

## THE CASE OF A PHENOMENOLOGICAL POSITIVIST

"Phenomenological Positivism" is a term Merleau-Ponty first used in the preface of his *Phenomenology of Perception*.<sup>1</sup> This kind of positivism is a manner of thinking which involves a method and an ontological claim. Its methodological concern is not to wonder whether there is a world; rather it is to recognize that the "world is already there, before any possible analysis." It is a methodology of disclosing the world by basing the possible on the real. Its ontological claim is that the world is the primary Logos, an inexhaustible facticity whose complete account I cannot give, despite my wishes to the contrary. My inseparability as a philosopher with the world means that "philosophy, too, is in history." Philosophy, therefore, cannot significantly begin with something prior to the world; it does not end with something beyond the world. And, in the middle, it has no key to absolutism. Phenomenological positivism is not asking for that which makes experience possible, it is looking for what experience is.

Merleau-Ponty's positivism, therefore, has a request and a proposal. Its request is to not go on a holiday from the world; its proposal is to overcome philosophies which do so. The most prominent form this holidaying assumes is that mode of philosophizing according to which whatever exists is either a thing or consciousness. Needless to say, the phenomenological positivism of Merleau-Ponty disagrees with those who think that the choice today in philosophy is between idealism or materialism, body and mind. This positivism should not be confused with logical positivism, for the latter, as we shall subsequently see, is the most articulate form of taking a holiday from the world. In logical positivism, logic not only takes care of itself, it takes care of the world also. In so doing it becomes the measure of what could be and what could not be the case in the world. According to phenomenological positivism, logic is not the condition of the world, its aim is not a logical construction of the world. Its contention is that the 'Logos' of logic is the world, and it is a proposal to have a commerce with the world which is "older than logic."<sup>2</sup> Phenomenological positivism is a case against materialism, idealism and logicism.

In the request of not taking a holiday from the world, a methodology for being present to the world is involved. The method of being so present to the world is neither induction nor deduction, neither logic nor a transcendental intuition. It is "perception" which is not so much a cognitive act, as a kind of "ontological ciphering" of the world. And the finding of such a "ciphering" is that the world is not a totality of things or objects, facts or sense-data. Nor is the world a caprice of cosmic illusion, a logical construction or a simple mistake of semantics. The world is an "inexhaustible facticity" in which the fixed and neat polarity of noumena and phenomena, in-itself and for-itself, *samsāra* and *nirvāna* is fortunately absent. Since perception is of the world from within it, not absolute knowledge of the world but 'absolute relation to it' could be the only privilege, of a philosopher. He has to realize that perception is never totally meaningless and that its meaning is not absolute and final. The world does not contain absolute sense or absolute non-sense; on the contrary, it involves both sense and non-sense. "The reason borders on unreason, certainty on contingency." The world is a dialectical situation, it is both "logical and contingent." Experience of contingency and chaos in such a world "prompts us to see rationalism in a historical perspective".<sup>3</sup> Rationality or truth is not given beforehand to logic, for logic presupposes perception of the world. Knowledge, including philosophical knowledge, is not given exclusively to mind, for mind has got body as its 'corporeal home'. "Even the subject of geometry is a motor subject" (*Phenomenology*, p. 388). And body is not an unthinking extension, not an object for "I think". It is a lived-through meaning, a style of being in the world. The human person therefore is neither a 'naked thing' nor a bare consciousness. It is an embodied-consciousness, a *body-subject*. Idealism lacks body without which it cannot walk; Hegel indeed forgot that history does not walk on its head. But Marxists too don't realize that history "does not think with its feet." History—and the human existence in it is neither its 'head' nor its 'feet'; it is *body*.<sup>4</sup> The logic of either thing or consciousness involves an either/or thinking, something a human subject cannot entertain without being abstract. Phenomenological positivism is a case against such abstractions; it is a proposal to philosophise as embodied consciousness and therefore to stick to the "original life-world."

A phenomenological positivist, claiming to be present to the world, necessarily situates himself and therefore his philosophy in the history of idea. He realizes that no philosophy begins at the beginning, and that it does not end at the end either. Phenomenology, as a philosophy of body-subject, "has been long on the way...certainly in Hegel and Kierkegaard, but equally in Marx, Nietzsche and Freud."<sup>5</sup> The phenomenological positivist situates himself in Hegel with the awareness that Hegel "understood everything except himself." It is so because although acknowledging that truth is a subject, he ignored the fact that, as a philosopher, he too was a historical subject. The positivist situates himself in Marx, but with the reservation that the "scientific" Marxists reverently misunderstood Marx. This so happened because they forgot the body is not a scientific object, but "a place I dwell in." Therefore, the historical evolution of mankind is not a "dialectical zoology" but a "spiritual unit" whose life is dialectic and whose essence is that it is always incomplete. The problem with both idealism and materialism is that they raise questions with a conclusion in mind; they treat the world as the datum of a cogito. Somehow, they cease to be actual; they lose contact with the pre-theoretical layer of experience which is the level of perception. The way they ask questions is determined by the kind of answers they want. The phenomenological positivist subjects their mode and kind of philosophical questions to scrutiny by criticizing first the level from which they ask such questions. He, then, situates them to the level of perception where "the world is inseparable from the subject, but a subject which is nothing but a project of the world."<sup>6</sup> It is in this inseparability that the world becomes a problem.

