

History as Intersubjectivity: Merleau-Ponty's Historical Perspective in Humanism and Terror

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Abstract: In *Humanism and Terror*, influenced and inspired by phenomenology and dialectics, Merleau-Ponty's view of history begins with a critique of two views of history: the historical determinism of Soviet orthodox Marxism and Sartre's theory of absolute freedom in terms of the view of history. In the field of social and political life, he intends to transcend the binary opposition between "intellectual politics" and "rational politics" represented by the above two views of history to question the meaning of history. In Merleau-Ponty, history not only has an objectivity that transcends the dichotomy of subject and object, belonging to the former object, but also a priori intersubjectivity. As the core of his view of history, the history of intersubjectivity is an infinite process of transformation of cognition and practice, thought and existence with temporality as the coordinate axis, rather than an immediate and intuitive existence. At the same time, this kind of history as intersubjectivity has its own form of expression in the realm of reality—violence, and through the analysis of violence, Merleau-Ponty follows Marx's steps to focus on revolutionary violence, and returns his view of history to the garden of humanism.

Keywords: Merleau-Ponty; Historical perspective; Intersubjectivity; Violence

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1. Merleau-Ponty's Critique of Historical Determinism and the Concept of Freedom of Decision

In his book *Humanism and Terror*, Merleau-Ponty elaborated on his critique of the historical determinism of Soviet orthodox Marxism and Sartre's theory of absolute freedom in the view of history. In the book, he presents his phenomenological understanding of history mainly by criticizing the views of the Hungary writer Kestler.

(1) The historical determinism of Soviet orthodox Marxism and its criticism

Merleau-Ponty largely agreed with Kestler's attack on the so-called Stalinist Marxism and the Soviet model of socialism in *The Darkness of Peace*. He believed that "the Soviet bureaucracy's view of history is completely fatalistic and deterministic," and that an important characteristic of this view of history lies in the opposition of the subjective and objective factors of history with dualistic metaphysical thinking. Over emphasis is placed on the role of objectivity and neglect of the role of subjectivity. Moreover, man, as a social and historical subject, is only a component of a huge machine that is irreversibly moving towards the "highest stage of communism" under such fatalism^[1]. he believed that the best illustration of this was the Soviet Union's "policy of imposing industrialization and collectivization of agriculture internally, with the inducement of profit, if necessary, without fear of establishing privileges." Externally, it "curbs the power of the proletariat of all nationalities and accepts class cooperation".

The historical determinism of Soviet orthodox Marxism is what Merleau criticized as "intellectual politics." "Intellectual politics" has the characteristics of mechanistic and atomistic, and holds that the meaning of history exists in individual events^[2]. In intellectual politics, individual historical events have a complete meaning independent of man our response to it is only an incidental fact that works in a single shot. If the significance of an individual event is merely a single valid thing for itself, then history is only a collection of disorganized, contingency

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facts. Our current decisions have nothing to do with future circumstances, and past thinking will not be reflected in future reactions over time. In general, the historical determinism of Soviet orthodox Marxism is the embodiment of Merleau-Ponty's intellectual political model of history.

(2) Sartre's theory of absolute freedom in terms of historical outlook and its criticism

Merleau-Ponty continued the Phenomenology of Perception in Humanism and Terror A critique of Sartre's existential theory of absolute freedom. Sartre believed that freedom is the essential attribute of human beings, and that human beings are beings who can freely choose and choose themselves. Merleau-Ponty wasn't entirely against it. He believed that man must have freedom, but obviously not unlimited and absolute freedom. Because the activity of man who has absolute freedom is the free activity of isolation, then the history of society is also the sum total of the free activity of absolutely free and isolated man, but if there is no common activity of society, History cannot be constituted only by the free movement of individuals in isolation. Freedom is indeed a human decision, but it is not an individual independent decision, it should also be a collective decision of the whole society. Merleau-Ponty emphasized that while acknowledging the free choice of man, it is also necessary to affirm the social and historical constraints of the other of this freedom.

Sartre's theory of absolute freedom in terms of historical outlook is what Merleau criticized as "rational politics." "Rational politics" is characterized by absolutism and holism, arguing that the meaning of history exists only in the totality of all events, and that individual events in individual periods can only have meaning under the guidance of the purpose of the whole: "To totalize history, to combine all the problems, to point to a future that has been recorded in the present (in which these problems will be solved in their entirety). Treat everything that humanity has experienced so far as to be pre-historical. History under the political concept of reason is only a single object that can be controlled by the whole, and the meaning of history lies in a purpose predetermined by human reason. When encountering individual events that conflict with the ultimate goal, rational politics represented by Sartre's theory of absolute freedom in the view of history can only deprive these individual events of their existence and make them incomprehensible "pre-historical" forms, and at this time they are reduced to "imposed" opinions and opinions", thus turning from reason into violence.

