Merleau-Ponty on the Phenomenology of the Social World

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Abstract

The social world is the object of investigation of the social sciences or the human sciences. The common ground for any phenomenological philosophy of social sciences is the life-world (*Lebenswelt*). Husserl is concerned with the demonstration and explanation of the activities of consciousness of the transcendental subjectivity within which the life-world is constituted. Two pioneers of phenomenological philosophy of social sciences are Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Alfred Schutz. In this article, we discuss Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of the social world by relating it to the contours of Husserlian phenomenology. In doing so, we take up for discussion Merleau-Ponty's notion of the 'Primacy of Perception' and its relation to the notion of the body; self and the other; community and the role of dialogue in understanding the social world.

Introduction

Merleau-Ponty, like Husserl, characterizes phenomenology as an investigation of the natural attitude from a transcendental perspective by making use of the method of reduction. Thus, for him, phenomenology is a matter of describing, not of explaining or analyzing our experience in the world. He also agrees with Husserl that phenomenology is the study of essences. However, it is not just that, as phenomenology in Merleau-Ponty's view, puts essences back into existence. Thus, it tries to understand man or the world from the point of view of their facticity. In other words, it is not just an eidetic reduction that phenomenology aims, rather it is an investigation of human existence in its concrete and contingent way of living that it seeks. In Merleau-Ponty's reading of Husserl, the radical distinction between the transcendental and the natural attitudes is obliterated; so also the gulf between fact and essence. "In spite of all his trenchant

formulations constantly reaffirming the radical distinction between the natural and the transcendental attitude, Husserl is well aware from the start that they do in fact encroach upon one another, and that every *fact of consciousness* bears the transcendental within it. As far as the relation of fact and essence is concerned…[Husserl] foresaw the overlapping of the two orders" (M. Merleau-Ponty, 1964).[i]

So, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy can rightly be called existential phenomenology. As he says, science provides an explanation or rationale of the world and man; nevertheless, all my knowledge of the world including my scientific knowledge is gained from my own particular point of view. The scientific knowledge without any reference to my experience is meaningless. "The whole universe of science is built upon the world as directly experienced, and if we want to subject science itself to rigorous scrutiny and arrive at a precise assessment of its meaning and scope, we must begin by reawakening the basic experience of the world of which science is the second-order expression" (M. Merleau-Ponty, 1962).[ii] The scientific point of view which reduces my existence to a moment in world's history is naïve. It takes for granted the point of view of consciousness which brings into being for myself and through which the world forms around myself and begins to exist for myself. "Back to things themselves" is a call to return to that world which precedes knowledge. Knowledge always speaks of this antecedent world and in relation to this prior world, science is an abstraction or a derivative sign language. This turn toward consciousness is distinct from that of the Idealists'. Moreover, the phenomenological demand for pure description differs from both the analytical reflection as well as scientific explanation. "Analytical reflection starts from our experience of the world and goes back to the subject as to a condition of possibility distinct from that experience, revealing the all-embracing synthesis as that without which there would be no world. To this extent it ceases to remain part of our experience and offers, in place of an account, a reconstruction"

(M. Merleau-Ponty, 1962)[iii]. Nonetheless, this reflection is incomplete as it ignores its own beginning. There remains an unreflective experience on which reflection tries to build up. That is, reflection is a construction and does not describe the real experience and hence perception cannot be substituted by judgements, acts or predications. Thus, Merleau-Ponty upholds the primacy of perception. He says that our relation to the world is not one between the thinker and his object of thought (M. Merleau-Ponty, 1964).[iv]

Body and the Primacy of Perception

The classical distinction of form and matter with regard to perception is illegitimate. The perceiving subject is no longer a consciousness which interprets or confers form on sensible matter in view of an ideal law which it possesses, on the other hand, matter is already pregnant with its form. That is to say, every perception takes place within a horizon and in the world. The perceptual experience is one 'in action' and not one of positing. Then the perceptual experience becomes the ultimate foundation upon which rationality, value and all existence rest. Perception is not an intellectual act as the intellectual act never grasps the object as "real" but only as possible or as necessary. However, in perception an object is presented as real; "…it is given as the infinite sum of an indefinite series of perspectival views in each of which the object is given but in none of which is it given exhaustively" (M. Merleau-Ponty, 1964).[v] The synthesis which gives unity to the perceived object is thus an accomplishment by the subject. The subject may delimit certain perspectives and also may go beyond them. This subject is none other than my body as the field of perception and action.

