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# THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE HUMAN BODY



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## THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE HUMAN BODY

Existential Phenomenology does not pretend to give new or further information about the physiological, anatomical or biological structure and functions of the body. In physiological and anatomical research the body is studied, analysed and treated as a mere object. Under the influence of these sciences and of the traditional view that man has or is both a body and a mind we are too much inclined to envisage the body as an object, as a thing side by side with other things. The human body like other material objects or things is in space and is subject to the mechanical laws which govern all other bodies in mathematical or geometrical space and time.

Phenomenology gives a different and illuminating perspective on the body as we exist and live it. The French phenomenologists like Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty throw penetrating light on the lived body. All modes of human existence are fundamentally in and through the body. The human body is not a body which belongs to the large family of material organisms and bodies. I live my body as that in, with and through which I am present to people and things. I am my body, an embodied consciousness. Man is an incarnated subjectivity in the world. The human body is subject through which we live and experience the world. Through the body we give meaning and structure to the world.

A little preliminary reflection on the lived human body shows that it is much more than a mere object, mechanical organism or anatomical entity. The body forms the bridge between myself, the other and the world; it makes the other and the world available to me. Through the body persons and not objects meet each other. A few examples from everyday life would suffice to illustrate this facet of the body. In kissing someone the mere thought of the anatomical structure of the lips (flesh, blood vessels, nerves and muscles) or of their biological functions would create nausea and even embarrassment. The same would happen in the case of other bodily organs through which we meet and perceive the world.

In anatomy, for example, the human hand is divided into different layers; the skin is described as a part of the integument, the bones are placed in the osteological, the muscles in the myological, the vessels in the cardiovascular systems. This is the hand of the world of science, the hand of the scientific textbook. But there is another hand: the hand of lived experience. The hand as object of anatomy and the hand which meets, perceives, touches, grasps, understands, receives, loves and declines the world are not exactly the same object. The hand of anatomical analysis is the hand of a dead body. The human hand which links and relates me to the world, which knows the world (sometimes better than I myself) is a lived hand, the hand of a human being capable of living his world from various dimensions. Through the hand man becomes involved in the world. Through the hand man meets the other, perceives and gives meaning and structure to the world. The lived hand speaks an almost universal language. Think of all the gestures of the hand. Through the gesture of shrugging the shoulders we

show our empty hands to the world. The gesture of empty hands is an answer to the world: we have nothing to offer. The interwoven hands; the praying hands (the symmetrical body) express humility, surrender to a higher power. The hands holding each other in a farewell express a different meaning than the hands sealing a bargain. A pledge of marriage is seen as "giving one's hand to". Through the hand I can meet, receive or reject the other. When young lovers caress the hands of each other there is no question of two objects (whether anatomical, physiological or even physical) meeting one another like billiard balls. Two lived bodies, two persons meet and are involved in a dialogue. Each one of them is present in and at the place of sympathetic contact. This situation wouldn't allow any thinking about the anatomical structure of the hand. The physiological textbook does not fit into this lived situation. The body of the beloved is not merely an anatomical or physical object; it has no blood vessels, muscles, nerves or even weight in the Newtonian sense of the word.

The lived body, though it consists of flesh and blood, should never be confused with the scientific picture of the body. In the world of science, including medicine, the human body is regarded as a mere object, mechanical organism, as an extension of nature. We would however commit a category-mistake when we place and see the lived body in the order or context of material objects and things only. The human body as we exist it belongs to the realm and world of lived experience, i.e. to man's life world. In the life world, for example, we find nothing of mathematical and geometrical space and time. The human body of the life world does not cover a distance in the same way as other bodies and objects. Human distance cannot be measured and calculated in geometrical or mathematical terms. Experienced distance cannot be defined as the length of a straight line connecting two points in space. Loved or anthropological space and distance unfold from and around man's body; between an experiencing and meaning giving subject and the world of persons and things.

The lived body (that we are) does have organs (stomach, eye, nose, ear, hand, arm, sexual organs) but these organs are not identical with those of the anatomical and physiological handbook. From these scientific reflections the notion is derived that the body belongs to the field of spatial things only. This notion is useful in, for example, medical science. When a physician examines my body then the body is for him an object which shows symptoms of a possible disease. He examines the body which I have, i.e. as object. He is expected to remain a neutral observer; his goal is knowledge and not closeness or unification. He touches the body in a gnostic way. Two persons do not meet as in a pathetic situation; the knowing hand of the physician touches and palpates a body.

This objective approach to the human body is of course fruitful. There is, however, a danger in regarding the body purely as an object especially in the light of the possibility of transplanting not only internal organs like the heart, liver, kidneys which have only biological functions, but also external

organs such as arms, hands or noses. Through these organs we meet, live and experience the world. Medical science should keep in mind that the body plays an important role in human life and does not merely perform biological or instrumental functions. How applaudible the successes to prolong man's life might be, medical science should also fix attention on the lived body; the body as subject. I will elaborate on this point after having discussed the body as subject in more detail.

