Some of the most original and exciting work in political theory is currently being undertaken by feminists. Old questions are being discussed from a new perspective, new questions are being raised and the classic texts reexamined. The essays in The Sexism of Social and Political Theory — which cover Plato, Locke, Rousseau, Hume, Hegel, Marx and Nietzsche — provide a good example of this critical textual reinterpretation. The theorists who appear in the conventional pantheon of "traditional political theory" are, of course, all male. More importantly, as the feminist reassessment of their arguments shows, they are also almost all male supremacists. The standard commentaries and textbooks have invariably ignored this aspect of the classics, regarding it as entirely unremarkable. The very few exceptions to what O'Brien in this volume calls "male-stream thought" are usually ignored too, typified by most commentators' refusal to admit that J.S. Mill wrote The Subjection of Women or that it is virtually a companion volume to his "acceptable" work On Liberty. Occasionally, male writers are stung into reactions like Bloom's comment about Book V of The Republic showing "contempt for convention and nature, [and] wounding of all the dearest sensibilities of masculine pride and shame, the family and statesmanship". Until the present revival of the women's movement made its influence felt in academia the separation in political theory of citizenship and political life from "private" domestic life and the world of women was virtually absolute.

The chapters of The Sexism of Social and Political Theory show in detail how the classic writers base their sexist arguments on appeals to the "natural" differences in attributes and moral characters of men and women and, most fundamentally, to the different roles of the sexes in reproduction (including childrearing). These differences (usually reasonably soberly presented, though there are examples of more or less pathological misogyny as in Schopenhauer's Aphorisms) are held necessarily to lead to the division of social life into two "separate spheres"; the "feminine" sphere of domestic life and reproduction, and the "masculine" public or political sphere of production and the state. Although women have now been admitted as citizens in Western countries, the belief is still widespread that they are "naturally" not fitted for political life. The task of uncovering the different
ways in which this belief has helped structure the great works of political theory is therefore of more than academic interest. It is crucial to an understanding of the present social basis of women's oppression — which in some of its most important aspects is really "the wife question" — and thus to the struggle for change. However, now that books and essays are appearing that analyse the arguments of the classics about women in the context of the theories as a whole, it is also becoming clear that the relationship of feminist theorists to the classic texts is neither straightforward nor unproblematic. The question raised by the new scholarship is what, if anything, traditional political theory can contribute to the development of an explicitly feminist political theory. If the mainstream of our theoretical past is sexist through and through, what relevance has it to feminists?

In her excellent study Women in Western Political Thought (also published in 1979), Susan Okin concludes that

it is by no means a simple matter to integrate the female half of the human race into a tradition of political theory which has ... defined them, and intrafamilial relationships, as outside the scope of the political.

More emphatically, at the end of the "Introduction" to The Sexism of Social and Political Theory the editors write that they hope that the book will show "ample reason for concluding that traditional political theory is utterly bankrupt in the light of present [feminist] perspectives". They conclude by calling for "new theories". If we are faced by a bankrupt past then it would seem to follow that feminist theorists must totally reject this theoretical heritage. But how many of us feel able to tackle the task that would confront us if nothing of traditional theory can be salvaged: how many of us possess the intellectual capacity or originality that a completely new start demands? Indeed, does it make sense to ask for an entirely new start? Happily, neither the "Introduction" nor the other essays give us sufficient reason to draw this daunting conclusion.

Clark and Lange refer to "the first major break with the tradition" that, they argue, occurs in the theories of Marx and Engels. In "Reproducing Marxist Man", O'Brien suggests that, notwithstanding the fact that Marx has his theoretical feet firmly in the "male-stream", his methodology provides necessary tools for the development of feminist theory. But, if Marx is useful, or essential, in the formulation of feminist political theory, then it must be asked whether other theorists, albeit also sexist, may not have something to contribute too. In other words, rather than (very unrealistically) rejecting all the past as "utterly bankrupt", feminist theorists should be considering the criteria to be used to decide where starting points, insights or methods can be
found. Moreover, unless Marx is the only theorist to whom feminists can refer, and he is thus placed outside “traditional political theory”, the notion of that “tradition” must be examined rather more closely than is sometimes the case in feminist critiques. For example, if Marx’s position in the tradition appears ambiguous, how is J.S. Mill to be classified? He can hardly be excluded from “traditional political theory” but he did write *The Subjection of Women* in which he explicitly criticises the argument for women’s “nature”. This suggests that sexism or criticism of sexism is only one, though a crucial, issue in feminist political theory. Nor is this at all surprising. It is true that the same assumptions about women’s nature and proper social place recur across the centuries but the assumptions are embedded in very different theoretical perspectives which, in turn, form part of historically specific forms of social life. If the “development of an adequate theory of the relation between production and reproduction” is, as the editors state, central to feminist political theory, certain theoretical perspectives will be a good deal more useful than others; some theories may, strictly, be irrelevant.

