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## **Embodiment and Feminist Philosophy**

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### **Introduction**

Questions of embodiment are central in feminist philosophy for several reasons. The sexed body is one of the chief themes of feminist politics; but the body is also a historical-philosophical concept that feminist scholars have problematized and scrutinized; and ultimately it is a metaphysical issue the relevance of which is a feminist-philosophical controversy. The thematic, historical-critical, and metaphysical interests often converge in concrete debates, but it is important to distinguish them conceptually for the clarity of the goals of our investigations.

First, feminist thinkers have developed philosophical arguments and concepts to tackle problems that are central in women's lives such as pregnancy, childbirth, abortion, rape, pornography, prostitution, sexual orientation, and the division of labor between the sexes. These classical feminist topics are today expanded by discussions of transsexuality, disability, technology, and animality. All these themes involve problems of bodily integrity and self-determination. In addition, they imply questions concerning physical force and violence, as well as questions concerning sensibility and affectivity and the nature of corporeal life in general. Thus, for strong topical reasons, the concepts of body and embodiment are central to feminist philosophy.

Second, feminist historians of philosophy have questioned the traditional oppositions between soul and body, mind and matter, and reason and sensibility, and critically discussed

the adequacy of the concepts of body and embodiment that we inherit from our philosophical forerunners. Feminists have argued that these traditional conceptual oppositions are misleading since they define the two terms in simple contrast, and privilege or valorize one term over the other either epistemologically or ontologically. Moreover, they have demonstrated that our philosophical tradition strongly associates the concept of femininity with the lower terms of these hierarchical oppositions. Thus, femininity is conflated with sensibility, body, and matter, while masculinity is coupled with soul, spirit, mind, and reason. With a conceptual repertoire such as this it is hard to argue for the equality of the sexes and for the fruitfulness or productivity of sexual difference. For these critical reasons, feminist philosophy inquires into the genealogies of the concepts of body and embodiment.

Third, the concepts of embodiment and materiality are pressing for any thinker who starts asking political and ethical questions concerning the relations between human beings and human communities. In so far as one conceives human beings as bodily beings with material environments and concrete histories, one cannot avoid taking a stand on ontological and epistemological questions on embodiment and materiality. Thus, there is also a metaphysical motivation for today's feminist philosophy of embodiment.

### **1. Historical Starting Points**

In the early modern period, with the development of the new natural sciences, the task of rethinking the relation between the body and the soul or mind became acute. The previously dominant Platonic and Aristotelian theories were challenged and abandoned.

The old Platonic similes and metaphors had suggested that the soul, or its highest part, governs the body and its lower appetitive and sensible functions, similar to the manner in which a charioteer or coachman drives his horses and a steersman navigates his ship (Plato 2005: 26–36, 246a–254e). Against this, the Aristotelian concepts of form and matter proposed

that the function of the soul is formative rather than governmental. In the Aristotelian understanding, the soul does not control or regulate the body but rather organizes it and gives it a proper form. This implies that disputes about the identity or separateness of soul and body are misguided, since the two phenomena are mutually dependent (Aristotle 1931: *De Anima* ii 1, 412b6–9).

These ancient conceptions were challenged in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by Descartes. He argued that we fail to account adequately for the relation between mind and matter as long as we assume that the two relata are both known in a similar manner and in a similar order. For Descartes, the mind is neither governmental nor formative but is epistemologically fundamental. We know ourselves primarily as ensouled or minded beings, as “thinking things” – *res cogitans, une chose qui pense* – in his terms. All our knowledge of other things, including material things and corporeal being as well as ideal entities and the divine being, is grounded on this primary form of knowledge (according to Descartes in the *Meditations* of 1641).

Descartes’ thesis of the epistemic primacy of the mind implies two different views of the mind-body relation. On the one hand, body and mind can be conceived in a general manner as two distinct substances with two different primary attributes: extension and thinking. This implies that they are independently existing things (as Descartes argues in *Meditations* and in *The Principles of Philosophy* of 1644). Being distinct and completely different in their essence, the two Cartesian substances cannot interact.