There is another sense in which the body could be regarded as a mere thing or an object. One can look at his own body through the eyes of others. In the eyes of the other I do not live my body any longer. Unconsciously perhaps we realise that our lived body has been objectified and we therefore react in various ways against this objectification. We do not know where to put our hands when we are exposed to a group e.g. as a speaker. In a blush of shame I acknowledge that my body is regarded as an object. But this reaction is based on the awareness of my embodiment, of my incarnated subjectivity. Bodily embarrassment and timidity express our awareness of the other's consciousness of our body — that, for example, our body could be used, but it also presupposes an internal awareness of the body as subject. In man's subjectivity lies his fundamental freedom. Man's freedom is restricted when his body, i.e. he himself, is regarded as an object in e.g. social contact, married life or even sexuality.

In some instances the body is placed in the category of objects. Objective categories are, however, applicable to only a part of my awareness of my own body, i.e., as seen by others or as a describable scientific object. But even this awareness of the other's consciousness of our body arises from the awareness that the human body is a subject — a lived body. Any approach which treats the body as an object, a thing, an extension of nature, or as a mechanical organism turns out to be unsatisfactory. For my body is not just an object, but the condition for all (including scientific) objectivity. It is not possible to take an "objective" point of view on that (the body) which always from various dimensions, perspectives and in various situations provides me with a point of view. A man may, for example, look for his fountain-pen, but he does not look for the hand with which he searches for the pen. The body is other than an object: it does not have to be looked for, but is that which perception presupposes. The body serves as observation point in our relationship to the world; it gives us access to the world as perceived. My body makes me present — within the world and is as such my spontaneous entrance into the world which permeates me. The world is nothing but the field of our experience, and we are nothing but a certain perspective of it. Perceiving and the perceived, the subjective and the objective are inseparable. Bodiliness is the unity of man's existence with the world. Upon the disintegration of my body my world breaks up. Through the body I perceive the world and give meaning and structure to it. I could not possibly perceive the world without my body. Maurice Merleau-Ponty says: "The theory of the body image is, implicitly, a theory of perception. We have relearned to feel our body; we have found underneath the objective and detached knowledge of the body that other knowledge

which we have of it in virtue of its always being with us and of the fact that we are our body. In the same way we shall need to reawaken our experience of the world as it appears to us in so far as we are in the world through our body, and in so far as we perceive the world with our body." (1:206) My bodily presence to reality makes the world exist for me in a certain way even before I think about it; reflect on it. "The thing", says Merleau-Ponty, "and the world are given to me along with the parts of my body, not by any 'natural geometry', but in a living connection..." (1:205) I am already a meaning-giving existence on the pre-reflective level of my bodily existence. The particular structure of my body, for example, my senses, kinesthetic powers, the arm, the hand with five fingers, the upright posture, already give an outline of the physiognomy of the world as it will appear to me. My bodily structure and behaviour are a preconscious dialogue with the world. Through my bodily structure I pose a manifold question to the world and through my body the world replies in many ways.

Let us briefly consider sensation in the light of the above introductory remarks. In behaviouristic and mechanistic psychology the senses are regarded as stimulus-response mechanisms, the body as a sort of telegraph office, and sensation is reduced to a transcribed message. But this description of sensation is a myth; it is based on the physics of colours and the physiology of the senses. Such a notion of sensation is, as Sartre observes, "... a pure daydream of the psychologist" (2:315). The work of phenomenologists on the problem of sensation will to my mind direct all future phenomenological psychology. A few remarks on the phenomenology of sensation would at this stage of our discussion suffice. To state it again: Through the body I perceive the world and give meaning to it. In the world of lived experience my body reveals the world to me. I see colours, I smell odours, I taste flavours, I touch things with my hands and my moving fingers reveal their smoothness or roughness. I do not see my seeing, hear my hearing, taste my tasting and touch my touching. These belong to the physiology of senses. Furthermore such "seeing" and "hearing" are, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, "processes in the third person". My hands do not belong to the world of tactile things, my eyes not to the world of visible things; my feet do not belong to the passable world and my ears not to the world of audible things. Through the body we are involved in sensation. Colours or sounds, on the other hand do not exist as such, as vibrations completely in themselves out there in a world of physics, independent of my bodily presence. We see green and not vibrations.

Without man as meaning-giving subjectivity there is no world existing in itself and on its own as a 'Natur-an-sich,' a 'monde-en-soi,' an agglomeration of brute realities. Without man, without my bodily presence to the world there would be no sights or sounds. Sight, sounds and flavours are answers which the world gives to my body. The world becomes colour and shape in reply to my seeing; it only becomes a field of sound in answer to my hearing. In this dialogue both partners, the body and the world are actively involved, so much so that if my body wants to see something in the world, it must assume the correct ocular position. My body has to situate

itself in the correct tactile position if it desires to touch something. The body asks the world to appear in a certain meaning. To the body in its sexual being, for example, the world appears in its sexual meaning.

