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# **Phenomenological Understanding of Embodiedness**

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## 1. Preliminary remarks

### 1.1 The concept ,phenomenology'

As Heidegger notices in 'Sein und Zeit' "phenomenology" is neither to be understood as "standpoint" nor as "direction" (GA 2, 37). "The expression 'phenomenology' means above all a term of method. It doesn't characterize the essential content what of the philosophical investigation but the how of these" (GA 2, 37). The accent lies on how - how something comes into our view, how it shows itself, i.e. how it can become a phenomenon. If it is said 'phenomenology' means primarily a term of method, method doesn't mean what generally is understood by it, the scientific procedure, but the access to an object-area, the way of access according to which a thing may appear. The expression 'method' refers to the correspondence which prevails between the access and the way a thing shows itself. In spite of all the other differences between phenomenologists they do agree about "the correlation of the way of access ('logos') and objects ('phenomenon') and the world as the basis of this correlation" (Vetter 2004, 411). The scientific procedure presupposes the method in the sense of the access to the topic. It is the method understood as such, deciding about the way of a scientific procedure and not vice versa.

There are different ways of approach, covering up a matter and those ways that make it appear. The word 'phenomenology' contains thereupon a request. "The title 'phenomenology' expresses a maxim which may then be formulated: 'to the things themselves!' – in contrary to all the freely suspended constructions, at random findings, in contrary to the adoption of apparently settled terms, in contrary to pseudo questions spreading very often as 'problems' through generations" (GA 2, 37) The mentioned maxim seems to be obvious, but it is not. This nonsense to claim that phenomenology is only depicting what is there anyhow can unfortunately still be met. That's out of the question. For 'the things themselves' are in no case openly there, they have to be made apparent and

freed from unproved constructions. The title 'phenomenology' implies a warding off, "a prohibitive sense: keeping away any unproved determination" (GA 2, 47) Thus warding off is by no means easy. We only have to think of the predominant inclination of people in the age of science, the inclination to forget the self-evidence of practical life or to consider it irrelevant and to understand oneself from the point of what a human being is not. The human being of the scientific age loves to speak in technical categories about himself and his kind and rather believes to be a highly complicated machine than a human being. The question what is in the case of the human body 'the thing itself' is only apparently trivial.

### **1.2 'Lived body' and 'physical body'**

In German there exist the two words 'Leib' and 'Körper'. 'Körper' a loanword of Latin 'corpus', which means in the first place the naturally existing material thing. It may, however, mean the living as well as the nonliving thing. Therefore 'body' means on the one hand just the 'only body', the 'body thing', on the other hand we may also talk about an animal's body or a human body. In this case an animal or a human being are considered as merely bodily, which presupposes to abstract from the animal's or the human way of being. The German word 'Leib', intended in its original, today hardly realized meaning as much as 'life', refers usually only to the human being. In English the difference is often referred to as 'physical body'/'lived body' as mentioned above.

'Physical body' and 'lived body' determine different points of view or – speaking phenomenologically – 'attitudes', according to which 'lived body' can be specified. We talk here about a scientific objectification. We are only able to objectify the lived body scientifically because we are already moving within an understanding of the lived body before any science. If the medical doctor didn't know already before any medical science owing to his own

understanding of his lived body what is meant with 'lived body', he would not have anything that he could his medical scientific statement refer to. Undoubtedly: Our understanding of the lived body, in which we move around in our daily life, has already always been interpreted in a certain way. It is interspersed by scientific conceptions, philosophical terminology, religious thoughts, but our lifeworld understanding of the lived body exceeds all these interpretations in a certain way. Otherwise these interpretations couldn't be questioned. The lifeworld understanding of the lived body is not only object of interpretations but at the same time it is also the authority of its critical questioning.

Of course: What is known is not yet recognized, a preliminary understanding is not yet a conceptual knowledge. Can we thereupon conclude that the preliminary understanding is the preliminary stage to conceptual knowledge, which has to be left behind? In our case, is the conceptual knowledge identical with the medical knowledge? Does medicine administer the appropriate understanding of the lived body? This depends obviously on how medicine understands itself, what medicine understands with academic science, which model of the lived body is relevant. Phenomenology answers here cautiously by pointing to the correct approach to the question: "The problem of the lived body is in the first place a problem of method" (Zoll. SE,122).

