CONCLUDING REMARKS

The concluding chapter of the present thesis attempts to recapitulate the schematic outline of Merleau-Ponty's programme of existential phenomenology and some of its substantive analysis.

Merleau-Ponty agrees with Husserl that phenomenology is a return "to the things themselves". But he does not uphold the Husserlian position that the correct view can be established as correct on the evidence of intuition, but rather by philosophical argument, i.e., from the definition of consciousness as 'intentional' or from scientific findings. Merleau-Ponty was not interested in simply explicating Husserl. 'He did not lock phenomenology up in an Husserlian archaeology or a Husserlian scholasticism'. Phenomonomology was meant to be a science that described what appears; and he continued the movement on his own account, without worrying about orthodoxy'. According to him "the most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction". This is how he comes out of the allegation imposed on all phenomenologists. According to Merleau-Ponty, if we were absolute mind, the reduction would present no problem. But since, on the contrary, we are in the world, since indeed the reflections are carried out in the temporal flux upon which we are trying to seize, there is no thought which embraces all our thoughts. This is said to be one of the achievements that
Merleau Ponty has over his contemporaries.

He starts from a fundamental phenomenon which is perception. By advancing the thesis of 'primacy of perception' he asserts, that the perceived life-world is the primary reality, the really real, true being so to say, the primary analogous. Merleau Ponty insists that the basic frame of mind is to begin with an idea of perception and with the phenomenon of perception itself. According to him, it is to detach oneself from the experience of perception and to attend an idealized conception of it. Consequently, the primary task of reflection, for Merleau Ponty, is to reverse this disorientation and to recover the basic phenomenon in its authenticity as the starting point for philosophy. The idea of universe, for example, must be seen to be nothing other than the phenomenal world of perception.

Merleau Ponty seems to have conceived man and his world as standing in a relationship of mutual 'participation'. According to him, Perception is a means of being in the world, and as such it is not necessarily an explicit and deliberately a thematic act; 'it is the background from which all acts stand out and is pre-supposed by them'. The world which is given in perception is the concrete, inter-subjectively life-world of immediate experience. Perception itself is defined in terms of sensory-motor behaviour through which the world is constituted for man as the world of human consciousness prior to any explicit or reflective
thought about it.

One question which might be put to Merleau-Ponty is whether there can be, from the phenomenological point of view, many precise things said about perception itself. In fact, Merleau-Ponty says much about the conditions and the objects of perception. But perception itself has to remain something mysterious, accepted in a kind of silence. The fundamental discovery of Merleau-Ponty and the focal point of his philosophy is the theory of "body-subject". "The affirmation of the 'body-subject' as the ambiguous unity-not union of bodily being and subjectivity is an unique achievement of Merleau Ponty's existential phenomenology. He has tried to re-establish the roots of the mind in its body and in its world by rejecting the doctrines which treat perception as a simple result of the action of external things on our body as well as those who insist on the autonomy of consciousness.

Our bodily existence and the things it experiences constitute the entire bulk of what is called our 'being-in-the-world'. Man is a 'body-subject', an 'ego-body', a 'body-image', a body itself. Merleau-Ponty neither separates man's body from his mind nor looks upon the former as a mechanical sequence of actions and reactions. His theory of Body Image is implicitly a theory of Perception. He takes phenomenal body as the matrix of human existence. It is the center around which the world is given, as a correlate of
activities. Through the phenomenal body, as he says, we are open to a world of objects as polarities of bodily action.

Merleau Ponty has described body as having a privileged status. "I can never be detached from it. It is the vantage point from which I perceive all possible objects. It is the body which is of resemblance and no bases for perception. 'Bases' can be arrived at only after perception and recognition has taken place. He insists that the word, 'Perception' includes the whole experience which gives the 'thing itself'. To perceive is to render ourselves present to something through the body.