These observations bring us to another aspect of the dialogue between world and body. Through the body we are involved in space: do we live space and time. Spatiality of lived experience does not belong to the objective realm of science. The space of the classical Newtonian theory is homogeneous, isotropic, continuous, and infinitely extended. There is however a vast difference between the mathematical and geometrical space and lived space. Human space is not measurable and calculable; it unfolds itself from and around the body. From my bodily position I experience things as high or low, far or near: through my body I experience the spatial meaning of the world. Geometrical space is an abstraction of lived or experienced space. Experienced distance cannot be expressed in geometrical terms for it is conditioned by many favourable and unfavourable personal circumstances. Distances within lived-space depend strongly on the experiencing human being, how he feels, for example.

We can read man's cultural world from his physique. Technical devices, cultural products and a large part of man's social behaviour patterns are patterned in terms of the structure of the body. Because I have hands with five fingers I can touch, take or receive the world in a way other than when I had one finger on each hand only. We can speak of a world of, through and by means of the hands. Take the tea-cup, the receiver of the telephone as only a few examples. We can, of course, cite innumerable examples of the body as giver of structure. For man the world is also a "pedestrian-world" on account of having feet and not wings.

The human species is characterized by the upright posture. By means of the difference in posture men and cats do not share the same environment — the same world. In keeping the upright posture man opposes the forces of gravity. The chair, the bed, are, amongst others, devices to counteract gravity. Through the upright posture man is in conflict with nature and this natural opposition to nature enables and compels man to produce technique, culture and society. Social customs, and bodily gestures and movement arise from and take place in accordance with man's upright posture.

From a pure methodological point of view I should merely have stated the basic problem in this introduction. I did not follow tradition and have said, in a hurried way perhaps, more on the topic than is necessary in any introduction. My approach was, I think, necessitated by just the topic under discussion: the phenomenon of human-existence-through-the-body.

Man's existence consists fundamentally in and could ultimately be reduced to being-in-the-world-through-the-body. The most basic problem of human existence and of science which is nothing but a human mode of being-in-the-world is that of the body. The scientist also gives meaning and structure to the world through his body; the world is an answer to his

bodiliness. He cannot shake off or escape his bodiliness. Science which is a meaning-giving activity tries to give an objective perspective on the world of lived experience. Now, since the body is the ground of and condition for all objectivity; since it always provides man with a point of view on the world, it follows that a phenomenological analysis of the body is not only of philosophical importance but of considerable importance beyond philosophy.

Phenomenological analysis of the way in which I am my body cuts through all traditional philosophical problems. Epistemological problems like perception, sensation, meaning, truth, knowing, etc., need to be restated and reinterpreted. This is also true of metaphysical problems, like e.g., the body-soul problem, materialism, immaterialism, space, time etc. Ethical problems like e.g., value, freedom, sexuality are directly affected.

The phenomenology of the body and by implication of perception is exercising a remarkable influence on psychology and psychiatry. One needs only to read the works of leading psychologists and psychiatrists like e.g., E. Minkowski, F. Buytendijk, J. van den Berg, H. Rümke, D. van Lennep, J. Linschoten, R. May, A. van Kaam, E. Strauss and S. Strasser to realise the importance of the role which the body plays in human life. My impression might be wrong but it seems as though psychologists in this country for some or other obscure reason, prefer to cling to traditional mechanistic principles, methods and theories. Little attention is, however, given to phenomenological psychology. This is all the more amazing when one considers that men in physical education have taken notice of phenomenological analyses of the body. I hope that more and more sciences would return to and take as starting point the primary phenomenon: human-existence-in-the-world-through-the body.

I will now give attention to this phenomenon in more detail. From a pure systematic point of view I will approach the human body from two angles: firstly as object and then as subject.

### **The body as object**

There is a widespread idea that man has or is both a body and a soul (mind). I am a soul and a body or I am a soul and have a body. The notion that the soul as a mysterious type of entity inhabits the body as a sort of temporary material cover has a wide currency. The soul which controls and regulates the body from within is regarded as of more value than the body. The soul belongs to a "higher order": to the realm of the spiritual — the unseen. The body, on the other hand, belongs to the domain of the brutish and the purely material.

This view on man, which is even fostered as a holy principle, arises from the traditional Cartesian distinction between body and soul. The French thinker of the seventeenth century, René Descartes, asserted that mind and body are two totally different types of entity. According to Descartes the

essential property of the mind is that it thinks, and the essential property of the body that it is extended. The realms of thought and extension are completely different. Minds are not in space and their operations are not subject to mechanical laws. The human body is in space and is subject to the mechanical laws which govern all bodies in space. The body is relegated to the realm of physical objects of which the basic feature is their geometrical qualities (size, shape and so on).

It is not my aim to discuss the mind-body problem in detail. The purpose of this essay is to show that the human body is much more than a mere physical object or thing; that it is a subject. The few critical remarks on the Cartesian dualism will serve to bring out the idea that man is an embodied consciousness: that the body as subject is the mode of contact between consciousness and the world. It is in the framework of this bodily contact and dialogue with the world, i.e., of man's being present in and to the world through his body that the "elusive" I, person or soul is manifested (not as a mysterious thing but as an observable phenomenon). To say that my existence consists in and could be reduced to being-in-the-world-through-the-body is to say at the same time that duality between my being and my subjectivity on the one hand, and the way in which I live my body on the other hand, becomes untenable.

