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MERLEAU-PONTY'S CRITIQUE OF MARXIST SCIENTISM

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In the immediate postwar period of hardening East-West relations, Merleau-Ponty began to re-think Marxism from a phenomenological perspective. In *Humanism and Terror*, he studied the Soviet Trials, in order to understand from the standpoint of the revolutionaries their notions of individual and collective responsibility. He also opened up the larger study followed in *Adventures of the Dialectic* in which Marxist scientism is criticized in terms of a Leninist and Weberian conception of the philosophy of history. In the following essay, these arguments are set out descriptively, or as nearly as possible in Merleau-Ponty's own terms. I have, of course, organized the arguments and made explanatory comments where necessary. Merleau-Ponty did not write in the discursive style favoured by the social sciences. This reflects the difference between hermeneutical and causal analysis. Rather than reduce Merleau-Ponty's thought to a mode of discourse of which he was extremely critical, not only on epistemological grounds, but also because of its attempt to reduce the autonomy of language and style, I have chosen to preface the argument with some analytic reading rules that I believe underlie its construction. I believe that a discussion over the responsibility of reading and writing would not be alien to Merleau-Ponty's thought and would also contribute to the critique of literary scientism.

Analytic Reconstruction of the Following Argument

Merleau-Ponty's argument relies upon the history of Marxism, while at the same time claiming that Marxism confers upon history a meaning without which history would be sheer violence. *Humanism and Terror* announces in its very title the twin birth of man and violence. In *The Rebel* Camus has argued that the birth of man is the beginning of endless violence. When Merleau-Ponty makes the *Adventures of the Dialectic* his topic, he has again to find a thread to history, avoiding the extremes of premature closure or of senseless ups and downs. It may be said that, after all, both *Humanism and Terror* and

Adventures of the Dialectic are topical works outside of the interests of political philosophy. But then we have surrendered the world to violence in order to preserve the harmony of history. Alternatively, we may risk the face of philosophy in search of truths that will be found to be partial, and possibly even destructive, when held in competition with other values and beliefs. Merleau-Ponty is a valuable thinker because he refused to separate politics and philosophy. He could do this because as a philosopher he was not wedded to the ideal of absolute knowledge, and because in politics he was just as opposed to historical fatalism as to senseless violence. Merleau-Ponty struggled to comprehend his times. He was not withdrawn. Nor did he surrender himself to aesthetic revulsion. He claimed no privileged theory of action, and so he avoided sloganizing the issues of rethinking Marxism at a time when positions were hardening in the East and West.

I want now to formulate the narrative that follows in the form of a number of rules of procedure which I believe furnish an analytic reconstruction of the arguments of Marxist humanism. These are the rules that I believe can be abstracted from the history of rethinking Marx in terms of Hegel, in order to provide a critique of Marxist scientism. By the same token, these rules may be interpreted as rules for anyone participating in the community of argument since Lenin read Marx in the light of Hegel. We may then think of the Marxist tradition as a set of rival reading practices that have to be understood as the very issues of Marxist politics, and not simply as glosses upon events intelligible apart from such practices. I consider this the basic postulate of Marxist humanism. It is challenged by Marxist scientism, such as that of Althusser, inasmuch as the latter espouses a conception of historical events whose life would be independent of the hermeneutical continuity of rival interpretations.

I Thus, in the first place, we must subject our own discussion of Marxism to the *humanist rule* that the nature of Marxism is not given to Marxists as the simple negation of bourgeois liberalism and capitalism. This is the Marxism of Commissars. It lacks its own voice. In other words, Marxism has no monopoly over criticism. Humanist Marxism must keep itself in question and it can only do this by means of a lively recognition of the limitations facing both socialist and liberal discourse.

II We may then treat the first rule as a procedure for reconstructing the history of Marxist thought since Marx himself read Hegel, through Lenin, into the Hegelian Marxism of Lukács and Kojève (we should also include Korsch who is closer to Kant) as the work of eliciting the Hegelian dialectic of recognition as:

(a) an ideal telos of history
(b) a method of hermeneutical analysis

III The test of these rules is offered in Merleau-Ponty's treatment of violence. We cannot consider violence as limited to either communism or capitalism, nor can we be sure that proletarian violence is only a temporary revolutionary expedient. For where the Party intervenes to bring the proletariat into history, there is always the risk that the Party will subject the proletariat to its own rule.

(a1) history and politics are made by men;
(a2) men themselves must be made human in the objective course of history and politics;
(a3) let us call the Party the action of bringing together (a1) and (a2) and the tension between (a1) and (a2) the field of justice and violence.

Thus, a phenomenological approach to the Soviet Trials will proceed hermeneutically, so as to avoid false antitheses in the construction of the member's *praxis* in trying to resolve the double commitment to historical inevitability and political responsibility.

(b1) The Trials are not to be treated *a priori* as illegal or corrupt justice;
(b2) nor can we justify collectivization *ex post facto*;
(b3) we must let stand member's rival readings of the primacy of economic and political decisions.

IV In light of the preceding rules we are necessarily engaged in a double task.

(a) the critique of Marxist scientism
(b) a hermeneutic of history and politics

V We may treat both tasks as the elicitation of an historical and political norm of *intersubjectivity*, specifically, the question is, How are free men to be

led to freedom? Marxist humanism is thus (broadly conceived) a *pedagogical problem*. Consequently, all future Marxist discussion should contribute to the development of socialist education and to an understanding of the relationship between truth and justice.

Waiting For Marx

It is impossible to think of modern political history apart from the Russian revolution. At the same time, it is hard not to be ambivalent towards the history and politics of Marxism itself. In the days before Communism ruled a major part of the world, one could believe that Communism would shunt all forms of political and economic exploitation into the siding of pre-history. In those days Marxism was emancipatory knowledge wonderfully scornful of the "iron laws" of history and economics. This is not to say that Marxist critique failed to recognize the weight of historical structures. Indeed, we owe Marx much of the credit for a structuralist analysis of historical development. By the same token, there has always been an uncertain relation between Marxist analysis of the determinism of historical structures and its prophecy of a proletarian fulfillment of historical law. Prior to the actual experience of the Revolution, it was easy enough to think of it as a temporary, albeit violent, intervention on the side of justice against a moribund but destructive ruling class. But the revolution is itself an institution and it soon acquires a history of its own, leaders and enemies, priorities and policies that could not be foreseen. In view of these complexities, Communist practice inevitably hardened and Marxism soon became the intellectual property of the Party abandoning the education of the proletariat in favor of slogans and dogma. This is the context of what we call Marxist *scientism*[1]. That is to say, once Marxism became Party knowledge and a tool for the industrialization of Soviet society, Marxism identified with economic determinism and the values of scientific naturalism at the expense of its own radical humanism. This is variously described as the difference between Communism and Marxism, the difference between theory and practice, or the difference between the early, Hegelianized Marx and the later, scientific Marx.[2]

Today socialism and capitalism are equally in question insofar as the same ideology of technological domination underlies their apparently opposed political and ideological systems. We can no longer assume that Marxism challenges capitalism and justifies the sufferings of revolution unless we can be sure that Marxism possesses the philosophical resources for rethinking the logic of technical rationality and the Party practices that have forced this logic upon the proletariat in the name of the Revolution. The task we are faced with is a reflection upon the very *logos* of western rationality. It is only against this broad

background that we can understand the historically specific goals and ambitions of western Marxism. In particular, it is in this way that we can best understand the phenomenon of recent attempts to rethink Marxism in terms of Hegelian phenomenology in order to liberate Marxist praxis from the limitations of positivist knowledge.[3] To rethink Marxism, however, means that we put it in abeyance as the only "other" answer that we have to the uncertainties of our times. In other words, it means that we need to examine the categories of Marxist thought such as man, nature, history, party and revolution, in order to recover a proper sense of their dialectical relations so that they are not organized around a simple logic of domination. What this will involve is a recovery of the relation between the already meaningful world of everyday life and the specific practices of science, economics and politics through which we attempt to construct a socialist society mindful of the historical risks and responsibilities of such a project. In short, by placing Marxism in abeyance while we rethink the meaning of socialism we educate ourselves into a permanently critical attitude towards the Party and History as guarantors of socialist rationality and freedom.

