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MERLEAU-PONTY
AND THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL CRITIQUE
OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

Marvin Surkin

A dissertation in the Department of Politics
submitted to the faculty of the Graduate School of
Arts and Science in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
at New York University

Oct. 1972


BERTELL OLLMAN, Advisor

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The following works by Maurice Merleau-Ponty will be cited in the text with the abbreviations indicated below:

- Themes - Themes from the Lectures at the College de France, 1952-1960. Trans. John O'Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970).
- SB - The Structure of Behavior. Trans. Alden L. Fisher (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963).
- PP - Phenomenology of Perception. Trans. Colin Smith (New York: Humanities Press, 1962; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962).
- HT - Humanisme et terreur. (Paris: Gallimard, 1947).
- SN - Sense and Nonsense. Trans. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964).
- Praise - In Praise of Philosophy. Trans. James M. Edie and John Wild (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1963).
- AD - Les Aventures de la dialectique (Paris: Gallimard, 1955).
- Signs - Signs. Trans. Richard C. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964).
- Primacy - The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays. Ed. by James M. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964).

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The Social Sciences and Phenomenology

In response to the debate concerning the objectivity and ideology of behavioral political science, this author wrote an essay criticizing American political science for propounding "non-sense," or creating and fostering a form of political sciencizing which functions to rationalize some of the most irrational features of American foreign and domestic policies.¹

"The myth of political benevolence" and "the myth of scientific omniscience" was opposed in the essay and it was concluded that the purity of knowledge is meaningless (non-sensical) as long as that knowledge is used by social institutions for certain prescribed purposes. Hence, social knowledge, whether it be scientific or not, has a value for that society and plays a function which can most often be called ideological.

¹"Sense and Nonsense in Politics" was originally published in PS (II, No. 4, Fall, 1969), 573-581; and in Marvin Surkin and Alan Wolfe, eds., An End to Political Science (New York: Basic Books, 1970), pp. 13-33. It is also reprinted in Michael Weinstein, ed., The Political Experience (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972). Chapter V of this thesis is a revised and expanded version.

There were numerous criticisms of this essay by political scientists. Ithiel de Sola Pool, for instance, wrote a highly vituperative attack in which he accused the author of being a misguided younger scholar who had not properly caught on to the drift of things.²

This author responded by writing:

Ithiel de Sola Pool's rejoinder...covers familiar ground. We already know the basis of his thinking - including both his "science" and his "ideology." He extols the virtues of a particular mode of science and the efficacy of a particular political system, as well as its policies and priorities. Professor Pool is in the mainstream of American political science today, and for those who share his tradition his rejoinder undoubtedly makes sense. What this implies, in my view, is that whether or not there is full agreement as to the mandarin role of social scientists espoused by Pool is of only secondary importance since the options are limited by the given standard of rationality as well as by the conditions of the social world.

My essay is an attempt to analyze this problem in social knowledge and theory. I have tried to show the irrationality of the system of rationality developed in American political science in which sense is really non-sense, science is really ideology. Professor Pool's rejoinder serves to reinforce the connections I have described between "policy" science and political "science". He admits, for instance, that "Researchers in any science are seldom very clear about the logical status of what they are doing. That is an exercise left to philosophers of science." This admission tallies, of

²Ithiel de Sola Pool, "Some Facts About Values," PS (III, 2, Spring, 1970), 102-106.

course, with his view that, on the one hand, social scientists will be able to supply the men of power with "a way of perceiving the consequences of what they do," while on the other hand, "...these various psychological and logical notions that we have been reviewing did get wound up in the day-to-day frame of thought (or ideology if you wish) of practicing social scientists into a highly useful set of liberal professional norms." The language changes from one context to the next but the meaning remains the same: the purpose of "science" or ideology or "liberal professional norms" is to serve the men of power.

My perspective is different. Not because it may be judged more or less rational or scientific, more or less ideological or value-laden. It is different because I have applied to social science, to ideology, and to theoretical criticism an alternate standard of rationality. My essay sketches such a new direction in social science. On this point I hope there is no misunderstanding. In any case, what is certainly clear to me is how successfully the existence of these two worlds in a journal of American political science reflects the difficulty any political scientist has in either sinking rationality or rescuing it.³

Meant, of course, was that actually no rational dialogue had taken place nor could one have, for the separation of two worlds of intellectual discourse and political attitudes presumed that we could only battle at each other in defense of our own points of view.

Other critiques of the essay were forthcoming,⁴ the upshot of which has been to reinforce, by and large, some of the

³"Rationalizing the Irrational," PS (III, 3, Summer, 1970), 450.

⁴See David Kettler, "The Vocation of Radical Intellec-

more traditional tendencies within political science, while leaving this phenomenological critique rather isolated, at least in terms of its impact on the discipline. The same is not the case in other social sciences in the U.S. (as will be documented below), where a serious intellectual and political movement is emerging in ways which suggest that phenomenology, Marxism and a politics of social change are coming together.⁵ The phenomenological movement in the social sciences represents one recent development in social theory whose methodology and political direction offer a basis for a new radical critique of the American political-economic system.

tuals," Politics and Society (I, 1, November, 1970), 23-49; and Bruce E. Wright, "Normation Principles and Prescriptions in Political Theory," American Political Science Association, Convention paper, 1970, mimeo.

⁵Fred Dallmayr, a political scientist, has argued forcefully for a phenomenological alternative in political science methodology. See "Existential Phenomenology and Social Science: An Overview and Appraisal," mimeo. However, most recent work in phenomenology and phenomenological Marxism has been going on outside political science. See especially Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966); Harold Garfinkel, Studies in Ethnomethodology (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1967); Aaron Cicourel, Method and Measurement in Sociology (Glencoe: Free Press, 1964); Erving Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (Garden City: Doubleday, 1959); Rollo May et al., Existence (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1958); Rollo May, Psychology and the Human Dilemma (Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1967); Abraham Maslow, Toward a Psychology of Being (New York: Van Nostrand, 1962); Frank Marini, ed., Toward a New Public Administration Theory (Scranton: Chandler 1971). Telos, a journal of marxism and phenomenology, published quarterly by the Department of Philosophy, State University of New York, Buffalo.

This thesis is part of that development. The main purpose is twofold:

(1) To demonstrate the significance of a phenomenological approach to political science as (a) a methodological and theoretical foundation for understanding and explaining social reality; and (b) a way to begin to grapple with the perplexities of rigid and static social theories of both the capitalist and the communist world in the light of recent movements for radical change. In this regard, I rely on the phenomenological marxism of Merleau-Ponty as a guide to analysis and as a means of introducing this alternative approach to American political science.

(2) To demonstrate the methodological and ideological limitations of behavioral political science to explain social reality or to provide the theoretical foundations for social change. In this regard, the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty is a significant critique of political science and one that is capable of highlighting the resistance of American political science to alternate ways of thinking (acting) about politics. In the last analysis, this thesis is an attempt to introduce a major twentieth century realm of political and social thought founded in the cross-breeding of phenomenology, existentialism and Marxism, which has been almost totally absent from the literature or interests of American political science.

Furthermore, it is my view that American society is in

need of a radical reorganization of social priorities. To achieve that end may call for a reconstruction of its dominant institutions, but at the least requires a redistribution of power and wealth as well as a redistribution of knowledge. The need for radical change grows as America's institutions find it increasingly difficult to meet the rising social demands of its most needy, most powerless, most alienated members. The vision of a white, liberal power structure bent on exploiting and repressing the poor and black at home and fighting counterrevolutionary, imperialist wars abroad is becoming more evident to the underclasses, left intellectuals, and students. What they envisage is the rationalization of bureaucracy, the monopolization of power and wealth, the tailoring of knowledge and technology, and the manipulation and control of the people in the interests of self-serving elites--managerial, corporate, political, and intellectual. To argue to the contrary is of no avail since this generation has experienced (and is becoming more conscious of) its own poverty, powerlessness, alienation, and knows how these feelings relate to the reality of American power and ideology in Vietnam and Santo Domingo, Watts and Detroit, Chicago and Columbia University. To plead for reason, detachment, objectivity or patience in the face of abject poverty, political repression, and napalmed women and children is absurd. Along with the power structure, reason, they will tell you, is what

gets us into Vietnam and keeps us there, produces a war on poverty but curtails funding, calls for "law and order" instead of freedom and justice. Moreover, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach to social reality offers a way of understanding beyond the claims to objectivity, rational, intellectual output of behavioral social science which, in the form of policy programs at home or pacification programs abroad tend to reinforce the established order. In fact, the meaning of so much rational model-building, statistical data, theorizing, planning and programming can be viewed-- as it is viewed by many of those most affected--as an elaboration of new, sophisticated techniques for "keeping the people down." This is the ideological significance of so-called "objective" or "scientific" knowledge as many have come to know it or experience its results.

Of course, this undercurrent in American society is merely the "knowledge by acquaintance" or felt knowledge of some Americans, certainly not the prevailing viewpoint, or the majority opinion. It is no wonder, then, that the rulers of both power and knowledge with their pluralistic, empiricist traditions find it so difficult to respond. For each of these two worlds of reality the other is incomprehensible, alien, quixotic. The situation is becoming more chaotic as these two worlds move farther and farther apart, demands become intolerable, and each side appears to be increasingly

intransigent.

While the methods and uses of social science criticized in this thesis demonstrate behaviorialism's intellectual and political incapacity to come to terms with this social reality, recent developments in existentialism and phenomenology have provided a radical alternative, one which, I contend, is more conducive to a critique of existing social institutions as well as to a theory of social change. At the same time, existential phenomenology provides a methodology for the social sciences which is no less rigorous, no less concerned with the verifiability of knowledge, and no less concerned with empirical inquiry.

The primary concern of existential phenomenology is the description of the life world (Lebenswelt) of everyday, common sense reality. It is a way of looking at the world, or describing its social reality, and disclosing, therefore, its human and social meaning. Starting with the human situation, the primordial condition of man's being-in-the-world (in-der-Welt-sein), phenomenology sets out to explore the different regions of human existence, the foundations of which are to be discovered in the everydayness of existence itself as it is experienced. In the language of phenomenology, the primacy of human existence is in the perception of the lived body (corps vecu) which is thrown into existence with others and the world. According to phenomenology, human existence is

pro-jective and intentional: through man's course of action new meaning is given to the world, history is made, and a new human and social praxis becomes possible. Man is condemned to history, said Merleau-Ponty; man, therefore, is condemned to be that being through whose actions the meaning construction of the world and of social relations is formed, deformed, re-formed, or transformed. Phenomenology, in short, is nothing less than a bold attempt to recover the primacy of human social existence, to re-establish human action as the motor of social forces and social relations, to reassert the social value and meaning of what William James called "the world of the street" in which every man and woman's actions have meaning in themselves as well as for others (pour autrui).

In regard to its methodological approach to social reality, phenomenology conforms to neither classical modes of subjectivism (irrationalism, solipsism) nor to classical modes of objectivism (rationalism, behavioralism). Phenomenology transcends both by establishing what Husserl, and later Merleau-Ponty and Alfred Schutz called intersubjectivity, by which is meant the fundamental interconnection between the external, subjective world including other people (être-en-soi) and the internal, subjective world of consciousness (être-pour-soi). This philosophy denies neither the world nor man, neither social structures and ideas nor human action, but rather attempts to describe the ineradicable link between the

two, and establish thereby the primacy of coexistence or human sociality. Hence the importance of phenomenology rests on its radical approach to social reality, its ability to describe the existential presence of man and his actions within the objective conditions of the world which are already established prior to his existence (i.e., man is thrown into the world). But equally important is the concept of intersubjectivity which lays the foundation for a new socialism based on its claim that all existence is coexistence and consequently all action is coaction, and a new humanism since "...a society is not the temple of value-idols that figure on the front of its monuments or in its constitutional scrolls; the value of a society is the value it places upon man's relation to man."⁶

Phenomenologists and existentialists, moreover, such as Merleau-Ponty, Schutz and Sartre argue for a dialectical unity of thought and action which seeks the meaning of praxis for social existence. Thus, following Marx, existence is meaningful only insofar as we "connect ourselves with history instead of contemplating it."⁷ For, what Marx calls praxis, "is the meaning which works itself out spontaneously in the intercrossing of those activities by which man organizes his

⁶HT, xiv

⁷SN, p. 79.

relation with nature and other men."⁸

In other words, the root of existence is consciousness; yet consciousness is always consciousness of something, i.e., involved consciousness, or a way of organizing projects of action based on the intentions of men or social classes in order to give meaning to their concrete historical situation.

This concern for social praxis, for the unity of thought and action, establishes existential phenomenology as a critical theory of radical political action, and represents a significant step toward reconciling Marxian socialism and existential humanism. These two movements share an awareness of the importance of a critical, humanistic, and existential attitude toward those petrified social forces and their ideological justifications which deny human existence, enforce patterns of social injustice, and alienate man from society itself. However, the key to the synthesis of these theoretical movements is the recognition of what Merleau-Ponty called the "dialectics of ambiguity." Briefly put, man is the motor of world historical forces, the being through whose actions social meaning, social change, and freedom are possible, but at the same time man is born into a world which he did not create and is always subject to others (co-actors) as well as to the existing ideas, institutions, and social processes

⁸Praise, p. 50.

which dominate his milieu. The dialectic, therefore, is an open-ended process, never restricted to either human action in itself or the social order in itself.

Finally, this approach to social science eschews value neutrality. It agrees with Marx that "philosophers have only interpreted the world in different ways; the point is to change it." While recognizing the central role of value and ideology in the quest for a free, open, and humane society and culture, existential phenomenologists and Marxists alike invite a sense of social commitment on the part of intellectuals, informed by a critical view toward transforming it. This approach is ideological in its quest for that historical truth by which man becomes the motor of the dialectic, enabling him to create the conditions under which he can make history and overcome both the resistance of the world and the institutional predilections of the political status quo to his projects for action.

Existential phenomenology aligned with a humanistic vision of social change is a radical alternative to behaviorism. First, because its vision of the world comprises the whole of social reality, including the common-sense reality of the man in the street, which the rationalistic universe of behaviorism tends to overlook. Second, because its vision of the social world is based on a critical attitude toward the status quo rather than the apolitical description of and com-

pliance with established political power so predominant among behavioralists. This radical methodology of social science offers some hope that from the seemingly mindless rationalism of America's political and intellectual elites and the seemingly mindless irrationalism of America's underclasses might emerge a new sense of reason and social purpose.

The thesis is divided into an introduction (Chapter I), four chapters, and a conclusion.

Chapter II deals with some of the major philosophical issues which separate phenomenology and behaviorism in order to contrast Merleau-Ponty's dialectical method with behaviorist objectivism.

Chapter III is concerned with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the social world in which his theory of dialectical intersubjectivity is considered as the foundation for an alternate methodology of the social sciences.

Chapter IV relates Merleau-Ponty's methodological concerns to the world of politics and demonstrates the importance of an open-ended dialectics of ambiguity.

Chapter V is an expanded phenomenological critique of behaviorism in which the interconnections between methodology and ideology are demonstrated.

Chapter II

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MERLEAU-PONTY'S PHENOMENOLOGY AND THE CRITIQUE OF BEHAVIORAL SOCIAL SCIENCE

As a basis for considering the methodological and political questions raised by Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, this chapter deals with some of the major philosophical issues which separate phenomenology and behavioralism. This will be done in order to demonstrate the significance of a phenomenological approach to political science as both a methodological foundation for explaining social reality and as an alternative approach to behavioralism. Merleau-Ponty has raised some of the significant questions concerning the critique of behavioral political science and he has in part laid the foundation for a radically distinct approach to social reality. Thus Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological marxism will be shown to be a relevant guide to criticism and analysis.

According to Merleau-Ponty, the chief historical problem for revolutionary theory and practice is the historical project of intersubjectivity. Merleau-Ponty describes human sociality as intersubjectivity, the dialectical interrelationship between subject and object, between subjective man and objective world, between theory and practice. But, according to Merleau-Ponty's methodological orientation, intersubjectivity

is not a natural condition of man but an historical project. This view reflects the methodological cross fertilization of phenomenology and marxism. This approach characterizes, moreover, what Merleau-Ponty calls the dialectics of ambiguity, that approach to the relationship of theory and practice, object and subject, based on openness or uncertainty as opposed to a deterministic unity. When Merleau-Ponty speaks of openness or ambiguity he is attempting to adjust our perceptions to those particular configurations of history for which there are no absolute subject/object options, no absolute theory or absolute praxis. There is instead a chiaroscuro of meanings from which we must learn to choose (to pro-ject) and upon which we must learn to act.

Merleau-Ponty's exploration of the historical project of intersubjectivity is, therefore, the key to a methodological orientation which serves as the basis for a politics of action, as opposed to contemplation or passivity. Moreover, this project is also a call to action, to those historical efforts of men, classes or nations to overthrow the oppression of an objectified world and social institutions, as well as to surpass (de-passe) the alienation of the self from others, from the world, and from the challenge to act creatively and constructively in the face of oppression. He reminds us of our historical task toward freedom, but also of the fragility of life and ideas, men and worldly structures, while remaining

cognizant of their resilience in the face of challenge and confrontation. Merleau-Ponty's "dialectics of ambiguity" is not only a method of analysis of the social world and the multiple levels of reality and historical possibility; it is also a practical reminder of the weight of the historical task we choose when we chose to act freely and collectively. In this regard, Merleau-Ponty's approach illuminates both the necessity and the contingency of any historical politics. In other words, Merleau-Ponty dares to speak openly about intersubjectivity and human sociality in the face of alienated social relations, fetishized social conditions, and bureaucratized and militarized social institutions in both the liberal-democratic and communist worlds. But because he does, he provides us with the guidelines for a viable theoretical method with which to relate objectivizing social forces to our historical projects to achieve intersubjectivity. In regard to problems of perception, sexuality, economics, politics or class relations, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is geared toward commitment and social action without illusion or dogmas. His existential phenomenology is a dialectical, open-ended but committed approach to the social and political world.

The importance of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach to the social sciences can be summed up this way:

- (1) It is a radical way of criticizing social existence. The phenomenological critique of behavioralism is a critique

of its methodological mode of explaining the social. Behaviorism is objectivistic, static, mechanical; phenomenology, on the other hand, is rooted in history and dialectics, it is open-ended mode of social investigation. The phenomenology of the social world is a radical attempt at integration; a serious effort to integrate the idea of man and the social world and the fact of man and the social world.

(2) It is a radical way of describing social reality which avoids taking for granted the pre-objective world of common sense man. In fact, everyday life as it is experienced in the common sense world is the starting point of every phenomenological project.

(3) It is a radical way of explaining the interrelationships between the outer and inner, between consciousness and the world, between objective and subjective meanings and social structures. It replaces the dualism of subject and object, self and world with the dialectical notion of intersubjectivity.

Merleau-Ponty asserts that a phenomenological philosophy is never cut off from sociology or politics; hence ideas or significations are never cut off from the facts, objects or signs which they express.¹ As John Wild says, in the

¹Signs, p. 101.

Lebenswelt, the lived world of everyday experience, there co-exist "world facts" and "scientific facts," or what William James called knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge about.² The phenomenological approach attempts to bridge this gap between knowledge and the real world and thus save philosophy from idealism and social science from objectivism. Merleau-Ponty's critique is harshest against the behaviorist trend in the social sciences for its objectivism and rationalism:

If objectivism or scientism were ever to succeed in depriving sociology of all recourse to significations, it would save it from "philosophy" only by shutting it off from knowledge of its object. Then we might do mathematics in the social, but we would not have the mathematics of the society being considered.³

Merleau-Ponty believes in neither shutting philosophy off from science nor in shutting science off from philosophy. Clearly his view is that the mathematics of the social leads nowhere, or worse, leads to the reification of a false sense of social reality. Phenomenology breaks with behaviorism over its methodology of social science since the latter results in an intellectualism or rationalism removed from the social reality it sets out to describe and explain. If by science is meant a behavioristic construction of the world of

²See John Wild, Existence and the World of Freedom (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1963), pp. 66 ff.

³Signs, p. 101.

human behavior, then phenomenology is opposed to science. But if by science is meant the concrete description of lived reality in the Lebenswelt (life world), then phenomenology is indeed compatible with science.

Philosophy is indeed, and always, a break with objectivism and a return from constructa to lived experience, from the world to ourselves. It is just that this indispensable and characteristic step no longer transports it into the rarified atmosphere of introspection or into a realm numerically distinct from that of science. It no longer makes philosophy the rival of scientific knowledge, now that we have recognized that the "interior" it brings us back is not a "private life" but an intersubjectivity that gradually connects us ever closer to the whole of history. When I discover that the social is not simply an object but to begin with my situation, and when I awaken within myself the consciousness of this social-which-is-mine, then my whole synchrony becomes present to me, through that synchrony I become capable of really thinking about the whole past as the synchrony it has been in its time, and all the convergent and discordant action of the historical community is effectively given to me in my living present. Giving up systematic philosophy as an explanatory device does not reduce philosophy to the rank of an auxiliary or a propagandist in the service of objective knowledge; for philosophy has a dimension of its own, the dimension of coexistence--not as a fait accompli and an object of contemplation, but as the milieu and perpetual event of the universal praxis. Philosophy is irreplaceable because it reveals to us both the movement by which lives become truths, and the circularity of that singular being who in a certain sense already is everything he happens to think.⁴

⁴Signs, pp. 112-113.

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is, therefore, an effort to recover the historical dimension of science as the basis for expanding human consciousness and knowledge. But this is the case only insofar as such knowledge can be placed in the service of the human situation itself which requires, in the final analysis, taking sides with those projects of social action which move men towards human and social transformation (i.e., revolution, social praxis). These themes are more fully discussed below in Chapter V.

Furthermore, much has been said of the "sense" of phenomenological social science over against the "non-sense" of behavioral social science in the preceding chapter. Phenomenological "sense" refers to its critique of the interrelationship between the bourgeois social order (i.e., America and the western countries today) and bourgeois social science, as well as the method by which phenomenology extends the realm of the real world for philosophy with a view toward humanizing and socializing that which is dehumanized and privatized in western society. The self-imposed methodological limitations as well as the politico-social perspective of behaviorist social science result in a kind of social "nonsense," irrational rationalism or ideological objectivism.

In advancing these methodological considerations, the analysis found in Alfred Schutz's essay "Concept and Theory Formation in the Social Sciences" states succinctly the most

pertinent arguments made by phenomenologists.⁵

Schutz opposes the "monopolistic imperialism" of the natural science method employed by empiricists, behavioralists, and logicians in the social sciences. For them, the methods of the natural sciences are the only basis for social knowledge, all else is ideology or irrationalism. On the contrary, the phenomenological approach to social reality embraces all of social reality not merely those phenomena observed in laboratory experiments or the like. This social reality includes, for Schutz,

...the sum total of objects and occurrences within the social cultural world as experienced by the common-sense thinking of men living their daily lives among their fellow-men, connected with them in manifold relations of interaction. It is the world of cultural objects and social institutions into which we all are born, within which we have to find our bearings, and with which we have to come to terms. From the outset, we, the actors on the social scene, experience the world we live in as a world common to all of us, either actually given or potentially accessible to everyone....⁶

Behavioralism and empiricism take for granted this social reality instead of describing it as the foundation of all social knowledge.

Two limitations of behavioralism follow from this

⁵Alfred Schutz, Collected Papers I: The Problem of Social Reality (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962), pp. 48-66.

⁶Ibid., p. 53.

methodological orientation. First, behavioralism tends to abstract from social reality constructs of the nature of human behavior in accordance with the dictates of natural science, i.e., stimulus-response, cause-effect, and so on. This results in an objectivistic or rationalistic social science far removed from the full description of social reality itself. The major distinction here is between the thought objects of the social sciences and those of natural science which are not differentiated by empiricists or behavioralists.

The world of nature, as explored by the natural scientist, does not "mean" anything to molecules, atoms, and electrons. But the observations field of the social scientist--social reality--has a specific meaning and relevance structure for human beings living, acting, and thinking within it. By a series of common-sense constructs they have pre-selected and pre-interpreted this world which they experience as the reality of their daily lives. It is these thought objects of theirs which determine their behavior by motivating it. The thought objects constructed by the social scientist, in order to grasp this social reality, have to be founded upon the thought objects constructed by the common-sense thinking of men, living their daily life within their social world.⁷

Thus phenomenologists agree that reflection, theorizing, scientific construction are only second order levels of meaning.⁸ The first order of social reality is in "the things themselves,"

⁷Ibid., p. 59.

⁸Ibid.

in everyday life as it is experienced, lived through. In this sense, social reality is concrete and experiential, not abstract or constructed. What the behaviorists and empiricists forget, or take for granted, is that which is the very foundation of social reality itself.