In the Cartesian theory there is a sharp distinction between body and mind. Body and mind belong to two different realms; mind to the mental and body to the physical. Our experience indicates that these realms are interrelated or interconnected. The soul affects the body and vice versa. When something happens to the body this affects the mind e.g. damage to parts of the brain results in "mental" disability. Similarly, a desire that one may have, can alter events in the physical world, e.g. when someone desires to stretch out his hand, the body does it. This gives rise to the question as to how body and mind are related since they belong to totally different realms. Bodies are in space; minds are not. There must, however, be some kind of contact between mind and body. According to Descartes the pineal gland at the base of the brain is the point of interaction between soul and body. But this theory does not explain plausibly how it is possible for mind and body to interact upon one another, if they are of two different natures. The pineal gland is physical, and how can the immaterial soul act upon a part of the physical body? Furthermore, can we speak of a seat of the soul? When we describe the soul as inside the physical body, we spatialise the soul which is regarded as spiritual and not extended. If the soul is somewhere in the body it should be conceived as a spatial entity which could be localized. But we can hardly maintain that the soul inhabits only a part of the body.

Speech idiom and the important biological role which the human heart plays in life must have given rise to the idea that the heart is the centre of the soul. This means that the soul is restricted to the confines of a part of the physical body and is so spatialized. Apart from this objection the recent heart transplantations have shown that the soul is very much afraid of the scalpel. Surgery has not as yet succeeded in discovering this "ghost in the

machine", as Ryle refers to the soul. The theory now exists that the brain might be assigned with this privileged status to be the residence of the soul. This again would spatialize the soul. Furthermore, what happens with the soul when a man is unconscious or in the case of damage to the brain? Does the soul or a part of the soul leave the body or does it, to apply another spatial term to an immaterial entity, shrink perhaps?

These remarks show that there is something radically wrong with the distinction body-soul and with the notion that man has a material and mortal body on the one hand, and an immaterial and immortal soul on the other. Let us also illustrate by means of a few examples. Most of us have had the experience that our whole world or lived experience is changed by a high fever. We see and hear things differently.

Can such a strict distinction between soul and body then be valid? In this distinction the soul is regarded as the "real man", the "inner-self" and the body as the mortal remains. One would never succeed in convincing a person who suffers from cancer that only his body as material cover has been affected while his "self", the "real man" has not been affected at all. The mother who caresses the forehead of her ill child does not think that she touches only a body which accommodates her real child. She touches her total child. The young lady in front of the mirror, busy with her make-up, does not merely care for a material object: her body. She already sees *herself* as she would appear to the other through her body as subject. She sees herself through the eyes of the other and may even play the role of a beloved with her body as available to the other.

Why do we, in the contact with the other, not assume that the body of the other is a mere machine, or object? Because we see it as the expression of subjectivity of the other. Why do we not accept that the smile of the other is merely a contraction of muscles or simply a response to a physical stimulus (as in behaviourism)? Why do we not regard a smile as a mere spiritual matter? Because we know that the other is a subject and not a machine. Because of man's subjectivity do we give in various situations various meanings to smiles (love, hatred, etc.). We even give meaning to the world through the smile. In everyday life we do not explain and see tears in terms of physiology. The human body as subject, as we live and exist it, is remarkably expressive of meaning. Apart from speech, gait, posture, smile, shudder, and the like, all incarnate a meaning which is easily read off. This meaning is directly perceived. One sees sympathy, fear, joy in the eyes and hears joy or embarrassment in laughter. These are not secret operations or inner psychological processes. The lived body's behaviour is meaningful.

Recent conceptual analyses by men like Gilbert Ryle (*The Concept of Mind*) and Renier Meyer (*Thinking and Perceiving*) have decisively shown that the so-called mental conduct concepts like, e.g. knowing, thinking, perceiving and believing do not directly designate internal episodes or operations of the mind. Ryle points out that the mind's operations are just as observable and evident as such operations as walking, jumping, etc.

"Knowing" is not a secret operation of a hidden entity but the observable exercise of a capacity. For to say that a man "knows" something is to say, in effect, that under certain conditions (say a test) he is able to give through his body a performance of a certain kind. Knowing is not a process or episode word but a dispositional concept. Ryle has the following to say about the logic of dispositional concepts in general. "When we describe glass as brittle, or sugar as soluble, we are using dispositional concepts, the logical force of which is this. The brittleness of glass does not consist in the fact that it is at a given moment actually being shattered. It may be brittle without ever being shattered. To say that it is brittle is to say that if it ever is, or even had been struck or strained, it would fly, or have flown, into fragments. To say that sugar is soluble is to say that it would dissolve, or would have dissolved, if immersed in water... To possess a dispositional property is not to be in a particular state, or to undergo a particular change: it is to be bound or liable to be in a particular state, or to undergo a particular change, when a particular condition is realised". (3:43) "To say that a person knows something... is not to say that he is at a particular moment in process of doing or undergoing anything, but that he is able to *do* certain things, when the need arises... ." (3:112) "To say that this sleeper knows French, is to say that if, for example, he is ever addressed in French, or shown any French newspaper, he responds pertinently in French, *acts* appropriately or translates it correctly into his own tongue." (3:119).