## **2. The approach to a phenomenological understanding of the lived body**

### **2.1 The problem of the lived body as a problem of method**

The statement, the problem of the lived body is in the first place a problem of method, a problem of primary access to the matter is saying: It depends on the way of access as what the lived body can show itself and accordingly can be determined – e.g. in the physical way as a body thing or biologically as organism. As everybody knows from this scientific point of view the knowledge

has been won, to which we owe the modern so-called western medicine – however also its problematic side effects. Now successes may also confirm the correctness of statements, but they cannot say anything about the derivation of the leading concepts under which these statements have been won. The successes must not make us oversee that the scientific objectification lives from the abstraction and depends on the preconditions which lie outside of the scientific reach. If e.g. the lived body is determined as organism, the question arises where does the leading concept ‘organism’ come from – on the way of a medical investigation it can really not be found because there it is already required. And furthermore the question what is the lived body as lived body is neither put nor answered with the determination of the lived body as a body thing or an organism.

This question is unavoidable and has an explosive effect if we think that leading concepts like ‘body’ or ‘organism’ can only be won because of our lifeworld understanding of the lived body. We must abstract from some dimensions of the lived body in order to be able to form concepts such as ‘body’ or ‘organism’, and we must dismiss ourselves as lived body beings so that the lived body may present itself as scientific object. The way leads from the understanding of the lived body to the concepts of the organism, not the other way round. Something similar is true of the concept of nature. As lived body beings we human beings are natural beings. However, what ‘nature’ means in this context is not yet answered regarding the scientific disciplines. Physics and biology are to do with scientific nature and not with natural nature. The access to nature as nature leads from the lived body as lived body. Therefore it means “talking about the human being as a lived body being <...> at the same time talking about nature” (Waldenfels 2000, 88).

## **2.2 Phenomenology of the lived body as hermeneutics of genuine lived body's experience**

A phenomenology of the lived body cannot start with an objectification of the lived body, but must begin further down. It must begin at the very point of making it possible. According to the maxim 'to the things themselves' above all the lived body as lived body – and not as anything else – must be taken into account. A phenomenology of the lived body has to go back to the genuine, i.e. lifeworld experience of the lived body and interpret it conceptually. This means taking this experience seriously and constantly binding back to it. Taking it seriously - because there is a tendency to use lifeworld experience only as a jumping off place for constructions instead of getting involved into it. And it asks for binding back, because only in it a conceptuality adequate to the experience can be found.

We make the genuine experience of the lived body when we meet as human beings and relate to one another as such. Only a personal attitude allows us to experience the lived body as lived body – and not as something different. (Husserl says in it the lived body is not given as a body thing but as a functioning lived body). Therefore the highest forms of personal behaviour are also the highest forms of the lived body's experience and vice versa. "Namely all the experience shows that the lived body disappears strangely into complete ignorance just in that moment when a human being exists in an especially characteristic and extremely human way <...> In such truly human behaviour the lived body qua body-thing is not here anymore for the acting person" (Boss 1975, 273).

That being the case, an adequate concept of the lived body depends upon a corresponding concept of the human being. And this concept means "Being-in-the-world". This is (at the latest since Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*) the

usual phenomenological short form. With 'Being-in-the-world' the original relational way of being of the human being is stressed. This means that the relation to oneself happens as relation to the other one, that the presence of oneself happens as strange presence, that the human being is essentially one's fellow-man— each of us is son or daughter of his/her parents – human being is from the beginning being-with. 'Being-in-the- world' means 'open to the world'. And since the human being is a lived body being understanding of the lived body and understanding of the world are inseparable. The phenomenological aspect stresses that the lived body will disappear as lived body in the moment, we forget our openness to the world. Thus M.Boss says that the basic lived body condition of the human being can only be understood if one is able to see it in its "original and immediate belonging to the existential relation to the world" (Boss 1977, 58).

### **3. The two dimensions of the genuine lived body experience**

The genuine lived body experience shows among others two dimensions which can be reduced to the short forms 'I am my lived body' and 'I have my lived body'.

#### **3.1 Identity of self and lived body**

Who sees a lived body sees somebody. But we do not see a body thing and we have the problem if in it there is something like a heteropsychological I. If I see your face, I'll see directly you yourself, and if I hurt your lived body, I'll hurt you yourself - and not something different from you. Wherever I have got to do something with your lived body, I have got to do immediately and directly with you yourself. Your body – that are you yourself, and I myself am my body. 'I' doesn't mean anything mysterious (I, psyche, spirit), which is up to no good in a body, but 'I' means the speaker himself in the wholeness of his temporal existence.

