acquired concepts. On the contrary, our awareness of difference develops out of the general outlines of the world. Difference is articulated as *differentiation*, and, thus, the unity that binds together differences is always prior and already guaranteed. Differences are,

therefore, not limitations in the world because differences 'bleed' into each other: "each perspective *merges into* the other and, in so far as it is still possible to speak of a synthesis, we are concerned with a 'transition-synthesis'" (PP 329). Even when differences have been articulated, they spill over into each other and flow together. We can interpret one experience in terms of another because they share a genealogical root in the primordial world. We can, therefore, account for synaesthetic experience: "under mescalin, the sound of a flute gives a bluish-green colour, the tick of a metronome, in darkness, is translated as grey patches" (PP 228). Merleau-Ponty remarks,

> Nor are these even exceptional phenomena. Synaesthetic experience is the rule, and we are unaware of it only because scientific knowledge shifts the centre of gravity of experience, so that we have unlearned how to see, hear, and generally feel (PP 229).

All experiences are in communication with all others because they participate in the primordial unity of the world:

> [E]xistence can have no external or contingent attribute. It cannot be anything - spatial, sexual, temporal - without being so in its entirety, without taking up and carrying forward its 'attributes' and making them into so many dimensions of its being.... There are no principal or subordinate problems: all problems are concentric (PP 410).

Experience is, then, a sort of great 'dialogue'. Every experience speaks to every other experience; they inform each other because they are all differentiations of the same individual. Experience is interpretive at its core because we only experience things *as of the world.*

CHAPTER 2.

THE ARTICULATION OF THE OTHER

> But we have learned in individual perception not to conceive our perspective views as independent of each other; we know that they slip into each other and are brought together finally in the thing. In the same way we must learn to find the communication between one consciousness and another in one and the same world. In reality, the other is not shut up inside my perspective of the world, because it slips spontaneously into the other's, and because both are brought together in one single world in which we all participate as anonymous subjects of perception. (PP 353)

There is sense to human freedom only when understood as *freedom from constraint*. We cannot be *absolutely* free: what would it mean to be free in a vacuum? free from what? I am free only insofar as I can negotiate in the midst of already acquired structures, and my free action is effective only if a future can be committed: "If freedom is doing, it is necessary that what it does should not be immediately undone by a new freedom" (PP 437). Absolute freedom would be random and anarchic. Action is meaningful only insofar as it is situated in a field: "Our freedom does not destroy our situation, but gears itself to it" (PP 442). Our freedom consists of particular possibilities, not pure possibility: our courses of action are limited. Conversely, we encounter obstacles only because we would otherwise be free. Freedom and constraint are meaningful by virtue of their opposition; they are each a matter of degree.

Accordingly, the human condition can be summed up with Merleau-Ponty's formula: "*I am given to myself*".

> *I am given*, that is, I find myself already situated and involved in a physical and social world - *I am given to myself*, which means that this situation is never hidden from me, it is never round about me as an alien necessity, and I am never in effect enclosed in it like an object in a box (PP 360).

I am not free to determine everything within my horizon because horizons are given; I find myself in the world. However, the world is the setting for my existence, it is given to me. That is, I am geared towards the world, and the world is geared towards me. The situation in which I find myself is not alien. Therefore, I find my freedom within what is already determined for me: "My freedom, the fundamental power which I enjoy of being the subject of all my experiences, is not distinct from my insertion into the world" (PP 360). I cannot invent experience, nor am I enslaved to it. I am able to direct my gaze and explore the horizons of the world, but whatever is given to my gaze once it has been directed is beyond my conscious control; at this level, experience is anonymous. However, we are free not just to the extent that we can direct our gaze. We are also free to assent or withdraw from experience as it is given.

> It is a fate for me to be free, to be unable to reduce myself to anything that I experience, to maintain in relation to any factual situation a faculty of withdrawal, and this fate was sealed the moment...I was thrown into the world (PP 360).

I may have an initial faith in that which I perceive, but I am not held captive to any particular perception because I am free to maintain or divest of this faith. I may not be free to withdraw from the world as a whole, but I may withdraw from particular

experiences in the name of the world in which I have primordial faith. I can distance myself from an experience as originally given by reinterpreting it in such a way as to make it more commensurable with other experiences.

In other words, my freedom concerns my reflective attitude to experience, but unreflective experience - that which is originally given - is not negotiable. I am not free to invent either the world or particular experiences. I have a primordial faith in the world (which we have already seen is impossible to undermine), and particular experiences are given to me as unreflective and anonymous. My freedom concerns the way in which I try to resolve the contradiction (see p 29f. above, and PP 330) between the world and its perspectival appearances. It is my fate to undertake this project of reconciliation, but the way I undertake it is the province of my freedom.

> Every experience will always appear to me as a particular instance which does not exhaust the generality of my being, and I have always, as Malebranche said, movement left wherewith to go further. But I can fly from being only into being....I call such and such a perception into question only in the name of a truer one capable of correcting it; in so far as I can deny each thing, it is always by asserting that there is something in general (PP 360).

Being appears only to the subject; being can be nothing independent of the subject. This is what Merleau-Ponty calls "the truth of solipsism" (PP 360). Experience is always given *to me*, and I always make it mine in order to reconcile two givens: the world and the particular perspective. I may shut myself off from things because I have the power of negotiating them:

> Contrary to the social world I can always use my nature as a sensory being, close my eyes, stop up my ears, live as a stranger in society, treat others, ceremonies and institutions as mere arrangements of colour and light, and strip them of all their human significance. Contrary to the natural world I can always have recourse to my thinking nature and entertain doubts about each perception taken on its own. The truth of solipsism is there (PP 360).

I can always withdraw from experience, but we must remember that this power is always in the service of experience and of being. That is to say, solipsism may express a truth, but not the whole truth. I may indeed be able to cut myself off from others, but this isolation cannot be maintained; the logic of solipsism collapses upon itself in the same way as does the logic of skepticism (see chapter 1, pp 20-23). I can deny the existence of others, but only if I first recognize them in order to deny them. "I must choose between others and myself, it is said. But we choose one *against* the other, and thus assert both" (PP 360). I can deny others only if I first call attention to them. Solipsism, like any thesis, must be *stated* and *argued* only insofar as it is not already perfectly obvious. In other words, solipsism is a thesis because it is an argument against something which we might otherwise believe - namely, the existence of others. If solipsism were, in fact, the whole truth of the matter, I would have no one but myself to convince of it, and the statement of the thesis would appear gratuitous and absurd. If there is truly only me, whose other existence would there be to deny? It only makes sense to formulate solipsism as a thesis if it satisfies a need, if, in other words, there is a *question* as to whether or not there is an other. "Any rationalism admits of at least one absurdity, that of having to be formulated as a thesis" (PP 295). Solipsism must be a

response to the experience of the other, and as a response it implicitly recognizes that to which it responds.

In other words, solipsism can only be formulated in the context of a dialogue. "I can evolve a solipsist philosophy but, in doing so, I assume the existence of a community of men endowed with speech, and I address myself to it" (PP 360). If I am truly self-identical and solipsism exhausts the truth of the matter, what can constitute the impetus to formulate solipsism as a philosophy? A philosophy is always dialogic; we say that a philosophy *addresses* certain questions because it exists only as a *response* and implicitly recognizes its interlocutors. According to solipsism, everything would already be contained within me and there could be nothing to challenge me or to demand a response. Merleau-Ponty writes,

> [T]he express recognition of a truth is much more than the mere existence within us of an unchallengeable idea, an immediate faith in what is presented: it presupposes questioning doubt, a break with the immediate (PP 295).