Merleau-Ponty's critique of Marxist scientism cannot be well understood unless we situate it in the intellectual history of France and the post World War II rejection of Communism by Leftist intellectuals who at the same time turned to the revival of Marxism.[4] This renaissance of Marxist thinking in part reflected the task of catching up with Central European thought — Korsch and Lukács — as well as with German phenomenology — Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger, not to mention Weber and Freud. The task was to separate the radical humanist philosophy of Marx from the Engels-Lenin orthodoxy of positivism and scientism.[5] In practice this meant reading Hegel anew and on this basis interpreting Marx's early writings. Merleau-Ponty was among many like Sartre and Hyppolite[6] who listened to Alexandre Kojève's lectures[7] on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*. It was not until the mid-1950's that the rift between Communism and Marxism — a difficult distinction for outsiders, let alone insiders — became wide open. Apart from other broken friendships, the friendships of Merleau-Ponty and Sartre and of Sartre and Camus were destroyed in the wake of *Humanism and Terror, Adventures of the Dialectic* and Camus's *The Rebel*.[8] Later, in his *Critique de la raison dialectique*, Sartre attempted to learn from this the "lesson of history", as he himself puts it, in a massive effort to construct an adequate Marxist history and sociology.

It is much easier for us thirty-two years after World War II to consider capitalism and socialism as subcultures of industrialism rather than as mortal antagonists. But in 1945 it was possible to hope that Communism was the solution to the capitalist syndrome of war and depression. For Leftist intellectuals in Europe the Soviet war effort and the Communist resistance promised a renewal of life once peace came. But peace never came, except as what we call the Cold War. In such an atmosphere, intellectual attitudes were forced to harden.

Capitalists and socialists increasingly blamed each other for all the violence and oppression in the world. The price of loyalty either to socialism or capitalism became a blind and uncritical faith.

The argument of *Humanism and Terror* is especially difficult to understand if the radical alternative forced upon French politics by the Cold War split between America and the Soviet Union is accepted without question. In 1947 there was still a chance, at least in mind of a non-Communist Leftist intellectual like Merleau-Ponty, that France and Europe would not have to become a satellite either to America or the Soviet Union. The hopes of the Resistance for immediate revolutionary change after the war had withered away in the tripartist tangles of the Communists, Socialists, and Christian Democrats. In March 1947, the Truman doctrine was initiated and in April the Big Four discussions on Germany failed. The introduction of the Marshall Plan in June of the same year, condemned by Molotov's walkout on the Paris Conference in July, hastened the breakdown of tripartism. Suspicion of the anti-Soviet implications of the Marshall Plan caused many of the Left to look towards a neutralist position for Europe, but made them uncertain whether to build this position around the Socialist Party, which had failed so far to take any independent line, or the Communist Party, which could be expected to follow a Soviet line. But the drift was towards a pro-Western, anti-Soviet European integration led by the center and right elements of the French Third Force, including the Gaullists. Within two years, the formation of the Brussels Treaty Organization, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and the Soviet Cominform brought down the iron curtain of which Winston Churchill had spoken in his Fulton Speech in March of 1946.

The intellectual French Left was in an impossible situation which no combination of Marxism or existentialism seemed capable of remedying. French capitalism was bad, but American capitalism was even more anathema to the Left, if only because it was in the rudest of health internationally, though perhaps not at home. At the same time, French socialism was anything but independent and its chances looked no better with Communist help. In such a situation it was impossible to be an anti-Communist if this meant being pro-American, witnessing the Americanization of Europe, and foreswearing the Communists who had fought bravely in the Resistance. On the other hand, it was not possible to be a Communist if this meant being blind to the hardening of the Soviet regime and becoming a witness to the Communist brand of imperialism which broke so many Marxist minds. It is not surprising that many on the Left as well as the Right were unable to bear such ambiguity and therefore welcomed any sign to show clearly which side to support, even if it meant a "conversion" to the most extreme left and right positions.

I want to argue that in *Humanism and Terror*[9] Merleau-Ponty does more than illustrate the fateful connection between revolution and responsibility as it

appears in the drama of the Moscow Trials. I think it can be shown that Merleau-Ponty develops a theory of the relations between political action, truth and responsibility which is the proper basis for understanding his approach to the problem of the relation between socialist humanism and revolutionary terror. *Humanism and Terror* was prompted by Koestler's dramatization of the Moscow Trials in *Darkness at Noon*. Merleau-Ponty's reply to Koestler's novel takes the form of an essay in which he develops a phenomenology of revolutionary action and responsibility in order to transcend Koestler's confrontation of the Yogi and the Commissar. The argument depends upon a philosophy of history and truth which draws upon Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception, embodiment and intersubjectivity. Here I shall restrict myself to the political arguments without entering into the structure of Merleau-Ponty's philosophical thought which in any case is better revealed in a certain style of argument rather than through any system.[10]

> Politics, whether of understanding or of reason, oscillates between the world of reality and that of values, between individual judgment and common action, between the present and the future. Even if one thinks, as Marx did, that these poles are united in a historical factor — the proletariat — which is at one and the same time power and value, yet, as there may well be disagreement on the manner of making the proletariat enter history and take possession of it, *Marxist politicis is, just like all the others, undemonstrable*. The difference is that Marxist politics understands this and that it has, more than any other politics, explored the labyrinth.[11]

It is typical of Merleau-Ponty to speak factually whereas he is addressing an ideal that his own work brings to reality. It needed Merleau-Ponty among others to take Marxist thinkers through the labyrinth of politics for them to understand the true nature of political trial and error. The philosopher of ambiguity,[12] as Merleau-Ponty has been called, prefers to raise questions rather than offer answers. This is not because he is nerveless but precisely because he wishes to bring to life the historical presumptions of Marxist thought. It is not literally the case that Marxists consider their knowledge undemonstrable. From the *Communist Manifesto* to the Russian Revolution there is a fairly straight line — at least doctrinally. But in fact such a line represents a colossal abstraction from the doctrinal debates and historical contingencies that shaped these debates and in turn were interpreted through them. Merleau-Ponty believed it

was possible to discern in the terrible reality of the Moscow Trials the places where the life of Marxist thought was larger than the simplistic moral antithesis of the Yogi and the Commissar. Of course, Merleau-Ponty's purpose is easily misunderstood. Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* is certainly true to Soviet practice from the time of the Trials to the later revelations in the Cominform Campaign against Tito, the Rajk-Kosov trials, the Soviet labor camps and mental hospitals. Like many on the Left, Merleau-Ponty himself had to open his eyes to Communist practice. Yet at the same time he begins to rethink Marxist philosophy of history and politics along the lines that have led to a renaissance of Marxist-Hegelian thought while only the most blind could have held on to the romance with Soviet institutions.