Meyer says: "In opposition of officially sponsored theories I argue that all these concepts function in descriptions of the performances of persons in situations of certain sorts, and that their logical functions are misrepresented when construed as involving reference to special status ('mental') acts and entities of various sorts... My constructive analyses all involve the notion of action-in-a-situation as the key notion employed in the descriptions of human life. For example, to know something is to be equipped to *do* certain sorts of things in certain sorts of *situations*; to think a certain thought is to *behave* in certain ways in certain sorts of *situations*; and to perceive something is to act and react in certain ways in *situations* of certain sorts... This means that any philosophical analysis will come to rest on the notion of *action* when carried to its ultimate consequences" (5: pp. 1-2). These analyses show that the view that the mind is some internal, mysterious ghost-like substance is false. But they also show that what is usually referred to as the life of the soul (knowing, imagining, believing, thinking) is linked in various ways with the life history of man as being present in the world through the body. My bodily behaviour reveals the world to me. How do I know that the ball is spherical, solid and leathery? My moving, throwing and pressing hands "reveal" these properties or rather phenomena. For these "properties" do not exist solely in the ball and not at all in my hands. It is only when my hands touch the ball that these properties are revealed to me. I perceive and know the world through my body. The world is an answer to my bodily behaviour. One more example. Smoothness or roughness are not properties inherent in things or in my body. Only when my body (hand) contacts the world, I perceive it as e.g. smooth. Smoothness, roughness, and even "space" and "time", are not

words which "describe" the world of things; they are concepts for my bodily presence to and behaviour in the world. It is in this contact with the world; in man's being-in-the-world as an embodied consciousness where the "I" "person" or "soul" unfolds itself.

In the light of the foregoing, I would now like to give a little attention to the concept of "soul".

In the Cartesian theory the soul and body are regarded as two different types of entity. "Body" and "soul" are grammatical nouns. We therefore tend to think that these concepts refer us directly from the same logical level to different types of things or entities. "Body" as a concrete noun is indeed such a first-order thing concept of which the logical function is to refer us to an observable and discoverable thing in the world. Since "soul" is regarded as an abstract noun we think, erroneously of course, that it is also a first order thing concept which refers us directly to an unobservable, mysterious or ghost-like entity in a spiritual world. We hereby create a spiritual world and populate it with ghost-like entities.

Abstract concepts, however, have different logical functions. They refer us from a different logical level to the same world of everyday experience. The abstract phrase "economic man", for example, does not like the concrete phrase "the old man" refer us to a particular man. When economists make statements about the economic man, they are not talking about my brother or anyone else's brother at all. They are offering an account of observable marketing tendencies and behaviour patterns. Abstract concepts do not directly refer to entities in the world of experience but nor do they tell us anything about unobservable entities in another mysterious world. They are second-order concepts which refer us from a different logical level, in a roundabout way perhaps, to observable phenomena in the world of lived experience. "Character" though it is, from a grammatical point of view, an abstract noun, does not really refer us to an unobservable, ghost-like psychological molecule in the inner life of man. If "character" were such an unobservable entity which exists in the secret and private life of man, how, then, is it possible to make such an everyday statement as "X has an admirable character"? Surely, no anatomical analysis or special insight is required for it is not possible to localize or discover "character" somewhere in man. "Character" is not a first-order thing concept which refers us to a spiritual entity, power or organ as the source of a man's overt behaviour. In everyday life it is a word for man's behaviour. "Character" is a second-order behaviour concept used to speak about a person's observable, overt and public behaviour patterns. It is a word for the way in which a man presents himself consciously to the world through his bodily behaviour (including speech.)

It is obvious that in the Cartesian theory and in subsequent theories on the body-soul relationship the concept "soul" has been misused as though it is a first-order thing concept. Since body and soul are regarded as totally different entities, the soul forms the negation of everything bodily. The

"properties" of the body are enumerated and the soul is then described by negating them. The body is observable; the soul is an unobservable thing. The body is material, the soul is immaterial or spiritual. The body has geometrical qualities and is extended; the soul has no form or size, or spatial extension. The body is divisible; the soul is an in-divisible entity. The notion of the soul as a mysterious type of thing rests on a category-mistake, on conceptual confusion. "Soul" like "character" is a second-order behaviour concept. The phenomenon of soul unfolds itself in man's observable bodily presence to and behaviour in the world.