The second limitation of behavioral social science is its denial or rejection of the pre-reflexive foundation of social reality, or what phenomenologists call the world of everyday, common-sense experience. Phenomenology, on the contrary, returns to "the things themselves," describes them so as to recover their lost or hidden meaning for man in the social world. Merleau-Ponty's language is most lucid and expressive of what phenomenologists mean by pre-reflexive knowledge, knowledge of the world of everyday reality which precedes scientific knowledge or reflection. He writes in The Phenomenology of Perception,

To return to things themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always speaks, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language, as is geography in relation to the countryside in which we have learned beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is.⁹

Thus, at its foundation, knowledge is in man and in things, or, in other words, knowledge is in the world (au monde). Consequently, all scientific knowledge is knowledge of the

⁹PP, ix.

second order. For Merleau-Ponty, this distinction cannot be forgotten or taken for granted if one is to describe the real world of men and things rather than construct it or formulate it. The former is concrete, the latter is abstract; the former returns to "the things themselves" in which the horizon of man in the world is the Sinngebung (active meaning-giving operation) which defines consciousness; the latter is a synthesis, a judgment, a product of analysis.¹⁰ Because empiricists fail to recognize these distinctions in knowledge, their constructions of the social world and knowledge are mystifications of the real:

They hide from us in the first place 'the cultural world' or 'human world' in which nevertheless almost our whole life is led. For most of us, Nature is no more than a vague and remote entity, overlaid by cities, roads, houses and above all by the presence of other people. Now, for empiricism, 'cultural' objects and faces owe their distinctive form, their magic power, to transference and projection of memory, so that only by accident has the human world any meaning. There is nothing in the appearance of a landscape, an object or a body whereby it is predestined to look 'gay or said', 'lively' or dreary', 'elegant' or 'coarse'.¹¹

Empiricism thus distorts the real, the social and the human by making them illusions, merely constructs of the observer or accidents of the human condition. For phenomenology

¹⁰ Ibid., xi.

¹¹ Ibid., 23

the common-sense knowledge of the everyday world is itself the foundation, the experiential basis of culture and society and, therefore, of the human world itself.

If...we admit that all these 'projections,' all these 'associations,' all these 'transferences' are based on some intrinsic characteristic of the object, the 'human world' ceases to be a metaphor and becomes once more what it really is, the seat and as it were the homeland of our thoughts. The perceiving subject ceases to be an 'acosmic' thinking subject, and action, feeling and will remain to be explored as original ways of positing an object, since 'an object looks attractive or repulsive before it looks black or blue, circular or square.'¹²

According to this conception, empiricism falsifies the real world. That there are stimuli and qualities in man and in nature is not to be denied. Criticism only arises in that empiricism reduces to stimuli and qualities, to conceptions and constructions, nature, cultural objects and man himself. Whereas the empiricist tradition finds meaning only in the objective world of thought, outside of man as it were, phenomenologists find the meaning in the interrelationship between objective and subjective, between man and his world. In phenomenology, neither objective nor subjective, neither man nor his world are a self-sufficient foundation for knowledge, though common-sense, subjective knowledge holds the first

¹² Ibid., p. 24 (Merleau-Ponty is quoting in part--Kurt Koffka, The Growth of the Mind (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1925), p. 320.

order of priority.¹³

For another way of stating Merleau-Ponty's views we turn to his notion of behavior. Following Gestalt psychology, Merleau-Ponty believes that behavior has a structure which means that it is neither situated in the in-itself nor the for-itself.¹⁴ Behavior is neither the unfolding of objective time like physical events, nor is behavior merely the projection of consciousness outward toward the external world. Rather, on the one hand, the world is the "place" where behavior appears; and, on the other, perceptive consciousness is something I do, in me and in the world. The phenomenological method surpasses (depasses) the alternative of the for-itself and the in-itself in that it views behavior as neither a thing nor an idea. Consequently, the phenomenological approach serves as an alternative to behavioralism in the social sciences because "behaviorism, solipsism, and 'projective' theories all accept that behavior is given to me like something spread out in front of me."¹⁵ "The structure of behavior," concludes Merleau-Ponty to the contrary, "as it presents itself to perceptual experience is neither thing nor consciousness; and it is this which renders it opaque to the mind."¹⁶

¹³ Ibid., p. 26; see also Ibid., p. 57.

¹⁴ SB, pp. 125-126.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 126.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 127.

Thus, when Merleau-Ponty follows Husserl's "return to the things themselves," it is in order to re-establish for philosophy, for descriptive psychology, for the social sciences, that knowledge which precedes the "scientific"--reflective, conceptual knowledge--which is the basis of science while being inexplicable by the method of (natural) science. Phenomenology sets out to re-establish the primordial reality of the world and of man for which science can only be a rationale or explanation, always at best a meaning of the second order.

Merleau-Ponty continues the development started by Husserl in returning from the objective world to the Lebenswelt (lived world) which "is the source in general of all the historical structures which help us to analyze or model our relations with others and with the truth."¹⁷ Instead of reducing the natural and historical world to objectivistic constructions, the phenomenological reduction seeks to embrace and describe the "flux" and contingency of world constitution. This search for a description and understanding of world-historical meaning is a search for what Husserl called the Ineinander, "the inherence of the self-in-the-world or of the world-in-the-self."¹⁸

¹⁷Themes, p. 108.

¹⁸Ibid.

Here, Merleau-Ponty opposes the scientism of much of contemporary social science for failing to make these distinctions because

I am not the outcome of the meeting-point of numerous causal agencies which determine my bodily or psychological make-up. I cannot conceive myself as nothing but a bit of the world, a mere object of biological, psychological or sociological investigation. I cannot shut myself up within the realm of science. All my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world without which the symbol of science would be meaningless.¹⁹

According to Merleau-Ponty, moreover, the dialectic of philosophical investigation and practical action holds true for two reasons:

1. On the one hand, "there is no place of truth" which the philosopher can call his reserved domain for solitude and solemn contemplation.²⁰ Such is not the freedom of the philosophy of action, or any true philosophical project. In Merleau-Ponty's view, "our relationship to the true passes through others. Either we go towards the true with them, or it is not towards the true that we are going."²¹ In short, there is no solitary truth; philosophy, even when

¹⁹ pp, p. viii.

²⁰ Praise, p. 31.

²¹ Ibid.

furthest removed from action, is a kind of action or involvement in a world of social action from which there is no escape. To do philosophy is to be involved (engagé), and to be involved is to accept a point of view of the world wherein to establish a "place of truth."

2. On the other hand, however, Merleau-Ponty upholds the view that to conceive of philosophy as merely whimsy or merely ideology is to permit philosophy to "evaporate into nothing but clouds." For Merleau-Ponty, to philosophize is to seek the truth, and this implies that there is something to see, to grasp, and to say.²² At the very least, the philosophical project must transcend the gap between itself as philosophy (ideas) and thought and itself as history. It must continue to envision the potential significance of ideas for action, for history, while "making philosophy the understanding of historical experience, and history the becoming of philosophy."²³ Hegel understood this though he absolutized knowledge and reified the "system." At one moment Hegelian absolutism resolves to simply spell out an ongoing historical process; he is the simple reader of a history already accomplished.²⁴ At other moments this approach encapsulates history

²²Ibid., p. 41.

²³Ibid., p. 48.

²⁴Ibid., p. 49.

in the idea, so that philosophy becomes the only subject of history, and the idea in the mind of the philosopher is totalized as universal history itself.²⁵

Merleau-Ponty refuses these excesses, refuses to see the necessity or even the possibility of choosing between "opposed alternatives" which then becomes the challenge to philosophy, especially a philosophy of action, and the world of historical, social action as well. Can philosophy accept action as its true realization? Can a contingent history fulfill the claims of philosophical truth? Or, on the contrary, can man learn anything from philosophy? Do ideas have any validity for the man of action?

Merleau-Ponty attempts to answer these questions which set the stage for his phenomenology of the social world. First, there is the realization that philosophy in the modern world is faced with a sense of sterility, an inability to say anything to those in movement. Philosophies in the end "are only words expressed a bit more coherently. The philosophy placed in books has ceased to challenge men."²⁶ In a world where every man is something of a philosopher, the philosopher is threatened with the loss of his vocation.

Secondly, Merleau-Ponty argues that philosophy can be

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid., p. 34.

meaningful in the modern world if, following Marx, "one 'destroys' philosophy as a detached mode of knowing, in order to 'realize' it in actual history."²⁷ This means not simply a humanism which attempts to explain everything by man. Existence and meaning of social history extend far beyond man himself or consciousness.²⁸ The task of philosophy is not to anthropologize the world, and history, but rather to arouse "us to what is problematic in our own existence and in that of the world..."²⁹

In short, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy opposes both the anthropologization of history which would explain everything by man and the absolutization of history in which everything would be reduced to an idea of the real world. For Merleau-Ponty, the former represents a false humanism and the latter a false universalism; while neither leads to the realization of the dialectical interchange between the two alternatives. In Merleau-Ponty's view, the uniqueness of Marx was to bridge that gap:

The novelty of Marx...was...not to identify the mover of history with human productivity, not to interpret philosophy as a reflection of historical movement, but rather to denounce the trick by which the philosopher slips the system into history in order then to recover it and to reaffirm its omnipotence precisely at the moment when he seemed to give it up.³⁰

²⁷ Ibid., p. 51

²⁸ Ibid., p. 44.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 50

Marx's mode of philosophizing, therefore, is no longer detached or abstract. It is concrete and "real" in the sense that it understands history as situation; meanings are made in history not merely established or preordained by the mediation of philosophers.³¹ Merleau-Ponty agrees with Marx that philosophy would rightly concern praxis, "the meaning which works itself out spontaneously in the intercrossing of those activities by which man organizes his relations with nature and with other men."³²

Finally, we may ask: Do ideas ever move men beyond their own historical subjugation? Do men ever succeed in creating (realizing) the concretization of their ideas other than in their own historical subjugation? In other words, consciousness raises the possibility of freedom and intersubjectivity, but their realization is always called into question by the realities of power, force, violence, and the objective and subjective conditions of the time.

Therefore, in Merleau-Ponty's thought, to ask whether we move from philosophy to politics or from politics to philosophy is beside the point. Merleau-Ponty is a phenomenologist of the social world not a politician, ideologist or party member. But politics is not merely an appendage to his

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid.

thought. It is living, historical dimension. Existence cannot be cut off from politics and social life; on the contrary, it can only be envisaged as played out in the political, social world itself. A phenomenology of the social world, then, cannot be less than a way of describing, criticizing and explaining historical, social and political existence.

In the work of Merleau-Ponty, this project is complicated by the eclectic character of his thinking. More than traces of influence from Hegel and Marx, Husserl and Heidegger serve to mediate his uncompromising drive for theory and his passionate push for commitment. He believes in the verities of social theory but for him there is never theory in itself, be it that of Karl Marx, Freud or any other. He believes in the exigencies of praxis but man never acts alone or without reference to his social situation, others and ideology. Consequently, Merleau-Ponty's thought defies easy categorization, especially as it is related to questions of politics and social life. What best characterizes Merleau-Ponty is, on the one hand, his rejection of historical skepticism and, on the other, his denial of any "total" commitment:

To sum up, we can no longer have a Kantian system of politics, because such a system is not concerned with consequences, whereas when we act it is indeed to produce external results, not just to make a gesture and ease our conscience. We cannot have 'skeptical' politics

because, appearance to the contrary, it chooses its goals and makes a selection of facts (which it then asks us to recognize) according to values it does not acknowledge, proposing to guide us to a definition of the 'possible' on the basis of these facts. Nor can we any longer have a proletarian Marxist politics along classical lines, because this politics has lost its grip on the facts. Our only recourse is a reading on the present which is as full and as faithful as possible, which does not prejudice its meaning, which even recognizes chaos and nonsense where they exist, but which does not refuse to discern a direction and an idea in events where they appear.³³

However, Merleau-Ponty's analysis, as seen in this chapter, is ambiguous, especially in his attempt to walk the tightrope between an open-ended method and a marxian socialist commitment.

His attempt to offer an alternative methodology to a static, status quo oriented behavioralism in the social sciences is a vital starting point for any philosophy of action and social change. Nevertheless, the limitations of behavioralism analyzed in this chapter demonstrate the importance of methodological choices as well as the political consequences. In order to further this critique and lay the foundations for developing an alternative approach to social reality, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the social world

³³SN, pp. 168-169

is considered in the next chapter, and then in the following chapter we relate Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological marxism to the problems of practical politics. In both cases we expound and interpret the thought and experiences of Merleau-Ponty with a view toward devising and developing an alternative social science, thus providing the foundation for an extended critique of behavioral social science (Chapter V).

Chapter III

THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE SOCIAL WORLD

In the previous chapter some of the key philosophical and methodological issues which separate the phenomenological and behavioral approaches to social reality have been analyzed. It has been seen that the scientific foundation of behavioralism produces a static, objectivistic perspective of the social world. Merleau-Ponty's critique of behavioralism is based on a phenomenological method which goes beyond the limits set by behavioralism. In contrast to the behaviorist tradition, the distinguishing feature of Merleau-Ponty's analysis, which will now be considered, is his concern for a phenomenological description of intersubjectivity in which the struggle for freedom and authentic social relations begins, for man, in history and in society. In his phenomenology of the social world, social life begins with a recognition of the relational or dialectical character of existence.

The social world is the core of the phenomenological project because Merleau-Ponty envisages the lived world (Lebenswelt, monde vécu) not as a sphere of objects to be observed, but of "values, cultural goods, desires" to be experienced, lived, acted upon, changed.¹ Merleau-Ponty's phenomono-

¹David Carr, "Merleau-Ponty: Incarnate Consciousness," in George A. Schrader, ed., Existential Philosophers: Kierkegaard to Merleau-Ponty (New York: MacGraw Hill, 1967), p. 373;

logy of the social world is a philosophical project which sets out to describe "the mingling of consciousness with the world, its involvement in a body, and its coexistence with others...."² Jean Hyppolite describes the meaning of the relations between man and world in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the social world as

une meditation sur cette connexion intime de l'existence et du sens. Notre existence ne s'enracine dans le monde et dans l'histoire que parce qu'elle y decouvre ou y invente un sens. Ce sens n'est pas ecrit dans la nature des choses, ou dans un esprit eternal, il est l'oeuvre preparee et toujours menacée de l'existence que nous sommes nous-meme.³

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the social world is a radical contrast to the tradition of behavioralism in the social sciences. It is contrasted with behavioralism in the following ways:

(1) A theoretical perspective of the human life-world of everyday common-sense reality, the world of multiple realities.

(2) A theoretical perspective of human intersubjectivity and social consciousness.

(3) A theoretical perspective of social consciousness as perceptive and perspectival.

²SN, p. 59.

³Jean Hyppolite, Sens et existence dans la philosophie de Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 3.

(4) An existentialist perspective of dialectics which relates social praxis and political action to historical situation and social consciousness.

But the basis of this "meditation" or interrogation is a phenomenological project in which the philosopher is a "perpetual beginner." Here Merleau-Ponty makes use of Husserl's notion of the radical reduction, which, at least in part, means that the philosopher "takes for granted nothing that men, learned or otherwise, believe they know."⁴ And further,

It means also that philosophy itself must not take itself for granted, in so far as it may have managed to say something true; that it is an ever-renewed experiment in making its own beginning; that it consists wholly in the description of this beginning; and finally, that radical reflection amounts to a consciousness of its own dependence on an unreflective life which is its initial situation, unchanging, given once and for all.⁵

Phenomenological reduction, therefore, belongs to existential philosophy, not to idealism or rationalism, being-in-the-world is the background of the phenomenological reduction, or, in other words, human and social existence is the subject of every phenomenological project.⁶

⁴ PP, xiv

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

In this chapter we will be concerned specifically with (1) the foundations of a phenomenology of the social world as developed by Merleau-Ponty; (2) an analysis of Merleau-Ponty's contribution to a theory of intersubjectivity and freedom; (3) an analysis of the theoretical and political significance of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. The latter point will also be the main concern of Chapter V.

Firstly, the phenomenological world-view is a view of a world of multiple realities. This starting point enables Merleau-Ponty to consider not only the rational or intellectual sphere of knowledge (reflexive knowledge) as a part of social reality, but also the everyday knowledge of common sense reality (pre-reflexive knowledge). This approach turns the outward bound thought of science and philosophy inwards, that is to say, this approach turns objective knowledge toward subjective knowledge, thought, in other words, toward action. For Merleau-Ponty the world of multiple realities is founded on:

(1) A Historical Method: An analysis of the real, historical world of subject and object as it is experienced as situation, perspective, consciousness by world actors;

(2) A Sociological Method: An analysis of the social world from the perspective of intersubjective consciousness and political action--neither subjective nor objective alone;

(3) A Dialectical Method: An analysis of the inter-

action of thought and action in historical perspective, that is, the interaction between subjectivity and objectivity, between self and others, between life world and world of objects and things, between social classes, nations, sexes. A philosophy of the social world concerns, for Merleau-Ponty, the meaning of social praxis or as he says, paraphrasing Marx, praxis is "the meaning which works itself out spontaneously in the intercrossing of those activities by which man organizes his relations with nature and with other men."⁷ Merleau-Ponty attempts to describe in a marxian vein the historical social process in which men and women organize their social world, live in it, and struggle to change it.

Therefore, Merleau-Ponty attempts to re-establish, following Marx, a radical humanism because it seeks the goals of philosophy--a complete grasp of the world--in the interconnections of man with his own history rather than in the contemplation of history.⁸ Such a philosophy requires a radical humanization of politics and a new conception of social history. Earlier conceptions of history, man, and politics are superseded by what Merleau-Ponty sees as Marx's philosophy of inter-subjectivity, a philosophy that is practically and concretely human yet rooted in the actual historical world

⁷Praise, p. 50.

⁸SN, p. 79.

situation. These earlier conceptions include Kierkegaard's existentialism because of its excessive inner subjectivism; Feuerbach's anthropologization of human history; Hegel's objectivism; and the rationalism of the empiricist tradition. None of these philosophies succeeded in realizing a dialectical and historical notion of man who is at one and the same time born into a world of ideas yet is himself the sole appropriator of ideas; or of a world of things and relations which is "already there" yet there to be created by man himself.

If it is neither a "social nature" given outside ourselves, nor the "World Spirit," nor the movement appropriate to ideas, nor collective consciousness, then what is, for Marx the vehicle of history and the motivating force of the dialectic? It is man involved in a certain way of appropriating nature in which the mode of his relationship with others takes shape; it is concrete human intersubjectivity, the successive and simultaneous community of existences in the process of self-realization in a type of ownership which they both submit to and transform, each created by and creating the other.⁹

Merleau-Ponty believes that it is not a question in Marx of whether man is attached to himself alone or to the world alone, to his freedom or to the objective world situation. These are false alternatives. In concrete reality, the bond that attaches man to the world is at the same time his only way to freedom.¹⁰ The task of philosophy, therefore, is to understand this historical dialectic. "Marxism is not a philosophy

⁹ Ibid., p. 129.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 130.

of the subject, but it is just as far from a philosophy of the object; it is a philosophy of history."¹¹

Merleau-Ponty's treatment of Marxist "humanism" explains his view that Capital is a concrete Phenomenology of Mind.¹² For Marx, one cannot do philosophy without fulfilling it, and while Merleau-Ponty feels that Hegel was not wrong he was nonetheless abstract. Hegel's logic is the "algebra of the revolution."¹³ But the important point is that the philosopher (e.g., the later Hegel) must realize that he cannot obtain "the revelation of the meaning of history to which other men simply submit."¹⁴ On the contrary, when the philosopher does away with isolated, abstract philosophizing and replaces it with concrete thinking, with a Marxian "critique," then philosophy succeeds in overcoming the "illusion of contemplation" and becomes, in Merleau-Ponty's view, "existential philosophy." When knowledge is put back into "the totality of human praxis" so that the subject is the subject of his situation, so that neither the subject nor the situation is mere fabrication, then we have a philosophy which is militant.¹⁵

¹¹ Ibid.; see also HT, pp. 101 and 148.

¹² HT, p. 101; SN, p. 133.

¹³ SN, p. 133.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 134.

Although much of the discussion of the political significance of Merleau-Ponty's notion of existential dialectics will be reserved for Chapter V, we can now suggest how Merleau-Ponty envisaged the interrelationship between a phenomenological philosophy and a politics of radical action.

Merleau-Ponty sees that the task of philosophy is ambiguous, dialectical. A philosophy of praxis is committed to action, to those social actions which set out to change the world. But, there is a dialectic or ambiguous relationship for the philosopher, as for all men--that between the means by which he understands what to do and the means by which he chooses what to do. The philosopher, according to Merleau-Ponty, helps us to understand. Philosophy is nothing more, in a real sense, than "putting into words what every man knows well..."¹⁶ Yet it is the philosopher who wakes up and speaks; his choice of not remaining silent is his mode of action. In other words, the phenomenology of the social world espoused by Merleau-Ponty is a bold effort to create a theoretical radicalism whose methodology binds it to the world of social action, whose trail is always crossed by the everyday experiences of humanity. The unique feature of Merleau-Ponty's radicalism is that it holds neither to the dogmas of the subjective or human nor to the dogmas of the objective or

¹⁶Praise, p. 63.

rational. It is rather an ongoing development of philosophical theory and knowledge bound as it is dialectically to the contingent world of human society. Finally, Merleau-Ponty attempts to found a philosophy of man in both the empirical radicalism based on phenomenological description and the social praxis of human actors.

Existence and the World of Freedom

And so I live not for death but forever, and likewise, not for myself alone but with other people. A more complete definition of what is called existentialism then we get from talking of anxiety and the contradiction of the human condition might be found in the idea of a universality which men affirm or imply by the mere fact of their being and at the very moment of their opposition to each other, in unreason, of a freedom which comes into being in the act of accepting limits and to which the least perception, the slightest movement of the body, the smallest action, bear incontestable witness.¹⁷

What we have called the existential dialectic in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is a method which approaches existence as social existence always in an historical situation

¹⁷ SN, p. 70.

(i.e., being-in-the-world). This means that the possibility of human universality through intersubjectivity becomes concrete and realizable in practical, everyday human interaction and discourse. Merleau-Ponty's existential dialectic highlights the interrelationship between the subjective consciousness, on the one hand, and the objective social forces on the other in an open, "ambiguous" manner, embracing the contradictory tendencies with regard to contingent and necessary history. The method, therefore, is eclectic, as Georg Lukacs rightly says in his later writings, because it remains fastened in the bourgeois split between objective understanding and moral feeling.¹⁸ Lukacs believes that Merleau-Ponty is closer to Weberian liberalism than to his own brand of neo-marxism. Merleau-Ponty, for his part, believes that his efforts to straddle objectivism and subjectivism make for a workable blend of early Lukacs and what he chooses to call Weberian marxism.¹⁹ The tension between these differing perspectives is real and will be further analyzed in the following chapter. However, what is essential at this point is the recognition that in Merleau-Ponty a bold effort is made to embrace the two worlds--subject and object, consciousness

¹⁸ Georg Lukacs, Existentialisme ou Marxisme? (Paris: Nagel, 1961), pp. 199, 203.

¹⁹ AD, pp. 15-42. This is translated as "The Crisis of the Understanding," Primacy, pp. 193-210.

and social praxis, existentialism and marxism. The results are undoubtedly mixed, or ambiguous, as Lukacs says and Merleau-Ponty agrees, but the perspective of the existential dialectic remains imperative in a world in which dogmatic theory and dogmatic action tend to replace the dialectical tension of historical development founded in marxism. As a prelude to Merleau-Ponty's politics and critique of politics (Chapter V), we will first examine the phenomenology of the social world as a philosophy of intersubjectivity and a philosophy of freedom.

According to Merleau-Ponty, the dialectical nature of man's sexual being, its historicity and sociality as well as its objectivity, is akin to the dialectical nature of politics and human action. Sexuality and politics are merely two aspects of the same problematic--the dimension (possibility) of human freedom in history. Merleau-Ponty argues against causality in human relations; history is contingent, man-made. While there is no transcending of human sexuality, even though sexuality is never a self-enclosed system, the same is true for politics, economics, and human social relations. He argues for a historical materialism, for the primacy of praxis over theory, for a concrete, open history which is contrary to classical economics, bourgeois theory or logical positivism, based on "a co-relation of productive forces and forms of production."²⁰ This approach to history, to human social praxis,

²⁰pp. p. 171.

is completed, following Marx, "only when the former emerge (productive forces) from their anonymity, become aware of themselves and are thus capable of imposing a form on the future."²¹ In this regard, history is not reduced to economics nor is economics reduced to history. In the same way, man is never reduced to sexuality. Rather, the philosopher attempts to give "a concrete conception of history" in which the dynamics of class struggle re-emerge in such a way that "economics is reintegrated into history..."²² in the same way that sexuality is integrated into being-in-the-world.