In *Humanism and Terror* Merleau-Ponty is concerned with revolution as the genesis of political community and with the dilemma of violence which in the name of fraternity becomes self-consumptive. This is the moral dilemma to which the Yogi responds by spiritualizing political action and which the Commissar handles by objectivizing his conduct in the name of historical forces. These alternatives, as posed by Koestler, are rejected by Merleau-Ponty on the grounds that they lose the essential ambivalence of political action and revolutionary responsibility. The science and practice of history never coincide. Because of this contingency, political action is always the decision of a future which is not determined uniquely by the facts of the situation. Thus there enters into political conduct the need to acknowledge responsibility and the fundamental terror we experience for the consequences of our own decisions as well as for the effects of other men's actions upon ourselves.

> We do not have a choice between purity and violence but between different kinds of violence. Inasmuch as we are incarnate beings, violence is our lot. There is no persuasion even without seduction, or in the final 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. This intrusion is not only a fact of political life, it also happens in private life. In love, in affection, or in friendship we do not encounter face to face "consciousness" whose absolute individuality we could respect at every moment, but beings qualified as "my son", "my wife", "my friend" whom we carry along with us into common projects where they receive (like ourselves)

> a definite role with specific rights and duties. So, in collective history the spiritual atoms trail their historical role and are tied to one another by the threads of their actions. What is more, they are blended with the totality of actions, whether or not deliberate, which they exert upon others and the world so that there does not exist a plurality of subjects but an intersubjectivity and that is why there exists a *common measure* of the evil inflicted upon certain people and of the good gotten out of it by others.[13]

Yet Merleau-Ponty refuses to draw the sceptical conclusion that violence and conflict derive from the essentially anti-social nature of the human passions. In his essay on Montaigne[14] which allows us to anticipate here his differences with Sartre, he interprets Montaigne's scepticism in terms of the paradox of embodied consciousness, namely, to be constantly involved in the world through perception, politics or love and yet always at a distance from it, without which we could know nothing of it. The sceptic only withdraws from the world, its passions and follies, in order to find himself at grips with the world having, as it were, merely slackened the intentional ties between himself and the world in order to comprehend the paradox of his being-in-the-world. Scepticism with regard to the passions only deprives them of value if we assume a total, Sartrean self-possession, whereas, we are never wholly ourselves, Merleau-Ponty would say, but always interested in the world through the passions which we are. Scepticism and misanthropy, whatever the appearances, have no place in Marxist politics for the reason that the essential ambivalence of politics is that its violence derives from what is most valuable in men — the ideas of truth and justice which each intends for all because men do not live side by side like pebbles but each in all.

Marxism does not invent the problem of violence, as Koestler would suggest, except in the sense that it assumes and attempts to control the violence which bourgeois society tolerates in the fatalities of race, war, domestic and colonial poverty. The Marxist revolutionary is faced only with a choice between different kinds of violence and not with the choice to forego violence. The question which the revolutionary poses is not whether any one will be hurt but whether the act of violence leads to a future state of society in which humanist values have been translated into a common style of life expressed as much in low levels of infant mortality as in solipsistic, philosophical and literary speculation. If consciousness were a lonely and isolated phenomenon, as it is pictured in the individualist tradition of philosophy and the social sciences, and above all in Sartre, then the Yogi's horror at a single death is enough to condemn a whole regime regardless of its humanist or socialist aims. But this is an assumption

which Marxist-Hegelianism challenges. We never exist even in splendid philosophical isolation let alone social isolation. We exist through one another, in specific situations mediated by specific social relations in which we encroach upon others and are committed by others so that our intentions are rarely entirely our own any more than their results. In these exchanges we necessarily prevail upon one another and one generation necessarily commits the future.[15]

The Marxist revolutionary starts from the evident truth of the embodied values of men and of the evil of human suffering. Only later does he learn that in the course of building the economic foundations of a socialist society he has to make decisions which subject individuals to forms of violence upon which the future of the revolution may depend. Marxism does not create this dilemma; it merely expresses it. Koestler, on the other hand, poses the problem in such a way as to miss the essential ambivalence of the subjective and objective options of the Yogi and the Commissar. The values of the Yogi are not simply the reverse of those of the Commissar because each experiences an internal reversal of the subjective and objective values whenever either is assumed as an absolute end. It is for this reason that Commissar Rubashov once imprisoned experiences the value of the self in the depths of its inner life where it opens up to the White Guard in the next cell as someone to whom one can speak. The tapping on the prison walls is the primordial institution of human communication for whose sake Rubashov had set out on his revolutionary career.

In the debate over the alternatives of industrialization and collectivization there were facts to support the various arguments of Stalin, Bukharin and Trotsky. But their divergences arose within the very Marxian conception of history which they all shared. Each regarded history as a reality made through action in line with yet altering the shape of social forces, just as a landscape is progressively revealed with each step we take through it.

> History is terror because we have to move into it not by any straight line that is always easy to trace but by taking our bearings at every moment in a general situation which is changing, like a traveller who pushes into a changing countryside continuously altered by his own advance, where what looked like an obstacle becomes an opening and where the shortest path turns out the longest.[16]

But the leaders of a revolution are not on a casual stroll. They walk on the wild side and must accept responsibility for the path they choose and to be judged by it as soon as they open it up. For this reason Merleau-Ponty argued that the Moscow Trials have to be understood in terms of the Marxist philosophy of

history in which history is a drama open towards the future in such a way that the significance of the action at any point of time is never unequivocal and can only be established from the futurist orientation of those in power. The Trials therefore never go beyond the level of a "ceremony of language" in which the meaning of "terrorism", "wrecking", "espionage", "defeatism", "responsibility" and "confession" has to be sensed entirely in the verbal exchanges and not through reference to an external ground of verificiation.

The Trials reveal the form and style of the Marxist revolutionary. The revolutionary judges what exists in terms of what is to come; he regards the future as more vital than the present to which it owes its birth. From this perspective there can be no purely subjective honor; we are what we are for others and our relation to them. So often in the Court Proceedings the "capitulators" while presenting themselves in the light of enemies of the Party and the masses at the same time hint at the discrepancies between the subjective and objective aspects of their careers. Their statements are to be understood not as formulations of the facts alleged in them except reflectively and by means of certain rules of translation. Consider the following exchange between Vyshinsky and Bukharin:

Vyshinsky: Tell me, did Tomsky link up the perpetration of a hostile act against Gorky with the question of the overthrow of the Soviet government?

Bukharin: In essence he did.

Vyshinsky: In essence he did?

Bukharin: Yes, I have answered.

Vyshinsky: I am interested in the essence.

Bukharin: But you are asking concretely . . .

Vyshinsky: Did your talk with Tomsky provide reason to believe that the question of a hostile act against Alexei Maximovich Gorky was being linked up with the task of overthrowing the Stalin leadership?

Bukharin: Yes, in essence this could be said.

Vyshinsky: Consequently, you knew that some hostile act against Gorky was under consideration?

Bukharin: Yes.

Vyshinsky: And what hostile act in your opinion was referred to?

Bukharin: I gave no thought to the matter at all at that time and I had no idea . . .

Vyshinsky: Tell us what you did think.

Bukharin: I hardly thought at all.

Vyshinsky: But was it not a serious matter? The conversation was about what?

Bukharin: Permit me to explain in a few words. Now, *post factum*, now, during the investigation, I can say . . .