On the other hand, we know our mind as being united with one body in particular and as capable of interacting with other bodies through this one body. In the Fifth Meditation, Descartes draws attention to this unitary notion of the mind-body relation and accordingly questions the adequacy of the ancient similes of navigation and piloting:

nature ... teaches me, by these feelings of pain, hunger, thirst, and so on, that I am not

merely present in my body as a sailor is present in a ship, but that I am very closely joined, and as it were, intermingled with it, so that I and the body form a unit.

(Descartes 1996: vol. 3, 159, italics added)

Descartes develops the idea of the soul-body union further in his correspondence with Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia by distinguishing between three different objects of knowledge and three different ways of knowing of these objects: mind as pure thinking, body as extended matter, and the mind-body union. He explains to Elisabeth that mind as pure thinking is known by the intellect alone whereas body as extended matter is best known by intellect aided by imagination. So, it is the faculties of intellect and imagination that provide us with knowledge of the two substances and their essential attributes. But in order to know the mind-body union, Descartes argues, we need to interrupt our intellectual studies and suspend also our imaginative activities and pay close attention merely to our sensations: “[W]hat belongs to the union of soul and body is known only obscurely by the intellect alone or even by the intellect aided by the imagination, but it is known very clearly by the senses” (Descartes 1996: vol. 3, 691).

This means that the source of the wisdom that concerns the mind-body union (or compound) is in the sensations, perceptions, and emotions that are part of our everyday dealings with the world and with others. On the basis of this insight, Descartes gave Elisabeth the following guidelines:

Metaphysical thoughts, which exercise the pure intellect, help to familiarize us with the notion of the soul; and the study of mathematics, which exercises mainly imagination in the consideration of shapes and motions, accustoms us to form very distinct notions of body. But it is the ordinary course of life and conversation, and abstention from meditations and from the study of things which exercise imagination, that teaches us how to conceive the union of the soul and the body. (Descartes 1996: vol. 3, 692)

Elisabeth was intrigued by Descartes' notion of the soul-body compound but not satisfied by his dual characterization of the relation between soul and body, and thus she asked for further explanations. Recent work in feminist history of philosophy has demonstrated that Elisabeth's persistent questions lead Descartes to modify and develop his account of the mind-body duality (Shapiro 2013, Bos 2010, Shapiro 2002, Tollefsen 1999, Alanen 2003). Elisabeth challenged Descartes by asking him to explain in detail how his definitions of mind and body as separate substances allow him to form any reasonable notion of the mind-body interaction, let alone a theory of intermingling:

I beseech you tell me how the soul of man (since it is but a thinking substance) can determine the spirits of the body to produce voluntary actions. For it seems every determination of movement happens from an impulsion of the thing moved, according to the manner in which it is pushed by that which moves it, or else, depends on the qualification and figure of the superficies of this latter. Contact is required for the first two conditions, and extension for the third. You entirely exclude extension from your notion of the soul, and contact seems to me incompatible with an immaterial thing.  
(Elisabeth to Descartes May 16 and June 20, 1643, Descartes 1996: vol. 3, 661)

Descartes answered Elisabeth, but his explications did not convince her. She required more clarifications and more distinctions, and their philosophical discourse continued and developed further. Eventually the exchange covered several topics, metaphysical as well as ethical, and ranged from mind-body interaction to the nature of the passions, and further to Stoic philosophical therapy and its efficiency in emotional distress, sadness, and desperation. Later Descartes dedicated his works, the *Principles of Philosophy* of 1644 and the *Passions of the Soul* of 1649, to Elisabeth, since her direct questions and ingenious counterarguments helped him clarify his early position and develop it farther by theorizing the receptive powers of the human mind: that is, sensation, perception, and emotion.

## 2. Contemporary Alternatives

Descartes devised a partial solution to the problem of the mind-body interaction by introducing a theory of the so-called animal spirits (*spiritus animalis*). These were very small hypothetical movements of matter, “very fine air or wind.” According to him these caused images on the surface of the pineal gland which in their turn caused sensory perceptions as we experience them (the pineal gland is a tiny organ in the center of the brain; Descartes thought that it is the part of the body that is in the most direct contact with the soul). Thus extended substance and thinking substance could interact thanks to the mediating operations of the animal spirits.

