

SOME NOTES ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF A "BODILY ETHICS"
Paper presented at IAPS-Conference held at the University of Gloucestershire 18th
- 21th September 2003

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1. Introduction

In this paper I try to defend the position that exercising the body in a manner that opens the body consciousness, can have quite radical ethical consequences. This paper is a schematic and short presentation of my project, where I intend to develop a phenomenological ethics of human movement. If you look closely at the existing research of sport ethics and the ethics of human movement in general, you can easily notice the practical non-existence of the phenomenological approach. Of course as a whole the kind of phenomenological ethics that takes human embodiment and movement as the starting point, is very young. Not until 1998 Merleau-Ponty Circle arranged a conference about "Ethical Bodies". Especially Merleau-Ponty's later philosophy, where he develops the concept of "flesh" has been one interesting starting point in this discussion.

What is meant by the concept of "opening of the body consciousness"? The idea behind this is that we can take basically two perspectives to exercising the body, that often go hand by hand. The movement of the body can be examined from outside or inside of the body. When a dancer is looking at her movement in a mirror to correct her mistakes, she takes the outer perspective to her body. When she turns her back to the mirror and tries to listen to her movement inside her body, she takes the inner perspective to her body. She listens to her body consciousness. This last perspective is the one I am interested in. And that's what I have done: the phenomenology of the listening to the body from inside. In this paper I try to describe you some of the results of this analysis. I also try to show that this kind of phenomenological analysis can have relevance from the point of view of ethics, too.

To begin with I shall shortly describe you some of the basic concepts. There is the basic distinction of the objective body and the lived body, which Merleau-Ponty does in his *Phenomenology of Perception*. From the point of view of different aspects of consciousness we can make the distinction between ego-consciousness and body consciousness. By ego-consciousness we refer to the place in our consciousness where the stream of associations is located. It is the place where we think, make plans, have memories and so on. When this stream of associations in our mind is in the centre of our attention, the body is on the periphery. We can change our attitude and let our mind be more empty. We can listen to our body and its inner sensations. When we do that, we step to the area of our body consciousness. Body consciousness

is supported by the proprioceptive senses, which give us information about our inner space. All the information of the proprioceptive senses does not arise to a conscious level. That is why we make the distinction between proprioceptive information and proprioceptive awareness. Actually proprioceptive awareness is used synonymously with the concept of body consciousness. There are also the concepts of body image and body schema which are connected with our experiences of the body. The body image is a system of all the perceptions, attitudes and beliefs that I connect to my body. It means my perception of my body, but also my conception of my body. The body schema is the system of motor abilities that function without conscious control. It consists of different physiological systems that make movement possible. It does not depend on the intentional object of my perception being my body. Vice versa, it usually functions better if my conscious perception is not directed to the movement of the body.

Then there is the concept of "the contemplative body". It refers to the body that is trained with different methods that allow its body consciousness become very sensitive. This kind of training can open different experiential levels of the body that I shall be soon describing. The contemplative body is more aware of its position, its relation to gravity, its movements. Body consciousness is opened by getting acquaintance to the inner space of the body, its structure and our proprioceptive perception of this space. The concept of the contemplative body also includes the idea, that we can change the quality of our experience by practising our body and mind. And this practise can have an ethical meaning.

Phenomenology of the contemplative body

I shall describe some of the basic features of the experience of the contemplative body that are relevant to my theme: the bodily ethics. The basic method of approaching the contemplative body and its experiences is conscious breathing. Conscious breathing opens up the experience of the center point of the inner space of the body which is located in the area of the abdomen, where the movement of breathing is experienced, too. With the advancement of training the inner space of the body is gradually felt to have two poles: On the one hand there is the association stream of the thoughts which is located in the inner space somewhere up in the area of the head; on the other hand there is the centre point of breathing, which is located somewhere in the abdominal area. We can roughly say that we identify ourselves with the one center or the other depending on our culture, experience and practice. There is a different quality between these two ways or styles of experiencing our self. If we identify ourselves with the "ego-logical" self, we experience our body very much as a "head-body". We live most of our time in rational thinking, in images, memories, plans. Our body stays on the periphery. Insensitivity in most parts of our bodies influences greatly the manner we support or take care of our bodies. I believe

this to be a strongly western structure of the body experience. We live in a culture that emphasises rationality and calculative thinking. Our culture is also the culture of the gaze or eyes. The place of the experiencing subject in the internal space is located at the area of the head. The metaphor of "a talking head" expresses well this basic experience of western man.

However there is another way, another style of experiencing the self revealed by the practise of breathing. By cultivating the conscious breathing, we can learn to move the focus of our consciousness inside the inner space of our body. In this way, we learn to explore its centers and limits. We can expand our body consciousness to govern new areas in our body and become more sensitive to its different qualities. We can even expand our body consciousness through the skin of our objective body, because the limits of our inner space are not objective but experiential. There are many breathing exercises where you are advised to "breathe with the whole body" and in this way blur the border between the inner space of the body and the external space. The cultivation of conscious breathing opens us the experience of the centre of the inner space of our bodies and this centre can be experienced as a centre or starting point of all action - including thinking. However, this thinking is different. It can be called "meditative thinking" or "intuitive thinking" because it emanates from silence. The experience of this center is also connected with willpower, vitality, the principle of life, the acceptance of a mystery.