Vyshinsky: Not during the investigation but during your conversation with Tomsky.

Bukharin: But this was only a fleeting conversation, a conversation which took place during a meeting of the Political Bureau and lasted only a few seconds.

Vyshinsky: I am not interested in how long this conversation lasted; you could have spoken to Tomsky for a whole hour somewhere in a corner, therefore your arguments are of no importance to me. What is important to me are the facts, and these I want to establish.[17]

It is not possible to understand these verbal plays apart from the Hegelian-Marxist expressions of the hypostases through which the logic of social forces reveals the essence of a situation or fact and its relevance for revolutionary action.[18] They will otherwise only seem to be the result of a corrupt legal process and as such the pure expression of Soviet terror. If *Humanism and Terror* were merely engaged in an *ex post facto* justification of Stalinism then Merleau-Ponty would simply have been doing bad historiography. But he understood himself to be involved in trying to comprehend Stalinism *ex ante* or from the political agent's standpoint, in other words, in the subjective terms of a Marxist philosophy of history and not just a Stalinist rewrite.

Responsible History

It is, then, Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of the Marxist philosophy of history that must concern us. His method of presentation in this case, as elsewhere, involves the familiar alternatives of determinism and voluntarism. As a complete alternative, determinism is incompatible with the need for political action, though it may be extremely effective in the rhetoric of politics to be able to reassure one's comrades that history is on their side; and similarly, a voluntarism that does not take into account the social preconditions of revolution is likely to waste itself in abortive action. Political reflection and political action occur in a milieu or interworld which is essentially ambiguous because the facts of the situation can never be totalized and yet we are obliged to act upon our estimation of them. Because of the double contingency of the openness of the future and the partiality of human decision, political divergences, deception and violence are irreducible historical phenomena, accepted as such by all revolutionaries.

> There is no history where the course of events is a series of episodes without unity, or where it is a struggle already decided in the heaven of ideas. History is where there is a logic *within* contingence, a reason *within* unreason, where there is a historical perception which, like perception in general, leaves in the background what cannot enter the foreground but seizes the lines of force as they are generated and actively leads their traces to a conclusion. This analogy should not be interpreted as a shameful organicism or finalism, but as a reference to the fact that all symbolic systems — perception, language, history — only become what they were although in order to do so they need to be taken up into human initiative.[19]

Marxism is not a spectacle secure from its own intervention in our common history. Marxists need a philosophy of history because human history is neither open in an arbitrary way nor so closed that we are relieved of the responsibility of reading its signs and implementing our own chances. The future is not stillborn in the present nor does the past lie unalterably upon the present. Between the past and the future there is the presence of ourselves which is the chance we have of testing our limits. In the human world men cannot be the object of their own practice except where oppression rules — that is to say, where some men subject others to the rule of things. Yet men need leaders as much as leaders need men. Thus there arises for Marxism the dreadful problem, once men are determined to be free, of how it is free men are to be led along the path of freedom. For freedom is not the absence of limits which would make knowledge and leadership unnecessary. Freedom is only possible in the real world of limits and situated possibilities which require the institution of thoughtful and responsible leadership.[20]

In confronting the problematic of freedom and truth, Merleau-Ponty reflected upon man's options in terms of Max Weber's response to the historical task of understanding. He saw in Weber one who tried to live responsibly in the face of conflicting demands of knowledge and action. This was possible, in the first place, because Weber understood that history is not the passive material of historiography any more than the practice of historiography is itself free of historical interests and values. There is no neutral material of history. History is not a spectacle for us because it is our own living, our own violence and our own beliefs. Why then are revolutionary politics not an utterly cynical resort to violence and nothing but a sceptical appeal to justice and truth? For the very reason, says Merleau-Ponty, that no ones lives history from a

purely pragmatic standpoint, not even he who claims to do so. Scepticism is a conclusion which could only be reached if one were to draw — as does Sartre — a radical distinction between political knowledge and political action. But allowing that we only experience things and the future according to a probable connection does not mean that the world lacks a certain style or physiognomy for us. We live in terms of subjective certainties which we intend as practical and universal typifications that are in no way illusory unless we posit some apodictic certainty outside the grounds of human experience. We do not experience uncertainty at the core of our being. The center of our experience is a common world in which we make appraisals, enlist support and seek to convince sceptics and opponents, never doubting the fundamental permutation of subjective and objective evidence.[21]

If we accept the Marxist view that there is meaning in history as in the rest of our lives, then it follows that Marxist politics are based upon an objective analysis of the main trends in history and not simply on the will of the Communist Party. In other words there is a materialist foundation to Marxist politics. At the same time, the trends in history do not lead necessarily to a socialist society. History is made through human action and political choices which are never perfectly informed and thus there is always a contingent factor in history. It is necessary to avoid construing these materialist and ideological factors too crudely. Marxian materialism is not the simple notion that human history consists in the production of wealth; it is the project of creating a human environment which reflects the historical development of human sensibility. Similarly, the Marxist claim that ideological systems are related to economic factors is not a simple reductionist argument; it is the claim that ideological factors and the mode of production are mutually determining expressions of a given social order. At any given moment the mode of production may be the expression of the ideological superstructure just as the physical movements of the body may express a person's life-style. But in the long run it is the economic infrastructure which is the medium of the ideological message — just as our body is the structure underlying all our moods. Because we do not inhabit the present as a region totally within our survey, nor yet as a zone of pure possibility, history has familiar contours for us, a feel that we recognize in our daily lives where others share the same conditions and the same hopes. This daily life is something we shape through our desires and which in turn acquires an institutional reality which conditions the future limits and possibilities that are our life chances. In short, we bring a life-style to political action, a life-time of suffering, with others and for others, and together, for better or worse, we decide to act. But it is neither an open nor a closed calculation. It is more like the decision to live from which we cannot withdraw, a decision which we never make once and for all and yet for which we are uniquely responsible. And like the decision to live, the choice of a politics entails the responsibility for the con-

tingency of violence which is the "infantile disorder" in our private and public lives.

> One can no more get rid of historical materialism than of psychoanalysis by impugning 'reductionist' conceptions and casual thought in the name of a descriptive and phenomenological method, for historical materialism is no more linked to such 'causal' formulations as may have been given than is psychoanalysis, and like the latter it could be expressed in another language . . .
> There is no one meaning of history; what we do always has several meanings, and this is where an existential conception of history is distinguishable from materialism and spiritualism. But every cultural phenomenon has, among others, an economic significance, and history by its nature never transcends, any more than it is reducible to, economics . . . It is impossible to reduce the life which involves human relationships either to economic relations, or to juridical and moral ones thought up by men, just as it is impossible to reduce individual life either to bodily functions or to our knowledge of life as it involves them. But in each case one of the orders of significance can be regarded as dominant: one gesture is 'sexual', another as 'amorous', another as 'warlike', and even in the sphere of coexistence, one period of history can be seen as characterized by intellectual culture, another as primarily political or economic. The question whether the history of our time is pre-eminently significant in an economic sense, and whether our ideologies give us only a derivative or secondary meaning of it is one which no longer belongs to philosophy, but to politics, and one which will be solved only by seeking to know whether the economic or ideological scenario fits the facts more perfectly. Philosophy can only show that it is *possible* from the starting point of the human condition.[22]

The foundations of Marxian history and politics are grounded in the dialectic between man and nature (domination) and between man and his fellow men (recognition). It is the nature of human consciousness to realize itself in the world and among men; its embodiment is the essential mode of its openness

towards the world and to others. The problems of conflict and co-existence only arise for an embodied consciousness driven by its basic needs into the social division of labour and engaged by its deepest need in a life and death struggle for identity through mutual recognition and solidarity. Embodied consciousness never experiences an original innocence to which any violence would do irreparable harm; we experience only different kinds of violence. For consciousness only becomes aware of itself as already engaged in the world, in definite and specific situations in which its resources are never entirely its own but derive from the exploitation of its position as the child of these parents, the incumbent of such and such a role, or the beneficiary of certain class and national privileges. We rarely act as isolated individuals and even when we seem to do so our deeds presuppose a community which possesses a common measure of the good and evil it experiences.