## II

According to Engels, the most fundamental question in philosophy is this : Which is primary, spirit or nature ? Allied with this is another question : What is the relation between thinking and being ? Is thinking capable of knowing reality ? The first kind of question is concerned with ontology, the second with epistemology and logic. Engels further contends that there has never been, as there can never be, more than two answers. One

answer is that thinking or spirit is prior to being or nature. The second one is that nature or being is primary to thinking or spirit. The first answer is idealism, the second materialism.<sup>7</sup>

In idealism, according to Marx and Engels, thinking constitutes being. This 'thinking' may assume the form of revelation, idea or logic. Principles are not derived from nature and history, they are apriori and independent of history. To such transcendental principles, nature and history have to conform. Thinking and being are identified, or else being is declared as manifestation of thought. The being of the world is conceived in light of the eternal becoming temporal. Problems of history arise when the non-historical becomes historical; problems are resolved when the historical is restored into the eternal.

Materialism, according to Engels, rejects apriorism of any sort : religious, metaphysical or logical. The so-called 'forms of thought' are not derived from thought, the genesis of logical schemata is not logic. Principles are not the starting point of enquiry, they are derived from nature and history. The conclusions of materialism are drawn from premises which are not themselves ideas. Facts regulate forms of thought, and not vice versa. Consciousness is a function of brain, and brain is matter which thinks. Thinking, howsoever abstract—including that of mathematics and logic—is expression of the material mode of being. The problems of history are historical; their solution is equally historical.

To come to the epistemological question : Whether our cognitions are capable of knowing the world. Idealism, according to Engels, either denies the possibility of knowing the world and its laws, or else it does not recognize the objective existence of the world at all. It holds either that the world is constituted of unknowable things-in-themselves, or that things are nothing but thought-contents, a complex of sense-impressions or sense-data. Contrary to this, Engels holds that our sensations refer to things which are material in nature, that matter is given independently of sensations, and that consciousness is merely a "photograph" of matter. Contrary to agnosticism, which he says is consequence of idealism, Engels maintains that the world is objectively given, that its structure and laws could be known, that the 'things-in-

themselves' have become 'things-for-us.'<sup>8</sup> Dialectic, not logic, is the key to the world.

### III

Engels' position may be summed up as follows : One either pleads the primacy of things and is therefore a materialist; or else one argues for the primacy of consciousness, and is an idealist. In between the two there is no compromise, and other than the two there is no third alternative.

In response to Engels' characterization of materialism and idealism, Merleau-Ponty, as a phenomenological positivist, has to make two points. One, Engels thinks abstractly; second, he does so because he raises the question abstractly. The point is to see whether experience sustains the primacy of 'thing' over consciousness, and vice versa. All that experience tells us is that consciousness is necessarily a consciousness of something, and that consciousness and its object are contemporaneous. Any question to establish the priority of the one over the other is precisely disowned by actual experience. The either/or thinking, implied in the way Engels raises the question is decidedly metaphysical, accordingly defined by Engels himself. As for the dialectic, Engels himself observes that in the dialectical mode of thinking the demand for "final solution and eternal truth ceases for all." If so, not only the metaphysical dichotomy of things and consciousness and therefore of materialism and idealism is by no means fixed and final, the very act of initiating this dichotomy the dialectic disallows in the first place. Unfortunately, the way Engels raises the question of things or consciousness smells of absolution. What dialectic discovers is the inherent circularity and therefore contemporaneity of things and consciousness of things. "We are equally incapable of dwelling in ourselves and in things, and are referred from them to ourselves and from ourselves to them."<sup>9</sup>

The way Engels raises the question of thinking and being gives the impression that the problem involved is scholastically cognitive. Here, Engels once more misunderstood Marx who said that the relation of thinking and being is directly related with the question of doing and being. "The dispute over the reality or

non-reality of thinking which is isolated from praxis is a purely scholastic question."<sup>10</sup> Engels, indeed, thinks scholastically. According to phenomenological positivism, thinking about being involves participation; it is engagement in the world. "There is no world without being-in-the-world", and it is in living through the world that I think through it. Knowing involves doing because consciousness is embodied consciousness. A disembodied consciousness is not known to think, and an embodied consciousness cannot think of body as a thing. Body is a way of being at the world, a point of view. The body is *samsāra*, a dialectic of action and consequence. It is a "circular structure". In treating body as a sensuous object or as a matter that thinks, the "scientific" materialism of Engels and Lenin takes for granted that the "objects" are simply *there*. In taking body as a subject, and therefore as a project at work in the world, Ponty proceeds to show how 'objects' arise, how objects and consciousness of it are both perched on a pyramid of history.<sup>11</sup> The encounter of the body-subject and the world is not given to 'thinking' but to 'perception' wherein the classical idealism and materialism are dissolved. For perception is pre-supposed both in Lenin's 'sensation' and the Hegelian 'logic'.