The recognition of a truth presupposes an unreflective experience which questions us, and what is the unreflective experience to which solipsism responds, but the experience of the other. Solipsism can never deny this original experience; it can only *respond* to it by denying it. Just as it is impossible consistently to deny the existence of the natural world (skepticism of perception), it is impossible to deny the existence of the social world. Any thesis one may formulate about the social world is already dialogic. Even if one refuses

to state one's solipsistic thesis, believing that there is no one to state it to, one has inadvertently acted, and this action cannot help but be situated in the social world:

> Even that universal meditation which cuts the philosopher off from his nation, his friendships, his prejudices, his empirical being, the world in short, and which seems to leave him in complete isolation, is in reality an act, the spoken word, and consequently dialogue (PP 361).

Solipsism would be consistent only if its formulation were somehow not an act:

> Solipsism would be strictly true only of someone who managed to be tacitly aware of his existence without being or doing anything, which is impossible, since existing is being in and of the world (PP 361).

We cannot extricate ourselves from the world - we have seen this already. The world enters into the core of my being; it is a dimension of my subjectivity. It is primordial, therefore, we cannot consistently doubt it. In the first chapter we saw that the natural world we perceive is primordial. Now we see that the social world is equally so. Merleau-Ponty writes,

> We must, therefore, rediscover after the natural world, the social world not as a sum of objects, but as a permanent field or dimension of existence: I may well turn away from it, but not cease to be situated relatively to it. Our relationship to the social is, like our relationship to the world, deeper than any express perception or any judgment (PP 362).

The social is given, just as is the natural. We cannot divest ourselves of either of these dimensions. Nonetheless, we must recall that the world is given *to me*. Others are still other *for me*. We can understand the nature of our involvement in the social world as analogous to that of our involvement in the natural world. The unity of the natural world is given as already in tension with its perspectival appearances; we have faith in

the world's unity despite the fact that this unity is never entirely constituted for us. The discrepancy between my faith in the world as whole and the particular perceptions I have of it is mediated by its unfolding in time (PP 330-1). The natural world is determined by its perspectival manifestations, and its perspectives are determined by the world. In other words, the tension between the world as whole and its appearances is productive of both these terms; they are what they are by virtue of their dialectical opposition. Likewise, self and other determine each other mutually even if they seem opposed. There is a self only insofar as there is already a non-self. The self is set over against the other as a figure in a field, and the field is always already given unreflectively. However, we are aware that the other is given to us immediately and unreflectively only when we have reflected on this fact. That is to say that the unreflective experience of otherness already yields the reflection of the self[11]. Otherness can be other only for a self whom it transcends. The 'problem of the other' is foreshadowed by the tension of self and other:

> [T]here is given the tension of my experience towards another whose existence on the horizon of my life is beyond doubt, even when my knowledge of him [or her] is imperfect (PP 359).

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[11]Merleau-Ponty says of the relationship between reflection and the self/other distinction:

> We must say of experience what we have said elsewhere about reflection: that its object cannot escape it entirely, since we have a notion of the object only through that experience. Reflection must in some way present the unreflected, otherwise we should have nothing to set over against it.... Similarly my experience must in some way present me with other people, since otherwise I should have no occasion to speak of solitude, and could not begin to pronounce other people inaccessible. (PP 359)

Just as perception is a project of mediating the world and its perspectival appearances, the constitution of self and other is given as a project to be undertaken.

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The problem of the other is, then, not unnatural because the experience of otherness must contend with that which is true in solipsism. However, the very fact that the self and other implicate each other guarantees that the problem is ultimately not an impossible one. Self and other are articulated by a process of differentiation; they come to be defined against one another. This process is teleological. Merleau-Ponty shows how self and other unfold temporally from a primordial unity. We can conceive of the process two ways. Either we can surrender to its teleological thrust and continue to develop the distinction, or we can seek its archaeological ground. There is a *problem* of the other only insofar as we try to resolve its tension with the self by continuing to articulate the opposition. In other words, the tension between the two terms is problematic only when we forget its origin.

All experience is, for Merleau-Ponty, grounded in the world, "the field of all fields" (PP 351). The experiences of self and other cannot, therefore, be incommensurable because they are both grounded in this same world. Our experiences of self and other develop out of a primordial unity which guarantees that they cannot ultimately exclude each other. The problem of the other is a problem of the *idea* of the other, not of the other as given in experience. Objective thought does not stop to consider what grounds the idea of the other. Objective thought seeks the solution to its

problem in other ideas without questioning the idea of the 'idea'. Such an approach is essentially static and obliterates its past; it gives priority to the constituted mind over the mind in the process of being constituted. The developed mind is thought to have attained self-sufficiency in its maturity such that it is freed from its own history. For instance,

> [p]ure sensation, defined as the action of *stimuli* on our body, is the 'last effect' of knowledge, particularly of scientific knowledge, and it is an illusion (a not unnatural one, moreover) that causes us to put it at the beginning and to believe that it precedes knowledge. It is the necessary, and necessarily misleading way in which a mind sees its own history (PP 37).

Also, Piaget discovered that the child realizes a *cogito* at the age of twelve; Merleau-Ponty, however, points out that Piaget was unable to see that the *cogito* must be reconceived if it is to be understood as a product of its development.

> At the age of about twelve years old, says Piaget, the child achieves the *cogito* and reaches the truths of rationalism. At this stage, it is held, he discovers himself both as a point of view on the world and also as called upon to transcend that point of view, and to construct an objectivity at the level of judgment. Piaget brings the child to a mature outlook as if the thoughts of the adult were self-sufficient and disposed of all contradictions (PP 355).

Merleau-Ponty is critical of Piaget for his understanding of development such that each stage surpasses its precursor without unfolding from it:

> [I]n reality, it must be the case that the child's outlook is in some way vindicated against the adult's and against Piaget, and that the unsophisticated thinking of our earliest years remains as an indispensable acquisition underlying that of maturity, if there is to be for the adult one single intersubjective world (PP 355).

Objective thought cannot conceive of history because the past is, for it, always erased by its most recent development. Transcendence does not, for objective thought, depend on a ground which is transcended; instead transcendence is understood to surpass its ground altogether and render its past irrelevant. There is a problem of the other only when we misunderstand the movement of teleology to exclude its archaeological source.

For instance, if we are blind to the "indispensable acquisition underlying [the experiences of] maturity" (PP 355), then we cannot account for the fact that the other is given to us despite its contradiction with selfhood. After all,

> [t]he perception of other people and the intersubjective world is problematical only for adults. The child lives in a world which he unhesitatingly believes accessible to all around him. He has no awareness of himself or of others as private subjectivities (PP 355).

If the world prior to the subject/object distinction were truly erased with the attainment of adult consciousness, we would be cut off from the other and not even suspect its existence. Merleau-Ponty writes,

> With the *cogito* begins that struggle between consciousnesses, each one of which, as Hegel says, seeks the death of the other. For the struggle ever to begin, and for each consciousness to be capable of suspecting the alien presences which it negates, all must necessarily have some common ground and be mindful of their peaceful co-existence in the world of childhood (PP 355).