The problem which besets the Marxist theory of the proletariat is that the emergence of truth and justice presuppose a community while at the same time the realization of a genuine community presupposes a concept of truth and justice. The Marxist critique of the liberal truth as a mystification which splits the liberal community starts from the exposure of its lack of correspondence with the objective relations between man in liberal society. By contrast, Marxism claims to be a truth in the making; it aims at overthrowing liberal society in the name of an authentic community. However, the birth of communist society is no less painful than the birth of man himself and from its beginnings communism is familiar with violence and deception. It might be argued that the violence of Marxist revolutionary politics arises because the Party forces upon the proletariat a mission for which history has not prepared it. The proletariat is thus the victim of the double contingency of bourgeois and communist deception and exploitation. The constant shifts in Party directives, the loss of socialist innocence, the reappearance of profit and status in community society may be appealed to as indications of the failure of Marxism to renew human history. Merleau-Ponty was aware of these arguments and indeed explicitly documents them with findings on conditions in the Soviet Union, including the shattering discovery of the labour camps.[23]

Nevertheless, Merleau-Ponty argued that the proper role of Marxist violence is as the midwife of a socialist society already in the womb of capitalist society. The image is essential to his argument. For it was intended to distinguish Marxist violence from historically arbitrary and authoritarian forms of violence.[24] The image of birth suggests a natural process in which there arises a point of intervention which is likely to be painful but is aimed at preserving a life which is *already there* and not entirely at the mercy of the midwife. In the language of the *Communist Manifesto*, the argument is that the birth of socialist society depends upon the full maturation of capitalism which engenders a force whose transition from dependency to independence is achieved through a painful

transition in which dramatic roles are assigned to the bourgeoisie, the proletariat, and the Party. There are, of course, features of the imagery of birth that lead to outcomes rather different from those which Merleau-Ponty wishes to draw. The human infant achieves maturity only after a long period of tutelage in which if anything social dependency becomes far more burdensome than umbilical dependency, as we have learned from Freud. Understood in this way the image involves a greater political dependency of the proletariat upon the Party and its commissars than is compatible with the aims of socialist humanism. Merleau-Ponty's ideal for the childhood of the revolution is the period of Lenin's frank and open discussions with the proletariat concerning the reasons for NEP. This was a time when words still had their face meaning, when explanations for changes of tactics were given which left the proletariat with an improved understanding of events and with heightened revolutionary consciousness.

> . . . Marxist Machiavellianism differs from Machiavellianism insofar as it transforms compromise through awareness of compromise, and alters the ambivalence of history through awareness of ambivalence; it makes detours knowingly and by announcing them as such; it calls retreats retreats; it sets the details of local politics and the paradoxes of strategy in the perspective of the whole.[25]

Marxist violence is thus an integral feature of the theory of the proletariat and its philosophy of history. To be a Marxist is to see meaning taking shape within history. Anything else is to live history and society as sheer force. To be a Marxist is to believe that history is intelligible and that it has a direction which encompasses the proletarian control of the economic and state apparatus, along with the emergence of an international brotherhood. Whatever the lags on any of these fronts, it is the Marxist persuasion that these elements delineate the essential structure or style of communist society. It is this structure of beliefs which determines the Marxist style of historical analysis and political action.

Even before he turned to Max Weber for his conception of responsible history, Merleau-Ponty had anticipated those adventures of the dialectic which had made it necessary to rethink Marxism as a philosophy of history and institutions. Unless this task is undertaken, Marxism must either continue to hide from its own history or else see its universal hopes thrown into the wasteland of historical relativism. Only an absolutely relativist conception of history as the

milieu of our own living can keep alive what Merleau-Ponty called "Western" Marxism.

> History is not only an object in front of us, far from us, beyond our reach: it is also our awakening as subjects. Itself a historical fact the true or false consciousness that we have of our history cannot be simple illusion. There is a mineral there to be refined, a truth to be extracted, if only we go to the limits of relativism and put it, in turn, back into history. We give a form to history according to our categories; but our categories, in contact with history, are themselves freed from their partiality. The old problem of the relations between subject and object is transformed, and relativism is surpassed as soon as one puts it in historical terms, since here the object is the vestige left by other subjects, and the subject — historical understanding — held in the fabric of history, is by this very fact capable of self-criticism.[26]

We have to understand how it is that Marxism which arises as a movement within history can be the fulfillment of history rather than a phase subject to its own laws of historical transition. How is it possible that men who are driven by material circumstances in general and the proletariat in particular are capable of the vision of humanity freed from exploitation and alienation? However these questions are answered, we have to face the fact that the proletariat is given direction by the Communist Party and that with respect to this relationship we face new questions about Marxist knowledge and the freedom of the masses. In his analysis of these questions Merleau-Ponty extended his reading of Weber through Lukács' studies in Marxist dialectics.[27] In terms of this reading Merleau-Ponty came to a reformulation of Marx's historical materialism. If materialism were a literal truth it is difficult to see how the category of history could arise. For matter does not have a history except by metaphorical extension. Men live in history. But their history is not external to themselves in the same sense that the history of a geological strata might be available to observation. Men inhabit history as they do language.[28] Just as they have to learn the specific vocabulary of Marxism, so they have to bring their everyday experiences of poverty, power and violence under the notion of the "proletariat" and to interpret their experiences through the projection of "class consciousness" and "revolution". Thus "class consciousness" does not inhere in history either as a pre-existing idea or as an inherent environmental force. What we can say is that

despite all its contingencies the history of society gathers into itself the consciousness that is dispersed in all its members so that it fosters their consciousness as civic knowledge:

> As a living body, given its behavior, is, so to speak, closer to consciousness than a stone, so certain social structures are the cradle of the knowledge of society. Pure consciousness finds its "origin" in them. Even if the notion of interiority, when applied to a society, should be understood in the figurative sense, we find, all the same, that this metaphor is possible with regard to capitalist society but not so with regard to precapitalist ones. This is enough for us to say that the history which produced capitalism symbolizes the emergence of a subjectivity. There are subjects, objects, there are men and things, but there is also a third order, that of relationships between men inscribed in tools or social symbols. These relationships have their development, their advances and their regressions. Just as in the life of the individual, so in this generalized life there are tentative aims, failure or success, reaction of the result upon the aim, repetition or variation, and this is what one calls history.[29]

Despite its detours and regressions, Merleau-Ponty retains his conviction of the overall meaning of human history as an emancipatory process but allows for the successes and failures in this project to lie in one and the same historical plane. History is the growing relationship of man to man. This does not mean that all previous societies are to be judged by today's standards because at every stage history is threatened with loss and diversion. What we can properly regard as today's developments really only take up problems that were immanent in the previous period. Hence the past is not merely the waste of the future. If we can speak of an advance in history it is perhaps only in the negative sense that we can speak of the elimination of non-sense rather than of the positive accumulation of reason. The price we must pay for history's deliverance of reason and freedom is that freedom and reason never operate outside of the constraints of history and politics. Therefore Marxism cannot simply claim to see through all other ideologies as though it alone were transparent to itself. Indeed, Marxism is itself open to the danger of becoming the most false ideology of all inasmuch as its own political life will require changes of position that can hardly be read from the state of its economic infrastructure.