This conception of the history of human sexuality or class relations is at bottom a radical attempt to describe the "real subject of history"--not the economic subject or the factor of sexuality, but "the living subject, man as creativity, as a person trying to endow his life with form, loving, hating, creating or not creating works of art, having or not having children."²³ In short, both human sexuality and the struggle over the forces and forms of production are ways of being-in-the-world (and consequently ways of acting) rather than ways of thinking. Praxis, Merleau-Ponty asserts, is the foundation of history, not thought.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

According to this view, all history is expressed in various forms of social existence, though the road to an interpretation of history is ambiguous, since the intersubjective relationship cannot be reduced to the objective condition in itself nor vice-versa.²⁴ Merleau-Ponty professes to overcome this historical dilemma not by reducing it or bifurcating it, but rather by embracing it: ambiguity is not a matter of reproach, it is inherent in things.²⁵ The existential conception of history sees the inherent link between subjective and objective forces, i.e., an open-ended, dialectical process. The link between intentionality and objective reality demonstrates as we have already noted, that only the living subject has a history, but a living subject who is "historically situated."²⁶ According to Merleau-Ponty's analogy, life breathes a sexual atmosphere, in the same way that the proletariat or the bourgeoisie becomes implicated, engaged, conscious of economics and the class struggle in regard to a certain historical backdrop which serves as the basis for their projective actions. In Merleau-Ponty's words:

If existence is the permanent act by which man takes up, for his own purposes, and makes his own a certain de facto situation, none of his thoughts will be able to be quite detached

²⁴ Ibid., p. 172.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 173.

from the historical context in which he lives, and particularly from his economic situation. Precisely because economics is not a closed world, and because all motivations intermingle at the core of history, the external becomes internal and the internal external, and no constituent of our existence can ever be outrun.²⁷

One might assert, as we shall discuss below, that freedom, in short, is possible but only as regards the reality of intersubjective existence against the backdrop of a world historical situation. Freedom is possible only on the condition that neither the subjective nor objective is vanquished, but rather by their interchange or a dialectic unity.

The World of Existence

The merit of existentialism is that it is devoted to thinking about the human condition. This entails recognition of those human demands to reach out beyond the limitations of the existing situation. Where life is fragile, institutions and laws are oppressive, men and social classes struggle for power or survival, existentialism brings resolve, commitment, and finally the negative act, an act which says No to the pre-

²⁷Ibid., p. 172; see also SN, pp. 113, 133-134; SB, pp. 222-223.

sent in order to create a new future. Merleau-Ponty, besides sharing the sense of existentialist commitment to man, moves beyond individual existence toward a social existentialism. Being-in-the-world represents in Merleau-Ponty's thought the possibility of sociality or coexistence since my body, others, and the world around me come into my perceptual and active field as "already there." The lived world (Lebenswelt) is an "inalienable presence" since it is always already there (*toujours-deja-la*).²⁸ The lived world refers not only to world embodiment as a structural presence to man, but to social embodiment of man to the world, that is, the coexistential presence of man to man vis-a-vis the structure of the world.

Merleau-Ponty's treatment of the world of existence is vital to these considerations. He claims, on the one hand, that the externality of being-in-the-world defines man, establishes his horizon or spatial and temporal limitations, and fixes his situation vis-a-vis himself, others and the world around him. This is the "thrownness-into-being" of which Heidegger speaks. But, on the other hand, being-in-the-world requires the particular intentional acts of men in their day-to-day encounters with others and the world as the basis upon which the world is given meaning, takes shape for us, is

²⁸PP, p. vii.

formed or transformed, molded or remolded. We cannot, therefore, speak of the structure of the world without including therein man as an intentional actor. There is always a dialectic of inner and outer, never the one alone. Merleau-Ponty asserts that

The world is not an object such that I have in my possession the law of its making; it is the natural setting of, and field for, all my thoughts and all my explicit perceptions. Truth does not 'Inhabit' only the inner man, or more accurately, there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself.²⁹

The "facticity" of man's being-in-the-world, therefore, can never be abrogated.³⁰

Merleau-Ponty's approach to being-in-the-world is closest to that of Husserl and Heidegger. According to Landgrebe, Husserl's aim was to comprehend the world as a structure, to demonstrate that the world owes its origin to the experiential characteristics of man.³¹ In Landgrebe's summary of Husserl, being-in-the-world has a two-fold meaning. First, "man lives already within his horizons, that he is an individual of this particular time and this particular community and therewith--as a human being 'in this world'--within a definitely limited horizon. Man thus sees himself...from the outside,

²⁹ Ibid., p. xi.

³⁰ Ludwig Landgrebe, Major Problems in Contemporary European Philosophy (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1966), p. 81.

³¹ Ibid., p. 73.

in the manner in which others see him, as the end result of all the processes of experiences which have led him to discover himself as this particular individual with this particular name, playing this particular role."³² And second, "Man's being-in-the-world means that he is a center of intentional operations and performances and that he knows himself as a being who builds upon the foundations laid by others and thus transforms the already given world for himself and for others."³³ "The world is not what I think, but what I live through. I am open to the world, I have no doubt that I am in communication with it, but I do not possess it; it is inexhaustible."³⁴

This approach to being-in-the-world is radically different from that of Jean-Paul Sartre's, Merleau-Ponty's collaborator at Les Temps Modernes. Contrary to Sartre, Merleau-Ponty holds that there is no radical split between the en-soi (in-itself) and the pour soi (for itself), or between the world and consciousness. Rather, in Merleau-Ponty's view, the en soi and the pour soi form the primordial structure of the human, social world. For, even though I enter the world through my perceptive consciousness, through my lived body

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid.

³⁴pp., p. xvii.

(corps vecu), it cannot be overlooked that this presence in the world is the basis of a social existentialism, that is to say, all existence (including consciousness) is social existence or coexistence. "Existence," Merleau-Ponty believes, "is the movement through which man is in the world and involves himself in a physical and social situation which then becomes his point of view of the world."³⁵ In spite of these differences, however, Merleau-Ponty praises Sartre's existentialism because it makes "the light of the spirit shine everywhere, because we are not body and spirit or consciousness confronting the world, but spirit incarnate, being-in-the-world."³⁶

Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty stresses the intentional structure of man's being-in-the-world. He describes existence as a certain kind of undertaking which requires involvement and commitment to action. To exist is to be conscious and to act, and only in this way can man expect to give (and gain) meaning from his world situation. Merleau-Ponty sees this as an existential (and political) necessity for man: "Because we are in the world, we are condemned to meaning; and we cannot do or say anything without its acquiring a name in history."³⁷

³⁵SN, p. 72.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 74-75; see also Jean-Paul Sartre, Situations (New York: Fawcett, 1965), pp. 175-176.

³⁷PP, xix.

Intentional being-in-the-world presupposes action, all action is founded in consciousness, and "all consciousness is consciousness of something."³⁸ Consciousness is not an in itself, nor is human action for itself. All action is co-action. "It is a question of recognizing consciousness itself as a project of the world, meant for a world which it neither embraces nor possesses, but towards which it is perpetually directed--and the world as this pre-objective individual whose imperious unity decrees what knowledge shall take as its goal."³⁹ Founded in consciousness as a form of active being-in-the-world, man lived through, experiential existence is always directed toward meaning-giving relationships. The dimensions of human, social meaning are always crossed over by the intentional human act. Following Husserl, Merleau-Ponty claims there is a "genesis of meaning" (Sinn-genesis): "Everything has meaning, and we shall find this same structure of being underlying all relationships."⁴⁰ Moreover, there are two types of intentionality, as distinguished by Husserl: (1) intentionality of act, "which is that of our judgments and of those occasions when we voluntarily take up a position;" and (2) "operative intentionality," or "that which produces the natural and antepredicative unity of the

³⁸Ibid., xvii.

³⁹Ibid., xvii-xviii.

⁴⁰Ibid., xix.

world and of our life, being apparent in our desires, our evaluations and in the landscape we see...."⁴¹

Despite Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on intentionality, he does not fail to see that it is both our actions and our given surroundings (or environment) that represent our historical starting point, our way of inserting ourselves in the world, making our map on the world, creating meaning out of the various configurations of the world.⁴² "The relationship between subject and object is no longer that relationship of knowing postulated by classical idealism, wherein the object always seems the construction of the subject, but a relationship of being in which, paradoxically, the subject is his body, his world, and his situation, by a sort of exchange."⁴³ Merleau-Ponty finds it is necessary to embrace the paradox, not to settle it by some arbitrary or rationalist division. Once again he opposes Sartre's radical antithesis of the en soi and the pour soi, of action and consciousness, world and self. For Merleau-Ponty, the antithesis, or better ambiguity, between my view of myself and another's view of me and between the for itself and the in itself should be described as "the living bond and communication between one term and the other."⁴⁴

⁴¹Ibid., xviii.

⁴²SN, p. 73.

⁴³Ibid., p. 72

⁴⁴Ibid.

In addition, since consciousness is always consciousness of something, action is always projective. We exist in the world which is our birthright, but we also inhabit the world and hence engage ourselves in projects of action which we choose. Man, therefore, projects a course of action or a social class projects a course of action such that it is always a way of relating consciousness (for itself) to an objective situation in the world (in itself).

In sum, the world of existence is characterized by a subject who, by inhabiting the world, originates a structure of meaning which we call history. The convergence of the facticity of the world (deja-la) and the inherence of man in the world (être-au-monde) involves the one in the other so that there is created a "unité de monde." When phenomenologists speak of intersubjectivity it is a way of rejecting both the subjectivism of human existence and the objectivism of the world structure while affirming the dialectical unity formed by the accord between man and his world. This human, worldly situation is pronounced by two inseparable facts. First, there is no subject (man) without object (others, world, things) just as there is no world without man.

The world is inseparable from the subject, but a subject which is nothing but a project of the world, and the subject is inseparable from the world, but from a world which it projects itself.⁴⁵

⁴⁵PP, p. 430.

Man is a "project-in-the-world" and the world is man's project. This implies intentionality. Man perceives his world, his situation, himself; therefore, consciousness is always consciousness of something. Moreover, to project a course of action is to choose to do this or that. Pro-jective action is involvement, commitment. Existence, consequently, is an opening up to the world, to society, to politics such that meaning, humane and worldly meaning, is created. This existential perspective opens up the question of the dialectic of human freedom and radical politics which will be examined below.

Second, man's existence is never solitary either in relation to the world or to others. Neither is man's being-in-the-world a duality between his consciousness (pour-soi) and his bodily presence (en-soi). There is neither "inner man" nor "outer worldliness" alone. Rather, there is a mutuality of inner and outer, an intersubjective unity. This unity is always an opening to each other, a way of synthesizing the contradictions of the world, of social existence. It is not a closed or final order, but presents the possibility of a human and social order.

History shares this intersubjectivity. History is a segment of sociality.⁴⁶ "There is a history only for a sub-

⁴⁶Hwa Yol Jung, "The Radical Humanization of Politics: Maurice Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Politics," Archives for Philosophy of Law and Social Philosophy (LIII, 2, 1967), 242.

ject who lives through it, and a subject only in so far as he is historically situated."⁴⁷ Human sociality, or intersubjectivity, therefore, inaugurates history as the encounter of myself (pour-soi) and the world (en-soi). Contrary to Sartre's bifurcation of the pour soi and the en soi, Merleau-Ponty here reasserts Marx's famous notion in the sixth thesis on Feuerbach that the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations.

Every incarnate subject is like an open notebook in which we do not yet know what will be written.⁴⁸

As we have noted above, Merleau-Ponty captures the spirit of being-in-the-world in its relation to intersubjectivity, sociality and politics in his chapter on "The Body and Its Sexual Being" in The Phenomenology of Perception.⁴⁹ He describes the lived body (corps vecu) as our vehicle in the world. It is the basic instrument for our interaction with ourselves and with others. It is by means of embodied consciousness (conscience incarnee) that we enter the world, and

⁴⁷PP, p. 143.

⁴⁸Primacy, p. 6.

⁴⁹PP, pp. 154-173.

form relationships with others and the world. The body is the foundation of our Mitsein (being-with-the-world).

The body is the vehicle of being in the world, and having a body is, for a living creature, to be interinvolved in a definite environment, to identify oneself with certain projects and be continually committed to them.⁵⁰

As Merleau-Ponty says, I am my body. By this he means that I am conscious of the world through the medium of my body. My body, therefore, is my point of view of the world, or, in other words, "the pivot of the world."⁵¹ All my actions are conditioned by and manifest in my body as it is present to the world. My being-in-the-world is primarily a bodily presence.

Moreover, insofar as existence is incarnated existence and social existence is involved existence, the bodily presence of man is the mediating force. It is because of our bodily entrance in the world that Merleau-Ponty can say that we "inhabit" the world, and thereby take up our situation in the world.⁵² Our horizon in the world is experienced through the body. Through the medium of our body we are always existentially in the world, but also of the world (inhabit).

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 82.

⁵¹Ibid.; see also Primacy, p. 5.

⁵²pp., pp. 138-139.

"Our own body is in the world as the heart is in the organism."⁵³ "Our constant aim," Merleau-Ponty writes, "is to elucidate the primary function whereby we bring into existence, for ourselves, or take hold upon, space, the object or the instrument, and to describe the body as the place where this appropriation occurs."⁵⁴

The importance of the body in its sexuality is not only that it is a form of intentionality, but that it is a primary means by which we throw ourselves into what we are doing.⁵⁵ Sexual behavior is a vital mode of our taking up of being, of our committing ourselves to a situation, experiencing it, giving it meaning. The sexual projects man's manner of being in the world. Rather than emphasizing the genital aspects of sexual behavior, however, Merleau-Ponty elucidates its historical, social and political role.

⁵³Ibid., p. 203.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 154. See also, "For us the body is much more than an instrument or a means; it is our expression in the world, the visible form of our intentions" (Primacy, p. 5.)

"The body is vital to existence in terms of both spatiality and temporality--"My body takes possession of time; it brings into existence a past and a future for a present; it is not a thing, but creates time instead of submitting to it" (PP, p. 240).

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 156. "My body is wherever there is something to be done" (PP, p. 250).

[The sexual] is what causes a man to have a history. In so far as a man's sexual history provides a key to his life, it is because in his sexuality is projected his manner of being towards the world, that is, towards time and other men.⁵⁶

The sexual is not merely a function of our existence; it is a mode of our being-in-the-world, the manifestation of one's given situation.

Yet, there is an ambiguity in human sexuality, as with all existence. We can neither reduce existence to the body or to sexuality, nor reduce sexuality to existence. The boundaries run into each other--in the same way as does the in itself and the for itself--and become modes of consciousness and freedom.

...We do not reduce sexuality to something other than itself by relating it to the ambiguity of the body. For, to thought, the body as an object is not ambiguous; it becomes so only in the experience which we have of it, and pre-eminently in sexual experience, and through the fact of sexuality. To treat sexuality as a dialectic is not to make a process of knowledge out of it, nor to identify a man's history with the history of his consciousness. The dialectic is not a relationship between contradictory and inseparable thoughts; it is the tending of an existence toward another existence which denies it, and yet without which it is not sustained.⁵⁷

The role of sexuality in existence, moreover, is masked by

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 158.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 167-168.

both necessity and contingency. Sexuality is necessary yet always contingent. It is a primary way of being yet it does not determine our being in any absolute sense. "Man is a historical idea and not a natural species. In other words, there is in human existence no unconditional possession, and yet no fortuitous attribute."⁵⁸

All that we are, we are on the basis of a de facto situation which we appropriate to ourselves and which we ceaselessly transform by a sort of escape which is never an unconditional freedom.⁵⁹

Therefore, sexuality can only be explained in itself, even though it is already something other than itself. In a sense, sexuality is our whole being. "Sexuality...is dramatic because we commit our whole personal life to it."⁶⁰

What distinguishes Merleau-Ponty's analysis is his concern for a phenomenological description of intersubjectivity. The struggle for freedom and authentic social relations begins for Merleau-Ponty in history and in society. Social life begins with a recognition of the relational, i.e. dialectical, or intersubjective character of existence. In the same way that sexuality dramatizes the "whole" or "totality" of existence, the perception and consciousness of class rela-

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 170.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 171.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

tions and the historical task of choosing courses of action are interrelated and inseparable aspects of the whole personal life of social man. To cast light on this "new beginning" in social consciousness and historical analysis provides a useful foundation for viewing an objective and objectifying world in which change is still possible or conceivable. It is my view that Merleau-Ponty's existentialist and phenomenological view of sexuality and perceptive consciousness lays the groundwork for a socialist concept of freedom, i.e., true human intersubjectivity, and begins the task of unleashing man and woman in capitalist society from the chains of exploitative and oppressive social relations. (To be sure, one major weakness of Merleau-Ponty's entire project is his avoidance of productive relations, even though, as we have shown in this chapter, he attempts briefly to relate sexuality to social class in production terms, not only in terms of social relations).

Freedom and Praxis

In man's co-existence with man, of which these years have made us aware, morals, doctrines, thoughts and customs, laws, works and words all express each other; everything signifies everything. And outside this unique fulguration of existence there is nothing.⁶¹

When Merleau-Ponty speaks of man's projects in the world, he refers to the perceptive consciousness of human being-in-the-world as it is linked to the intentional and purposive structure of social existence toward courses of action. For Merleau-Ponty, therefore, existence is perspectival and includes both a seeing or being and a doing (e.g., perspective consciousness and social praxis). Neither one alone is sufficient. In this way, Merleau-Ponty attempts to bridge the gap between consciousness and praxis and delineate a philosophy of action in which freedom, social transformation and intersubjectivity become realizable. It is true, of course, that Merleau-Ponty remains a man of ideas in this regard, even though he always speaks of a philosophy of action or praxis. In order, therefore, for Merleau-Ponty to consider practical matters of freedom and politics, of social movements towards freedom and social change, he refers first to the perceptual or intersubjective basis of human existence. And it

⁶¹SN, p. 152.

is from this point that his notions of freedom become significant.

As he sees it, the task of describing the lived world is at the bottom a description of the perceptual foundation of human consciousness of himself, others and the world. Philosophy reflects on the unreflected life of human consciousness not by wondering "whether we really perceive a world," but by declaring that "the world is what we perceive."⁶² Not only is the phenomenology of perception a project of the world, but consciousness itself is a project of the world.⁶³ Hence, "to seek the essence of perception is to declare that perception is, not presumed true, but defined as access to truth."⁶⁴ Or, put differently, perception is not itself knowledge of the world, but the background of all knowledge: "Perception is not a science of the world, it is not even an act, a deliberate taking up of a position; it is the background from which all acts stand out, and is presupposed by them."⁶⁵ "The world," in other words, "is not an object such that I have in my possession the law of its making; it is the natural setting of, and field for, all my thoughts and all my explicit

⁶²PP, xvi.

⁶³Ibid., xvii.

⁶⁴Ibid., xvi.

⁶⁵Ibid., x-xi.

perceptions."⁶⁶ In this way, it is only by our perceiving a world and things which pertain to it that we open up for ourselves a horizon of existence. Perceptual consciousness is the experiential basis of what becomes for me my world.

Perception, in other words, is the primordial mode of human being-in-the-world, it is the background or "field" from which knowledge and existence emanate. Every perception takes place within a horizon of meaning, within a horizon of worldly "facticity," within a horizon of sociality or co-existence, within a horizon of "action" (pratiquement).⁶⁷ We do not merely pose the problems of our condition or of the world, we stand in a certain relation to them as engaged consciousness or engaged body. Such is the basis of one's situation, or point of view of the world, in which perception or perceptual consciousness is always the presupposed foundation.

Hence, according to Merleau-Ponty, consciousness is always consciousness of something and "the perceived world is the always presupposed foundation of all rationality, all value and all existence."⁶⁸ Perception, then, is the ground of human sociality in that it has a structure of intentional-

⁶⁶Ibid., xi.

⁶⁷Primacy, p. 12.

⁶⁸Ibid., pp. 13, 68.

ity or directedness.⁶⁹ To speak of perception is to speak of giving meaning to a human situation, and to speak of meaning (sens) is to grapple with a particular world-horizon in which men act by taking up a place that becomes their point of view of the world and thus defines their history, their politics, their existence. But perception itself is neither knowledge, judgment or action;⁷⁰ it is neither knowing, valuating or doing.⁷¹ Rather, perception is the window through which the meaning of human existence, of the world situation, of time and space are grasped. Perception is not knowing in the reflective sense, but seeing in the pre-reflective sense. This is the meaning of the phenomenological reference to the primordial world of perception.

In addition, man perceives through the body, through the senses, or what Merleau-ponty calls the incarnated consciousness.⁷² "Consciousness is being towards the thing through the intermediary of the body."⁷³ My entrance to the world is through my body which is marked out by perception. My way of perceptual acting through the (incarnated) body is the root

⁶⁹PP, pp. 54, 430.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 34.

⁷¹Ibid., pp. 38, 40.

⁷²Primacy, pp. 3-5.

⁷³PP, pp. 138, 139.

of my self-awareness, my relationship to others, and to the world.

In the politics of existence, for Merleau-Ponty, "we take our fate in our hands, we become responsible for our history through reflection, but equally by a decision on which we stake our life, and in both cases what is involved is a violent act which is validated by being performed."⁷⁴ In other words, the politics of existence always concerns as its core an historical drive of man for freedom in which responsibility and the choice of action are placed in dialectical tension. The horizons of freedom are always circumscribed by man's free action, but one never acts alone or completely free of his environment (Umwelt) or social situation (the objective social world). However, on the other hand, if one chooses not to act, then freedom becomes a mystification since freedom is measured in terms of our conduct, it is determined by what we do.⁷⁵ Freedom is in what we do or else it is nowhere. To be free is to have the possibility of acting freely and to choose to act in that way. Freedom is action informed by reasoned reflection-consciousness, perception, understanding. All else is meaningless--mystification, alienation, subterfuge, ideology--in regard to man's historical quest for

⁷⁴Ibid., xx.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 437.

freedom and free (human) social relations. Merleau-Ponty asserts that "A freedom which has no need to be exercised because it is already acquired could not commit itself in this way..."⁷⁶ Thus Merleau-Ponty's notion of freedom is part of his critique of every objectivistic approach to social reality. This applies to liberal democracy, fascism, or even communism insofar as these doctrines and their historical expression mystify social relations and consciousness by calling unfreedom freedom. As long as history has not come to an end, as long as alienated social relations are the existing plight of man, as long as the revolution--socialist or proletarian power--remains an idea of the future, then human and social freedom is in question, problematic. Freedom requires an open world, the constant possibility of a new future; "the very notion of freedom demands that our decision should plunge into the future..."⁷⁷

Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty's consideration of freedom is founded in ambiguity. There is an inextricable bond in all human life and all social relations for which my act serves to mediate my situation (the objective world, in itself) and my freedom (my subjective consciousness, for itself). The existential project towards freedom is, therefore, both

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 437.

⁷⁷Ibid.

determined and undetermined, both in itself and for itself: "The evaluation of the present[objective social condition] operates through one's free project for the future" [the subjectivity of human choice and the contingency of action].⁷⁸

Once again it is Merleau-Ponty's notion of intersubjectivity which offers a vision of moving beyond the limitations of subjectivity and objectivity. For instance, he argues that an understanding of the objective situation is never sufficient to awaken class consciousness: "There was exploitation long before there were revolutionaries."⁷⁹ The concrete view of history, revolution, freedom, must begin with one's situation--consciousness--from which one learns what a bourgeois or proletarian means.

Taking myself in my absolute concreteness, as I am presented to myself in reflection, I find that I am anonymous and pre-human flux, as yet unqualified as, for instance, 'a working man' or 'middle class'. If I subsequently think of myself as a man among men, a bourgeois among bourgeois, this can be, it would seem, no more than a second order view of myself; I am never in my heart of hearts a worker or bourgeois, but a consciousness which freely evaluates itself as a middle class or proletarian consciousness.⁸⁰

But, of course, Merleau-Ponty is equally against a subjectivist or idealist approach to freedom which would reduce the prole-

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 443.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 442.

tarian or bourgeois condition to the awareness of it by the subject for himself. Such a view would deny the historicity of man and the social world into which every human subjectivity is thrown. On the contrary, Merleau-Ponty writes:

I am not conscious of being working class or middle class simply because, as a matter of fact, I sell my labor or, equally as a matter of fact, because my interests are bound up with capitalism, nor do I become one or the other the day on which I elect to view history in the light of the class struggle: what happens is that 'I exist as working class' or 'I exist as middle class' in the first place, and it is this mode of dealing with the world and society which provides both the motives for my revolutionary or conservative projects.⁸¹

Essential to this view of freedom is that there is no freedom without action--insertion in the world, commitment to the world, and action to change the world--and that freedom can only be attained as an aspect of human sociality. First, freedom requires a freely acting man (consciousness): "I recognize myself as a worker or bourgeois on the day I take my stand in relation to a possible revolution."⁸² Second, Merleau-Ponty speaks of a "kind of atmosphere of sociality,"⁸³ reflecting his view that all existence is co-existence or social existence which functions as the framework of every concrete project of action.⁸⁴ Intersubjectivity encompasses Merleau-Ponty's idea of freedom in the sociality of future

⁸¹Ibid., p. 443.