The Cartesian dichotomy (body-soul) gives rise to the idea that the human body is nothing but a material object or mechanical organism. Classical psychology was influenced by the Cartesian para-mechanical theory. Ryle says: "Now when the world 'psychology' was coined, two hundred years ago, it was supposed that the two-worlds legend was true. It was supposed, in consequence, that since Newtonian science explains... everything that exists and occurs in the physical world, there could and should be just one other counterpart science explaining what exists and occurs in the postulated non-physical world... Moreover, as Newtonian scientists found and examined their data in visual, auditory, and tactual perception, so psychologists would find and examine their counterpart data by counterpart, non-visual, non-auditory, non-tactual perception" (3: 301). According to this para-Newtonian programme, psychologists would study human beings in a completely different way. This, however, turned out to be an empty promise only. Part of the failure is due to the fact that the psychologists (under the influence of the Cartesian para-mechanical theory) tried, without success, to explain man as a being-for-others. Classical psychology tries to describe human behaviour through the body as a body-for-others; through the body as object. Sensation, for example, is explained by representing the human body as equipped "with the properties of an emitting, transmitting, and receiving set all at once." Sensation is thus explained in terms of a physics of colours and of a physiology of the senses. How misleading this approach to man is, will become evident in our discussion of the body as subject. In its attempt to give an objective account of human behaviour psychology not only adopts the methods and principles of the natural sciences but also approaches man as an object, i.e., through the "third-person"; through the other. No attention is given to experience and perception through the first-person; through the body as subject; through the body as being-for-itself. The fact that the body as subject always provides me with an objective point of view, that it is the condition for all objectivity is totally neglected. Mechanistic psychology does not only lead to a distorted image of man, but gives rise to a number of false dilemmas. I illustrate:

The psychologist who is doing research work on perception bases his theories upon the most solid kind of evidence, namely upon his own senses. While at work he uses his eyes and ears. While writing up his results he delivers the severest possible censure upon these bad witnesses: observers (including the psychologist himself) never perceive what they naively



suppose themselves to perceive. While investigating he uses his senses as reliable. In his results on the senses of the other he says that the senses are misleading. This is not only a dilemma but involves a contradiction. If the senses are always misleading then his theory cannot be valid, for it is based on evidence supplied by his own senses. This dilemma illustrates that the psychologist is working through the other while neglecting his own incarnated subjectivity — the subject which supplies him with a point of view on the other.

In spite of the “*cogito ergo sum*” (I think, therefore I am) the Cartesian theory in its further explication is a theory about the body of the other as object and not about my body as I exist it as subject. Sartre says: “... We pointed out that I could not take any point of view on my body in so far as it was designated by things. The body is, in fact, the point of view on which I can take no point of view, the instrument which I can not utilize in the way I utilize any other instrument...” (2: 340).

According to Sartre our body-consciousness has three “dimensions” or three “facets”: one for its owner, a second one for others, and a third for the owner as being conscious of the other’s facet of his own body. He says “... we must... examine the body first as being-for-itself and then as being-for-other” (2: 305). He also proceeds to give an account of our body as we see it “through the eyes of the other.” “I exist my body: this is its first dimension. But in so far as *I am for others*, the Other is revealed to me as the subject for whom I am an object.... I exist for myself as a body known by the Other.” (2: 351) As I have said in the introduction these two last facets of the body presuppose an awareness of my body as subject. I will therefore concentrate on Sartre’s exposition of the “body as being-for-itself” (facticity).

### The body as subject

Sartre’s most important observation on the body is that on the pre-reflective level we “exist” or “live” our body. I do not merely have a body, I am and live my body. Our body is “*corps vécu*”. Sartre’s phenomenological analysis shows that the body could not be placed on an objective level only. “My body as it is for me (*pour - soi*) does not appear to me in the midst of the world.” (2: 303).

My body serves as an observation point in my relationship to the world. There is a close relationship between the body and the world; the body is a totality of relationships with the world. “We know that there is not a for-itself on the one hand and a world on the other as two closed entities...” (2: 306). The human subject is a capacity for “opening itself to”, or in the words of Husserl, an “intentionality”. “By the mere fact that there is a world, this world can not exist without a univocal orientation in relation to me... (2: 307). The objectivized world is a “desert world or... a world without men...; since it is through human reality that there is a world” (2: 307).

“When we say that the for-itself is in-the-world, that consciousness is consciousness of the world, we must be careful to remember that the world exists confronting consciousness as an indefinite multiplicity of reciprocal relations which consciousness surveys without perspective and contemplates without a point of view” (2: 306). The body is the link between consciousness and the world. As such the body provides me with a finite and partial perspective on the world. Thanks to the body we can vary our perspectives of the world. We can live the world from various dimensions. “For human reality, to be is to-be-there; that is, ‘there in that chair’, ‘there at that table’, ‘there at the top of that mountain, with these dimensions, this orientation, etc.’. It is an ontological necessity.” (2: 308).

Space is not an “external relation”, i.e., space is not an otherworldly thing, an abstract mathematical or geometrical entity. Space unfolds from my body. I live space. Through my bodily presence to and actions in the world do I constitute space. Through the relationship body-world, phenomena like far, near, high, low, up, down, manifest themselves. “For me this glass is to the left of the decanter and a little behind it; for Pierre, it is to the right and a little in front”. (2: 306). “The constitution of space as a multiplicity of reciprocal relations can be effected only from the abstract point of view of science; it cannot even be represented. The triangle which I trace on the blackboard so as to help me in abstract reasoning is necessarily to the right of the circle tangent to one of its sides, necessarily to the extent that it is on the blackboard. And my effort is to surpass the concrete characteristics of the figure traced in chalk by not including its relation to me in my calculations any more than the thickness of the lines or the imperfection of the drawing” (2: 307).