Since Descartes’ time, the psychological and physiological sciences have taken enormous steps, and today they can explain multiple phenomena of human behavior. Despite these advances, the philosophical problem of interaction lingers. To be sure, we have abandoned the Cartesian notion of animal spirits as unsubstantiated. But the theoretical task of mediating between the extended and non-extended realms still remains, and is undertaken by new candidates. Neurons are the most recent theoretical entities that are supposed to handle the connection between the two realms of being. They are said to “convert” or “interpret” the quantifiable physiological processes of our bodies into the qualitative “form” that is familiar to us from experience (e.g. Marchese 2015). However, philosophically and conceptually the idea of the neuron *as converter or translator* is no more satisfying than the idea of animal spirits. Both ideas retain the duality of two distinct realms of being, the material and the experiential (or the quantifiable and the qualitative), and simply theorize a kind of unit that is capable of operating in both realms.

Frustrated by the re-emergence of such problems, contemporary philosophers have developed metaphysical alternatives to dualism and suggested strategies that do away with the

problems of interaction altogether. These include reductivism, eliminativism, epiphenomenalism, emergentism, supervenience physicalism, token identity theories, and functionalism. These all build on the modern naturalistic doctrine according to which the natural sciences – or physics that provides the grounds and the methodological model for these sciences – ultimately determine or confine what there is or what being fundamentally involves. According to this paradigm, each being is either itself physical, belonging to the unified totality of physical nature, or a variable dependent on the physical, and thus at best a secondary “parallel accompaniment” (Husserl 1965, 32/169). Most of these approaches allow multiple explanatory concepts – functional, structural, and syntactic, for example – but all demand that the explanatory strategies of psychology accord with physicalism. Within this modern paradigm, the human person is conceived as a two-layered reality, a compound system, in which a material – biological, biochemical, chemical, and physical – basis provides the foundation for the emergence of psychic and mental features. So, understood, psychic and mental features are not properties of any types of immaterial entities – souls or spirits – but are properties of immensely complex physical systems.

The formation of the higher levels of the psyche is framed as a causal-functional process in these naturalistic theories (see, e.g., Haslanger 2012: 210, Scheman 2000). Usually it is not assumed to be a monocausal, purely organic process but is understood as involving both internal organic and external environmental causes. Environmental factors are seen as influencing the development of psychic features and structures, together with inborn organic factors.

Some feminist philosophers are committed to naturalism or physicalism because of their basic philosophical commitments and interests (Anthony 2007, 2005, Hankinson Nelson and Nelson 2003, Hankinson Nelson 1990). These philosophers have to find ways of explaining the macro-level phenomena that are crucial to the feminist project without



compromising the principles of naturalism or physicalism. This does not demand explanations in terms of physical concepts, but explanations that are in agreement with physicalism or do not conflict with it. The most central of these macro-level phenomena is gender, i.e. the difference between women and men. Sally Haslanger offers a naturalistic analysis of gender, compatible with most physicalistic approaches (those articulated by the concepts of supervenience). Haslanger argues that the biological categories of female and male are natural kinds, composed of objective things with a physical undercurrent. In contrast, the categories of man and woman are positions of subjection and dominance that such entities may occupy in contingent constellations of force and power. If all such constellations were resolved exhaustively, thoroughly and permanently, then there would no longer be women or men (Haslanger 2000a: 11–12, 2000b; see also Haslanger 2005: 122–124; cf. Paanala 2005).

Other feminists have challenged the paradigm of modern naturalism and physicalism and offered alternative analyses of the concepts of gender. Some have developed neo-Aristotelian solutions (e.g. Witt 2003, Nussbaum 2000, 1999, Witt 1998). Others have resorted to Wittgensteinian arguments about the multifunctional character of our mental and experiential concepts (e.g. Scheman 2000).

There is also a growing interest within feminist philosophy in the novel ontological approaches that can be loosely classified under the title “new materialism” or “neo-materialism”. These approaches are “new” in the sense that they reject the idea of substance characteristic of classical materialism and build their ontologies on dynamic processes, unpredicted events, and conflicting forces with analogous intensities. They are not naturalistic or physicalistic in the sense discussed above, since they do not relinquish to the natural sciences the ultimate word on what there is, but rather argue for materialism or monism on independent metaphysical grounds – Whiteheadian, Bergsonian, Hegelian, or Spinozist (e.g.

