

Self, Other and the World:
A Critical Study of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*

Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
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MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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DECLARATION

I **Ramesh Chander** declare that the dissertation entitled **Self, Other and the World: A Critical study of Merleau–Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception*** submitted by me for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree in this or any other university.

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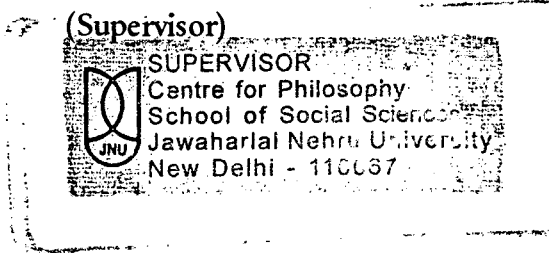
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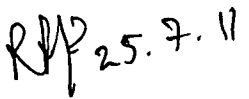
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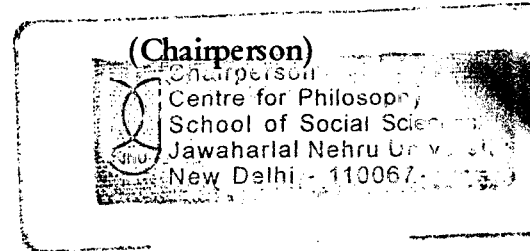
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We recommend this dissertation may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


(Dr. Bhagat Oinam)




(Prof. R.P. Singh)



To my mother

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Introduction

The history of modern western philosophy treats the concept of self, other and the world in a different way. Starting from Descartes to Merleau-Ponty, there have been different perspectives of understanding human reality. Every school of thought be it Cartesian, phenomenological, existential or existential-phenomenological, interprets the phenomena of self, other and the world in their own right. In other words, to understand the concept of self, other and the world per se, their understanding depends on certain perspectives of looking at human reality.

The Cartesian notion of subjectivity is understood as something pure consciousness. It is anonymous, invisible Cogito. It perceives things without having itself perceived. It reflects the objects of the world while it itself remains unreflected. It objectifies things but itself remains subjective. There is no reversible gearing between subject and object. It maintains subject-object duality. Such disengaged way of knowing reality led Descartes to propound mind-body dualism. The mind-body problem is the outcome of the objective way of understanding reality. The mind is characterized by the property of consciousness while the body by extension. Both these substances are diametrically opposed in nature. The mind is understood as pure consciousness and treats body nothing more than any object of the world. Descartes proposes the mechanical notion of subjectivity. He argues that subjectivity is non-physical and completely immaterial in nature. It is pure consciousness. It is altogether different from physical body. The mind is immaterial, indivisible, and spiritual in nature, beyond the spacio-temporal dimensions and in this sense it is transcendent, while the body is physical, divisible, within the spacio-temporal dimensions and all causal laws are applicable to it. Thus, mind and body are exclusive to each other because of their opposed substantial nature and independent existence.

The subject is bare consciousness and is away from the world. It understands things in duality. There is no reversible gearing of subjectivity. The subject is irreversibly

directed towards objects of the world from its subjective centre. It is not involved in the worldly affairs by being with the world. It is the perpetual knower, intervenes in the worldly activities by detaching itself from the world. There is no lived self-world dialogue as the self is not in-the-world precisely because of its nature. It is the non-physical, immaterial self. It does not transcend towards the outside world. It remains enclosed in anonymity. Such a detached account of subjectivity perceives things objectively. Subjectivity, thus, is understood as something like transparent consciousness and remains away from the world.

Descartes proposed mechanical relationship between mind and body. The traditional sciences like mechanical physiology and classical psychology are considered as the brain child of Cartesian way of thinking. Even some modern and contemporary sciences like behaviorism, neurosciences and reductionism are influenced by such thinking. The mechanical explanation rests on the stimulus-response mechanism between the mind and body. Mechanical physiology treats body to be like an object which means that body is similar to any object of the world. It conceives mind to be the proper subject of knowledge. The physical body has no role in the process of knowing. It is non-intellectual substance. Hence classical psychology reduces our bodily experience to representation.

Empiricism and rationalism are the two schools of thought that emerged in response to Descartes' way of looking at things. These approaches also understand reality in parts and reduce reality into objects. The problem of "other mind" is an outcome of such thinking. The "other" is reduced to an object. Objective attitude perceives things objectively because it considers the perceiving self as bare consciousness. The outcome of such thinking is that it leads to "solipsism" as there is no possibility of inter-subjectivity or the inter-subjective world. The world is considered either as the result of the constituting consciousness or as the pile of things objectively present in the spacio-temporal dimensions. Empiricism maintains that the world is objectively present independent of the subject while intellectualism maintains that the world is the result of constituting consciousness and is not independent of the subject. The result of such

thinking is that there remains perpetual unbridgeable duality either between the subject and object or self and world or self and the other. The roots of such conception lie in the very fundamental way of looking at the reality. Perception as the very fundamental way of understanding reality remains limited to epistemological domain. Epistemological perception neither can understand the reality as a whole nor its actual phenomenon.

The phenomenological perspective of “perception” on the other hand is radically different from the empiricism and intellectualism. Unlike the latter, the former seeks to understand the very phenomena of reality such as—the self, other, world, space, time, freedom and so on. The phenomenological perspective intends to put flesh back on the hollow skeleton of subjectivity. It brings down subjectivity into the life world. Subjectivity is understood as an embodied subjectivity. It is grounded in-the-world. It is neither pure consciousness nor the pure body but the conglomeration of mental and physical what is putatively known as psycho-physical subject. It is always in-the-world. It perceives the perceived world as the life world. The life world is the socio-cultural world which is the abode of inter-subjectivity. Phenomenology does not reduce the “other” into an object. It perceives “other selves” as bodily-selves as its own bodily-self. There is no bare consciousness. It considers self as the lived bodily-self and always in-the-world.

Edmund Husserl sought to know things in themselves. He makes call to go back to things in themselves. He argues that the job of philosophy is to understand meanings. Meanings are immanent in consciousness. But, meanings emerge when our consciousness encounter with the world. There is no independent existence of meanings. He further argues that we are so fed up with our prejudices that normally it is not possible to have the experience of what is given in experience. In order to understand things in themselves Husserl adopts the method of epoche. However, on the other hand, Merleau-Ponty, although influenced by Husserl did not accept his method of phenomenological reductions. He maintains that being is “historical being” and always in-the-world. It is social-cultural being and cannot be divorced from original experience. Unlike Husserl, Merleau-Ponty maintains that meanings are not immanent in consciousness but present

in-the-world. In this respect Husserl is considered as internalist while Merleau-Ponty is externalist.

The proposed dissertation work is a text based study. I am mainly focusing on Merleau-Ponty's concept of self, other and the world in his magnum opus *Phenomenology of Perception*. I have discussed some of the basic problems of the issues under analysis, traditionally understood, and Merleau-Ponty's new insight to the issues in question. My problem is centered on Merleau-Ponty's concept of self which is unlike his predecessors neither mind nor body but the merging of both and is called as conscious-body or embodied-consciousness. I have analyzed how far Merleau-Ponty succeeded in resolving the problem of dualism and his own way of understanding reality vis-à-vis his predecessors and how he disagrees with them. How body as subject of perception (i.e., body-subject) is related with the world as object of perception? It is to be analyzed how Merleau-Ponty's view of body as the subject of perception (i.e. body-subject) is radically different from his predecessors. Merleau-Ponty states that the central problem that lies at the very heart of perceptual experience is that consciousness requires an object to be conscious, yet it loses itself in the object. In other words, when we perceive something, the object of our perceptual experience is presented within our perception as transcending our perception. It is to be analyzed how perception can have such a paradoxical character and how Merleau-Ponty seeks to tackle it.

I proposed to examine the Cartesian notion of subjectivity and Merleau-Ponty's critical reflection on this notion. I have thoroughly analyzed Merleau-Ponty's concept of physical subjectivity and its inseparability from the world. Interestingly, it is also to be analyzed whether the concept of bodily-subjectivity is subjectivity proper or not? I have also tried to review Merleau-Ponty's attitude towards Cartesian epistemology of self and his attempt to distance himself from the rationalist and empiricist theories of the self. The focus has also been to examine such dominant perspectives which have influenced not only our philosophical vision of looking at things but also of social life. These perspectives exist for us as to see the world without having seen themselves. Similarly, certain philosophical perspectives enable us to see the world but are not seen by

themselves. Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* is an attempt to analyze such views that provide incomplete vision of human reality.

Merleau-Ponty, throughout his life span, remained concerned with the question of lived-perception. The “lived perception” does not rely on the particular way of looking at reality such as—theories, conceptualizations, abstractions, science and philosophy. It seeks to understand reality as it is and also as a whole. Our natural way of understanding of things is through different perspectives (i.e., science, conceptualization, theories, and philosophy) but such understanding leads to error. We tend to think that “lived perception” is the same as “conceived perception,” However, for Merleau-Ponty, both are different. The basic concern of the *Phenomenology of Perception* is to take our conception of being, human reality, truth, time and freedom, to the “lived perception” from which they arose to make us aware of limitation of these conceptions. The problem arises when we absolutise and assume that this is the only way of knowing reality; then it distorts reality.

In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Descartes has been one of the main opponents. Descartes' way of looking at reality is altogether different from Merleau-Ponty's. His notion of subject is something unembodied, cloaked in anonymity. It sets himself to function in one direction, from its subjective centre to the objects that are cast before it. Hence, this irreversible gearing of subject can never itself be known, since it must be that from which the knowing of the object occurs.¹ On the other hand, empiricism in attempting to overcome the apparent problem in Descartes initiates a movement going back to things. Rationalism stresses the active role of subject. Immanuel Kant while reconciling rationalism and empiricism argues that such problems cannot be solved unless we change the way of looking at reality. Edmund Husserl emphasizes going back to things as they are. Again, Martin Heidegger, after having reflected on these problems, pushes us back to the role of subject.

1. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, Humanities Press, New York, 1962, pp. vii-xi.

However, Merleau-Ponty, in his *Phenomenology of Perception*, argues against the Cartesian way of looking at human reality. He says that there is no dualism between mind and body. For this, he employs a new term called embodied-consciousness or conscious-body. He refutes such perspectives by arguing that substance and consciousness are not two separate entities but both are one and the same as actor and acting are not different. Action cannot exist away from actor. Action is embodied in the consciousness.

The *Phenomenology of Perception* attaches great importance to the primacy of perception. It locates itself within perception. However, it must be kept in mind that it is not a traditional epistemological study of perception. Otherwise, it would lead to a paradoxical work. Although the *Phenomenology of Perception* locates itself within perception, its concern is metaphysical – what is the fundamental nature of reality or being as found in perception? What is time? What is freedom? Much of the *Phenomenology of Perception* is an attempt at arguing for the primacy of perception over reflective and analytic thought.

Merleau-Ponty argues that much of the contemporary philosophy is trapped between empiricism and intellectualism's conception of reality. The former reduces reality to the material or physical and the latter raises reality to the status of an idea or to pure rationality. He is not in favour of saying that both these positions are worthless but makes it clear that both positions arise from "lived-perception" and both grasp reality through sense experience. However, in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty sheds light on the concept of philosophy and in what manner it is different from other sciences. For him, as well as for Husserl, phenomenology is philosophy done rightly. Arguing against the contemporary way of doing philosophy, he says that because of the great success of the natural sciences, there has been a tendency to make philosophy in the image of sciences. However, the fact is that philosophy is very different from sciences. The sciences are primarily concerned with developing theories, assumptions and knowing the objects of the world that exist and developing knowledge. They also deal in finding connection between and explaining them.

The text, i.e., *Phenomenology of Perception* in addition to its preface and introduction is broadly divided into three parts. The first part mainly deals with the subject of perception while the second part deals with the object of perception. The third part contains the issues like Being-for-itself and Being-in-the-world which further deal with the concept of the Cogito, temporality and freedom.

My dissertation work excluding its Introduction and Conclusion is divided into three chapters. Each chapter contains three sections. The first chapter namely “Critique of preceding philosophies” is developed to analyze Merleau-Ponty’s critical reflection/understanding regarding preceding philosophies. The very first section, i.e., Merleau-Ponty on Cartesian dualism seeks to analyze the underlying factors that led to the problem of mind-body dualism. Merleau-Ponty argues that Descartes’ way of looking at reality gives rise to the problem of dualism which may be in various forms such as – mind-body, subjective-objective and internal-external. It seeks to perceive reality in mechanistic terms and reduces reality into causal phenomena. Mechanical physiology and classical psychology are considered as the by-products of Descartes’ way of understanding reality. These sciences reduce our body merely as an object of knowledge and not subject of knowledge. In the second and third section I have analyzed how empiricism and rationalism as the two prominent schools of thought arose in response to Descartes’ way of looking at reality. I have also reflected on Merleau-Ponty’s critical analysis on these perspectives. He argues that although both these perspectives seek to claim reality independently but deviate from truth in a fundamental way. Empiricism argues that reality lies outside there and perceptual experience is the main source of knowledge. On the other hand, intellectualism claims that reason is the main source of knowledge and all knowledge is inherently present in our consciousness. Empiricism resorts to “sensation” as the basic unit of perception. It also relies on the principle of “association” and “projection of memories,” While on the other hand intellectualism relies on the ground of “attention” and “judgment,”

The second chapter, i.e., Merleau-Ponty’s conception of self and other, is devoted to understand Merleau-Ponty’s conception of the self and other. The very first section,

namely, “the self as bodily-self” is developed to understand Merleau-Ponty’s basic notion of subjectivity. The “subjectivity” for Merleau-Ponty is physical. Deviating from the mainstream thinking he argues that subject is “bodily-subject.” The earlier view, particularly of Descartes was that “subjectivity” is “pure subjectivity” and is detached from the world. However, Merleau-Ponty presents a different picture of “subjectivity.” He gives a phenomenological account of subjectivity. Phenomenology brings back subjectivity into the life world and makes it alive. It studies the very phenomenon of subjectivity. It is intended to re-embodiment the disembodied subject of Descartes. It is the embodied consciousness or the conscious-body taking part in the lived activities of the lived world. It is not detached from the objects as well as other beings of the world. Instead, it transcends towards the outside world. The second section, namely, “Self and its freedom: Merleau-Ponty’s critique of Sartre,” mainly deals with Merleau-Ponty’s idea of freedom vis-à-vis Jean Paul Sartre. The intention behind bringing in Sartre is two fold. The first reason is that Merleau-Ponty gives a very critical account of Sartre’s idea of freedom throughout the chapter on “freedom” in his *Phenomenology of Perception*. The second reason is that Merleau-Ponty categorically argues that the concepts “freedom” and “determinism” are inconsistent. Both cannot be logically consistent. Merleau-Ponty gives a very critical account of Sartre’s idea of “absolute freedom,” Merleau-Ponty by elaborating the notion of “freedom” and “determinism” argues that either there is freedom or there is determinism. There is no middle ground between the two. An action cannot be both-free and determined at the same time. It seems to be logically inconsistent to hold that freedom and determinism go hand in hand. I have also critically analyzed the compatibility of Sartre’s notion of “facticity” and “absolute freedom.” While the third section, i.e., “Self and its Other,” incorporates Merleau-Ponty’s notion of “self” and its “other.” Merleau-Ponty attempts to respond to the problem of “other minds” by incorporating different phenomena of lived experience such as love, hatred, reciprocity, co-existence, inter-personal communication, etc., He argues that objective thought is the root cause of the problem of “solipsism,” It dichotomizes the reality into being-for-itself and being-in-itself. It reduces to “other” as merely an object like any other object of the world. Merleau-Ponty’s greatest contribution lies in his refutation of the “argument from analogy” or the “reasoning by analogy,” He argues that the “reasoning by analogy”

cannot account for the existence of the “other,” Moreover, it leads to the old mind-body problem of the Cartesianism.

The third and the final chapter, namely, “Merleau-Ponty on the self-world relationship” mainly deals with the self-world relationship. Arguing against the subjective and objective notion of intellectualism and empiricism, Merleau-Ponty argues that neither of views is true. These approaches either consider the world as the result of the constituting consciousness or as the pile of things objectively present in the spacio-temporal dimensions. The result is that there remains perpetual unbridgeable duality either between the subject and object or self and world or self and the other. The roots of such conception lie in the very fundamental way of looking at the reality. The “perception” as the very fundamental way of understanding reality remains limited to epistemological domain. Epistemological perception neither can understand the reality as a whole nor its actual phenomenon. Merleau-Ponty argues that the very phenomena of world are revealed through “perception” and it is phenomenological perception. It perceives the world as neither subjective nor objective but as something perpetually there. It perceives the perceived world as lived world. Its different phenomena which I have discussed in this section such as space, time, distance, depth and so on are lived phenomena. In the present section an attempt is made to analyze how Merleau-Ponty understands the phenomena of world different from his predecessors. Also, how the world is not only a conglomeration of objects arranged in the space but is the lived world. It is also to be analyzed how the space as the lived space provides ground for the world as the lived socio-cultural human world.

In the second and third section (i.e., “the self-world dialogue,” and “the inseparability of the self, other and the world”) an attempt is made to understand the self-world communication. The self-world communication between them is compatible if both are of same nature. The subject of “perception” is the “bodily-self” and always in-the-world. It is transcending towards the world through its different openings. The perceived world acts as a sort of field of action for the subject. The “perception” acts as sort of screen between them. It bridges the gap between the subject and object. The

consciousness is embodied not only in our body but also in-the-world. The inter-world communication primordially exists between incarnate subjectivity and the perceived world. But it is to be analyzed that what is the ground of self-world dialogue? How the self, other and the world are inseparably related with each other.

CHAPTER 1

Critique of Preceding Philosophies

A. Merleau-Ponty on Cartesian Dualism

The history of modern western philosophy treats the concept of self in a different way. Starting from Descartes to Merleau-Ponty, there have been different perspectives of looking at human reality. Every school of thought be it Cartesian, phenomenological, existential or existential-phenomenological interprets the phenomenon of self in its own right. In other words, to understand the concept of self per se, their understanding depends on certain perspectives looking at human reality.

Rene Descartes proposed the mechanical notion of subjectivity. He argues that subjectivity is non-physical and completely immaterial in nature. It is pure consciousness. It is altogether different from physical body. Probably, he was the first among the modern western philosophers who applied the concept of mind and consciousness interchangeably. For him, consciousness is always pure consciousness. For this, he proposed the doctrine of mind-body dualism.¹

The doctrine of mind-body dualism implies that mind and body are the two diametrically opposed but relative substances. Both these substances possess different attributes. Mind is having the attribute of thought while body is of extension. The former is immaterial and hence indivisible while the later is material and divisible since it is composed of parts. Mind is spiritual in nature and hence it is transcendent. It is beyond the spatio-temporal dimensions and as such no causal law is applicable to mind. However, on the other hand, body is physical body. It is causally determined. All

¹ Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. John Cottingham, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986, pp. 54-60.

physical laws of nature are subjected to it.²

Descartes proposed the mechanistic explanation of human body which means that human body is exactly like a machine and composed of parts. Its different parts are externally related to each other and there is no explicit internal relation as such. Externally related not in the sense that my body and object of the world, but my body and mind. Both the mind and body influence each other. As Descartes says:

But why should that curious sensation of pain give rise to a particular distress of mind; or why should a certain kind of delight follow on a tickling sensation?... For there is absolutely no connection (at least that I can understand) between the sensation of something causing pain and the mental apprehension of distress that arises that sensation.³

It is evident from the above quote that Descartes proposed mechanical relationship between mind and body. The mechanical explanation rests on the stimulus-response mechanism between mind and body. Mechanical physiology conceives body to be like an object which means that body is similar to any object of the world. Cartesian school of thought also implies that subject as a knower is pure consciousness. Physical body has no role in the process of knowing. Physical body is nothing more than an object. It is non-intellectual substance.⁴

... that I am a thinking thing, I can infer correctly that my essence consists solely in the fact that I am a thinking thing. It is true that I may have (or, to anticipate, that I certainly have) a body that a clear and distinct idea of myself, in so far as I am simply a thinking, non-extended thing; and on the other hand I have a distinct idea of body, in so far as this is simply an extended, non-thinking thing. And accordingly, it is certain that I am really

² Ibid., pp. 55-59.