⁸²Ibid., p. 446.

⁸³Ibid., p. 448.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 449.

(revolutionary) man and the humanity of future (revolutionary) society. This is true as much for human sexuality as it is for economic relations.

We can conclude, however, that since Merleau-Ponty's analysis of being-in-the-world permits us to perceive both internal or subjective and external or objective conditions and relations of personal, social or historical phenomena, we are forced to awareness of the future possibility of a true human intersubjectivity as well as its historical denial. Thus, borrowing from the actual experience of Merleau-Ponty, his existential situation and the way he was able to reflect on existence, perception and freedom, we may have come that much further in conceptualizing, and therefore dealing with concretely, the problematic of human sociality, as earlier expressed by Marx in The Theses on Feuerbach, No. X. Nonetheless, the significance of the concept of intersubjectivity for social philosophy and political action is that it is the philosophical means, in Merleau-Ponty's thought, of bridging the gap between thought and action, between the subjective and objective in history. Firstly, by intersubjectivity Merleau-Ponty means that the lived-world comprises the realm of human actors whose very existence is dependent on the perspectives they hold (perception is perspectival), their relationship with each other, their accord or lack of it with the world around them--institutions, things, power--all of

which is giving meaning through the course of action men take. The human world is an intersubjective world, but primarily a world dominated by action rather than by thought.⁸⁵ It is, moreover, this interhuman world of action which not only gives meaning to the already existing structures of the world, but also sets the foundation for thought, for reflection. In so far as men act together, a world of meaningful thought becomes possible; and in so far as men act together, a social world becomes a reality. Thought is not an object, but the expression of man's co-existence, of his being-in-the-world. Likewise, "the social is not simply an object but to begin with my situation...."⁸⁶ Thus, thought and action are interlocked, they co-exist through the interrelationship which human action brings to the world.

Secondly, intersubjectivity embraces the opposites of subjectivity and objectivity by establishing the reciprocity of self and other, self and world, inner and outer. Intersubjectivity establishes "an atmosphere of humanity:"⁸⁷ The world is molded to my existence (and that of others) and my existence is molded to the world by a sort of exchange. We can refer here to mutuality rather than singularity: the barrier

⁸⁵Jung, op.cit., p. 246.

⁸⁶Signs, p. 112.

⁸⁷pp, p. 347.

between self and others or between the self and the natural or social world appears now, according to the phenomenological project, as a false illusion of rationalism. There is in this world view uncertainty, to be sure, but neither nothing nor everything at once. We live in this dialectical uncertainty which Merleau-Ponty calls "ambiguity." "I know myself only in so far as I am inherent in time and in the world, that is, I know myself only in my ambiguity."⁸⁸ In this sense, the distinctions of subject and object are not simply interchangeable but become interlocked in an inextricable exchange: men come into being only in the world, yet the world has human and social meaning for the man of action (and his co-actors) alone.

It is only a short step from these philosophical investigations to the development of Merleau-Ponty's very important concept of sociality upon which his politics of existence is based. In ruminating on human intersubjectivity, for instance, he writes:

Just as nature finds its way to the core of my personal life and becomes inextricably linked with it, so behavior patterns settle into that nature, being deposited in the form of a cultural world. Not only have I a physical world, not only do I live in the midst of earth, air and water, I have around me roads, plantation, villages, streets, churches, implements, a bell, a spoon, a pipe. Each of these objects is molded to the human action

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 345.

which it serves. Each one spreads round it an atmosphere of humanity...The cultural world is then ambiguous, but it is already present. I have before me a society to be known. An Objective Spirit dwells in the remains and the scenery...[but] it is through the perception of a human act and another person that the perception of a cultural world could be verified.⁸⁹

From this perspective it is clear that, for Merleau-Ponty, existence is nothing but a "network of relationships" for man, and these alone matter to him.⁹⁰ Interrelatedness is the basic condition of the lived world. Man is condemned to history, and thus to a social compact: "I enter into a pact with the other person, having resolved to live in an inter-world in which I accord as much place to others as to my self."⁹¹ In the same way that man's being-in-the-world is "already there," i.e., man is open to existence, "the social is already there when we come to know or judge it."⁹² Merleau-Ponty recalls in this context that both peasants and workers joined the same struggle in Russia in 1917 because they shared the same fate: "Class was experienced in concrete terms before becoming the object of deliberate volition."⁹³ In another context,

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 347-348.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 456.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 357.

⁹² Ibid., p. 362.

⁹³ Ibid.

Merleau-Ponty asserts that "nation" and "class" are neither merely external conditions or internal values, but modes of co-existence or human sociality.⁹⁴ Mutuality is the key: Neither individualism nor collectivism, but the we-relationship explains the true nature of human sociality.⁹⁵ The social world, therefore, is there to be discovered, to be lived through, to be infused with humanity:

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: 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. It is as false to place ourselves in society as an object among other objects, as it is to place society within ourselves as an object of thought, and in both cases the mistake lies in treating the social as an object.⁹⁶

And, Merleau-Ponty concludes:

We must return to the social with which we are in contact by the mere fact of existing, and which we carry about inseparably with us before any objectification. Objective and scientific consciousness...would be impossible... if I did not find in my own life the basic structures of history.⁹⁷

In sum, the relevance of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenologi-

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 363.

⁹⁵Jung, op.cit., pp. 27-28.

⁹⁶pp, p. 362.

⁹⁷Ibid.; See also: "The social is not collective con-

gical investigation lies in (1) its point of view of the world and of man as social or intersubjective; (2) its critique of social reality in so far as it elaborates a conception of sociality as an active, meaningful we-relationship in a bond with history and social structures; (3) its attempt to lay the groundwork for an intentional and communitarian social order by theoretically breaking the false barrier between self and others and world structure, i.e., the false illusions of objectivism and subjectivism.

Merleau-Ponty's contribution to a phenomenology of the social world is methodological as well as political and ideologically relevant. As seen in this chapter, Merleau-Ponty attempts to establish a dialogue between philosophy and the social world of everyday reality: a dialogue between situated man and the social and institutional forces which alienate man and control society. His philosophy is an interrogation of historical ideas in relation to historical social reality. Further, as has been seen, intersubjectivity is the starting point for analysis of the human condition, of perception, and of social thought. In this regard, a normative benchmark is established by which to interpret our world in terms of the meaning of social relations, freedom, and justice. Here

sciousness but intersubjectivity, a living relationship and tension among individuals." (SN, p. 90).

methodology blends with ideology, but only so as to reassert the primacy of human existence.

It thus remains to be seen whether Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology can succeed in re-establishing, or setting the foundations for re-establishing, the connection between ideas and reality, between the philosopher or social scientist and the man in the street. This task has indeed been the subject of criticism as well as the hope of philosophers and social scientists from Marx to Merleau-Ponty himself. As in the past, much depends on whether ideas can move men toward the kinds of political action which may make social freedom realizable. These questions are considered in the following chapter as part of an examination of the existential dialectic of Merleau-Ponty, especially in forms of the way he relates his phenomenological marxism to the problems of communist politics.

Chapter IV

EXISTENTIAL DIALECTICS AND THE CRITIQUE OF POLITICS:

MERLEAU-PONTY'S PHENOMENOLOGICAL MARXISM

AND THE PROBLEM OF COMMUNISM

It seems to us that for at least thirty years our contemporaries have...been living through an adventure that is much more dangerous than, but analogous to, that which we have thought to meet in the mild order of our relationships to literature or our body. The same ambiguity that, upon analysis, leads the idea of mind into the idea of body or language has visibly invaded our political life. And in both cases it is more and more difficult to distinguish what is violence and what is idea, what is power and what is value, with the aggravating circumstance that in political life the mixture risks ending up in convulsion and chaos...our times have experienced and are experiencing, more perhaps than any other, contingency.

(Signs, pp. 235,239)

Is a phenomenological Marxism possible? Is it necessary? Why "phenomenological" Marxism? The political significance of Merleau-Ponty's thought pivots on a resolution of these questions because the test of his phenomenology of the social world is the extent to which it is relevant to historical

social praxis--the movement of oppressed peoples for revolutionary transformation of society. Merleau-Ponty's claim, as we have previously noted, is that the phenomenology of the social world is an open-ended and humanistic revision of marxism that is necessary for understanding our own time and for effecting change. What is at issue is whether (1) every valid Marxism is "orthodox" or classical Marxism and (2) every form of Marxist politics leads to Stalinism. The issues are, at the same time, both theoretical and polemical and Merleau-Ponty is a pivotal figure in the debate. What we should attempt to show is that a phenomenological Marxism is, as Paul Piccone suggests, "precisely the theoretical selfconsciousness of the crisis of Marxism and an attempt to explain and overcome it."¹ Thus we return to the debates of the 1940's and 1950's as experienced and criticized by Merleau-Ponty in order to come to grips with some of the major political (and methodological) questions with which we are faced in the process of developing radical social theory and political action for America in the 1970's.

In regard to Merleau-Ponty's theoretical response to the politics of his time it must be remembered that he took Marx seriously throughout his life. In 1946, Merleau-Ponty

¹Paul Piccone, "Phenomenological Marxism," Telos (9, Fall 1971), 6.

wrote:

Boiled down to its essence, Marxism is not an optimistic philosophy but simply the idea that another history is possible, that there is no such thing as fate, that man's existence is open-ended. It is the resolute try for that future which no one in the world can know will come or, if it comes, what it will be.²

And in 1960, at the end of his life and having moved to a much more ambiguous stance vis-a-vis marxism, he wrote, "Marxism...is an immense field of sedimented history and thought where one goes to practice and to learn to think."³ It must also be remembered that Merleau-Ponty as the first political editor of Les Temps Modernes took communist politics seriously. Merleau-Ponty was a supporter, a critic, never a member of the Communist Party. But it is against the background of this experience that we come to understand his political commitments, his marxisme atentiste (waiting marxism),⁴ or waiting game vis-a-vis communist politics, and his critique of politics. As we have shown before, Merleau-Ponty is against every form of orthodoxy, yet he is committed to a political solution to the historical problems of man and contemporary society. Herein lies an important lesson for the

²NS, p. 119

³Signs, p. 12.

⁴HT, xxi ff.

so-called apolitical politics of American social science, as well as for the political expectations of the New Left in search of revolutionary theory and action.

Further, in response to the question of phenomenological Marxism, it is important to recognize that orthodox Marxism must be seen as a bankrupt philosophy if one opposes the excesses of Stalinist politics, and the "official" Marxist status given to Soviet politics since 1917. The "official" Marxist line would have us believe that the politics emanating from the Soviet Union and its official philosophies, ideologies and supporters is always the correct line. Whether it be the Stalin-Hitler Pact, the Sino-Soviet Split or the Czech Invasion. In addition, this approach requires compliance to the Moscow line by all Communist Party members, rewarding agreement, punishing deviation. It is precisely this hard line which existentialists, phenomenologists, "humanist" Marxists in Eastern Europe and the New Left in the West have waged both against in their efforts to save Marxism from perils and regain the revolutionary initiative through a level of theoretical analysis and social considerations which is in accord with political reality, not dogmatically fixed and rigid as Stalinist politics and orthodox Marxism.

For instance, in 1961, Georg Lukacs, at the height of the most dogmatic phase of his career, wrote a polemic, Existentialism or Marxism,⁵ in which he not only attacked exis-

⁵op.cit.

tentialism (especially Sartre and Merleau-Ponty) but also any approach other than "orthodox" Marxism as philosophy of imperialism.

Sartre rebutted in Search for a Method,⁶ even though he had adopted his own form of "ultra-bolshevism" attacked by Merleau-Ponty.⁷ What is interesting for our purposes is that "official" Marxists, such as Lukacs, felt obliged to respond to the existentialist (phenomenological) challenge to their supremacy and that existentialism had become something more than a philosophy of the subject--it was indeed a philosophy in search of a method, in search of movement, in search of social and political meaning and relevance. When Merleau-Ponty said as early as 1945, that the proletariat movement is masked, he was seriously challenging the historical validity or concreteness of abstract doctrine and setting the stage for opening a new phase in the history of dialectics and revolutionary politics.

The task of phenomenological Marxism is to confront the dogma of Marxism and Marxist politics by opening theoretical and practical questions, such as the relation of subject to object, the role of consciousness in politics, in short, to challenge the theoretical hegemony of the ideas and organization of communist politics in a time (post 1945) in which the

⁶Jean Paul Sartre, Search for a Method (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1963).

⁷This will be further considered below. See also Paul Piccone, op.cit., pp. 3-4.

working class movements are in some phase of disintegration or disarray as a revolutionary political force. Thus, as Piccone effectively states:

The 'phenomenological' qualification appended to Marxism, far from being a mere philosophical afterthought, is the conceptual otherness of a determinate socio-historical problem. The political confrontation between New and Old Left. It is not surprising, therefore, that 'orthodox' Marxism (or Stalinism) overcoming the ambiguities and doubts of the philosophies of the way (all those attempts to criticize Marxism such as Merleau-Ponty's a-communism) by means of a mechanistic doctrine of 'party-ness' (Parteilichkeit) according to which the Party is not to be questioned in its decisions after they are made, since it is the true representation of the interests of the working class--the agency of historical change.⁸

On the contrary, the efforts to build a rapprochement between phenomenology and Marxism since the development of Hegelian Marxism of Marcuse and the early Lukacs, the critical theory of Horkheimer and Adorno are rooted in a mixture of existentialism, phenomenology and Marxism.

The early efforts at Hegelian or phenomenological Marxism (founded in Heidegger and Husserl) have been characterized by Merleau-Ponty as Western Marxism in opposition to "orthodox" Marxism. This approach undertaken from the side of phenomenology, especially by Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and Tran Duc Thao is a major historical attempt to synthesize phenomenology and

⁸Piccone, op.cit., pp. 5-6.

Marxism. Although the difficulties of such a synthesis abound, we can agree with Paul Piccone that

Only by seeing Marxism as the outcome of phenomenology and phenomenology as an inextricable moment of Marxism is it possible to attain any reconciliation which simultaneously produces a relevant phenomenology and a non-dogmatic Marxism.⁹

As regards this historical project, Merleau-Ponty is a seminal figure. It is a question whether he ever succeeded in combining his phenomenology philosophy and his Marxist politics in his dialectics of ambiguity, as we have suggested.¹⁰ Nonetheless, his journey through the political struggles of the resistance and the post-war European left movement is pertinent to our understanding of the problems of a socialist perspective in advanced capitalist countries from the point of view of a socialist consciousness, a methodological alternative to rigid Marxism, on the one hand, and rigid bourgeois social scene, on the other. Piccone, for instance, is willing to allow Merleau-Ponty partial merit for reopening the theoretical dialogue of reconciliation because

To the extent that both Marxism and phenomenology are not separate, but merely distinguishable movements of the same broad perspective what resulted with Merleau-Ponty was neither an exclusively phenomenological nor exclusively Marxist perspective, but a phenomenology that paved the way for structuralism and a tamed Marxism that gave way

⁹Ibid., pp. 11-12.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 11.

to social democracy.¹¹

The task Merleau-Ponty sets out to accomplish was to show that "Marxism needs a theory of consciousness,"¹² and to begin the process of developing such a theory. It is at this point that phenomenology and the philosophy of intersubjectivity emerge in their relation to revolutionary politics. Merleau-Ponty therefore struggled to bring dialectics closer to human existence and consciousness (to recover the subjective in history) without losing sight of the objective world and social conditions. In his development of an existentialist dialectics, a dialectics of ambiguity, Merleau-Ponty moves from the phenomenology of the social world toward the politics of the left.

Because the adventures of the dialectic demonstrate that there has been no revolutionary (historical) synthesis between reality and value, subject and object, judgment and discipline, individual and totality, present and future, Merleau-Ponty tries to rediscover the dialectical tension, as opposed to the revolutionary synthesis, in social reality.¹³ The politics of everyday life in the West as well as in the Communist countries manifest and reinforce these tensions: violence,

¹¹Ibid.

¹²AD, pp. 56-57. An English translation is published in "Western Marxism," Telos (6, Fall 1970), 148.

¹³AD, p. 12.

terror, alienated social relations remain unsurpassed by contemporary politics. Mikel Dufrenne writes that, for Merleau-Ponty,

La dialectique ne signifie rien d'autre que l'impossibilité de toute transcendance ou de tout être hors de la relation qui constitue le fondement. Ce qui est dialectique, c'est l'ambiguïté du fondement... Nous sommes toujours dans le plein du monde: si fortement que l'homme s'affirme et se conquière, il n'y a pas d'homme preexistant à son histoire, il n'y a pas plus d'homme intérieur que de monde extérieur.¹⁴

Merleau-Ponty's own conclusion is that

La dialectique, ce n'est ni l'idée de l'action réciproque, ni celle de la solidarité des contraires et de leur dépassement, ni celle d'un développement qui se relance lui-même, ni la transcroissance d'une qualité, qui installe dans un ordre nouveau un changement quantitatif jusque-là: ce sont là des conséquences ou des aspects de la dialectique... Le monde et l'histoire ne sont plus un système à plusieurs entrées, mais un faisceau de perspectives inconciliables, qui ne coexistent jamais, et que seul maintient ensemble l'héroïsme sans espoir du Je.¹⁵

The dialectic is neither a total system that has been realized (the Russian revolution or Communist politics) nor a total

¹⁴Mikel Dufrenne, Jalons (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), p. 219.

¹⁵AD, pp. 273, 276.

system to be realized (Trotsky, Sartre). It is rather a perspective of historical possibilities in which a vision of world historical forces is tempered by the human situation and social relations, those contingent factors of history in which man not outside forces or ideas, acts as "the motor of the dialectic." Dufrenne puts it succinctly when he says: "Mais Merleau-Ponty dialectise la dialectique."¹⁶ "Pour lui...point de totalité, mais seulement des totalisations toujours inachevées et toujours recommencées."¹⁷

Merleau-Ponty's sense of history and dialectics calls for a recognition of ambiguity, contingency, subjectivity not just rationality, totality, objectivity. The tension of these historical forces is the plane of action as well as philosophy. The dialectic is a looking inward toward oneself and consciousness and a looking outward toward others and the structure of the social world.¹⁸ Hence, it might be said that the dialectic requires intersubjectivity. In attacking Koestler's notion of the yogi and the commissar as dialectical opposites, Merleau-Ponty notes that Rubashov's choice (Darkness at Noon) was an either/or choice in which either conscience (internal values) is everything or else it is nothing (and

¹⁶Mikel Dufrenne, *op.cit.*, p. 218.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 218-219.

¹⁸HT, p. 11.

external or objective values become everything). This leads Kostler (and Rubashov) to an un-dialectical logic.

The logic of which Rubashov follows is not the existential logic of history described by Marx and expressed in the inseparability of objective necessity and the spontaneous movement of the masses; it is the summary logic of the technician who deals only with insert objects which he manipulates as he pleases.¹⁹

The difficulty with the conception of the yogi and commissar is that it fails to reckon with the Marxian and existentialist notion of an intersubjective truth. On the one hand, there is mystification in the inner life of thought, conscience and individuality. But, equally important, on the other hand is a concern about the objectivization of external or social life through ideology, absolute principles. An intersubjective truth

consists in questioning our situation in the world, inserting ourselves in the course of events; in properly understanding and expressing the movement of history outside of which values remain empty words and have no other chance of realization.²⁰

With this notion of intersubjective truth in history, Merleau-Ponty is led to explore, on the one hand, the historical project of Marxism, and on the other, the historical reality of communist politics as the only twentieth century expression

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 15.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 20.

--theoretical-practical--of the possibility of a social praxis based on intersubjectivity.

History for Merleau-Ponty is, in short, a chiaroscuro, and historical dialectics are bounded on all sides by ambiguity and unrest. In Merleau-Ponty's view, we should speak of an existential dialectics, dialectics of ambiguity, or as Claude Lefort remarks, "Telle philosophie...est un agnosticisme...mais un agnosticisme...en revolution."²¹ At its best, Merleau-Ponty's approach sets out to develop a philosophical mediation with everyday life, the perpetual beginning of the world of ideas in its inextricable relatedness with the world of social reality. As Levi-Strauss emphasizes in a book which he dedicated to Merleau-Ponty: dialectical reason is only a point of departure, not one of arrival.²² Dialectical reason is an opening to, it is perspectiveal, it is constitutive not constituted. "The role of dialectical reason is to put the human sciences in possession of a reality with which it alone can furnish them...."²³ "It is therefore far from being the case that the search for intelligibility comes to an end in history as though this were its terminus. Rather, it is history that

²¹Claude Lefort, "L'Idée d'être brut et d'esprit sauvage," Les Temps Modernes (No. 184-185, Nov. 1961), 285.

²²Claude Levi-Strauss, The Savage Mind (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 250.

²³Ibid.

serves as the point of departure in any quest for intelligibility."²⁴

In this chapter we shall consider: (1) Existential dialectics and Marxism; (2) Merleau-Ponty's Marxism and the Communist question; and (3) The Critique of Politics and the Role of Militant Philosophy (with special attention to Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of Max Weber, Georg Lukacs and Machiavelli).

1. Existential Dialectics and Marxism

Dialectics, for Merleau-Ponty, is an opening of philosophical thought to the world of social praxis by means of a mediating act. Dialectics points the way to the options of history. It is never final, total, but ambiguous, perspectival, concrete. Merleau-Ponty describes his notion of dialectics as a concrete philosophy. He writes:

A concrete philosophy is not a happy one. It must stick close to experience, and yet not limit itself to the empirical but restore to each experience the ontological cipher which marks it internally. As difficult as it is under these conditions to imagine the future of philosophy, two things seem certain: it will never regain the conviction of holding the keys to nature or history in its concepts, and it will not renounce its radicalism, that search for presuppositions and foundations which has produced the great philosophies.²⁵

²⁴ Ibid., p. 262.

²⁵ Signs, p. 157.

Another way of putting the matter is to see the interrelatedness of philosophy and politics such that we might say that philosophy has lost its claim to "the truth," "it has lost its right to the a priori, system, or construction, when it no longer dominates the whole of experience"²⁶ for "the notions of truth and freedom arise only in certain cultures and are not historical laws as is pretended in the liberal version of history. Truth and freedom are options of history whose matrix is violence."²⁷ To deny philosophy the absolute, for Merleau-Ponty, is not to denigrate its place in any historical perspective. The first task of philosophy is to see itself as it envisages history, as problematic, open-ended, and in this sense dialectical.

The dialectic we are rediscovering, according to Merleau-Ponty, is the "dialectic of the real."²⁸ What this allows for is not the rediscovery of "sense" or "non-sense," truth or the absurd in any final form. Rather, it points to a theoretical-practical recognition of the emergence of the human experience from the conflict and contradictions of freedom and subjectivity, on the one hand, and violence and objectivi-

²⁶Ibid., p. 158.

²⁷John O'Neill, Perception, Expression, and History: The Social Phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 81.

²⁸Signs, p. 156.

zation, on the other. The contrast here is not between altering views of philosophical truth, existence versus essence, system versus system, but rather a mode of encountering the real in reality, man in the world. Existential dialectics is an inquiry into "the different and really antagonistic idea of a freedom which is freedom only embodied in the world as work done upon a factual situation."²⁹ Or further, for the philosopher or the man in the street:

Facing freedom, existence unveils a wholly new face of the world--the world as a promise and threat to it; the world which sets traps for, seduces, or gives in to it; not the flat world of Kantian objects of science any more but a landscape full of routes and roadblocks; in short, the world we 'exist' and not simply the theater of our understanding and free will.³⁰

Merleau-Ponty brings philosophy to the level of human experience, to politics and social life. The main question, of course, is how we are to relate our experience to what we know, our commitment to our political thinking. In regard to post war left politics in France, Merleau-Ponty says:

Perhaps commitment only curtails freedom of thought when such commitment is confused; in the absence of political thinking able both to accept all truths and to take a stand in

²⁹ Ibid., p. 155.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 115.

reality...It is not surprising that, with only ambiguities to choose from, we do not feel at ease anywhere, and loyalty to a party has become an arduous task.³¹

The job of intellectuals is not to embellish false hopes and illusions with the name dialectic, truth or the proletariat. As Merleau-Ponty sees it, "the class struggle is masked. We are at an ambiguous moment in history. Neither capitalism nor revolution fights openly any more: because capitalism is unsure of its own future and cannot project itself in terms of a positive theory, and because Marxism...has ceased to animate a proletarian politics."³² Hence, the job of intellectuals

is not to maintain the devotionary, hysterical atmosphere or the vague fervors and terrors which impart a mythical and almost puerile character to French politics but is rather to take stock of this century and the ambiguous forms which it offers us. If, thanks to information and facts, this ambiguity came to be no longer merely endured but understood, then our political life might cease to be haunted by phantoms and might recover a little reality.³³

³¹SN, p. 154.