According to materialism, says Engels, all knowledge is historical. That may be true, but, in order to make knowledge 'scientific', Lenin based it on 'sensation'. Little does he realize that sensation is an abstraction in the first place; in the second, to begin with sensation is to get rid of all past, all history. Consistently speaking, it is to get up as a 'clean-slate' every fine morning; it is to cease to be temporal. Perhaps Engels forgot Marx who said that our five sense organs together with their objects are the "work of the whole previous history".

To a phenomenological positivist, perception is not only a cognitive act, it is also an organizing project. It is not only historical, it is the bearer of history too. And history is not just a dialectic of economic alienation and "simple riches", as Engels and Lenin politically proclaim. "History", says Ponty, "is a strange object; it is ourselves". It is a moving subject, a genealogy of culture and meaning, contingency and chaos. That is why the phenomenological positivist asks two questions. One is: Who can see?; the second is: What is seen? The answer is that only

embodied consciousness can see, perceive and think. What we see as temporal beings is that the world could not be reduced to the thought of it, and that as thinking beings we can't reduce consciousness to a thing. 'The most important thing that reduction teaches is the impossibility of complete reduction.'<sup>12</sup> The world is not a state of consciousness, not a thought-content. It is not an 'object' at all.

The question of the relation of thinking and being is really an act of "ontological ciphering". What one comprehends through this 'ciphering' is that the primacy of 'being' over 'thinking', or vice versa, could not just be the issue. The simple truth to perceive is that one without the other is impossible; the reasoning of either mind or matter could not be the reasoning of an embodied philosopher. In making it the only philosophical issue, Engels forgets that a philosopher too has to deal with the world he lives in. The consequence of such a philosophizing about the world from within it is that just as we can't significantly raise the question as to how and why the temporal is graduation of the eternal, so also we can't positively affirm as to when the problems of history are to be precisely resolved historically. If the very life of history is its contradiction, then there is no historical guarantee that contradictions will be resolved in history. Raising philosophical questions because one already has absolutistic answers either 'beyond' or 'later on' in history is not the privilege of those who think from within it. Those who do so, both Engels and Hegel, treat the world as if they were above it. They raise and answer questions about the world on behalf of God.

The most difficult task in philosophy is not only to raise a question, it is also to see that in so doing one does not succeed in disconnecting the 'what' of a question from its 'wherefrom'. Philosophers, indeed, asked interesting questions, but they forgot the simplest thing, i.e., that they live in the world. The 'what' of a question was alienated from its 'wherefrom', mind from body, logic of existence from existence. Ponty wanted to situate philosophy into the 'original life world'. This he did, because the reason why one becomes a philosopher is that he is in the world. God can't be a philosopher; He need not be. God, for some, may be

the solution to a problem, but He just can't have a problem. He may become problematic out of grace, but that eventually forces a God to be in the world.<sup>13</sup> Logical positivism asserts that even if God thinks of the world, he must think in terms of the laws of logic. Phenomenological positivism suggests that even if God thinks, he must first be in the world, must think of the world. In the former case, God becomes subject to logic; in the second case, God becomes subject to being in the world. The point of departure in phenomenological positivism therefore is this : How can I talk of the world while being in the world? Given this context, the precise nature of a philosophical problem is this: "...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..."<sup>14</sup> The point is that my being open to the world is an encounter, not with a logical case but with an existential situation, and that the embodied person is precisely the capacity to make it. I am immanent in this existential case, and the very structure of my being is such that I transcend it. This contemporaneity of immanence and transcendence is the true existential dialectic. Situated in such a world as he is, it is not the privilege of an embodied philosopher to confidently affirm as to whether and why God created the world out of nothing, nor again to contend that to begin with man is nothing. Thinking from within the world, we can't significantly talk as to what God had or had to have in mind as a consequence of which there is a world, or what 'laws of logic' God must observe in order to avoid the contingency of an "illogical world". As with the absolute beginning of man and his world, so with the end too. The phenomenological positivist suggests that it is not for man to act like God, in case God is dead. God is supposed to begin with nothing; in principle, He could have everything. Existing in the temporal thickness which is the world, man does not begin with nothing; he can't end with having everything.<sup>15</sup> In a sense the world is immanent in me, it is sedimented through my transcending it. It is so because in this existential dialectic the modality of man and the world, perception and the percept is the same. It is this modality which gives a "thing its concrete physiognomy, to organism its manner of handling the world, to subjectivity its



historical inheritance."<sup>16</sup> It is this modality from within which man, as an embodied subject, may philosophize.

