

The Somaesthetic Body and the Phenomenological Consciousness

Ulrik Winding Søberg

Abstract: *All human beings, regardless of geography, ethnicity or other ancestry, have always been born into a pre-existing world history. It is a world history that has countless stories, many of which deal with human nature, purpose and knowledge, and these themes have often been expounded through mythologies and pedagogical interpretations. Such interpretations of observations and phenomena of man have historically embedded themselves as generational exoteric transmission of constituent ideals of human life, including the view of human consciousness and body. Among the most significant narratives for human philosophy is the story of the body, as the body is the basis for our empirical anchoring in the world. Although man is something else and more than just body (consciousness/spirit), this is immaterial and have throughout history been immensely difficult to conceptualize. Therefore, man has taken detours to be able to speak of consciousness as an essential feature of being human, and one of the most frequently frequented detours has been the body. The visible body is a lot easier to sculpt than the invisible consciousness, why human cultures have often used the body as a representative marker of whatever values the culture in question has held important. With this impact on the concept of “human”, the body is always more than just a body and apparently divides man into body and consciousness. The body is with us across culture in all our activities, and with its decisive influence in human idea development and the creation of cultural habits, the body has a fundamental and all too often misinterpreted presence in every crevice of our society.*

Keywords: *Intentionality, Somaesthetics, Phenomenology, Emotions, Chinese philosophy.*

2. Extended Self (and Extended Agency)

The following article will describe fundamental idea-historical and philosophical-anthropological connections between body and consciousness and how they still form the basis of the concept of "man" today. The article will shed light on these connections and their influence on the view of human nature and knowledge up to the present day, and how this has led to a fundamental

exoteric interpretation of human knowledge dominated by a mental activity assigned primarily to consciousness and the body as secondary and as a container and instrument of the same consciousness. The same view of the body will be illustrated as conducive to a misinterpretation of human nature carried by an essentialism in which the senses of the body and the impulses of emotions are inherited evolutionary instincts. This has led to an incomplete perspective on being human in various decisive areas of society. Through analyses of ancient body perspectives, a Hellenistic and a philosophical Taoist, a methodical philosophical practical approach to being human will be outlined. It is a pre-modern approach that aims at a philosophical involvement of all modalities of the individual and it is a view on knowledge in which the body exist as a central somaesthetic fixation point and functions as an equal ideal for various virtues as cognition. These analyses will illuminate a dominating, decisive and reclusive embodied nuance of human knowledge and at the same time outline the potential for the place for body and emotion and their role in educational philosophical practice, as more than a tool for health and learning and more than a medium for the self to express itself through, but as crucial part of the foundation of human knowledge. By extension the body and emotions contribute as an underrated cornerstone of knowledge and exist as a natural path to exercise our experience of knowledge and thus contribute to a broader scope through which the concept of knowledge can be investigated.

Polarised Fundaments

“*A room without books is like a body without a soul.*” The quote is said to have been uttered by Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BC) the lawyer who with his role in the murder of Julius Caesar, sealed his own fate and lost his head and hands as a result. The quote brilliantly encapsulates how man throughout history has strived with ambition for a fixed point of knowledge from which relationships that exist between body and consciousness could be investigated and human culture has sculpted the concept of consciousness or spirit and the idea being human as more than just a body. To identify what we are talking about here, we can begin by establishing the premise of the origin of the concepts (Durkheim, Mauss 1963[1903], 11) and in this case the premise can be said to be that we exist as human beings by virtue of our body. The body is our empirical anchorage in the world, which is shown in, among other things, its services that are necessary for our practical interaction with the world. This allows us to not only sustain ourselves, but also to cultivate ourselves and our communities (society) and thereby create culture. In the words of Marcel Mauss (1872-1950), the body is man's first and most natural instrument (Mauss, 1973, 70-889).¹ For the same reason, the body has a larger and more significant role in establishing the ontology of the individual than it is awarded, because the body confirms that I exist in this physical world.