I would suggest that the latter is true of pre-modern theories. Recent work on Plato reveals wide disagreement whether his arguments are, or are not, feminist. Lange in “The Function of Equal Education in Plato’s *Republic* and *Laws*”, argues that his position “cannot properly be understood as feminist”, but she also states that Plato’s “theoretical concerns are ultimately not those of feminism”. The last comment raises the fundamental question of what is involved if feminism is to be a theoretical issue. What is necessary for feminist questions to be raised from within a particular theorist’s work, even if he is a male supremacist? It seems to me that it is not until the modern period, until “individuals” begin to be seen as beings who are “naturally” free and equal, and social life as a whole is conceived as grounded in convention, that the “theoretical concerns of feminism” become possible and can be raised in a general or universal fashion (rather than finding isolated examples of fascinating speculation about different social and sexual arrangements). If this is so, the problem then becomes one of deciding which of the modern members of the tradition have most to offer feminist political theorists. The character of the problem tends to get lost beneath the fact that “individuals” are conventionally regarded as male. In the “Introduction” Bentham and Marx are distinguished from Rousseau, Hobbes, Locke and Hegel on the grounds that the former do not necessarily take the term “citizen” or “man” (or, I add, “individual”) to be extensionally male. However, the principles of most (radical) modern theories are presented as universal. Whether or not a particular theorist actually extends them to women is only part of the problem (neither Bentham nor Marx, nor J.S. Mill, are completely outside the “male-stream”). An equally important question for feminists is whether a particular theorist’s work could be used in the positive task of developing new, feminist theory, for largely critical purposes — or not at all.
C. PATEMAN

Hume's empiricist utilitarianism, for example, appears to be "utterly bankrupt". Louise Marcil-Lacoste shows that to follow "Hume's Method in Moral Reasoning" is to provide a "philosophical justification of sexist discrimination". The allegedly natural character of women — and Hume's version is spelled out by Steven Burns in the first part of the chapter — can only be presented as a fact of life; women's social position can never been seen as a moral and political problem. On the other hand, other essays illustrate how critical feminist questions can be raised from within a theorist's arguments, although this occasionally tends to be obscured by an author's zeal to reveal the full extent of sexism. For instance, Clark's very helpful discussion of "Women and Locke" draws out the implications for women and reproduction of Locke's justification of the appropriation and inheritance, by men, of private property. However, she weakens her argument by asserting that Locke's theory "is, in the end, far more objectionable than that of Filmer". Locke may not have extended his attack on patriarchal theory to conjugal relations, but his individualist contract theory, and its significance for the development of feminism, puts him on the outer side of a theoretical and historical divide from Sir Robert Filmer's divinely ordained and all-encompassing patriarchalism. Locke's contract theory allows the question of women's status as individuals to be raised; indeed, Locke, and his patriarchal opponents, are aware that individualism makes this question impossible to avoid, if not to suppress. The origin of feminism, like that of other modern radical, critical theories, is bound up with the development of individualism but, again like other critical theories, if feminism is to be more than merely critical (or do more than demand equal rights within the liberal capitalist social structure) it has to transcend and transform its abstractly individualist heritage. That is to say, if there are to be new theoretical advances by feminists, the theorists who cannot be ignored are those who attempt to go beyond abstract individualism while extending (in principle) concrete, social freedom to all individuals. These include Marx, of course — who "broke" with the "tradition" that the once revolutionary liberal, abstract individualism had become by the mid-nineteenth century — but it also, very importantly, includes the blatently male supremacist Rousseau and Hegel.

Both these theorists emphasise the distinctiveness of the domestic and political spheres while basing their theories on the necessary inter-relationships among different dimensions of social life. Such a theoretical project is essential to feminist critiques of the separation of reproduction and production, of personal and political life. In her essay on "Rousseau: Women and the General Will", Lange remarks that "it appears that a truly egalitarian political theory, . . . must include a philosophy of synthesis or harmony of reason and appetite not one of their opposition". Rousseau and Hegel claim to provide such a philosophy, but even though this claim will be rejected by feminists, feminist theorists share a similar goal. There is a profound sense in
OF SEXISM IN POLITICAL THEORY

which the oppositions, antimonies or separations which structure liberal theory and liberal-capitalist practice are ultimately different ways of expressing the most general opposition and separation; that between the particular and universal. This antimony is exemplified in popular consciousness in the opposition between male and female (“male” stands for universal, political, public, production, reason, philosophy; “female” for particular, private, personal, reproduction, feeling, appetite). A new feminist theory has thus to tackle not only sexism but the most fundamental and complex problems of philosophy and political theory.

Feminist theory is subject to two reductionist temptations: one is the Marxist temptation to reduce feminism to the problem of class; the other is the radical feminist temptation to reduce all social subordination to a biological opposition between male and female. The theoretical complexities of a Rousseau or Hegel provide a protection against temptation. In an excellent discussion of “Hegel and ‘The Women Question’”, Patricia Jagetowicz Mills shows, for the first time to this reviewer’s knowledge, how Hegel’s commentators have failed to see that his “universal” is merely partial. Hegel’s universal “is necessarily male and male is not universal”. But Mills also reminds us that although “neither the family nor woman’s oppression can be understood apart from an analysis of capitalism” we cannot simply apply the categories of political economy to the domestic sphere; the specificity of Hegel’s three spheres of family, civil society and state must be maintained. The difficulty of doing this is illustrated in the “Introduction” where it is argued that the legal structuring of the family derives from the middle class need to secure inheritance, so that the working class family has less need of legal marriage and its function is essentially reproductive. Cheap reproductive labour ensures the supply of cheap productive labour. This argument is too simple and mechanical in its association of one class with reproduction. Our socio-economic system is, and always has been, patriarchal-capitalist (and it may now be the case that the need for cheap labour has been considerably, and permanently, reduced; the demand for the contemporary equivalent of cannon-fodder seems to be holding however); the consolidation of capitalist social relations depended not only on the inculcation of factory discipline, but also on bourgeois patterns of legal and moral family relations becoming accepted by the bulk of the population.