Malabou and Johnston 2013; Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012, Malabou 2011, Malabou and Butler 2011, Grosz 2004, Braidotti 2002, Grosz 1994).

Phenomenological philosophy diverges from all these approaches in building on the epistemological Cartesian insight that it is crucial to keep distinct two different ways of studying human bodies. One type of investigation proceeds under the guidance of the intellect and imagination and the other is informed by sensations, perceptions, and emotions – and we are not to explain one of these in terms of the other. The French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the irreducibility of these epistemic alternatives and argues for a pluralistic understanding of bodily being:

Thus experience of one's own body runs counter to the reflective procedure which detaches subject and object from each other, and which gives us only the thought about the body, or the body as an idea, and not the experience of the body or the body in reality. Descartes was well aware of this, since a famous letter of his to Elizabeth draws the distinction between the body as it is conceived through use in living and the body as it is conceived by the understanding. (Merleau-Ponty 1995: 231)

In the next sections, we will introduce some basic concepts of phenomenology since this philosophy offers a powerful way of understanding the body, not just as an object of natural scientific knowledge, nor as an topic of metaphysics, but also as a source of meaning and subject of intending. This alternative has proven fruitful in the study of the multiple differences between men and women as well as the differences between sexed and non-sexed ways of being human.

### **3. Phenomenology of Human Embodiment**

Phenomenology is a philosophy of experience. It studies human experiences in their qualitative richness, with the aim of clearly distinguishing between different forms of

experiencing and identifying their subjective and objective components and the points of correlation between the subjective and the objective. In this context, the term “subjective” does not refer to any inner realm of private states or processes or to the mere qualitative aspects of our immanent lives but refers to the ways in which external (and internal) objects are given to us.

The objects experienced come in different sorts: some are material things but others are ideal items, such as numbers and functions; yet others are sources and carriers of meaning, such as tools, novels, theories, and persons. Also, the types of experiences that give us objects are multiple and various. They may be emotional experiences, such as shame, love, and resentment, but they may also be cognitive experiences of believing, knowing, arguing, and criticizing, or practical experiences of projecting goals and determining means. Both individual and collective experiences need to be investigated as well as familiar experiences and historically or culturally distant forms of experiencing.

The aim is not to survey the details of individual experiences or to generalize over them in order to construct a theory of experiencing. Rather, the phenomenologist works on concrete human experiences, and compares and analyzes their features in order to illuminate their necessary structures and forms of change and development. The most important of these structures are temporality and intentionality or directedness:

All our experiences flow in time. They pile one upon another and motivate one another, forming complex temporal wholes that can be described and analyzed by the phenomenological concepts of sedimentation and habituation (on the concept of habituation, see, Moran 2011). On the other hand, all experiences are also directed at objects; and the experienced objects characteristic of human lives come in many different types. We attend to and focus on not only things but also values and goals; and we are interested not just in states of affairs and facts but also in persons, organizations, institutions, and comprehensive

histories of such complex objects. All these different types and kinds of objects must be carefully described, and at the same time their relations of dependency must be clarified (on the concept of intentionality, see, Drummond 2003).

Among the pivotal objects of our experience is the human body. We can call the human body a “core object” since it has a central role in our lives both as an experienced object and as an experiencing subject. Most if not all objects of interest relate to human bodies in one way or another and, on the other hand, it is through our own sensing, perceiving, and desiring bodies that we can relate to things and events in the first place. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir formulates this idea by writing that our body is “our grasp upon the world and the outline of our projects” (Beauvoir [1949] (1991), 66). But she then argues that traditional philosophical discussions of human bodies are dominated by an androcentric bias that leads us to interpret phenomena characteristic of femininity or femaleness as derivatives of masculinity or maleness. In Beauvoir’s account, this is a fundamental mistake: human embodiment is not a unitary or homogenous phenomenon but involves two main variations – the feminine-female and the masculine-male.

In order to describe and analyze this duality, Beauvoir resorted to phenomenology of embodiment developed by the German phenomenologist Edmund Husserl in the 1920s. While studying the experiential grounds of spatial things and spatiality, Husserl had developed a powerful set of conceptual tools that account for the different ways in which living bodies are given to us in experience (see Husserl 1993, 1988; cf. Heinämaa 2011). Beauvoir and her philosophical colleagues, Emmanuel Lévinas, Jean-Paul Sartre (1956), and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1995), applied these concepts to a whole new set of phenomena and complemented Husserl’s studies with analyses of affective, sexual, and erotic bodily relations.