#### IV

According to Engels and Lenin, matter is a 'philosophical category'. Motion does not happen to matter. "Never anywhere has there been matter without motion...nor can there be." Matter, without motion, leads to idealism, to baptising of the cosmos, as in Newton. Because of this inseparability of matter and motion, nature is inherently dialectical. Dialectic is scientific, for the "proof of dialectic is nature." "Matter is given to man by his sensations, and is copied, photographed...while existing independent of them." This distinction of "photographing consciousness" and matter so 'photographed' is something which Lenin claims to be "in akin to natural science." Lenin further contends that the primacy of sensations over ideas, and that of matter over sensations is fundamental to 'scientific materialism'.

Needless to say that Engels and Lenin wanted to make materialism dialectical, and dialectic materialistic. They wanted to make materialism 'scientific' by keeping it empiricistic; they wanted to avoid the bourgeoisie abstraction by situating knowing into the material mode of being.

The point to see is that Lenin can't eat the cake and keep it. His 'scientific materialism' whose argument is the empiricist epistemology, goes against his dialectical ontology, whose argument is history. Incorporating Lockean empiricism into the Cartesian metaphysics, the French materialist concluded two things. First, reality is matter which exists apart from mind; secondly, there is nothing in mind which is not derived from the senses. Mind, to begin with, is a *tabula rasa*, and the function of brain is to generate thought, as liver secretes bile. Nature is not art, but a system of necessary laws, an automation. In it, there is not ethical apart from the physical; ethics is applied physics. To derive the 'is' from the 'ought' is a 'rational sin'. Mind can be cured by curing the body; medical science "could solve for morality the riddle of existence."

But there is another implication involved in this Lockean empiricism. It is this: Berkeley's objections against Locke are

genuine. If there is nothing in knowledge which is not derived from sensations, how to establish that reality outside is different from sensation? Therefore, the philosophical issue, Lenin argues, is this : Whether we have sensation because there is matter, or there is matter because we have sensation of it. Involved in it is a methodological problem, and it is this : Whether to start from things to sensation and idea, or from sensation and idea to things. The latter approach is adopted by Mach.<sup>18</sup> He proposed to construct physical elements out of sensations or psychic elements. That is to say, the actual elements of the world are not things or bodies, but colors and sounds—in a world, sense-data. With equal scientific claim—psychophysics as he calls it—Mach contends that to regard sensations as effects caused by a ‘nucleus’ called a material thing is a mere habit, an unscientific and uncritical common sense. To contend that sensations are caused by external bodies, as Lenin wants us to believe, is to turn facts into argument; it is metaphysics, an idle and “superfluous assertion.” Mach concluded that sensations are not symbols of things; on the contrary, things are symbols for the complex of sensations.

To this, Lenin retorts : “An old song, most honorable Professor !” Lenin charges Mach with subjective idealism, and wonders that such a ‘brainless philosophy’ exists.<sup>19</sup> He requests Mach to see that Berkeley gave “numerous proofs that out of psychological elements one can build nothing but solipsism.”

Ponty understands that the Marxist positivism is fighting on two fronts. On the one hand, it is opposed to mechanism; and on the other, it is waging a war against idealism. But, then, he requests Engels and Lenin to see that if nature is dialectical, then this nature is not of the natural science. It is a nature perceived by man and is inseparable from human action. There is subjectivity in it. If nature is nature, as Engels and Lenin contend in order to retain their “scientific” dialectic, then it is “exterior to us....it will yield neither the relationships nor the quality needed to sustain a dialectic.”<sup>20</sup> In fact, Lenin’s contention that sensation is “transformation of external excitation into mental state,” together with his anxiety to keep knowledge scientific, leads precisely to the denial of external things. This

scientism establishes sense-data as the ultimate constituents of the world. But, the method to study these sense-data is certainly not dialectic. It may be, as in Russell's analytical empiricism for instance, a kind of "incorporation of mathematics and a powerful logical technique." The findings of such a 'logical technique' is that the basis of sense-data are individual percepts, and that there is no method by which we can begin with data which are public to many observers.<sup>21</sup> By implication, it means that knowledge is not historical and social; in fact, the problem is as to how it could be so. An attempt is made by Russell, for instance, to theorize. This is done by making a distinction of 'mental' and 'physical' events. The former is known by 'acquaintance'; the latter type "if known to occur is inferred." But even this does not help out of solipsism, for in order that something be inferred it is imperative that it be previously perceived. How and what could be inferred about a "public event" with which one is never "acquainted" ? The external world, therefore, becomes a 'convenient hypothesis', or else an animal expectation.<sup>22</sup> It seems that to the problem whether there is an external world or whether it is different or not different from the mental—there really is no answer on the basis of the empiricist epistemology. If a philosopher does not see that there is a world to begin with, his concern then becomes to wonder whether there is, or how can there be a world. To the question whether sense-data are material or mental, some modern empiricists reply that they are neither. Sense-data are neutral.<sup>23</sup> But if sufficient conditions to affirm sense-data, either mental or physical, are wanting, so is the case with declaring them as neutral. Caught in its own logic, this philosophy surrenders all claims to have any commerce with the actual world. Some have gone as far as to contend that a statement referring to the existence of the world is a semantical mistake. Not epistemology, but logic now takes care of the world. Philosophy has become analysis, and analysis "does not claim to describe the behavior of the mental, physical objects; it expresses formal consequence of definition." Objects are reduced to logical facts, 'object-statements' replaced by 'logical-statements.' This, Carnap calls "methodological materialism", and which he warns is "purification" of older