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, by contrast, seeks to recognize the dialectical relationship between teleology and archaeology, between the articulation of difference and the primordial ground of all difference.

> The relation of reason to fact, or eternity to time, like that of reflection to the unreflective, of thought to language or of thought to perception is this two-way relationship that phenomenology has called *Fundierung*: the founding term, or originator - time, the unreflective, the fact, language, perception - is primary in the sense that the originated is presented as a determinate or explicit form of the originator, which prevent the latter from reabsorbing the former, and yet the originator is not primary in the empiricist sense and the originated is not simply derived from it, since it is through the originated that the originator is made manifest (PP 394).

Merleau-Ponty's notion of teleology (or development or articulation) allows for the 'origin' to be gathered up into the 'originated' so that the former is not obliterated. After all, the latter can be *originated* only insofar as it maintains an awareness of its history. The originated articulates its origin, and it can do this because the origin already anticipates that which will develop out of it; the origin contains the seeds of its history.

In the Introduction we outlined two oppositions which make a problem of the other: self/other and body/consciousness. We have already seen (and will continue to see) that the first opposition is grounded in unreflective and primordial experience which only subsequently articulates itself in terms of self and other. The body/consciousness opposition may be overcome in the same way. We should not understand the body to be exhausted by physiological descriptions. The body is not simply

> that object which the biologist talks about, that conjunction of processes analyzed in physiological treatises, that collection of organs shown in the plates of books on anatomy... (PP 349).

The physiological body is the body that Descartes had trouble bridging with consciousness; it is the body which is partly responsible for the problem of the other.

> How significance and intentionality could come to dwell in molecular edifices or masses of cells is a thing which can never be made comprehensible, and here Cartesianism is right (PP 351).

Instead we need to reflect on the genesis of this idea of the body; we need to search for the *arche (or genealogical root)* of the body-in-itself.

> It is simply a question of recognizing that the body, as a chemical structure or an agglomeration of tissues, is formed, by a process of impoverishment, from a primordial phenomenon of the body-for-us, the body of human experience or the perceived body, round which objective thought works (PP 351).

The body needs to be understood as lived, but consciousness also needs to be reconceived as embodied. Body and consciousness are caught up within each other just as are the self and other. They cannot be extricated from each other because they share a primordial unity.

> As for consciousness, it has to be conceived, no longer as a constituting consciousness and, as it were, a pure being-for-itself, but as a perceptual consciousness, as the subject of a pattern of behaviour, as being-in-the-world or existence (PP 351).

The other is a problem for objective thought because the latter is unable to conceive of *Fundierung*, the relationship which ties ideas to their roots in unreflective experience. Objective thought finds itself faced with four terms: my *cogito*, my body, the other's body, and the other's *cogito* - and it approaches the problem of the other by trying to bridge these terms. It does not understand these terms to be the products of a process of development, but takes them instead as logical steps which must somehow be bridged or deduced one from the other.

For Merleau-Ponty the problem of the other is equally the problem of the self. As we have seen, the two terms are interdependent. We cannot assume that the *cogito* is primary and that we must find a way to break out of it in order to experience the other. Merleau-Ponty's strategy is to dig beneath the opposition and understand how the terms came to be articulated in the first place. This archaeological project reveals a primordial indistinction between self and other, body and consciousness. The self is discovered to be the product of a process of articulation. The self cannot be extricated from the process in which it is grounded, and thus can never finally breaks free from the experience of the other. The self is, therefore, never wholly private and closed in upon itself; I am always somewhat other to myself. The other is also never completely alien, but is an *alter ego*: I find myself outside myself in an other. Likewise, the body is always lived, and consciousness always incarnate. "Under these conditions the antinomies of objective thought vanish" (PP 351).

Merleau-Ponty often challenges objective thought with the discoveries of child psychology.

> A baby of fifteen months opens its mouth if I playfully take one of its fingers between my teeth and pretend to bite it. And yet it has scarcely looked at its face in a glass, and its teeth are not in any case like mine. The fact is that its own mouth and teeth, as it feels them from the inside, are immediately, for it, an apparatus to bite with, and my jaw, as the baby sees it from the outside, is immediately, for it, capable of the same intentions. 'Biting' has immediately, for it, an intersubjective significance (PP 352).

Here is an example which subtends the dichotomies of self and other, body and consciousness. Merleau-Ponty notes that the infant could not be imitating the action of biting because it has little notion of itself, and is not yet capable of comparing its body with the other's. In "The Child's Relations with Others", Merleau-Ponty considers the possibility of a child imitating another's smile, and concludes that "we can in no way rest on the supposed analogy between the other's face and that of the child" (CRO 116). According to the traditional philosophical (and psychological) notions of consciousness and the body,

> [t]he child would have to set his facial muscles in motion in such a way as to reproduce the visible expression that is called "the smile" in another. But how could he do it? Naturally he does not have the other's internal motor feeling of his face; as far as he is concerned, he does not even have an image of himself smiling (CRO 116).

The self/other dichotomy must give way if we are to account for the child's reaction. Biting is, for the child, a reversible relationship of the one biting and the one bitten. The child experiences biting as both active and passive; these aspects are not yet distinct for it. The child experiences a bite from both the perspectives of the biter and the bitten. The child is subject and object of the bite because its experience is not yet restricted to its body. "It perceives its intentions in its body, and my body with its own" (PP 352). The child's consciousness does not issue from *within* its body precisely because body and consciousness are not distinct for it. It inhabits another's actions as well as its own; the other's behaviour is anonymous and accessible to the child.

Merleau-Ponty discusses the relationship of oppositional pairs as *systems*. Self and other, for instance, constitute a system. These two terms exist by virtue of their opposition and are inextricable. The self is completed by the other and vice versa: "there exists an internal relation which causes the other to appear as the completion of the system" (PP 352). My body also forms a system with the other's body:

> my body and the other's are one whole, two sides of one and the same phenomenon, and the anonymous existence of which my body is the ever-renewed trace henceforth inhabits both bodies simultaneously (PP 354).

My inherence in my body cannot be separated from the way in which the other's body appears as another existence because each is a moment in a single structure. We cannot maintain the traditional philosophical notions of *ego* and *alter ego*; these terms must be modified. "In order to think of him as a genuine *I*, I ought to think of myself as a mere object for him, which I am prevented from doing by the knowledge which I have of myself" (PP 352). We experience *both* self and other so we should not describe them as exclusive terms.

> But if another's body is not an object for me, nor mine an object for him, if both are manifestations of behaviour, the positing of the other does not reduce me to the status of an object in his field, nor does my perception of the other reduce him to the status of an object in mine. The other person is never quite a personal being, if I am totally one, and if I grasp myself as apodeictically self-evident (PP 352).

The system comprised of my body and the other's guarantees that the relationship between our bodies is always circular. "[M]y perceptions are centred outside me as sources of initiative and judgment..." (PP 353), so that I perceive another body as an

other; the other is never totally private and personal. Conversely, I know that I am embodied because I am also never wholly private and know myself as others know me; I understand myself to be perceived from the outside. A system is a *gestalt*; it cannot be reduced to the particular terms which comprise it because they can be understood only in light of the system as a whole. The self/other system can be conceived of only if we modify its two terms and interpret them as manifestations of "a third genus of being" (PP 350), or the whole which is prior to these parts.