Both empiricism, which advocates a scientific explanation and intellectualism, which emulates analytical reflection are thus inadequate in understanding human perception and action. Moreover, both the above standpoints have in common what Merleau-Ponty calls 'objective thought' as a view of the world. The objective thought

portrays the world as a collection of identifiable objects. It assigns a definite spatio-temporal coordinate for all objects and conceives them of having a set of definite properties like size, shape, colour, etc. It further assumes that these objects interact causally with each other and their properties are amenable to causal explanation. Thus the objective thought characterizes the world as an object in the mathematician's or physicist's sense irrespective of its ontological status. However, the world which we actually perceive is not this 'objective' world. It is the world of our everyday life, the one in which we 'live-through'. It consists of objects whose properties are not fully determinate and instead of causal determination, there obtain relationships of meaning and reciprocal expression. These objects are not located in a unique spatial framework but are situated with respect to the human beings' specific field of action and thus are varyingly situated. So, in the 'lived-world' one deals with objects that are 'situated' in relation to specific human actions. In other words, it is the human body as subject of action which determinates the objects as situated in its field of action. "Our bodily experience of movement…provides us with a way of access to the world and the object, with a 'praktognosia' [practical knowledge] which has to be recognized as original and perhaps as primary. My body has its world, or understands its world, without having to make use of my 'symbolic' or 'objectifying function'" (M. Merleau-Ponty, 1962).[vi] Thus the subject, by its very nature as embodied consciousness, right from its beginning is oriented towards the world. This bodily orientation is primary and hence any subsequent intellectual or empiricist interpretation vitiates the whole process.

As against Husserl's notion of intentionality, Merleau-Ponty conceives it as involved in one's ability to act on the world. Husserl characterizes intentionality as the relationship between acts of consciousness and their objects. For Husserl, consciousness is always directed to some object and the object is always intended or meant by the act. Such an account of intentionality gives rise to the notion of body as distinct

from consciousness. The body as an object intended by the conscious acts of the non-bodily subject—the cogito. Now, Merleau-Ponty says that in performing an action, one's body is not to be seen as guided by an intentional consciousness, which is independent of the body. Rather, intentionality belongs to the body itself and it is this organization which provides the connection between the human beings and the world.

This view of Merleau-Ponty with regard to the doctrine of intentionality has its ramifications in the concept of phenomenological reduction. For Husserl, reduction enables the bracketing of natural attitude and thereby opens up the realm of transcendental consciousness. Husserl thus sought to disengage the consciousness from the world through reduction. However, for Merleau-Ponty, reduction far from being a technique to disengage from the world is an attempt to be in the world with full awareness of it. So Merleau-Ponty remarks:

It is because we are through and through compounded of relationships with the world that for us the only way to become aware of the fact is to suspend the resultant activity, to refuse it our complicity...to put it 'out of play'. Not because we reject the certainties of common sense and a natural attitude to things – they are on the contrary, the constant theme of philosophy – but because, being the presupposed basis of any thought, they are taken for granted, and go unnoticed, and because in order to arouse them and bring them to view, we have to suspend for a moment our recognition of them (M. Merleau-Ponty, 1962).[vii]

However, Husserl himself holds that the consciousness is inseparable from the world in which it inhabits. This is evident from the following words of Husserl:

The soul's reality is based upon corporeal matter, not the latter upon the soul. More generally, within the total objective world, the material world is what we call Nature, a self-contained and particular world which does not require the support of any other reality. On the contrary, the existence of mental realities and a real mental world is tied to the

existence of a nature in the first sense of the term, to the existence of a material nature, and it is so linked not for contingent reasons but for reasons of principle (E. Husserl, 1980).[viii]