³²Ibid., pp. 160-161.

³³Ibid., p. 170.

The Politics of Existence and
The Dialectics of Ambiguity

Merleau-Ponty starts out as an existentialist who recognizes the need for coming to terms with social reality. His limitations include that he is always a man of ideas, not a man of action; he is pushed toward commitment but accepts ambiguity if intersubjective truth, the truth of the Lebenswelt is not forthcoming.³⁴

Like Sartre, he wants to be both internally committed and externally free to search for meaning, innuendo, change, etc.³⁵ (Sartre says this in his Merleau-Ponty essay).

As we shall see below, this attitude is reflected in Merleau-Ponty's view of the Nizan-Sartre relationship. Unlike Sartre's ultra-bolshevism, however, Merleau-Ponty is never prepared to abandon ideas, the quest for the meaning of the Lebenswelt, for human intersubjectivity, regardless of the political consequences. As we see below, he supports an attentisme marxiste when hope remains for a reconciliation of social consciousness (intersubjectivity) and social reality (revolutionary politics). But he rejects the Marxist project and opts for an a-communism, a third way, when liberal democracy and Soviet communist represent to him alternate forms of

³⁴Paul Piccone, op.cit., pp. 24-25.

bureaucratic absolutism. He justifies his own political and intellectual dilemmas through elaboration of his "dialectics of ambiguity." For Merleau-Ponty, this ambiguity is found in intersubjectivity and the Lebenswelt, a product of alienation, of social distance, of meaning structures and knowledge. But it is also found in his assessment of the social world and the political realities of the time. The experience of the 1960's in America and the New Left with its successes and failures give us reason to believe that we have something to learn from an understanding of the way Merleau-Ponty dealt with the intellectual and political struggles of the 1940's and 1950's in France.

The politics of existence focuses on the possibility of turning the methodological concerns of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the social world toward the major theme of social existence in the contemporary western world. Merleau-Ponty attempts to recover the humanistic perspective from the existentialist tradition of Kierkegaard and the social perspective from Marxism. Thus, Merleau-Ponty's political thought is directed toward a view of a new society, of social transformation, of a future freedom, and toward the abolition of exploitation, oppression and dehumanization in the capitalist world. Central to his thought is the necessity of intersubjectivity in man's relations with others as well as his relations with his world. The problematic of existence, in fact,

is precisely that, on the one hand, intersubjectivity is a necessary condition for social freedom as well as for every movement of radical social change; while, on the other hand, the possibility of intersubjectivity is always in question. This dialectic comprises the basic ambiguity of human history.

The battle of existentialism has therefore always involved a struggle between vastly differing life styles, world views and methodologies. Existentialism has been attacked for being a new irrationalism, subjectivism or activism. Yet existentialists, in contrast to many of their rationalist or behavioralist critics, have led the fight, along with Marxists and other humanists, against exploitative and oppressive social relations, institutional hegemonies and ideologies of control and manipulation. In quest of the human and social meaning of existence, existentialists have attempted to reassert the primacy of human action as the foundation for making a new history and a new society. In short, existentialism is a philosophy or a movement in revolt against dehumanized man, exploitative social relations and oppressive institutions. It is a negative revolt, but one which bears a positive commitment towards creating a new future.

In Merleau-Ponty's existentialism we find neither a pessimism, irrationalism, or solipsism, but rather a philosophy which is concerned with the concrete human situation in its physical, social, and historical milieu.³⁶

³⁶David Carr, op.cit., p. 370.

As with many others of his generation, it was Merleau-Ponty's experience of the War, the Resistance and the struggle for reconstruction after the war that, in addition to the intellectual tradition of marxism and existentialism, formed the basis of his politics of existence. In his essay, "The War has Taken Place,"³⁷ Merleau-Ponty recounts the historical situation in France at the onslaught of Naziism across the face of Europe. The experience of that history by left intellectuals is laid out before us in a lucid exposition of historical existence in confrontation, both with its ideas and itself as well as with others and the real world of power and terror. The existentialist sense of lost freedom, of the crunch of history, and the necessity to act in order to survive pervades the dialogue. What the experience shows is that existentialism becomes a fact when it (existence) is embraced by a consciousness which can only be realized in and through the demands of an historical situation.

Firstly, at the period of Munich false consciousness prevailed; intellectuals, like Merleau-Ponty, consciously refused to act, or to know nothing of what was happening.

Events kept making it less and less probable that peace could be maintained. How could we have waited so long to decide to go to war? It is no longer comprehensible that certain of us accepted Munich as a

³⁷ SN, pp. 139-152.

chance to test German good will. The reason was that we were not guided by the facts. We had secretly resolved to know nothing of violence and unhappiness as elements of history because we were living in a country too happy and too weak to envisage them.³⁸

War and violence were unreal, merely facts of someone else's history. There were memories of 1914 but no face to face awareness. Philosophy (e.g. Merleau-Ponty himself) was optimistic. But in its optimism this philosophy "reduced human society to a sum of consciousness always ready for peace and happiness."³⁹ In short, a bourgeois attitude prevailed which was neither existentialist nor socialist. The facts were known but only as thought, nor concretely.

We knew that concentration camps existed, that the Jews were being persecuted, but these certainties belonged to the world of thought. We were not as yet living face to face with cruelty and death; we had not as yet been given the choice of submitting to them [the Nazis] or confronting them.⁴⁰

These intellectuals were entrapped by their ideas, for even though they should have known better, the facts (the concrete reality) meant nothing. "We did not know that this was a soil to be defended by thought it the natural lot of men."⁴¹

The situation that Merleau-Ponty describes is one dominated by the air of peace and freedom, of individualism and

³⁸Ibid., p. 139.

³⁹Ibid., p. 132.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 140.

philosophy (ideas) cut off from its ties to the real world separated from the historical situation ("history has not yet been written."⁴²). For these intellectuals, French history is not theirs; theirs is the individualistic life of their class, i.e. bourgeois history, their freedom is a question of formal procedures to be chosen rather than substantive struggles to be waged. For them, there was no class struggle, there was no state violence; history was masked.

From our birth we had been used to handling freedom and to living an individual life. How then could we have known that these were hard to come by? How could we have learned to commit our freedom in order to preserve it? We were consciousness naked before the world. How could we have known that this individualism and this universalism had their place on the map? What makes our landscape of 1939 inconceivable to us and puts it once and for all beyond our grasp is precisely the fact that we were not conscious of it as a landscape. In the world in which we lived, Plato was as close to us as Heidegger, the Chinese as close as the French--and in reality one was as far away as the other. We did not know that this was what it was to live in peace, in France, and in a certain world situation.⁴³

Their bourgeois sensibilities even went as far as their entry into the military. As Merleau-Ponty recounts, we donned uniforms, but "we still had the leisure to think of others, of separate lives, of the war as a personal adventure; and

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

that strange army considered itself a sum of individuals..."⁴⁴
 In essence, these intellectuals did not feel involved even at this point.

However, after June 1940, when the fighting became serious, Merleau-Ponty recounts how he (and other intellectuals) became engaged, committed. They acted out of a new sense of what their former freedom meant, they began to see their own individual lives differently:

They sensed that their former freedoms had been sustained by the freedom of others and that one is not free alone. If they had once felt cheerfully in control of their lives, that, too, had been a mode of co-existence, possible only in a certain atmosphere--unmentioned in their past philosophy--where each consciousness communicates with every other.⁴⁵

The war brought home the reality in which terrible choices could not be avoided since everything was at stake including personal freedom. "...no enslavement is more apparent than that of an occupied country."⁴⁶ Reality, it would appear, was turned upside down: Instead of the facts being distorted or mystified by their ideas, it was now their ideas which appeared strange, out of place, unreal in the face of the war situation. Only an existential leap could produce a recovery, which would

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 141.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 142.

⁴⁶Ibid.

have to be intellectual as well as physical.

The existentialist commits himself in order to be free, he acts in order to be human. At the same time, he runs the risk of defeat, destruction and death, since no freedom is absolute or guaranteed. If we are to avoid being "good Germans," then we must see, as did Merleau-Ponty, that "we are in the world, mingled with it, compromised with it."⁴⁷ Therefore, both the men of ideas and the men of action are tied up with the world, thrown into the world in such a way that they must both make judgments about their situation and act within it. "A judgment without words is incomplete; a word to which there can be no reply is nonsense; my freedom is interwoven with that of others by way of the world."⁴⁸ This is all the more imperative, Merleau-Ponty argues, since he finds in existentialism and marxism alike the view that "no effective freedom exists without some power." "Freedom exists in contact with the world, not outside it."⁴⁹ It is from the War, the Occupation and the Resistance that Merleau-Ponty learned these lessons in the ambiguity of human history. From these experiences Merleau-Ponty learned that values remain normal, subject to history and the course of action men

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 147.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 148.

choose.⁵⁰ And further, that following Marx, there is no value "without an economic and political infrastructure to make them participate in existence."⁵¹ Merleau-Ponty, as intellectual and as engagee came to see the inextricable accord between the human quest for freedom and the objective course of social history, and thus the dialectical relationship that holds between being and doing, freedom and power, and the objective and subjective conditions in the social world. Bringing together pieces of existentialism and marxism, humanism and socialism in a unique formulation of a philosophy of politics and a commitment to political action he concludes "The War Has Taken Place" in this way:

It is doubtful whether tyranny can ever be eliminated from political life, whether the State could wither away and men's political or social relations could ever be reintegrated into their human relationships. But even if we have no guarantee that these goals will ever be realized, we can at least see very clearly the absurdity of an anachronistic tyranny like anti-Semitism and of a reactionary expedient like fascism. And this is enough to make us want to destroy them roots and branch and to push things forward in the direction of effective liberty. This political task is not incompatible with any cultural value or literary task, if literature and culture are defined as the progressive awareness of our multiple relationships with other people and the world, rather than as extramundane techniques. If all truths are

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 152.

⁵¹ Ibid.

told, none will have to be hidden. In man's co-existence with man, of which these years have made us aware, morals, doctrines, thoughts and customs, laws, works and words all express each other; everything signifies everything. And outside this unique fulguration of existence there is nothing.⁵²

The creation of Les Temps Modernes by Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, de Beauvoir and others after the War was an effort rooted in their wartime experiences and intended to preserve the spirit of the Resistance and to synthesize the fermentation of the intellectual left into a new politics for postwar France. They decided to enter into the political debates of the post-war period through the vehicle of a monthly journal with a commitment to political action.⁵³ They believed that intellectuals must remain in the political arena in order to maintain any leverage with reality. Even if there is still ambiguity in every relationship of ideas to action, this relationship shows us a way of breaking away from the dilemma of being and doing, of thought and action.⁵⁴ Since politics had so touched their lives to the core, they made a conscious decision to immerse themselves even more

⁵²Ibid., p. 152.

⁵³Michel -Antoine Burnier. Choice of Action: French Existentialism on the Political Front Line (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 3.

⁵⁴SN, p. 151.

deeply into the murky waters of political life, to place their intellectual thought side by side with their political experience at the altar of history.

Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and the others were, moreover, motivated by the realization that existentialists had been, in Sartre's words, "I was a-political and reluctant to make any commitment, but my heart was on the Left, of course, like everyone else's."⁵⁵ But for the founders of Les Temps Modernes, their collective act was a conscious rejection of existentialist individualism. They had primarily been concerned with their own existence, not with history. For even though much of their philosophy had found its motivation in an attack on bourgeois life, existentialism had remained fundamentally bourgeois. Without a conception of history, there was no understanding of social praxis.⁵⁶ Their conception of man was individualistic as well. They were concerned with the concrete possibilities of freedom but discovered that freedom was not bound up with man's solitary projects of action. Instead, they now understood freedom as the ensemble of his social relations in the marxian vein.⁵⁷ The unreconstructed outlook of existentialism that man acted alone or not at all

⁵⁵Jean Paul Sartre, "Introduction," in Paul Nizan, Aden Arabie (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1968), p. 51.

⁵⁶Michel-Antoine Burnier, op.cit., p. 4.

⁵⁷Ibid.

now went completely against the intentions of this new project, especially for Merleau-Ponty, who was to be the main political editor of the journal.

Les Temps Modernes was the vehicle for this new kind of existentialism. The germ of social reality had entered their lives through the study of Hegel and Marx as well as Husserl and Heidegger, through the example of communists like Paul Nizan, through their sense of existential freedom and human intersubjectivity (see Chapter above). Clearly, ideas could not irrupt into history, they merely laid seed and waited. Hence, it took the experiences of the War to make them see reality. It was necessary, in short, for history to irrupt into life.⁵⁸ By creating Les Temps Modernes these intellectuals recognized the weight of history and the tasks before them...They opted for the view held by Merleau-Ponty that "man is condemned to history" as opposed to that of Sartre, "man is condemned to freedom." This new spirit of the French Existentialists was summed up by Simone de Beauvoir in The Prime of Life:

Then, suddenly, History burst upon me, and I dissolved into fragments. I woke to find myself scattered over the four quarters of the globe, linked by every nerve in me to each and every other individual. All my ideas and values were turned upside down.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 7.

⁵⁹ Cited in Ibid.

Merleau-Ponty, Sartre and their collaborators chose not to abandon their former humanism, but to reassert it in a new, more meaningful form: the road to freedom, they now affirmed, passes through history via political life and action. The commitment to freedom, the sine qua non of existentialism, now came to mean the commitment to collective action, to social praxis, to a new rapport with marxism and communist politics (though they never joined the Party).

Just about a year before his death, Merleau-Ponty published Signs, the introduction to which is part of his ongoing effort to come to grips with a dialectic of thought and action and with the problem of political commitment of intellectuals. In point of fact, these ruminations are a commentary on his own experience as a committed intellectual and the relation of his own thinking to Marxism and communist politics. The Introduction to Signs is a rumination on the major questions which were always at the center of Merleau-Ponty's thought. His search for socially and historically founded meaning has taken him through an open-ended journey whose path is marked out by the intercrossing of philosophy and history, ideas and social existence. This journey, for Merleau-Ponty, is a "perpetual beginning,"⁶⁰ founded on the

⁶⁰PP, xiv.

problematic of existence and meaning, in search of the social structure of the world and philosophical truth. Another way of putting it is to say that Merleau-Ponty's philosophical project of world interrogation is a perpetual opening to the historical, the political, the human dimensions of existence.

In Signs, Merleau-Ponty attempts to recapture the major themes of his investigation in the light of his own experiential assessment. What characterizes these reminiscences and commentaries is, above all, the way in which Merleau-Ponty lays bare his sense of the intercrossing of sense and non-sense, the rational and the irrational in history, for which philosophy is only an answer of sorts. The sense of ambiguity, of lost hopes, unkept promises, unanswered questions, haunts this essay and serves as the final backdrop for his existential dialectics and his critique of politics. "The philosopher's road may be hard," writes Merleau-Ponty, "but we can at least be sure that each step points a way for those to come." However, "in politics, one has the oppressive sensation of blazing a trail which must be endlessly reopened."⁶¹ In other words, whereas we can show that the course of philosophical thought and investigation has its own logic and rationality, politics, and the relationship of philosophy to politics, shows only detours with an occasional success.

⁶¹Signs, p. 3.

This is not to say that politics is the pitfall of any true philosophical project, but rather that philosophy and politics are dialectically bound in such a way that the "true" for philosophy or "freedom and social justice" for politics always escape any final resolution or completion. "Questions can indeed be total," writes Merleau-Ponty, "but answers, in their positive significance, cannot."⁶² And thus, "If we take philosophy and history as they are being made, we shall see that philosophy finds its surest evidence at the moment of inception, and that history as it comes to be is dream or nightmare."⁶³

As Merleau-Ponty seems to say, it is problematic whether philosophy ever surpasses (depasse) its own self-enclosed "truths," if it ceases to be philosophy as philosophy and becomes realized philosophy (Marx). Philosophy serves to mystify and deceive as well as to clarify and inform history. But, for historical truth or applied philosophy, "History takes still more from those who have lost everything, and gives yet more to those who have taken everything." "For its sweeping judgments acquit the unjust and dismiss the pleas of their victims. History never confesses."⁶⁴

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 4.

In short, confronted with adversaries on all sides, capitalist politics as well as communist politics, Merleau-Ponty claims that all thought is contingent (and subordinate) in the sense that its validity must await affirmation or denial in history. Philosophy cannot escape the test of time. But what about politics? Here the question is not truth as in philosophy, but efficacy. For Merleau-Ponty, the dialectics of history is always a reminder that between philosophical truth and an efficacious politics lies a veil of ambiguity, incompleteness, contingency. This means that neither philosophy in search of action, a group, a movement, nor politics in search of a way, a means, a model, principles is unfettered in its historical project.

What good is there in having been right yesterday against Stalinism and today against the Algerian affair, what good in patiently untying the false knots of communism and anti-communism, and in setting down in black and white what both know better than we do, if these truths of tomorrow do not exempt a young man from the adventures of fascism and communism today? What good is it if these truths are sterile to the extent they are not given political expression in that language which speaks without saying, which touches the springs of hope and anger in every man, and which will never be the prose of truth? Is it not an incredible misunderstanding that all, or almost all, philosophers have felt obliged to have a politics, whereas politics arises from the "practice of life" and escapes understanding? The politics of philosophers is what no one practices. Then is it politics? Are there not many other things philosophers can talk about with greater assurance? And when they map out wise perspectives about which the interested parties

care nothing, are they not in fact admitting
that they simply do not know what politics
is all about?⁶⁵

From the perspective of 1960, Merleau-Ponty envisions the dilemma of politics and philosophy as the mutual loss of the dialectics of ambiguity: politics has become something less (or other) than revolutionary politics and philosophy has developed a "political mania" in its effort to be pure, thorough, principled, committed. Merleau-Ponty is referring especially to the politics of the communist party in France and to the "ultra-bolshevism" of Sartre,⁶⁶ which we will discuss more fully below. What he attacks here is the post-war marriage of philosophy and politics which he believes has not produced either good philosophy or good politics, but rather reduced both to a common denominator, ideology, for practical, though not necessarily efficacious or rational reasons. He writes:

...in the recent period, all forms of life and spirit were linked to a purely tactical politics, a discontinuous series of actions and episodes with no tomorrow. Instead of combining their virtues, philosophy and politics exchange their vices: practice became tricky and thought superstitious.⁶⁷

In short, the historical dialectic, the dialectics of ambiguity, is defeated if either politics or philosophy loses its basic

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 5-6.

⁶⁶ AD, pp. 131-211.

⁶⁷ Signs, p. 6.

foundation. For instance, what relations will Marxists have to the Communist party? Do Marxists uphold all of the doctrines and principles of Marx or only "certain points?" If certain points of Marxism do not stand up today, what replaces them? What is the outcome of a political need to be loyal combined with a philosophical need to make a break (at least on "certain points")? Can revisionism be faithful to Marxism and Marxian politics alike? At every point these questions concern the relation of Marxism to Marxist politics. But for Merleau-Ponty, "the Marxist link between philosophy and politics is broken."⁶⁸ Hence, the tragedy is that many Marxists act as if the principles of Marxian philosophy--the end of philosophy through its realization in history--had been achieved or was in active process. They employ the doctrines and regurgitate the formulas of Marxism as if events had not changed the status of the proletarian movement. On the other hand, some Marxists, having seen the failure of philosophy to get turned into reality, "which was the trial or test of the creative negation," "repudiate Marxism as revolution."⁶⁹

Merleau-Ponty rejects these two extreme tendencies--total acceptance and total rejection, philosophy against poli-

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 8.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 9.

tics or politics against philosophy. The solution is not to leave communist politics or forget one's principles. Neither approach faces the continuing need for a philosophy without mystification and a politics without mystification. But how does one avoid repudiating Marxism if there is no revolution, or if the proletariat is "inactive?" For Merleau-Ponty, the answer, taken from the side of philosophical interrogation, is an ambiguous mixture of acceptance and rejection. He writes in Signs:

What we are saying is that with the events of recent years Marxism has definitely entered a new phase of its history, in which it can inspire and orient analyses and retain a real heuristic value, but is certainly no longer true in the sense it was believed to be true.⁷⁰

Merleau-Ponty attempts to place philosophy on the altar of history but only so as to retain the sense and value which each has to the other. He believes, therefore, that to ask the question of whether one is a Marxist or not is irrelevant. Marxism is still, in 1960, the same historical truth it was for Merleau-Ponty in the early post-war period, though it is now a "veiled truth:" the proletariat is hidden, the class struggle is divided or masked, communist politics has failed in its historical project or degenerated into authoritarianism. In some ways--Stalinism, the invasion of Hungary, Korea--Marxism is a truth that failed. But Merleau-Ponty re-

⁷⁰ Ibid.

jects the choice between yogi and commissar because

Behind Marxist statements, confirmed or dis-confirmed, there is always Marxism as a matrix of intellectual and historical experiences, which can always be saved from total failure by means of some additional hypotheses....⁷¹

This is the sense in which Merleau-Ponty carefully defends a middle ground between the anti-communism of a Koestler and the ultra-bolshevism of a Sartre. Events have driven him closer and closer to a Husserlian philosophical interrogation, commitment becomes increasingly tempered by reflection. He declares, "disclosing fundamental meaning-structures through all its manu fissures, our age calls for philosophical interpretation."⁷² Philosophy and the role of the intellectual in this period becomes, for Merleau-Ponty, "action at a distance."⁷³ This is the price he believes it is necessary to pay in order to rescue the dialectical mediation, or any semblance of historical meaning, flexibility, openness toward the future.

In sum, rejection of official Marxism, the position of the French communist party or the politics of the USSR, does not constitute, for Merleau-Ponty, a rejection of Marxism. History merely highlights the ambiguous path of thought and

⁷¹Ibid., p. 10.

⁷²Ibid., p. 13.

⁷³Ibid.

action. Thus, for Merleau-Ponty, one talks about Marxism "from within" when one can, and from "without" when one must both in respect to Marxism as an historical movement and Marxism as a doctrine.⁷⁴ Marxism is less and more than an historical movement or a doctrine, if, as Merleau-Ponty believes, we are to retain the sense of dialectical meaning and truth in our perspective. In the last analysis, Marxism "is an immense field of sedimented history and thought where one goes to practice and to learn to think."⁷⁵ Merleau-Ponty gets to the heart of the matter when he says in conclusion:

We are aware of the distance between Marxism as an instrument of theoretical analysis and the Marxism which defines theory as consciousness of practice. There are situations of class struggle, and we may if we wish formulate the world situation in terms of bourgeoisie and proletariat; but this is no longer anything but a way of speaking, and the proletariat but a name for a rationalistic politics.⁷⁶

What is needed, warns Merleau-Ponty, is certainly revolutionary politics; but what is essential to that end is theoretical clarity in the face of historical ambiguity. Perhaps more, but certainly nothing less can be expected or required of the philosopher of action, the committed intellectual. Anything short of this project would be deceptive.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 12.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 13.

With these views in mind, Merleau-Ponty reflects on the problematic of commitment in his critique of Jean-Paul Sartre's latest tone of "despair and rebellion" in his commentary on Paul Nizan.⁷⁷

Sartre and Merleau-Ponty were both friends of Nizan's at the Ecole Normale; they both took sides with him in his rebellion and his joining the Communist Party. But Sartre here reminisces about the mistake Nizan made when he left the Party in 1939 over the Nazi-Soviet Pact. "I tend to think that he acted impulsively, that he should not have broken with his friends, with his true life. I tell myself that if he had lived, the Resistance would have brought him back into the ranks, as it did so many others."⁷⁸ Sartre condemns Nizan's act of renunciation of his [Nizan's] hopes for revolution and freedom but also condemns his own youth: He understood the communist question, as did Nizan, Merleau-Ponty and other intellectuals of the left, but unlike Nizan, Sartre takes himself to task because "I was apolitical and reluctant to make any commitment, but my heart was on the Left, of course, like everyone else's."⁷⁹

Merleau-Ponty, for his part in the dialogue, accuses

⁷⁷"Introduction," in Paul Nizan, Aden Arabie, op.cit.