It is historical that soul becomes the normal expression of the emancipated personality; it was a significant shift in language when psyche went from meaning life in all its manifestations to signifying the soul as opposed to the body. (Grønbech, 1961, 4,41)

It is in the attempt to add this “something” to man as more than just a body that feels and senses, that substance is given to our known concept of consciousness or spirit/soul and can rightly be called a process of mental self-identification when the term “human being” refers to a reflexive subject, as the modern invention of man includes (Foucault, 2005, 364). In addition, this

¹ [10.1080/03085147300000003](https://doi.org/10.1080/03085147300000003)

marks the fact that our formative efforts with each other, from early man up to the present day have been the focal point of human culture. The body here can easily be predicated as *something*, as the body is the only thing about man that empirically exist, and it is after all easier to say something certain about the visible body than about the invisible consciousness (spirit). Our body is what we are and through its services we can sustain life, according to Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Because of this insistence, we must also pronounce and articulate the body and being human as more than just a body. We have primarily done so by articulating it as something in relation to something else, most often, consciousness (Shusterman, 245(3), (2008): 293-311).

Thus, the body has acquired a wide range of fields of significance for meaning in human culture and these meanings have had a decisive influence on our view of consciousness, body and human nature. Regardless of whether the body's teleology has been handed down by philosophy, religion, pedagogy, medicine, biology, sport, aesthetics, the art of war, sexology, etc., it has been cultivated and always imposed on an intention. These intentions are based on two existential polarizations; body and consciousness and are founded in an interpretation of good/evil extended into the view of humanity (Aristotle, 1997(1946), 1254b, 14f), where especially specific contradictions have carried the optics of human essence and knowledge into a normative current. Consciousness and language unmistakably belong together and through the division of human characteristics regarding natural opposites, the body ends up on the wrong side of good and evil. Since consciousness and language can easily be constituted, as they symbolize life (soul) and are not immediately up for debate, the body in our cultural circle thus acquires an underlying role as a something and the body must then historically see itself reduced to the tool of consciousness in our interpretations of human nature and knowledge (Høeg, Ræder, 1953, Timaios, 69-70a, p.87, Timaios, 86c, p.106f). Based on the prominent phenomena of the body, a number of exhaustive systems of contradictions about the universe, man and nature were developed, which are interpreted and continued from Plato (428-347 BC) and expressed in the doctrine of the threefold soul. Human life and thus the good life takes shape according to the Platonic words, as an exercise in cultivating and equipping the soul of reason so that it can supplement and support the constant operations of the soul of will to keep the operating soul at bay. This perspective on man is explained by contrasts, where logos (reason) is pure and untainted and soma (the body) with its eternal messages of calm/unrest and pleasure/displeasure is an eternal source of instability for the true and virtuous reason. With this, pure thought and reason are linked to the doctrine of virtue. Later, this human view is conveyed by Aristotle (385-323 BC) and man as a rational animal that finds pleasure in contemplation, which gives birth to a telos. This displacement from natural embodied oppositions embedded in normative value differences can also be seen in i.e., writings of Hippocrates' (460-370 BC) humoral pathology and reproductive doctrine (G.E.R Lloyd, 1984, 317ff), where contradictory mixing ratios between human fluids form the framework for countless scenarios of mood and personality, as well as healing and conception. The normative values interpreted and displaced within natural bodily properties are revealed precisely by the slave's recollection of knowledge and it is established that the slave already possessed reason. Reason was hidden in the slave's consciousness and only had to be nurtured a little before it came to the fore, and the aim is to dissolve the distinction between status and knowledge between slave and citizen and aim for all people to acquire genuine knowledge through cultivation.

Human culture is rarely something we as a species have planned for, but rather something we have developed into habits through a process of cultivation (Norbert, 1998, 8-9). Via especially our productive basis, we have shaped our society with these autonomous processes of cultural