materialism.<sup>24</sup> The distinction of this methodological materialism from older forms of materialism, is that it is not concerned with material things; that would be metaphysics. In it, the "philosopher always remains within the realm of speech thinking." The miracle of turning 'water into wine' has been achieved; logic has come home.

## V

The predicament of refusing to significantly acknowledge the existence of the world has a reason; it is a conclusion from a methodological argument. The reason is to sacrifice the actual for the abstract, and then call it 'empiricism'. The methodology is the natural stand-point with its claim of a "scientific epistemology", its concern to keep knowledge 'natural' by making sensations as protocol of experience.

It is true there can be no experience without our contact with things. But the question is whether this contact is of the form of sensation, and whether sensations are *experienced* to be received in a 'clean-slate'. Little did the scientific empiricists, more so Lenin, realize that the "development of the five-sense organs is the work of the whole previous history." It is this historico-cultural world, and not sensations, which shapes the actual relationship of nature, and therefore of natural science, to man. "Sensations and images", says Ponty, "neither appear anywhere other than within a horizon of meaning, and significance of the percept, far from resulting from association, is in fact pre-supposed in all associations." Sensation is never felt or experienced; it is only conceived. Sensation is a thought-content; it is not the "first but the last object of knowledge." Experience shows that consciousness is always of something, that "perception is gestalt". Sensation is abstraction, and an empiricism based on it succeeds only in mistaking the ideal for the actual.<sup>25</sup>

This contingency happens when philosophers forget that, like anything else in the world, knowledge too has becoming. As the young Marx said, "One basis for life, and another for science, is a lie." Philosophy should realize its historical inheritance, for every situation of knowledge involves in it the immanence of the world. Logical empiricism is an example of ignoring this historical immanence.

## VI

Logic operates with its three laws of identity, contradiction and excluded middle. Something is itself, it could not be both itself and not itself at the same time; and these two mutually exclusive alternatives exhaust all possibilities. But the point is to see that there is no neutral logic; logic involves ontological implication, a mode of being and a world view. Now this logic, with its three laws, not only constitutes the world, it is the condition for there being a world. "Logic pervades the world, logic is the measure of the world, logic stands in internal relation to the world." In terms of this logic, the world is defined as a totality of facts "whose center is tautology, and whose outer limit is contradiction" (*Tract.* 5.143; *Note Books*, 3.6.15). What rules the world is tautology; what makes something impossible in the world is contradiction. Contradiction is not in the world; instead it is the outer post to defend a territory where a thing is itself and could not be unequal to itself. In such a world things are other to one another, fixed and finished. In it there is no seed becoming a sprout; there are only seeds and sprouts.

In case one reminds the logical positivist of the seed *becoming* a sprout, he is asked to see that that is not the philosophical problem. The philosophical problem is not that there is a world; it is as to how *can* there be a world. Their concern is not with what happens in the world, but with what *can* happen in the world in terms of a transcendental logic. Not that philosophy describes that which happens; on the contrary, only that which *can be described can happen*. The reason is that everything in the world is necessary. The "only necessity that exists is a logical necessity, so, too, the only impossibility that exists is logical impossibility." What is logically possible is the connection of the laws of logic and the totality of "facts"; what is logically impossible is "the connection between the will and the world." (*Tract.* 6.373; p. 145). The consequence of such a logical world is that process and result must be equivalent; in it there has to be a total "absence of surprise." Since the accidental is logically impossible, contingencies and chaos are not in the world, cannot be in the world. The sense of the world of facts is determined by logic, its nonsense is determined by logic, even the fact and limit of there being a world is determined by logic. Only that which could be thought is

there in the world. Not that something is thinkable because it is possible, but that something is significantly possible because it is 'thinkable'. The limit of the world is set from within thinking. Thinking is constituted by a logic which is 'transcendental' (*Tract.* p. 33, 113). Every possibility in such a world is fixed in advance; logic has become omniscient. Even if God thinks of creating a world, he could not think or create it contrary to the laws of logic. The reason, according to the logical positivist, is that "thought could not be of anything illogical. We could not say what an illogical world would be like."<sup>26</sup>