The Victory over Cartesian Dualism

Various facts may be put forward to confirm the assertion of Merleau-Ponty's victory over cartesian dualism. Merleau Ponty, repeatedly asserts that his philosophy is a radical victory over cartesianism, which is characterized by Descarte's sharp dichotomy between the thinking mind and the mechanical body\(^1\). For this reason, it may be suspected that the affirmation of "body subject" as the ambiguous unity-not union-of bodily being and subjectivity - is the most fundamental affirmation of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. Secondly, the conclusions which he draws from extensive analysis in his phenomenology of perception are nearly

\(^1\) Merleau Ponty, the structure of behaviour, trans., Alden Fisher, Boosten : Beacon Press, 1963, pp. 3,6,10.
always concerned with the subjective character of the human body. In order to understand what Merleau Ponty is getting at here, we may give adequate emphasis on what the body as operative subject is. The body subject (This helpful term is borrowed from Remy Kwant, the phenomenological philosophy of Merleau Ponty, Pittsburgh, 1963) is not the body described in terms of causal processes, but the field of lived-world experience. It is (said to be) interiorly united spheres of meaning. Within this manifold, certain specific configurations develop, shared in different ways by these different spheres. For example, a perceptual sense of space, location of objects in spatiality, the articulation of space, is the simultaneous achievement in visual development and in one's ability to move, seek and touch objects which enables the body-subject in its various dimensions of possibility. These modalities as lived significance-bearing and significance-generating being is the body-subject. Speaking is one modulation, one possible usage of the body-as experience. Speaking is a third genre phenomenon, neither of physiological function, nor of pure intellect. According to Merleau Ponty, it is a style or configuration of experience. Merleau Ponty emphasizes that expressing in

3. Ibid., pp. 210, 217, 228.
language is the process by which the significance of lived body senses (meanings) comes to be known and made explicit and decided.⁴

Accordingly, when Merleau-Ponty expresses the philosophical awareness of our time, he assigns the central position to the "body-subject" as victory over dualism⁵. For this reason we may say that his idea contains the decisive standpoint of his philosophy. According to Merleau Ponty, the body is neither a thing in the cartesian sense nor a pure bodiless thought. The human body has a mode of being of its own, by virtue of which it defy description in cartesian terms. To indicate this mode of being, he uses such terms as "body-subject" and "ego-body".⁶

Merleau-Ponty speaks about the body itself. Many have attributed to bodily being a personal, subjective character, but the reason was that they considered the body inhabited or animated by an indwelling spirit, a spiritual soul, i.e, by a principle of a different order which is most intimately connected with the body. Merleau-Ponty does not mean this and repeatedly denies it⁷. According to him, the body as

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6. Ibid., p.239.
body is an existence and therefore of a subjective nature. It is a subject and therefore does not derive its subjective character from a principle distinct from itself.

The phenomenon of perception reveals for Merleau Ponty a mode of being which is neither that of pure thing not that of pure thinking, a third genre of being in which body and consciousness are one and the same phenomenon.

The experience of one's own body reveals to us an ambiguous mode of existence. The body is not an object. The consciousness I have of it is not thought.

At the same time that the body withdrawn from the objective world and comes to form a third kind of being between pure subject and object, the subject loses its purity and transparency. The notion of body and the notion of consciousness are profoundly transformed. It is merely a matter of recognizing that the (idea of) body is formed by a process of impoverishment from a primordial phenomenon of the body-for-us. With regard to consciousness, we have to conceive it no longer as a constituting consciousness, pure being-for-itself, but as perceptual consciousness, as the subject of a manner of behaving.

He explained behaviour of human body by examining the genesis of one's experience of 'having' a body. He employs

the phenomenological method in order to describe the most primitive impressions our body gets from the world, while it lives. Man is defined as a meaning-giving existence, a center to which the vehicle of my perception and movement in the world. The possession of a body implies the ability, to change levels and to 'understand' space. Space is 'empty' and yet all the objects of perception are there. The perception of space is not a particular class of 'states of consciousness or acts'. Its modalities are always expressions of the total life of a subject, the energy with which he tends towards a future through his body and his world. As Merleau Ponty says "The body is not an object. The consciousness I have of it is not a thought. I have no other way of knowing the human body than by living it".9

Following the phenomenological line of thinking, Merleau-Ponty denies the possibility and the necessity of 'proving' the existence of any being. According to him, being is validated rather by its meaning in experience, individual or common. He does not adequately concern himself with what the meaning of God might be-whether, for example, God is less a 'final solution' than the attainable objects of certain intentions, and only of thought but also of action. His dismissal of the problem of God is puzzling.