³ Ibid., pp. 52-53.

⁴ Ibid., p. 54.

distinct from my body, and can exist without it.⁵

For Descartes, mind is also an anonymous subject, distinct from the objects of world. Descartes' main problem was how to get out of mind to grasp the objects of the world. He was also concerned with the issues like—what is there outside of the mind? Whether, the objects of the world could be grasped clearly and distinctly or not. What lies in the mind? Whether subjective and objective world meet with each other or not. Or, what is the relation between subjective and objective world?

Descartes argues that objective realm affects the subjective and vice-versa. He argues that the objective, i.e., body particularly part of brain containing common sense influences the subjective, i.e., mind and reverse is also possible.⁶ Such sort of interactions and its mechanism has been one of the major challenges before modern western philosophy. It also arose various questions in the mind of later philosophers such as whether really there exist two mutually exclusive substances or mere an illusion.

Our consciousness is affected by the objective world which in turn leads to “human knowledge.” However, when our consciousness affects the objective world it leads to “human action.” In other words, “human knowledge” is an outcome of the objective world on our consciousness while “human action” is the result of subjective over objective.⁷ These two phenomena, i.e., human knowledge and human action which are fundamental to the epistemological enquiry can be adequately explained by understanding basic nature of reality whether the fundamental nature of reality is subjective or objective or both.

Descartes conceives that mind/consciousness as a subject is distinct agent. Its distinction is based on its substantial nature. Both have separate and independent existence. But, separateness does not imply detachment as what Descartes argues “... that

⁵ Ibid., p. 54.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 59-60.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 59-61.

I am not merely in my body as a sailor in a ship.”⁸ But, still it is not something like an embodied-consciousness or conscious-body what Merleau-Ponty claims. Descartes’ subject is an unembodied consciousness and remains in anonymity. There is no possibility of reversibility in it and as such subjectivity always remains a pure subjectivity. It is intentional but only towards an object, i.e., unidirectional. Hence, there is no dialectical interplay between subject and object.

However, Descartes’ doctrine of mind-body dualism, and his irreversibility thesis of subject and object have been severely criticized. He is the upholder of mechanistic physiology and explains the phenomena of self and body in a purely mechanistic sense. But mechanistic physiology cannot account for certain phenomena such as phantom limb, anosognosia and reflex action so adequately.⁹ Same is applicable to classical psychology.¹⁰

In order to provide an adequate account of these phenomena, a very different conception of reality is required. Merleau-Ponty argues that neither the mechanistic

⁸ Ibid., p. 56.

⁹ The phenomena of phantom limb is understood as a sort of pain sensation either causes because of amputated limb or paralysis. It occurs to those individuals whose limb is amputated or to those individuals who born without limbs. The appendage pain is also considered as the case of phantom limb pain. Here, Merleau-Ponty uses this phenomenon to argue against those who consider that human body is nothing more than an object. It is used against the Cartesian notion of mind-body phenomena who conceive the relationship between the two is mechanically constituted. But the fact of the matter is that such a phenomenon cannot be adequately accounted for by the mechanical physiology and classical psychology. These sciences are failed to account for such phenomena that why an amputee still feel pain in the amputated limb or the presence of limb even when his limb is amputated. Anognosia is associated with the loss of ability to feed back. Under it the concerned victim does not suffer the loss of memory but neurological impairment. It is causes paralysis due to stroke. The concerned patient fail to perceive others as well as his own body. Merleau-Ponty argues that why a person fail to experience his paralyzed limb even when it is not amputated. While a reflex action is an involuntary and automatic response to stimulus without conscious control.

¹⁰ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith, Humanities Press, New York, 1962, pp. 76-79.

physiology nor the classical psychology can do justice to these phenomena. He further argues that such sorts of problems remain unresolved because of our distorted way of looking at reality.¹¹ We perceive reality from a certain definite perspective. In the same line of arguments, he further makes an objection to the reflective and analytical attitudes.

These perspectives seek to understand reality in parts and hence fail to understand reality in its entirety. Perhaps this was the main reason which compelled Merleau-Ponty to adopt different perspectives to understand reality as a whole and not in parts. He adopted phenomenological method over the reflective and analytical. In order to come out of the Cartesian problem of the mind-body dualism, Merleau-Ponty thoroughly examined the physiological and psychological conception of body. The mechanistic physiology conceives body as an object. Merleau-Ponty in his *Phenomenology of Perception* defines object is something:

... that exists partes extra partes, and that consequently it acknowledges between its parts, or between itself and other objects only external and mechanical relationships, whether in the narrow sense of notion received or transmitted, or in the wider sense of the relation to variable.¹²

It also visualizes body in term of causal relationship. Body is understood in terms of stimulus-response mechanism.

However, modern physiology does not blindly accept such notion of body.¹³ It has more or less replaced the classical conception of the stimulus-response mechanism. This is owing to the fact that all types of stimuli do not cause perception-what is termed as “constancy hypothesis.”¹⁴ Hence, there is no one to one correspondence between stimulus

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 80-81.

¹² Ibid., p. 73.

¹³ Ibid., p. 73.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 14.

and response. Moreover, neither our body nor our mind could give an adequate account for our bodily behavior. Body and its behavior have traditionally been explained in terms of physical and psychic facts.

Also, to conceive human organism merely as mental or physical is equally inadequate to account for such problems. It requires new conception of human reality which incorporates both the elements together—mental and physical.¹⁵ Hence, it is certainly better to consider human being as a psycho-physical being. Otherwise, the phenomena of phantom limb, anosognosia, reflex action and others cannot be resolved. Cartesian conception of reality cannot provide proper justification to these problems, since he provided separate and distinct perception of mind and body.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty in order to overcome the problem of the mind-body dualism and also to provide adequate description to these problems criticized the classical notion of mechanistic physiology and psychology. He argues whether body can be simply considered as an object—a being altogether composed of different parts, bearing external relation with each other. However, if the body is considered as just an object, it must act like a very complicated machine. It must follow all the laws of causality which are fundamental to understand bodily behavior.¹⁶

Merleau-Ponty in order to illustrate the shortcomings of traditional sciences—mechanistic physiology and classical psychology, argues that the various phenomena like phantom limb, anosognosia and reflex action cannot be adequately accounted for under these disciplines. These phenomena are not under causal laws and hence cannot be causally explained. He further argues that a purely physiological account cannot explain the phenomena of phantom limb—an amputated limb which is no longer a part of body but it is still experienced. While on the other hand, a limb which is paralyzed but not amputated is not considered as a part of body and taken out of account.¹⁷

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 77.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 84-88.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 80-82.

Similarly, psychological account also cannot fully explain such phenomena as it fails to determine why phantom limb is not experienced any longer when there occurs any injury to nerves leading an anosognosic to prompt his handicap even if he is not forgetting or failing to see.¹⁸ Moreover, it cannot explain the phenomena of reflex action as Ponty says:

reflexes themselves are never blind processes; they adjust themselves to a 'direction' of the situation, and express our orientation towards a 'behavioural setting' just as much as the action of the "geographical setting' upon us.¹⁹

Merleau-Ponty argues that such phenomena could be adequately understood by adopting a new perspective to reality. Cartesian perspectives of looking at reality cannot properly understand such phenomena as they either adopt physiological or psychological perspective. He further argues that we must understand the body not as an object but rather as our being-in-the-world. Our body is situated in the world. It is opened to the world through its different holes in it. It is the chief vehicle of our being-in-the-world. It interacts with other beings of the world and thus makes communication with other things as well as beings of the world.²⁰

Being is pre-reflective, pre-objective and primordial. Our body is not an object like other things of the world but as an experiential self. It is the foundation of all experience of the world since both our being and world are primordially situated.²¹ Being is also a cultural being and present in the "cultural-world."²²

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 80-81.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 79.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 86-88.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 79-87.

²² Ibid., p. 88.

Thus, conceiving body as an object and not as an experiential subject distorts reality. Our body as an understanding self is inseparably related to the world. The former is intentional towards the latter not in parts but as a whole. There is a sort of dialectical interplay between our perceiving body-subject and the world. Merleau-Ponty argues that the true nature of reality lies in considering living body as an embodied-self or conscious-body.

The phenomenological perspective is a proper substitute for traditional views—physiological and psychological. Unlike the latter, the former describes reality. It does not seek to explain reality like all other sciences. It locates human existence between the physiological and the psychological determinants. At the same time, phenomenological perspectives do not resort to reductionism—the reduction of mental states to brain states and vice-versa.²³

The very ambiguity which lies at the very heart of such phenomena—phantom limb, and anosognosia could be apprehended only when we realize that being is always being-in-the-world. The unique phenomena like why an amputee still feel the presence of his limb even though it has been anestheted or why an anosognosic feel the absence of his/her limb even when it is not yet amputated. Of course, there are representations of these phenomena but these are due to one's situated experience at a particular spacio-temporal horizon.²⁴

In this respect, our experience is situated in the living world and not transcendental like that of the pure-subject/cogito of Descartes. His subject/cogito is beyond spacio-temporal dimensions, away from the situated experience of the world and hence fails to experience such phenomena. It entails that the concept of “temporality” and “spatiality” are indispensable to account for the phenomena of phantom limb and anosognosia.

²³ Ibid., pp. 74-75.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 78-80.

As I have already mentioned in the preceding paragraph that the body is the vehicle of being-in-the-world and this body interacts with the surrounding environment. Its involvement with the environment leads to gain certain experience and this experience is neither reflective nor momentary. It is pre-reflective, pre-objective and also primordial as being is primordially present in-the-world. Such an involvement of the body with the world accounts for the experience of the phantom limb and anosognosia. Since, such an experience is in between the physiological and psychic that makes up such phenomena intelligible.²⁵

Our body as a vehicle of experience through interaction:

... is seen to comprise like two distinct layers', the "habitual body" and the "present body". The former signifies the body as it has been lived in the past, in virtue of which it has acquired certain habitual ways of relating to the world. The "habitual body" already projects a habitual setting around itself, thereby giving a general structure to the subject's situation. Since it outlines, prior to all reflection, these projects which it "expects" to encounter at other pole of its projects, this body must be considered as an "anonymous," or "perceived," global intentionality. As such, it draws together a comprehensive past which it puts at the disposal of each new present, thereby already laying down the general form of future it anticipates. With its "two layers" the body is the meeting place, so to speak, of past, present and future because it is the carrying forward of the past in the outlining of a future and the living of this bodily momentum as actual present. This is why the anosognosic continues to perceive objects as being manipulative for him although his handicap precludes his manipulating them any longer. Similarly, by projecting his customary situation around him, the amputee's habitual body may prompt him to try to walk on his missing leg²⁶

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 81-85.

²⁶ Monika M. Langer, *Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception A Guide and Commentary*, Mackmillan Press, Hong Kong, 1989, p. 32.

It is evident from the above quote that such unique phenomena occur when there is the presence of the past experience in the present body. Our body is the continuous experience of all the activities of the past. These different activities become habitual to body as the body continuously encounter with the cultural world. These activities involve various emotions, feelings, attachments, actions and so on. When past is reflected in the present for future course of action, such a phenomenon is experienced. However, when one reveals his amputated/paralyzed limb constantly, one is properly acquainted with this unique experience and no longer tries to run through his amputated leg. However, it must be kept in mind that amputee adjusts himself/herself according to his amputated or paralyzed limb through new bodily experience. Once it is thoroughly experienced that the amputee does not bear his/her limb any longer he ceases to behave abnormally.²⁷

Such phenomena can also be described by taking an instance of psychoanalyst's patient—a patient who suffers from a horrible experience of the past. The experience is so dreadful that he cannot consciously remind it. He tries to banish it from the conscious part of his brain through repression. However, such a horrible experience gets sedimented deep into the unconscious part of brain. Occasionally, such an experience disturbs patient and he thus behaves abnormally. However, all this is due to the past experience what we carry with ourselves in our present life. Once the past experience is banished from our mind we become conscious about our present experience, otherwise, remain slave to our past life.²⁸

The phenomena of phantom limb and anosognosia are analogous to such experience. The deep sedimented experience of the past life leads to cause such behaviour. This is happened out of emotions and feeling that an amputee tries to walk on his amputated leg. However, such phenomena are not due to physiology or psychic facts. These are not causally determined. But, on the other hand, these are based on “lived experience” of the cultural world. It pertains to existential mode of being situated in the

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 33-34.

²⁸ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp. 83-84.

customary world. Also, the very fact that nerves leading to brain, if damaged, cannot cause such phenomena. This explicitly shows that body is indispensable and inseparably related to “being” and also with the world. Hence, there is no question of joining the soul with the body as both are not separable.²⁹

Merleau-Ponty in part first and chapter second of his *Phenomenology of Perception* analyzed the classical Psychology and its conception of body. Classical psychology holds that the body is an object, exists as parts outside of parts. While in the first chapter, I have analyzed the mechanistic physiology and its notion of body. Mechanistic psychology has also treated body as an object of experience and not something like subject of experience. Like the first chapter, in the second chapter too, Merleau-Ponty provides preliminary critique to classical psychology and its notion of body as an object.

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He argues that although classical psychology conceives body is simply an object, but the bodily experience is not compatible with such views. Such views are proved to be contradictory with bodily experience. The various features of body which are experienced in our day to day experience like permanence, double sensation, the body as affective object and kinesthetic sensation³⁰ do not account for considering body as an object. In the light of these features, Merleau-Ponty sought to develop a strong criticism against the classical psychology which treats body as merely an object.³¹

Merleau-Ponty presents the first distinction between “body” and “object” through the feature of “permanency.” He argues that an “object’ is not intimately related to me as that of my own “body.” My body is inseparably linked to my self. There is no duality

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 82-88.

³⁰ Kinesthetic sensations refer to sensations originating in the muscles, tendons and joints. It is a sort of awareness of the position of one’s body parts and movement with other parts of the body. Such awareness of the bodily position and of its different parts is cognized through receptors located in muscles, tendons and joints.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 90-96.



between my own self and my body. In fact, I am my own body.³² There is no subject-object pole between my body and my self. Perhaps, this was the reason that he proposed the new conception of “subjectivity.” Unlike his predecessors, he argues that subject is bodily-subject.³³ Hence, my body is not perceived in the sense of any object of the world. He further elaborates the distinction between “body” and “objects” of the world by saying that:

... my body is distinguishable from the table or the lamp in that I turn away from the latter whereas my body is constantly perceived. It is therefore an object which does not leave me. But in that case it is still an object.³⁴

The above argument implies that I may withdraw my gaze from the particular object of the world and thereby it may no longer come into my field of vision.

However, the detachment of vision from the particular object does not mean that I am totally detached from the objects of the world. As being is always being-in-the-world, so I am always encountered by the objects of the world. It is always present with me and also constantly perceiving one’s own “body” or one’s own self. It also means that “perception” is not an epistemological perception but it is it is “lived perception.” One is always aware about one’s own self. But, the question arises that does “perception” always mean conscious perception. If “perception” is always a conscious perception then it is difficult to justify whether one is always conscious or not.³⁵

Moreover, objects are presented before me. But my body cannot be presented before me like any object of the world. As Merleau-Ponty says that:

³² Ibid., pp. 90-92.

³³ Ibid., pp. 94-95.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 90.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 90-92.

It is an object, which means that it is standing in front of us, only because it is observable... it is particularly true that an object is an object only in so far it can be moved away from me, and ultimately disappear from my field of vision.³⁶

It implies that “objects” are observed while “body” is experienced. The experience of the “body” is not external but internal. It is conscious experience but not in the Cartesian sense of the term. It is “embodied-consciousness” and experience is always embodied since there is no concept of bare consciousness. Besides this, an “object” can be removed from the field of my vision, while “body” cannot be removed from my gaze. I cannot place my body somewhere else than my own self. I cannot detach myself from my perceptual experience. Moreover, I cannot perceive my body from different angles as there is no possibility of separate existence of my own self and body. In fact, I am my own body.³⁷ As Merleau-Ponty says:

I observe external objects with my body. I handle them, examine them, make them, but my body itself is a thing which I do not observe: in order to be able to do so, I should need the use of a second body which itself would be unobservable.³⁸

All objects of the world are observed through body. It facilitates communication with other beings as well as with objects of the world. The second characteristic feature of body which distinguishes it from object is the case of “double sensation.” There is a dialectical relationship between subject and object and object is unique to our body. It cannot be presented by the objects of the world. As Merleau-Ponty says:

... when I touch my right hand with my left, my right hand, as an object, has the strange property of being able to feel too.... The two hands are never simultaneously in the relationship of touched and

³⁶ Ibid., p. 90.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 91.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 90-91.

touching to each other. When I press my two hands together, it is not a matter of two sensations felt together as one perceives two objects placed side by side, but of an ambiguous set up in which both hands can alternate the roles of “touching” and “touched”. What was meant by talking about “double sensation” is that, in passing from one role to the other, I can identify the hand touched in a moment be touching.³⁹

Here, the important point to be noted is that the hand which is being touched as an object also possesses “sensation.” Also, both are not simultaneously touched or touching but there is a passing of the phenomena of “touching” to the “touched” and “touched” to “touching.”

Thirdly, Merleau-Ponty argues that the body as an “affective object,” whereas external things are from my point of view merely represented. It means that our body is the locus of pain. It is not an instrument or cause of pain through an external object but through our body. If it is said that I am feeling pain through my body, then it implies that I am different from my own self and body. However, there is no duality between my self and my body. In fact, I am my body. Hence, it is pertinent to uphold what Merleau-Ponty argues that “my foot hurts” means not –“I think that my foot is the cause of this pain,” but; the pain comes from my foot” or organ “my foot has a pain.”⁴⁰

Finally, classical psychology attempts to express the originality of the movement of my body. It shows the difference between the movement of my body and objects of the world. This phenomenon is termed as “kinesthetic sensation.”⁴¹ Merleau-Ponty argues that external objects are located in the world and can be removed/moved from one place to other by me. However, my body cannot be moved from one place to another like these objects. This is owing to the fact that my body is not located somewhere else in the spacio-temporal dimensions. My body is intended towards the objects of the world but

³⁹ Ibid., p. 93.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 93.

⁴¹ Ibid., pp.93-94.

there is no mediation between my intention and action. I am my body. My whole body is intentional towards object. And not something like bare consciousness. Consciousness is not transcendental but embodied. My whole body approaches to objects directly. It becomes clearer from the following quote:

I move external objects with the aid of my body, which takes hold of them in one place and shifts them to another. But my body itself moves directly, I do not find it at one point of objective space and transfer it to another, I have no need to look for it, it is already with me-I do not need to lead it towards the movement's completion, it is in contact with it from the start and peoples itself towards that end⁴²

Thus, classical psychology gives mechanistic interpretation of "body." Such approach treats "body" as an "object." It treats consciousness/mind as detached from body. Accordingly, the former is considered as "subject" while the latter is considered as an object. Classical psychology also reduced our bodily experience to representation. However, Merleau-Ponty tried to put back flesh on the "pure subjectivity." He argues that human experience is pre-objective and any analytical or reflective attitude cannot reduce it into object. It is not only pre-objective but also lived-experience. Since, human being is primordially situated in the world; any attempt to reduce "body" into a mere "object" is equally fraught with inconsistencies.