To clarify the problem : The logical positivist's concern is as to how there *can* be a world, the phenomenological positivist's concern is that there is a world. The former is concerned with what can happen in the world, the latter with what happens in the world. The former contends that what can be 'described' happens in the world, the latter argues that what happens in the world can be described. The latter may imagine the former's predicament, that it would be difficult to say what an illogical world would be like, but requests him nevertheless to see that the world is already there before any possible analysis. To that due, he is only tempted to ask as to wherefrom Wittgenstein has received his logic. Certainly not from the world. For "logic", says Wittgenstein, "must look after itself".<sup>27</sup> If the world were to take care of logic, it could not fix, in advance, as to what could be the case and what could not be the case in the world. If logic is transcendental, as Wittgenstein himself admits, then he is not discussing the structure of the actual world, he is prescribing the possibility of a world like God. Wittgenstein is not talking of the world, he is talking of the transcendental possibility of a world. A philosopher can't talk about such a possibility without himself being transcendental. In that case, a philosopher becomes a mind without body, a disembodied being. This, actually, is what Wittgenstein is led to, and he honestly admits it. For he writes in the *Tractatus* : "A philosophical self is not a human being, not a human body...but rather...the limit of the world—not a part of it."<sup>28</sup> It seems the condition of being a logical positivist is not only to forget that there is a world, it is also to cease to live in the world. It is a retreat from time, an ideal case of taking a holiday from the world.

VII

The mistake of philosophers, hitherto, has been their failure to recognize that knowledge has history. Hegel was the first philosopher to perceive it. Speaking of his *Phenomenology of Mind*, Hegel says: "This volume deals with the becoming of knowledge." The paradigm of such becoming is this. The seed disappears when the blossoms break through. Truth is not a substance, not an unmoved abstraction. Truth is subject, a process "of its own becoming, a circle which pre-supposes its end...and has its end for its beginning." Truth is actual. "Of the Absolute, it must be said that It essentially is a result."<sup>2</sup> The Absolute actualizes Itself by becoming self-conscious, by self-externalizing Itself. This self-externalizing, in space, is nature; in time, it is history. An object in space and time is spirit at loss. But a limited spirit is negation of itself. Therefore, spirit negates its own negation, allows self-alienation and overcomes it. This, then, is the becoming of knowledge, a home-coming of Idea. A systematic exposition of such a becoming Hegel calls "science", and the perfect example of such a 'science' he claims is his *Phenomenology of Mind*.

Hegel's merits, says Ponty following Marx, are three. First, his argument that knowledge has becoming; second, his criticism of theories which take truth and false, together with the distinction between the two, as fixed, and finished; third, his perception that truth consists in the process of cognition itself. This, Hegel achieved by making logic dialectical. Logic, according to Hegel, has history. Of such a history, contradiction is the center; tautology is impossible in it. To say tautology is the center of the world, as Wittgenstein does, is to admit that there is no world. Contradiction is not just in thought about things; it is the life of a thing. Contradiction is not formal, it is ontological. Negativity is the heart of a thing; reality is negation, an instance of dialectic.

The complaint of phenomenological positivism against Hegel is not that he is wrong; it is that he is abstract. The root of this abstraction is his Absolute in terms of which he argues that the end is at the beginning, and that the beginning is precisely realized at the end. Consequently, Hegel based his phenomenology on

logic, terminated history in the Absolute Idea, and concluded that philosophy has realized its immanent finality in his *Phenomenology of Mind*. Consciousness, nobody knows why, indulges in self-consciousness, and the world emerges as an autobiography of God, as it were. Consequently, instead of deriving ideas from history he derived history from idea; while affirming that logic has history, he gives the impression that history is logic. He did perceive that knowledge has history, but failed to see that knowledge is historical too. Hegel lost the actual for the sake of the transcendental. The profound observation that "nothingness can exist only in the hollowness of being", Hegel sacrificed at the altar of the Idea. Consequently, alienation becomes of the nature of idea; its overcoming, equally an idea. "Thus", as Marx retorted, "my authentic religious existence is my existence in the philosophy of religion, my authentic political existence in the philosophy of law...and my authentic human existence in philosophy..." Hegel, says Ponty, after Marx, began with logic, lived in logic and ended with logic. He succeeded in giving us a "palace of ideas", a conceptual time in contrast with the logical positivist who can give us nothing but a conceptual space.

It is indeed the case that the Hegelian way of thinking "turns everything upside down", but it does not follow from this that Hegel is a "terrible mistake from beginning to the end," as Marx contends. According to Ponty, Hegel's achievement is that he has taken everything into account, but he failed to understand himself, his own historical situation.<sup>30</sup> In failing to give the 'unhappy consciousness' a historical heritage, he succeeded in philosophizing history from above it. Ponty turns the metaphysical idealism into phenomenological positivism by existentializing Hegel, by letting the 'unhappy consciousness' accept the world as its homeland. The method is to base logic on phenomenology, and not phenomenology on logic. 'Scientific' materialists like Engels and Lenin discovered the origin of experience in objects, Hegel in the Idea, and Wittgenstein in logic. Lenin treated the human subject as if it were a zoological object, Hegel took man as a 'moment' in the home-coming of the Idea. Wittgenstein simply asserts that the "self...the philosophical self is not a human being, not a human body...and not part of



the world." In materialism, idealism and logicism, the contingencies of the world are ignored, and the claim to final truth is thereby established in abstraction.