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The lived body experience of our fellow human beings doesn't show any dichotomy between interior and exterior, of a bodily before and behind. When I look into your eyes I have neither got to do with a somatic exterior referring to a psychological interior nor is it necessary to have to conclude from a perceivable before to a nonperceivable behind. We rather see e.g. somebody's wrath. The corporal condition of the other one – his red skin, the frowning – is not a sign that refers to something different, to the effect of wrath lying behind, but the corporal condition of the other one is already the reality of his effective relation to the world, namely his wrath's itself.

We do not see any isolated solus ipse, but somebody in the relation to others and something different, somebody in the way as he allows himself to be approached by the things of the world. The other lived body – that is the other one in the way as he is referred to his fellow human beings, to the things, and in these relations to the common world. Your lived body is the respective way of your presence. Who sees a lived body does not see a body thing, but somebody, and who sees a corpse sees somebody who was.

This genuine lived body experience which we are able to make in our fellow humans' community will already be misinterpreted if we declare our own psychological conditions to be projected to a perceivable foreign body or to be empathized into it, or we conclude from corporal changes to a correlating psychological condition which is analogue to my own one. These misinterpretations see right away in the lived body a kind of lock to the other one. But our lifeworld experience does not proof this presumption. The lived body of the other one does not push between me and the presence of the other one so that this obstacle lying in between on the way of empathy or a projection



or an analogous conclusion would have to be overcome, but the lived body makes the other one present.

The phenomenological critique as to the mentioned theories is: These theories skip the original lived body experience and start from an incorrectly put question. First of all they insinuate that the fellow humans' existence is strange to us in difference to our own to which we have a privileged access, and that we reach the other one only by building a bridge to him. And secondly these theories move from the beginning in a dichotomy of psychological interior and corporal exterior without asking how this difference could have arisen. Phenomenologists insist instead that "without sufficient determination of the lived body phenomenon" it cannot be said "how it is at all with the difference of psyche and soma" (Zoll. SE, 121)

### **3.2. Difference between self and lived body**

The second dimension of the original lived body experience is indicated by the word 'mine'. I myself am not any kind of lived body but my body. In so far as I relate to my lived body and objectify it, intervene in it, train it, change and manipulate it, I may say I have my body. My lived body that is actually I myself, but in a way that my lived body stands in a difference to myself about which I can dispose on the one hand but which on the other hand concerns me.

I am my lived body by having it. This having does not mean a possession, not any kind of disposing. My lived body is not a vehicle or an instrument. I can put away an instrument but not my hand. Having our lived body enables us to possess things as well as to objectify the lived body. If I relate to my body, I certainly always relate to myself - but the fact that I can and must speak of my lived body shows that I am not identical with my lived body in a way that I am not anything different to my body. The attribution ("my body") is not done by

my lived body but by myself. And it is not my lived body that acts but I myself  
- that, however, always in my bodily presence.

Having a lived body implies being withdrawn from oneself – as the possibility shows to objectify the lived body to a body thing or an organism. As the objectification is by no means done by a subject free of the lived body but by a lived body being, by a concrete human being. It consists of a change of attitude which in its case is an enactment based in the lived body. The lived body belongs to the conditions of possibility of its objectification. The difference of ‘functioning’ und objectified lived body is never to be removed, because also the removing intention is an enactment based in the lived body. Therefore it could be said: “all the phenomenon of the existing human being are essential and because of that always: bodily” (Boss 1975 274).

The withdrawing from oneself manifests itself also in phenomenon like e.g. tiredness which rises within myself and comes over me or injuries which lead towards a partial inability of the functioning of my lived body and consequently impedes my relation to the world. My lived body is subject to natural laws and conditions I am not able to dispose of. Especially when ill the difference between my lived body and myself becomes conspicuous. During an illness something like an objectifying tendency of my lived body, in the face of which I am helpless, is becoming obvious, a tendency within myself turning against me. I am my lived body, but in a way that my lived body withdraws itself from me at the same time. However, since I am my lived body I am withdrawn from myself as soon as my lived body withdraws from myself. The “separation lies <...> within what we are ourselves, therefore we ourselves are torn apart there where our lived bodiness goes its own ways” (Welte 1965 89). Being withdrawn from your lived body means being withdrawn from oneself. “Having your lived body is at the same time a certain being possessed by it” (Haeffner 2000, 132).