B. Empiricist Perspectives on Reality and Merleau-Ponty's Critique

In order to respond to the problem of the nature of reality (i.e., subjective or objective, mental or physical) empiricism and intellectualism as the two schools of thought emerged. They argue that Descartes' problem is confusion about the nature of our ideas. He did not make any distinction between, i.e., spiritual and physical. Moreover, there was also confusion about the source of some ideas. Such confusion leads Descartes to believe

⁴² Ibid., p. 94.

that there are two types of diametrically opposed substances. He concludes that some ideas pertain to material things while others refer to spiritual things. Such confusion regarding the true nature of ideas leads to dualism.⁴³

Empiricism, argues that things are objectively present in the world and not in the mind. If they are in the mind then we can never grasp them. However, we grasp the ideas of the things through sense data supplied by our sense organs. Our ideas are composed of subjective and objective elements. When data is supplied by sense experience it is objective in nature. However, it is processed by means of memory and association, it involves subjective elements. For empiricists, to know an idea is to go back to the original source of ideas. The source of ideas is the sense data obtain through sense-experience. In fact, experience only gives us sense data and thus we must ultimately understand all our idea in terms of objective ideas.⁴⁴

On the other hand, rationalism also attempts to analyze the problem of Descartes. It argues that Descartes' problem is not a real problem but a self created problem. It is caused due to the confusion in the nature of ideas. Descartes accepted that every sort of idea is present in mind, i.e., spiritual and material. However, the fact of matter is that there are some ideas which do not correspond to reality or there is no actual existence of such ideas. For rationalism, reality is rational in nature and is grasped through reason. Sense experience cannot grasp reality adequately.⁴⁵

Merleau-Ponty, in order to know the true nature of reality and to resolve certain paradoxes in which empiricism and intellectualism are trapped, develops four chapters in the introduction of his *Phenomenology of Perception*. In these four chapters, he criticizes certain "traditional prejudices" and lays emphasis to return back to phenomena.⁴⁶ He

⁴³ Ibid., 59.

⁴⁴ Janice Thoma, *The Minds of Moderns: Rationalism, Empiricism and Philosophy of Mind*, Acumen Publishers, Stocksfield, 2009, pp. 156-61.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 51-54.

⁴⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp. 3-63.

attached great importance to the “primacy of perception.” The “primacy of perception” implies “lived perception” of the immediately given without prejudices. He argues that our definite mechanistic ways of looking at reality distorts reality. However, reality is understood through “lived perception” in “lived experience” which is not away from life world.

The first chapter is devoted to the “theories of sensation” as a unit of perception/experience. It deals with the two common-sense theories of sensation which are propounded by psychological school of thought such as – “simple impressions” and “sense qualities.”⁴⁷ It also deals with mechanical physiology which explains perception in terms of stimulus-response mechanism. Merleau-Ponty analyses all these positions one by one and provides a critical account against all these positions.

Classical approaches adopt “mechanical approach” to understand “perception.” But, such analysis fails to understand reality per se, what Merleau-Ponty says that “... traditional analyses missed the “phenomenon of perception.”⁴⁸ They consider “sensation” as the basic unit of perception. The “sensation” according to them is the building blocks of “perception” and “perception” in turn is the sum total of all “sensations”. Pure sensation is undifferentiated, instantaneous, and meaningless and out of our lived experience as what Merleau-Ponty says that “pure sensation will be the experience of an undifferentiated, instantaneous, dotlike impact.”⁴⁹ But, Merleau-Ponty argues that these undifferentiated impressions which are imperceptible and devoid of figure-background structure having no place in perception. These approaches become obscure as they talk about pure perception.

However, Merleau-Ponty, argues that the only way in which “perception” can be purely studied is to examine “perception” as it actually happens in our experience. Sensations in case of actual perception are always seen to have a “figure-background”

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 3-4.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 3.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 3.

structure which the so called “pure sensation” or “impression” does not have. It becomes clear from the following quote:

... elementary perception is therefore already charged with a meaning. But if the shape and the background, as a whole, are not sensed, they must be sensed, one may object, in each of their points.... The structure of actual perception alone can teach us what perception is. The pure impression is, therefore, not only undiscoverable, but also imperceptible and so inconceivable as an instant of perception.... An isolated datum of perception is inconceivable....⁵⁰

Some of the classical theories realized the mistake of their predecessors and sought to rectify it. What they did was to replace the notion of “pure sensation” by the concept of “determinate quality” which was said to be a property of the object itself. As Merleau-Ponty says that:

The determinate quality by which empiricism tried to define sensation is an object, not an element, of consciousness, indeed it is the very lately developed object of scientific consciousness.⁵¹

This approach treats the world as a determined whole with solid, fixed objects, separated from each other by clear physical boundaries. This view is composed of isolated self contained elements. Anything which seems otherwise is dismissed as arising out of some deficiencies in the perceiver rather than as an example of the indeterminate nature of the object.

On this model, how objects give rise to perceptual experience is explained by the commonly accepted physiological process. Sense organs are stimulated by atoms of matter, the central nervous system transmits the stimulation to the brain where stimulation is recorded and decoded and the result is an experience. This system reduces

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 4

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 6.

the perceiver to a passive physical system receiving stimuli and responding determinately. This model is assured to be credible by both common sense and science. It becomes clear from Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*:

... We have in principle a point-to-point correspondence and constant connection between the stimulus and the elementary perception. But this 'constancy hypothesis' conflicts with the data of consciousness, and the very psychologists who accept it recognise its purely theoretical character. For example, the intensity of a sound under certain circumstances lowers its pitch; the addition of auxiliary lines makes two figures unequal which are objectively equal; a coloured area appears to be the same colour over the whole of its surface, whereas the chromatic thresholds of the different parts of the retina ought to make it red in one place, orange somewhere else, and in certain cases colourless.⁵²

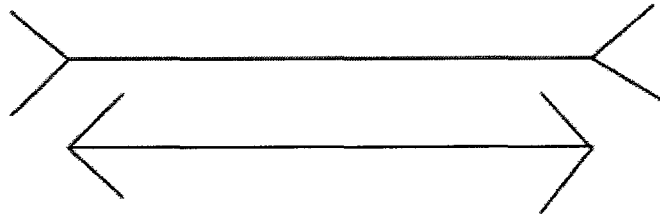
Merleau-Ponty points out that our "actual experience" is not so simple and mechanically assigned. Its very nature is "implicit," "ambiguous" and "contextual." He gives various examples like the "Muller Layer's optical illusion"⁵³ to prove his point. He says that:

The two straight lines in Muller Lyer's optical illusion are neither of equal nor unequal lengths; it is only in the objective world that this question arises. The visual field is that strange zone in which contradictory notions jostle each other because the objects-the straight lines of Muller-Lyer- are not, in that field, assigned to the realm of being, in which a comparison would be possible, but each is taken in its private context as if it did not belong to the same

⁵² Ibid., pp. 7-8.

⁵³ In Muller Lyer's Optical illusion, the two lines drawn of same length appears to be of different length.. But, what is interesting here is that while the centre portions of these two lines seem to be of different length, but if one measures them , one will find that both lines are of equal length.

universe as the other.⁵⁴



This ambiguity in Merleau-Ponty's opinion should prompt us to withdraw our belief in an external world characterized by mechanical sensations and determinate qualities, i.e., the world as we have seen it until now. We are to go beyond to the objective realm to grasp the true nature of perception.

In the second chapter of the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty, continues with the notion of pure, meaningless, sensory given that has been problematised in the last chapter. He says that as per the "figure-background" structure that which is perceived must have an outline and this outline cannot be another "sensation" since we have already used the term for that of which it is an outline.⁵⁵ This shows the inadequacy of the invoking the notion of "sensation" in analyzing perception.

One further defence would be that the "outline" is not a sensation but a collection of sensations, as a line is composed of indivisible points which are not intrinsically connected. But, what is the reason for such association. Empiricism explains that it is our memory of seeing similar association in the past and calling them by the same name. Thus, it is through the introduction of the twin concepts of "association" and "memory" that empiricism seeks to provide memory to the meaningless impressions.⁵⁶

Merleau-Ponty gives a thorough criticism of this view. He asks two questions– a) what is it about the present perceptual data which causes the perceiver to associate them in a particular way?; b) what is it about the present perceptual data which calls up a

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 6.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 13.

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 14-16.

certain memory in the mind of the perceiver? These questions, says Merleau-Ponty cannot be answered if the perceptual data/sensations is meaningless. To prevent arguing in a circle, “association” and “memory” must themselves have their basis in a perceptual experience which has meaning. Otherwise, we will have a case of meaningless concepts explaining other meaningless concepts.⁵⁷

Merleau-Ponty says that if we bring in the principle of “association” it leaves unexplained. Why “sensations” are associated in a particular form. Similarly, in case of memory, there is no explanation as to why only a particular thing is remembered? Instead, we are left with a model wherein things have no concrete nature but are associated and constituted on the basis of past experience. Why thing is recognized as a thing in the first place is left unexamined. Moreover, a worldview based on “sensation” reduces anything to “sensations” and knowledge itself becomes no more than the description of “impressions.” But perception does not mean remembrance as Merleau-Ponty argues that “to perceive is not to remember.”⁵⁸

Hence, we find that notion of “sensation” and its full paraphernalia including “association” and “projection of memories” has to be discarded. Otherwise, we run the risk of reducing the whole experience to either mechanical reaction to arbitrary association of meaningless units or to process based on similar processes in the past. Instead, we must return to the phenomena themselves. If we do so we will find a whole, a meaningful present experience at every moment bounded by a past. In this system, the relation between present and past comes under examination. It is in Merleau-Ponty’s view is a more worthwhile endeavor than the empiricist projects of an association of meaningless sensations impart meaning to a similar group of present sensations.⁵⁹

Merleau-Ponty thinks that the objective world view based on “sensation” cannot be easily suppressed by a worldview based on phenomena though the latter is correct.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 21-23.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 22.

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 22-24.

Since, all phenomena are theoretically reconstructed in terms of “impressions” as the basic unit of experience. They cannot be used to disprove empiricism.⁶⁰ The only way for the phenomenologist is to make thought aware of its own prejudice and making it appropriate the basic phenomena concealed by empiricist constructions.

Another change that Merleau-Ponty subjects empiricism is to reduce things to conglomeration of stimulus and qualities and completely falsify and overrule. It should have intrinsic, cultural and human meaning. The phenomenologist has therefore to rediscover and describe the cultural world/ the world as culture.

C. Intellectualist Perspectives on Reality and Merleau-Ponty’s Critique

Rationalism as a school of thought claims that reality is rational in nature and reason is the driving force for attaining knowledge. It also holds that reality is contained in our consciousness. Reason grasps the elements of our experience and thus transcends experience. Experience cannot be the valid source of knowledge. As reality is rational in nature, it cannot grasp truth apart from reason. It is the “reason” which grasps rational reality.⁶¹

However, Merleau-Ponty argues that both the perspectives of looking at reality, i.e., empiricism and rationalism, cannot adequately account for the phenomena of lived perception. In order to expose the shortcomings of these perspectives, he proceeds in a very systematic manner. He, first of all analyses various principles of empiricism on which it is based. I have already dealt with the various principles of empiricism in the previous section. Merleau-Ponty takes these entire principles one by one as– impressions and determinate qualities with meaning, constituting sensation as a basic unit of perception; association and projection of memories.

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 22-23.

⁶¹ M.C. Dhillon, *Merleau-Ponty’s Ontology*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1988, pp. 26-30.

Merleau-Ponty, after having dissatisfied with the empiricist account of “perception” switched over to the notion of “attention” and “judgement” as the basic elements of the intellectualistic theories of perception. Although, Merleau-Ponty argues that both the intellectualism and empiricism are at the same platform but still there seems to be advancement over the empiricism. However, its main problem also lies in the sense that it approaches to the phenomena of “perception” through reflective and objectifying attitude.

After pointing out the basic shortcomings inherent in a world view based on “sensations,” Merleau-Ponty then moves on to the additional concepts as employed by empiricism such as “attention” and “judgement” to defend “sensations” as a fundamental unit of experience. He attacks the concept of “attention” first. He argues that there are many cases in which perception does not exactly correspond to the stimulus. To explain these cases the empiricism argues that “sensations” are present in these cases too, but remain unperceived due to lack of “attention” to them. For example, in the “Muller Lyer’s figure,”⁶² if we focus enough “attention” we may see both the lines as equal in length.

However, Merleau-Ponty argues that this view suffers from its own problems. It does not explain why “attention” occurs in some cases but not in others. Again, there is the question as to what triggers this “attention.” And if there is anything which triggers this “attention” then what triggers that thing and so on ad-infinitum. Another problem is that the elementary perceptions already contain the structure which is essential for the brain to make an image of the object. And it can safely be presumed that “attention” does not create anything new in the perceptual data as:

Attention then, creates nothing, and it is a natural miracle, as Malebranche to all intents and purposes said, which strikes up like sparks just those perceptions or ideas capable of providing an answer

⁶² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 6.

to the questions which I was asking. Since “bemerken” or taking notice is not an efficient cause of the ideas which this act arouses, it is the same in all acts of attention, just as the searchlight’s beam is the same whatever landscape be illuminated.⁶³

Then how can it be said to make confuse or illusory perception clear?

To deal with these problems, the psychologists bring in the notion of intellectualism and posit consciousness as the missing link. They say that “attention” only throws light on what is already present. They argue that it is consciousness which through its constituting activity creates the structure of what is perceived and this structure is always there irrespective of our seeing it.

Merleau-Ponty attacks intellectualism by arguing that if structures are produced due to the very activity of consciousness they must be possessed by it. But this would lead to a further question. If it is consciousness which produces the structure of objects how can it ever be deceived about anything as is seen to be quite often?⁶⁴

Another important issue which arises here is that bringing in the notion of consciousness puts limits on our knowledge. If consciousness itself is responsible for perceptual structure then it already possesses these structures as we perceive an object. Then what is left to know, it may be asked? Nothing, if we follow intellectualism.

And in the case of empiricism, everything is there to be found out. Therefore, Merleau-Ponty complains that both these concepts leave no space for contingency or indeterminacy. There is no middle ground. Either we are totally ignorant or totally cognizant of what we are seeing. While empiricism postulates a world which operates causally on the perceiver, intellectualism merely draws a duplicate empirical world by a consciousness which sustains it. Thus, there is no middle ground which according to

⁶³ Ibid., p. 26.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 27-29.

Merleau-Ponty is the actual nucleus of perception. It becomes clearer from the following quote:

Empiricism cannot see that we need to know what we are looking for, otherwise we would not be looking for it, and intellectualism fails to see that we need to be ignorant of what we are looking for, or equally again we need to be ignorant of what we are looking for, or equally again we should not be searching.⁶⁵

Merleau-Ponty does not explicitly reject “attention” but understands in different, much limited sense. He notes that paying “attention” is not merely throwing light on pre-existing data. The “attention” is a process in which what is initially given as indeterminate is slowly articulated. Before, “attention” there is neither chaos nor determinate qualities. And after “attention” complete knowledge is not reached. He gives the example of infants where slowly and steadily they begin to distinguish detailed colors where earlier they perceived either “the colored” or “the colorless.” In the earlier stages, the structure of their perception was less developed, it was not as if they failed to see determinate colors due to lack of attention.⁶⁶

In this way, Merleau-Ponty weakens the role of “attention” as perceived by psychologists. If “attention” is not to be the ally of empiricist and intellectualistic thought then a new concept is required to take its place. The faculty of “judgment” is then introduced as this new concept is required.

Grounding perception on “judgment” is equally problematic because it presupposes the world as given. It is made on the stuff given in perception. It is a sort of attitude towards the objects of the world. Judgment is made on the presupposed conception of the world. It is not free from prejudices and preconceptions. Moreover, it cannot adequately account for the very phenomenon of reality.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 28.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 29-30.

Merleau-Ponty argues that both the empiricism and intellectualism cannot describe the very phenomena of perception. The perception is neither the activity of the constituting consciousness nor is it an objective property of mind. The “perception” is understood as our being in-the-world. It is bodily phenomenon and can be understood in terms of our situatedness in the environment. Perception as the phenomenon of bodily-subject is exhibited by the whole body. It is not limited to particular spatial location of our body. Our body is located in a particular situation and is having particular experience of that particular environment.

Our body is a point of view on the world and is perspectival. It cannot have the hold over the whole phenomenal field and thus “perception” is also perspectival because it is exhibited by the bodily-self which is also perspectival. Unlike Brentano, Merleau-Ponty argues that our whole body is intentional. Here, body-subject is the mark of intentionality. The intentionality is regarded as “motor intentionality” rather than “mental.”

Merleau-Ponty gives phenomenological account of perception. Perception for him is an embodied phenomenon understood by embodied-subject. Arguing against those who consider “perception” as mental phenomenon, Merleau-Ponty argues that such a conception of “perception” remains merely a conception. It cannot account for the true nature of experience. Perceptual experience is always bodily experience. There is no disembodied experience. Embodied perceptual experience occurs in-the-world. There is no other worldly experience since being is always in-the-world and interacts with the environment through its body. Perception is neither an intellectual construction in abstraction nor passive registering of sense data but it is active involvement of bodily-self in-the-world. Merleau-Ponty argues that both the empiricism and intellectualism fail to understand the lived phenomenon of the lived perception. These schools of thought cannot understand the dynamic aspect of reality. Our perception is the medium through which we experience different phenomena of the world because we are always directed towards the world. Perception thus, understood is not something special event or

happening but a perpetually incessant phenomenon. Being is always in communication with the world through its situatedness in a particular socio-cultural and geographical environment. Being is historical being and having primordial experience, this is what makes “perception” as a primordial phenomenon.

CHAPTER 2

Merleau-Ponty's Conception of the Self and Other

A. The Self as the Bodily-Subject/Self

Merleau-Ponty's greatest contribution lies in his notion of subjectivity which is physical subjectivity. Deviating from the main stream thinking he argues that subject is bodily-subject. The earlier view, particularly of Descartes was that subjectivity is pure subjectivity and is detached from the world. It is beyond the spacio-temporal dimensions. It is pure thought or pure consciousness. Such a subject of Descartes is something anonymous and remains hidden in mystery. There is no reversible gearing of subject.

However, Merleau-Ponty presents different picture of subjectivity. He gives the phenomenological account of subjectivity. Phenomenology brings back subjectivity into the life world and makes it alive. It studies the very phenomenon of subjectivity. It is intended to re-embody the disembodied subject of Descartes. It is the embodied-consciousness or the conscious-body taking part in the lived activities of the lived world. It is not detached from the objects as well as other beings of the world. Instead, it transcends towards the outside world.

Such a self transcendence is also termed as intentionality. However, unlike Descartes' notion of intentionality, Merleau-Ponty holds that whole body is intentional. It is not the case that only consciousness is intentional but our whole body is intentional. Like Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty claims that being is always being-in-the-world.¹ It cannot get away from the world. However, the concept "world" does not mean mere

¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, Humanities Press, New York, 1962, pp. 79-80.

conglomeration of things but it is cultural world. It is the habitat of beings along with other objects of the world.