habits and based on the opposition between body and soul, man is divided with the threefold soul into reason, will and drive, synonymous with insight and logic, decision and action and an irrational resistance and autonomous, animal, and unruly desire. Here both body and emotions land on the reviled side of human nature. Feelings and body are attributed to will and urges and with culture as a phenomenon that is never intended and executed, but instead happens by rudimentary volition and interpersonal mechanisms, culture is habits that govern human activity, and the course has been accordingly, a containment and controllability of the emotions and bodily mechanisms. Central to such a formative philosophy have been the emotions, which without sensible direction in this perspective remain disturbing influences on the embodied impulses and hence their disturbing influence on sensible actions. This is the mind's habit of thinking in terms of dichotomies. A habit that, with the interpretation of our Platonic legacy have imposed and internalised the ideas and philosophical concepts of this legacy, with convictions that it is the idea that leads the action and not the action that requires an idea, which we subsequently rationalise and scrutinise. Based on this mindset, the body and emotions change several times over the course of the history that has been handed down to us in western cultural circles. The idea of balance between body fluids is rejected and a mechanical and instrumentalist perspective gains ground. With the (in)famous cartesian dualism, body and consciousness transform into reason/unreason with the imperative of keeping the crazy passions from the doorstep of reason.² Concurrently the active-passive dualistic variant of Baruch Spinoza (1632-77) also influences the phenomenological legacy, culminating with the Freudian psychoanalysis. Like Plato's three-part soul, the impact of emotions on our embodied action can be surprising, but with the help of rationality they can be systematized, and we can thereby scrutinize them. Hereby the idea of man as a creature with cognition as its pinnacle is obvious. This error-in-apparatus model as a human view, where normatively deviant behaviour is considered a fault in the machinery (body or mind) has great success behind it, especially within pharmacology. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) bases his psychoanalysis on the same logic. From this, the theory of instinct or drive³ is designed, where consciousness is determined by the drives of the body and emotions in a dualistic life drive versus death drive. Through the main properties of the personality, the energetic interplay between psyche and soma exists, whereby the human drives are directed to specific pleasures and pleasure profiles. A cardinal point of this variant of the body-soul dichotomy is the legacy of Hellenistic dualism. In his understanding of the energetic interplay, Freud uses a hydraulic principle which is used in Hippocratic humoral pathology, and despite Freud and his more sophisticated system, the logocentric dualism in this variant cannot be overlooked. Unavoidably bound to the body are the senses and hence the emotions, and via various variants of dualistic interpretation of man, our sensuality and emotional life have often been viewed as something we humans have not had much control over. Therefore, they must be primitive evolutionarily inherited instinct impulses which are activated by trauma or "the unconscious" and have therefore led to a crippling of the consciousness(psyche). With the legacy of the Platonic and Cartesian view of human nature as the exoteric view of man, later misleadingly substantiated by Darwin (Barrett, 2018, 35, 158-9), human nature is interpreted as uncontrollable emotional impulses sitting in the brain and expressed through the irrationality of the body and the chaos of emotional life, which are harnessed by rationality. With this, the body and emotions and their importance for knowledge are relegated to a kind of subjective knowledge

² [doi:10.1017/CBO9780511805042.010](https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511805042.010)

³ Natural need that evokes a strong urge to satisfy it.

that quite dualistically stands in opposition to a justified logocentric objective knowledge⁴ and at the same time the body is reduced to a container for reason and emotions; in other words, mechanized and instrumentalized apparatus for optimization or mannequin for beautification and mental self-expression. Admittedly, the matter has been more nuanced and the interest in the relationship between body and soul has probably been more thorough than it was initially interpreted, but the perception of man as constituted by this rudimentary essentialism was what survived and remained standing for posterity.

Anti-rationality and emotional sentimentality - polarities

With the phenomenology of the 20th century, our interpretation of man as body and soul is reversed. Reason (the soul as synonymous with intellect and knowledge) loses its primacy and today body and emotions are cultivated in an anti-rationalist mentality and a polarization of body and consciousness is again evident. This shift begins with Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and with the concept of intentionality, consciousness as “awareness of something” cannot to be overlooked. Phenomenology does not aim to investigate the world in the usual scientific way; empirical, objective, and logical analysing. Rather, it seeks to reach under all these layers and observe the phenomena as they are, reformulating cognition to consist of subjective-objective tension. The aim of phenomenology is to encapsulate the phenomenon in its entirety and thereby intensify a more intuitive and immediate attention to the phenomenon. The body gains ground with Husserl, his break with Cartesian dualism, and his account of man as embodied and being more than body, which can be seen in the concepts of *Körper* and *Leib*. These two embodied modes through which man can perceive himself in the world and at the same time recognize the phenomena of the world are constitutive of our temporal sense of both the past and the future.⁵ Man as in a body and as having a body has the body in focus, but still serves primarily consciousness and an actual embodied philosophically methodically developed practice does not come of it. On the contrary, phenomenology ends up trying to investigate a consciousness-independent reality through that very same consciousness. With Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and his phenomenological reduction to being, the role of the body is again in service of consciousness since Heidegger himself cannot or will not reveal his perspective on the physicality of being (Heidegger, 2007, §23, 132). Later, Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) in *Being and Nothing* (1943) interprets human existence as a consciousness/soul/spirit, where the fleeting movement of consciousness from one moment is replaced by the next, thereby reinterpreting the body into bio-organic mechanics with essence. The body finds a bit more space as an independent player by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961). He aims to counter Sartre's philosophical objectification of man and has in his errand both to fix the body as a thought-provoking and thought-setting subject and at the same time deprive the Cartesian cogito of its central place. According to Merleau-Ponty, consciousness is not “I think that”, but rather “I can” and this verb belongs to the body. With this and his empirical basis, body and soul are turned around in the exoteric interpretation of human existence and meaning. The body is no longer something I have, but something I am and qua the interpretation of man as a body with essence (consciousness) I am a consciousness (essence) in an aggregate and modern phenomenology has not yet managed to break with the polarized heritage, which is now called “perception as perception about something” (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, 81), a variant of Parmenides