Through my bodiliness I live space. “The relativity of modern science aims at being. Man and the world are relative beings, and the principle of their being is the relation. It follows that the first relation proceeds from human-reality to the world. To come into existence, for me, is to unfold my distances from things and thereby to cause things ‘to be there’. But consequently things are precisely ‘things-which-exist-at-a-distance-from-me’. Thus the world refers to me that uni-vocal relation which is my being and by which I cause it to be revealed”. (2: 308). The world is an answer to man’s bodiliness.

Through the body the world assumes and reveals structure, meaning and order. The perspective of the world reveals my bodiliness. “It is absolutely necessary that the world appear to me in order. And in this sense this order is me, ... this order is the body as it is on the level of the for-itself... the body is identified with the whole world inasmuch as the world is the total situation of the for-itself and the measure of its existence” (2: 309).

The idea of this close interconnection between embodied consciousness and the world becomes clear in Sartre’s theory concerning perceptual consciousness. This theory is at the same time a severe criticism of the

“psychologism” of sensation as offered in the classic theories.

The classic notion of sensation was formed under the influence of the methods and principles of the positive sciences. In anatomy and physiology the senses are studied as objects. Man arrived at his knowledge about the structure and functions of the sensorial organs by studying those of others, i.e., by studying the sense-organs as object. “First we established that the Other had eyes; later as physiologists dissected cadavers, they learned the structure of these objects; ... With the microscope we have examined the nerves of cadavers and have determined exactly their trajectory, their point of departure, and their point of arrival. The totality of these pieces of knowledge concerned therefore a certain spatial object called the eye; they implied the existence of space and of the world. In addition they implied that we could see this eye, and touch it... .” (2:310).

The objectivized sense-organs are then like all other objects in the world of space. Outside and in relation to the sense-organs there exists the external world — a world of things and objects in space which are in their turn studied objectively by the Newtonian sciences. Sensation is now explained by classical psychology in terms of the relationship which we find between objects. Sensation is the mechanical relationship between stimulated organ and stimulating object. “We then found ourselves in the presence of two objects in the world: on the one hand the stimulant; on the other hand, the sensitive cell or the free nerve ending which we stimulated. The stimulant was a physical-chemical object, an electric current, a mechanical or chemical agent whose properties we know with precision and which we could vary in intensity or in duration in a definite way. Therefore we were dealing with two mundane objects, and their intramundane relation could be established by... means of instruments” (2: 310). The relation of the stimulant to the organ is thus a relation of thing to thing, almost like the shock between two billiard balls. In this way sensation is explained on the one hand by a physiology of the senses and on the other by the mechanical laws which govern all bodies and objects in space. The senses are regarded as mere stimulus-response mechanisms. The body is seen as a type of telegraph office with the function of registering and interpreting impressions from an external objective world. Sartre shows that such a physiology and physics of human existence and behaviour would never work, because the human subject (subjectivity) has been left out of account. “Such is the notion of sensation, ... it is pure fiction. It does not correspond to anything which I experience in myself... . We have apprehended only the objective universe; all our personal determinations suppose the world and arise as relations to the world. Sensation supposes that man is already in the world since he is provided with sense organs, ...” (2: 314). The human subject is an “openness” to the world. “The body is, in fact, the point of view on which I can take no point of view, ...” (2: 340). The perceived world is an immediate answer to my bodiliness. My body makes the world *immediately* available to me. My body invests the world with meaning even before I think about this meaning. Certain things in the world already mean colour, sound, flavour, odour, shelter, food, far and near

before I am consciously aware of this meaning. My body, my sense-organs, reveal the world to me as smooth, rough before I reflect on it. Body and world are always involved in an immediate preconscious dialogue. The meaning of the world and of human existence originate in this dialogue in which both partners, world and man as embodied consciousness are active. The world does not exist as an “en-soi”, as a thing-in-itself apart from man as meaning-giving subject. Neither does the world possess in itself properties, structure and meaning which man could only discover by research and investigation. “Smoothness” is not a property inherent in the world. It is only in the contact between body and world when the phenomenon of “smoothness” manifests itself. Without touching the world there is no such a “property” as “smoothness”. Without bodiliness there are no sights, sounds, and flavours. On the other hand the other partner in the dialogue: the world must also be immediately present (through my bodiliness of course). Colours, flavours and tactile qualities do not exist in my body. It is only in this immediate dialogue between body and world that these phenomena appear to me as a consciousness. Damage to my eyesight results into a changed world. I see the world differently. The distorted bodiliness in some of Picasso’s paintings reveals various distorted worlds — worlds which are answers to the body. The body of the person reaching puberty reveals the instability and clumsiness of his world.