Another illustration of the difficulty of maintaining the specificity of different dimensions of social life can be found in O’Brien’s lively essay on Marx (which includes a discussion of an early work of Hegel’s on reproduction which complements Mills’ argument). O’Brien points out that “birth is not an object of philosophy” either for the young Marx who thought that the idea of creation led to nonsensical questions about the “original” creation of humankind, or for the older Marx who saw sexuality as merely immediate or contingent. However, O’Brien tends to fall into the radical
feminist temptation. She argues, ingeniously, that the origins of the gender struggle lie in the alienation of male sperm in copulation. Men cooperate to “annul the alienation of the seed” through the social fact of paternity, established through the domination of women and the appropriation of children. But how then can the subordination of female to male be ended? The proletariat overthrow the bourgeoisie by abolishing capitalism, and thus abolishing the “proletarian” and “bourgeois” classes — but the feminist revolution can hardly follow the radical feminist analogue of the class struggle. “Masculine” and “feminine”, like “bourgeois” and “proletariat” are social and historical constructs, but male and female are not. If the basis of the gender struggle lies in the “alienation” of male seed in heterosexual copulation, the only solution is radical feminist separatism — or the elimination of males. I should add that writers in this volume are not advocating either course.

One rather murky aspect of male supremacist theory that is not much discussed is the extent to which it rests on a fear and envy of women, more specifically of their sexuality and ability to give birth. This is touched on in Christine Garside Allen’s chapter on “Nietzsche’s Ambivalence About Women”, which also provides the first comprehensive account of Nietzsche’s views on women. He saw women as “naturally” slavish and as “naturally” Dionysian. However, they are lesser Dionysians who will bear the supermen. Nietzsche explicitly and frequently used the metaphor of motherhood, but claimed that only men could be philosophical and spiritual mothers. He also reserved some of his most bitterly misogynist comments for educated feminists, but he was personally attracted to intellectual women, including Lou Salomé. Allen suggests that if they had formed a lasting relationship his theoretical development might have been different. Perhaps. But, on Allen’s own account, the role that Nietzsche saw for Salomé exemplifies the only place, as Michele Le Doeuff has pointed out (Radical Philosophy, 1977), that educated women are allotted by philosophers. Allen says that Nietzsche saw Salomé as a “disciple”, and he wrote to her that “I very much wished that I might be your teacher”. Only if women confine themselves to being disciples as practical underlabourers, who provide a necessary constraint on the flights of general theoretical fancy of their masters, do they pose no threat to reason or philosophy. This is exactly the role that J.S. Mill gives to philosopher’s wives in the Subjection, although Allen cites Mill and Taylor in this context.

The Sexism of Social and Political Theory is a very stimulating collection which may well be disregarded by the contemporary successors to the classic male supremacists who should give it careful attention. There is a bibliography of recent feminist, and related, theory for those who wish to take these questions further. Two final reflections. First, at various points in the book it seems more confusing than a help to stretch the term “reproduction” to include child-rearing as well as child-bearing. Second, although I have
argued that feminist theorists should not turn their backs on “traditional theory” this is not their only source of assistance and insight. The practice of the women’s movement, in particular the attempts at anti-hierarchical organisation and the stress on mutual aid and solidarity, has its own implicit theory and if feminist theorists forget this they will merely continue to perpetuate the present separation of intellectuals from everyday life.

Reader in Government
University of Sydney
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW AND PSYCHIATRY

Editor-in-Chief:
David N. Weisstub, Clarke Institute of Psychiatry,
University of Toronto

This journal provides a multidisciplinary forum for the exchange of ideas and information among professionals concerned with the interface of law and psychiatry. Because there is a growing need for exploring the fundamental goals of both the legal and psychiatric systems and the social implications of their interaction, the journal seeks to enhance understanding and cooperation in the field. It does this through the varied approaches represented, not only by law and psychiatry, but also by the social sciences and related disciplines.

CONTRIBUTORS AND READERS: police, lawyers, psychiatrists, psychologists, behavioral therapists, mental health officials, human rights teachers, criminal justice authorities, law enforcement authorities, social workers, and social scientists.

Published Quarterly
Institutional Subscription 1981:
Two-year Rate (81/82):
Personal Subscription Rate:

Volume #4
All back issues and microforms available.

FREE SAMPLE COPY ON REQUEST
Prices include postage and insurance. Prices are subject to change without notice. Sterling prices apply for customers in UK and Eire.