Thus, Husserl too emphasized the embodied nature of consciousness like Merleau-Ponty. The essential difference between the two nevertheless, lies in the aim of reduction. For Husserl, reduction aimed at bringing the essential core of consciousness into light. It is thus an investigation of essences (eidos) that Husserl sought in his method. Merleau-Ponty on the other hand was interested in the concrete existence of man in the world. The world is not merely a correlate of thought. Consciousness does not constitute the world in the sense of creating it. Consciousness on the other hand is in a perceptual 'dialogue' with the world and all meaning is the resultant of this dialogue. In this sense, if one wishes to say, consciousness constitutes the world. Again, Husserl's project of a transcendental phenomenology seeks to elucidate the structures of the transcendental ego. For him, the ego is the subject of experience and being the owner of habitualities, it includes all the intentional life of that subject. This makes transcendental phenomenology a project of transcendental ego through its egological locutions. In other words, Husserl grounds the transcendental ego as the 'ultimate source' of all our experience. Contrary to this Merleau-Ponty believes that experience of a subject cannot be made completely known. For him, a transcendental phenomenology of this type fails to acknowledge the opacity of the world as well as the existence of the other.

The Situated Self and the Other

For Merleau-Ponty, in order to have a meaningful concept of the other, it is necessary that my own existence should be more than an awareness of mere existing. It should also incorporate my incarnation in some nature so as to reveal the possibility of a historical situation. "The *Cogito* must reveal me in a situation, and it is on this condition alone

that transcendental subjectivity can, as Husserl puts it, *be* an intersubjectivity" (M. Merleau-Ponty, 1962).[ix]

In his *Cartesian Meditations,* the 'Fifth Meditation' is devoted by Husserl to uncover the sphere of transcendental being as intersubjectivity. It is in the sphere of one's ownness that one constitutes the existence–sense of other selves. He says that the apprehension of any concrete object as a particular takes place through a series of experiences of the same object given beforehand in a horizon. The undetermined object of intuition becomes a determined object in the continuation of the experience that unfolds only what is included in the object as a pure explication. This pure explication then unfolds in a concatenation of particular intuitions of the object's very ownness as the "internal" determinations—its essence. What is thus anticipated horizonally becomes constituted originaliter by the explication of its essence. Similarly, with the explication of one's own self, one starts with experiences, which belong to one's own empirical self. Then by looking for those essential features without which the experiences of one's self cease to be one's own, one reveals the essence of 'empirical self'. As Husserl says:

When I am effecting transcendental reduction and reflecting on myself, the transcendental ego, I am given to myself perceptually as this ego – in a grasping perception. Furthermore I become aware that, although not grasped before this perception, I was "already given," already there for myself continually as an object of original intuition…[Nevertheless] it becomes uncovered originaliter when my experiencing–explicating regard is directed to myself, to my perceptually and even apodictically given "I am" and its abiding identity with itself in the continuous unitary synthesis of original self-experience (E. Husserl, 1960).[x]

However, this is not to say that self-explication is just like the explication of any other 'visual thing' as it goes on in any particular perception. The experiences of oneself are not confined to perception in

the normal sense as it uncovers my own past by means of recollections. Thus self-explication is carried out largely in acts of consciousness that are not perceptions. For example, my memories and intentions provide an access to my past and future respectively. The content of these acts of consciousness may be unclear or illusory as there is the possibility of faulty memories or vague intentions and as such they are imperfect evidence. So our aim in explicating the self is not to bring out these particular contents, but the apodictic evidence of the self by explicating the structure of one's experience of oneself. "In unqualifiedly apodictic evidence self-explication brings out only the all-embracing structural forms in which I exist as ego – that is to say: in which I exist with an essentially necessary all-inclusiveness and without which I could not exist" (E. Husserl, 1960).[xi]

The essential mode of existence is one of 'temporality.' 'Time' as an all-embracing apodictic a priori incorporates the self-constitution of self's own processes. In other words, self exists through time and undergoes change through time. At any given point of time, self has an experience of itself and each such experiences constitutes the temporality of the self. Thus the transcendental ego has an idea of itself as an empirical self which is temporal and changing. This 'idea' is an a priori one in that it determines the content of the self as something identifiable. "This fully determined content itself, with the sense of something firmly identifiable again and again, in respect of all its parts and moments, is an 'idea', valid a priori" (E. Husserl, 1960).[xii] Thus, in revealing the essential structural forms of self-experience, self-explication makes intelligible the structure of transcendental ego in relation to its empirical self as a temporal being.