The centre of the inner space of the body I have described is very important for the Asian culture, where the practise of conscious breathing is an essential part of philosophical and religious traditions. Deepening practise can show this centre of the inner space of the body as the centre of the pure consciousness, consciousness without an ego. In this experience there is no consciousness which is separate from the body, on the contrary this kind of dualism is broken. In this experience the limits of the body consciousness in its inner space fade away and merge into pure consciousness.

Movement and structure consciousness

A very rich and extensive movement and structure consciousness of the body is borne by training the proprioceptive awareness. This is done by moving with inner awareness, by listening the inside of the body. For instance in practising taijiquan we search a special way of moving the body consciously so that if one part of the body moves, its every part is moving. Learning this kind of movement requires a sensitive body consciousness but at the same time it brings it about, too. This kind of practise changes the quality of our movement and the way we experience our bodies. The inner quality of the body gets a more water like or running tone. The liveliness of the movements is also borne of the fact that we become more aware of the air around us. There is a feeling of the inner flow of the body, but at the same time there is a feeling of a slight resistance of the air surrounding our bodies. We become sensitive to two

directions: internal and external senses and this sensitiveness or awareness changes the quality of our movements.

We become more sensitive to our relationship to the earth and gravity, too. When we move, we always have a contact point to the earth. We become aware of the centerline of the body, which supports our optimal, upright structure.. This structure awareness expands itself to all our movements. We become aware how we always use the earth as a counter force to our movements. We become to "anchor" our body and its movements. One way to describe this is to say that our bodies are having a dialogue with the world. A Japanese philosopher Hiroshi Ichikawa uses this metaphor describing the way how the senses of the body work. When we touch a stone, we pose it a question. The stone answers us by its smoothness. It is a question of interaction, a dialogue. It is also a question of bodily knowledge, because we can know at once, that the stone is round even if we do not conceptualize it. However if we are asked about it, we can answer. Until then this knowledge is prepredicative, tacit knowledge, which is there in the body ready to be put to words, if needed. Ichikawa describes walking in the same way. Every step can be seen as a question, to which the earth gives an answer by its smoothness, irregularity or slipperiness. My body replies with adapting its movements to its perceptions. Usually, we are not aware of this dialogue between our bodies and the world, but we can throw light on it through phenomenological analysis. Practising the body consciousness is itself this kind of practical phenomenology. When we practise the movement and structure consciousness of the body, we try to become more aware of this dialogue between the body and the world.

Pulsation of the cells

In the "natural attitude", we transcend the body and very rarely stop to listen to its the inner sensations. The consequence has been that most part of the inner space of our bodies will not open to us even if we turn to look at it. Some authors of the field think that we have lost our ability to experience the inner feelings of the body. Our body consciousness is damaged. If we turn inside to listen to our body, we can find out that either we do not feel much of anything or we can feel pains and aches in some part of our bodies. Nevertheless if we patiently exercise our bodies by doing conscious movement, or just stand still but aware, we can find a new world. In the beginning, we can feel how our fingers become alive. Our fingers are filled of many kinds of internal feelings. You can feel a kind of internal vibration. You can feel as if every cell in our fingers begin to vibrate with a high frequency. Little by little the sensation spreads inside your whole body. You can feel a kind of inner dance of the cells in your fingers and other parts of your body. This is a very pleasant feeling that is familiar to most of us, especially to people who exercise their bodies. Now the question arises, what is our normal, everyday experience? How open we are towards the inner sensations of our body and how much the activities of our mind cover up these feelings. How alive do we feel our bodies are?

The sensation I am presently describing is familiar to those dancers who consciously try to open their body consciousness. The dancer-coreographer Deborah Hay writes in her book "My body, the Buddhist", how she in the beginning in 1970 began to daily imagine that every cell in her body could hear, perform and surrender the dance simultaneously. She writes: "After six years of *I imagine every cell in my body can hear, perform, and surrender the dance simultaneously*, other than the sensitivity it engendered, I had unintentionally trained myself to identify the physical sensation of trust. I turned my attention from loosely formulated, niggling thoughts, which felt like they occupied the top half and back of my head. I chose instead to notice the imagined feedback from my bones, solar plexus, face, throat, knees, ie, my cellular construct. Without looking for a linear translation of that feedback, yet maintaining a presumption that consciousness was present in every cell, I became appreciative of an unlimited source of cogent non-linear input. I thus retrained my relationship to 'mind' away from 'head' and into my entire body."