One reason why philosophers claimed absolute truth is that they ceased to think as embodied persons. Ponty proposes to discover the origin of objects, ideas and logic—including the philosopher himself—in experience. For "experience anticipates philosophy and philosophy is merely elucidated experience."<sup>31</sup> It is this experience to speak 'from within' which the phenomenological positivist admits has become his destiny. The implication is that between the philosopher and the world, there is a two-way traffic. There is a world for me, because I am not unaware of myself, and I am not concealed from myself because I have a world." Given this dialectical circularity, proving the primacy of objects presupposes consciousness, and "consciousness always finds itself already at work in the world." That is to say, this dialectical circularity does not allow to prove the primacy of objects over consciousness, and vice versa. What it shows is that, in any situation of knowledge, consciousness and its object are contemporary.<sup>32</sup> Consciousness of the world is not based on self-consciousness, an object cannot be reduced to the thought of it. Nor is consciousness a simple 'photograph' of the world; it is a project and a point of view in a situation. The relation of subject and object, says Ponty, is "relation of being in which, paradoxically, the subject is his body, his world and his situation by a sort of exchange." The philosophical subject is not at the limit of the world, it is at the center of the world.

The philosopher, therefore, is an embodied being; he is aware that his consciousness is embodied. Body is not an inert thing, an unthinking extension. Body is a field, a *ksetra*, in which my "perceptive powers are localized." Body is not an object, the world is not an object, either. The theory that there are two modes of being—being-in-itself which is that of things arrayed in space, and being-for-itself which is that of the consciousness engaged in negation—is untenable.<sup>33</sup> For it ultimately invites problems, such as whether there is a world, and whether there are 'other minds'. If there were 'things' and consciousness were a 'no-thing', there would indeed be nothing between the two. A metaphysical gap would creep in. In the absence of any media-

tion between being ( world of things ) and nothing ( consciousness ), history and time, freedom and responsibility — including Sartre's socialism and revolution — could not be explained. Ponty requests us to see that the dichotomy of 'being' and 'nothing' is an abstraction; there are no more 'things' and consciousness isn't a 'nothing'. Consciousness, indeed, is a blowing wind, but it blows from a situation and is routed in a 'zone of generalized existence.' The world is not psychologically immanent in me, nor is it a metaphysical derivative of a transcendental consciousness. The world is not an object such that one could possess in cognition. Nor is it a big box in which man is enclosed as chickens in a cage. The world is the primary logos and a horizon, a meaning structure and therefore, a historical thickness. It involves "fissures and gaps in which subjectivities slip and lodge themselves." The world is a temporal subjectivity; it is *samsāra*.<sup>34</sup>

In this historical thickness which is the world, the human subject and his perception is a 'temporal wave.' It is so, because my being and cognition involve not so much "I think" as "I can." Consciousness is 'burdened' with the material of past actions. Knowing is situated into doing; it is not a synthetic cognitive activity, but an intentional act. Perception is not expression or reflection of a pre-existing being. It is art : the art of bringing truth into being. (*Phenomenology*, p. xx). Cognitive process, therefore, is at the same time a temporal process; perception as an intentional act involves a passage from the past to the future. This passage is not something that I see as an on-looker; it is not a datum of my cognito. "I perform this passage", I exist it, I am this passage. That is why the embodied-subject is not a series of discrete psychic acts; it is a "single temporality, an unforgettable tradition." My past has not become a dead object over which I can pass judgements; it is my immanent *karma* in terms of which I pass judgements. Not that I was my past; I am it. I am a sedimented existence, perched on the pyramid of time. I myself am time.<sup>35</sup> I am *samsāra*.

This existential modality of man and the world and their essential inseparability brings two important points. First, as a philosopher in absolute relation with the world, the phenomenological

positivist does not pretend to "tell us what God might think of it." Secondly, there can be no philosophical consciousness without the world, and that it is impossible to tell what the world would be like without being conscious of it. Now human consciousness, according to Ponty, is always conscious existence. That is to say, consciousness is social and cultural in its constitution. This, Ponty admits, he learned from Karl Marx, and therefore argues that the inevitable consequence of historical consciousness is a certain historical materialism. Lenin's scientific materialism reduces society and culture to biological process; it justifies its scientism by naturalizing history. According to historical materialism, Marx said, "nature developing in history is the actual anthropological nature." Instead of naturalizing history, Marx thought of history a humanization of nature, so that humanity could be natural to man in the "stateless society." The point to see is that being in the historical world and knowing it are inseparable. "To be born is both to be born of the world, and to be born in the world." That is why Ponty says that the notion of the world as a "human" object was reserved for Karl Marx." His *Das Capital*, Ponty calls a "concrete phenomenology of the cultural world."<sup>36</sup>