PERGAMON PRESS
U.S.: Maxwell House, Fairview Park, Elmsford, New York 10523
U.K.: Headington Hill Hall, Oxford OX3 0BW
Canada: 150 Consumers Road, Willowdale, Ontario M2J 1P9
Monika Langer

Barry Cooper, *Merleau-Ponty and Marxism: from terror to reform*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1979, cloth $17.50, pp. 223.

Professor Cooper's aim is to present a critical study of Merleau-Ponty's politics. He points out that scholars have dealt only superficially with this aspect of Merleau-Ponty's work, and proposes to rectify the situation by confining his purview to the political dimension.

Cooper argues that Marcel's notion of commitment and Hegel's critique of religion influenced Merleau-Ponty's choice of humanism as the core of his political thought. To elucidate the philosophical justification for this commitment to humanism, Cooper briefly considers Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. He prefices his remarks with the rather curious contention that since *Phénoménologie de la Perception* has been acclaimed a classic, "one is justified in reading it in a particular way if one can show it to be consistent with other, chiefly political, pieces of the same period" (p. 16). Deeming it futile in any case to attempt a balanced summary of the book, and stressing that his "purpose is simply to document the genesis and nature of Merleau-Ponty's philosophical assumptions insofar as they bear upon his politics," Cooper restricts his consideration to Merleau-Ponty's notion of historical contingency (pp. 16-17). He notes that human being is a continual act of commitment to a future ontologically distinct from its past, and that vertical transcendence is an illusion. Pointing to Kierkegaard, Cooper argues that Merleau-Ponty erred gravely in failing to recognize that "human being is ontologically limited by its very nature" (p. 24). "For Merleau-Ponty," says Cooper, "the only limitations to human commitments are either natural or given limitations or else merely human limitations, that is, the pragmatic consequences of earlier choices. In neither case are these limitations ontologically significant to human beings as such. Rather they should be seen as challenges to action and obstacles to be removed" (p. 24). This lack of ontological limitations constituted "an aberration of understanding" which restricted Merleau-Ponty's political thought and, valid critical insights notwithstanding, excluded "the further questions that carry one's perspective to further and more comprehensive levels" (p. 25).

Cooper devotes considerable attention to Merleau-Ponty's reflections on
the experience of war, occupation, resistance, and liberation, which confirmed practically his theoretical commitment to humanism and prompted him to articulate a political 'ethics of responsibility'. Cooper argues that besides emphasizing responsibility for the unanticipated consequences of one's commitments, Merleau-Ponty "tried to justify responsibility for violence in the name of humanism" (p. 36). His adoption of Marx's theory of the proletariat and the inseparability of means and ends, ruled out reliance on the fabrication metaphor to justify humanist violence. However, Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of history as process raised the problem of relativism, the spectre of the historical traveller who lacks all signposts and "can know neither where he is nor where he is going" (p. 42). "How can it matter what we do", asks Cooper, "if history is a process and the final 'moment' or 'product' is not held to be its proper justification?" Cooper concludes that "any justification of humanist terror must be from outside history" (p. 40). Yet by rejecting a divine situator of human beings, Merleau-Ponty excluded the possibility of judging politics "through mimicry of the divine logos" (p. 45). He therefore posited a 'logic of history' which, as an 'absolute within the relative', eventually eliminates 'irrational historical forms' but does not preclude a series of accidents ending in chaos. Cooper dismisses this negative dialectic as "pragmatic make-believe" whose only justification for violence was hope (pp. 41-42). "If one focuses upon process rather than outcome," says Cooper, "there is nothing to prevent men from believing that limits are temporary, wilful, or even desirable conventions that must disappear as the process unwinds" (p. 45). By drawing out the political implications of his philosophy, Merleau-Ponty arrived at an argument from necessity which "constituted, in effect, the sought-for external justification of humanist terror." (p. 44) It stipulated, contends Cooper, that:

As contingency, violence may some day be ended, but we can have no knowledge of that day before it dawns. Nevertheless it was the day to which all human beings (all whose consciousnesses had been purged of transcendence) were necessarily committed. At the same time, as necessity (prior to that day), violence was justified not on its own terms but by the context of a violent world... The whole problem, so far as Merleau-Ponty was concerned, was that the new day had not (yet) dawned and we can meanwhile only hope for it while being compelled to employ violence against those whose hopes are different. (pp. 46-47)
Cooper argues that Merleau-Ponty’s “appeal to hope is an appeal to abandon our common sense experience of everyday reality as well as our experience of divine reality and take our bearings within the imagination, where humanist, progressive violence provides the only means to achieve proletarian power or mutual recognition” (p. 55). In his view, Merleau-Ponty “tried to overcome, or at least obscure with rhetorical bluster, the obvious embarrassment of having to rely on such fragile and vulnerable assumptions” (p. 53). By reducing all non-violence to hypocrisy, Merleau-Ponty “violated the first rule of phenomenological hermeneutics, to allow the meaning itself to appear” (p. 185, #30).