The stand point for the explication of the existence-sense of other selves and also that other selves do experience the same world as one's own self do must be traceable to the primordial sphere of one's ownness. Such an explication reveals four levels of constitution in a hierarchical manner that each successive level presupposes the earlier

levels. First comes the constitutional level pertaining to the 'other ego'—that is, to egos excluded from my own primordial ego in its concrete being. At the second level there occurs an ego-community which is a harmony of subjects. This constitution on the basis of others does not remain isolated but includes myself amidst others and thereby forms the community of egos. This community in its communalized intentionality constitutes the one identical world. In other words, motivated by the second level there arises a world which is identical for everyone as a result of an addition of universal sense to my own primordial world. This is the third level of constitution. Nevertheless, the world remains a transcendental one here. It is only at the fourth level of constitution, where all egos present themselves in the objective world as psychophysical men giving worldly sense to transcendental egos that our everyday world is constituted (E. Husserl, 1960).[xiii]

We are tempted to say in the case of experiencing a man that the other is presented before us "in person." Nevertheless, neither the other ego himself nor any of his subjective processes are given in our experience originally. Had it been the case, we could gain direct access to the other's own self and eventually it looks as if the other is not really an 'other' as he himself and I myself would be the same. The problem cannot be solved by merely invoking the notion of a 'body' in place of the other ego as the unity of the body then becomes a product of my own sensuousness. So, in order to have a sense of the other, there needs to have the mediation of an intentionality which emanates from my primordial world so as to make present to consciousness a "there too" which is not itself there. Thus, it is a sort of appresentation. Now, Husserl says the body over there which is apprehended as an animate organism derives its sense by a transfer of sense from my own experience. "Since, in this Nature and this world, my animate organism is the only body that is or can be constituted originally as an animate organism…the body over there, which is nevertheless apprehended as an animate organism, must have derived this sense by an apperceptive

transfer from my animate organism, and done so in a manner that excludes an actually direct, and hence primordial, showing of the predicates belonging to an animate organism specifically, a showing of them in perception proper" (E. Husserl, 1960).[xiv] Thus, there is a similarity which enables this analogical apprehension to connect the body over there with my body. This analogical perception nevertheless is not an inference. Every apperception is a pointing back to a "primordial instituting" so as to constitute an object with a similar sense. This kind of analogical perception is not peculiar to the perception of others. Husserl points out that even the physical objects that are unknown to us are known by this analogical perception. We have seen similar things before and these serve as a 'type' for us to recognize the other similar objects. "Thus each everyday experience involves an analogizing transfer of an originally instituted objective sense to a new case, with its anticipative apprehension of the object as having a similar sense" (E. Husserl, 1960).[xv]

According to Husserl 'paring' is a distinctive feature of this analogical perception of others. The ego and alter ego are always given in an original pairing. Pairing is a universal phenomenon in the transcendental sphere. It is the primal form of a passive synthesis of association. It is phenomenologically founded as a unity of similarity and as always constituted as a pair. Thus there is an intentional overreaching that comes about as soon as the data that undergo pairing occur. As a consequence of this overreaching, a mutual transference of sense takes place in the paired data. That is, a perception of each according to the sense of the other takes place. Now, Husserl asks whether this analogical perception is merely a transfer of sense. In that case, what makes it another's organism, (alter ego) rather than a second organism of my own? Here comes the second distinctive feature of this analogical apperception: what is appresented by this analogical perception can never attain actual presence. That is to say, no

originarily presentation of any of the appropriated sense can take place in my primordial sphere.

In other words, the existence sense of other body demands that one cannot have a direct experience of the sensations one apperceives in the other. Hence there is no direct verification possible regarding the other body's existence as an animate organism. However, there are other horizons which can be verified as far as other bodies are concerned. "Every experience points to further experiences that would fulfil and verify the appresented horizons, which include, in the form of non-intuitive anticipations, potentially verifiable syntheses of harmonious further experience" (E. Husserl, 1960).[xvi]