But the establishment of a "stateless society" is not a necessity—logical, metaphysical or dialectical. It could not be scientifically predicted. At most, it is a demand whose realization is not guaranteed by a divine decree. There is, indeed, a logic in history but it only tells that nothing in the world is accidental, just as nothing in it is logically necessary. Hegel, according to Marx, committed the double mistake of suspending history in the Absolute Idea, and of finalizing philosophy in the *Phenomenology of Mind*. On the same ground, Ponty suggests, Marx and Engels should not have concluded history in the stateless society, and philosophy in the *Das Capital*. Hegel began with Pure Idea, his historical "home-coming" to the Absolute Idea had a metaphysical guarantee. He had an abstract beginning, thought of abstract problems and gave an abstract solution. Marx began with 'praxis', his solution is claimed to be concrete and actual. But, the success of the Marxist 'praxis' has no metaphysical guarantee (*Sense and Non-sense*, p. 82). It is true that reason has become historical, but it is equally true that the historical reason

does not preach. "History never confesses." But, in spite of the Marxist claim of an empirical and experimental dialectic, its ideological predictions sound thoroughly theological. Ponty requests them to see that the "synthesis of historical contradictions exist de-jure in Hegel; it can never be more than defacto in Marx." If there is no guarantee of universal salvation 'beyond' history, it could not be guaranteed 'later on' in history. "The date of revolution is written on no wall."

That is why the phenomenological positivist requests us to see that man has become historical through and through, and that history is basically 'ambiguous'. From within history, a philosopher can't speak of possibility of certainty; what one can speak of is only the certainty of possibility. Ponty observes that the essence of history is that "it is always incomplete", and proposes that we "leave the illusion of contemplating a complete history". It is between *samsāra* and *nirvāna* that a philosopher is condemned to limp.

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#### NOTES

1. The phrase 'Phenomenological Positivism' is used by Merleau-Ponty in the preface of his *Phenomenology of Perception* (p. xvii). He calls it a method of philosophy "which bases the possible on the real". This paper is an attempt to present the case of Merleau-Ponty.
2. "The only pre-existing Logos is the world itself." *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), p. XX.
3. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, p. 56; *Sense and Non-sense* (North Western, 1964), p. 120.
4. *Phenomenology*, p. XIX.
5. *Ibid.*, VIII.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 230.
7. Engels, "Ludwig Fuervach and the End of Classical German

- Philosophy," in Karl Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, New York: International Publishers, 1968, pp. 603-6.
8. *Ibid.*, Also, Lenin, "Materialism and Empirio-Criticism", Burns (ed.) *A Handbook of Marxism*, London, pp. 636-37.
  9. Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, North Western, 1964, p. 199.
  10. Burns, *Handbook*, pp. 228-9.
  11. "Thus my body is a thing, but a thing I dwell in. It is, if you wish, on the side of the subject." *Signs*, p. 166.
  12. *Phenomenology*, p. XIV.
  13. "The origin of Christianity as the religion of the death of God is its rejection of the God of the philosophers and its heralding of a [God who takes on the human condition." *Sense and Non-sense*, p. 96.
  14. *Phenomenology*, p. 363.
  15. *Ibid.*, p. 454.
  16. *Ibid.*, pp. 57; 374.
  17. Burns, *Hand Book*, pp. 640-3.
  18. Ernst Mach, *Analysis of Sensations* in Lenin's "Empiric-Criticism", Burns, *Hand Book*.
  19. Lenin, *Ibid.*, pp. 637-38.
  20. *Sense and Non-sense*, p. 126.
  21. Russell, *Human Knowledge, its Scope and Limit*, p. 22.
  22. *Ibid.*, pp. 526-27.
  23. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, New York, Dover, 1952, p. 123.
  24. Carnap, *The Unity of Science*, quoted by M. Cornforth, *In Defence of Philosophy*, London 1950, p. 74.
  25. "The pure impression is not only undiscoverable, but also imperceptible and inconceivable as an instance of perception." *Phenomenology*, pp. 4-5.
  26. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*; (Peare, trs), 3.031, p. 19, 6.1261, p. 131; 6.3, p. 137; 6.374, p. 145; 6.362, p. 143; 6.375, p.145.
  27. *Ibid.*, 5.473, p. 95.

28. *Ibid.*, 6.632; 5.641, p. 119.
29. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*, p. 82.
30. *Sense and Non-sense*, p. 64. Marx: "...this entire idea which has given Hegelians such terrible headaches is from beginning to end nothing but abstraction." Easton and Guddat (ed.) *Writings of the Young Marx*, (Doubleday, 1967), p. 334.
31. *Phenomenology*, p. 63.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 298.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 349.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 333.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 421; 407; 422.
36. *Sense and Non-sense*, p. 131.