4 I.e., knowledge/imagination, fact/value, thought/emotions.

5 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11097-019-09610-z>

(Mejer, 1995, 15) and his “thinking is the thought of something”. With this, attempts to think body and mind together are primarily done as a service to consciousness or squeezed under the concepts of intuition (Marion, 2002, 81-104). Rather than a splicing of the two, a variant of the dualistic polarization is interpreted in the form of the anti-rational cultivation of body and emotions we know today from concepts such as “intelligence of emotions” and “the ninth insight”, as well as the pleasurable beautification and cultivation of the body we see in gyms and under the constricting sports and health paradigm, where genuine immersion and reflection in embodied activity disappear in favour of a more banal mental activity predominant in embodied practice (Dekkers, 2008, 309-12).

This shows the place of the body (and emotions), which retains the role of apparatus for the mind and is in our Western cultural circle representatively expressed by the late modern experience economy. The open opportunity of life and man to create noema⁶ can be found in experiences that “move you” and “makes a difference” for the subject, often accompanied by a rhetoric that can extend to formulating life beyond the banal everyday concepts.

Somaesthetic Cultivation

In the baggage of philosophical Taoism, an antique and fully developed somaesthetic contribution can be found in the descriptions of the harmony between two reciprocal transcendent polarities. According to philosophical Taoism knowledge is facilitated through cognition associated with a subjective bodily awareness. Being familiar with both one's own internal emotional patterns and own sentient flesh lays the ground for thinking, creativity and understanding. It highlights a concept of knowledge, which is subjective and emotional in context with rational objectifying cognition. That the body-emotion-mind in conjunction could calibrate and accommodate to the vicissitudes of the world's phenomena is thus considered to be true knowledge. Knowledge comes in philosophical Taoism by being capable of somatic and emotional heuristics in equal degree with objectifying cognition (such as language) and social interaction with outside influences, although cognition still has an essential place to fill in recognition. This is embedded in all aspects of philosophical Taoism and thus it is evident that the body's sensations and the emotions that come from these links man to nature. It is so, because it is from our senses that we, through our body can feel and experience the world and all its phenomena. With the sensations of the body follows the fact that we become aware of our sensations and thereby the distinctive feature, manifested by our perception of distance and time, appears as our conscious understanding. We will always understand the phenomenon without noticing that, via our bodily sense and emotions, already have recognised the phenomenon. The sensation we feel in the body appears prior to language and does not just give us access to an imperceptible experience of the world, but simultaneously a human way of achieving an understanding of the world and can be exemplified by pointing to aesthetics. Aesthetics is an embodied cultivation of our felt sensory experiences and it is natural for humans to imitate their sensations from the external world, because it arouses emotions that make us resonate with the aesthetic impression of the sensation. Common to all sensations is that we recognize them aesthetically prior to the objective logic of language shapes our conceptions and they contain unknown meanings that differ from the names we otherwise have for the sensation; names that otherwise give us meaning and familiarity with all the world's phenomena (Løgstrup, 1976, 9). A large part of a human life can be said to consist of this effort to make sense of the world and human historicity. Art allows us to delve into our sensations