Thus, the experience of 'Other ego' is ensued by its harmonious behaviour. Subsequently if there is something discordant about its behaviour then it becomes a pseudo-organism. This indirect verification is something similar to the verification of one's own memory as an access to one's past. Moreover, one experiences one's own body as "Here" in a spatial location whereas the others as 'There'. This 'Here' and 'There' can be changed by virtue of one's movements. Thus one is not just in a space but oriented in space. That is one's position in space gives one his perspective and this can be changed by moving over to another position. Thus the orientation in space is another horizon of the perception of human bodies. By transferring the sense of one's orientation in space by analogical apperception to other human bodies, one experiences the other as a concrete ego, as another point of view on the world. Now, what is appresented as a body over there in my surrounding world is not my own ego as I am here and not there. The two locations 'Here' and 'There' are incompatible for my ego to be simultaneously presented. That is, what is incompatible in simultaneous coexistence becomes compatible only if I apperceive the body over 'there' as an 'other' ego. One attributes contents to these other egos by what Husserl calls "empathy." For example, I understand the outward

conduct of the other who is angry or cheerful from my own conduct under similar circumstances, i.e., by empathizing with the other.

Community and the Social World

The experience of the other produces the community. The community is first of all constituted by the commonness of Nature. The other's body is perceived as having a different body with a different primordial sphere and as having a different perspective. However, it is apperceived as part of the same Nature and the perspective as one on the same world. This happens through 'presentation'. The presentation reveals the immanent temporality that is shared by the other along with my own ego. Thus, presentation enables a connection between my own ego as a living self-experience and the alien sphere presentiated there in by an identifying synthesis. Thus, at this first level of community an objective world is constituted with its objective time and objective men as possible thinking subjects like myself. The second level of community reveals that the other experiences myself as an other for him, just as I experience him as an other for me. Thus, Husserl says:

…in the sense of a community of men…there is implicit a mutual being for one another, which entails an objectivating equalization of my existence with that of all others – consequently: I or anyone else, as a man among other men. If with my understanding of someone else, I penetrate more deeply into him, into his horizon of ownness, I shall soon run into the fact that, just as his animate bodily organism lies in my field of perception and that, in general, he experiences me forthwith as an other for him, just as I experience him as my other (E. Husserl, 1960).[xvii]

For Merleau-Ponty, the other is experienced as a body which is 'the vehicle for a form of behaviour'. In his emphasis on the significance of 'body', Merleau-Ponty is in agreement with Husserl. One finds oneself thrown in a natural world and the world of nature can be discernible at the centre of subjectivity as all my perceptions have nature as its

background. Just as nature finds its way into my life, the cultural world constituted by the behaviour patterns do come naturally to me. "Just as nature finds its way to the core of my personal life and becomes inextricably linked with it, so behaviour patterns settle into that nature, being deposited in the form of a cultural world" (M. Merleau-Ponty, 1962).[xviii] This cultural world is experienced as self-evident like the physical world and is shared by a community. Objects in this cultural world are moulded by people for their use. These sedimented behaviour patterns in the cultural objects are not of any particular human being, rather it announces the presence of others. "The cultural world is then ambiguous, but it is already present. I have before me a society to be known. An Objective Spirit dwells in the remains and the scenery…. In 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, … and it is through the perception of a human act and another person that the perception of a cultural world could be verified" (M. Merleau-Ponty, 1962).[xix]

Objective thought cannot give an adequate account of the existence of other people. It tries to explain the existence of others by analogy from one's own case. The actions of others are understood through my own actions. But then it presupposes the existence of others and does not explain how one comes to understand others. So, Merleau-Ponty asks:

But this is precisely the question: how can the word 'I' be put into the plural, how can a general idea of the I be formed, how can I speak of an 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'? (M. Merleau-Ponty, 1962).[xx]

Merleau-Ponty does not deny the role of analogical perception in revealing the existence of others. His claim is rather that objective thought cannot explain the analogical perception of other people.