Cooper maintains, in sum, that having unnecessarily restricted the field of his political thought, Merleau-Ponty was prompted to shift the whole discussion “to the level of the imaginative” in an attempt to overcome the objections of relativism and to preserve his conception of humanism. “However,” says Cooper, “one cannot live always in the imagination, and Merleau-Ponty was also a man of great common sense” (p. 55). When he put aside “the grand theoretical questions of process, incarnation, and the dialectic of contingency and necessity,” and turned to common sense questions, “some of these ambiguities and inadequacies were cleared up or at least modified” (pp. 71, 55). Hence, Cooper devotes much of his book to the study of these latter questions. He situates them in their polemical context, outlines the historical background of the political events which led Merleau-Ponty to alter his judgements, and traces the evolution of his politics. Cooper thus examines in detail the Moscow Trials and “the thoroughly practical, common sense, though not, perhaps, everyday question of the actual historical fate of Bukharin” (p. 55). He applauds Merleau-Ponty’s analysis as “a model of clarity” and declares that “in the limited sense of political action... his understanding of contingency is undubitably valid” (p. 69). Cooper speaks of our having to act with and against others, our inability to foresee all and control the consequences of our actions. Nonetheless, he criticizes the “limitations in his thinking” which prompted Merleau-Ponty to ignore “the spiritual corruption of Stalinism” and cling to an attitude of ‘Marxist waiting’. As Cooper sees it, “the politics of hope and resignation were translated into a practical commitment that refused to judge what was unknown” (pp. 83, 71, 76, 75). Yet Merleau-Ponty’s efforts to avoid blocs and war “were of no avail; their impact on real politics was nil. As a result he developed a more modest understanding of the political role of the thinker, as well as a more moderate politics” (p. 168).

Until the Korean War, claims Cooper, Marxism belonged to Merleau-Ponty’s “ideological imagination” and was not challenged by “real life” (p. 98). With this event, however, the truth of Marxism as critique irrespective of action could not be maintained: ‘There must be something that prepares for the defects of action, even in criticism.’ That ‘something’ was the failure to
recognize that 'revolutions are true as movements and false as regimes', because once institutionalized, they stifle any authentic opposition (pp. 109, 133). Cooper stresses the importance of Merleau-Ponty's concept of institution, noting that it "indicated a more concrete and commonsensical . . . turn in his political thought" (p. 133). Lacking this concept, Marxism decomposed into consciousness and history. Cooper contends that Les Aventures de la Dialectique, which embodied these reflections, constituted "a watershed" for Merleau-Ponty's political thinking and "may also have been a turning point for his philosophy as a whole", although philosophers have not appreciated "its pivotal philosophical significance" (p. 134).

Merleau-Ponty's continued refusal to accept the inevitability of blocs now led him to propose a 'new liberalism', or 'non-communist left', instead of a 'Marxist waiting'. Cooper points out that "from the perspective of Merleau-Ponty's political writings, his later philosophical efforts seem directed towards something like a metaphysics of common sense . . . whose first task is to uphold the realness of factual truth." In the political dimension, "this means an insistence upon the reality of the mundane and factual" (pp. 169-170). Further, Cooper interprets Merleau-Ponty's stipulation that "direct ontology cannot be done" as "philosophical moderation", and argues that "the practical ethical implication that Merleau-Ponty drew . . . was that one must learn to moderate one's indignation at suffering or beholding injustice" (p. 176). Between the "metaphysics of common sense" and the politics of reform Cooper detects a "coherence": "justice implies moderation, while ontology . . . implies indirection" (p. 176). He concludes that Merleau-Ponty came to realize that "moderate speech is the public responsibility of the philosopher" (p. 177).

In discussing Merleau-Ponty's political thought, commentators have generally noted the importance of humanism and considered various political events contributing to the development of his position vis-à-vis Marxism. Although Cooper provides a comprehensive account of the political context within which Merleau-Ponty wrote, his argument is weak. Cooper confines himself to the political dimension of Merleau-Ponty's thinking — abstracting it from the rest, interpreting it, and referring back to the "more philosophical works" exclusively from the perspective of the political, in search of assumptions underlying the political as already interpreted by him. His failure to understand the whole from which he has isolated the dimension renders Cooper's treatment of the latter superficial and misleading. 

Merleau-Ponty contends that "history is other people; it is the interrelationships we establish with them". He argues, further, that all forms of human coexistence are based on perceptual experience and manifest the same fundamental structures. As Merleau-Ponty notes, this is not to say that history consists in perceiving. "Perception is rather the fundamental basis which cannot be ignored." A study of this primordial realm is therefore indis-
THE DISCLOSURE OF SENS

pensable for an understanding of Merleau-Ponty's political thought. Such an examination reveals major flaws in Cooper's argument.