⁶ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/noema>

by mediating sensory impressions into aesthetic expressions, so that we can reflect on their meaning. In aesthetic experience and activity, we acquire new layers of meaning and this can be seen in all human art (Løgstrup, 1976, 98-102). From a cognitive perspective, it can be said to be a central trait of being human (Løgstrup, 2008, 13). Such aesthetic expression can be found in the foundation of philosophical Taoism in lyrical writings such as Laozi, which lays ground for methodical somaesthetic practices. Hence one of the most prominent representations of this body-emotion-mind perspective on knowledge is the emphasis in philosophical Taoism on *somaesthetic movement arts* such as Tai Chi. Internal movement arts such as Tai chi are methodical evolved through centuries of research and are practiced with the single unified goal of obtaining a harmonising and not intrusive path to cultivating the body-emotion-mind collaboration via subjective processing and comprehension of emotions and body and the cognition that follows. The methodical somaesthetic curriculum in Taoist philosophy of non-intervention, as described in *Laozi*⁷, can find a Western philosophical resemblance in the negative upbringing and the formative plasticity of man. Neither in philosophical Taoism does non-intervention interpret as apathy. In the same way that negative pedagogy should not be interpreted as *laissez-faire* pedagogy and thus leave human learning and development to arbitrariness. The inheritance of negative pedagogy forms a framework of the human being in the form of embodiment as we are formed by “nature, our sociality and the things of the world” (Bloom, 1979, 38) and thereby we are inevitably bound to our environment and our body as natural organism. Philosophical Taoism provides a concept of embodiment, in which the splicing together of the mind’s discursive intentionality (cognition) and the body as sentient organism (somatic knowledge) provides optimal potential for knowledge and cultivation hereof. More concise formulated; our mind’s intentionality and the sensory saturation of body-emotion-mind processing and its essential participation in all aspects of perception and reasoning. The splicing of human understanding can provide a perspective on knowledge and learning as consisting of body, emotions, and mind. They are never separate and always independent and never in any fixed order or hierarchy. They act as the variety never detached from the whole, however, autonomous, and mutually influencing each other.

Body-Brain Knowledge (creation of emotion and meaning)

The automatic simulation of a world by the brain is caused by intrinsic brain and body activity and all basic feelings are derived from this *interoceptive* attendance and maintaining of the body’s inner life. Interoception are evolutionary evolved towards “economising” the resources of our body and the saturated flow of sensory stimuli from interoception continues from birth to death (Barrett, 2018, 58). The intrinsic activity is not only a budgeting of the body and mind’s potential, but give rise to all simulation such as daydreaming, imagination, etc. and it comes to fruition by the brain’s innate ability to make predictions. Through evolutionary efficiency the brain developed as a puzzle solving organ that merge fragments of new sensory input and experience to predict how every fragment concerns your current situation. The brains primary operation of collecting the fragments in coherent meaningful structures consists of prediction loops, where our mental model of the world continually is shaped and reconstructed, and its most vital predictive function is “body-budgeting” (Barrett, 2018, 66-67). Every emotion we consciously feel, are brought forth via brain-networks that attend to the economising of the human organism and are done so by the intrinsic continuous predictive regulation of the

⁷ In English known as Dao De Jing

organism towards maintaining homeostasis. Since human emotion appears to demonstrate that variety is the norm, despite of our habitual tendency to perceive emotions as intrinsic, any event that impact our inner body-budgeting will become personally *meaningful*. (Barrett, 2018, 70) This can be exemplified by our change of heart rate when someone important to our social situation i.e., our teacher passes by, and he or she might strike up conversation. The feelings we experience in general are derived from a range of basic emotions, called *affect* which are based in basic feelings of pleasantness/unpleasantness and calm/uneasy. This is a cardinal trait of the human experience of the world and us self as beings in it. As described affect are dependent on interoception, which does not mean that the chief function of interoception is to produce affect. It instigates our brain to search for past experiences with phenomena in the world and relate them to every introduced situation we must attend to. This generates *affective realism* where we imbue physical objects in oscillation between arousal and equanimity. This in effect means that we inherently attribute certain phenomena or other people positive or negative characteristics (Barrett, 2018, 75). For our brain this implies how the phenomena or person affects our body budgeting systems in correlation with our past experiences regarding the phenomena/person and its effect on our experiences of the world are tremendous. In fact, interoception has more merit than perception in recognition and as we believe that we are reacting with emotion to our perception we are constructing our perception. Thereby we are participating more in what we are experiencing than we believe we are. What we experience as feelings alters our perception of the world and thus rationality cannot prevail over or subdue emotion, because the condition of the body budget is the foundation of every thought and perception, we have (Barrett, 2018,81). In this, the stealthy and unnoticed brain and body collaboration gives soil to human perception, experience, and knowledge. The brain encodes concepts on categories of phenomena in the outside world. Our emotional concepts of “things worth knowing” can be categorised under various knowledge bookmarks such as, “things worth knowing concerning me” and “things worth knowing about the world in correlation to me in a particular context”⁸ etc. (Barrett, 2018, 87-88). The myriads of concepts can thus be considered our knowledge of the phenomena, and we construct the cognitive categories from this knowledge. This results in generation of a surrounding world from where everything of importance to us expresses itself and becomes visible to a being with a body like humans. This unconscious nuance of experience and understanding can be termed inherent meaning and inevitably interconnect the human species to its environment. This is especially manifested by somatic experiences and associated emotions in a developing phase. In particular, the somatic experiences are characterised by general vitality effects (Stern, 1985(2000), 54) which is referred to as intermodal perception. This marks the significance of the ability of young children to meaningfully experience processes of dawning “organizing of things” and the product of this organization can be termed as “the dawning self” (Johnson, 41).