The notion of system is problematic, however, because it works backwards from parts to whole, from opposition to complementarity. It is one thing to demonstrate the impossibility of solipsism or the necessity of the primordial unity of experience, but another to describe the actual development of such a system. In his posthumously published "Working Notes", Merleau-Ponty writes under the heading of "Dualism -- Philosophy": "The problems posed in the [Phenomenology of Perception] are insoluble because I start there from the 'consciousness'-'object' distinction"[12]. We can, to a certain extent, trace the genealogy of the traditional dualisms of philosophy. However, we can do this only if we first modify our understanding of the terms in opposition. We cannot, for instance, trace solipsism as traditionally formulated back to its roots in experience. We have seen that traditional solipsism is an impossible project, and if this solipsism must be discarded, so must the *cogito*. The self/other *system* is, however, not

[12]Merleau-Ponty, The Visible and the Invisible, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p 200.

comprised of traditional philosophical terms. It is difficult to reinterpret a traditional dualism as a system because each of its terms must be interpreted through its opposite, and if both terms require reinterpretation, then we are left without a clear point of departure.

This is a problem characteristic of Merleau-Ponty's treatment of the other in the Phenomenology of Perception. He writes there,

> If my consciousness has a body, why should other bodies not 'have' consciousnesses? Clearly this involves a profound transformation of the notions of body and consciousness. As far as the body is concerned, even the body of another, we must learn to distinguish it from the objective body as set forth in works on physiology (PP 351).

The philosophical language Merleau-Ponty inherits does not necessarily accommodate his attempt to think the body, self, and other: "[W]e must *learn* to distinguish [the lived body] from the objective body" (PP 351, my italics). In his chapter in the Phenomenology of Perception entitled "Other Selves and the Human World", Merleau-Ponty demonstrates the necessity of reconceiving the other, and suggests that the solution to the problem of the other lies in the direction of archaeological research. However, we must still *learn* to distinguish the other from the alien *cogito*. The self/other gestalt remains to be conceived. We shall turn to Merleau-Ponty's essay entitled "The Child's Relations with Others" because it offers a more detailed description of the other as it comes to be articulated in the process of development. Furthermore, the essay facilitates a comparison with Hegel's master/slave dialectic (which will follow in Chapter 3) because it offers an alternative developmental drama.

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According to classical psychology, the subject is related to its body by *cenesthesia*. Merleau-Ponty defines cenesthesia as

> a mass of sensations that would express to the subject the state of his different organs and different bodily functions. Thus my body for me, and your body for you, could be reached, and be knowable, by means of cenesthesic sense (CRO 114).

The cenesthesic relationship is introceptive and therefore inaccessible to others.

> A mass of sensations, by hypothesis, is as *individual* as the psyche itself. That is to say, if in fact my body is knowable by me only through the mass of sensations it gives me (a mass of sensations to which you obviously have no access and of which we have no concrete experience), then the consciousness I have of my body is impenetrable by you....[i]t is likewise impossible for me to represent to myself the way in which you feel your body (CRO 114).

Cenesthesia concerns the body as experienced from within; it is inaccessible to others because they can perceive only the external appearance of my body.

Merleau-Ponty contrasts cenesthesia with the notion of the *corporeal* (or postural) *schema*. According to the latter, one experiences one's body only as paired with the world.

> The consciousness I have of my body...is the perception of my body's position in relation to the vertical, the horizontal, and certain other axes of important co-ordinates of its environment (CRO 117).

There is no *purely* internal (or cenesthesic) experience of the body; the body and the world form a system and "express each other reciprocally" (CRO 117) such that one experiences one's own body as a form of being-in-the-world, and the world is

experienced only as given to the perceiving body. If one were to take the claim of cenesthesia seriously, then the introspective sense of the body would have no common measure with our sense of the world. In fact, we do describe the experience of our own bodies in the same terms we describe the world, "for only thus can [I] appear at the top of [my] phenomenal body, and be endowed with a sort of 'locality'" (PP 351). The corporeal schema has a place in the world because the body is already infused by the world. The body is spatial whether it is experienced from within or without. However, the world that enters into the constitution of the body is not an objective world-in-itself. Geometrical space, for instance, has no up or down, left or right. The world is oriented only insofar it is perceived by a subject. In other words, my body is experienced neither as purely subjective nor objective. In any case, I experience my own body in terms of a world shared by others, therefore, the experience I have of my body is never completely cut off from others.

Merleau-Ponty argues that the child's body functions at first only introceptively. It cannot approach the world; instead the child is passive and responds to internal stimuli. In its first few months a child is capable primarily of nursing and respiration. Perception is not possible until the extroceptive senses (vision, hearing, etc.) develop. Perception requires a corporeal schema; the world can only appear when the child's body is oriented towards it. This orientation requires a certain awareness of the body. One cannot perceive unless one attains "a minimal bodily equilibrium" (CRO 122), that is, until one actively positions one's body in relation to the world.

> [T]he effort at equilibrium continually accompanies all our perceptions except when we are lying on our backs. But also, observes [the psychologist] Wallon, it is above all in this position that the child's thinking and perception fade away; he falls asleep (CRO 122).

There is a link between motility and perception such that

> the two functions are only two aspects of a single totality and that the perception of one's entry into the world and of one's own body form a system (CRO 122).

Merleau-Ponty makes it clear that the corporeal schema develops gradually from the initial state of introception, but he does not grant priority to either motility or perception. They are interdependent, not causally linked. In fact, at this early stage of development, these two aspects are not yet articulated as such; the body and (external) perception are undifferentiated. Merleau-Ponty's purpose is to *describe* the development of perception, not to rationalize each of its moments. Motility and perception (or an awareness of the body and the world) are aspects of a single totality: the corporeal schema - and the advent of this system constitutes the beginnings of an experience of the world.

Just as the body and the world are initially given as a unity, so the self and other are at first given as indistinct. In fact, "[t]his entire placement...of the corporeal schema is at the same time a placing of the perception of others" (CRO 123). The system of self and other also develops out of an initial introceptivity. Before the development of the extroceptive senses, the child registers the presence of others only as

> differences felt by the child in the state of his body - differences in his well-being according to whether the nurse's breast is present or absent and also according to the way in which the child is held in the arms of each of the persons involved (CRO 124).

The extroceptive senses develop long before the child is able to distinguish itself and others. Merleau-Ponty writes that "[i]n waiting for the union that will arise between the data of external perception and those of introceptivity, the introceptive body functions as extroceptive" (CRO 122). However, since the child has not yet developed notions of inside and outside, it would seem more consistent to say that experience is simply given without being placed according to this distinction. As Merleau-Ponty writes later in the same essay, "The child in no way distinguishes at first between what is furnished by introception and what comes from external perception" (CRO 133). The child does not initially understand the extroceptive senses to concern an external world. Consequently, its first extroceptive contacts with others are not placed outside it. The other is experienced as an immediate presence; the other is not yet *other* than the child. If the child has no conception of its own interiority, neither does it conceive of the other as another interiority. All experience is immediate and self-evident: "He has no knowledge of points of view. For him men are empty heads turned towards one single, self-evident world where everything takes place" (PP 355).