Thanks to this groundwork, contemporary phenomenology contains a powerful toolkit for the examination of the various aspects of human embodiment. In this framework, several

different meanings of the human body and embodiment can be distinguished, and the relations between these different meanings can be clearly defined. The human body is not assimilated to a living organism or biomechanical system. Rather the human body is conceptualized in a number of different ways depending on the evaluative, practical, and cognitive aspects of the situation in which it is grasped: thing and mechanism, to be sure, but also tool, expression, sediment, trace, and dwelling (general introductions to feminist phenomenology include Fisher, Stoller and Vasterling (eds.) 2005, Heinämaa 2003, Fisher and Embree (eds.) 2000).

The traditional oppositions of mind/body and culture/nature can be avoided, since all phenomena – mental and bodily, cultural and natural – are studied under their subjective and objective aspects and under the correlation between the subjective and the objective. Instead of two separate realms of reality, the mental and the material, we discover a variety of phenomena with intentional as well as sensible determinants. The human body is not merely grasped as a material thing, a bio-mechanism, or an information-processor, but is also understood as our fundamental way of relating to the material world and worldly objects. The human mind is not a self-enclosed pure spirit or a mere epiphenomenon on top of material reality, but is a power that is necessarily expressed in bodily gestures and corporeally related to other “embodied minds” or “minded bodies.” Nature is not just an object of the physical sciences but is also the common field for all perceiving, moving, and acting bodies, human and animal.

Unlike the traditional concepts of mind and body, the phenomenological concepts of consciousness and intentional objectivity imply one another. Intentional consciousness is always consciousness *of something*, and the intended objectivity is always valid *for someone*. Beauvoir captures this mutual dependency of subjectivity and objectivity by writing: “It is impossible to define an object in cutting it off from the subject through and for which it is

object; and the subject reveals itself only through the objects in which it is engaged”

(Beauvoir [1945] 2004: 159–160).

This means that all bodily experiences and phenomena involve both subjective and objective factors. By differentiating between their types and forms, we can disclose several aspects and layers of human embodiment. Most importantly, distinctions between different ways of *being* a body, of *having* a body, and *transforming* as a body allow us to analyze problems central to feminist and post-feminist theory and politics. These include phenomena as diverse as pregnancy, physical work and artistic expression, cosmetics and body transplants, eating disorders, sexual pleasure and violence, and transsexuality. The next sections discuss more closely some of these phenomena in the framework of contemporary phenomenology.

#### **4. Bodies as Instruments and Expressions**

When human and animal bodies are studied by the experimental and mathematical methods of modern natural sciences – in medicine, physiology, and zoology for example – they are thematized as *complicated mechanisms*. They appear as individuals belonging to biological species, as biochemical structures, or as information systems. These causal-functional categories are necessary for the natural scientific theoretization of bodily relations and behaviors but they do not exhaust the senses of human embodiment. Several other senses are essential to and central in our conscious lives.

In everyday practical contexts, our own bodies and those of other humans and animals appear to us primarily as means of perception and manipulation of material things. I roll the ball towards a child who sits on the floor opposite to me, and when the ball comes into her reach, the child catches it with her fingers. I can do this because I see the child’s fingers as potential means of controlling environing things and their movements. I do not have to infer

or reason that the child's body involves such manipulative means. I immediately see her body as orienting and controlling its environment in a peculiar manner common to all humans (or primates).

The simple example of the child and the ball captures the main idea, but the phenomenon proves more complex in most practical situations involving co-operative, communicative, and historical factors. For example, when a woman in labor is asked to "hold back" and "push," she is asked to use her body as means for the delivery of the child. But her reaction to such instructions depends on the specific condition of her body, on her personal history, and on the social-cultural practices in which she participates. When soldiers are commanded "Left shoulder, ARMS!," they are attended to as functionaries ready to manipulate their weapons with their bodies. But their promptness of obeying the command depends on the situation in which they operate, on its social and historical boundaries, and on their personal relations to this situation.