⁷⁸Ibid., pp. 52-53.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 51.

Sartre of endorsing, not the life of Nizan as a rebel and revolutionary, but a chimera: "He cherishes the idea of a rebellious youth, and it is a chimera; not just because there is no longer time, but because his precocious lucidity does not cut such a bad figure beside the violent delusions of others."⁸⁰ Sartre's is like a reflective rebellion, but one that would renounce the richness and perspicacity of reflection in order to recover the passion and potency of active commitment which Sartre failed to make. Merleau-Ponty's advice is to see that, for his part, Nizan made such a commitment while ultimately recognizing, through selfcriticism, the meaning of illusion, deception, and compromise in all politics. Sartre, on the other hand, should see that his intellectual output is his form of rebellion and that wishful thinking about another youth, a different history can neither bring it back nor make it right.

In 1939, Nizan is going to discover abruptly that one is not so quickly saved, that adherence to communism does not free one from the dilemmas and heart-rending anguish; while Sartre, who knew it, begins that apprenticeship in history and the positive which was to lead him later on to a sort of communism, from without. Thus their paths cross. Nizan returns from Communist politics to rebellion, and the a-political Sartre becomes acquainted with the social.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Signs, p. 23.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 30.

Merleau-Ponty finds in Nizan a clear sense of the chiaroscuro of history: "History gives no pure and simple answers."⁸² In his rebellion from the Party, Nizan was correct, according to Merleau-Ponty, contrary to Sartre's illusions of purity, because "he realized that to be a Communist is not to play a role one has chosen but to be caught in a drama where without knowing it one receives a different role."

It is a lifetime undertaking which one carries on in faith or ends up pulling out of, but which in any case exceeds agreed upon limits and the promises of prudence. If it is like this, and if it is true that in the Communist life as in the other nothing is ever irrevocably accomplished--if years of labor and of action can be stricken in a twinkling with derision--in that case, Nizan thinks, I cannot do it, and the answer is no.⁸³

Nizan's deception pushes him to resignation and rebellion: he is a man acting in history--the producer of a new history and a new man, as Marx envisioned it. Yet Marxist man is also a product of history, an objective and objectifying process. Nizan "was subject and he was object. As object, lost along with his times; as subject, saved along with the future."⁸⁴

This perspective is appropriate to the times because

⁸² Ibid., p. 33.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 31.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 29.

in Merleau-Ponty's words, "historical man has never been human, and yet no man is alone."⁸⁵ While Merleau-Ponty believes along with Sartre and Nizan that historical man must commit himself to his world and such commitment begins with the rebellion of the negative man, he reminds us of the subterfuges of the negative man.⁸⁶ Thus, he offers his own interpretation of Nizan as evidence against Sartre's. Nizan helps us understand the ambiguity (compromise and deception) of all politics but also the ambiguity of historical existence itself. As Merleau-Ponty puts it:

Man is hidden, well hidden, and this time we must make no mistake about it: this does not mean that he is there beneath a mask, ready to appear. Alienation is not simply privation of what was our own by natural right; and to bring it to an end, it will not suffice to steal what has been stolen, to give us back our due.⁸⁷

Even negativity is not free from mystification, ideology, the wrath of history. This is the lesson to be learned from reading Nizan and shows the extent to which Merleau-Ponty and Sartre parted company over just these fundamentals. At a time when Sartre is discovering the communist truth in Nizan and elsewhere,⁸⁸ Merleau-Ponty retreats from rebellion and

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 24.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 30.

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 33-34.

⁸⁸ See Jean Paul Sartre, "Introduction," Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (New York: Grove Press, 1968).

towards what he calls in Signs, "unremitting virtu."⁸⁹ We are all equally caught in the chiaroscuro of present history, directions are not clear and events are shared by communist and non-communist alike, by intellectual and activist alike. Merleau-Ponty writes:

Communism sees through a glass darkly in the perspective of a new man and a new society. But for the time being, and for a whole long period which is called negative, what it turns against the bourgeois State is the machinery of the State. The means it turns against evil are evil means. From now on, each thing has a double meaning, depending on whether it is judged according to its evil origin or in the perspective of the future it invokes. The Marxist is the wretch he was; he is also that wretchedness restored to its place in the total scheme of things and known in terms of its causes. As a writer in a period of "demoralization," he prolongs bourgeois decadence; but in the very process of doing so he bears witness to it and surpasses it towards a different future.⁹⁰

For Merleau-Ponty these are "the adventures of the dialectic." And he is prone to show the underside of these adventures in order to clarify the difficulties as well as the possibilities of a dialectic of history. He lashes out against his close friend and comrade on Les Temps Modernes for what he calls Sartre's "ultra-bolshevism"--reflective rebellion in search of a cause chooses the unmet dreams of the revolutionary politics of the Communist Party.

⁸⁹ Signs, p. 35.

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 28-29.

The basis of Merleau-Ponty's critique of Sartre is that his new adherence to communist politics is resolutely antidialectical. Sartre's approach, according to Merleau-Ponty, absolutizes subject and object, necessity and contingency in the same way his early philosophy bifurcated existence into en soi and pour soi, the in itself and the for itself, being and consciousness. He asserts that

[Sartre] fonde maintenant l'action communiste en refusant toute productivité à l'histoire en faisant d'elle, pour ce qu'elle a de connaissable, le résultat immédiat de nos volontés, et, pour le reste, une opacité impénétrable.⁹¹

Consequently, Sartre's Marxism is not dialectical but reductive and absolutistic--ultra-bolshevist. Sartre reduces the historical struggle to the antagonism of bourgeois and proletariat, the former being in possession of everything, the latter totally dispossessed.⁹² Theoretically, therefore, from this total antagonism or contradiction (bourgeois vs. proletariat, subject vs. object), the total negation (proletariat as universal class) rises to become the total affirmation (praxis) in the revolution. But Merleau-Ponty rejects this as thesis and as praxis. He rejects it as thesis (dialectical theory) because "La politique révolutionnaire repose désormais sur le non-etre du proletariat et sur la décision que le crée comme sujet de l'histoire à partir de

⁹¹AD, p. 134

⁹²Claude Lefort, "La Politique et la pensée de la politique," Lettres Nouvelles (11, No. 32), pp. 64-65.

rien."⁹³ And he opposes Sartre's conception as praxis because the proletariat class struggle is masked, hidden, inactive, and communist politics have not fully become the new destruction-realization of the new man and the new society. For instance, Claude Lefort supports Merleau-Ponty's critique of Sartre when he notes that

[Sartre] Il croyait découvrir dans la révolution prolétarienne le moment historique particulier et décisif d'une destruction-réalisation, mais s'exposant au mythe d'une fin de l'histoire, et, pour en éluder des conséquences, laissant dans la vague ce qu'il fallait entendre par réalisation.⁹⁴

Merleau-Ponty raises the same question: "Le conclusion de ces aventures est-elle donc que la dialectique était un mythe?"⁹⁵ And his response is a reassertion of the ambiguity of the dialectic against Sartre's totalizing image:

Mais l'illusion était seulement de précipiter dans un fait historique, le naissance et la croissance du prolétariat, la signification totale de l'histoire, de croire que l'histoire organisait elle-même sa propre récupération, que la pouvoir du prolétariat serait sa propre suppression, negation de la negation.⁹⁶

In a word, Merleau-Ponty believes that Sartre's dualism has denigrated the existentialist perspective of subjectivity and contingency, on the one hand, and the Marxist perspective of

⁹³AD, p. 134.

⁹⁴Claude Lefort, op.cit., p. 66.

⁹⁵AD, p. 276.

⁹⁶Ibid.

objectivity and necessity, on the other. Instead, what is left is "La dialectique joue donc exactement le rôle d'une idéologie, elle aide le communisme à être autre chose que ce qu'il pense;"⁹⁷ neither good philosophy nor good politics, but, in its crudest sense, ideology.

Contrary to Sartre, Merleau-Ponty attempts to maintain a sense of dialectics in which the existentialist situation and the social perspective are both supported (reinforced). He maintains the view that the ideal model of the historical dialectic bridges the gap between Marx's social perspective and the human condition.

2. Merleau-Ponty's Marxism and the Communist Question

The dialectic of the subjective and the objective is not a simple contradiction which leaves the terms it plays on disjointed; it is rather a testimony to our rootedness in the truth...In more concrete terms, the common assumption of all revolutionaries is that the contingency of the future and the role of human decisions in history makes political divergences irreducible and cunning, deceit and violence inevitable.⁹⁸

Merleau-Ponty's idea of Marxism is not based on any absolute principles, such as the objectiveness or scientificity

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 132.

⁹⁸ HT, p. 96.

of history, its necessary unfolding, logic or rationality. Rather, he is committed to a view of Marxism without illusions in which there is always an ongoing play and tension of forces in dialectical opposition--history has a logic and a contingency.⁹⁹ Merleau-Ponty's Marxism is thus

...not an optimistic philosophy but simply the idea that another history is possible, that there is no such thing as fate, that man's existence is opened. It is the resolute try for that future which no one in the world or out of the world can know will come or, if it comes, what it will be.¹⁰⁰

This history is on the side of man as active subject within a historical situation--both subjective and objective factors are present in any historical undertaking. Neither the subjectivity of the yogi nor the objectivity of the commissar can be the foundation for a historical dialectic. Rather,

Marxism is neither the negation of subjectivity and human action nor the scientific materialism with which Rubashev began. It is much more a theory of concrete subjectivity and concrete action--of subjectivity and action committed within a historical situation.¹⁰¹

However, if the dialectic as Merleau-Ponty sees it is to be preserved in Marxist analysis and Marxist politics, it is necessary not only to take sides with the objective forces in history (economics, class struggle), but to do so only by

⁹⁹SN, p. 124.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 119.

¹⁰¹HT, p. 22.

means of connecting ourselves with history,¹⁰² which is to say, integrating and not stifling the contingent, human and individual initiative and action in the historical process. In other words, for Merleau-Ponty, a living Marxism is an existential Marxism. And an existential Marxism includes a recognition of the contingency in history as well as a logic or rationality in history, subject and object intercrossing through the actions of men and groups. There is "the contingency of history, without which no one would be to blame in politics, and the rationality of history, without which there would be only madmen."¹⁰³

The root of this conception is found in the notion of praxis. Merleau-Ponty argues that for Marxism nothing in history is absolute contingent but that the revolutionary synthesis is not a rational system or part of a rational development of history in itself. Rather, revolutionary praxis is in history and in man; in other words, praxis is inter-subjective.

...humanity's return to order, the final synthesis, is not necessitated but depends upon a revolutionary act whose certainty is not guaranteed by any divine decree or by any metaphysical structure of the world...It is therefore characteristic of Marxism to admit that history is both logical and contingent, that nothing is absolutely fortuitous but

¹⁰²SN, p. 79.

¹⁰³HT, p. 41; see also, "La materialisme historique n'est

also that nothing is absolutely necessary.¹⁰⁴

Merleau-Ponty calls this the "dialectical facts" of history. Marxism, accordingly, is neither a philosophy of the subject nor a philosophy of the object, but a philosophy of history and class consciousness (praxis).¹⁰⁵ The essence of revolutionary theory as well as revolutionary practice is man, related in a certain way to historical social forces:

It is man involved in a certain way of appropriating nature in which the mode of his relationship with others takes shape; it is concrete human intersubjectivity, the successive and simultaneous community of existences in the process of self-realization in a type of ownership which they both submit to and transform, each created by and creating the other.¹⁰⁶

In more concrete terms, the human factor in which project and action, object and subject, meet is what is meant here by revolutionary praxis:

Thus history is not comparable to a machine, but to a living being. There is a science of the revolution, but there is also a revolutionary praxis which that science clarifies but does not replace. There is a spontaneous movement of objective history, but there is also human intervention which makes it leap stages and which cannot be foretold from theoretical schemas.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ SN, p. 120; also SN, pp. 125-126.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 130.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 129.

¹⁰⁷ HT, p. 89.

However, nowhere does Merleau-Ponty more fully clarify his position than when he argues the construction of a closed history in which men are only spectators in a game which may be predetermined by those who gather knowledge, in which history is indifferent to the consciousness and actions of men. According to Merleau-Ponty,

...the point is that we are not spectators of a closed history; we are actors in an open history, our praxis introduces the element of construction rather than knowledge as an ingredient of the world, making the world not simply an object of contemplation but something to be transformed. What we cannot imagine is a consciousness without a future and a history with an end.¹⁰⁸

Based on his own assessment of the political climate in the 1940's and 1950's and his notion of existential dialectics, Merleau-Ponty changes his attitude toward Communist politics and to the Marxian project of proletarian revolution. He begins in Humanism and Terror in the late 1940's to point the way toward a theoretical stance vis-a-vis Communist politics and the USSR which calls for commitment without adhesion. This "atentisme marxiste" is based on the belief that one is either for communism or against it.¹⁰⁹ There is a risk in this position, Merleau-Ponty believed, because of the violence and "terror" inherent in the revolutionary politics of the

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 92.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 184.

USSR.¹¹⁰ But it is a risk which is necessary if we are to move beyond the situation created by the realities of the Moscow trials toward a new man and a new society.

Later, with the publication of The Adventures of the Dialectic (1955), he altered his position to that of "a-communisme," to be a Marxist from "within" when one can and a Marxist from "without" when one must. The situation had changed as experienced by Merleau-Ponty with the Communist role in the Korean War, the decline of the Cold War, and the decline everywhere of proletarian politics, proletarian action, and proletarian ideology. In contemporary history, the proletarian movement is "hidden," and the Marxist project of reuniting theory and practice through the universal vehicle of the proletariat is "indemonstrable."¹¹¹ Consequently, Merleau-Ponty retreated to "a rumination continuelle" and turned back to such writers as Max Weber and Machiavelli for an understanding of the present crisis in politics and ideas. He retreated, in short, from politics, the politics of the Communist movement, and employed his philosophical position of dialectical ambiguity to support his "a-communisme."

Thus, Merleau-Ponty's early position enabled him to interpret the Moscow trials as a necessary part of revolutionary

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ AD, p. 11.

justice, not because they represented true justice but because such violence or terror carries a face toward the future and must be judged by the revolution (by history, the future). "The Moscow trials are in the form and style that belong to the Revolution. For the revolutionary judges what exists in the name of what does not yet exist, but which he regards as more real."¹¹² As opposed to bourgeois (liberal) justice which adopts the past as its precedent, revolutionary justice, as Merleau-Ponty saw it, adopts the future, which is to be determined by praxis.¹¹³ The Moscow Trials are therefore to be understood as a phase in the political struggle and an expression of the violence (revolutionary progressive violence) in history.¹¹⁴ That violence is necessary in history is for Merleau-Ponty a fact which cannot be denied as it tends to be by the ideologies of liberalism. And the risk one takes in committing oneself to a course of political action always entails a degree of violence, confrontation and the play of power. The only difference can be the meaning of historical praxis, its violence and the view of the future: The Communist question that Merleau-Ponty asked in Humanism and Terror is whether an historical politics based on Marxism can,

¹¹² HT, pp. 27-28.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 28.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 31.

through revolutionary violence, move social relations and world history toward a new humanism. His answer, as we have noted above, is hopeful but not definite. He concluded that there is no one destined to win, choose at your own risk, because of the inextricable situation today in which "it is impossible to be an anti-Communist and it is not possible to be a Communist."¹¹⁵ However, he did write emphatically against liberalism and took sides with the Marxist project ("attentisme marxiste"). Meanwhile, he offered the pertinent reminder that Marxism must discover a violence which recedes with the approach of man's future¹¹⁶ because "the Marxist transition from formal liberty to actual liberty has not occurred and in the immediate future has no such chance."¹¹⁷

For Merleau-Ponty there are basically two kinds of violence in political life. First, there is violence which advocates nonviolence, complacency, law-and-order, and ideology, and thus institutionalizes in practice what is hidden from social consciousness. This is the violence of "a decadent liberalism and rationalism."¹¹⁸ Second, there is violence which advocates revolution, social upheaval, terror in the name of a social movement--the proletariat class struggle--which

¹¹⁵Ibid., p. xxi.

¹¹⁶Ibid., p. xviii.

¹¹⁷Ibid., p. xxiii.

¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 34.

looks forward to "the horizon of the future."¹¹⁹ This is the "revolutionary hypothesis"--to establish in the name of the proletariat as universal class a form of violence which "recedes with the approach of man's future."¹²⁰ Merleau-Ponty understands this to be the meaning of "revolutionary violence:"

This is what Marx believed he found in proletarian violence, namely, the power of that class of men who, because they are expropriated in present society from their country, their labor, and their very life, are capable of recognizing one another aside from all differences, and thus of founding humanity. Cunning, deception, bloodshed, and dictatorship are justified if they bring the proletariat into power and to that extent alone.¹²¹

Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty's discussion of violence in politics is based on the assumption that all politics includes violence regardless. This is always comprehensible from the side of the objective social world such as in the relations of production, but never fully comprehensible from the side of human subjectivity since violence in any form is always an affront to human conscience, "the negation of conscience." Thus ambiguity enters into any discussion of violence. Merleau-Ponty adds:

We do not have a choice between purity and violence but between different kinds of vio-

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. xviii.

¹²⁰ Ibid., pp. xviii-xix.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 108.

lence. Inasmuch as we are incarnate beings, violence is our lot. There is no persuasion even without seduction, or in the last analysis, contempt. Violence is the common origin of all regimes. Life, discussion, and political choice occur only against a background of violence. What matters and what we have to discuss is not violence but its sense or its future. It is a law of human action that the present encroaches upon the future, the self upon other people.¹²²

The only conclusion to be drawn from this discussion of the relation of violence to political life is that it is the denial of violence, the condemnation of violence, the rejection of violence as a means of political action or political life generally which is more guilty of denying the domain of existence and the reality of historical society as we know it. In Merleau-Ponty's words, "He who condemns all violence puts himself outside the domain to which justice and injustice belong."¹²³

These reflections led Merleau-Ponty to the position that Communism was the only movement of the twentieth century which has raised the question of transforming social relations and attempted to create a truly revolutionary praxis,¹²⁴ while liberalism excludes the revolutionary hypothesis altogether.¹²⁵ In his early writings, Merleau-Ponty takes sides

¹²² Ibid., p. 109.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 110.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. xv.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. xvii.

with the revolution because he saw that

Within the USSR violence and deception have official status while humanity is to be found in daily life. On the contrary, in democracies the principles are humane but deception and violence rule daily life.¹²⁶

In relation to the USSR and the concentration camps, Merleau-Ponty said that

Whatever the nature of the present Soviet society may be, the USSR is on the whole situated, in the balance of powers, on the side of those who are struggling against the forms of exploitation known to us...From which we do not draw the conclusion that indulgence must be shown toward communism, but that one can in no case make a pact with one's adversaries.¹²⁷

He summarized his early position when he wrote, "A regime which is nominally liberal can be oppressive in reality. A regime which acknowledges its violence might have in it more genuine humanity."¹²⁸

However, by the late 1950's his political position appeared to take a radical turn away from the left. For instance, he wrote in 1955, in sharp opposition to Communist politics, that

Il n'y a pas de dialectique sans opposition et sans liberté, et il n'y a pas longtemps d'opposition et de liberté dans une révolution...Les révolutions sont vraies comme mouvements et fausses comme régimes.¹²⁹

¹²⁶Ibid., p. 180

¹²⁷Signs, p. 268.

¹²⁸HT, p. xv.

¹²⁹AD, p. 279.

What this change represents in Merleau-Ponty's thought is not a rejection of the possibility of any revolutionary praxis, but rather a recognition that, based on the realities of Soviet politics and the Communist party in his own country, the revolution had not as yet been realized nor was proletarian power possible in the immediate future. He now viewed the Moscow trials from a different perspective: "Les proces de Moscou, c'était la révolution qui ne veut plus être révolution, ou inversement--nous laissons la question ouverte--un régime établi qui mime la révolution."¹³⁰ Merleau-Ponty had now come to believe that the world political situation had changed, confirming his rather than Sartre's changed perspective:

Yet it is clear that a revolutionary politics cannot be maintained without its pivot, that is, proletarian power. If there is no "universal class" and exercise of power by that class, the revolutionary spirit becomes pure morality or moral radicalism again. Revolutionary politics was a doing, a realism, the birth of a force. The non-Communist Left often retains only its negations. This phenomenon is a chapter in the great decline of the revolutionary idea...Because its principle hypothesis, that of a revolutionary class, is not confirmed by the actual course of events.¹³¹

However, Merleau-Ponty has not wavered fundamentally; he has asserted the basic ambiguity in existence, hence, the

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 98.

¹³¹ Signs, 329.

basic ambiguity in all politics and all knowledge insofar as politics and knowledge are historically centered with their path established by the insertion of man in the world (être-au-monde). This is the major contribution of Merleau-Ponty to our understanding of our times and the meaning of social relations in history. Throughout the full extent of his writings and the various tactical changes of political position, Merleau-Ponty holds to the basic notion that

The human world is an open or unfinished system and the same radical contingency which threatens it with discord also rescues it from the inevitability of disorder and prevents us from despairing of it, providing only that one remembers its various machineries are actually men and tries to maintain and expand man's relations to man.¹³²

When Merleau-Ponty says that Marxism "is a radical solution to the problem of human coexistence beyond the oppression of absolute subjectivity and absolute objectivity, and beyond the pseudo-solution of liberalism,"¹³³ he is placing the concept of revolutionary praxis in the center of history. When Merleau-Ponty writes that "Marxism seeks to destroy the alternative of subjective or objective politics by submitting history...to the exigencies of a certain condition considered human by all men, namely, the condition of the proletariat,"¹³⁴ he is giving an interpretation of historical

¹³²HT, p. 188.

¹³³Ibid., p. 103.

¹³⁴Ibid., p. 111.

dialectics in which the proletariat as the "universal class" in Marxist theory is the "motor of the dialectic," the essential pivot of revolutionary praxis.¹³⁵

3. The Critique of Politics and the Role of

Militant Philosophy

In 1958 Merleau-Ponty was interviewed by L'Express and was asked: "As a philosopher and political thinker, do you have an opinion about the war in Algeria, and can you tell us what it is?"¹³⁶ His reply was:

I have an opinion and I do not hide it. But it is perhaps no longer a solution, even if it was one two years and a half ago. Nothing proves that a given problem is soluble at any time whatsoever, and it would be excessive to reproach us for not having any solution when the problem itself has been allowed to go to pot. I see only partial truths...¹³⁷

In regard to his assessment of another event in recent history and its relation to his philosophical perspective, Merleau-Ponty said in commenting on the way the Big Three--Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill--decided the events at Yalta:

If everything counts in history we can no longer say as Marxists do that in the last analysis historical logic always finds its ways, that it alone has a decisive role, and that it is the truth of history. The Bolsheviks practically admitted that opportunity only knocks once. Trotsky writes: "Lately again one could hear the

¹³⁵Praise, p. 51.

¹³⁶Signs, p. 328.

¹³⁷Ibid.

opinion expressed that if we had not seized power in October, we would have taken possession of it two or three months later. A gross error! If we had not seized power in October, we never would have seized it." (Lenin, pp.77-8) Good. But then we must not say that the revolution is "ineluctable." We must choose between the revolution as action and as truth. The true Marxist drama is there, rather than between "superstructures" and "infrastructures," or between men and things.¹³⁸

These reflections shed additional light on the latest political perspective of Merleau-Ponty, especially his reluctance to throw all of his (or our) dice onto the roulette table of history. But, furthermore, what we are witnessing in these reflections is the mind of the philosopher who believes in commitment choosing not commitment but rumination, reflection, criticism and self-criticism. Merleau-Ponty reminds us of the limitations of all courses of action, but emphatically warns us against any commitment or course of action which attempts to totalize action, finalize history, and establish truth--practical truth in action, or moral or theoretical truth in the idea. For Merleau-Ponty compromise is not a nasty word to be avoided by the left, by men of action or committed intellectuals; compromise is, rather, the condition of existence which is always bounded by the irrational, bounded by contingency. Merleau-Ponty speaks of this attitude as "la rumination continuelle."¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 276.

¹³⁹ AD, p. 7.