Objective thought, he says, recognizes only two modes of being: being in itself and being for itself. Thus within the framework of objective thought, the perception of other people by a subject involves a contradiction. The other person as my object of perception exists as a being in itself. Nevertheless, in so far as it is a subject the perceived other must be a being for itself. Now, according to objective thought nothing can be both for itself and in itself. Thus there is no place for others in objective thought. It inevitably becomes solipsistic. One's body and the world are not to be understood as objects coordinated together by a functional relationship that objective thought establishes. The relation between my body and the world rather should be understood in terms of a real implication. As Merleau-Ponty says:

I have the world as an incomplete individual, through the agency of my body as the potentiality of this world, and I have the positing of objects through that of my body, or conversely the positing of my body through that of objects, not in any kind of logical implication, as we determine an unknown size through its objective relations to give sizes, but in a real implication, and because my body, is a movement towards the world, and the world my body's point of support (M. Merleau-Ponty, 1962).[xxi]

Dialogue and the Primacy of the Social

According to Merleau-Ponty, we must conceive our perspectives as our insertion into the world-as-an-individual. Perception is our inherence in things. Thus, if one experiences this inhering of one's consciousness in its body and its world, the perception of other selves is no longer a problem as the other two is an embodied consciousness. "As for consciousness, it has to be conceived, no longer as a constituting consciousness and, as it were, a pure being-for-itself, but as a perceptual consciousness, as the subject of a pattern of behaviour, as being in the world or existence, for only thus can another appear at the top of his phenomenal body, and be endowed with a sort of 'locality'"

(M. Merleau-Ponty, 1962).[xxii] My body perceives the body of another person as having an extension of my own intentions in its familiar way of dealing with the world. Thus the body of the other person is the first cultural object as it is the "vehicle of a form of behaviour." Merleau–Ponty draws upon the work of Piaget to adduce his claim that intersubjective experience precedes personal experience. He brings the example of an infant who opens its mouth if one pretends to bite its fingers. That is, even an infant is aware of the body activities as the same whoever engages in them. This awareness of sameness cannot be the outcome of an analogical reasoning, as the baby has never seen its own facial image so as to find the similarities.

Language is another cultural object that plays a crucial role in the perception of other people. In a dialogue or a conversation, the language becomes a shared activity. It is an interchange of thoughts. "In the experience of dialogue, there is constituted between the other person and myself a common ground; my thought and his are interwoven into a single fabric, my words and those of my interlocutor are called forth by the state of the discussion, and they are inserted into a shared operation of which neither of us is the creator" (M. Merleau-Ponty, 1962).[xxiii] In the course of dialogue, myself and the other co-exist through a common world which merges our perspectives. Only in retrospect, when one reflects on the dialogue that one is able to think of it as an episode in one's personal life. Thus Merleau-Ponty shows that solipsistic doubts are the outcome of reflection. "The perception of other people and the intersubjective world are problematical only for adults. The child lives in a world which he unhesitatingly believes accessible to all around him" (M. Merleau-Ponty, 1962).[xxiv] Here, Merleau-Ponty's aim is to show the primacy of the social over the personal. Our pre-reflective activity involves communication in the social world. The personal world is a development from the social. Even the Hegelian account of the struggle between the consciousness as each seeks the death of the other

presupposes the common ground in the social sphere. As Merleau-Ponty says for the struggle ever to begin needs some common ground in the social world. However, these arguments do not eliminate the individuality of the other. Thus, he holds that:

… the behaviour of another person, and even his words, are not that other person. The grief and the anger of another have never quite the same significance for him as they have for me. For him these situations are lived through, for me they are displayed….If, moreover, we undertake some project in common, this common project is not one single project, it does not appear in the selfsame light to both of us, we are not both equally enthusiastic about it, or at any rate not in quite the same way…. (M. Merleau-Ponty, 1962).[xxv]

It may so happen that the other's consciousness and mine may produce a common situation in which they communicate with each other. Nevertheless, we must keep in mind that such commonalties come from the subjectivity of each of us. Thus, it is clear that the problems associated with the perception of the other do not originate from objective thought alone nor do they all dissolve entirely with the discovery of behaviour. In other words, we have to search the basis on which the uniqueness of the cogito as well as objective thought are grounded. For this, we need to know how it is possible to posit the other. "But first we need to know how it has been possible for me to posit the other. In so far as I am born into the world, and have a body and a natural world, I can find in that world other patterns of behaviour with which my own interweave…" (M. Merleau-Ponty, 1962).[xxvi] It is the awareness that my existence is given to itself that acts as the ground of the Cogito. This self, the Cogito, is a witness to any actual communication and without it the latter is never possible. This fact raises certain solipsistic doubts. "There is here a solipsism rooted in living experience and quite insurmountable. It is true that I do not feel that I am the constituting agent either of the natural or of the cultural world…. Yet although I am outrun on all sides by my own acts, and