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological investigation discloses perception itself to be "a violent act". Perception is shown to be already "primordial expression", and it emerges that the structure of expression involves a fundamental encroachment. This elemental violence characterizes the very being of incarnate subjectivity and therefore is a condition of all modes of human interrelations. Hence this form of violence, which constitutes the background of all political life, is an ontological limitation which precludes the possibility of ever eliminating all forms of violence. Far from pointing "to the threads of violence that decorate the social fabric", as Cooper would have it (p. 48, my emphasis), Merleau-Ponty discloses the ineradicable background of ontological intrusion and urges that any discussion of terror be situated within this context. With respect to the different sorts of eradicable violence, such as the terror discussed by Cooper, the notion of humanism and the criterion of progressiveness are indeed crucial for Merleau-Ponty. The significance of these terms, however, is fundamentally altered when one recognizes — as Cooper fails to do — the ineradicable residue of encroachment in all human coexistence. Contrary to Cooper's argument, human contingency for Merleau-Ponty implies a violence whose origin is ontological. Hence Cooper errs in arguing that Merleau-Ponty regards any limitations as ontologically insignificant and considers violence a necessary, but "temporary limit" to the achievement of a "homogeneous society" in which all "limitations to human commitments" would be ended (p. 24). This means rejecting Cooper's further claim that Merleau-Ponty clung desperately to that "ideal" until events finally forced him to adopt "a sensible political attitude" (pp. 98, 199, #88).

An examination of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perceptual experience reveals, moreover, that the denial of a divine situator and truths beyond history does not entail a relativism of the sort suggested by Cooper's description of the traveller for whom "there are no signposts at all". Merleau-Ponty's position on relativism, significance and truth is extremely complex, and there can be no question of reconstructing it here. It is an issue to which he returns again and again. The following considerations, however, will indicate the weakness of Cooper's argument.

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological study discloses that perceptual experience comes into being through a primordial "communication" in which our body's "coexistence with the world magnetizes experience and induces a direction in it." Phenomenal body and pre-objective world are inseparable, but irreducible, terms of a "primordial dialogue" in which the world, as "intentional pole", "beckons" the body; and the body, as intersensory transcendence, outlines a "general form of the world" and lays down the general structures of experience. It is in this primary, pre-personal, pre-
objective, pre-logical dialogue that the world, objectivity, subjectivity, certainty, significance and truth come into being: “the experience of perception is our presence at the moment when things, truths, values are constituted for us”. Phenomenal body and pre-objective world “gear into” a reciprocal “hold”, giving rise to a “perceptual field” within which perceptual constants “become crystallized” and “things” emerge. The thing’s identity is a dynamic “style of existence” which emerges in the way in which it elicits and responds to perceptual exploration. Colour, for example, has to do with a “total configuration” involving an interaction of all parts of the perceptual field through “the logic of lighting”. There is a genesis of mutually implicatory perceptual constants; the objects of perception come into being only as part of a whole dynamic configuration which, though open-ended, is self-affirming. From the anonymous, primary dialogue a perceptual absolute, or “world” comes into being. Because “our body is not geared to the world in all its positions”, and because the genesis of reality is inseparable from “a certain bodily attitude”, there is a perceptual optimum or telos consisting in an intersensory balance of detail and clarity, in virtue of which things can emerge as unreal, as more or less probable, or as self-evident. The reciprocal “hold” of body and world, though contingent, is thus not arbitrary. Hence to claim, for example, that no one site, shape, or colour is truer than any other since these “vary with the perspective”, is to presuppose our experience of determinate sizes, shapes and colours, and further, the experience of a perceptual world — and to fail to account for their genesis in perceptual experience. In tracing the genesis of reality, Merleau-Ponty brings to light a “logic of perception” which effectively subverts this sort of “vulgar relativism”.

Perceptual experience is inherently perspectival, open-ended and ambiguous; yet “the perceived world is grasped only in terms of direction” and “the very significance of the object . . . must be linked to its orientation, as indeed is indicated by the double usage of the French word sens.” The primordial dialogue of perceptual experience reveals that significance is both centrifugal and centripetal, thus indicating “a new meaning of the word ‘meaning’.” Further, the primary dialogue and the meaning emerging from it are already intersubjective, for the perceptual world is always already a cultural world. Just as the phenomenal body’s sensory fields “gear into” each other and open onto an intersensory perceptual world, so the sensory fields of plurality of body-subjects “gear into” each other and open onto an intersubjective world, or “interworld”: “The phenomenal world is not pure being, but the sense which is revealed where the paths of my various experiences intersect, and also where my own and other people’s intersect and engage each other like gears.” History is the web of significance which emerges from this “interworld”; it manifests the same fundamental structures. Though irreducible to perception, history likewise involves an intersubjective,
THE DISCLOSURE OF SENS

circum "hold" on the world, such that a direction, a non-arbitrary configuration crystallizes: "What is known as the significance of events is not an idea which produces them, or the fortuitous result of their occurring together. It is the concrete project of a future which is elaborated within social coexistence and in the One before any personal decision is made." Here, as at the primary level of perception, there is a fundamental dialectic such that "we confer upon history its significance, but not without its putting that significance forward itself. The Sinnggebung is not merely centrifugal". In short, just as there is a genesis of perception, there is a genesis of history in which, ambiguity and incompleteness notwithstanding, events take shape and a self-affirming structure emerges. To say that history is process, is to say precisely that it is this dynamic ongoing structuration. As at the level of perception, accidents are never ruled out; and these can disturb the "dialogue", thereby upsetting the dynamic structuration of the historical field. Nonetheless, there is a "logic of history" just as there is a logic of perception, such that a telos, an absolute, emerges from contingency. There is no God to "(fix) the future from behind the world scene", and there is only "a horizon of probabilities, comparable to our perceptual horizon which can, as we approach it and it becomes present to us, reveal itself to be quite different from what we were expecting." Nevertheless, "the future . . . is not an empty zone in which we can construct gratuitous projects; it is sketched before us . . . and its outline is ourselves". History, thus, is not "the configuration of choices that cannot be justified", as Cooper's interpretation alleges. As in the case of perceptual experience, a "vulgar relativism" presupposes the existence of historical significance and fails to account for its genesis in our intersubjective experience.