The Key to understanding this early sense of an emerging self is its tie to bodily states and processes: The first such organization concerns the body: its coherence, its actions, its inner feeling states, and the memory of all these. That experiential organization with which the sense of a core self is concerned (Stern, 1985, 46)

The organization of things is undergone by the feeling that experience flows smoothly and progresses, the feeling of flow. This kind of flow sensation of human experience, consist of distinct patterns and structures of felt qualities. The felt qualities appear as contours of the relationship

⁸ The context of myself in situations of experiencing something I find interesting or the opposite.

between i.e., sounds and words and the somatic experience and feeling of the sounds. The feeling of currents is thus best explained by kinetic concepts such as surging, fading, explosive, volatile, etc. extensively (Johnson, 2007, 41-43). During a person's upbringing we don't bestow these inherent somatic social and relational sensory contours much thought. By contrast, we use them unconsciously to feed our abstract structures of cognition. From we are very young, we form via somatic experience and the associated feelings meaning to the world through first our parents and siblings. Later we form meaning through our friends, family, lovers, colleagues and otherwise a social life. As a result of these cascades of sensory input our brain evolves a *statistical* wiring of learning (Barrett, 2018, 94) which functions as template for emotions chiselled from the concepts and categories. These emotions we constitute as knowledge and young children quickly learn that the knowledge their concepts are missing to obtain meaning, are dwelling in the mind of other humans and the world around them. In continuation of the body-budgeting systems continuous active collaboration it ascertains as essential partaker of knowledge in every second of our life. Even when we are merely imitating emotion and social meaning body-budgeting regions in the brain are dominantly active. Thus, a reclusive body-emotion-mind mechanism fixates as prototypical for human understanding (Barrett, 2018, 13) and reveals the reclusive, yet automatic mechanism of body-emotion-mind, which lays ground for all human experience and knowledge.

The Body as a Brain

As all prototypes the body-emotion-mind mechanism can be cultivated and across cultures this has been sought in various cultural, social, and religious practices and most often this has been done via the body. As humans we formed our culture by cultivation. Often, we did so with reference to mythological worlds of kingdoms and deities, demons and angels who reigned over man. This gap of strength and virtue between man and gods lays ground for the *hybris/nemesis* theme of ancient Greek mythology. The main lesson from this theme is the term *sofrosyne*, which translates to temperance. A man of temperance could merit *Areté* which leads to *Kydos*; qualities any honourable man of Greece should possess. *Sofrosyne* was applied by Aristotle as the centre point of virtue between abstinence and licentiousness; in his notion of morality known as "the golden middle". The aim of practicing *Sofrosyne* is the rein of one's sensory experience of pleasure and is primarily that of harmonising the bodily experience of contentment, revel, lust, anticipation etc. A dualistic approach to the human understanding can be discerned in this classical polarised view on body-emotion and rational knowledge the other. In philosophical Taoism the errand differs from this binary approach by its inherent emphasis on man as a whole and the experience of the surrounding environment as basis for knowledge and genuine rationality. Philosophical Taoism perceives the human condition and thus knowledge as fashioned from a dyadic and can be illuminated by the phrasing of the various chapters, exemplified in LZ.2⁹:

Everyone in the world knows that when the beautiful strives to be beautiful, it is repulsive. Everyone knows that when the good strives to be good, it is no good. And so, have and to lack generate each other. Difficult and easy give form to each other. Long and short offset each other. High and low incline into each other. Note and rhythm harmonize with each other. Before and after following each other (Ivanhoe, , 2003, 2).