submerged in generality, the fact remains that I am the one by whom they are experienced, and with my first perception there was launched an insatiable being who appropriates everything that he meets.…" (M. Merleau-Ponty, 1962).[xxvii] Nevertheless, Merleau-Ponty points out that solipsism and communication cannot be the two horns of a dilemma.[xxviii] "Reflection must in some way present the unreflected, otherwise we should have nothing to set over against it, and it would not become a problem for us. Similarly, my experience must in some way present me with other people, since otherwise I should have no occasion to speak of solitude, and could not begin to pronounce other people inaccessible" (M. Merleau-Ponty, 1962).[xxix] Solipsism is self-defeating as any presentation of solipsistic argument involves using language which is a cultural object and assumes an audience. "I can evolve a solipsist philosophy but, in doing so, I assume the existence of a community of men endowed with speech, and I address myself to it.… [Even the] refusal to communicate, however, is still a form of communication" (M. Merleau-Ponty, 1962).[xxx]

What lies at the root of my subjectivity as well as my transcendence towards others is the phenomenon of my being given to myself. That is, I am given to myself as situated in a physical and social world. Social world is thus a permanent field of existence. "Solipsism would be strictly true only of someone who managed to be tacitly aware of his existence without being or doing anything, which is impossible, since existing is being in and of the world" (M. Merleau-Ponty, 1962).[xxxi] A philosopher who reflects cannot but take others along with his meditation as they are his associates and his knowledge is built on their opinions as well. Thus, transcendental subjectivity is intersubjectivity precisely because it is a revealed subjectivity, revealed to itself and to others.

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End Notes:

i. M. Merleau-Ponty, 1964, The Philosopher and Sociology in Richard C. Mc Clearly (trans.), Signs, p. 106, Northwestern University Press. Also see his article The Philosopher and His Shadow in Signs, pp. 159–181.

ii. M. Merleau-Ponty, 1962, in Colin Smith (trans.), Phenomenology of Perception, p. viii, Routledge and Kegan Paul.

iii. Ibid., p. ix.

iv. M. Merleau-Ponty, 1964, The Primacy of Perception and its Philosophical Consequences in James M. Edie (trans.), Primacy of Perception, p. 12, Northwestern University Press.

v. Ibid., p. 15.

vi. M. Merleau-Ponty, 1962, in Colin Smith (trans.), Phenomenology of Perception, pp. 140–141, Routledge and Kegan Paul.

vii. Ibid., p. xiii.

viii. E. Husserl, 1980, in Ted E. Klein and William E. Pohl (trans.), Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Third Book, p. 117, Martinus Nijhoff.

ix. M. Merleau-Ponty, 1962, in Colin Smith (trans.), Phenomenology of Perception, p. xiii, Routledge and Kegan Paul.

x. E. Husserl, 1960, in Dorion Cairns (trans.), Cartesian Meditations, pp. 101–102, Martinus Nijhoff.

xi. Ibid., p. 103.

xii. Ibid., p. 103.

xiii. Ibid., pp. 106–108.

xiv. Ibid., pp. 110–111.

xv. Ibid., p. 111.

xvi. Ibid., p. 114.

xvii. Ibid., pp. 129–130.

xviii. M. Merleau-Ponty, 1962, in Colin Smith (trans.), Phenomenology of Perception, p. 347, Routledge and Kegan Paul.

xix. Ibid., p. 348.

xx. Ibid., p. 348.

xxi. Ibid., p. 350.

xxii. Ibid., p. 351.

xxiii. Ibid., p. 354.

xxiv. Ibid., p. 355.

xxv. Ibid., p. 356.

xxvi. Ibid., p. 357.

xxvii. Ibid., p. 358.

xxviii.	Speech and the problem of other are intertwined in Merleau-Ponty's thought. See, M. Merleau-Ponty, 1973, in John O'Neill, The Prose of the World, pp. 131–146, Northwestern University Press.
xxix.	M. Merleau-Ponty, 1962, in Colin Smith (trans.), Phenomenology of Perception, p. 359, Routledge and Kegan Paul.
xxx.	Ibid., pp. 360–361.
xxxi.	Ibid., p. 361.