Merleau-Ponty was acutely aware that he had only begun to sketch out a phenomenology of culture, of truth and of history. The project remained unfinished at the time of his death, and many of the difficulties which it poses remain unresolved. However, it is clear that the denial of a divine sitiator and truths beyond history does not imply the sort of relativism claimed by Cooper. In light of Merleau-Ponty's insistence that the fundamental structures of perceptual experience pervade all forms of human coexistence, his contention that there is a logic of history which is an absolute within the relative, cannot simply be dismissed without first considering his phenomenological account of perception. The latter indicates that Merleau-Ponty's contention is not mere "pragmatic make-believe", as Cooper maintains, Merleau-Ponty therefore had no need to take refuge in the imagination so as to evade the charge of relativism — nor is the development of his political thought to be chartered in terms of his emergence from the imagination into the common sense world, as Cooper would have it. Moreover, Merleau-Ponty argues at length that common sense is dogmatic, that it suffers from a retrospective illusion which masks the genesis of reality. The world which common sense
M. LANGER

regards as natural or factual is a result, not a starting point. Hence for Merleau-Ponty there can be no question of analyzing "the given", as common sense dictates. On the contrary, "the realistic prejudice which all the sciences borrow from common sense" must be put in abeyance, in order to disclose "the meaning of the world or of history as that meaning comes into being." To contend that Merleau-Ponty's thought moved increasingly towards common sense is, therefore, a serious misinterpretation.

Merleau-Ponty's political position must, as already indicated, be understood within the context of his fundamental philosophical project. Contrary to Cooper's claim, I would suggest the following development. In the preface of *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty points out that "because we are in the world, we are condemned to meaning, and we cannot do or say anything without its acquiring a name in history." It seems to me that Merleau-Ponty's entire work constitutes a comprehensive effort to dis-close the emergence of "sens" by tracing its genesis in "a logic lived through", which is the very "flesh of history". Although his endeavour remains constant, Merleau-Ponty's insight develops as he digs ever further "down to the perceived world" whose structure "is buried under the sedimentations of later knowledge." In order to disclose "the core of primary meaning around which the acts of naming and expression take shape", Merleau-Ponty undertakes a phenomenological investigation of the incarnate subject and the perceived world. He reveals the primary "dialogue" between phenomenal body and pre-objective world, and describes the reciprocal "hold" of its terms. Having shown the existence of this primordial "communication", as well as the interdependence and non-coincidence of its terms, Merleau-Ponty focuses increasingly on the "chiasme", the "écart" between them from which all meaning emerges. This shift of focus requires a corresponding shift from perception and the body to vision and the flesh; hence, Merleau-Ponty concerns himself increasingly with painting and language. The subject of perception is one for whom seeing, thinking and speaking are already distinct modes of relating to the world. To reach the level of "brute being" below the perceived-world-as-already-meaningful, Merleau-Ponty abandons the "tacit cogito" and turns to the realm of the painter, where he finds an example par excellence of vision as creative participation in the coming to be of "sens". The painter's vision is at the juncture of eye and mind, where thought, speech and vision have not yet become differentiated. It is a "concrete" seeing which "installs" itself in things, so that the painter has the impression of being looked at by them. His activity involves an optimal distance from, and a reversibility with, the visible which he is interrogating. This reversibility, and the attempt to capture it at its birth, lie at the root of his fascination with the self-portrait. Through a violent movement which deceters and receters the visible, the painter transforms our vision of, and hence our relation to, the world. It is the philosopher, however, who recognizes the universal significance of such
THE DISCLOSURE OF SENS

reversibility, and the "gap" which makes it possible. Through a creative
decentering and recentering of language, the philosopher employs this
fundamental reversibility in order to disclose the genesis of "sens" in all
aspects of human coexistence. By being "everywhere and nowhere", he traces
events and his own discourse to their birth in "the flesh of the world", thereby
opening them up so as to disclose their fundamental element of contingency.
In so doing, he reminds us of both the logic and the contingency of the history
which we are making. By seizing the meaning of events, as it comes into being,
Merleau-Ponty's "phenomenology of origins" thus seeks to avoid a closure of
history. This ceaseless interrogation is a genuinely "concrete" philosophy —
not because it is a "metaphysics of common sense" as Cooper claims, but
because it locates the meaning of events in the very texture of "brute being".