In this experience the whole inner space of the body is born to a new vibrating, vital life. It is important to notice that this vital pulse of life is experienced in mental atmosphere or scenery where there is no difference between subject and object. It is experienced in the inner space of a conscious body where there are no clear limits, because there are no dualisms, dicotomies. The vital pulse of life that is experienced is not entangled in my ego-logical centre. I may have the feeling that it is connected with my breathing but not so that "I" breath but I am being breathed. Some kind of principle of life is penetrating me, is breathing in me. But it does not pierce only me, because there is no me opposite the objects; this vital vibration of life pierces everything existing. That is why in this pulse of life you can feel to be the same as all the sentient beings. From the point of view of ethics, this is most important because this experience is the bodily root of the feeling of empathy. Here, of course, the concept of "bodily" does not mean anything different from the "mind". All this happens in the body consciousness, in the consciousness that is body, in the body that is consciousness.

It is interesting to see that the Buddhist philosophy recognizes the experience I am talking about. In the Buddhist literature, you can find the same kind of phenomenological description and it is also connected to what they call the "life-principle". The question is obviously about the description of the same phenomenon.

Cognitive science

Before I connect all this with ethics, I want to say a few words about modern cognitive science. Especially Francisco Varela has written extensively about how the human being, its consciousness and its relationship to the world is seen in the modern cognitive science. For me, this is very interesting because it heavily supports the picture I have drawn above using the phenomenological method. According to Varela the human mind is embodied and our perceptions are borne in the interaction that

happens between the world and the human being. According to him and modern cognitive science it is not the case that there is a subject that gets impulses from outside but the perception of the world is born in a very complex process of interaction between the man and the world. He uses the concepts of "enactive embodiment" and "embodied cognition" when he wants to emphasize the bodily and worldly roots of our cognition. Varela writes: "Let us now turn this slogan 'The mind is not in the head' into a more structured logic: Cognition is enactively embodied. 'Enactive' is a label used here in its literal sense. Cognition is something that you bring forth by the act of handling, by the fact of doing it actively. It is the very foundational principle of what mind is all about. That entails (...) that it is a deep co-implication, a co-determination of what seems to be outside and what seems to be inside. In other words, the world out there and what I do to find myself in that world, cannot be separated. The process itself makes them completely interdependent, quite literally so (...)."

Then he writes about the consequences of this: "If the mind is not in the head, where the hell is it? It is precisely the point here: it is in this non-place of the co-determination of inner and outer, so one cannot say that it is outside or inside. The other consequence that follows, which is less commonly noticed, is that the mind cannot be separated from the *entire* organism. We tend to think that the mind is in the brain, in the head, but the fact is that the environment also includes the rest of the organism; includes the fact that the brain is intimately connected to all of the muscle, the skeletal system, the guts, the immune system, the hormonal balances and so on. It makes the whole thing into an extremely tight unity. In other words, the organism as a meshwork of entirely co-determining elements makes it so that our minds are, literally, inseparable, not only from the external environment, but also from what Claude Bernard already called the *milieu intérieur*, the fact that we have not only a brain but an entire body."

Actually, Varela thinks it very strange that we have ever come to have the notion that we are that separate and distinct. He further describes researches, where it is described, how a newborn baby can have an emphatic reaction just a couple of hours after the birth. She is able to imitate a smiling face. He describes how the cognition is born in this relationship between I and you, I and the world. He also describes how a feeling, an affect, is born in the meeting of other person, when we meet someone else as the same kind of subject I myself am. He writes: "It is through her body that I am linked to the other, first as an organism similar to mine, but also perceived as an embodied presence, site and means of an experiential field. This double dimension of the body is part and parcel of *empathy*, the royal means of access to social conscious life, beyond the simple interaction, as fundamental intersubjectivity."

Ethics

Finally, I try to pose the most important ethical questions that these thoughts will arouse.

1. Our pre-linguistic relationship to the world opens us the way to knowledge. Now we can ask if this prereflective experience has an ethical dimension, too. Is there such ethical knowledge that is based on this bodily, prereflective experience? Would this mean that there are in body's immediate, preconceptual relationship to the world "bodily" problems, goals or solutions already before any interpretation.

2. An answer to these questions presupposes that we closely look at man's relationship to the world, to other people, to the environment, to the nature. I have described above how by exercising the body and opening the body consciousness we can have an experience of a kind of "life principle". This experience can be seen as an immanent or direct experience of nature and expression of life, because life as a phenomenon can be seen the same in all the places it appears. The experience of life in our bodies can open a way to empathy towards all sentient beings.

3. I have also described how dualistic experience can be broken by practising the body. The everyday experience consists of dualism of body and mind, man and world, self and nature. By practising the body this "natural attitude" can be broken. I think it is a relevant question to ask if the many ethical problems we nowadays encounter are based on our dualistic way of experiencing ourselves and the world. We can ask if we can change the value experience of man by changing his experiential relationship to the world, to other people, to his body and mind.

4. I believe that exercising the body can be one way to come back to the root experiences of ethics. The phenomenological description of this way is needed - first to show that this possibility exists; second to allow a more detailed analysis of how we can proceed from this experiential basis up to a well-formulated intersubjective theory of ethics.

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