...Il y aurait fausse rigueur a attendre des principes parfaitement elabores pour parler philosophiquement politique. A l'epreuve des evenements, nous faisons connaissance avec ce qui est pour nous inacceptable, et c'est cette experience interpretee qui deviant these et philosophie.¹⁴⁰

It is through his commentary on Max Weber, Machiavelli and Georg Lukacs, that Merleau-Ponty elaborates on "la rumination continuelle" and sets the outline for what might be called in Merleau-Ponty's language a militant philosophy of politics without illusions, or an existential politics.¹⁴¹

Merleau-Ponty's account of Machiavelli lends support to this perspective. Machiavelli is neither totally for politics and violence nor totally for virtue and morality in social life. "Collective life is hell,"¹⁴² and man is condemned to history. But what is present in Machiavelli is a critical awareness of the necessity of power, on the one hand, and the possibility of freedom, on the other. What Machiavelli describes is how one uses as much power as is necessary in history in order to attain whatever freedom is possible. For Machiavelli, there is both virtue or principles in history as well as chance or contingency. In the last analysis, he comes up on the side of virtue¹⁴³ but is sanguine in his advice to the prince on the use of vice, terror, and force in succeed-

¹⁴⁰Ibid.

¹⁴¹SN, pp. 64, 134.

¹⁴²Signs, p. 211.

¹⁴³Ibid., p. 217.

ing to power. Thus any real attempt to establish a humanism in history, or a true human community, must pass through the problematic of power. What is needed, as Marx knew well, is a fil conducteur: "a guideline allowing him to recognize among the different powers the one from which something good could be hoped for, and to elevate virtue above opportunism in a decisive way."¹⁴⁴ Merleau-Ponty believes Machiavelli lacked this aspect in his political thought added later by Marx and the Marxists. But Machiavelli does remind us of the irrational or contingent in the world (Chance) as well as the verities of principal actions (virtue).

Chance takes shape only when we give up understanding and willing. Fortune "exercises her power when no barriers are erected against her; she brings her efforts to bear upon the ill-defended points." (The Prince, Chapter 25) If there seems to be an inflexible course of events, it is only in past events. If fortune seems now favorable, now unfavorable, it is because man sometimes understands and sometimes misunderstands his age; and according to the case, his success or ruin is created by the same qualities--but not by chance.¹⁴⁵

Finally, Machiavelli helps us see that the task of a real humanism is to create the power of the powerless, or at least one that would not be unjust. But Machiavelli saw correctly, and Marx as well, that "values are necessary but not

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 222.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 218.

sufficient."¹⁴⁶ "Everyone is fighting in the name of the same values--freedom and justice. What distinguishes them is the kind of men for whom liberty or justice is demanded, and with whom society is to be made--slaves or masters... those who live through history and those who make it."¹⁴⁷ What we learn from Machiavelli, in short, is that any try for a truly human community passes through the relations of men to men which is always fraught with struggle and the play of power, not just ideas, principles, or philosophy.

If by humanism we mean a philosophy of the inner man which finds no difficulty in principle in his relationships with others, no opacity whatsoever in the functioning of society, and which replaces political cultivation by moral exhortation, Machiavelli is not a humanist. But if by humanism we mean a philosophy which confronts the relationship of man to man and the constitution of a common situation, and a common history between men as a problem, then we have to say that Machiavelli formulated some of the conditions of any serious humanism. And in this perspective the repudiation of Machiavelli which is so common today takes on a disturbing significance: it is the decision not to know the tasks of a true humanism. There is a way of repudiating Machiavelli which is Machiavellian; it is the pious dodge of those who turn their eyes and ours toward the heaven of principles in order to turn them away from what they are doing. And there is a way of praising Machiavelli which is just the opposite of Machiavellianism, since it honors in his works a contribution to political clarity.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 221.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 223.

In Merleau-Ponty's view, this perspective is Marxian as well as Machiavellian: As a critique of politics it is sanguine about the realities of power and the propensities of men toward justice and equality, while maintaining a resolute militancy in regard to those human efforts to create a new humanity and a new future.¹⁴⁹

In his later writings, Merleau-Ponty turns to Weber's social science and Georg Lukacs' humanist Marxism in order to re-establish a philosophy of history and politics which seeks a non-dogmatic middle course between sectarian politics and any absolute criteria for philosophical understanding. Merleau-Ponty turns to Weber not to support liberal politics against communist politics. As we have seen, he rejects these two as the only alternatives for assessing the current situation. Rather, what interests Merleau-Ponty is the extent to which Weber as a liberal remains "faithful to the spirit of search and of knowledge...which is able to juxtapose the order of truth and that of violence," that is, the spirit of openness which responds equally to the rightness as well as the wrongness in the world of social reality, and to theory as well as politics.¹⁵⁰ Merleau-Ponty turns to Lukacs' "Western Marxism"

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ See Primacy, p. 193.

in order to answer the question: How can relativism be overcome? Or, in other words, how can the intersubjective relationship between man and his world, between subject and object, be affirmed in history? What concerns Merleau-Ponty is the extent to which Lukacs' philosophic radicalism makes sense not only for objective history but for human relations as well. In both cases, Merleau-Ponty employs their ideas to elaborate his own perspective.

Weber's liberalism, asserts Merleau-Ponty, "is completely new because he admits that truth always leaves a margin of doubt."¹⁵¹ History has vectors; there is no final or absolute history nor philosophy of history as Merleau-Ponty has learnt from the experience of communist promises (theory) and communist realities (praxis). What is essential to the politics of understanding of Weber, in Merleau-Ponty's view, is that its perspective of historical analysis places every historical project of political action on the same plane, bearing both an objective and an subjective meaning or truth. Every historical project has an objective foundation in social relations, it stands in history and serves to elucidate that history. But, on the other hand, every historical project is subject to change, correction, reinterpretation, failure, in short, contingency. Thus, on the side of objectivity--theory--there

¹⁵¹Ibid.

is always truth, not nothing; on the side of subjectivity in history, of men in action--praxis--there is always a freedom such that action, not ideas, determines what will happen to us.

Hence, Merleau-Ponty attempts to turn the weakness of the historian and social scientist who is, in some sense, always outside events looking in, into a strength by confronting the human and contingent factors in history, that is, taking into consideration the inside of every historical event or process. Even Weber's ideal types, Merleau-Ponty finds, are not to be taken as keys to history:

They are only precise guideposts for appreciating the divergence between what we think and what has been, and for bringing into the open what has been left out of our interpretation.¹⁵²

History, in other words, is understood from the outside through analysis of the "objective" content, but also from the inside through understanding the perspective of the actors themselves:

Because of the fact that the order of knowledge is not the only order, because it is not enclosed in itself, and because it contains at least the gaping chasm of the present, the whole of history is still action and action already history. History is the same whether we contemplate it as a spectacle or assume it as a responsibility.¹⁵³

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 194.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

Following Weber, Merleau-Ponty makes a resolute try to situate historical understanding between the extremes of objective historical knowledge (Marxism) and the agnostic or subjectivist history of liberalism or existentialism:

Historical understanding thus does not introduce a system of categories arbitrarily chosen; it only presupposes the possibility that we have a past which is ours and that we can recapture in our freedom the work of so many other freedoms. It assumes that we can clarify the choices of others through our own and ours through theirs, that we adjust one by the other and finally arrive at the truth.¹⁵⁴

Or, put more succinctly, in light of what we have called the dialectic of "inner" and "outer":

There is no greater respect, no more profound objectivity than this claim of going to the very source of history. History is not an external god, a hidden reason of which we need only record our conclusions. It is the metaphysical fact that the same life, our own, is played out both within us and outside us, in our present and in our past, and that the world is a system to which we have various accesses or, if you prefer, various likenesses.¹⁵⁵

And since all truth passes through human action, the course of things is determined not in thought but in praxis:

If history does not have a direction like a river but only a meaning, not a truth but only errors to be avoided, if practice is not deduced from a dogmatic philosophy of history, it is not superficial to base a politics on the analysis of the political man.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 204.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., also Ibid., p. 205.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 210.

Lukacs, in his later philosophy, criticizes what he calls Merleau-Ponty's eclecticism because it remains anchored in the bourgeois split between objective understanding or the total view of history and moral feeling or agnostic history akin to the liberalism of Weber.¹⁵⁷ For Lukacs, the paradox between these two extremes is indefensible. But Merleau-Ponty, for his part, takes up the criticism of Lukacs and argues with him that Weber stopped short in relativizing the subject and object in history because he "remains dominated by the idea of unconditional truth without perspective."¹⁵⁸ While Weber's historicism remains liberal, without a revolutionary political perspective, Lukacs' approach in his early and influential History and Class Consciousness (1923),¹⁵⁹ is more radical while remaining humanistic, and is given serious attention by Merleau-Ponty.

Lukacs' radical perspective, asserts Merleau-Ponty, is an effort to find the absolute in the relative: subject and object are envisaged as relativized--fragmentary, changeable--in the "totality of the given," but the tensions may be transformed, opposites and contradictions surpassed (dépasse) through the dialectic in history and man, in the movement towards a new, more humane totality. If for Weber the materialism of

¹⁵⁷ Georg Lukacs, op.cit., pp. 199, 203.

¹⁵⁸ "Western Marxism," op.cit., p. 140.

¹⁵⁹ Georg Lukacs, History and Class Consciousness (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971).

Calvinist society is understood as an attempt to deduce all culture from the economy, it is due, at least in part, to a failure of political perspective.¹⁶⁰ Here, on the contrary, Merleau-Ponty borrows from Marx and Lukacs the notion that

Historical materialism is not the reduction of history to one of its sectors: it is the claim that there is a close connection between the person and his external world, between the subject and the object which determines the alienation of the subject in the object and, if the movement can be reversed will determine the re-integration of the world with man.¹⁶¹

This is the foundation, Merleau-Ponty believes, for a non-dogmatic Marxism which relativizes the absolute--absolute knowledge, mechanistic or one-dimensional deductions of historical processes, the bourgeois class rule--in order to gather the fruits of historical change into the absolutization of the relative--historical knowledge, the proletariat as universal class and its rise to power.

However, at this point Merleau-Ponty is not prepared to go all the way with Lukacs or Marx in his analysis because of his critical attitude toward the communist movement. But what he supports in Lukacs is his undogmatic, existentialist and humanist Marxism for which the dialectic "is his continuous intuition, a consistent reading of actual history, the re-establishment of tormented relationships, of the endless

¹⁶⁰"Western Marxism," op.cit., p. 142.

¹⁶¹Ibid.

interchanges obtaining between subject and object."¹⁶²

In sum, a dialectical method and a "progressive" historical historical perspective, as developed by Lukacs, combine to yield a meaning in history, not a simple determination but rather guidelines, trends, directions. Historical or revolutionary meaning is ambiguous, but progressive action is still possible. There is promise and danger therein:

The revolution that has become an institution is already in decay if it sees itself as accomplished. In other words, within a concrete conception of history where ideas are only stages in the social dynamic, each progressive step is ambiguous since it is acquired within a crisis situation. A new period comes about where new problems arise and surpass (de-passe) it.¹⁶³

For Merleau-Ponty, progressive action and meaning in history are possible but always threatened by ambiguities, deviations, contradictions, and need, therefore, to be constantly reinterpreted. Contrary to Hegelianism or dogmatic Marxism, history or meaning is never final or totally accomplished: "There is less a sense [meaning] of history than an elimination of nonsense."¹⁶⁴

In addition, in Lukacsian Marxism the notion of praxis as class consciousness, beyond the division of subject and object, beyond the bifurcation of theory and practice is worked out. Class consciousness is praxis, i.e., "Less than

¹⁶²Ibid.

¹⁶³Ibid., p. 147.

¹⁶⁴Ibid.

a subject and more than an object, a polarized existence, a possibility which manifests itself in the situation of the proletariat, at the juncture between things and his life," and "Objective possibility."¹⁶⁵ Praxis concerns active consciousness, social consciousness, and thus, in historical perspective, class consciousness.

It is a global project which supports and animates the productions and actions of a class, which proposes to this class an image of the world and of its tasks in this world, and which, keeping in mind external conditions, assigns it a history.¹⁶⁶

Finally, it is important to note that this "philosophy of history" does not give us the keys to history as much as it restores it as permanent question. The mark of Lukacs' western Marxism is not that it supplies us with answers to the riddles of history, to its contradictions and deviations, but that it "makes us aware of our time and of its partialities," that "it shows us the present permeated by self-criticism, by a power of negation and of transcendence."¹⁶⁷ While Max Weber gave us an understanding of the particularity of the culture of every age or nation as experienced through the vehicle of our participation in history, Georg Lukacs' dialectic of history is rooted less in thought than in that class that

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 153.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 154.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 161.

transforms the particular into the universal.¹⁶⁸ However, in the final analysis, Merleau-Ponty calls for a "living history," which falls somewhere between the theoretical formulations of Weber as modified by Lukacs and the political commitments of Lukacs. Merleau-Ponty calls this approach to ideas and reality, to theory and practice, a "militant philosophy," because it utilizes the dialectical vision as a way toward the "universal negation"--a consistent questioning and criticism of knowledge and politics--even if a revolutionary praxis is not possible at the present time. This philosophical critique and method is, for Merleau-Ponty, a radical praxis itself from which he is able to conclude that philosophy, in the final analysis, is a "necessary detour" from the world of social reality.¹⁶⁹ When Merleau-Ponty writes that "history is realized philosophy in the same way that philosophy is formalized history," he is then in a position to conclude that "Western Marxism" is an integral philosophy without dogma.¹⁷⁰ For our own time we need to recognize the meaning for philosophy and politics of Merleau-Ponty's words: "The truth of politics is only the art of inventing what will later appear to have been required by the times."¹⁷¹ This will entail not

¹⁶⁸Ibid., p. 161.

¹⁶⁹Ibid.

¹⁷⁰Ibid., pp. 141-142.

¹⁷¹Primacy, p. 210.

only recognition of the necessity of the Marxist dialectical vision, of consciousness as praxis, of revolution and radical social change, but also the possibility or limitation, as well as the necessary conditions, for a historical dialectics of this kind. This is not to suggest that we simply adopt Merleau-Ponty's political experience for the current situation in politics and theory. After all, his experience was different from our own. It does mean, however, that the critique of politics and social and political science, as well as the search for alternative methods of studying social reality and affecting change, can find in Merleau-Ponty's thought and the dialogue between phenomenology and marxism that foundation upon which to build radical social theory and action.

Merleau-Ponty's methodological concerns, which have been analyzed in Chapters II and III, and their relation to the contemporary world of politics considered in this chapter, clearly go beyond the limits set by the behavioral tradition. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological Marxism develops: (1) an open-ended dialectic of social relations; and (2) an alternative approach to the dialectic of theory and practice founded on an intersubjective perspective of social reality, and therefore in sharp contrast to behavioral objectivism. Thus the foundations have now been established for an extended phenomenological critique of the behavioral tradition in the social sciences. The critique, which follows in Chapter V, is a

necessary prelude to further developing a phenomenological alternative because it clearly demonstrates the myths upon which the claims to practical neutrality or objectivity and scientific rationality are based.

Chapter V

THE LIMITATIONS OF AMERICAN POLITICAL SCIENCE AND THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL MOVEMENT

Merleau-Ponty wrote in 1948 that "the political experience of the past thirty years oblige us to evoke the background of non-sense against which every universal undertaking is silhouetted and by which it is threatened with failure."¹ Merleau-Ponty refers to the experience of that generation of intellectuals for whom Marxism was a "mistaken hope" because it lost "confidence in its own daring when it was successful in only one country."² But this criticism is equally relevant for a new generation of intellectuals in America for whom the ideals of liberalism have been emptied of reality and have become little more than a super-rational mystique for the Cold War, a counter-revolutionary reflex in the third world, and a narrow perspective of social welfare at home. Merleau-Ponty argues that Marxism "abandoned its own proletarian methods and resumed the classical ones of history: hierarchy, obedience, myth, inequality, diplomacy, and police."³

¹SN, p. 4.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

Today intellectuals in America are making the same critique with equal fervor about their own lost illusions.

As we search for new ways to comprehend the social realities of American life and new modes of social thought and political action to reconstruct "the American dream," Merleau-Ponty's notion of sense and nonsense guides us to see the historical relationship between ideologies and practice, between thought and action, between man and the world he creates. It symbolizes that recurrent fact in history whereby reason parades as unreason, where even "the highest form of reason borders on unreason."⁴ We must learn from recent history that "the experience of unreason cannot simply be forgotten;"⁵ that the most noble claims to universal truth, the most rational modes of philosophical or social inquiry, the most convincing declarations of political leaders are all contingent, and should be subject to revision and open to criticism and change. Marx and Kierkegaard, it should be recalled, shared in their revolt against Hegel's "Reason" insofar as the latter claimed to have attained through reason that universal truth in which history realizes itself, the real becomes rational and the rational becomes real. The significance of this revolt against Hegelian rationalism is not its renuncia-

⁴SN, p. 4.

⁵Ibid., p. 5.

tion of reason itself, but rather the extent to which in Hegel's philosophical system reason is exalted and sanctified over against the historical, human and irrational in history.

Having attempted in the preceding chapters to expound a phenomenological revision of marxism by means of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the social world as a theoretical alternative to behavioral social science, the phenomenological critique of behavioralism can now be elaborated more fully. The primary task in this chapter is to reassert the need for continued investigations in phenomenology and marxism by re-emphasizing the limitations of behavioralism. In the vein of phenomenology, Hans Peter Dreitzel explains the need for critical social science in opposition to the kind of complaisant social science dominant in the US:

...The products of social science are neither value-free nor neutral in regard to their utilization. The social function of social science research is determined not only by the choice of the problem area under study but even more so by the methodological approach used. For, in social science, the methodology is always an integral element of what we call sociological knowledge. Hence methodological controversies have been part of the history of social science until this day.⁶

This is the main line of reasoning developed in this chapter which describes and criticizes the inextricable linkage between

⁶Hans Peter Dreitzel, "Social Science and the Problem of Rationality: Notes on the Sociology of Technocrats," Politics and Society, 2, No. 2 (Winter, 1972), 167.

methodology and ideology so as to come to grips with the technocratic, mechanistic, objectivistic functions of behavioral social science. Therefore, the phenomenological critique of behavioral social science recognizes the historical linkage between the present social forces of reason and unreason, sense and nonsense, and attempts to unmask the guise by which the most prevalent modes of thought, their institutional expression, and their ideologies keep us from grasping their real social meaning.

My purpose in this chapter is to show the rigorous adherence to social science methodology adopted from the natural sciences and its claim to objectivity and value neutrality function as a guise for what is in fact becoming an increasingly ideological, non-objective role for social science knowledge in the service of the dominant institutions in American society. And further, to show that the prevailing modes of inquiry in the social sciences in no way counter these recent developments in the uses of knowledge, but rather tend to re-enforce them, i.e., re-enforce the "irrational" or ideological uses of knowledge. Moreover, I will examine what Noam Chomsky has called the double myth of the social sciences: the myth of political benevolence and the myth of scientific omniscience.⁷ The view, in other words, that since we have

⁷American Power and the New Mandarins (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969).

arrived at the end of ideology, knowledge and technology are free-neutral or non-ideological--to serve the interests and powers of the "benevolent" American state and corporate elite both at home and abroad.

When one ruminates in the realm of ideas, questions of ideology or social goals need not arise, even though they may be applicable; but in the world of social reality in which ideas are always related to institutions and social practice, questions of the social use of knowledge and ideology cannot be avoided. Thus, while this paper deals with methodology in the social sciences, its primary concern is with ideology. In short, this chapter expands the phenomenological critique of behavioralism by showing not only its conservative or "apolitical" biases, but, more importantly, the necessary inter-relationship between behavioral methodology and ruling class ideology.

The New Role of the Social Sciences

In recent years, the burgeoning critique of behavioralism has put forward the claims that its proponents are guilty of "implicit and unrecognized conservative values," "fearful of popular democracy," and tend to "avoid political issues in their research."⁸ It is argued, therefore, that

⁸See Charles McCoy and John Playford, eds., Apolitical Politics: A Critique of Behavioralism (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1967).

the study of power as the observable exercise of power is conservative because it fails to consider the non-observable, non-decision making process;⁹ that to assume that elites are the guardians of liberal democratic values and succeed in satisfying most demands made on the American polity is to demonstrate a fear of popular democracy especially when this view is coupled with the presumption that the masses tend to be undemocratic;¹⁰ and that the increasing trend to build mathematical models based on the criteria of the physical sciences abstracts political science from political reality and renders such research pseudo- or apolitical by reducing it to a sophisticated numerology.¹¹

To the contrary, however, in a recent counter-critique, Bert Rockman has developed the view that these troubles of social science methodology are due to the shortcomings of the researcher, his failure to understand the role his ideology plays in his research, or the limitations of the present level knowledge, but not due to the methodology itself.¹² Although this view is in many ways persuasive, it does not fully contend with the critique since it is obvious that one must

⁹See Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz, "The Faces of Power," in ibid.

¹⁰See Peter Bachrach, The Theory of Democratic Elitism: A Critique (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967).

¹¹See Francis Wormuth, "Matched-Dependent Behaviorism: The Cargo Cult in Political Science," Western Political Quarterly, vol. 20 (December 1967), 809-40.

¹²Bert Rockman, "A 'Behavioral' Evaluation of the Critique of Behaviorism." Unpublished.

social science on the basis of what it knows and what it does, not on the basis of what it ought to know or what it ought to do. For, to the extent that knowledge, including methods of inquiry and techniques of data collection, is socially determined, the social scientist's assertion of the purity of his methodology, "the quality of [his] operationalizations," his "resourceful utilization of technique," or the high moral virtue of his ideological biases, are in themselves insufficient grounds for judging the results of empirical research. Bert Rockman's view, for example, is that "the only real issue is how well we are able to operationalize," which "is dependent upon what we define as reality."¹³ But the point is that what we define as reality is also dependent on what we already know or our pre-conceived knowledge, and that the validity of relevance of methods of inquiry and the utilization of technique are also implicated in the social determination of knowledge.

The limitations of this behavioralist outlook lies, according to phenomenological approach of Merleau-Ponty, in the social scientist's choice of theoretical criteria, i.e., the questions he asks and his methodological premises, not merely his political biases. For, if the social scientist

¹³Ibid., p. 40.

employs technique for science, operationalism for rationality, then in fact he will be allowing political, economic or psychological considerations to be decisive rather than scientific or analytical ones as he claims. As we shall discuss below, American social scientists become cold war specialists and advocates for government policy not simply because they are anti-communist ideologues or favor domestic repression, but because they are paid (and accept payment) by the government to operationalize these policies and to make the most "resourceful utilization of technique" possible. In fact, by this choice of method, wherein technology and science become indistinguishable, social science methodology and an apolitical politics supportive of ruling class power and privilege become indistinguishable. This point was most effectively made in a recent critique of Defense Department scholars by Hannah Arendt, who observed that the evidence of the Pentagon Papers shows that

The problem solvers did not judge, they calculated; their self-confidence did not even need self-deception to be sustained in the midst of so many misjudgements, for it relied on the evidence of mathematical, purely rational truth. Except, of course, that this 'truth' was entirely irrelevant for the 'problem' at hand.¹⁴

Contrary to phenomenological approach to knowledge, which

¹⁴"Lying in Politics: Reflections on The Pentagon Papers," New York Review of Books, 1, November 1971, 37.

treats knowledge as social and goal oriented, behaviorist knowledge is calculated according to instrumentalist criteria. Such knowledge is relevant to supporting those objectives permitted or tolerated within the existing political/social systems, be they rational or irrational, relevant to progressive policy-making or not. Hence, the major shortcoming of behavioral social science is precisely its inability to go beyond the merely technical or instrumental.

Therefore, the limitations of behavioral methodology are to be found even in Rockman's convincing paper because, on the one hand, he puts forward a view, with which I fully agree,¹⁵ that "our 'science' will consist of developing interpretations of the political universe, based partly on data and partly on ideology."¹⁶ On the other hand, he concludes that "the data should enable us to test for the invalidity of clearly defined propositions on their own terms."¹⁷ The latter point is questioned by even some positivists, who, like Moritz Schlick, assert that there is an important distinction between verified knowledge and verifiable knowledge.¹⁸

¹⁵Though I agree, I am not at all sure how one goes about determining the point at which science begins and ideology leaves off.

¹⁶Rockman, op.cit., p. 41.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸"Meaning and Verification," in Herbert Feigl and Wilfrid Sellars, eds., Readings in Philosophical Analysis (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1949), pp. 146-170.

The former is subject to tests for validity or invalidity, but the latter, according to Schlick, cannot be verified here and now. For example, in order to prove the proposition of the existence of God, one must wait and see. This suggests that at least there are classes of knowledge for which the data will not enable us to test for validity or invalidity merely on the basis of clearly defined propositions taken on their own terms. Does social knowledge not fall into this class of knowledge?