It is within this context that the development of Merleau-Ponty's position
vis-à-vis Marxism must be considered. His detailed discussion of the Moscow
Trials, for example, centers on the Marxist understanding of history. In
response to the charges brought against him, Bukharin acknowledges that
there is indeed a logic of history; but he insists that this logic is not pre-
determined. By continually qualifying the prosecutor's questions and
comments, Bukharin points out that the logic of history is a direction, a
configuration of meaning which emerges in a lived situation whose terms are
interdependent. For Merleau-Ponty, Bukharin's case throws into relief the
dialectical interaction of human being and intersubjective world — that
intertwining of logic and contingency which is the very texture of history.
Merleau-Ponty's fundamental effort to disclose the genesis of "sens" precludes
regarding his treatment of Bukharin as a "thoroughly practical, common
sense" question. Similarly, his later rejection of the theory of the proletariat as
an arbitrary closure of history, must be understood not as a moderation of
indignation, but as part of an increasing focus on the "écart" in primordial
being. Such a comprehensive study of Merleau-Ponty's political thought has
yet to be undertaken. Regrettably, Cooper's book does not constitute an
advance in this direction.

Montreal

Notes

In order to avoid possible confusion between citations from Cooper's book and citations from
Merleau-Ponty's works, I am putting the latter in single quotation marks ('...') in the first section
of my review. In the second part, I revert to normal quotation marks since there is no occasion for
confusion.

1. A statement Cooper makes with reference to Merleau-Ponty's consideration of Lukács
perhaps best indicates the scope of the problem: "At one level Merleau-Ponty was simply
reiterating a commonsensical sociological observation first made in the Phénoménologie, that
one lived such-and-such a role before being conscious of it." (117; the reference is to pp. 506-
511)

M. LANGER


6. As Merleau-Ponty notes in *Humanism and Terror*: “Inasmuch as we are incarnate beings, violence is our lot . . . Life, discussion, and political choice occur only against a background of violence . . . It is a law of human action that the present encroaches upon the future, the self upon other people.” (109). Cooper cites this and other passages, but does not seem to appreciate their significance.

7. For an elaboration of these points, see my article, “Merleau-Ponty: the ontological limitations of politics” in *Domination*, (ed.) Alkis Kontos, University of Toronto Press, 1975, pp. 101-114. See also my “Violence in the Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty” (Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1973)


18. *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 450. See also Merleau-Ponty's remark that it is a matter of studying the body of history, rather than its head or feet (Ibid., p. xix).


Books Received


*Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Ideas of the West, 1856-1900*, Doug Owram, University of Toronto Press, cloth $25.00, paper, $10.00.

*Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism 1867-1892*, Gregory S. Kealey, University of Toronto Press, cloth $27.50, paper, $12.50, pp. x, 433.

*The Demands of Justice*, James P. Sterba, University of Notre Dame Press, cloth $10.95, pp. xii, 164.

*Social Justice in the Liberal State*, Bruce A. Ackerman, Yale University Press, cloth $17.50, pp. xii, 392.

*Manipulatory Politics*, Robert E. Goodin, Yale University Press, cloth $17.95, pp. x, 250.

*Past Masters Series*, Oxford University Press


*Marx*, Peter Singer, paper $2.50, pp. 82.

*Dante*, George Holmes, paper $2.50, pp. 104.

*Jesus*, Humphrey Carpenter, paper $2.50, pp. 102.


League for Social Reconstruction: Intellectual Origins of the Left in Canada 1930-1942, Michiel Horn, University of Toronto Press, cloth $20.00, pp. ix, 270.

Edmund Burke and the Critique of Political Radicalism, Michael Freeman, University of Chicago Press, cloth $21.00, pp. 250.

Political Obligation in its Historical Context: Essays in Political Theory, John Dunn, Cambridge University Press, cloth $34.50, pp. 355.

A Discourse on Property: John Locke and his adversaries, James Tully, Cambridge University Press, cloth $22.50, pp. xiv, 194.

A Proletarian Science: Marxism in Britain 1917-1933, Stuart Macintyre, Cambridge University Press, cloth $27.50, pp. xiv, 286.

Sogoshosha: Engines of Export-Based Growth, Yoshi Tsurumi and Rebecca R. Tsurumi, The Institute for Research on Public Policy, paper $8.95, pp. xvii, 93.


Government Intervention in the Canadian Nuclear Industry, G. Bruce Doern, The Institute for Research on Public Policy, paper $8.95, pp. xxi, 208.


Performance Administration, Alan Walter Steiss and Gregory A. Daneke, D.C. Heath Canada Ltd., cloth $25.95, pp. xi, 267.

Employment and Labor-Relations Policy, Charles Bulmer and John L. Carmichael, Jr., D.C. Heath Canada Ltd., cloth $27.50, pp. x, 276.
Canada’s Political Economy, Grant L. Reuber, McGraw-Hill Ryerson, paper $8.95, pp. 308.

Legislation and Society in Australia: Law in Society: No. 4, Roman Tomasic, George Allen and Unwin, pp. 420.


Quebec: Social Change and Political Crisis (Revised Edition), Kenneth McRoberts and Dale Postgate, McClelland & Stewart, pp. x, 325.

Karl Marx and the Anarchists, Paul Thomas, Oxford University Press, cloth $52.50.

CJPST

One of North America’s leading reviews for theoretical discourse on the crisis of culture and society. One critic described the Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory as an, “intellectual window on the world”.