Sartre says: “Let us establish first that senses are everywhere and yet everywhere inapprehensible. This inkwell on the table is given to me immediately in the form of a *thing*, and yet it is given to me by *sight*. This means that its presence is a visible presence and that I am conscious that it is present to me as visible — that is, I am conscious (of) seeing it. But at the same time that sight is knowledge of the inkwell, sight slips away from all knowledge; there is no knowledge of sight. Even reflection will not give us this knowledge. My reflective consciousness will give to me indeed a knowledge of my reflected-on consciousness of the inkwell but not that of a sensory activity. It is in this sense that we must take the famous statement of Auguste Comte: ‘The eye can not see itself.’ It would be admissible, indeed, that another organic structure, a contingent arrangement of our visual apparatus would enable a third eye to see our two eyes while they were seeing. Can I not see and touch my hand while it is touching? But then I shall be assuming the point of view of the Other with regard to my senses. I should be seeing eyes-as-objects; I can not see the eye seeing; I can not touch my hand as *it is* touching. Thus any sense in so far as it is-for-me is an inapprehensible; it is not the infinite collection of my sensations since I never encounter anything but objects in the world. On the other hand if I assume a reflective point of view on my consciousness, I shall encounter my consciousness of this or that thing-in-the-world, not my visual or tactile sense; finally if I can see or touch my sense organs, I have the revelation of pure objects in the world, not of a revealing or constructive activity. Nevertheless the senses are there. There is sight, touch, hearing.” (2: pp. 315-316).

The world itself is colour and shape in reply to my seeing; a field of sound in

answer to my hearing. But "I cannot see the seeing, that is, I cannot apprehend it in process of revealing an aspect of the world to me". (2: 304).

A little conceptual analysis will help. "Seeing" like a number of other words, though it is a grammatical verb, does not denote any activity, process or episode. It is an achievement concept. Ryle says: "... the grammatical fact has tended to make people... oblivious to the differences of logical behaviour between verbs of this class (achievement concepts) and other verbs of activity or process. The difference, for example, between kicking and scoring, treating and healing, hunting and finding, ... listening and hearing, looking and seeing, travelling and arriving, have been construed, ... as differences between co-ordinate species of activity or process, when in fact the differences are of quite another kind... . When a person is described as having fought and won, or as having journeyed and arrived, he is not being said to have done two things, but to have done, one thing with a certain upshot". (3; pp. 143-144). To win a race is not to be engaged in two processes: the running and the winning, but to bring the race to an end. One cannot give a running commentary on the winning of a race, for it is no process. "Reaching the end of the measured mile of a race-track takes no time. The runner was running for some five minutes before he reached this point, but his reaching this point did not prolong his running-time. His reaching is not something with its own beginning, middle and termination. The same is true of winning a mile race... . I can say that I am occupied in searching for a pencil... but not that I am occupied in finding a pencil... . In the same way I can be looking for, or looking at something, but I cannot be seeing it. At any given moment either I have not yet seen it or I have now seen it. The verb 'to see' does not signify an experience, i.e. something that I go through, am engaged in. It does not signify a sub-stretch of my life-story" (4: 103-104). "Seeing" as achievement concept denotes my bodily presence to and behaviour in the world which is an immediate answer to my seeing. In conclusion I quote Ryle once again on this point: "... there is something which is drastically wrong with the whole programme of trying to schedule my seeing a tree either as a physiological or as a psychological end-stage of process... . Neither the physiologist nor the psychologist nor I myself can catch me in the act of seeing a tree — for seeing a tree is not the sort of thing in which I can be caught" (4: pp. 101-102). "Seeing" is a word for my preconscious dialogue with the world through the body.

In compiling this account on a topic about which such a lot might be said, I have allowed myself the luxury of writing on points that happen to interest me. In other words, this essay was merely meant as an introduction to phenomenology and to what is to my mind the most fundamental problem: the body. I have stopped short with Merleau-Ponty, not because I think his work unimportant, but on the contrary, because I think it far too important to be tucked away in a perfunctory final-paragraph. The most eminent contribution to the phenomenology of the body is the work of Merleau-Ponty. It deserves a detailed discussion in another article.

## Opsomming

Die fenomenologie van die menslike liggaam toon dat die liggaam meer is as net 'n objek, 'n ding of 'n verlengstuk van die natuur. Ek is my liggaam, ek leef my liggaam. Die deurleefde liggaam is subjek.

Hierdie perspektief op die liggaam het reeds 'n verreikende invloed uitgeoefen op bv. die hedendaagse fenomenologiese psigologie en psigiatrie. In ons land is daar, met enkele uitsonderinge, nog maar weinig aandag aan die fenomenologie van die liggaam gegee. Hierdie artikel, wat uit die aard van die saak slegs die vernaamste aspekte van so 'n ingewikkelde saak kon aanraak, is bloot bedoel as 'n soort bekendstelling.

Deur my liggaam is ek teenwoordig en verwickeld in die wêreld. Vanweë my liggaam ontmoet ek die wêreld op 'n bepaalde manier en gee ek betekenis en struktuur aan die wêreld. My liggaam en die wêreld is in 'n wedersydse pre-reflektiewe dialoog betrokke. Die wêreld is 'n antwoord op my liggaam (-struktuur) en my liggaamsbeeld of -houding openbaar my wêreld. So gesien is die liggaams-probleem altyd grondliggend — nie alleen in die wysbegeerte nie maar ook in die meeste vakwetenskappe.

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