Merleau-Ponty believed that "intellectual politics" came from empirical and materialist thinking, and its representatives were Weber, Soviet orthodox Marxism, Trotsky, etc.; "Rational politics" comes from theoretical and conceptual thinking, and its representatives include the young Marx, Lukacs, etc.^[3] Merleau-Ponty expresses his intention to transcend these two theories of history through his commentary on Weber: "The path he seeks is between history as a unique set of facts and the arrogance of a self-proclaimed ability to encapsulate the past within its category and reduce it to a philosophy that we think about it." That is, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of history that transcends the subject-object dichotomy domain, a kind of former object Unfinished history, i.e., "the social world as a continuous field and existential dimension".

2. History as Intersubjectivity

From the perspective of the history of modern Western philosophy, the first to deal with the question of the relationship between subjects was the phenomenological pioneer Husserl. His phenomenology requires the "suspension" of all people and things understood as external entities, and then the transcendentalities, functionalization, and ethereal of the self into a kind of supreme logical subject. But this brings with the difficult question: How is it possible for us to know others? Therefore, intersubjectivity (cross-subjectivity) is necessary to free Husserl's phenomenology of consciousness from the trap of solipsism. From the perspective of the history of modern Western philosophy, the first to deal with the question of the relationship between subjects was the phenomenological pioneer Husserl. Husserl pioneered the phenomenology of transcendental subjectivity in order

to critique mentalism. Husserl's phenomenology requires the "suspension" of all people and things understood as external entities, and also requires the "suspension" of the Cartesian self of the natural subject of mind and matter, and then the transcendentalities, functionalization, and ethereal of the self into a kind of supreme logical subject. He then took the intentional construct grasped in pure intuition as the source of knowledge, and adhered to the principle of self-evidentness of the monistic subject with a strict phenomenological method. But this brings with it a series of difficult questions: Is individual knowledge universal and objective? How is it possible for us to know others? Therefore, intersubjectivity (cross-subjectivity) is necessary to free Husserl's phenomenology of consciousness from the trap of solipsism.

Heidegger, as the successor of Husserl's phenomenology, also deals with intersubjectivity. Heidegger argues that intersubjectivity in Husserl's phenomenology of consciousness is based on a priori subjectivity, which is the relationship between epistemic subjects within the realm of consciousness, rather than the relationship between epistemic subjects and the world of external objects^[4]. Thus, Gadamer says in *Truth and Method* that "Heidegger accuses Husserl's phenomenology of its ontological unwarrantedness of transcendental subjectivity"^[5]. In this way, Heidegger proposes an ontological intersubjectivity: the existence of man and the world has an identity, and this identity is manifested in the relationship of interaction and understanding between subjects^[6]. This means that Heidegger sees the self as "here and now" as identical with others, that the self is in the midst of others, that others constitute the living environment in which the self becomes, and that the self meets others through language and communication. Obviously, modern philosophers such as Heidegger and Gadamer have moved beyond the dualistic thinking of the philosophy of subjectivity to ontological and hermeneutic philosophy.

Merleau-Ponty, who rethinks history in the context of breaking away from dualistic thinking, argues that although the relationship between man and nature, the relationship between man and society, and the relationship between man and history can all be used as "subject-object", but history is obviously not exactly the same as the other two: "History is a strange object, an object equal to ourselves; Our irreplaceable life, our primordial freedom, has been foreshadowed, compromised, and staged in another freedom that has now passed. In history, we are questioning the theory itself as a subject, the relationship between people, and even the reflection on the relationship between people. History and its meaning lie in intersubjectivity. Merleau-

Ponty's analysis of the idea that history is intersubjectivity, is reflected in his distinction between "personal history" and "public history." Carman points out that "what is new and interesting about his [Merleau-Ponty's] political writings lies not in their substantive theoretical content, but in his efforts to extend phenomenological insights from the individual to the public sphere, from the realm of perceptual experience to the impersonal structures of collective action and social life"^[7].

3. As the Unfolding of Intersubjectivity History

Merleau-Ponty transcends binary modes of thought to examine unfinished history as intersubjectivity. First of all, he asks not to presuppose the meaning or direction of history, not to presuppose the coherence of history, and then to examine whether one or more definite patterns of relations can be formed between subjects, how to form them, and so on. "It has a past and a future, and they are not a simple negation of itself, but it is unfinished as long as it has not yet transitioned into other perspectives or the perspectives of others." That is, in Merleau-Ponty's view, history consists in a definite pattern of relations between subjects. Moreover, the generation of this deterministic relationship pattern depends on the convergence and unity of perspectives between subjects.