The voice is the child's first (extroceptive) perception of the other. It is not given to the child as a *sign* of the other's presence. It is transparent to the child because the voice is perceived as a corporeal schema, a mode of being-in-the-world. A voice is given extroceptively to the child *and* the one speaking. The voice is expressive because it is already oriented towards others. One does not express one's innermost thoughts and feelings. Expression always already anticipates its reception by others; interpretation

already enters into the constitution of expression. In other words, the one who speaks is always somewhat other to him- or herself.

> And since...the other who is to be perceived is himself not a "psyche" closed in on himself but rather a conduct, a system of behaviour that aims at the world, he offers himself to my motor intentions and to that "intentional transgression" (Husserl) by which I animate him and pervade him (CRO 118).

For instance, the other's voice is a conduct or behaviour for the child because the child perceives the other through its own body and is able to relate to the sound of the voice in something of the same way as does the one whose voice the child hears. Just as the child bites when being bit, the child cries when it hears crying. Crying is contagious among very young children because they do not distinguish themselves from others. This first stage of development is one of "pre-communication, in which there is not one individual over against another but rather an anonymous collectivity, an undifferentiated group life" (CRO 119). This is, however, not yet true communication because the latter presupposes the self/other distinction, and this has not yet been articulated. Communication occurs across an already established self/other boundary.

The child finds itself in the other and the other in itself because it is incapable of distinguishing the introceptive and extroceptive senses; they are initially given as a unity. Consequently,

> the specular image, given visually, participates globally in the existence of the body itself and leads a "phantom" life in the mirror, which "participates" in the life of the child himself (CRO 134).

The child cannot initially perceive a mirror image as a *mere* image because there is, for it, not yet any basis on which to make such a discrimination. The child lives through the image encountered in the mirror. This is not to say that the child has truly identified itself in this image, because the child finds itself equally in all behaviour and, therefore, nowhere in particular.

After six months of age the child begins to discover that the body (its own or the other's) occupies a particular location in space and that the body appears perspectivally. The child first learns this about the other's body.

> A child smiles in a mirror at the image of his father. At this moment his father speaks to him. The child appears surprised and turns toward the father....He is surprised that the voice comes from another direction than that of the visible image in the mirror (CRO 127).

At this moment the child begins to learn that the specular image is a mere image which it has identified with its father; the child begins to discover that the specular image constitutes a perspective on the father and is not identical with him. The child begins to learns this about its own body as well.

> At thirty-five weeks the child still extends his hand toward his image in the mirror and appears surprised when his hand encounters the surface of the glass (CRO 128).

The child begins to understand two things:

> [I]t is a problem first of understanding that the visual image of his [the child's] body which he sees over there in the mirror is not himself, since he is not in the mirror but here, where he feels himself; and second, he must understand that, not being located there, in the mirror, but rather where he feels himself introceptively, he can nonetheless be seen by an external witness *at the very place at which he feels himself to be* and with

> the same visual appearance that he has from the mirror. In short, he must displace the mirror image, bringing it from the apparent or virtual place it occupies in the depth of the mirror back to himself, whom he identifies at a distance with his introceptive body (CRO 129).

In other words, the child discovers a disjunction between the extroceptive and introceptive senses. However, far from dissociating from the specular image, the child still identifies with it and understands it to be a perspective on itself. The child discovers in the mirror how its body appears to others.

> The child's problem is not so much one of understanding that the visual and the tactile images of the body - both located at two points in space - in reality comprise only one, as it is of understanding that the image in the mirror is *his* image, that it is what others see of him, the appearance he presents to other subjects (CRO 140).

Eventually, these realizations sediment and the child understands its position among others. The self is discovered to be other for other selves who are other for me.

> In the initial state of perception there is consciousness not of being enclosed in a perspective...but of being in direct touch with things across a personal-universal vision. The *I* arises when the child understands that every *you* that is addressed to him is for him an *I*; that is, that there must be a consciousness of the reciprocity of points of view in order that the word *I* may be used (CRO 150).

Only with this discovery of other selves does the child begin to be capable of threatening or feeling threatened by the other. Merleau-Ponty argues that any struggle between consciousnesses presupposes a prior indistinction of self and other; Hegel's 'fight to the death' presupposes primordial pre-communication.

> For the struggle to begin, and for each consciousness to be capable of suspecting the alien presences which it negates, all must necessarily have

> some common ground and be mindful of their peaceful co-existence in the world of childhood (PP 355).

Merleau-Ponty locates Hegel's master/slave dialectic at the end of a long process rather than at the beginning. (However, in the next chapter we shall see that Merleau-Ponty misreads Hegel's dialectic.)

"The Child's Relations with Others" provides a more detailed description of the process by which the other comes to be articulated than does the Phenomenology of Perception. In many respects, however, the account it offers is more of a chronological ordering of psychological phases than a phenomenological description. "The Child's Relations with Others" surveys empirical evidence for the primordial indistinction of self and other and the subsequent articulation of this dichotomy. Merleau-Ponty treats such psychological phenomena as sympathy, transitivism, and spatial syncretism as evidence of his phenomenological account, but his discussion of these phenomena does not make clear the inner logic of this teleological movement from syncretic pre-communication to a consciousness of self and other as distinct. For instance, it is not clear how the child could be struck with the incongruity of the father's image in the mirror and the sound of his voice if the child does not yet have a notion of perspective. If the child cannot identify location and cannot dissociate from its experiences, the child should not be capable of experiencing this incongruity. Merleau-Ponty's discussion of the mirror, therefore, begs the question.

But if Merleau-Ponty is unable to account for every step in the articulation of self and other, his approach to the problem of the other is clear. Consciousness is not originally confined to a particular body or perspective; experience is initially diffuse and undifferentiated. At this primordial level there is neither self nor other, body nor consciousness, subject nor object. These distinctions are only subsequently articulated as differentiations of this primordial unity. Self and other can never come to exclude each other because they are always subtended by a prior syncretism. Self and other are articulated together as a pair: one discovers oneself only when one learns that one is not the other (or vice versa), and this discovery presupposes a prior indistinction of self and other. Furthermore, the primordial unity of self and other is not erased as these terms come to be defined. Instead they can appear only as figures against this field. Merleau-Ponty argues that the solution to the problem of the other should not be sought in first principles or by trying to bridge self and other, but by seeking the archaeological ground of the distinction. Self and other can be traced back because they are products of a teleological development.

In the following chapter we will further explore the nature of Merleau-Ponty's teleology by contrasting it with Hegel's teleology and dialectics.

CHAPTER 3.

CONCLUSION: DIALECTICS & DIFFERENCE

Knowledge, according to the empiricist, is given passively to the subject who receives it. The passivity of consciousness in the face of nature guarantees that the objective world is reflected in the subject; the physiology of the senses presents the world-as-it-is to consciousness. In other words, knowing is, for the empiricist, always a function of the world and the objective body. The subject has no role in the constitution of being. Being is already fully constituted in itself.

Intellectualists, on the other hand, understand being as *only for* consciousness. Existence is, for the intellectualist, constituted by the subject and there can be nothing which the subject has not already known. If there is a gap between being and knowing, it is only because we have somehow forgotten what we have already known. Consequently, the intellectualist project is a search for metaphysical principles which underlie existence. The discovery of these *a priori* principles will show being to be grounded in the transcendental subject. Gary Madison writes that intellectualism claims to

> follow up in an inverse direction a path of constitution already traversed without the subject's knowing it.... Reflective analysis wants to place itself behind its own beginning in experience and ground its facticity on its ideality, its reality on its possibility. It thinks that its possibility is given in advance and loses sight of its real origin (Madison, 152).