The practical framing of the human body involves variations that are crucial to feminist theory and politics. In "Throwing Like a Girl," the American phenomenologist and critical theorist Iris Marion Young draws attention to the fact that women's relations to their own bodies as means of practical governing are delimited and compromised by their training and education. And even before entering such institutional settings, their bodily capacities and dispositions are shaped and molded by the positive and negative reactions of their elders and their peers (Young 1990, cf. Chisholm 2008). By combining critical-theoretical and phenomenological insights, Young argues that environmental social-historical conditions of experiencing shape us as motor agents and as bodily subjects. Further she suggests that this in turn affects our possibilities of governing our spatial environment. Thus, a vicious circle is established in the formation of types of experiences and conditions of experiencing. The

concepts of sedimentation and habitation allow a purely phenomenological account of such processes (for these concepts, see Jacobs 2016, Heinämaa 2014b, Jacobs 2014, 2013).

In addition to operating as our means of manipulating things and governing space our bodies also serve other practical purposes. Vitality, and symbolically, the most important of these is the function of housing and sheltering another living being attributed to female bodies in pregnancy. The topic of pregnancy is widely discussed in feminist philosophy and its multifaceted nature is illuminated by bio-ethical, historical, social-scientific, and critical-political inquiries (e.g. Labouvie 1998, Martin 1987). Feminist phenomenologists have contributed to this discussion by analyzing the experiential structures of pregnancy and childbirth. Their inquiries show how social and practical significances intertwine with deeply emotive, vital, sensory, and subliminal forms of experiencing (Heinämaa 2014a, Young 1990, cf. LaChance 2014, LaChance and Lundquist 2012, Gahlings 2006).

It is important to emphasize that the experiential fact that our bodies are given to us as our means of manipulating things also involves the possibility of treating the bodies of all living beings, other bodies as well as our own bodies, as mere material things. In other words, we can “objectify” living experiencing bodies, and we do this for many different purposes. Some of these purposes are violent, alienating, and exclusionary, while others are beneficial, empowering, and consolidating (cf. Morris 1999, Haslanger 1993). Examples range from pornography, torture, and sadism to physical therapy and play.

For political reasons, feminist philosophers have mainly discussed the negative senses of objectification (Papadaki 2014, cf. Nussbaum 1995). By combining phenomenological, pragmatic, and critical-theoretical perspectives, Susan Bordo for example argues that in modern societies women are urged and forced to treat their bodies primarily as aesthetic and economic objects and to neglect the practical and vital significance of their corporeality. In Bordo’s analysis, this inflicts distortions on the body-images of young women and leads to



increase of eating disorders, bulimia and anorexia (Bordo 1993). Dorothea Legrand has questioned this explanatory paradigm by resorting to the phenomenological theory of bodily intersubjectivity or intercorporeality. Legrad argues that eating disorders should not be merely interpreted in terms of social-historical conditioning but must also be understood as special forms of exchange in which the victim is not a passive recipient but a communicating agent. Her analyses show that food, eating, and the body operate in anorexia as means of transmitting emotional desires to others lacking in sensitivity and responsiveness (Legrand and Briend 2014). In this understanding, anorectic starvation would not be a neglect of one's own practical-vital body but would rather be an attempt at communication in an extreme social-emotional setting.

Legrand's analysis demonstrates that the concepts of objectification do not merely describe situations in which human or animal bodies are subjected to external ends that harm them. Rather living beings are able to treat their own bodies as objects of different sorts and they do so in order pursue their values and to promote their ends. This means that the concepts of objectification as such are ethically and politically neutral and allow us to analyze several different types of corporeal and intercorporeal relations, both harmful and beneficial (cf. Slatman 2014, Weiss 2009, 1999).

A well-known example is provided by Jean-Paul Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* of 1943. Sartre describes a situation in which a young woman avoids the advances of a male companion by systematically neglecting the sexual significance of his words. When the man takes her hand, the woman changes her relation to her own body in a complex way in order to delimit the sexual meanings of this bodily gesture. Instead of identifying with her hand, she distances herself from it and acts as if the hand were just another thing lying on the table: "the hand rests inert between the warm hands of her companion – neither consenting nor resisting – a thing" (Sartre 1956: 97; translation modified).