Merleau-Ponty's main intention was to bring back subject into the world in which there is reversibility between subject and object. He argues that there is reversibility between subject and object and it is difficult to exactly identify which is subject and which is object. However, at the same time it doesn't mean that Merleau-Ponty reduces subjectivity into objectivity or subject into object.

In order to justify bodily-subjectivity as the subjectivity proper, Merleau-Ponty provides a very systematic account of bodily-subjectivity. He first of all refutes the traditional conception of body as an object, propounded by mechanical physiology and classical psychology which I have already dealt with in the last chapter.

Merleau-Ponty develops his theory of subjectivity as the bodily-subjectivity on the basis of-intentionality, perception, being-in-the-world, and spacio-temporal dimensions. He argues that subject as embodied subject transcends itself from its subjective pole to objective pole. Subject is not something pure consciousness or pure thought and perceives objects in abstraction. Instead, Merleau-Ponty argues that there is no possibility of any subject devoid of bodily embodiments and its directedness towards the world.

These bodily intentions bind the subject with the world and that is what makes inseparability of subject and the world. However, the Cartesian model of interaction between subject and the world is not feasible in this sense as their fundamental perspective of reality is different from what Merleau-Ponty holds. The former considers only mind or consciousness as an intentional agent and it is away from the world while the latter considers embodied-self is intentional and always in-the-world.

Merleau-Ponty considers body as the subject of perceptual experience. Our body is being-in-the-world and it is our perspective to encounter the objects of the world.

Merleau-Ponty while criticizing the traditional views regarding our body and perception argues that perception is bodily phenomena. It is neither mental nor sensory what intellectualism and empiricism hold. Moreover, it is neither subjective nor objective. But, it is our body which interacts with the world and having perceptual experience.

Merleau-Ponty in his *Phenomenology of Perception* holds that the traditional prejudices either considered subjectivity as a detached agent from body or reduced it into pure thought and considered body as mere an object among other objects of the world.² The subject of perception is treated as a separate entity from the perceived world. The perceived world is considered nothing more than conglomeration of physical objects. However, in either case, we have missed the actual phenomenon of perception through which actual experience is possible. We are prejudiced that our body is nothing more than an object what mechanistic physiology conceives. While describing the nature of “object” Merleau-Ponty writes:

... that it exists *partes extra partes*, and that consequently it acknowledges between its parts, or between itself and other objects only external and mechanical relationships, whether in the narrow sense of motion received and transmitted, or in the wider sense of the relation of function to variable.³

It implies that our body is reduced to in-itself and under the causal mechanism of stimulus-response. However, Merleau-Ponty argues that the various phenomena like phantom limb, anosognosia, reflex action and so on cannot be adequately accounted for by the mechanistic physiology and classical psychology. He is convinced that there must be something fundamentally wrong with these approaches since these approaches cannot adequately account for certain phenomena.

² Ibid., pp. 90-92.

³ Ibid., p. 73.

Merleau-Ponty argues that our body is the main agent of our perceptual experience. There is no causal relation between body and perception. Instead, he maintains that “the theory of body is already a theory of perception.”⁴ There seems to be a sort of coincidence between perception and body. Any sort of abstraction, be it conceptual or physical apart from body is not viable. Instead of saying that our body is an agent of perceptual experience, it is certainly better to consider our body as the very condition of perception.

Moreover, it provides definite point of view to perceive the world. It is evident from what Merleau-Ponty says that my body “is my point of view on the world.”⁵ Maintaining the difference between body and external objects of the world and also considering body as bodily perspective to the world he adds:

It is true that external objects too never turn one of their sides to me without hiding the rest, but I can at least freely choose the side which they are to present to me. They could not appear otherwise than in perspective, but the particular perspective which I acquire at each moment is the outcome of no more than physical necessity, that is to say, of a necessity which I can use and which is not a prison for me: from my window only the tower of the church is visible, but this limitation simultaneously holds out the promise that from elsewhere the whole church could be seen.⁶

Merleau-Ponty criticizes Descartes’ disembodied pure thinking subject. He also criticizes rationalistic perspective of disembodied subject as it provides reflective attitude towards reality. Merleau-Ponty argues that embodied-subject provides bodily point of view of our ordinary experience of the reality in the world. Such an experience is not possible in a detached sense of body from the world. He adds:

⁴ Ibid., pp. 203-5.

⁵ Ibid., p. 70.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 90-91.

One might reply that this 'bodily experience' is itself a 'representation,' a 'psychic fact,' and that as such it is at the end of a chain of physical and physiological events that alone can be ascribed to the 'real body'. Is not my body, exactly like external bodies, an object that acts on receptors and finally gives rise to the awareness of the body? Is there not a 'interoceptivity,' just as there is an 'exteroceptivity'? Can't I find in the body message wires sent by the internal organs to the brain, which are installed by nature to provide the soul with the opportunity of feeling its body?⁷

Mereau-Ponty in his *Phenomenology of Perception* attached great importance to the primacy of perception. Perception as understood by Merleau-Ponty is not something like epistemological perception. It is neither purely mental nor purely physical, but somehow conglomeration of the two as being is a psycho-physical being. Phenomenology understands the very phenomenon of perception. It understands metaphysical aspects of reality such as what is being, freedom, subjective, objective and so on?

Merleau-Ponty's account of subjectivity is embodied. It is incarnate-subject. He, in fact, avoids both the extremes that self is either mental phenomena in which all thoughts and perceptions occur or body which is devoid of all these. He accepts middle way between the two extremes. Had subject been pure consciousness, it would have been separated from the physical body.

Perception is a window to the outside world.⁸ The perceiver is accessible to the outside world through perception and vice-versa. However, such a perceptual phenomenon must be exhibited by a subject who comes under the spacio-temporal dimensions. Clearly, neither the Cartesian subject nor the intellectualistic subject does fulfill the criteria of being a phenomenological subject. This is owing to the fact that phenomenological subject, particularly in Merleau-Ponty, is not away from the perceived

⁷ Ibid., pp. 75-76.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 91-92.

world. However, the Cartesian subject is a pure mental or pure consciousness and does not fall within the spacio-temporal dimensions because of its very nature.

But, Merleau-Ponty argues that subjectivity is physical. Self is bodily-self. It is active perceiver of the outside world. However, perception for him is not a mere reflection on passively received sensory data.⁹ Subject as bodily subject is actively involved in the different functions of the world. It always encounters with the objects of the world. Since, subject is not away from the world as it is bodily subject. The resulting perception coming out of bodily subject is lived perception.

For lived perception to be possible there must be lived perceiver actively engaged in the lived world. The perceived world is also a lived world. Hence, there is a lived experience of the lived world coming out of lived perception. The body for Merleau-Ponty is not an inert thing present among other objects of the world. He categorically differentiates between our body and other objects of the world.

Body is to be seen as a conscious subject. Traditional approaches to body, i.e., mechanistic physiology, classical psychology, behaviorism and natural sciences reduce body into mere an object. However, body is the locus of every sort of thinking, rationality, existence and communication with other beings as well as objects of the world. Communication is a medium of interaction with the perceived world. However, there is no medium for communication other than that of our own body.¹⁰

Our body through its different holes is opened to the outside world. These holes/channels act as connecting link between our body and the perceived world. In this respect our body acts as a sort of image between me and the world. However, our whole body is in communication with the outside world as well as other beings of the world. It

⁹ Ibid., p. 74.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 353-54.

is not proper to say that we are in touch with other beings through a definite part of our body like our eyes, forehead etc.¹¹

Although, language is the chief mode of interaction with the outside world but it is not a mental phenomena. It is a bodily phenomenon. Our whole body experiences different things of the world. Body is a mode of experience. Hence, it could not be reduced into mere an object.

Body is the mode of speech and expression.¹² It exhibits different phenomena and is situated in a particular spacio-temporal horizon. Its situatedness in a particular horizon leads it to have varieties of experience. There is a dialectical relationship between our-body and world. Hence any reduction is not viable.

But, the subjectivity is an incarnate-subjectivity in a particular situation. It is inseparably located from its surrounding environment. There is no anonymous subject, altogether separated from other objects of the world. Self as a bodily-self is constantly engaged in its different activities like perceptual, sexual, linguistic engagement with the world.

Materialism is the doctrine that holds that a person is a highly complicated machine like system consisted of physical facts. While on the other hand, “idealism” is the doctrine that holds that a person is a non-physical mind. Both these views are diametrically opposed to each other but still each claims truth separately. However, dualism is the doctrine that a person is composed of two substances – mind and body. Mind is immaterial and survives the death of body since it constitutes the very essence of a person. While physical body is a contingent fact.

Merleau-Ponty argues that all these ontological doctrines regarding a person are fraught with inconsistencies. Neither the “materialism,” nor “idealism” could claim truth

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 354-57.

¹² Ibid., pp. 174-99.

independently. These doctrines adopt reductionist approach to subjectivity. Reductionism is the doctrine that holds that mental subjective states could be reduced into physical objective states and vice-versa.

Merleau-Ponty makes distinction between the perceiving body and external objects of the perceived world. He says that like external objects of the world his body is not observed. There is a fundamental distinction between the perceiving body and external objects of the world. The former acts as perceiver and performs the function of perception while the latter is merely observed or perceived. The relation between the two is of the perceiver-perceived. The perceiver perceives the perceived not the perceiver itself. He says that:

I observe external objects with my body, I handle them, examine them, walk around them, but my body itself is a thing which I do not observe: in order to be able to do so, I should need the use of a second which itself would be unobservable.¹³

On the other hand, dualism is the thesis that holds that both mental and physical entities exist. Descartes' dualism was substance dualism which holds that mind and body are the two relative substances exist simultaneously. It holds that mental influences the physical and vice-versa. However, Descartes' dualist thesis posed several problems before philosophers like the union of the two diametrically opposed substances.

However, Merleau-Ponty provides phenomenological solution to the Cartesian problem. He holds that mental and physical are not two separate independent entities. Instead, both are intertwined together constituting as a whole organism what he calls psycho-physical organism. There is no causal relationship between the two. The duality is perceived because of our analytical attitude. But the being is primordially existing in-the-world and it is from the start existing in unity and always in-the-world.

¹³ Ibid., p. 91.

He also argues that our reflective attitude understands reality in parts. It does not perceive reality in its actual existence. The mental-physical distinction is not found in our immediate experience. The primordially existing being-in-the-world is prior to mental-physical distinction. The being in its primordial existence is in unity and any reflective knowledge cannot distort it. It becomes clear what Merleau-Ponty says that before reflection:

The unity of man has not yet been broken; the body has not yet been stripped of human predicates; it has not yet become a machine; and the soul has not yet been defined as existence for-itself.¹⁴

Pre-reflectively, human being is not broken into mental and physical predicates or into substances. It is at the particular period of time that the notion of the distinct human predicates came into existence. It is also because of the philosophical reflections and philosophical judgments towards reality.

B. The Self and its Freedom: Merleau-Ponty's Critique of Sartre.

Merleau-Ponty attached great importance to subjectivity and its freedom. The subjectivity is understood as physical subjectivity. It is not causally determined. There is no causal relationship between the subject and his body. The subject is not causally related to the perceived world and his society. The present section is devoted to understand Merleau-Ponty's notion of "self" and its "freedom." However, Merleau-Ponty, does not deal with the concept of "freedom" in isolation. He makes a detailed critique of Sartre's notion of freedom. In the chapter on "freedom" in his *Phenomenology of Perception*, he develops a thorough critique of Sartre's notion of absolute freedom. It is, therefore, pertinent to bring in Sartre's notion of freedom. My main intention here is to analyze the concept of

¹⁴ Stephen Priest, *Merleau-Ponty*, Routledge Press, London and New York, 1998. p. 66.

“freedom” of Merleau-Ponty vis-à-vis J P Sartre. But, before proceeding further, it is necessary to first understand Sartre’s notion of freedom.

Sartre’s concept of “freedom” is not understood without the concept “Being-for-itself.” Both these concepts are so intertwined that one is incomplete without the other. Sartre in the part fourth of his *Being and Nothingness* elaborates the notion of freedom. Sartre gives an ontological interpretation to freedom. He reduces the Being-For-itself to doing. On reflecting the works of the psychologists of the twentieth century, Sartre realizes that:

We find no given in human reality in the sense that temperament, character, position, principles of reason would be acquired or innate data existing in the manner of things.¹⁵

It implies that human reality does not contain something which is prior to human action. In fact, human reality consists in its interaction to its surrounding environment and also based on different circumstances and situations. The very existence of human reality is reduced to action, which means that human existence and human action are not separate but both are one and the same thing. In order to make this position more consistent I quote Sartre—“human reality does not exist in order to act later; but for human reality, to be is to act and to cease to act is to cease to be.”¹⁶

However, it should be borne in mind that human action is not prior to human reality. Sartre even goes to the extent of saying that human reality is action and all these actions are attached to the Being-for-itself. If we consider that human reality is determined to action by something like prior to action then it leads to a sort of necessity or determinism. However, for Sartre “the existence of the act implies its autonomy.”¹⁷

¹⁵ Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes, Gallimard Publishers, 1957, p. 476.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 476.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 476.

While explaining action, he further says that “For an act is a projection of the for-itself toward what is not, and what is can in no way determined by itself what is not.”¹⁸

Besides action, Sartre also introduces other concepts like “human consciousness,” “negation” and “nothingness” in order to fully explain the notion of “freedom.”¹⁹ This is because all these concepts are so inter-related that nothing could be understood in isolation. He attributes consciousness to “Being-for-itself” because “for-itself” is not full and having lack in contrast to “in-itself.” According to Sartre, the nature of consciousness consists in “to go beyond itself, to be what it is not and not to be what it is.” The above quotation implies that the notion of consciousness is understood in terms of certain possibilities or projects because consciousness is always of something and it is always directed towards an object or goal. As Sartre writes:

... freedom of man is the reason why there is nothingness in the world. In other words, the being that conditions the appearance of nothingness is freedom. The condition due to which human reality can deny the whole or part of the world is that human reality carries within itself the nothingness which separates its present from the past. Consciousness constitutes itself in relation to its past as separated from the past by a nothingness.²⁰

Now, apart from action as the condition of freedom, it seems to me that Sartre’s concept of “absolute freedom” and “facticity” are self contradictory. Although, he says “that man being condemned to be free,”²¹ but does it really make sense? At one point of time he says that man is having absolute freedom. But, at the same time he also admits man’s “givenness” or “facticity” in the form of one’s place, past, environment,

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 435.

¹⁹ Christopher Macam, *Four Phenomenological Philosophers*, Routledge Publishers, London and New York, 2005, pp. 155-57.

²⁰ Mrinal Kanti Bhadra, *Critical Survey of Phenomenology and Existentialism*, Published by member-secretary for Indian Council of Philosophical Research, New Delhi, 2004, p. 365.

²¹ Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 553.

fellowman and death. Givenness or facticity, according to Sartre is something which is unavoidable or to which one can have no control. If “facticity” is unavoidable, inevitable and out of one’s choices, then, does it not prone to determinism? Sartre attaches “freedom” to the Being-for-itself in the sense that it has certain projects and possibilities and choices. For this reason he says that:

... freedom is the freedom of choosing but not the freedom of not choosing. Not to choose is, in fact, to choose not to choose. The result is that the choice the foundation of being-chosen but the foundation of choosing.²²

However, if freedom consists in only one’s choices then one’s “givenness” is not subject to one’s choices. One’s birth and death are free from one’s choices but still there are inevitable and unavoidable facts. Again, if man is absolutely free or having unlimited-absolute freedom then, he should also be free from givenness. But, he is not any freer from facticity. To make this point more clear, it is also accepted that Sartre did not accept facticity (i.e., death as a project or possibility for itself) as a project or possibility. He even denies resorting to suicide. He says that “suicide” is not the solution of problems. In his words:

It would be in vain for us to resort to suicide in order to escape this necessity. Suicide cannot be considered as an end of life. ... Since it is an act of my life, indeed, it itself requires a meaning which only the future can give to it; but as it is the last act of my life, it is denied this future. Thus, it remains totally undetermined.²³

In the same manner, Sartre denying “death” as the possibility of Being-for-itself says that “death cannot be my peculiar possibility, it cannot even be one of my possibilities.”²⁴ Again, for Sartre, “freedom is conceived only as the nihilation of a

²² Ibid., pp. 481

²³ Ibid., p. 540.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 540.

given.”²⁵ But, is it really possible for Sartre? Sartre, perhaps influenced by Heidegger admits Being is always Being-in-the-world.²⁶ The “givenness” is in the form of one’s birth, environment, fellowman and death is always in-the-world.²⁷ It means that it is an inevitable part of human reality. Now, if Sartre admits that freedom is conceived only as the nihilation of a given, then, it means that without nihilation of the “given” there is no freedom.

However, nihilation of “givenness” is not subject to our choices or control. Again, if it is to be accepted that all the five forms of givenness except death are nihilated, even then there could be no concept like “absolute freedom.” This is owing to the fact Sartre does not accept death as possibility even rarest of rare possibilities of for-itself. Hence, it implies that it is groundless to accept absolute-unlimited freedom.

In order to further elaborate the expression “man is condemned to be free” Sartre introduces the concept of “freedom and responsibility.” It is true that freedom is the fundamental postulate of ethics that man is morally responsible for their actions. If this were not true, moral judgments in fact would have no justification. As I have already mentioned in the very outset that Sartre attaches freedom to Being-for-itself and not to the Being-in-itself. This is because of the reason that we do not judge the action of the Being-in-itself, (i.e., inanimate) to be moral or immoral, because they are rigidly determined by physical laws.²⁸

Also, we do not judge the actions of children and insane persons to be moral or immoral because their actions are not free. We hold adult human beings morally responsible for their actions if they are not sane and under no coercion. We hold them responsible for what they do, because they are free in doing their actions. In support of

²⁵ Ibid., p. 481.

²⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson, Basil Blackwell Publishers, Oxford and Cambridge, 1962, pp. 182-88.

²⁷ Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 553-56.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 173-76.

this argument, I quote Kant's eighth moral judgment from his *Critique of Practical Reason*:

The autonomy of the will is the sole principle of all moral law of all duties which conform to them; on the other hand, heteronomy of the elective will not only cannot be the basis of any obligation, but is, on the contrary opposed to the principle thereof and to the morality of the will.²⁹

Thus, "responsibility" presupposes the action of the will. Otherwise, all sorts of praise and blame, reward and punishment, become illusory. Responsibility implies self-causation, self-determination, or freedom. It implies the power of the self to choose. Sartre also attached great importance to human choice. His position is clear up to this point. But, his assertion seems to become problematic when he says:

... that man being condemned to be free carries the weight of the whole world on his shoulders for the world and for himself as a way of being.³⁰

This means that Sartre believes that man is free to do what he wants. But, since a man is social being and is it compatible to have absolute freedom? Such a sort of "absolute freedom" is not possible in a civil society. The absolute freedom of one individual or group leads to the un-freedom of other individuals because man as a rational being lives in civil society. In support of my argument I shall quote:

A thief's liberty to take away anybody's property would become a threat to everybody's security. A driver's freedom to drive at his own whim would endanger the life and liberty of all users of the road. Such a situation is obviously self-contradictory. It cannot be permitted in a

²⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Thomas Kingmill Abbote, Kessinge Publishing House, 1909, p. 25.