Empiricism and intellectualism have an inadequate notion of the relationship between knowledge and being because they reduce one to the other. For the former, knowledge is determined directly by being, while for the latter, being is always circumscribed by the subject's knowledge. Consequently, neither empiricism nor intellectualism can account for knowledge as a specific moment: knowledge is either all or nothing.

Descartes, Kant, and Husserl are some of the philosophers Merleau-Ponty most often associates with intellectualism. Hegel can also be considered an intellectualist insofar as, for him, all being is ultimately identical with Spirit and is conscious of itself. Nothing can transcend Hegel's Spirit because it is being itself; being and thought are identical in absolute knowledge. However, while it may be true that Hegel is *ultimately* an intellectualist, in his Phenomenology of Spirit he accommodates a natural consciousness which is in the process of being educated and describes experience which is not yet fully conscious of itself. Merleau-Ponty identifies this aspect of Hegel. He writes in his essay entitled "Hegel's Existentialism",

> But if the Hegel of 1827 may be criticized for his idealism, the same cannot be said of the Hegel of 1807. The *Phénoménologie de l'esprit* is a history not only of ideas but of all the areas which reveal the mind at work: customs, economic structures, and legal institutions as well as works of philosophy. It is concerned with recapturing a total sense of history, describing the inner workings of the body social, not with explaining the adventures of mankind by debates among philosophers[13].

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[13]M. Merleau-Ponty, "Hegel's Existentialism", in Sense and Non-Sense, trans. Hubert L. & Patricia Allen Dreyfus, (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p 64.

Merleau-Ponty champions the Hegel who described the logic immanent in natural consciousness, not the Hegel who claims to have attained absolute knowledge once and for all. In certain respects Merleau-Ponty finds a phenomenological ally in this "existential" Hegel. Below we will consider some possible analogies between Merleau-Ponty and Hegel. However, it should be clear from the start that Hegel is ultimately an intellectualist. In other words, the existential reading of Hegel cannot be sustained without ignoring the overall structure of Hegel's thought. Hegel's phenomenological descriptions are ultimately subsumed by the infinite Spirit.

Having said that, we should note that Merleau-Ponty and Hegel are similar at least insofar as they conceive of the relationship between experience and knowledge as temporal. Both thinkers are aware of the inadequacy of a static rationality in accounting for the situations in which we find ourselves. Hegel was not satisfied with Kant's *a priori* conditions because they were incapable of truly accounting for historicity. Similarly, according to Merleau-Ponty, our knowledge is always outstripped by our situation; we find ourselves always already involved in the world. As Madison explains,

> Just as Hegel wanted to give a foundation to Kant's transcendental attitude, so also Merleau-Ponty seeks to realize the ambition of Hegel's phenomenology: the reflective recuperation of what we effectively are (Madison, 149).

In other words, these two thinkers seek to ground philosophy itself, to justify the philosopher's status. Merleau-Ponty and Hegel are not satisfied with metaphysical principles abstracted from experience and stripped of their context because they are

conscious that philosophy itself needs to be grounded. They begin their inquiries with an awareness of their thought as thought and, therefore, seek to understand how thought came about in the first place. In other words, Merleau-Ponty and Hegel conceive of their own thought as products of a long development. Hegel writes, "Of the Absolute it must be said that it is essentially a *result*, that only in the *end* is it what it truly is" (§20)[14]. Talk of the absolute is foreign to Merleau-Ponty, but both philosophers recognize the genealogical lineage of thought.

> In transcendental philosophy of the traditional sort, the [arche] is discovered in the form of a principle or an a priori. For a radical reflection such as Merleau-Ponty advocates, however, the task is not only that of discovering the first principle of reality but also reflection's own principle. Reflection's radical question is the question of its own reality and its own possibility; it is the question of its grounding. This is to say that a philosophy which looks for its own [arche] is looking for the radical starting point (Madison, 153).

Reflection should understand its roots in unreflective experience, and come to terms with itself as the consequence of a *temporal development*. The epistemological problem of the relationship between nature and consciousness is, then, not necessarily grounded in a metaphysical distinction, but in a teleological orientation. In other words, reflection and the unreflected, or knowledge and being, are related to each other by means of a dialectical process. Hegel writes,

> It is this coming-to-be of *Science as such* or of *knowledge*, that it is described in this *Phenomenology* of Spirit.... In order to become genuine

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[14]All quotations given in paragraph number from: G.W.F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

> knowledge, to beget the element of Science which is the pure Notion of Science itself, it must travel a long way and work its passage (§27).

Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception is not structured like Hegel's philosophical *Bildungsroman*, the Phenomenology of Spirit; it is instead a work of archaeology. But since Merleau-Ponty searches for genetic origins and not principles, we can reverse his archaeology and read this work as an account of a teleological development. After all, Merleau-Ponty was not only a philosopher, but a developmental psychologist. In fact, for a while he held a chair in child psychology at the Sorbonne. Of course, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology does not translate into a reading of history in the way that Hegel's Phenomenology does; Merleau-Ponty's teleological account is more *ontogenetic* than *phylogenetic*.

Merleau-Ponty and Hegel also share a notion of process in which the stages that comprise teleological movement are essential and never wholly transcended. Each moment in the process is preserved in being surpassed (*aufgehoben* to use Hegel's term). A Hegelian would be sympathetic to Merleau-Ponty's complaint that Piaget's notion of development is deficient.

> It must be the case that the child's outlook is in some way vindicated against the adult's and against Piaget, and that the unsophisticated thinking of our earliest years remains as an unsophisticated acquisition underlying that of maturity (PP 355).

As Hegel writes, development, or the process of coming-to-be cannot "be like the rapturous enthusiasm which, like a shot from a pistol, begins straight away with absolute knowledge, and makes short work of other standpoints by declaring that it takes no notice

of them" (§27). The developmental process is thoroughly temporal and its past is not dispensable.

Dialectic also plays a very important role in Merleau-Ponty's work (especially his early and middle work). In Chapter 2 we considered Merleau-Ponty's notion of the 'system' which is comprised of dialecticized philosophical oppositions. For instance, the body and the world form a system such that each term can be understood only in relation to the other term (see Chapter 2, pp 52f.).

However, we cannot press the Hegel analogy much further. Merleau-Ponty attempts to subvert traditional philosophical dualisms by dialecticizing them and he does this in the course of his archaeological project; his strategy is to excavate the primordial unity of such dualisms as self and other, body and consciousness by means of the dialectic. Hegel's dialectic, on the other hand, proceeds teleologically towards its goal of absolute knowledge. Hegel and the Merleau-Ponty of the _Phenomenology of Perception_ may be dialectical, but their dialectics proceed in opposite directions: Hegel's dialectic is the force of teleological progress, while Merleau-Ponty's dialectic is the means of archaeological research.