#### **4. The lived body as an essential medium of an existence open to the world**

Our existence moves within the crossing of being a lived body and having a lived body. Because of this reason the lived body is phenomenologically determined as medium or essential medium of an existence open to the world.

“Our bodily existence shows itself only then in a pure and perfect state if it <...> is only medium, transition, there of what we are ourselves” (Welte 1965, 85). In a similar way Waldenfels says: The lived body is “medium of our relation to the world” (Waldenfels 2000, 210), “The lived body is the medium in which the world as such appears” (Waldenfels 2000, 249). B. Welte also uses the concept ‘essence medium’. All the lived body (and not single organs) is the essence medium of our existence open to the world. The lived body is essence medium, because I am my lived body, it is not separated from me, it is never in front of me like a body thing, because I see you when seeing your lived body. And it is essential medium because I have my lived body – and not my lived body, but I myself enact my Being-in-the-world. Therewith it must be considered that the lived body as a medium “differentiates itself from ourselves <...>, but does not lie independently at the side of our being <...>, that much better as a medium it is an immediate and essential element of our being ourselves” (Welte 1965, 85). Our Being-in-the-world is constituted in itself in a bodily way, it does not come from outside into a medium strange to itself, but it is “through itself a being-in in a medium <...> it comprises in itself its own medium. This is therefore itself and directly its own. Being oneself is in itself bodily” (Welte 1965, 86). (In this way Welte refuses the wrong perception that the lived body is something exterior to ourselves, and that an I-substance originally free of the lived body comes into a body thing.)

Other authors (like e.g. M. Boss) talk about an immediate belonging of my lived body to my being-in-the-world. The bodily existence of the human being can only be understood if we are able “to see it in its original and immediate

belonging to its existential relation to the world” (Boss 1977, 58). This immediate belonging is also named as ‘delivery’.<sup>1</sup> The relations to the world – of whatever kind, be them sane or ill – are delivered bodily.

Or we talk simply about ‘lived bodying’ of the human existing, of the human being-in-the-world. “From whatever side we try to approach the understanding of bodily existence of the human being it always becomes evident that the ‘lived bodying’ supposes the existing. This, the existing, is what ‘is lived bodying’ (Boss 1975, 284).

And what is true of the undisturbed lived bodying, namely to be a respective delivery of the being-in-the-world, is also true of the pathological lived body phenomenon (Boss 1977, 59). If the relation to the world is respectively enacted in bodily existence, pathological lived body phenomena announce pathologically limited relations to the world of the patient. The pathology of the lived body phenomenon does not in the first place want to be taken as dysfunction of the organic processes, but wants to be understood like before “as the ‘lived bodying’ of the – in its special way disturbed delivery – existential relations to what is coming up” (Boss 1977, 59), i.e. of such relations to the world, about which the human being cannot dispose in a free and norm conforming attitude.

The phenomenological determination of the lived body as a medium or essence medium of a world open existing moves on a level which lies before a monistic or dualistic interpretation of the human being. Already before hand it wants to avoid two things: On the one hand the difference which manifests itself in having-lived body should not be reduced in a monistic way to a difference of carrier and quality. (The monism confuses world openness of the human being to a system quality and asks us to understand ourselves as quality of something

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<sup>1</sup> The german word ‚Austrag‘, ‘austragen’ is difficult to translate. It means delivery, carry to term, bring into the world, give birth to.

that we are not.) On the other hand the experience of our lived body should not “before hand vanish in a difference of thinking and extended substance – or as we are used to say nowadays –of software and hardware” (Waldenfels 2000,22)

Naturally, with the phenomenological determination of the lived body the difficulties caused by our basic lived body condition do not vanish. A phenomenology of the lived body does not deliver an explanation of the ways of functioning of the lived body’s organs. That is exactly, as it had to be shown, completely impossible because of merely methodical reasons since an explanation is bound to the objectification, whereas a phenomenology of the lived body puts the question to what lies before and on the basis of every objectification. A phenomenology of the lived body is therefore never a competition to scientific explanations. It is, however, necessary to demonstrate which explanatory potential and which range those explanations have. If we want to answer this question appropriately we must have understood in a reflexive and conceptual way –and not anyhow – where from an objectification of the lived body had to have abstracted from the very beginning. Otherwise there is the danger that the human being identifies himself with a theoretical construction and explains himself away.

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