³⁰ Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 553.

civil society; otherwise it would defeat the very purpose of social organization.³¹

Sartre attached great importance to “choice” and says that “choice” is freedom and vice-versa. However, sometimes, it so happens that even if we are free from external constraints but we are not able to reduce our choices into actions. This becomes clear from the following quotation:

A man may not be free even if there are no external restraints. For example, when a person is suffering physical pain or is mentally disturbed, he may not be able to do what he loves to do. Man is not only a rational creature; he is also a sensitive creature. He may feel constrained due to hunger, thirst or fatigue. So freedom in the widest sense requires that man should not feel any internal or external constraint. This means freedom from physical pain, diseases, ignorance, fear or want. It is very difficult to look for such freedom in the real world.³²

Sartre, while explaining “freedom and responsibility” argues that “there are no accidents in a life; a community event which suddenly bursts forth and involves me in it does not come from the outside.”³³ Such a conception seems contradictory. One may argue that if facticity (i.e., birth and death) is not determined and it may happen at any point of time then it is not more than an event or accident. Sartre himself accepts this notion while explaining death – “death as always been-rightly or wrongly is what we cannot yet determine—considered as the final boundary of human life.”³⁴

³¹ O P Gauba, *Social and Political Philosophy*, Mayur Publishing House, New Delhi, 2007, p. 94.

³² Ibid., p. 92.

³³ Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 554.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 532.

Sartre, describing the notion of “death” also says that “death is no longer.... I become responsible for my death as for my life.”³⁵ However, it may be argued that if death is facticity and we have no control over it then, how Sartre says that I become responsible for my life. It seems to me an apparent contradiction and also defeats the very foundation of the expression—“freedom and responsibility” which implies that responsibility always presupposes freedom.

Also, so far as the concept “situation”³⁶ is concerned, it is not true forever. Sartre says that man is responsible for his every sort of situation because he is the creator of situations.³⁷ But, it is not the case that man is the creator of every sort of situation. There are certain physical and natural laws in which man finds himself and there is also a sort of interaction between the two where one influences the other.

On the psychological ground, his position is also not so consistent. He reduces one’s freedom to one’s choices. But, the psychology of voluntary acts which includes our free choices is determined by motives and desires. When there is a single motive, this motive determines the volition and the consequent action. But, when there are several motives simultaneously present, there arises a conflict of motives and the strongest one prevails over the other and represses and determines the choices.

In other words, the “choice” is determined by the strength of the “motive.” Not only this but also the strength of motive is determined partly by the environment influencing the individuals and partly by the mental character and constitution of the individual himself. Since we live in this world, how can we ignore its influence on ourselves?

However, Merleau-Ponty in the opening lines of the last chapter of his *Phenomenology of Perception* maintains that subject is not causally determined. He

³⁵ Ibid., p. 532.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 554.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 554-56.

directs such criticism against the Cartesian notion of subjectivity. He argues that there is no causal relationship between subject, body and the world. In his own words—“... it is clear that no causal relationship is conceivable between the subject and his body, his world or his society.”³⁸ This is owing to the fact that Merleau-Ponty considers subject as bodily subject and not body as merely an object.

Merleau-Ponty by elaborating the notion of “freedom” and “determinism” argues that either there is freedom or there is determinism. However, there is no middle ground between the two. An action cannot be both – free and determined at the same time. It seems to be logically inconsistent to hold that freedom and determinism go hand in hand. In his own words:

It is inconceivable that I should be free in certain of my actions determined in others: how should be understood a dormant freedom that gave full scope to determinism?³⁹

Commenting on the doctrine of determinism, he argues that:

In order to be determined (in the two sense of that word) by an external factor, it is necessary that I should be a thing. Neither my freedom nor my universality can admit of any eclipse.⁴⁰

However, Merleau-Ponty argues that self is not causally determined by the external factors. Self is an active self always transcends towards the external world and there is a sort of dialectics between self and the external world. Hence, to reduce self into a thing is not viable option. And if self is not reduced into thing it remains no more determined. This subject is free and not determined as it does not fulfill the criteria of being a determined subject i.e., does not reduce into thing. The self as both free and

³⁸ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 434

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 434-35.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 435.

determined is incoherent because logically both positions are mutually inconsistent. He further argues that:

Once I am free, I am not be counted among things, and I must be uninterruptedly free. Once my actions cease to be mine, I shall never recover them, and if I lose my hold on the world, it will never be restored to me. It is equally inconceivable that my liberty should be attenuated; one cannot be to some extent free.⁴¹

In order to prove that self as a bodily-subject is not causally determined, Merleau-Ponty argues that self is not a thing. It is not like any other object of the world. It is also not an inert thing among the objects of the world. However, self as bodily-subject is opened to the world and is in constant interaction with the perceived world. Self transcends the determinate structures of the world.

There can be no limitation on my freedom. Since the determinate structure of the world is not something simply lying outside there, but rather, they follow from the subject. Without subject there is no world and the world that is, is always the world of some subjects. This is what makes freedom of the self. And if the self is free, it is not determined because both doctrines are mutually inconsistent. It becomes clear from the following:⁴²

- 1) Once I am free, I am not to be counted among things.
- 2) I must be uninterruptedly free.
- 3) Therefore, one cannot be to some extent free.

Or

- 1) I am free and if I am free I am not a thing (and only things are determined).

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 435.

⁴² Stephen Priest, *Merleau-Ponty*, Routledge Press, London and New York, 1998. pp. 151-52.

- 2) Therefore any action of mine is free (and there is not a time when I am not free).
- 3) Therefore, I am not free in some of my actions but not others.

However, Merleau-Ponty's conception of the self and its freedom seems to be somewhat incoherent. Like the being of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty's self as bodily-self is always in-the-world.⁴³ Also, it is not pure consciousness like that of Descartes and intellectualists which transcends the spacio-temporal dimensions. It is in the very life world. And whatever under the spacio-temporal dimensions has to be causally determined. In this sense, Merleau-Ponty's self could also be operated under causal laws. However, that is not acceptable to Merleau-Ponty.

After having refuted the notion of causality, Merleau-Ponty also argues that our motives do not constraint our freedom. Our interaction with other beings, motivation, nature and my temperament do not consume my freedom. Instead, all of these rather than being something that restricts my freedom actually flow from my freedom and its choices. In his own words: "the alleged motive does not burden my decision; on the contrary my decision lends the motive its force."⁴⁴

Merleau-Ponty criticizes Sartre's notion of freedom. Sartre is the upholder of unlimited freedom. He reduces freedom into choices and then into actions. There is no difference between "action" and "freedom" and both are one and the same thing. Consequently, we can say that all actions are free. But, doesn't it look meaningless since action is free and it cannot be otherwise? Does it lead to freedom? It becomes clear from the following:

If indeed it is the case that our freedom is the same in all our actions, and even in our passions, if it is not to be measured in terms of our conduct, and if the slave displays freedom as much by living in fear as

⁴³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 79.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 435.

by breaking his chains, then it cannot be held that there is such a thing as free action, freedom being anterior to all actions.⁴⁵

Merleau-Ponty argues that by equating “freedom” with “subjectivity,” the very notion of “action” becomes redundant. This is owing to the fact that actions are meaningful only when an actor performs in the world and the acting self must be of the nature of the existing world. However, Sartre’s nature of self is diametrically opposed to the existing world. In other words, consciousness is the negation of what exists in the world⁴⁶. And it seems to be inert in the sense that nothing can pass from us to the outside world and from outside world to us as both are of contradictory nature.

Apparently, the “action” has no meaning. And if such is the case then what is to be said about freedom. If there is no dichotomy between action and freedom then freedom also seems to be meaningless. It becomes clear from the following:

... it is the nature of consciousness which consists in having no nature, and in no case can it find external expression or a place in our life. The idea of action, therefore, disappears: nothing can pass from us to the world, since we are nothing that can be specified, and since the non-being which constitutes us could not possibly find its way into the world’s plenum.⁴⁷

Again, Sartre attached great importance to the very notion of “choice.” Choice is always of something. If to choose is to choose something for which freedom has a desire, then the freedom of self is limited. If Sartre’s freedom is absolute then it must not have any desire of something. It is absolute. It must not be limited by needs which fall outside of it. And if it does not have any “need” then why does it choose? There remains no question of “choice.” Hence the very notion of “choice” vanishes. In his own words:

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 436-37.

⁴⁶ Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 481.

⁴⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 437.

The very idea of choice vanishes, for to choose is to choose something in which freedom sees, at least for a moment, a symbol of itself. There is free choice only if freedom comes into play in its decision, and posits the situation chosen as a situation of freedom. A freedom which has no need to be exercised because it is already acquired could not commit itself in this way: it knows that the following instant will find it, come what may, just as free and just as determinate.⁴⁸

Merleau-Ponty perceives the “freedom” from the phenomenological perspectives. He seeks to know the very phenomena of freedom. Freedom for him is something which comes in our lived experience. It is present in our lived experience. However Sartre’s freedom is “absolute” and thus totally “indeterminate.” Can we have experience of such freedom? Freedom can only be described if it comes out from a “background.” However, it is not possible in case of Sartre’s notion of freedom. Hence, Sartre’s notion of freedom seems to be “abstract.”

Merleau-Ponty upholds the notion of “freedom” as self-determination. Self determination is the power to begin or intervene in any course of action. It is the power of autonomous self to assert own point of view or power to interrupt any state of affairs. We have the power to either begin or end our course of actions. It is the inherent and autonomous power of self. Moreover, such an inherent power is not something a-priori but empirical and is present in our situated experience. Neither it is divorced from our experience nor is it possible for us to have its experience independent of self:

... we have indeed always the power to interrupt, but it implies in any case a power to begin, for there would be no severance unless freedom had taken up its abode somewhere and were preparing to move it.⁴⁹

We have certain motives which are continuously operating within us. Some of them lead us to do certain course of action. However, some others obstruct us to do other

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 437.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 438.

acts. Now the question arises that do our motives act as sort of self-determination? However, in case of Merleau-Ponty, our motives should be considered as a sort of freedom as self-determination. Here, again, Merleau-Ponty gives two possibilities in case of our motives:

... motives incline me in a certain direction, one of two things happens: either things are strong enough to force me to act, in which case there is no freedom, or else they are not strong enough, then freedom is complete and as great in the worst torments as in the peace of one's home.⁵⁰

I am not fully agreed with such a notion of freedom. My own contention is that if Merleau-Ponty considers "freedom" as a form of "self-determination" and it has the power to either obstruct or begin any course of action then what is the status of our motives? Do we consider our motives as part of our freedom or not? Again, if our "motives" are considered as part of our freedom, then do we have complete freedom?

We have seen that Merleau-Ponty provides two possibilities regarding our motives and both are mutually exclusive to each other. In the first instance they are strong enough to force me to perform certain course of action. However, in the second case they are not strong enough. I am not free in the first case while I have complete freedom in the second case.

However, Merleau-Ponty very abruptly concludes that we have complete freedom as self is not causally determined. But if motives are the causes of our actions then in certain cases we could have freedom while in certain other cases we have no freedom. Logically, it is quite true to hold that if our motives are causes behind our actions then there is no freedom. But if reverse is the case then we are free.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 435.

Another putative objection against the freedom of self is “temperament.” Generally, it is argued that our “temperament” is a sort of threat to our freedom. Our temperament enforces us to do certain course of action and thus we are determined. However, Merleau-Ponty argues that such objection is groundless. Our temperament is not something away from our being. In fact, it constitutes the very nature of self. And if my temperament causes me to act then I am not determined. In this respect I am free.

My temperament exists only for the second order knowledge that I gain about myself when I see myself as others see me. In so far as I recognize it, confer value upon it, and in that sense, choose it.⁵¹

Merleau-Ponty also objects to the notion of the “weakness of the will” as an argument to challenge the notion of freedom. Normally, it is thought that there are certain things which are willed by our will but cannot be actualized. When we fail to accomplish these things we generally, argue that it is because of the “weakness of the will”. However, Merleau-Ponty takes such a problem in a different perspective. He says that:

We often see the weakness of the will brought forward as an argument against freedom. And indeed, although I can will myself to adopt a course of conduct and act the part of a warrior or seducer with ease and in a way that “comes naturally”; really to be one that is.⁵²

Moreover, there is a difference between one’s willing and actual acting. Merely by the dint of one’s will one’s poverty cannot be eradicated. Just by willing by a beggar, a beggar cannot become millionaire. There is a difference between our will and our concrete action. As Merleau-Ponty says that:

... neither should we seek freedom in the act of will, which is, in its very meaning, something short of an act. We have recourse to an act of will only in order to go against our true decision, and, as it were, for

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 435.

⁵² Ibid., p. 436.

the purpose of proving our powerlessness. If we had really and truly made the conduct of the warrior or the seducer our own, then we should be one or the other.⁵³

Merleau-Ponty argues that there is a “complete freedom.” Bodily self is not determined and there are no causal constraints. If there are physical constraints, they are in fact no more real constraints. These constraints are self created constraints by the bodily-self. It becomes clear from the following:

Even what are called obstacles to freedom are in reality deployed by it. An unclimbable rock face, a large or small, vertical or slanting rock, are things which have no meaning for anyone who is not intending to surmount them, for a subject whose projects do not carve out such determinate forms from the uniform mass of the in itself and cause an orientated world to arise a significance in things.⁵⁴

From the above, it is apparent that although, Sartre tried to give absolutist color to human freedom, but, he could not resolve all the contradictions—in the form of “facticity” and “situation.” All these contradictions are self created contradictions in the sense that he himself endorses these contradictions before discussing the concept of “absolute freedom.” Besides this, the way Sartre deals with the concept of “absolute freedom” is entirely different from what others have done. It is unique in the sense that he does not treat human freedom in ideas or in the ideal world.

According to him, human freedom lies in the certain engagements in the world. He attached human freedom to the Being-for-itself which is always in the process of coming out or engaged in certain projects. In this way, freedom is reduced to “actions” and “actions” are nothing more than our free choices. And there are choices because the Being-for-itself is lack or nothingness.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 436.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 436.

C. The Self and its Other

The present section “self and its other” briefly incorporates Merleau-Ponty’s critical reflection on the notion of “self” and its relation with “other.” Merleau-Ponty attempts to respond to the problem of the “other mind” by incorporating different phenomena of lived experience such as love, hatred, reciprocity, co-existence, inter-personal communication, etc.,

Merleau-Ponty deals with the problem of “other minds” from the phenomenological perspective. He presents a critical account to our objective way of looking at reality. Objective thought is the root cause of the problem of “solipsism.” It (i.e., objective thought) reduces to “other” mere as an object like any other object of the world. It leads us to perpetually trap in the dichotomy of being-for-itself and being-in-itself. It maintains duality between mind-body, self-other and the self and the world.

The “objective thought” treats our consciousness as the subject of knowledge. It is pure consciousness and is reduced to for-itself. On the other hand, the “other” is reduced to in-itself which is as good as any physical object of the natural world. Natural world is merely treated as a conglomeration of objects. There remains perpetual duality which is unbridgeable under the objective way of understanding reality. Moreover, there remains no space for the “other.” The “other” is reduced to object like any object of the world. Besides this, the second major problem with our traditional way of understanding reality is that it gives way to the problem of solipsism.

However, Merleau-Ponty argues that the problem of “other” and “solipsism” could be resolved if we adopt different perspective of looking at reality. In other words, we have to rethink the very fundamental perspective of looking at reality in a different way. Like self is neither a pure consciousness nor a pure physical body but somehow the conglomeration of the two what Merleau-Ponty considers as psycho-physical organism. Take for instance the traditional notion of “subjectivity” which is putatively understood

as something like pure consciousness or transcendental ego. But the question is that can we reduce subjectivity into pure ego?

The apparent answer is that to treat self either as pure consciousness or pure physical body distorts the very fundamental reality. Like wise, the world as perceived world is not merely a mechanically determined world constituted of mere physical objects. It is social-cultural world and is not away from the perceiving self. There is a sort of self-world dialects in which “other” also comes into existence.

Merleau-Ponty also holds that “meanings” are given in perceptual experience. Perceptual experience is the lived experience of the lived world. The lived social-cultural world contains the meaning. These meanings are realized through the phenomena of lived perception which are given in our perceptual experience. Meanings are always already there.

Merleau-Ponty while describing man-nature relationship argues that subject is not something alien to the outside world. The outside natural world is not self contained, nor is the subject. Subject is born into existence in a particular period of time. Subject is historical, situated in definite social and cultural world. It is not something cloaked in anonymity but always transcending towards the perceived world. He also argues that the world is not nature is not outside of subject but exists at the heart of subjectivity. It becomes clear from the following quote:

I am thrown into a nature, and that nature appears not only as outside me, in objects devoid of history, but it is also discernible at the centre of subjectivity.... Thus introducing historicity into my life.⁵⁵

Clearly, if self and the world are inextricably linked, there has to be a constant interaction between the two. Self is not fully present in itself and it is constantly transcending towards the perceived world and consequently the self is outside of itself.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 346.

However, world is inside of the subject. It implies that the world is human world or cultural world. Such cultural world also indicates the presence of “other selves.” Cultural world is also constituted of other beings apart from me. Such a notion of cultural world also refutes the very possibility of “solipsism.” As Merleau-Ponty argues:

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, plantations, villages, streets, churches, implements, a bell, a spoon, a pipe. Each of these objects is moulded to the human action which it serves. Each one spreads round it an atmosphere of humanity... recently evacuated.⁵⁶

Merleau-Ponty argues that the very existence of these cultural objects entails the presence of “other.” These objects are the creations of other beings which are anterior to our reflective attitude and always in-the-world. The existence of the “other” is undermined only by undermining the very existence of these cultural objects. These are the manifestations of the acts of being-in-the-world. As Merleau-Ponty writes:

The cultural world is then ambiguous, but it is already present. I have before me a society to be known.... I the cultural object. I feel the close presence of others beneath a veil of anonymity. Someone uses the pipe for smoking, the spoon for eating, the bell for summoning, and it is through the perception of a human acts and another person that the perception of a cultural world could be verified.⁵⁷

Clearly, objects are given in perception possessing cultural and social meanings. But the question is how is it possible for a cultural world to be always already there for us and how is it grasped? Merleau-Ponty maintains that I understand the behavior of others through my own inner experience. The “others,” their instruments and the world are understood through analogy. I draw an analogy between other’s behavior and my own. But, again, the question is that how can we use the personal pronoun “I” at the place of

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 347.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 348.

we? How can “I” be reduced into plurality? Isn’t the case that the very notion of intersubjectivity vanishes the subjectivity itself? However, Merleau-Ponty argues that “I” is the centre of experience. Through “I” everything else is experienced. “We” is understood through “I.” as is evident from the following quote:

... how I experience my own cultural world, my own civilization. The reply will once more be that I see a certain use made by other of the implements which surround me, that I interpret their behavior by analogy with my own, and through any inner experience, which teaches me the significance and intention of perceived gestures.⁵⁸

In the same line of arguments Merleau-Ponty attached great importance to “I” and its role in understanding the presence of the “other.”

In the last resort, the actions of others are, according to this theory, always understood through my own; the “one” or the “we” through the “I.” But this is precisely the question: how can the word “I” be put into the plural, how can a general idea of the “I” other than my own, how can I know that there are other I’s how can consciousness which, by its nature, and as self knowledge, is in the mode of the I, be grasped in the mode of thou, and through this, in the world of the “one”?⁵⁹

Merleau-Ponty argues that because of our “objective attitude,” we do not have proper space for other people. Our objective way of looking at reality treats other body nothing more than an object standing before us. Such is the conception of mechanical physiology and classical psychology. These traditional sciences adopt objective attitude in looking at human reality. They consider other bodies standing before our consciousness are nothing more than objects consisted of parts outside of parts. They fail to perceive that other body also possesses consciousnesses as our own body.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 348.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 348.