If Marxism is not to degenerate into a willful ideology and yet not claim absolute knowledge, it must be geared to the praxis of the proletariat. But this is not an easy matter since the proletariat does not spontaneously realize its own goals and by the same token the Party cannot easily avoid a specious appeal to the allegedly objective interests of the proletariat. If like Sartre we force the distinction between theory and praxis, then the Party is either reduced to a democratic consultation of the momentary thoughts and feelings of the proletariat or else to bureaucratic cynicism with regard to the gap between the present state of the proletariat and the Party's idea of its future. So long as we think of consciousness as a state of individual minds then we cannot get around the problem of locating the synthesis of knowledge in an absolute consciousness, called the Party. This means that the proletariat is really not the subject of its own deeds but the object of what the Party knows on its behalf. To understand Merleau-Ponty's critique of Sartre's "ultrabolshevism" we need to have some notion of how they were divided even over a common philosophical background. The opposition between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty derives in the first place from their fundamentally opposite phenomenologies of embodiment. For Sartre the body is a vehicle of shame, nausea and ultimate alienation caught in the trap of the other's look.[30] In Merleau-Ponty the body is the vehicle of the very world and others with whom together we labour in love and understanding and the very same ground to which we must appeal to correct error or overcome violence. In Sartre the body is the medium of the world's decomposition, while in Merleau-Ponty the body symbolizes the very composition of the world and society. In each case there follows radically different conceptions of political life. In Merleau-Ponty, the extremes of collectivism and individualism, labour and violence are always historical dimensions of our basic social life. To Sartre, nothing unites us with nature and society except the external necessity of scarcity which obliges us to join our labour and individual sovereignty into collective projects which are always historically unstable.

> The "master", the "feudal lord", the "bourgeois", the "capitalist" all appear not only as powerful people who command but in addition and above all as *Thirds*; that is, as those who are outside the oppressed community and *for whom* this community exists. It is therefore *for* them and *in their freedom* that the reality of the oppressed class is going to exist. They cause it to be born by their look. It is to them and through them that there is revealed the identity of my condition and that of others who are oppressed; it is for them that I exist in a situation organized with others and that my possibiles as dead-possibles are strictly

> equivalent with the possibles of others; it is for them that I am a worker and it is through and in their revelation as the Other-as-a-look that I experience myself as one among others. This means that I discover the "Us" in which I am integrated or "the class" *outside*, in the look of the Third, and it is this collective alienation which I assume when saying "Us". From this point of view the privileges of the Third and "our" burdens, "our" miseries have value at first only as a *signification*; they signify the independence of the Third in relation to "Us"; they present our alienation to us more plainly. Yet as they are nonetheless *endured, as in particular our work, our fatigue are nonetheless suffered*, it is across this endured suffering that I experience my being-looked-at-as-a-thing-engaged-in-a-totality-of-things. It is in terms of my suffering, of my misery that I am collectively apprehended with others by the Third; that is, in terms of the adversity of the world, in terms of the facticity of my condition. Without the Third, no matter what might be the adversity of the world, I should apprehend myself as a triumphant transcendence; with the appearance of the Third, "I" experience "Us" as apprehended in terms of things and as things overcome by the world.[31]

In Sartrean Marxism it is therefore the role of the Party to unite an ever disintegrating proletariat to which it plays the role of the other or Third analogous to the role of the capitalist as the Other who unites the atomized labour of the workshop or assembly line. In effect, Sartre constructs the Party as the sole source of historical intelligibility because he denies any basis for inter-subjectivity to arise at other levels of conduct. The result is that Sartre is obliged to idealize the notions of fact, action and history as nothing but what is determined by the Party. Hence the Party is subject to permanent anxiety since it is deprived of any middle ground between itself and a proletarian praxis from which it might learn to formulate, revise and initiate plans that do not risk its whole life. Because he can only understand expression as pure creation or as simple imitation, Sartre loses the real ground of political communicaton.

> If one wants to engender revolutionary politics dialectically from the proletarian condition, the revolution from the rigidified swarm of thoughts without subject, Sartre

> answers with a dilemma: either the conscious renewal alone gives its meaning to the process, or one returns to organicism. What he rejects under the name of organicism at the level of history is in reality much more than the notion of life: it is symbolism understood as a functioning of signs having its own efficacy beyond the meanings that analysis can assign to these signs. It is, more generally, expression. For him expression either goes beyond what is expressed and is then a pure creation, or it copies it and is then a simple unveiling. But an action which is an unveiling, an unveiling which is an action — in short, a dialectic — this Sartre does not want to consider.[32]

Properly speaking, praxis is not divided between theory and practice but lies in the wider realm of communication and expression. Here Merleau-Ponty's argument already anticipates Habermas' later correction of Marx's confusion of the emancipatory orders of labour and symbolic interaction.[33] The everyday life of the proletariat makes the notion of a class a possibility long before it is formulated as such. When the occasion for the explicit appeal to class consciousness arises, its formal possibility does not lie in the power of the Party's theoreticians but in the ordinary capacity of men to appraise their situation, and to speak their minds together because their thoughts are not locked behind their skulls but are near enough the same in anyone's experience of exploitation and injustice. Of course, the Party has to give these thoughts a political life, to realize their truth as a common achievement in which the proletariat and the Party are mutually enlightened. "This exchange, in which no one commands and no one obeys, is symbolized by the old custom which dictates that, in a meeting, speakers join in when the audience applauds. What they applaud is the fact that they do not intervene as persons, that in their relationship with those who listen to them a truth appears which does not come from them and which the speakers can and must applaud. In the communist sense, the Party is this communication; and such a conception of the Party is not a corollary of Marxism — it is its very center."[34] Thus we see that the heart of Marxism is not just the communalizing of property but the attainment of an ideally communicative or educative society whose icon is the Party. At the same time, this ideal society of labour and speech is obliged to resort to violence since its truths reflect only a reality that has to be brought into being. Marxist truth is not hidden behind empirical history waiting to be deciphered by the Party theoreticians. Ultimately, the issue here is the question of the education of the Party itself in its role of educating the masses. It was first raised by Marx himself in the Third Thesis on Feuerbach. If the Party is not above history then it is inside

history like the proletariat itself. The problem is how to relativize the opposition between Party and proletarian consciousness so that their mutual participation in history is not organized in terms of a (Party) subject and (proletariat) object split. The argument between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty parallels the difference between the political practices of Lenin and Stalin, at least insofar as Merleau-Ponty like Lukács can argue for a period in Lenin's own use of the Party as an instrument of proletarian education and party self-critique. In his book, *Lenin*,[35] Lukács argues with respect to Lenin's political practice much the same thesis that Merleau-Ponty later espoused, namely, that it must not be confused with *realpolitik*. "Above all, when defining the concept of compromise, any suggestion that it is a question of knack, of cleverness, of an astute fraud, must be rejected. 'We must,' said Lenin, 'decisively reject those who think that politics consists of little tricks, sometimes bordering on deceit. *Classes cannot be deceived.*' For Lenin, therefore, compromise means *that the true developmental tendencies of classes* (and possibly of nations — for instance, where an oppressed people is concerned), which under specific circumstances and for a certain period run parallel in determinate areas with the interests of the proletariat, are exploited to the advantage of *both.*"[36] In the postscript to his essay on Lenin, Lukács repeats the argument for the unity of Lenin's theoretical grasp of the political nature of the imperialist epoch and his practical sense of proletarian politics. In trying to express the living nature of that unity in Lenin's own life, Lukács describes how Lenin would learn from experience or from Hegel's *Logic*, according to the situation, preserving in himself the dialectical tension between particulars and a theoretical totality. As Lenin writes in his *Philosophic Notebooks:* "Theoretical cognition ought to give the Object in its necessity, in its all-sided relations, in its contradictory movement, in- and for-itself. But the human Concept 'definitively' catches this objective truth of cognition, seizes and masters it, only when the Concept becomes 'being-for-itself' in the sense of practice."