Sartre studies this example while developing his theory of self-deception (bad faith) as a structure of human existence. Several feminist commentators have problematized Sartre's choice of examples and argued that they betray an androcentric or "heterosexist" bias (e.g. Le Dœuff 2007; Barnes 1999; Hoagland 1999). Simone de Beauvoir already argued in *The Second Sex* that Sartre's analysis starts from a simple opposition between attraction and repulsion that dominates Freudian approaches to sexuality. She claimed that such concepts can not account for the complex character of feminine desire nor for the variety of human sexuality (Beauvoir 1993: 92/81, cf. Heinämaa 2006).

Despite these problems, Sartre's analysis illuminates the experiential fact that we can relate to our bodies in several different ways, and can intend our bodies both as mere things and as our necessary means of having things at the same time.

Sartre's case study also allows us to highlight the fact that in many communicative contexts, the practical articulation of human bodies makes way for expressive intentionality, which renders human bodies into expressive vehicles of meaningful gestures. The caressing hand of the lover does not merely appear as a tool for the manipulation of things but is given as an expression of his or her desire.

Erotic situations in general frame human bodies as expressions of desire, passion, and pleasure. The face, the hands, the genitals, and the whole body of the desiring person indicate the presence of his or her passion and express or manifest its particular form. The ecstatic face is not given to us as a goal or a means to a goal, but appears as a manifestation of delight or *jouissance* that grows with each turn in the expressive exchange. If we characterize emotional expressions as means that serve predetermined ends, then we subject the phenomenon to inadequate concepts and neglect its specific structure and dynamism. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir argues that the confusion of erotic intentionality with practical intentionality has led to a neglect of feminine eroticism and its specific character. Lure Irigaray builds on this

insight in her *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, and argues that preoccupation with the goals of reproduction blinds us to the true generativity of corporeal love that happens between the sexes:

[L]ove can be the motor of becoming, allowing both the one and the other to grow. For such love each must keep their bodies autonomous. The one should not be the source of the other nor the other of the one. Two lives should embrace and fertilize each other, without either being a fixed goal for the other. (Irigaray 1993, 28)

## 5. A Critique of Absolutism

In light of the phenomenological analysis of embodiment, the natural scientific concepts of organism and bio-mechanism prove insufficient for feminist philosophy. They only capture human bodies as components of causal-functional nexuses and thus overlook broad areas of human experience in which bodies appear as motivational, purposeful, and expressive. These latter types of relations are not reducible to causal relations, because their relata – the motivating and the motivated, the intended and the intending, and the expressed and the expressive – are mutually dependent and are not separable parts of a fixed whole. Human bodies are not merely nodes in chains of causal-functional relations but are also expressive units tied to other expressive units by internal relations of sense, motivation, and communication. By definition, the natural scientific concepts of organism and bio-mechanism do not capture such bodily relations.

It is no use to add psychic or psycho-social systems of significance on top of a body defined in purely causal-mechanical terms. Such an addition may present the body as invested with individual and communal significations and meanings, but it does not help us to capture the sense-forming aspects of embodiment or the body as a *source* of meaning. More precisely,

the idea of cultural and social construction of meaning does not contribute to philosophical understanding of the experiential foundations of the psycho-physical compound.

Husserl's phenomenology of embodiment provides a philosophical analysis of the psycho-physical articulation of human embodiment, its grounds and its limits. In addition, it includes strong arguments that question the ontological and methodological primacy of the biomechanical understanding of the living body and demonstrate its dependency on practical and expressive bodies. I have explicated these arguments in previous works (Heinämaa 2003, 2011). For present purposes, it suffices to point out that Husserl's main strategy is to question the internal consistency of the naturalistic project and to argue that, in order to promote his philosophy, the naturalist has to presuppose in practice what his doctrine denies in theory, i.e. the ideality of reason (e.g. Husserl 1965, 31/169).

Even if one could not accept this argument about the conditions of human reasoning, the conceptual innovations that Husserl made to distinguish different ways of intending living bodies have proven beneficial to feminist philosophy in several topical areas of study. An adequate account of human embodiment must not confuse the alternative ways in which we intend living bodies, or slide from one sense of embodiment to another without an explicit account of their relations. Keeping these senses distinct allows us study and critically discuss the co-existence of human beings as women and men, and not just as female and male animals.

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