The existence of other people is a difficulty and an outrage for objective thought.... The body of another, like my own, is not inhabited, but is an object standing before the consciousness which thinks about or constitutes it.⁶⁰

Besides this, the main problem with our “objective thought” is that it does not overcome the so called self created dichotomy between being-in-itself and being-for-itself. The being-in-itself is treated as something inert object while being-for-itself is our consciousness which always in certain projects as it is incomplete hollow structure. The former is presented before the latter where there remains perpetual dichotomy.

There are two modes of being, and two only: body-in-itself, which is that of objects arranged in space, and being for-itself, which is that of consciousness.⁶¹

The corollary of “objective thought” is that it does not leave any space for “other being.” There is no plurality of consciousness. This is owing to the fact that it perceives dichotomy between consciousness and body, thinker and thought. But, Merleau-Ponty understands the problem of the “other mind” in a different perspective. He does not take into account the objective thought to understand “other mind.” For him self as bodily-self and always already in-the-world and there is no mechanical relationship between the perceiving self and the perceived world. Both are dialectically related to each other. Both are also not enclosed entities cloaked into mystery but there is an ambiguous relation between the two. Describing the bodily-self and the world he says that “... between my body is a movement towards the world, the world my body’s point of support.”⁶²

It implies that our body as the self is always transcending towards the outside world. Merleau-Ponty in order to justify the existence of “other being” goes back to experience. He argues that being is a primordial being situated in the perceived world.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 349.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 349.

⁶² Ibid., p. 350.

The self and the world are primordially related to each other. The self as a subject of experience is anterior to every sort of “objective thought.” As the self is transcendent being, and not anonymous consciousness, it enters into communication with other beings of the social world. It experiences not only the different objects of the world but also the “other” as experiencing self not before consciousness but “bodily-self.”

If I experience this inhering of my consciousness in itself body and its world, the perception of other people and the plurality of consciousness no longer present every difficult... If my consciousness has a body, why should other bodies not ‘have’ consciousness? Clearly this involves a profound transformation of the notions of body and consciousness.⁶³

Differentiating between the body as a perceiving subject and other body Merleau-Ponty argues that the very phenomenon of “perception” is exhibited by the bodily-self. And the experience of the “other” through “reasoning by analogy” is equally fraught with inconsistencies. In his own words: “there is nothing here resembling “reasoning by analogy.”⁶⁴ Our objective thought claims that the experience of the “other” is nothing but “inference by analogy.” The “argument from analogy” is understood as seeing other bodies similar to my own and making inference that other bodies also possess mind as my own although I have no access to other minds. From the behavior of other bodies I infer that like my body other bodies also contain mind. However, in reality the “inference by analogy” cannot entail the existence of the “other.” It presupposes that I recognize the “other” as “other” and this is precisely what is supposed to explain. There is nothing in the experience of “other” that even resembles “reasoning by analogy.”

However, this phenomenon of perception is primordial to every sort of knowing. Perception does not mean epistemological perception that involves subject-object dichotomy and knows reality in parts. Neither is it reflection nor does it analytical

⁶³ Ibid., p. 350.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 352.

knowing. Perception is the very phenomenon exhibited by our bodily-self. It is anterior to every sort of reflective attitude and entails inter-subjective existence. It is the very phenomenon of perception that leaves space for the other. In order to further substantiate his point, Merleau-Ponty develops an interesting example of a child's biting:

A baby of fifteen months opens its mouth if I playfully take one of its fingers between my teeth and pretend to bite it. And yet it has scarcely looked at its face in a glass, and its teeth are not in any case like mine. The fact is that its own mouth and teeth, as it then from the outside, are immediately, for it, an apparatus to bite with, an any jaw, as the baby sees it from the outside, is immediately, for it, capable of the same intentions, "biting" has immediately, for it, an inter-subjective significance.⁶⁵

Had there been "pure cogito" in Cartesian sense, there would be no experience of "other." This is because of the fact that Cartesian subject misses the very phenomenon of perception. The perception is the phenomenon exhibited by the bodily-self. But in the Cartesian sense of the body, our body is nothing more than an object. However, if our self is other than our body then it no longer experiences worldly phenomenon. It remains away from the lived phenomenon of the lived world. Same is true to our behavior as behavior is exhibited by our body through different modes.

Moreover, we fail to experience the very phenomenon of our actual experience. To reduce our bodily behavior into mere cause-effect series is to remain away from our actual experience. Causal mechanism leads to determinism. But, Merleau-Ponty says that we are not determined beings under the causal laws.

Traditional sciences such as mechanical physiology, Classical psychology, reductionism and behaviourism leave no space for the "other." These sciences reduce "other being" as an object. This is because their fundamental perspective of looking at

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 352.

reality is definite. They apply objective attitude to reality. They always understand reality in dichotomy.

The dichotomy may be between mind and body, self and other or between self and the world. Again, self is considered as pure consciousness or pure knower always separated from the object of knowledge. It always remains away from the object presented before it. It understands objects standing before its consciousness in a detached manner. It does not involve itself in the very process of knowing which occurs in this very world. This is also because of the reason that subject is pure subject beyond spacio-temporal dimensions. It is not historical cogito lives in the very world from anteriority.

However, as is evident that Merleau-Ponty considers subject as a bodily-subject. It is the subject which constitutes the locus of every sort of activity. The presence of the “other” also becomes intelligible through bodily subject. It perceives itself as well as the “other.” It provides legitimate space for the “other.” It experiences the behaviour of itself as well as of the “other” in the same spacio-temporal locations. As Merleau-Ponty writes:

But if another’s body is not an object for me, nor mine an object for him, if both are manifestations of behaviour, the positing of the status of an object in his field, nor does my perception of the other reduce him to the status of an object in mine.⁶⁶

However, body-subject is the ground of all lived phenomenon—communication, love, hate and so on. These lived phenomena of the lived world are not possible without bodily-subject. But these phenomena always involve the existence of the other. Communication entails inter-personal communication. There is no communication in its isolation. The very word pre-supposes the existence of the “other being.” Same is true with the phenomena of love and hate. In our common parlance when we say that the “other” is a threat for me or we are “threat” for the “other.” What does it indicate? Does it not indicate the existence of the inter-subjective world? Does it not indicate the co-

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 353.

existence of “I” and the “other”? Does such a communication not take place in the same world? The answers of all these questions are found in the self-world or self-other dialogue what Merleau-Ponty says that: “... we must learn to find the communication between one consciousness and another in one and the same world.”⁶⁷

Moreover, the self as the bodily-self is a psycho-physical self. It is also a sensory being experiences different phenomenon of the outside world through its different channels such as visual, auditory and tactile. Through these channels self is opened to the outside world. It interacts and also encounters with different objects as well as other beings of the world. This is what makes possible the very phenomenon of communication with the outside world.

In so far as I have sensory functions, as visual, auditory and tactile field, I am already in communication with others taken as similar possible physical subjects.⁶⁸

It is evident that the “other” is other for an objective thought. The problem lies with our perspectives of understanding reality. Philosophers bearing a philosophical hat seek to philosophies reality. It is loaded with prejudices and deviate from the reality per se. As Merleau-Ponty says that the “other” is problematic only for adults not for a child. Adults approach to reality from a particular perspective and this leads them to miss the very phenomena of reality. However, a child is not aware about any perspective and perceives things as they are. In this sense a child has inter-subjective significance.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 353.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 353.

CHAPTER 3

Merleau-Ponty on the Self-World Relationship

A. The World as the Lived World/Human World

There has been a traditional debate among different philosophical schools of thought over the issue of whether the world is subjective or objective. The empiricist school of thought visualizes the world as objectively existent, while the intellectualist school of thought argues that the world is subjective and cannot exist independently of the perceiver. It implies that the understanding of the real nature of world is solely limited to these two perspectives and that these too are in disagreement with each other.

Moreover, these approaches consider the world as merely a result of the constituting consciousness or as the pile of things objectively present in the spacio-temporal dimensions. The result is that there remains a perpetual unbridgeable duality either between the subject and object or self and world or self and the other. The roots of such conception lie in the very fundamental way of looking at the reality. Perception as the fundamental way of understanding the reality remains limited to epistemological domain. The epistemological perception neither can understand the reality as a whole nor its actual phenomenon.

Merleau-Ponty argues that the very phenomenon of reality is understood through the phenomenological perspective. The phenomenological perspective of perception is radically different from the epistemological one. Unlike the latter, the former seeks to understand the very phenomena of reality such as – the self, other, world, space, time, freedom and so on. The *Phenomenology of Perception* is devoted to understand these phenomena. Throughout the text, Merleau-Ponty seeks to understand these phenomena from the phenomenological perspective of perception.

In the present section an attempt is made to analyze how Merleau-Ponty perceives the perceived world different from his predecessors. Also, how the world is not only a mere conglomeration of objects arranged in the space but the world is the lived world. It is also to be analyzed how the space as the “lived space” provides ground for the world as the lived socio-cultural human world.¹

As is evident, the subject of perception is not disembodied consciousness acting away from the lived world. The perceiving self is embedded in-the-world. It is inseparably related to the perceived world.² The self as an incarnate subjectivity is always actively present in the self-world dynamism. It is not transcendental ego but is itself transcending towards the perceived world through its bodily channels. There is a constant engagement of the bodily-self with the phenomenal world. The experience comes out of the self-world encounter is lived experience.

Merleau-Ponty argues that the traditional approaches conceiving the “space” either in the form of “container-contained” or “subjective-objective” are fraught with inconsistencies. There are some phenomena which are not adequately responded by the traditional approaches. For example, the experiment by Stratton is equally problematic to the empiricists and intellectualists.³ In case of normal vision the retinal image is inverted. In Stratton’s experiment, an attempt has been made to reverse the case. The correctional glasses were made with the non-inverted retinal image to see through them the visual field. The result was that on the very first day of the experiment, the visual field was perceived upside down. On the second day the visual field became upright while the body turned upside down. While in the third and the final stage, both the body and the world became upright.⁴

¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, Humanities Press, New York, 1962. pp. 362-63.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 426-30.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 254-56.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 244-49.

What does this experiment signify? What does “inversion” signify? How can empiricism and intellectualism adequately account for “inversion” of the visual field and the body? Intellectualism holds that transcendental ego constitutes spatial position through its activity. It is the exclusive function of the subject. However, it fails to explain the phenomenon of “inversion.” In reality the constituting self knows about the wearing of correctional glasses. The perceiving subject should not feel the inverted experience of the world and his own body. If the constituting consciousness of intellectualism constitutes the spatial position then it should not allow experiencing the inverted image.⁵

On the other hand, empiricism is the view that holds that the world objectively exists independently of our consciousness.⁶ But, it is equally lost in providing an adequate explanation of the “inverted” and “upright” experience of the world even when the subject is still bearing the correctional glasses. If “space” is the property of the objective world then it should not turn upright since the subject is still bearing the correctional glasses. Merleau-Ponty argues that the above experiment leads us to the conclusion that the “space” is neither the by-product of constituting consciousness nor the property of the objective world. There must be something more than the subjective and objective account of the space.⁷

Merleau-Ponty turns his attention to another spatial meaning “depth.”⁸ His point of disagreement with the traditional views is that they do not account for such meanings given in perception. He makes an attempt to awaken us to go back to the “original experience” of the self-world phenomena in which every other phenomenon is based and could be adequately accounted for. He argues that “depth” is neither the property of any object nor the construction of intellect.⁹ In this sense it is even more original than the other spacio-temporal dimensions.

⁵ Ibid., p. 247.

⁶ Ibid., p. 247.

⁷ Ibid., p. 249.

⁸ Ibid., p. 254.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 258-59.

Merleau-Ponty argues that traditional approaches reduce “depth” into “breadth” seen from the side. George Berkeley holds that our retinas receive only flat projections of the spectacle and that “depth” is not spread out before our eyes but given only in a foreshortened form. As Merleau-Ponty writes:

Berkeley shows that it could not be given to sight in the absence of any means of recording it, since our retinas receive only a manifestly flat projection of the spectacle.... Berkeley would probably reply that, whatever may be true of the retinal image, depth cannot be seen because it is not spread out before our eyes, but appears to them only in foreshortened form.¹⁰

He further argues that what one calls “depth” is nothing other than a juxtaposition of points that I am simply in a bad position to see. If I were a spectator looking at what I am looking at from the side, I would see “depth.” He maintains that depth is invisible and cannot be seen without seeing from the side.¹¹ Intellectualism on the other hand holds much the same view that “depth” is invisible and is not available in the world as that of other objects. The “depth” is also the synthesis of constituting consciousness like any other spatial objects. It is not directly visible to the perceiver but is constituted by his consciousness while encountering with it.¹²

Merleau-Ponty, however, does not accept the “depth-breadth” equation and criticizes the very notion of the conversion of “depth” into “breadth” seen from the side. He argues that such a conception is the result of our confused way of looking at things. We fail to accommodate the actual experience of the phenomenon of “depth.” It becomes visible when our bodily self encounters with the world. It remains no more hidden when

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 254-55.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 255-56.

¹² Ibid., pp. 255-56.

our embodied-self encounters with it.¹³ It is a lived phenomenon of the lived self-world dialogue.

The “depth” is therefore a lived phenomenon. It has a lived through relation with the subject of experience. It is not an abstraction from the objects of the world. It is the result of subject-object encounter and is inseparably bound with them. In this sense it is a relational phenomenon. It therefore, is not understood through our preconceptions. Our preconceptions either reduce depth into breadth or consider it as invisible property of objects synthesized through constituting consciousness.¹⁴ The “depth” like any other dimension of the space is primordial. One needs to live it and not merely rely on abstract conceptions and calculations. It is the result of our concrete experience with the world. It is the result of our body’s power of grasping.¹⁵

Merleau-Ponty argues that the other spatial entities like distance, motion and size cannot be understood without going back to our “original experience.” Such experience is revealed through the self-world interaction. Take for instance the notion of “distance” which is also one of the aspects of the space. The concept of “distance” is understood through the self’s intensity of gearing to the world. It is the manner of grasping objects of the world. The “distance” is understood through object’s mode of changing size and shape. When the perceiving self has loose grip over the objects it means that the objects are located far away from the self. However, when the perceiving self identifies the objects more clearly, it means that the self has strong grip over the objects and the distance between the self and the objects is less. As Merleau-Ponty writes:

And yet is not a man smaller at two hundred yards than at five yards away? ... One can only say that the man two hundred yards away is a much less distinguishable figure that he presents fewer and less identifiable points on which my eyes can fasten, that he is strictly

¹³ Ibid., pp. 258-59.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 259.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 258-61.

geared to my powers of exploration.... That the thing is beginning to slip away from the grip of our gaze and is less closely allied to it. Distance is what distinguishes this loose and approximate grip from the complete grip which is proximity¹⁶

The “distance” is thus, understood in terms of “clarity” and “vagueness” in our perception. The more clearly the perception the more near the object is and vice-versa. But perception is the lived phenomenon of the self-world relation and this relation is primordial. The resulting phenomena such as depth, distance, motion, and time and so on are also lived because they are presented to us in our “perceptual experience.” These phenomena are not abstractions of our perceptual experience. These phenomena cannot be adequately accounted for by our “objective attitude.” Objective attitude does not rely on perceptual experience in which the bodily-self encounters with the objects of the world. The self is actively involved in the perceptual experience in which it encounters with the visual field.

The phenomena of “motility” and “spatiality” are internally related. Motility is nothing more than phenomenal body’s hold on different intervals of time. The subject is the creator of movement in its encounter with the world. Motion is not something external to the experiencing self. Traditional approaches believe that in order to understand the concept of “motion” some external mark is required either in motion or in rest. However, Merleau-Ponty refutes the very conception of the relativity of the external things in understanding the phenomenon of “motion.”¹⁷

The perceiving self is perpetually aware of every moment. It experiences every moment by its self-involvement in the world. It cannot experience anything by detaching from itself and from the world. This is because the self as the bodily-self is not reduced to an in-itself. It cannot come out of itself thereby knowing different spacio-temporal

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 261.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 274-76.

moments. The perceiving self experiences each and every spacio-temporal moment. In this sense “space” and “time” are also mutually inclusive and internally related.

Merleau-Ponty argues that being is a situated being. The experiences of myths, dreams, inanity and everyday life are in contradiction to the analytic attitude. Our experience opens us to the real phenomena of life. It transcends our objective attitudes in understanding lived phenomena. Instead of saying that “space” is existential; it is more appealing to argue that existence is spatial. In the words of Merleau-Ponty:

We must not wonder why being is orientated, why existence is spatial, why, using the expression we used a little ago, our body is not geared to the world in all its positions, and why its co-existence with the world in all its positions, and why its co-existence with the world magnetizes experience and induces a direction in it. The question could be asked only if the facts were fortuitous happenings to a subject and on objects indifferent to space, whereas perceptual experience shows that they are presupposed in our primordial encounter with being, and that being is synonymous with being situated.¹⁸

In order to further illustrate the phenomenon of spatial existence, I would quote what Stephen Priest says:¹⁹

- 1) Every conceivable being is related either directly or indirectly to the perceived world. (ppt, 252)
- 2) The perceived world is grasped only in terms of direction. (ppt,253)
Therefore,
- 3) We cannot dissociate being from orientated being. (ppt,257)

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 252.

¹⁹ Stephen Priest, *Merleau-Ponty*, Routledge Publishers, London and New York., 1998, p. 112.

Merleau-Ponty also derives a supplementary conclusion from 1, 2 and 3 which is anti-metaphysical:

- 4) There is no occasion to find a basis for space or to ask what the level of all levels is.

The gearing of incarnate-subjectivity to the world produces a new phenomenon of the lived world. The lived world incorporates the socio-cultural world. The world is not merely a natural world consisting of pile of objects but also the human world. The perceived world is the fundamental field of existence of being. The latter can never detach itself from the former. The being can turn away from particular field of vision but not from all. It cannot have hold over the whole world. The moment it turns away from one side, it remains open to the other one. It cannot totally be away from the world itself because it is situated in-the-world. And the moment we become aware of our existence, we find ourselves in the world. This is because our existence does not depend on reflectivity. The being primordially exists in the world. As Merleau-Ponty writes:

We must therefore rediscover, after the natural world, the social world, not as an object or sum of objects, but as a permanent field or dimension of existence: 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.... The social is already there when we know it or judge it.²⁰

Merleau-Ponty argues that the incarnate-subjectivity is not an object among other objects of the world. It is also not a passive observer of things. But, it is actively engaged in different projects. It always encounters with the perceived world. The perceived world is both the natural and the social-cultural world. We cannot treat the perceived world as merely an objective thought of the perceiving self. In both the cases, either to reduce subjectivity into objectivity or to reduce the social-cultural world into our object of thought leads us to a fundamental mistake. In his own words:

²⁰ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 362.

It is a false to place ourselves in society as an object among other objects, as it is to place society within ourselves an object of thought, and in both cases the mistake lies in treating the social as an object.²¹

The self-world relation is primordial. The social-cultural world is already there before our reflection. The existential relation is anterior to any objective awareness, as Merleau-Ponty says that “prior to the process of becoming aware, the social exists obscurely and as a summons.”²² While further reflecting on the subject-object relation Merleau-Ponty argues that the social world is not merely an object. It is the world of the shared feelings of inter-subjectivity. The inter-subjective feelings of the inter-subjective world involve co-existence, mutual love, hate, jealousy, sympathy and reciprocity. But, our objective way of perceiving world reduces it into third person object. It becomes clearer when Merleau-Ponty says that to reduce social into third person object is a fundamental mistake:

Despite cultural, moral, occupational and ideological differences, the Russian revolution of 1917 joined the workers of Petrograd and Moscow in the struggle, because they felt that they shared the same fate; class was experienced in concrete terms before becoming the object of a deliberate volition. Primarily the social does not exist as a third person object. It is the mistake of the investigator, the “great man” and the historian to try it as an object.²³

In the same line of arguments, Merleau-Ponty further writes:

The historian and the philosopher are in search of an objective definition of class or nation; is the nation based on common language or on conceptions of life; is class based on income statistics or on its

²¹ Ibid., P. 362.