If, as he admits, it is of the nature of man to think of God, why is God not treated as a valid, if indeterminate, intentional object of our experience?

One of the distinct features of the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty is the analysis of the human body. I cannot understand the function of the living body except by enacting it with myself, and expect in so far as I am a body which rises towards the world. This is not the only perceptive which I may take towards my body. I can look at my body as I look at others, as the cripple sees himself as a cripple only by reference to what others can do that he cannot. Even in this 'perspective' towards the body, it must be made clear that the body is not an object, in the sense of mere being-in-itself. We must distinguish between viewing a person ('through his body") and simply viewing a (physical) body; we can view a body of a person as a mere physical body; but this is a highly peculiar situation, and certainly not the way we usually view others. It is virtually never the way we view, our own bodies.

If my body is not a material object, either for myself or for others, then we can extend some interesting theses encountered in our analysis of consciousness as applicable to the body as well. e.g., it does not make sense to say that our body is in space and time. Merleau-Ponty tells us that "it inhabits space and time". Neither does it make sense to talk of the divisibility of the body. For Merleau
Ponty, habit is a matter of enlarging our body; habit expresses our power of dilating our being into the world, or changing our existence by appropriately fresh 'instruments. To get used to a hat, a car, or a stick is to be transplanted into them, or conversely to incorporate them into the bulk of our own body. It is literally true that the subject who learns to type incorporates the key blank space into his bodily space. We can say that the body is not simply another object in the world to which I (that is, consciousness) am mysteriously attached; my body and I are indistinguishable. (My body) is an object which does not leave me. I for myself am both consciousness and body inseparably, as I for others and others for-me are consciousness and body inseparably. My relations with others are always a struggle to preserve my freedom, especially to preserve it from the objectifying look of others. To preserve my freedom, I attempt to change the other into an object for me. First, my looks serve this purpose, but more dramatically, I can focus my attention on his body and attempt to reduce him to pure body. This is, of course, impossible, but the more 'physical' the other becomes, the more free I become from him. In closing this discussion of the body, It is worth commenting that Merleau-Ponty has turned these insights concerning the peculiar place of my body in the world into a basis for a theory of perception. The theory of body is a theory of perception. One could not
grasp the object without the mediation of bodily experience. External Perception and the perception of one's own body vary in conjunction because they are two facets of one and the same act. He asserts that by conceiving my body as a mobile object, I am able to interpret perceptual appearance.

Consciousness is analyzed in the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty not as a knowing consciousness or as primarily reflecting consciousness, but rather as an active, 'living' consciousness. He argues that consciousness is first of all a perceiving, feeling, motile consciousness. It is first of all a practical consciousness, a prereflective consciousness. Perception need not be analyzed as primarily a cognitive notion. Perception may be viewed more broadly as the general "relations of consciousness and nature" or as "the original relation of consciousness to being". He takes the problem of perception to be equivalent to the problems of phenomenology as a whole, and take perception as the basic activity of consciousness. Merleau-Ponty insists that "all consciousness is, to some extent, perceptual consciousness". Merleau-Ponty begins with the Husserlian dictum that "All consciousness is consciousness of something", and began with the cartesian doctrine that the existence of consciousness itself is known simply by virtue of its existence. Consciousness is nothing but the intentional activity; it is not an object itself nor an
object for itself. Merleau-Ponty's views on the concept of 'consciousness' are much more difficult to summarize, largely because he avoids the term as much as possible usually using 'consciousness' as an equivalent of "knowing" or "reflective".

It is a psychological notion of consciousness which Merleau-Ponty takes up in his study. Consciousness is approached from outside as a part of reality. Like other existentialists he admits that human consciousness is not 'closed' within itself like an object, but is a 'project of the world', a relationship of something other than things and persons.