We can sharpen this contrast. In Chapter 1 we saw that Merleau-Ponty's teleology proceeds from the one to the many. All distinctions are grounded in a primordial unity; experience is initially given as indeterminate presence. Gradually the world begins to take shape. Distinctions are at first vague and broad, but the world becomes progressively more differentiated. Figures emerge out of the indeterminacy of the world,

the "field of all fields." The world unfolds for us from a primordial unity. First we are acquainted with the world as individual and only subsequently do we discover this world to be differentiated. "There is always something confronting [us], a being to be deciphered, an *omnitudo realitatis*, and the foundation of this possibility is permanently laid by the first sensory experience" (PP 328). Thus plurality and difference are discovered as we learn to differentiate.

Similarily, in the early part of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit, natural consciousness discovers difference within an original plenitude. Hegel's dialectic of consciousness is like Merleau-Ponty's dialectic which progressively discovers differentiations within being. For Hegel, however, self-consciousness cannot be achieved by such a dialectic. The passage from the one to the many is a dead-end as far as self-consciousness is concerned. Early on in the Phenomenology of Spirit, Hegel reverses this dialectic. The history of self-consciousness proceeds from the many to the one.

In this respect, Hegel's teleology is the reverse of Merleau-Ponty's: the realization of self-consciousness is the passage from the many to the one (Spirit). Hegel's dialectic mediates difference as it is encountered and eventually brings about the reconciliation of all difference in absolute knowledge. To be fair, Hegel does posit a sort of primordial unity in the notion of being-in-itself, but this cannot be experienced as such. Being-in-itself undergoes the transformation to being-for-itself, being which knows itself. In this process being is dissociated from itself. Hegel writes,

> The activity of dissolution is the power and work of the *Understanding*, the most astonishing and mightiest of powers, or rather the absolute power. The circle that remains self-enclosed and, like substance, holds its moments together, is an immediate relationship, one therefore which has nothing astonishing about it (§32).

The understanding cannot, for Hegel, know being-in-itself, but must first negate and dissemble it. The work of Hegel's Spirit is, however, not thereby finished; Spirit re-members what it has negated and reconciles being with itself dialectically. Although Hegel does recognize a primordial unity in the notion of being-in-itself, the teleological structure of the Phenomenology of Spirit does not need to accommodate the dissolution of being because this is always already accomplished. Dissolution is the condition of our initial encounter with the world such that experience is not initially adequate to the plenitude of being. Hegel's teleology must, therefore, proceed from the many to the one. We do not *learn* to recognize difference (as Merleau-Ponty argues); according to Hegel, we encounter difference and plurality and must subsequently learn to recognize the fundamental unity of being. Hegel's dialectic forges unity out of a prior manifold.

Consequently, difference is, for Hegel, far more radical than it is for Merleau-Ponty. For Hegel difference is not encountered as differentiation; difference is not already circumscribed as it is for Merleau-Ponty, and it is not necessarily anticipated. According to Merleau-Ponty the unity of experience is primordial and always already achieved; difference is, therefore, given as already in context. For Hegel, on the other hand, the unity of experience can only be conceived retrospectively from the standpoint of Science or absolute knowledge. The education of consciousness is a process of

resistance and disillusionment. Experience is, for Hegel, "the path of the natural consciousness which presses forward to true knowledge" (§77), but natural consciousness does not know itself to be still in the process of its education:

> Natural consciousness will show itself to be only the Notion of knowledge, or in other words, not to be real knowledge. But since it directly takes itself to be real knowledge, this path has a negative significance for it, and what is in fact the realization of this Notion, counts for it rather as the loss of its own self; for it does lose its truth on this path. The road can therefore be regarded as the pathway of *doubt*, or more precisely as the way of despair (§78).

For Hegel, then, experience is a process of encountering difference. But Hegel's 'difference' is not Merleau-Ponty's 'difference' because natural consciousness cannot anticipate the path of Spirit. Natural consciousness always takes itself to be complete, but is forced by the dialectic to face otherness which it could not foresee. Consequently, experience is a "way of despair".

Merleau-Ponty's teleology, on the other hand, is an articulation of difference only insofar as it is already implicit and anticipated. Merleau-Ponty's "path" is, therefore, not characterized by doubt and despair, but by faith. Difference is never radical, but only a matter of degree. As we observed earlier, the novel, for Merleau-Ponty, is given as the familiar; we perceive according to the rule of metaphor.

In accordance with their different understandings of 'difference', Hegel and Merleau-Ponty have contrasting accounts of how the other is known. As we have seen, self and other are, for Merleau-Ponty articulated together as a pair such that the other is never more alien to oneself than one is to oneself. In other words, the self does not

discover the other -- the other must be differentiated from one's own self, and thus the other is never encountered as strange and unfamiliar.

For Hegel, on the other hand, the other is discovered only through a struggle. One consciousness encounters another because they are each all-consuming desires, which face the world and others as alien. Consciousness lives only by negating that which it encounters as external to it. Hegel describes a scenario which has come to be known as the 'fight to the death'. Although it is fictional and not to be taken literally, its purpose is to express the logic of desire and recognition. When two consciousness meet but do not recognize each other as such, they attempt to negate each other and, thereby, find themselves engaged in a *fight to the death*. When two consciousnesses encounter one another they are no longer simply negating beings, but beings which are themselves risking negation; they are staking their lives. The fight to the death will not, however, end in death insofar as this struggle is to be productive and sublated. One of the beings realizes its attachment to life and the risk of continuing the struggle. Consequently, this consciousness forfeits its freedom and becomes slave to the other consciousness who in turn becomes master. Hegel argues that the master/slave relationship is unstable. Each desires recognition from the other, but one must first recognize the other if one is to recognize his or her recognition of oneself. In other words, each desires the other's desire. As long as the master and slave are unequal, neither will receive full recognition. The relationship continually reverses itself until finally the two achieve an equilibrium and

a mutual recognition; this is achieved only at the end of the Phenomenology of Spirit in absolute knowledge.

For our purposes it is not necessary to trace every step of Hegel's argument. We need only see that, for Hegel, the other is initially unacknowledged. Consciousness may discover the other and itself by the same process, but this is not to say that the other is given as always already familiar. In fact, the other is initially alien and external to consciousness; self and other are not understood to be interdependent and aspects of a necessary unity. The truth of the matter can only be realized when individuals, as the philosopher Charles Taylor writes,

> come to see themselves as emanations of universal *Geist*. For it is only then that they will not see the surrounding universe as a limit, an other[15].

Natural consciousness does not anticipate the other, and the other is, therefore, given along the "way of despair"; the other is encountered only after violent struggle.

Merleau-Ponty refers to Hegel's master/slave dialectic in various places in his writings on the other. In "The Child's Relations with Others", Merleau-Ponty remarks that it is only after the stage of "syncretic sociability" that the child learns jealousy, cruelty, and conflict with others. He describes children approximately three years of age who have already learned to differentiate themselves from others:

> Often one sees pairs of children, one of whom exhibits himself in his most remarkable activities (playing with this or that latest toy, talking, holding

[15]Charles Taylor, Hegel (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1975), p 148.

> forth) while the other watches. This relation is often at the same time a relation of master and slave (CRO 142).

And we recall that in the Phenomenology of Perception Merleau-Ponty argues that any struggle between consciousnesses presupposes an acknowledgement of the other with whom one is engaged.

> With the *cogito* begins that struggle between consciousnesses, each of which, as Hegel says, seeks the death of the other. For the struggle ever to begin, and for each consciousness to be capable of suspecting the alien presence which it negates, all must necessarily have some common ground and be mindful of their peaceful co-existence in the world of childhood (PP 355).