²² Ibid., p. 362.

²³ Ibid., p. 362

place in the process of production? It is well known that none of these criteria enables us to decide whether an individual belongs to a nation or a class.²⁴

Merleau-Ponty questions the very validity of “objective thought.” He argues that objective thought cannot properly account for the very phenomena of the social-cultural world. It even cannot understand the inter-subjective world. He also says that the inter-subjective world is not based on any objective definition. Arguing against the historians and philosophers, he says that the social-cultural world is not objectively understood. Any attempt to understand the human world through objective definition misleads us from the reality. The “objective attitude” reduces the world into “third person object.” But the question is that does it really exist as a third person object? Is there any objective definition of class and nation? Merleau-Ponty argues that class and nation as group of individuals are not based on any statistics or language but on the shared feeling of the inter-subjective world. Every individual is situated in a particular situation and is having its own situated experience. The situated experience of subject becomes inter-subjective when it encounters with other selves in the same social-cultural world. This leads to shared feelings of the inter-subjective world because otherselves are also experiencing the same situated experience.

B. The Self-World Dialogue

The subject of perception, (i.e., bodily self) and the object of perception, (i.e., the perceived world) and the relationship between the two is the main concern of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*. The phenomenon of perception is exhibited by the perceiver in-the-world. It is the subject of perception which gives rise to objectivity. The object of perception is the perceived world. The whole phenomena of subjectivity

²⁴ Ibid., p. 362.

and the objectivity are exhibited by perception. Perception as is understood here is not epistemological but phenomenological.

The very phenomenon of “perception” seeks to understand the subject of perception and the object of perception. The object of perception is the world as perceived. The perceived world is understood as it is presented to the perceiving subject. It describes the very phenomenon of objectivity and does not rely on our preconceptions of the world nor on our theories about the world. Rather, it goes back prior to our conceptions and theories of the world as perceived – the world as it is found in our perceptual experience. Instead, it is this world that gives rise to conceptualizations and theories, and it is this world upon which these are based. It also acts as the fundamental ground of all perceptual acts.

However, all perceptual acts are performed by the subject of perception which is the bodily-self. The bodily-self is more than an object and is also a dynamic pole of the perceptual experience and, thus, it is never just an object but always something that goes beyond itself into the world. The world is always something that goes beyond itself too. The world is the other dynamic pole of perceptual experience. Perception acts as a sort of bridge between our bodily-self and the objective world. It transcends subjectivity into objectivity and vice-versa. It becomes clear when Merleau-Ponty says that the world is within me and I am outside of myself:

... I am, does not limit my access to the world, but on the contrary is my means of entering into communication with it... Nothing determines me from outside, not because nothing acts upon me, but, on the contrary, because I am from the start outside of myself and open to the world.²⁵

There is a dynamic relation between subjectivity and objectivity. Our subjectivity as the bodily-self transcends towards the objective world. It causes a sort of interaction

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 455-56.

between the subject-object dynamism. However, such a dynamic involvement between the two develops a sort of relationship which is very ambiguous. Such ambiguity gives rise to various questions like whether the perceived world is same as that of objective world of things out there.

Merleau-Ponty places “ambiguity” not only in our perceptual experience but also into things. In order to understand the true nature of things it is necessary to go back to actual experience. Such an experience differentiates between what is given in experience and what appears in our perceptual acts. Things as they appear are different from things as they are in the real world.

Merleau-Ponty argues that neither analytic attitude nor our prejudices are in a position to make sense of the objective world. The analytic attitude is based on abstractions from experience. But the perceived world is experienced through the lived-through experience of the perceiving bodily-self. Merleau-Ponty in his *Phenomenology of Perception* says that “the theory of the body is already a theory perception” which means that the body plays an important role in the perception of the world as well as one’s own body. The external perception of the world and one’s own body are synonymous. It is apparent from the fact that certain cases like Aristotle’s illusion, heautoscopy, Stratton’s experiment, and diplopia are not adequately accounted for through these perspectives.²⁶

²⁶Through these examples Merleau-Ponty shows the importance of the bodily perception which is the ground of the experience of the external world as well as of the perceiving body. Here, he says that analytic attitude cannot adequately account for these phenomena because these phenomena are based on the lived through experience of the body. It is the synthetic power of the body to adequately account for the external perception of the world as well as its own body. In case of Aristotle’s illusion, when one touches an object with fingers crossed, one experiences as if one is touching two objects. Is it the case that we are touching the same object with two sense organs? Why do we experience two objects with our sense of touch, while one with our sense of vision? The heautoscopy is an example of bodily disturbance in which one’s body is manifested in experience as double, mostly in the form of the face. In Stratton’s experiment a lens is used with correctional glasses in which a person is made to see through. Normally, image formed on the retina is inverted. But in this experiment, it was reversed. The result was that in the first day of experience, the visual field is perceived as inverted or upside

The conclusion resulting out of these examples shows that traditional ways of understanding reality fail to understand world as the lived world, self as the lived-self and the dialogue between them. However, such an understanding of the lived phenomena of the self, other and the world makes sense only when there is an appeal to original experience. Such an original experience is prior to our reflective attitude. It seeks to understand the very phenomenon of the self, other and the world in its totality. Merleau-Ponty argues against our limited ways of understanding reality. Our “analytical” and “reflective attitudes” perceive reality in parts.

We fail to understand the self as embodied-self and the world as human-world. This is precisely because of the reason that we have reduced perceiving self either as disembodied-self or thinking self. The former implies that our consciousness and body are the two distinct entities and body is mechanically consisted of parts outside of parts while the latter means that our thinking consciousness is the subjectivity proper. In either case, we have missed the very phenomena of actual experience. To reduce subjectivity into pure consciousness or thought and the perceived world into pile of things cannot account for lived phenomena.²⁷

The roots of such misunderstanding come out of our disengaged way of looking at reality. The subject of perception as is understood from traditional conception remains cloaked in anonymity. It is alien to the outside world and to our body. As such it is beyond the spacio-temporal dimensions. It implies that there is no possibility of self-world dialogue since both are diametrically opposed. A pure transparent consciousness cannot account for different phenomena of the objective world. It merely reduces the

down. While in the second stage of experience, the visual field turn right side up while body is experienced as upside down. In the third and the final day of experience, everything is experienced right side up. In Diplopia, a person faces visual disorder in which double image of a single object is seen. This phenomenon is popularly know as double vision.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 73-79.

outside world into a conglomeration of things as it considers our body as an object among other objects of the world.

Moreover, under such self-world schema, the “intentionality” is limited to our consciousness. But the question is that can transparent consciousness or the pure ego account for different phenomena of the perceived world by themselves remaining away from the objective world? Merleau-Ponty argues that in order to have lived experience of the lived world, the very conception of reality requires different perspective. Otherwise, the very duality (i.e., subject-object, mind-body, self-world and self-other) remains as it is and cannot be properly understood.

Merleau-Ponty maintains that there is no disembodied experience. Our body is the locus of experience. Instead of bare consciousness, our whole body is intentional what Merleau-Ponty calls bodily intentionality or motor intentionality. The self as the bodily-self is constantly directed towards the outside world.²⁸ It cannot remain away from the perceived world. Since the latter provides the very platform for every sort of perceptual phenomenon, hence the resulting experience out of such self-world encounter cannot be reduced to bare experience.

Such a lived-experience emerges out of the lived phenomena of the lived perception. It is the lived-through experience of the bodily-self. However, such experience is inherently present in the phenomenal world. It is prior to our “reflection” and cannot be vitiated by our “reflective judgments.” Merleau-Ponty maintains that being is primordial and always in-the-world.

The incarnate-self is primordially anchored to the primordial world through its power of anchoring.²⁹ Its anchoring power is compatible through its different sense organs that make grip over the inter-sensory objects. The hold over different objects involves a gearing of the body to the world and that hold in turn implies motility,

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 123-29.

²⁹ Ibid., p.261.

temporality, incompleteness and ambiguity. This incarnate-subjectivity gives rise to objectivity. Although things are inseparable from the perceiver, they still maintain objectivity. Things are independent but not in absolute sense. Things and perceiver enter into one another without getting absorbed into the other.

My chief concern in this section is to analyze how “subjectivity” comes into existence in this world? We have seen that “objectivity” comes into existence through the perceptual acts of the incarnate-subject. But, for any objectivity to be possible there must be an inhabiting self. It is to be analyzed how “otherselves” and the socio-cultural world come into existence for us. Apart from the natural world, it is to be analyzed how socio-cultural world encounters into our personal awakened experience.

Merleau-Ponty argues that traditional approaches reduce “subjectivity” into bare consciousness or pure constituting ego.³⁰ Bare consciousness is as good as transparent ego and becomes incomprehensible. It cannot account for the existence of another subjectivity since the very notion of subjectivity is bare consciousness. It ultimately gives rise to the problem of “solipsism.”³¹ However, Merleau-Ponty argues that the very notion of “solipsism” is untenable. This is owing to the fact that the very notion of “solipsism” requires language in order to establish its validity. Language however is not private. It is always socio-cultural. And the moment we utter the word “solipsism”³² it remains no more “solipsism.” Moreover, the very word presupposes the existence of the “other.” This is because any utterance in any language remains no more private and becomes public.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 349

³¹ Ibid., pp. 349-50.

³²This term is derived from the Latin word *solus* meaning alone and *ipse* itself. It is an extreme philosophical position which holds that only I myself exist whereas anything else like physical world and otherselves are nothing more than objects of my consciousness standing before my consciousness. Such an extreme philosophical position is due to over-reliance on inner mental states and provides no clue for the existence of external reality.

Merleau-Ponty refutes the traditional conception of the existence of other subjectivities. Traditionally, the existence of other subjectivities is understood through the “argument from analogy”³³ which means that other’s existence is deduced from the behavior of bodies which I perceive. The “reasoning via analogy” also implies that there is sort of correlation between my own conscious states and the behavior of my body. However, grounding inter-subjectivity “on analogy” is equally untenable. It is based on the old mind-body problem and cannot adequately account for the inter-subjectivity.

At the heart of the “argument from analogy” lies the distinction between constituting consciousness and our body. The former is reduced to being-for-itself since it is pure consciousness while the latter is reduced to in-itself. There seems to be a lack of any common ground between the two. But the “argument from analogy” presupposes what it explains. The argument is developed in language and it is presented for someone. Hence it tacitly presupposes the existence of others.

In order to further illustrate the “argument from analogy” Merleau-Ponty instantiates the behavior of a fifteen year old baby. A fifteen year old child opens its own mouth if someone pretends to bite one of its fingers. The opening of mouth by the baby is not the immediate cause of bodily expression as baby has scarcely perceived her mouth and teeth in mirror. But the fact of the matter is that the baby perceives its intentions from the inside that teeth and mouth are meant for biting. And when it perceives the external intentions of biting by someone, it opens its mouth. The opening of mouth by baby has an inter-subjective significance.³⁴

³³ Generally, an “argument from analogy” is understood as drawing a conclusion about some event or object because same is true about other object on the ground of their similar characteristic features. Here, it means grounding the existence of “other” by perceiving the behaviour of bodies. Merleau-Ponty rejects such reasoning on the ground that instead of solving the problem of solipsism, it leads to the old mind-body problem.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 352.

However, the same illustration is not applicable to pure or transparent consciousness. It cannot account for such phenomenon as it is an embodied phenomenon. How can a disembodied consciousness exhibit such phenomenon? Only an incarnate subject with an incarnate “intentionality” can perceive other “incarnate intentionalities” directly because it and they are internally related. It becomes clearer from the following quote:

Between my consciousness and my body as I experience it, between this phenomenal body of mine and that of another as I see it from the outside, there exists an internal relation which causes the other to appear as the completion of the system. The other is not transparent for me because I am not transparent for myself, and because my subjectivity draws its body in its wake.³⁵

Moreover, our intentions are not mental but bodily. The bodily-intentionality acts as the very mode of speech and expression. It is this speech and expression which is comprehended by other bodily intentionality prior to any reflection. In case of the above cited example, the baby does not preconceive its own intentions but directly perceives its intentions through its body. At the same time, the baby neither posits the existence of others nor deduces their intentions by “analogy” with its own; rather, it perceives other bodies with its own phenomenal body and thereby directly perceives their intentions.

Merleau-Ponty arguing against the “reasoning via analogy” maintains that for the child, there is no problem of “other subjectivity.” For the child, the inter-subjective world is self evident and no other argument or theoretical conceptualization can make it explicit. The child directly perceives the inter-subjective world not by means of any “comparative analogy” but through its own phenomenal “incarnate subjectivity.” It perceives others’ phenomenal bodies through its own phenomenal body and thereby directly perceives their inherent intentions. Moreover, the child is not aware about its any

³⁵ Ibid., p. 352.

definite perceptivity to experience other incarnate subjectivity in the inter-subjective world. It implies that like “objectivity”, “subjectivity” also emerges as an “incarnate subjectivity” with the emergence of human personality. Merleau-Ponty further writes on the inter-subjective significance of child:

The perception of other people and the inter-subjective world is problematical only for adults. The child lives in a world which he unhesitatingly believes accessible to all around him. He has no awareness of himself or of others as private subjectivities, nor does he suspect that all of us, himself included, are limited to one certain point of view of the world.... He has no knowledge of points of view. For him men are empty heads turned towards one single, self-evident world where everything takes place....Others are for him so many gazes which inspects things....³⁶

Language constitutes an important element of the human world. It presupposes the existence of other selves and the cultural world. It acts as a dominant mode of inter-subjective communication. However, language is the expression of incarnate-subjectivity which exists in the human world. Incarnate subjectivity through its inter-sensory modes encounters with the cultural world. It exhibits the different phenomena of speech, expression and language through its different inter-sensory organs.³⁷

Consciousness is embodied not only in our own body but also in the socio-cultural human world. It is inherent in our body as well in the human world that makes viable the inter-world communication. The inter-world communication primordially exists between incarnate-subjectivity and the human world. A child first of all appropriates the inter-subjective language and gradually with the development of its personality starts communicating with the inter-subjective world. However it does not mean that the child doesn't have inter-subjective significance.³⁸

³⁶ Ibid., p. 355.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 356-60.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 356-362.

Human beings have primordially inter-subjective significance. This is because being has primordial existence in the primordial world. The resulting relation between the two is also primordial. Perhaps this is the main reason that the child has an inter-subjective significance.

But the question is whether we ever think about the very possibility of inter-subjective communication in the human world? Merleau-Ponty argues that our bodily-self is the vehicle of communication in the world. It is an embodied-self opened to the outside world through its different holes. It is also opened to the past, future and other beings of the world. The opening of self to its past is what makes it a historical being. Such a transcendence of being into its past also makes it a socio-cultural being.

The being-in-the-world is not mutually exclusive but inclusive. It is internally related to other beings of the world and forms a system of inter-relationships. From such a framework of inter-relationships one may turn away but one cannot become alien to them. This is owing to the fact that one is relatively situated in the particular horizon. Moreover, one is internally related to the natural and social world through its inherent sensory functions. This is what constitutes the social-cultural world in which being is associated with other beings through mutual love, hatred, friendship, jealousy, anxiety and so on.

C. The Inseparability of the Self, Other and the World.

The self, other and the world are ontologically inseparable from each other as a triadic structure inherently related on the same spacio-temporal horizon. There is a sort of inter-world communication which strengthens the bond of inseparability. The being is always being-in-the-world and is inherently related to the world. The world acts as the field of inter-subjective experience. This inseparability is a characteristic feature of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological thinking. The phenomenological understanding of the

phenomena of the self, other and the world shows inseparability of the triadic relationship.

The phenomenal self as I have already discussed in the previous chapters is an incarnate-consciousness or embodied-consciousness. It is not only present in the world but internally related with the world. The world acts as the field of experience for the self. The bodily-self is the vehicle of experience in-the-world. It is actively involved in the different phenomena of the lived world. The perceptual phenomena are exhibited by the embodied-self through its constant engagement with the perceived world. This perpetual anchoring of the bodily-self to the perceived world leads to the self-world dialogue. The self-world dialogue is a lived dialogue since it emerges out of the lived phenomena.

The bodily-self is embedded in-the-world and it has its own situated experience. Its situatedness under the particular spacio-temporal dimension does not seal it off from its environment. It is directed towards the outside world through its phenomenon of perception. The perception is bodily phenomena and not mental. The bodily intentionality is the mark of the bodily-self. The earlier position was that of mental intentionality. But it cannot account for the very phenomena of perception. The phenomena of perception seek to describe the first hand experience of the phenomenon under description. Husserl makes a call to go back to the “things-in-themselves,” but Merleau-Ponty calls for going back to “original experience.”³⁹ The original experience is traced neither through “sensation” nor “intellectual synthesis” but through “perception.” The perceptual experience is primordial, pre-reflective, and pre-objective and is not realized objectively.

³⁹ Merleau-Ponty influenced by Husserl remains faithful to him. In order to understand the true nature reality, Husserl makes a call to go back to things in themselves while Merleau-Ponty calls for going back to original experience. Merleau-Ponty disagrees with Husserl on the point of phenomenological reduction. Merleau-Ponty questions: is the consciousness transcendental ego? The phenomenological reduction cannot account for original experience as the being is always in-the-world and any reduction is not possible. Husserl talks about the transcendental subjectivity while Merleau-Ponty talks about embodied subjectivity always transcending towards the world. In this respect Husserl is considered an internalist while Merleau-Ponty is considered an externalist.

The empirical sciences attempt to understand reality objectively. However these sciences are trapped in the subject-object duality and thus miss the phenomena of reality. Merleau-Ponty declares:

To return to the things themselves is to return to that world prior to 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 country-side in which we have learnt beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is.... The world is there before any possible analysis.... 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.⁴⁰

Merleau-Ponty further elaborating the phenomena of “perception” argues that neither idealism nor realism can adequately account for the ontological status of the subject-object relationship. The former considers the perceiving self as disembodied consciousness and the object of perception in the form of world as perceived as the task of the constituting consciousness while the latter considers the world as objectively present. Idealism considers that the world is immanent in the consciousness while realism accepts it to be ready made. In both the cases, the self-world relation is being objectively judged. Subjectivity is reduced to bare consciousness and it remains sealed off in-itself. It does not transcend itself into the perceived world and remains as transcendental ego into the transcendental realm. Its hermetical closure retains subject-object duality in its true sense and leads to perpetual separability.