It was by turning to Hegel that Lenin sought to find a way to avoid making theory the mere appendage of state practice, while reserving to practice a more creative political role than the retroactive determination or revision of ideology. But this meant that Marxist materialism could never be the simple enforcement of political will, any more than political will could be exercised without a theoretical understanding of the specific class relations it presupposed. Thus Lenin remarks that "The standpoint of life, of practice, should be first and fundamental in the theory of knowledge . . . Of course, we must not forget that the criterion of practice can never, in the nature of things, either confirm or refute any idea *completely*. This criterion too is sufficiently 'indefinite' not to allow human knowledge to become 'absolute', but at the same time it is sufficiently definite to wage a ruthless fight against all varieties of idealism and agnosticism." Of course, in these later Hegelian formulations Lenin is modify-

ing his own version of Engels' dialectical materialism as set forth in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, thereby rejoining the challenge set to this work by Lukács' own *History and Class Consciousness,* as well as by Karl Korsch's *Marxism and Philosophy*, both published in 1923. Lukács' essay on Lenin was published on the occasion of Lenin's death in 1924. What died with Lenin was Orthodox Marxism, although its dead hand was to be upon socialism for another thirty years or more. But while it is clear that scientific socialism was not ready for Lukács, the same must be said of the West, where only today is the critique of scientific praxis entering into a properly reflexive or critical social science. What *History and Class Consciousness* made clear was that living Marxism is inseparable from its idealist and Hegelian legacy. The Hegelian concept of totality furnishes a matrix for the integration of ethics and politics through the restless dynamics of man's attempt to measure his existential circumstances against the ideal of his human essence, which he achieves through the struggle against self and institutional alienation. The Hegelian Marxist totality is thus the basis for the integral humanism of Marxist social science.[37]

What Merleau-Ponty adds to Hegelian Marxism from his own phenomenology of perception is an unshakable grasp of the "interworld" (*intermonde*) of everyday living and conduct which is far too dense and stratified to be a thing of pure consciousness. This is the world of our species-being, a corporeal world whose deep structures of action and reflection are the anonymous legacies of the body politic.[38] The interworld is never available to us in a single unifying moment of consciousness or as a decision whose consequences are identical with the actor's intentions. But then none of us thinks or acts outside of a life whose ways have moulded us so that what "we" seek is never entirely our own and therefore borrows upon the very collective life which it advances or retards. Thus we never have anything like Sartre's absolute power of decision to join or withdraw from collective life. What we have is an ability to shift institutions off center, polarizing tradition and freedom in the same plane as creativity and imitation. Our freedom, therefore, never comes to us entirely from the outside through the Party, as Sartre would have it. It begins inside us like the movements of our body in response to the values of a world which it opens up through its own explorations and accommodations. It follows that Sartre's conception of the party expropriates the spontaneity of all life in the name of the proletariat, having first separated the proletariat from what it shares with men anywhere engaged in the struggle for life.

> The question is to know whether, as Sartre says, there are only *men* and *things* or whether there is also the interworld, which we call history, symbolism, truth-to-be-made. If one sticks to the dichotomy, men, as the place

> where all meaning arises, are condemned to an incredible tension. Each man, in literature as well as in politics, must assume all that happens instant by instant to all others, he mus be immediately universal. If, on the contrary, one acknowledges a mediation of personal relationships through the world of human symbols, it is true that one renounces being instantly justified in the eyes of everyone and holding oneself responsible for all that is done at each moment. But since consciousness cannot in practice maintain its pretension of being God, since it is inevitably led to delegate responsibility — it is one abdication for another, and we prefer the one which leaves consciousness the means of knowing what it is doing.[39]

The universality and truth towards which political consciousness aims are not an intrinsic property of the Party. They are an acquisiton continuously established and re-established in a community and tradition of knowledge for which individuals in specific historical situations call and to which they respond. Understood in this way, history is the call of one thought to another, because each individual's work or action is created across the path of self and others towards a public which it elicits rather than serves. That is, history is the field which individual effort requires in order to become one with the community it seeks to build so that where it is successful its invention appears always to have been necessary. Individual action, then, is the invention of history, because it is shaped in a present which previously was not just a void waiting to be determined by the word or deed but in a tissue of calling and response which is the life of no one and everyone. Every one of life's actions, insofar as it invokes its truth, lives in the expectation of a historical inscription, a judgment not only of its intention or consequences but also of its fecundity which is the relevance of its "story" to the present.

> History is the judge — not History as the Power of a moment or of a century — but history as the space of inscription and accumulation beyond the limits of countries and epochs of what we have said and done that is most true and valuable, taking into account the circumstances in which we had to speak. Others will judge what I have done because I painted the painting to be seen, because my action committed the future of others; but neither art nor politics consists in pleasing or flattering others. What they

> expect of the artist or politician is that he draw them toward values in which they will only later recognize their own values. The painter or politician shapes others more than he follows them. The *public* at whom he aims is not given; it is a public to be elicited by his work. The others of whom he thinks are not empirical "others", nor even *humanity* conceived as a species; it is others once they have become such that he can live with them. The history in which the artist participates (and it is better the less he thinks about "making history" and honestly produces *his* work as he sees it) is not a power before which he must genuflect. It is the perpetual conversation woven together by all speech, all valid works and actions, each according to its place and circumstance, contesting and confirming the other, each one recreating all the others.[40]

Merleau-Ponty returns Marxist politics to the flux of the natural and historical world, rejecting its compromise with the ideals of objectivism which have made the tradition of rationality an enigma to itself. Henceforth, politics must abide in the life-world where Husserl found its roots and from there it must recover its own ontological history.

Today history is hardly more meaningful because of the advent of socialism in the Soviet Union or elsewhere. Indeed, the potential nuclear confrontation of world ideologies has brought human history to new heights of absurdity. Marxism has become a truth for large parts of the world but not in the sense it intended. The question is what conclusion we should draw from this. Writing in 1947 and the decade following, Merleau-Ponty was afraid that the West would try to resolve the Communist problem through war. To this he argued that the failures of Communism are the failures of Western humanism as a whole and so we cannot be partisan to it, far less indifferent. The Marxist revolution can lose its way. This is because, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, it is a mode of human conduct which may be true as a movement but false as a regime. But it is the nature of political action to offer no uniquely happy solution. Political life involves a fundamental evil in which we are forced to choose between values without knowing for certain which are absolutely good or evil. In the Trojan wars the Greek gods fought on both sides. It is only in modern politics that, as Camus remarks, the human mind has become an armed camp. In this situation Merleau-Ponty wrote to overcome the split between good and evil which characterizes the politics of crisis and conflict. Above all, he raised the voice of reason which despite scepticism and error achieves a truth for us that is continuous with nothing else than our own efforts to maintain it.