Consciousness in the first place is not a matter of 'I think' but 'I can'. Consciousness is directed towards the thing through the intermediary of the body. The sense of 'cogito' in which he is interested is that of a kind of vestigial self-consciousness which accompanies all our actions and thoughts. This consciousness is inseparable from body and is grounded in perception. Accordingly, his book 'Phenomenology of perception' is intended to understand man's place in the world by understanding what perception is. He insists that we cannot understand perception as long as we insist upon an absolute distinction between perceiving subject and the perceived object.

What we have pursued in this thesis, to some measure is a closer understanding of Merleau Ponty's concept of man.
The line of thinking that we have presented and the information supplied obviously do not allow a critical account or evaluation of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy as a whole. His position is presented here mainly for its descriptive value, even though one cannot avoid the dominant ontological tenor in giving an account of it. We tried to argue that, as for Merleau Ponty, consciousness is a way of being; to be conscious is to communicate with the world and with others, and not others as exterior objects. Accordingly, Merleau-Ponty affirmed the existential situation of the body by its very relations to the world.

One of the important contributions of Merleau Ponty to the phenomenological world in particular and philosophical arena in general is his interpretation of Descarte's cogito. Merleau Ponty's fundamental criticism of Descarte's is this: if the object of my perception can be doubted, why not the subject also? Merleau Ponty thus questions the indubitability of consciousness. The Cogito of Merleau-Ponty is open to doubt just as much as the object of his thought. Accordingly, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that the perception is a kind of act wherein it is impossible to separate the act itself from its term. Perception and perceived have necessarily the same existential modality; it is impossible to dissociate from perception the consciousness which attains the thing perceived. Obviously, then, I cannot maintain the certitude of perception while rejecting the
thing perceived. Thus Merleau Ponty will say that it is not the 'I think' which will contain the 'I am', but rather the 'I am'in its transcendence, takes up the 'I think' and incorporates it in its existential movement, through which consciousness also becomes existential.10

Before concluding, a word should be said about the general significance of Merleau-Ponty's work for French Phenomenology. It is probably safe to say that without Merleau Ponty, and particularly without his "phenomenology of perception", phenomenology would have longer remained a mere tool of existentialism, as it increasingly became in the hands of Sartre. On a more tangible level, without Merleau ponty and his academic presence, phenomenology would hardly have achieved so early the prestige which he has won for it by his own spectacular career.

Merleau-Ponty's stature as a phenomenologist will have to rest on more intrinsic merits than his personal success and the formal qualities of his presentation, outstanding though these may be. The first impression one receives in surveying Merleau Ponty's writings may easily be that of a systematic spirit whose main interest is in taking up major traditional themes and fitting them into a new synthesis. The significance of his contributions is based precisely on

the fact that he resumes the more conventional themes, considers carefully the traditional solutions and particularly the scientific evidence, before attacking them directly, and integrates them into a systematic new frame based on phenomenological principles.

There would be little point in discussing here the question how far Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology carried out the last, if not the ultimate, intentions of Husserl's Program. His version has a right to be examined on its own merits. One of the most characteristic aspects of Merleau Ponty's phenomenology is his attempt to bring it down from the level of pure consciousness into the world of concrete life, so to say, to incarnate it in individual and social human existence.

It was one of Merleau-Ponty's fondest claims that his phenomenology can break the deadlock between Realism and Idealism and between empiricism and rationalism by making use of the best insights of gestalt Psychology in a manner which the Gestaltists themselves had not been able to do. This raises the question of the legitimacy of his critique of the gestaltist theory as still enmeshed in an outdated conception of science. Specially, did not Merleau-ponty himself take some points for granted which the gestaltists cannot be expected to accept without fuller demonstration? He seemed to consider it as axiomatic that causation from the Psychical world to that of consciousness is
inconceivable. He did this often which suggests that the very category of causation has no status in phenomenology. Now the study of causation is indeed one of the more difficult and unfinished tasks of phenomenology, and causal relationships between physical and conscious entities may be particularly obscure. But that does not imply that all belief in causation is illegitimate "causalism" from the very start. Not even Husserl had abandon it to that extent.

Concluding, a limited study as the present thesis, it may be said that Merleau-Ponty has re-established the roots of the mind in its body and in its world by rejecting the doctrines which treat perception as a simple result of the action of external things on our body.