After careful analysis of the problem, it is not difficult to see that the deep-seated contradiction behind the question is still the binary opposition between the subject and the object, the practical subject and the theoretical subject. Merleau-Ponty believes that this is a limitation that can and must be surpassed. The problem of existence

cannot be abolished, because we cannot but have all kinds of relations with existence, and even the transcendental nature of thinking is constituted in the existence of the transcendent subject. As we become more aware of history and its significance, we are becoming clearer. As Merleau-Ponty put it: "But perhaps this is precisely the nature of history, that it is not anything definite as long as it is oriented to the present; It is only when it is once opened as a scene to a posterity who will summarize it that it is fully real? Perhaps, before the image of the past that we ourselves provide, there are only sequences of events that have neither formed a system nor formed an opinion, and whose truth is still in a state of delay? Perhaps this is the definition of history: it can exist entirely only through what happens later, in the sense that it depends entirely on the future. "

4. "Violence": as a Manifestation of Intersubjectivity History

Merleau-Ponty's view of history is not only reflected in Humanism and Terror's critique of Soviet orthodox Marxism's determinism of history and Sartre's theory of absolute freedom in the view of history and it is also manifested in his understanding of violence. For Merleau-Ponty, violence and history as intersubjectivity need to be understood together. It is precisely because history and its meaning are constantly generated in the process of mutual transformation between cognition and practice, the mode of relationship determined between subjects, and the convergence and unity of perspectives between subjects, that the concept of violence is precisely the proper meaning of the intersubjective view of history.

Violence is an expression of intersubjectivity history. Merleau-Ponty believes that "man is an objective being surrounded by the outside world, and needs to rely on other people and the natural world to complete himself, and in the process of possessing a certain amount of wealth, he will show his own characteristics, and thus he will contradict others." In the process of pursuing and realizing freedom, individuals are also in the process of relating with others and society, and more importantly, with others. The process of social disputes and attempts to get rid of the shackles is the historical development process of intersubjectivity. On the other hand, conflicts and even compromises between individual subjects and others and society can be seen as a kind of dispute and violence. Therefore, violence is actually the main expression of the history of intersubjectivity in Merleau-Ponty.

The history of violence as intersubjectivity is inevitable. If we regard violence as an inevitable relationship between the individual subject and other people and society, then it is inevitable to conclude that violence is objectively real and inevitable. In Humanitarianism and Terror, Merleau-Ponty says: "The so-called history, to be precise, is what each person does, not only in his own name, in his own name, in his domination, but also in pushing others, dominating others, so that as long as we live, we will lose the right to excuse ourselves with good intentions, and what we do to others, what kind of people we are. Can be seen, in Merleau-Ponty's view, the history of our existence is the history of intersubjectivity. It is undeniable and objective that who we are is determined not by us but by the relationship between me and others, and it is precisely this inevitable connection that violence manifests. So there is a strong inevitability to the existence of violence.

Revolutionary violence is progressive. Merleau-Ponty distinguishes between revolutionary and counter-revolutionary, and only revolutionary violence is progressive. In his view, "the nature of violence is varied, and revolutionary violence is desirable because it has a humanitarian future." "So, what makes revolutionary violence progressive is that it is linked to humanitarianism. So how does revolutionary violence manifest humanitarianism? Merleau-Ponty emphasized that the subject of revolutionary violence is the proletariat, and that the class interests of the proletariat determine that revolutionary violence is humanitarian. In the proletariat, the subject and the object have reached an unprecedented unity, and history is no longer "the arbitrary will of some men" nor is it subordinate to some "inscrutable spirit of the world" In the revolutionary violence of the proletariat, the history of intersubjectivity is constantly unfolding in the form of "treating man as man".

5. Summary

An important feature of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is to reconcile and compromise, so it is also called "ambiguous philosophy" or "ambiguous philosophy" by Western philosophical circles. Surprisingly, Merleau-Ponty himself agreed with this statement, even prefacing his work with an essay describing his philosophical ambiguity. This is because, in Merleau-Ponty's view, it is precisely this ambiguity that can embody the dialectic and break out of the dichotomy between subject and object. We can see that in the book "Humanitarianism and Terror", Merleau-Ponty It is also by presenting an ambiguous view of history, expelling the dichotomy of subject and object from the field of history, and realizing the criticism and transcendence of historical determinism and absolute freedom with a kind of intersubjectivity history, which is presented in a historical phenomenological attitude. Although Merleau-Ponty did not follow Marx's footsteps in his later years, such a historical-phenomenological approach did play an extremely important role in the clarification of Marxism.

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