Merleau-Ponty understands struggle between consciousnesses to be always dependent on a prior mutual recognition. In "Hegel's Existentialism", he comments, "We cannot be aware of the conflict [in the fight to the death] unless we are aware of our reciprocal relationship and our common humanity"[16]. And in "The Child's Relations with Others" violence and conflict emerge in the account of the development of children only after the primordial indistinction of self and other. Merleau-Ponty writes,

> The relation in question [that of master and slave], says Wallon, would include a confusion of self and another in the same situation of sentiments. The master exists through the recognition of his lordship by the slave, and the slave himself has no other function than to be there to admire and identify with the master. We have here a state of "combination with the other," as Wallon says, that is the mark of childish affective situations (CRO 142).

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[16]Merleau-Ponty, Sense and Non-Sense, p 68.

Conflict emerges in the form of jealousy and deliberate cruelty. Struggle, for Merleau-Ponty, always assumes a recognition of the other with whom one is in conflict. Conflict is always a 'system' of self and other, sadist and masochist.

> I would not covet, in right and principle what others have if I did not sympathize with them, if I did not consider others as "other myselves." Cruelty must, then, be understood as a "suffering sympathy" (Wallon) (CRO 143).

Certainly Merleau-Ponty is right that Hegel's master and slave are interdependent and form a system. Each desires the desire of the other. As Hegel explains:

> Each is for the other the middle term, through which each mediates itself with itself and unites with itself; and each is for itself, and for the other, an immediate being on its own account, which at the same time is such only through this mediation. They *recognize* themselves as *mutually recognizing* one another (§184).

However, Hegel's master and slave dialectic does not beg the question of the other in the way that Merleau-Ponty suggests. Merleau-Ponty situates this dialectic after the development of the *cogito*, but in transposing it from Hegel's philosophy to his own, he must divorce the master/slave relationship from its origins in the 'fight to the death'. In fact, he can only resituate the master/slave dialectic in his own system by misreading it.

First, we must understand that the fight to the death results from consciousnesses which overrun each other. Consciousness struggles with the other because it does not recognize the other as an aspect of its identity; consciousnesses do not understand themselves to be interdependent and, therefore, reciprocal. The fight to the death is inevitable because consciousness initially seeks only a one-sided recognition of self.

Hegel's notion of conflict is very different from Merleau-Ponty's notion which includes an implicit recognition of the reciprocity of the other with whom one struggles. Hegel's 'fight to the death' results from a clash of others who are so other as to be unrecognized as such. According to Hegel, natural consciousness cannot truly appreciate the truth of the other.

For Merleau-Ponty there can be no such radical difference in experience and, therefore, he cannot accommodate the fight to the death in his philosophy. He must divorce the master/slave dialectic from its Hegelian roots in the fight to the death, and consequently, he cannot acknowledge the sort of violence which results from the inadvertent domestication of otherness.

The fight to the death is not simply a prelude to the master/slave dialectic, but enters into it and determines its character. The struggle continues in the dialectic because the master/slave relationship is unstable and continually reverses itself. Recognition of the other (and self-consciousness) is achieved by degree. Master and slave are unequal because they do not acknowledge each other to the same extent. They may recognize each other to a certain degree, but "for recognition proper the moment is lacking" and, therefore, "[t]he outcome is a recognition that is one-sided and unequal" (§191). Hegel's master/slave dialectic is a process of coming to know the other (and oneself), and this process is all along marked by struggle and conflict, because consciousness always underestimates the otherness of the other. The truth of the master/slave relationship is ultimately the interdependence and equality of the two, but this truth is not always already

announced to the master and slave. It may be true, but must be discovered *as true for* each consciousness. The process of educating consciousness as to its interdependence with others is a struggle, a "way of despair", because the other continues to exceed the expectations of consciousness.

Thus Hegel's master/slave dialectic cannot be extricated from the fight to the death. The dialectic is a continued struggle. Although it is true that "for each consciousness to be capable of suspecting the alien presence which it negates, all must necessarily have some common ground" (PP 355), it is not necessarily the case that struggle presupposes a recognition of the other in all its otherness.

In the critical literature on Merleau-Ponty it has often been noted that although Merleau-Ponty's work represents an attempt to transcend the limitations of metaphysics, this project was only partially realized in his Phenomenology of Perception. To a certain extent, he was still subject to the influence of a philosophy of consciousness of the Husserlian type with its central demand that all that may be known must be immanent in the subject's "sphere of ownness". Gary Madison argues that the Phenomenology of Perception was still ultimately captive to this "immanentist demand" (Madison, 163), and therefore cannot accommodate such a notion as the *unconscious*.

> [T]he refusal to recognize a "transcendence in immanence," the thesis which postulates that everything which can be and can be thought must have its intelligible ground in our actual experience - goes hand in hand with the author's inability at this time to see any real meaning in the notion of the *unconscious*. For the psychoanalyst the unconscious is that which could never, under any circumstances, be present to our consciousness as such

> and which is immanent to conscious experience only by remaining irremediably transcendent to it (Madison, 164).

Merleau-Ponty's inability to account for the notion of the unconscious is symptomatic of a certain limitation of his phenomenology: he is blind to a kind of transcendence which cannot be anticipated. Just as Merleau-Ponty cannot accommodate the unconscious, neither can he accommodate an encounter with a certain type of otherness which is unexpected and unannounced in experience. Together Hegel's fight to the death and master/slave dialectic describe this sort of encounter and provide a notion of *struggle* with otherness which is beyond the scope of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. I am suggesting that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology may be limited to the extent that it cannot account for a kind of otherness with which one must struggle in order to know.

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Merleau-Ponty conceives of experience as a *Gestalt*; particular experiences are expressions of "a vast individual...which persists on the horizon of my life" (PP 328). Being as a whole is implicitly present in each and every experience. The world is always already there; nothing can be experienced which is not in some way already tacit. Merleau-Ponty's philosophical hallmark is the structure of the *always already*. The condition of experience is that whatever is given must already have been announced. Consequently, for Merleau-Ponty, teleology and genealogy are reversible: the forward movement of experience can only articulate what was already there to be discovered.

The other is not a problem for Merleau-Ponty because it does not come to be discovered -- it is always already familiar. Self and other are not opposed terms, but form a *Gestalt*. The self and the other appear only against the backdrop of their primordial unity; these terms are articulated together as a pair and are, therefore, from the beginning reciprocal and complementary. The recognition of the other does not lie ahead still to be achieved, but is already given.

The other which is already familiar cannot be the other which is encountered. Merleau-Ponty's other must be differentiated or split off from a global experience of intersubjectivity, unlike Hegel's other which becomes familiar by a long process. In this respect, Hegel accommodates an otherness more radical than Merleau-Ponty allows. Of course Hegel is no champion of radical difference insofar as his phenomenology serves the purpose of a total and absolute knowledge which cannot ultimately tolerate any level of otherness. Hegel's description of the encounter with the other, however, challenges Merleau-Ponty's account since it acknowledges a kind of otherness which the latter cannot recognize. I am not suggesting that Hegel's understanding of the other is definitive; instead I have offered Hegel as a foil to highlight some possible limitations of Merleau-Ponty's discussion of the other. In other words, I have offered the contrast in order to explore a line of inquiry -- a line which I do not claim to have exhausted.

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