For the very moment we assert that unity and reason do not *exist* and that opinions are carried along by discordant options which remain below the level of reason the consciousness we gain of the irrationalism and contingency in us cancels them as fatalities and opens us to the other person. Doubt and disagreement are facts, but so is the strange pretension we all have of thinking of the truth, our capacity for taking the other's position to judge ourselves, our need to have our opinions recognized by him and to justify our choices before him, in short, the experience of the other person as an *alter ago* in the very course of discussion. *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 that its various machineries are actually men and tries to maintain and expand man's relations to man.

Such a philosophy cannot tell us *that* humanity will be realized as though it possessed some knowledge apart and were not itself embarked upon experience, being only a more acute consciousness of it. But it awakens us to the importance of daily events and action. For it is a philosophy which arouses in us a love for our times which are not the simple repetition of human eternity nor merely the conclusion to premises already postulated. It is a view which like the most fragile object of perception — a soap bubble, or a wave — or like the most simple dialogue, embraces indivisibly all the order and all the disorder of the world.[41]

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Notes

1. The critique of Marxist scientism was first advanced for English readers (if we leave aside the earlier and then untranslated work of Karl Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy* and Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*) by Karl Popper in his *The Open Society and its Enemies* and *The Poverty of Historicism*. I have examined this debate in John O'Neill (ed.), *Modes of Individualism and Collectivism*, London, Heinemann and New York, St. Martin's Press, 1973.

2. In a number of essays I have argued for the unity of Marxist humanism and science. See my "For Marx Against Althusser", *The Human Context*, Vol. VI, No. 2, Summer 1974, pp. 385-398; and "The Concept of Estrangement in Early and Late Writings of Karl Marx" in my *Sociology as a Skin Trade*, Essays towards a Reflexive Sociology, London, Heinemann and New York, Harper and Row, 1972, pp. 113-136; and "Marxism and Mythology", *Ibid.*, pp. 137-154.

3. George Lichtheim, *From Marx to Hegel*, and other Essays. London, Orbach and Chambers, 1971.

4. George Lichtheim, *Marxism in Modern France*, New York and London, Columbia University Press, 1966 and *from Marx to Hegel*, London, Orbach and Chambers, 1971.

5. Alfred Schmidt, *The Concept of Nature in Marx*, London, NLB, 1971.

6. Jean Hyppolite, *Studies on Marx and Hegel*, Edited and Translated by John O'Neill, New York, Basic Books and London, Heinemann, 1969.

7. Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, New York, Basic Books, 1969.

8. Richard Crossman (ed.), *The God that Failed*, New York, Harper and Row, 1949; Michel-Antoine Burnier, *Choice of Action*, Translated by Bernard Murchland, New York, Random House, 1968.

9. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Humanism and Terror*, An Essay on the Communist Problem, Translated and with an Introduction by John O'Neill, Boston, Beacon Press, 1969.

10. John O'Neill, *Perception, Expression and History:* The Social Phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1970 and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology, Language and Sociology*, Selected Essays, Edited by John O'Neill, London, Heinemann, 1974.

11. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Adventures of the Dialectic*, Translated by Joseph Bien, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1973, p. 6. My emphasis.

12. Alphonse de Waelhens, *Une philosophie de l'ambiguité*, L'existentialisme de Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Louvain, Publications Universitaires de Louvain, 1967.

13. *Humanism and Terror*, pp. 109-110. My emphasis.

14. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Reading Montaigne", *Signs*, Translated by Richard C. McLeary, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1964; John O'Neill, "Between Montaigne and Machiavelli", in *Sociology as a Skin Trade*, pp. 96-110.

15. John O'Neill, "Situation, Action and Language", in *Sociology as a Skin Trade*, pp. 81-93.

16. *Humanism and Terror*, pp. 100-101.

17. *Report of Court Proceedings in the Case of the Anti-Soviet "Bloc of Rights and Trotskyites"*, Moscow, March 2-13, 1938. Published by the People's Commissariat of Justice of the U.S.S.R., Moscow, 1938.

18. Nathan Leites and Elsa Bernaut, *Ritual of Liquidation*, The Case of the Moscow Trials, Glencoe, The Free Press, 1954.

19. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Themes from the Lectures at the Collège de France, 1952-1960*, Translated by John O'Neill, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1970, pp. 29-30.

20. John O'Neill, "Le Langage et la décolonisation: Fanon et Freire", *Sociologie et Societés*, Vol VI, No. 2, Novembre 1974, pp. 53-65.

21. John O'Neill, *Making Sense Together*, An Introduction to Wild Sociology, New York, Harper and Row and London, Heinemann, 1974.

22. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Translated by Colin Smith, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962, pp. 171-173.

23. "The U.S.S.R. and the Camps", *Signs*, pp. 263-273.

24. "There is indeed a Sartrean violence, and it is more highly strung and less durable than Marx's violence." *Adventures of the Dialectic*, p. 159.

25. *Humanism and Terror*, p. 129.

26. *Adventures of the Dialectic*, pp. 30-31.

27. Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, Studies in Marxist Dialectics, Translated by Rodney Livingstone, London, Merlin Press, 1971.

28. John O'Neill, "Institution, Language and Historicity", in *Perception, Expression and History*, pp. 46.64.

29. *Adventures of the Dialectic*, pp. 37-38.

30. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, Translated and with an Introduction by Hazel E. Barnes, New York, Washington Square Press, 1969, Part III.

31. *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 544-545.

32. *Adventures of the Dialectic*, p. 142.

33. "In his empirical analyses Marx comprehends the history of the species under the categories of material activity *and* the critical abolition of ideologies, of instrumental action *and* revolutionary practice, of labour *and* reflection at once. But Marx interprets what he does in the more restricted conception of the species' self-reflection through work alone. The materialist concept of synthesis is not conceived broadly enough in order to explicate the way in which Marx contributes to realizing the intention of a really radicalized critique of knowledge. In fact, it even prevented Marx from understanding his own mode of procedure from this point of view. Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, Translated by Jeremy J. Shapiro, Boston, Beacon Press, 1971, p. 42. Cf. Jürgen Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, Translated by John Viertel, Boston, Beacon Press, 1973, Ch. 4, Labor and Interaction: Remarks on Hegel's Jena *Philosophy of Mind*.

34. *Adventures of the Dialectic*, p. 52.

35. Georg Lukács, *Lenin. A Study on the Unity of his Thought*, London, NLB, 1970.

36. *Lenin*, p. 79.

37. This much has been established in the academic debate over the early and later writings of Marx. One would have thought that it is no longer arguable that Marxism can be separated from its Hegelian sources. Yet, recently this argument has reappeared in the influential contributions to critical theory developed by Habermas and by the structuralist readings of Marx fostered by Althusser. I have considered these arguments in my essays, "Can Phenomenology be Critical?", and "On Theory and Criticism in Marx", in *Sociology as a Skin Trade*, pp. 221-236 and pp. 237-263.

38. John O'Neill, "Authority, Knowledge and the Body Politic", in *Sociology as a Skin Trade*, pp. 68-80.

39. *Adventures of the Dialectic*, p. 200.

40. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, Translated and with an Introduction by John O'Neill, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1973, p. 86.

41. *Humanism and Terror*, pp. 188-189.