Moreover, there is no reason to conclude that because we have clearly defined propositions, they will necessarily be consistent with socially defined knowledge or socially acquired, street knowledge. Contrary to the objectivist approach of behavioralism, phenomenology as developed by Merleau-Ponty accepts "street-knowledge" as vital to an intersubjective approach to social knowledge. Merleau-Ponty calls this knowledge pre-reflexive, the knowledge of the every day experience of man in society. For Merleau-Ponty, it is precisely the recognition of the interrelationship between different levels of knowledge--scientific and common sense--upon which an intersubjective view of social reality relies. This approach is the means by which the world of ideas and the world of everyday experience can be linked. The point was well-made by Murray Kempton, who recently noted:

I think there is a change now in our view of life: we know more than we ever knew before,

but we know it instinctively, and not from the sources of public information we get. What do we know, exactly? We know that Walt Whitman Rostow is a fool. We know that Dean Rusk is a clerk. We know that Mr. Nixon is not really very much worse than the people who preceded him (which is a sufficient judgment on them), and so on. We know all these things not because anyone told us but because events have explained them to us. And it is this explanation that people are looking for.¹⁹

To criticize social science methodology and its criteria of verification, operationalization or objectivity is not to denigrate the relevance of scientific inquiry. It is rather to analyze the social and political nature of this methodology, and to see the extent to which knowledge is socially determined, the extent to which social forces decide what knowledge is relevant and how (and for what purposes) it is to be used. I will attempt to delineate three methodological approaches to social science with a view toward analyzing the linkage between scientific method and ideology or the ideological implications of research. These are: (1) The New Mandarin; (2) The Public Advocate; (3) The Persuasive Neutralist.

The New Mandarin is best characterized by Ithiel de Sola Pool, whose view it is that the social sciences should be devoted to the service of the mandarins of the future because psychology, sociology, systems analysis, and political science

¹⁹David Gelman and Beverly Kempton, "The Trouble With Newspapers: An Interview with Murray Kempton," The Washington Monthly, Vol. 1, No. 3 (April 1969), 26.

provide the knowledge by which "men of power are humanized and civilized." In order to keep the actions of the men of power from being "brutal, stupid, bureaucratic," "they need a way of perceiving the consequences of what they do." To perceive the consequences of public policy, i.e., to describe the facts, is the primary contribution of the empirical social sciences to the uses of American power. This view of the facts is circumscribed by the social and apolitical context in which Pool operates. His "facts" are not neutral facts since the questions asked as well as the answers given are pre-determined by the world of rationality defined by the existing political system. This approach to social science is concerned with outcomes but only as instruments of government policy not goals themselves. As an example of this approach, Pool informs us of what we have learned in the past thirty years of intensive empirical study of contemporary societies by formulating the central issues of order and reform in this way:

In the Congo, in Vietnam, in the Dominican Republic, it is clear that order depends on somehow compelling newly mobilized strata to return to a measure of passivity and defeatism from which they have recently been aroused by the process of modernization. At least temporarily, the maintenance of order requires a lowering of newly acquired aspirations and levels of political activity.²⁰

²⁰Cited in Chomsky, op.cit., p. 36.

The meaning of this analysis for American policy clearly is in accord with counter-revolutionary American policies such as recent pacification programs, counter-insurgency and the like. But the social scientist denies that this sort of analysis is ideological, claiming instead that these studies conform to the scholarly, objective rigor of his discipline. This approach to social science is, in the final analysis, concerned less with truth or objectivity than with efficiency, less with the social reality of progressive social sources than with the social reality of the men of power. Behavioralist objectivity, therefore, unlike the intersubjective approach of Merleau-Ponty, which recognizes the involvement of the theorist in social reality as well as the link between objective conditions and subjective experiences and interpretations--is locked into an ideological paradigm of system maintenance.

Take for example the following proposition by Professor Pool on "restructuring" government as an "empirical" formulation: "I rule out of consideration here a large range of viable political settlements" for restructuring government in South Vietnam, namely, those that involve "the inclusion of the Viet Cong in a coalition government or even the persistence of the Viet Cong as a legal organization in South Vietnam." Such arrangements "are not acceptable" since the only acceptable settlement is one "imposed by the GVN

despite the persisting great political power of the Viet Cong."²¹ While it may be argued, as Pool puts it, that "the only hope for humane government in the future is through the extensive use of the social sciences by government,"²² the precise ideological nature of this new role, despite all claims of objectivity to the contrary, is not to be denied. In effect, intellectual detachment and the disinterested quest for truth--the professed essence of the value-free, neutral social scientist--are replaced by the new elite role of the masters of knowledge,²³ whose knowledge is placed at the disposal of the "benevolent" political interests of the masters of power. Accordingly, social scientists become, in essence, "house-ideologues for those in power."²⁴

The Public Advocate appears to be a more selfless servant of the people, who is concerned primarily with reforming public policy to better the lot of the poor, disfranchised or underdeveloped. His professed mission is to serve the public good rather than the government or the corporation. In response to the plight of the poor and black in America, Daniel P. Moynihan adopts the stance of the Public Advocate.

²¹Ibid., p. 49.

²²Ithiel de Sola Pool, "The Necessity for Social Scientists Doing Research for Governments," Background, 10 (Aug. 1966), 111.

²³Daniel Bell, "Notes on the Post-Industrial Society: Part I," The Public Interest, No. 6 (1967), 24-35.

²⁴Zbigniew Brzezinski, "America in the Technotronic Age," Encounter, Vol. 30 (January, 1968), 16-26.

He decries the failures of the War on Poverty to contend with the "problem."²⁵ His view is that the problem of poverty cannot be solved either by discouraging the rigorous inquiry into the social process that keeps men in poverty (or leads them out of it), or by falling back on the guilt complex of the white society that concludes that "White racism is essentially responsible for the explosive mixture which has been accumulating in our cities since the end of World War II." Rather, for Moynihan, "American social science can do better, and so it ought."²⁶ This requires commitment on the part of the social scientist--the War on Poverty was such a commitment--and an honorable desire to be helpful. Therefore, even though there were many failures in the War on Poverty program, the commitment by social scientists and the government for which they worked was made, and "that commitment stands, and intellectuals, having played a major role in its establishment, now have a special responsibility for both, keeping it alive and on the proper track."²⁷

The Public Advocate uses his social science knowledge to influence public policy, but he is not, so it is claimed,

²⁵Daniel P. Moynihan, Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding (New York: Free Press, 1969).

²⁶Daniel P. Moynihan, "The Professors and the Poor," Commentary, Vol. 46, No. 2 (August, 1968), 28.

²⁷Ibid.

the servant of government since his primary objective is to get public policy to react to unmet social demands...."²⁸ However, the research design, the questions posed, and the general framework of the analysis are circumscribed by the Public Advocate's desire to do something for the poor and black people insofar as that "something" is possible within the known or assumed limits of the existing institutions to respond. For the Public Advocate, "simply to blame the system is...obscurantism" and best left out of consideration. He prefers to limit his research to influencing policy within the system--to make the system work better. The Public Advocate assumes, therefore, the values of the system and its operationality as given; he does not question it. Like the New Mandarin, the Public Advocate assumes a one-dimensional perspective of social reality insofar as he leaves unquestioned the basic values of the system for which he advocates policy. The Public Advocate is committed to change, but only those social changes that are determined by those in power. An obvious case in point is Moynihan's role as agent for the US government, while claiming to do something for the poor and the black. According to Merleau-Ponty, as long as the social scientist or policy scientist assumes the role of "outsider"

²⁸ Lee Rainwater and William Yancey, eds., The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy (Cambridge, M.I.T. Press, 1967), p. 24.

doing something for these people instead of the "insider" doing something with those people, he remains committed to a non-liberatory role of Advocate not for the people, but for the power-brokers.

In the Moynihan Report on the Negro family, "doing something for these people" was revealed in a special research report for the internal use of the government. The report revealed a pattern of instability in the Negro family structure which represented a "tangle of pathology...capable of perpetuating itself without assistance from the white world."²⁹ In addition, Moynihan adduced evidence to show that illegitimacy, crime and juvenile delinquency, drop-out rates and unemployment were "causally" connected to family structure.³⁰ The social scientist has here uncovered a case of deviant social pathology, the cure for which is to change the deviants, not the system. Christopher Jencks criticizes Moynihan's conservative analysis because "the guiding assumption is that social pathology is caused less by basic defects in the social

²⁹ Ibid., p. 42.

³⁰ In a perceptive article, William Ryan criticizes The Moynihan Report for drawing inexact conclusions from weak and insufficient data; encouraging a new form of subtle racism which he calls "savage discovery," i.e., the belief that it is the weaknesses and defects of the Negro himself that account for the present status of inequality between Negro and white; and for interpreting statistical relationships in cause-and-effect terms. See "Savage Discovery: The Moynihan Report," in Ibid., p. 458.

system than by defects in particular individuals and groups which prevent their adjusting to the system."³¹

The major concern of the Public Advocate is not knowledge in itself by the policy relevance of his research findings. When he writes "a polemic which makes use of social science techniques and findings to convince others," it should be clear that he expects that "the social science data he could bring to bear would have a persuasive effect."³² Therefore, the scholarly or "scientific" quality of his research or its political relevance for those he wants to do something for would seem to be of only secondary importance. The Public Advocate is committed primarily to advocating ways by which the existing social institutions can be made to function better. However broad a range of research or policy this may include, it is nonetheless limited to the established parameters of the system, and thus it appears that the Public Advocate always tends to tell the government what it wants to hear, i.e., to constantly re-enforce existing myths and ideologies or create "a new set of myths to justify the status quo."³³ In no way does this qualify the Public Advocate as an objective or value-free social scientist.

³¹"The Moynihan Report," in ibid., p. 443.

³²Ibid.

³³William Ryan, op.cit., p. 465.

According to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological perspective, the Public Advocate operates outside the dialectic of intersubjectivity because his role as advocate for the government puts him in contradiction with his role as advocate for the people. The interrelationship does not hold because the Public Advocate makes choices in favor of one side (the government) over the other. More importantly, the failure of the Public Advocate to recognize the insider's view of reality, of social demand, and policy goals occurs because he is and outside observer, not an inside participant. In both cases, the phenomenological approach of Merleau-Ponty goes beyond these limitations of behavioral policy science. Julius Lester has correctly perceived the social and political function of the Public Advocate when he says, "Bang! Bang! Mr. Moynihan," because

somehow...nothing is true for a white man until a white man says it. Let the black say the same thing and it will not be heard, or, if heard, ignored. Let a white man say it and it becomes truth. It should be obvious why it will be the Moynihans we go after first rather than the southern sheriff.³⁴

The case of the Persuasive Neutralist appears on the surface to be altogether different from the first two types. The New Mandarin and the Public Advocate are ideologues for the existing social system who use their social science know-

³⁴ Look Out, Whitey! Black Power's Gon' Get Your Mama! (New York: Grove Press, 1968), p. 54.

ledge in one form or another to serve these institutions and policies. However, the Persuasive Neutralist is a professional methodologist concerned "strictly" with the techniques and knowledge brought forth by the scientific or "behavioral" revolution in the social sciences. His studies are generally not policy-oriented, though he claims that policy studies may also be "objective"³⁵ and he eschews any sign of ideological intent in his research. The Persuasive Neutralist, not unlike the other types, has a calling, but his is to science not to polemics, dogma or ideology. His main function is to cumulate knowledge about the social world, to describe, understand and interpret reality, not to change it.³⁶

In my view, however, the Persuasive Neutralist is equally subject to the claim of non-objectivity, of ideology and non-sense stated above. The view, for instance, that one's research objective is to describe reality but not to change or criticize it, is, I would argue, fundamentally conservative and will generally tend to re-enforce existing institutions and social patterns. But I think the critique can go further than I have thus far suggested.

First, behavioral social scientists make the basic claim that the world of thought and knowledge is objective and

³⁵Heinz Eulau, The Behavioral Persuasion in Politics (New York: Random House, 1963), pp. 136-137.

³⁶Ibid.

rational. The social scientist so oriented adapts the intellectual posture of the physical scientist whose main function is to observe the phenomena of his chosen sphere of social reality and organize his data in such a way that he will be able to understand, interpret and, hopefully, explain that segment of the world under observation. His work is piecemeal; he theorizes and hypothesizes and later, by employing the techniques of modern technology and science, cumulates data, replicates experiments, amasses evidence for his propositions. In all events, his research is the work of the rational thinker, the "scientist," who is constrained in his social inquiry by the self-imposed rules of the physical sciences to see the world from the outside, as a neutral observer. He is constrained in his view of social reality because for him the world is what "I think" not what "I live through." This world of science is the natural or physical world which reason alone (scientific or conceptual knowledge) can harness; but it is not the world of man and society which is always composed of reason and unreason, preconceptual or common sense knowledge and conceptual knowledge, thought and action, objective and external phenomena as well as subjective and internal phenomena. In short, for the behavioral scientist, "scientific" knowledge can overcome irrationality, contingency and subjectivity. However, the knowledge of behavioral scientists is limited to what William James called "knowledge-about" or thought know-

ledge which he distinguishes from "knowledge by acquaintance" or felt knowledge. To be empirical, according to James and contemporary phenomenologists, requires the distinction and elucidation of these different levels of knowing and meaning construction if the object of inquiry in social science is the social and human word itself. For James, "feelings are the germ and starting point of cognition, thoughts the developed tree,"³⁷ and, therefore, a genuine empiricism "cannot simply construct experience as a logical patterning tailored to the convenience of this or that analysis of what valid propositions require." But "we must inquire into the ways in which logical order can relate to the concretely felt experience."³⁸

Moreover, the claim of objectivity in behavioral social science is not warranted by facts. Since objectivity refers to only external, observable, physical phenomena--the things of the world--it fails to recognize precisely those human and social experiences which also include internal, subjective, and psychical phenomena. What is essential for social science is the recognition that

Human behavior is neither a series of blind reactions to external "stimuli," nor the project of acts which are motivated by the pure

³⁷William James, Principles of Psychology, Vol. 1, p. 227.

³⁸Eugene T. Gendlin, Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning (Glencoe: Free Press, 1962), pp. 9 and 139.

ideas of disembodied, wordless mind. It is neither exclusively subjective nor exclusively objective, but a dialectical interchange between man and the world, which cannot be adequately expressed in traditional causal terms.³⁹

To put it in other words, human behavior and human knowledge are neither exclusively nonsensical or irrational nor exclusively sensical or rational. The quest for exclusivity from either side has no scientific foundation in regard to men and society. To the contrary, behavioral science is primarily concerned with theory construction and scientific testability rather than social tenability. Models tend to be viewed as theories (provable or disprovable cause-effect propositions) which purport to forecast practical results, i.e. game theory or the domino theory.⁴⁰ Replicability of experiments or uniformity of data are given the status of causal explanation. In contrast, Max Weber asserts that

...If adequacy in respect to meaning is lacking, then no matter how high the degree of uniformity and how precisely its probability can be numerically determined, it is still an incomprehensible statistical probability, whether dealing with overt or subjective processes.⁴¹

In order to avoid the objectivism and intellectualism of science, one must recognize this dependence of conceptuali-

³⁹"Forward," in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, SE, pp. xv-xvi.

⁴⁰Wormuth, op.cit., p. 816.

⁴¹The Theory of Social and Economic Organization (New York: Free Press), p. 88.

zation on the preconceptual life-world, which Husserl called the Lebenswelt, because:

The whole universe of science is built upon the world as directly experienced, and if we want to subject science itself to rigorous scrutiny and arrive at a precise assessment of its meaning and scope, we must begin by reawakening the basic experience of the world of which science is the second-order expression....To return to things themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge speaks, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language, as is geography in relation to the countryside in which we have learned beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is.⁴²

In so far as behavioral scientists ignore this social "reality," in so far as they fail to distinguish scientific facts or natural reality from world facts or social reality, their research tends to objectify or reify human and social meanings. There can be no doubt that behavioral social science has amassed "knowledge-about," but the capacity for this knowledge to reconcile is theoretical understanding of social problems with the experienced reality of, say, the black power advocates, and direct technical knowledge toward the quest for free, creative social activity and responsive social institutions is today, indeed, questionable.

Second, it is becoming more evident with recent trends in the uses of technical and social science knowledge by large-scale institutions that science and technology are not necessarily progressive, as it was once thought. As John McDermott

⁴²pp, pp. viii, ix.

has recently noted:

Segments of knowledge still belong to technical specialists and pieces of knowledge to the well educated, but only the very largest organizations are able to integrate these proliferating segments and pieces into systems of productive, effective or, more likely, profitable information. That is the meaning of technological progress: the systematic application of new knowledge to practical purposes. And it dictates a continual increase in the size, wealth and managerial capacity of the organizations which seek thus to apply knowledge. Corporations, government agencies, universities and foundations have been quick to respond.⁴³

In the face of this technological explosion and increasing institutionalization and professionalization of knowledge, to claim a neutral or "objective" role for social science is clearly to fall under the onus of what Merleau-Ponty called "nonsense." Briefly put, the full thrust of reason and knowledge is being turned against itself--against truth and humanity--in favor of the dominant institutions and power-centers which are now tending toward the manipulation, rather than the liberation of mankind, especially its underclasses. In short, the persuasive Neutralist who inveighs against the ideologies and utopias that want to change the world in favor of a scientific or "objective" description or interpretation of social reality turns objective knowledge upside down: a fundamentally a-political posture becomes highly political or ideological insofar as that knowledge serves those institutions

⁴³"Knowledge is Power," The Nation, April 14, 1969, p. 458.

and power interests whether these be pacification programs in South Vietnam or the molding of dangerous energies of black youth into established "legitimate" channels in American society.⁴⁴ To put it another way, the meaning and social significance of rational inquiry is inverted--sense is turned into nonsense. (From this perspective it could be argued that the Wallaceites and New Left extremists and other so-called social deviants have correctly perceived the insane world of reason from which they rebel.)

The serious limitations of even the most sophisticated methods and techniques of social science was underscored in a recent report by the Center for the Study of Conflict Resolution at the University of Michigan which noted that, after eleven years of research using the most proficient methods and techniques they had gotten no closer to resolving conflict in the world or explaining the causes of violence. In fact, the report suggested, the situation requires all conceivable efforts to search for radically new methods of inquiry.

Finally, in terms of the ideological implications of social science, the position taken by some behavioral scientists that the recognition and clarification of their own biases will be placed in perspective and then to get on with the pursuit of science is rightly attacked by Heinz Eulau, a

⁴⁴Elinor Graham, "The Politics of Poverty," in M. Gettleman and D. Hermelstein, eds., The Great Society Reader (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 230.

well known behavioralist.⁴⁵ Eulau's view is that one's science is either value-free or it is not. It "is a problem of fact," exhorts Eulau," that can be answered only through empirical research into the nature of science as a form of human activity."⁴⁶ The only quibble I have with Eulau, whose view is representative of most behavioral thought, is the assumption about the value-free study of politics he makes. In reference to policy science, Eulau writes: "The policy science approach does not assume that a value-free scientific study of politics is impossible because men pursue values through politics. Indeed, it sharply distinguishes between propositions of fact that are believed to be subject to scientific-empirical inquiry, and propositions of value for which empirical science has as yet no answer."⁴⁷ Accordingly, the policy scientist can avoid violating the canons of scientific method by recognizing the existence of both facts and values and keeping a subtle balance of distance between them. Therefore, Eulau concludes, this approach "does not deny that scientific research on propositions of fact cannot serve policy objectives; indeed, it asserts that political science, as all science, should be put in the service of whatever goals men pursue

⁴⁵Eulau, op.cit., p. 136.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 135.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 136.

in politics."⁴⁸ But the keynote of Eulau's position gives a telling commentary on all three approaches when he asserts that science is still value-free even if "there is nothing in his science that prevents its being used for ends of which he disapproves."⁴⁹

Despite his claims of value-neutrality, Heinz Eulau's conclusions could not be more insightful: social science is always used by societies which generally determine what knowledge will be used and how knowledge will be used. The purity of knowledge is meaningless as long as that knowledge is used by social institutions for certain prescribed purposes. Hence, social knowledge, whether it be scientific or not, has a value for that society and plays a function which can most often be called ideological. Alas, we have come full circle back from the Persuasive Neutralist to the New Mandarin and Public Advocate. The differences could not have been very significant from the start.

In conclusion, the limitations of behavioral political science as seen through the phenomenological critique have now been clearly established. The case study analysis employed in this chapter not only sheds new light on the limitations of behavioral method and its ideological predisposition

⁴⁸Eulau, op.cit., pp. 136-137.

⁴⁹Ibid.

but also lays the foundation for moving beyond criticism to a new political science both in terms of methodology and political perspective.

The overriding criterion of this critique is that behavioral methodology is inextricably linked to a narrow-range, complaisant, and conservative ideological perspective. Political scientists employ mathematical models, data collection and other techniques adapted from natural science methods and use these techniques and skills, by and large, in the service of America's power structure. The phenomenological critique demonstrates the integral development of these two features of American political science. In a word, the methods adopted by political science are not value-free while the choices of policy objectives are not accidental.

Chapter VI

CONCLUSION

The philosopher's road may be hard, but we can at least be sure that each step points a way for those to come. In politics, one has the oppressive sensation of blazing a trail which must be endlessly reopened.¹

This thesis is devoted to the phenomenological marxism of Merleau-Ponty in order to develop a comprehensive methodological and political critique of behavioral political science and so as to develop the foundations for an alternative social theory.

The first task has been critique. This is the overriding need in an age in which hardened ideologies and static political attitudes are supported and reinforced by social science knowledge, techniques and methods. As long as behaviorist methodology and the professional status of social science intellectuals serves American imperialism at home and abroad, the task of critical or radical intellectuals will continue to be to uncover the myths of scientific omniscience and political benevolence treated in this thesis. This thesis has demonstrated that the methodological demands of behavioral

¹Signs, p. 3.

social science are inextricably tied to the uses of social knowledge: (social) science and technology, social theory and political practice (policy-making) have been shown to be welded together by historical tradition as well as methodologically and ideologically.

Perhaps there is nothing new about the masters of knowledge serving the masters of power and wealth. However, the purpose of the critique in this thesis is based on the view that social scientists need to continue to strengthen the critical theory of society as a way toward establishing the intellectual validity of their alternative approaches with a view toward relating theory to practice. In other words, the significance of the critique of behavioralism must go beyond criticism toward a continually renewed quest for the roots of social theory which can serve the interests of those most in need of social change. Thus, this author interprets the phenomenological marxism of Merleau-Ponty neither as a value-free social science nor as merely a political ideology for the new movements for social change in this country. Rather, the interpretation of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological marxism and its relevance for social theory and political action rests on the link between methodology and ideology, that is, a committed social theory which is addressed to those historical efforts to attain progressive, liberatory political action.

The criticism of behavioralism does not rest solely on

the fact that this approach to social science fails to maintain value neutrality. Rather, the critique is twofold: first, that behavioralism claims to represent something which it implicitly or explicitly rejects both in terms of methodological principles and political ideology and advisory policy-making--value neutrality; and second, that behavioralism is, therefore, an illusory methodology in support of non-progressive, non-liberatory politics. The phenomenological marxism of Merleau-Ponty begins with a recognition of the interrelationship between theory and practice because this approach asks different questions about social reality and upholds different objectives.

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological marxism offers a new starting point for theoretical investigations into social knowledge and social reality which may have farreaching relevance for those new movements for social change. First, the methodological consideration of multiple levels of reality in Merleau-Ponty's theory of intersubjectivity is in sharp contrast to behavioralist objectivism, and establishes the basis for a radical perspective of theory and action which recognizes the historical interrelationships between subject and object, scientific knowledge and common sense knowledge, consciousness and social structure. Following this perspective, social theory is open, though not exclusively, to "scientific" knowledge or technical know-how for the purposes

of understanding and explaining social reality. Social theory is open, moreover, to the everyday common sense experiences, needs, interests of ordinary people because it treats their perceptions as an equally valid aspect of the world of social knowledge and consequently as an integral part of social reality. This approach to theory is most conducive to a valid response to social problems because it treats these problems, as they are perceived and experienced by those most affected, as real.

Second, Merleau-Ponty's opposition to dogma is a welcome contrast to both the right-wing rationalism of behavioralism and the left-wing rationalism of much of communist ideology. He attacks both extremes and begins the process of revising Marx along the lines of a "dialectics of ambiguity" or an existentialist dialectics which is open-ended in terms of historical necessity and historical contingency. Merleau-Ponty believes that intellectuals must be politically committed, and that social theory loses much of its significance removed from the world of politics. At the same time, however, Merleau-Ponty falls short of total commitment, coming up on the side of contingency over necessity insofar as he remains critical of the historical possibilities for revolution. This approach has its weaknesses in that it remains hesitant about social movements and political organization where choice and commitment is called for. But it also has its strengths since it questions even the most impressive

theories and political movements while remaining open to consideration to possible acceptance of every effort to bring about the kind of social transformation which will make human intersubjectivity and true human freedom possible.

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