Moreover, through these perspectives the reality is reduced into an unbridgeable duality. The subject as pure consciousness cannot engage itself with perceptual experience. It perceives things in a disengaged manner partially being the reason that both are opposed in nature. Anything standing before the perceiving consciousness is

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. ix-xi.

nothing more than an object. The world as perceived world is reduced to a mere pile of things. It perceives the perceived world as natural world consisting of different objects and nothing more. It cannot account for the socio-cultural world. The socio-cultural world is the world of inter-subjectivity. But the inter-subjective existence is experienced through the bodily phenomena. Our body-self from its subjective pole always transcends towards its objective pole. It never remains in itself. There is a sort of reversible relationship between the self, other and the world. The bodily-self transcends towards the world and the world in turn present in the very heart of the subjectivity. The subject finds outside of itself into the world and other selves and the world into the self. As Merleau-Ponty writes:

... the question is always how I can be open to phenomena which transcend me, and which nevertheless exist only to the extent that I take them up and live them; how the presence to myself (*Urprasenz*) which establishes my own limits and conditions every alien presence I at the same time derepresentation (*Entgegenwartigung*) and throws me outside myself.⁴¹

However, the concept of “subjectivity” acquires new meaning in the last chapter of the *Phenomenology of Perception*. Merleau-Ponty brings about the phenomenon of “temporality” to describe the relation between the self and the world. He establishes an identity relation between “subjectivity” and “temporality.” It is therefore necessary to bring in the notion of “temporality” to fully understand the inseparable lived in relation between the self, other and the world. The phenomenon of “temporality” acquires new meaning in his thought. But before coming to Merleau-Ponty’s notion of “temporality”, it is necessary to throw some light on the traditional notion of “temporality.”

The natural sciences and common sense views maintain that “time” is like an object and is objectively present in the outside world. It is as real as any object of the objective world. It is independent of the subject and is like a river constituting of parts.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 363.

They attach “eternity” to time. Empiricism and classical psychology maintain that time exists not in the objective world but in the consciousness. It means that “time” is a succession of memories and the past and the future are determined on the basis of projections of these memories. Intellectualism on the other hand argues that neither of these positions can explain what time is. It maintains that “time” involves consciousness and neither of these positions relates “time” with consciousness. The “time” is not objectively present in the objective world. It is also not a datum of consciousness. But, the “time” is a constituent of the constituting consciousness. Time, thus constituted, by the constituting consciousness is present not only in the present but also in the past and the future.

Merleau-Ponty, however, accepts neither of these views regarding the very the existence of the phenomenon of “temporality.” He finds at least some faults with each view. He argues that time is not objectively present in the world nor in the form of the projection of memories. Intellectualism holds that “time” is the synthesis of the constituting consciousness but the synthesis should not be done once for all. It demands afresh synthesis each time. The “temporality” thus conceived needs to be perceived from a different perspective. The phenomenological perspective understands “temporality” in lived experience of being. It cannot be objectively understood as there is no perceiver-perceived relation. It is understood as the fundamental dimension of being.

Merleau-Ponty says that neither the subject is within “time” nor “time” within subject. In fact, “we must understand time as the subject and the subject as time.”⁴² He establishes the identity relation between the two. The identity relation is based on the very structure of “subjectivity” and “temporality.” “Subjectivity” is in-the-world and does not involve in the synthetic activity as Merleau-Ponty says: “At the heart of the subject himself we discovered, then, the presence of the world...”⁴³ It discloses itself with every phenomena of the world. This is the very structure of “subjectivity” in which it is identified with “temporality.” Merleau-Ponty further writes:

⁴² Ibid., p. 422.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 429.

It is through time that being is conceived, because it is through the relations of time-subject and time-object that we are able to understand those obtaining between subject and world. Let us apply to those problems we began with the idea of subjectivity as temporality.⁴⁴

The relation of identity between “subjectivity” and “temporality” is conceived through their essence. The bodily-subject as the subjectivity proper constantly transcends towards the world. It is the basic essence of the bodily-self. It cannot remain in itself hermetically sealed off from the world. It always tries to fly out from itself. However, the “time” also exhibits the similar phenomena. It is never static and enclosed in anonymity as Merleau-Ponty says: “... there is no seat of time; time bears itself on and launches itself afresh. Time is an indivisible thrust....”⁴⁵ It is always in perpetual flight from present to the future. He further says that:

Subjectivity is not motionless identity with itself; as with time, it is of its essence, in order to be genuine subjectivity, to open itself to an other and to go forth from itself.⁴⁶

Merleau-Ponty talks about the “living time” which is of the nature of the living self. The living time has the same inner identical structure with that of the living self. The living self becomes aware of itself of time because of their identical structure. But, if the self is something like transcendental ego or constituting consciousness, it cannot merge itself in time. This is because of the reason that the “self” is not identified with “temporality.” Time here means the lived through time:

We shall never manage to understand how a thinking or constituting subject is able to posit or become aware of itself in time. If the *I* is indeed the transcendental Ego of Kant, we shall never understand how

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp.430-31.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 423.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 426.

it can in any instance merge with its wake in the inner sense, or show the empirical self still remains itself. If, however, the subject is identified with temporality, then self-positing ceases to be a contradiction, because it exactly expresses the essence of living time.⁴⁷

Again, while identifying “temporality” with “subjectivity”, Merleau-Ponty says that the former is not there if the latter is not there. Subjectivity is the lived-subjectivity and it harmonizes “temporality.” There is no temporality without subjectivity and vice-versa. The “time” is not something objectively flowing out there like a river. It is not objectively being perceived by someone. As Merleau-Ponty says: “We are not saying that time is for someone.... We are saying that time is someone...”⁴⁸ I am not living in time nor the time is living within me but I am living time. There is no difference between the two. As Merleau-Ponty says: “... being and being conscious are one and the same thing. ... My being and my consciousness are at one....”⁴⁹ While further refuting the objectivity of time. Merleau-Ponty says:

The passage of one present to the next is not a thing which I conceive, nor do I see it as an onlooker, I effect it; I am already at the impending present as my gesture is already at its goal, I am myself time, a time which “abides, and does not “flow” or “change”....⁵⁰

The self is not a transparent consciousness away from the world devoid of “historicity.” It inheres in the world and has its own situated experience. Its lived through experience of the past, present and the future is what keeps it in harmony with the other selves as well as the world. “Temporality” also unfolds to past, present and future but this dehiscence to the past and future is the subjectivity itself. “Subjectivity” is presence and through its presence it is opened to the past and future. “Subjectivity” affects itself and is also affected by itself. But the affecting-affected relation is not something external but

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 425.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 422.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 424.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 421.

internal. The being is in harmony with itself and with other beings of the world. The being is in communication with the world because it is presence to the world. It is present to itself because it is present to the world. There is a sort of “reciprocal” relationship between the self and the world. Both the self and the world are primordially related with each other because both are primordial.

The being is always polarized towards what it is not. It takes its flight into the world from itself. It is loaded with certain projects that can be fulfilled in-the-world. Not only is the subject opened to the world but the world is equally polarized towards the subject. Nothing is in-itself. Otherwise, the very dialogue between them is not feasible. Both are actively transcending towards each other. In other words, this is what makes the inseparable relation between them. Reflecting on the inseparability between the self and the world, Merleau-Ponty writes:

The world is inseparable from the subject, but from a subject which is nothing but a project of the world, and the subject is inseparable from the world, but from a world which the subject itself projects. The subject is a being-in-the-world and the world remains ‘subjective’ since its texture and articulations are traced out by the subject’s movement of transcendence.⁵¹

The other selves and the social-cultural world are problematic only for ‘objective thought.’ The objective thought perceives reality in parts. It maintains an unbridgeable duality between the perceiver and the perceived. It reduces the perceiving self into objects and the world into a conglomeration of things. However, the world is the world of inter-subjectivity in which there are different phenomena of inter-subjective existence. If the perceived world is nothing more than the natural world then how can we account for the existence of human world? The existence of the latter is a fact and it cannot be denied because it is reflected in our day to day experience. Can “objective thought” account for

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 430.

the shared feelings of the inter-subjective world in which different lived phenomena like love, hate, jealousy, enmity, peaceful co-existence, trust and sympathy occur?

The fact of the matter is that we seek to know these phenomena through objective attitude. Our objective ways of looking at reality miss the lived phenomena of the lived world. Our “objective attitudes” are overwhelmed by prejudices, presuppositions, and determinations; and cannot adequately account for lived experience. We presuppose that the “other” is nothing more than an object standing before my consciousness. Such thinking is the outcome of our “objective attitudes” replete with prejudices. Merleau-Ponty running against the currents of objective attitudes argues that the very way of understanding reality is defective and it requires a different approach to reach to the phenomena.

The shared world of feeling is the world of inter-subjectivity. It is inseparably related to me, other and the world. I perceive other selves when I encounter with my self in an inter-subjective experience. But I do not perceive the “other” as merely a transparent consciousness. The self is the bodily-self consisted of flesh and blood. But, not consisted in the sense of “*partes extra partes*”⁵² what mechanical physiology maintains. The self is embodied-consciousness embedded in-the-world. There is an inter-subjective experience not of any transparent subject but of bodily-self. I perceive “other bodies” as I perceive my own. The phenomenological experience of my own and of the “other” is similar because both share the same environment. It becomes clear from the following quote:

⁵² The French phrase “*partes extra partes*” means parts outside of parts. Merleau-Ponty uses this meaning while defining an object. The mechanical physiology considers an object is mechanically constituted of different constituent parts. The relationship between different parts is external. However, Merleau-Ponty says that the relationship between mind and body or the self and world or between the self and object is not mechanical. The self, other and the world are inseparably related with each other.

Others are for me neither visible objects nor invisible subject, neither bodies nor immaterial minds. Indeed, they are not present to me as targets of observation or judgments at all, but as persons, bodily agents I immediately and involuntarily identify with in my own sensitivities and behavior.⁵³

The entire theme of the *Phenomenology of Perception* is summed up by arguing that the “objective thought” understands reality in an objective way. It understands reality in parts. It considers the perceiving self as something immaterial, pure knower while our body as nothing more than an object. It perceives the subject-object dichotomy between the mind and body. It perceives the “other” as either invisible subject or visible object or bodies or immaterial mind. And the world is perceived as “natural world” consisting of objects. But, Merleau-Ponty argues that the root of problem lies in the very fundamental way of perceiving reality. We perceive reality in parts because we have dichotomized it. We are so prejudiced that we cannot appeal to “original experience.” However, the problem of the self, other and the world is understood only by understanding the real nature of the self. The self is neither a mind nor a body but somehow the conglomeration of the mind and body what Merleau-Ponty says “psycho-physical” organism. It is bodily-self and perceives the “other” also as bodily-self through its own intentions, sensitivities and behavior. But the being is always in-the-world and the perceived world is not merely a natural world but the socio-cultural world. It is inter-subjective world in which the self and the “other” are dialectically related with each other. The world acts as a field of experience for the inter-subjective experience. Our body is a point of view to the world. The world canalizes the inter-subjective communication. If our body is the vehicle of communication, the world is the fundamental route in which the very communication takes place. The triadic relationship between the self, other and the world is dialectically related and the very triad is inseparably related.

⁵³ Taylor Carman, *Merleau-Ponty*, Routledge Publishers, London and New York, 2008, p. 150.

Conclusion

Doing philosophy by putting on particular philosophical hats definitely leads to error and misses the very phenomenon of reality per se. Our particular ways of understanding reality condition our understanding towards things. We perceive reality from a definite perspective in which we are already molded. Such perspectives are loaded with prejudices and predeterminations. Seeing reality through the glasses of preconceptions leads to misunderstanding of the real phenomena of truth. It distracts us from the actual phenomena of truth. Instead of disclosing reality, it conceals it through prejudices. It cannot understand the dynamic aspect of reality because it perceives things objectively. Objective thought perceives things in isolation and maintains subject-object dichotomy. It perceives duality not merely between the subject and object but also between mind and body, self and other, self and the world and so on. The present dissertation work reflects the role of definite perspectives in our understanding of reality. In the light of these perspectives, I have, following Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, sought to chalk out the underlying roots of epistemological perspectives which lead to the problem of dualism, solipsism, and the relation between mind and body, mental and physical, self and other, self and world and so on. Descartes' epistemology of self is pure subjectivity. The subjectivity is understood as mental. It perceives our body as nothing more than an object. It also reduces the "other" to nothing more than an object standing before our consciousness while the world is perceived as mere conglomeration of objects. The Cartesian school of thought perceives reality objectively. Objective thought distorts the very phenomenon of reality. The very phenomena of self, other and the world are objectively understood. It understands reality in parts. It maintains unbridgeable subject-object duality in perpetuity. It also perceives duality between mind and body, self and other and the self and the world. It distorts the very phenomenon of lived experience and alienates us from our own self, from other selves and from the world. The Cartesian mind-body problem is the outcome of objective thought. Intellectualism and empiricism are the two schools of thought that perceive reality objectively. Intellectualism holds that the world is immanent and is understood through our constituting consciousness while

empiricism maintains that world is objectively present independent of subject. Mechanical physiology and classical psychology also treat our body as nothing more than objects consisting of parts. However, all these are the objective ways of knowing reality. Such a disengaged way of understanding gives an incomplete picture of reality. It cannot understand the underlying lived dynamic relation between the self, other and the world.

However, Merleau-Ponty in his *Phenomenology of Perception* argues that subjectivity is physical. It is corporeal subjectivity. Our body is the locus of experience. It is the active self actively involved in the worldly pursuits. The corporeal subjectivity is dialectically related to the perceived world and to other subjectivities. The phenomenon of perception is exhibited by the bodily-self. Perception is not a mental phenomenon but physical. Perception is the medium through which inter-subjective experience occurs. But the phenomenon of perception is itself grounded on bodily subject. Perception acts as a sort of screen between our bodily self and the perceived world. Subjectivity is an incarnate corporeality. It is embedded in-the-world. It is opened to the world through its different inter-sensory holes. The self-world dialogue is a characteristic feature of the bodily-self. Our body is a point of view on the world. Unlike the Cartesian subjectivity, it perceives the world and remains itself visible. The seer and the seen are of the same nature because both are constituted of the same flesh. We perceive the world because we are in-the-world. We are not only in the world but we are of the world. It is a two-way traffic. The self is from the starting outside of itself while the world is in the self. The self-world relation is reversible. We are dialectically related with the world. We perceive the world and the world also perceives us. The phenomena of perception is understood as bodily self's relation to the perceived world. The body as the subject of perception is anchored to the world.

The understanding of subjectivity as bodily subjectivity dissolves the underlying duality between mind and body, subject and object, mental and physical, internal and external, self and other, and self and the world. The phenomena of perception and intentionality are exhibited by the bodily-self. But the perceptual experience is neither subjective nor objective but is understood as fundamental aspect of our being in-the-

world. The self is not an enclosed entity but always in dialogue with the outside world. Being is primordial and is in communication with the world which is also primordial. The relation between the self and world is also primordial. Merleau-Ponty's central theme of the *Phenomenology of Perception* is to understand the phenomena of "perception" from the phenomenological point of view. The *Phenomenology of Perception* attaches great importance to the "primacy of perception." It understands the metaphysical aspect of reality which includes the basic understanding of – being, space, time, world, self, other, freedom, and so on. The entire text has been a critique of epistemological way of understanding reality. Much of the *Phenomenology of Perception* is an attempt at arguing for the "primacy of perception" over "reflective" and 'analytic thought.'" Merleau-Ponty argues that the 'reflective' and "analytic thought' cannot understand reality in totality. The 'objective thought' understands things objectively. But, phenomenology seeks to understand the very structure of perception.

The intellectualist and empiricist schools of thought pertain to epistemological inquiry. Both perceive reality objectively. Intellectualism holds that thought is the relation to the world while for empiricism holds that it is sense data. While criticizing empiricism and intellectualism on the notion of perception, Merleau-Ponty argues that neither of the notions is compatible with the actual experience. The former maintains that "perception" is grounded in "sensation" while the latter holds that "perception" is the outcome of "judgment." However, the very concept of "sensation" is confused because we see things and not sensations. The phenomenon of "perception" in its real sense implies that if someone perceives an object then the perceived object must be there. Moreover, the concept "sensation" is parasitic on objects. We encounter with objects not "sensations." On the other hand, perception is not grounded in "judgment." Perception is prior to thought. Thought presupposes perception. Intellectualism holds that "thought" is the relation between the being and the world but Merleau-Ponty argues that it is not thought but "perception" which acts as sort of bridge between the two. Thought is not related with the world but it is away from the world. It is objectively related with the world. Perception on the other hand, is exhibited by our bodily-self and is related with the world. Our bodily-self through the phenomena of "perception" is a point of view on the

world. The bodily-self is neither pure intellect nor pure physical object, but a conglomeration of the mental and the physical: what Merleau-Ponty calls living bodily self.

Merleau-Ponty argues that the traditional as well as contemporary theories of “perception” fail to adequately account for body as the fundamental ground of perceptual experience. Our body perceives the world and world also perceives us because both are constituted of the same flesh. Our bodily schema is same as that of the visual field. It is not only the world that is spacio-temporal but our body is also spacio-temporal. There is an internal as well as external harmony between the self and the world. The world and bodily-self are intertwined together. The crisscrossing or overlapping between the two indicates that there is no fundamental unity between them because both are distinct. The grounding of “perception” in the bodily-self and bodily-self in the world indicates that there is no unbridgeable duality between them. Merleau-Ponty says that we perceive the world because we are worldly. The sameness of the flesh of the world and self indicates that we are primordially in communication with each other consciously or unconsciously. We have identical relation with the world.

However, the very concept “primordial” becomes difficult to understand. Michael Kullman and Charles Taylor in their article “The Pre-Objective World” have argued that the very experience of the pre-objective world requires language to describe such experience. But, how can we account for such experience when language is not pre-objective or primordial? The perceived world is there even before our language. It is difficult to understand the pre-objective experience because our ordinary language cannot describe it. For any experience to be possible, the experiencing subject must be there. Moreover, the description of experience is possible through language which is socio-cultural. Otherwise, it may lead to “solipsism.” But even for “solipsism”, the experiencing self must be there; otherwise the very concept does not exist. However, such a criticism cannot easily refute the very notion of primordial existence of the self, other and the world and their inter-relationship. In defense of Merleau-Ponty’s notion of “primordial existence”, I would instantiate the case of a fifteen year old child who cannot

speaking but can communicate. Why does the child open its mouth when someone takes one of its fingers into its mouth and pretends to bite? It simply means that the child has primordial communication power. Otherwise, it cannot perceive the intentions of other subjects through analogy.

In the present dissertation, I have analyzed that the problem of mind-body dualism is the victim of “objective thought.” The “objective thought” has been the dominant perspective of understanding things. It perceives reality objectively. It has not only influenced the philosophical domain but also our ordinary life. It leads us to perceive “otherselves” in duality of mind and body. In our actual experience there is no encounter with the disembodied intellect. There is bodily co-existence with other bodies. Our encounter with “otherselves” is through our body because our whole body is perceptual. Because of this bodily nature, the “intentionality” is grounded in body not in mind. Others are encountered with my bodily-self neither as visible objects nor invisible subjects. They are also not the target of our “judgment.” They are presented to our bodily-self as persons. There is no place for “analogy” for establishing the existence of the “other” because they are directly presented to our bodily-self. Moreover, “comparative reasoning” leads to the old mind-body problem. This is because it perceives things in duality and does not consider bodily-self as the subjectivity proper. The objective thought also perceives the world as a natural world determined by causal laws and not an inter-subjective world.

Grounding perception in the bodily-subject leads us to have embodied perceptual experience of the self, other and the world in an inseparable manner. The embodied self provides space for the “other.” It has ethical concern for the “other” and for the “world.” The triadic relationship between the self, other and the world dissolves the unbridgeable duality between them. The very “triad” is constituted of the same flesh and there is no adequate logical criterion to exactly assign the status of subjectivity and objectivity for perpetuity. The relation between the self, other and the world is dynamic because the very reality is dynamic in nature. Any preconception regarding such a dynamic nature of reality leads us to nothing but misconception about the real nature of reality.

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