9 This article will reference Laozi as LZ followed by chapter, i.e., LZ.6

That a binary structure of human understanding is a natural prototypical feature of the human condition is also legible in LZ.11:

Thirty spokes are joined in the hub of a wheel. But only by relying on what is not there, do we have the use of the carriage. By adding and removing clay we form a vessel. But only on relying on what is not there, do we have use of the vessel. By carving outdoors and windows we make a room. But only by relying on what is not there, do we have use of the room. And so, what is there is the basis for profit; What is not there is the basis for use- (Ivanhoe, 2003, 11)

This chapter points to the inherent dualistic structure of human knowledge in the form of the positive and negative existence all phenomena in the world holds (Moeller, 2006, 108). These polarities constitute the concepts of Yin and Yang. By LZ.42 the Yin-Yang are exemplified by the phrasing of conception and birth of the things of the world; “The Way produces One. The One produces two. Two produces three. Three produces the myriad creatures. The myriad creatures shoulder the *yin* and embrace *yang*, and by blending and circulating Qi 气 they attain harmony (Ivanhoe, 2003, 45). In LZ.42 Yang (male) has behind it, obscurity while moving and facing forward and are the positive aspect of the conception of phenomena and thus knowledge. Obscurity is the negative of knowledge and the unmoved Yin (female), whom all things are nourished by. They are fundamental distinctions of the dyadic constitution of knowledge of the things in the world and are also expressed in LZ.15:

Opening, like ice about to break. Honest, like unhewn wood. Broad, like a valley. Turbid, like muddy water. Who can, through stillness, gradually make muddied water clear? Who can, through movement, gradually stir to life what has long been still?” (Ivanhoe, 2003, 15)

Within the mentioned chapters, symbolic images of universal structures are present, and share one common feature; they are all deprived of positive form; they are so-called “negative” forms (Moeller, 2006, 24). The wood is still not fashioned and whatever it will become is not yet done. The water is muddy and chaotic and the fluvial is enshrouded by unclarity. Once the water is calm, you can clearly see what is below. The valley is immense, vast, and spacious and represents void; potential to be full. The valley is negative space, unlike the full mountains that surround it. Both the wood and the water are like the valley in its original “non-forms”, as they are before they take a form we know. The cultural embedding of this notion of continuous fluctuation between two polarities and thus change, can be illustrated by the image of i.e., sun-moon or the sunny and shady side of a mountain (Moeller, 2006, 98). The word sun literally translates tai-yang 太阳, which means “highest yang”, while a cloudy weather forecast is called yin-tian 阴天 which translates to “yin heaven”.

The propagation of the turning point between conception and birth of the things of the world takes place in obscurity for us humans, be it phenomena of the world, our emotions, or our knowledge. As the plant is nourished by water, we do not see the water in the plant as we do not see many of nature's creations. The plant root is hidden from us, it lies lower emanating its “dark” and hidden efficacy. The creation of our emotions and knowledge takes place in stealth, without contours and the feminine is, in Philosophical Taoism, a marker of where there is no longer and not yet is (Moeller, 2006, 11-15). As the water nourishes itself by producing, by the same token the gate in LZ.6 and as the doors and windows in LZ.11 express a symbolic image of

an emptiness embraced by filling as the empty valley is embraced by rich mountains. The gate, the doors and windows express fertility and femininity, legible in LZ.10; “When the portal of Heaven opens and closes, can you play the part of the feminine” (Ivanhoe, 2003, 10). The word sky/heaven 天空 is in Chinese understood as the term “major cycle” or just “natural”. Heaven or cycle are the world's central function and exist in harmony in its cycle. The structure is made of universal entities and these entities provide course for the seasons of the years and the passage of time. In this way, the cycle of life is the gate through which life itself passes and the gate of heaven opens and closes for life in the same way as the bellows are depicted in LZ.5: “Is not the space between Heaven and Earth like a bellows? Empty yet inexhaustible!” (Moeller, 2006, 16-20).

In Philosophical Taoism are the distinct realm of existence and presence and its counterpart; non-presence and non-presence precedes the existing world full of presence (Moeller, 2006, 21-32). None-presence is what precedes and produces the present things and their diversity. The relationship between the presence/non-presence is legible in LZ.42 where the numerical concept phrases One as the immediate product of Dao and as the beginning of the process of being. It is a dual significance of solitude and totality, the empty centre, and the complete whole. One makes provision for Two. Two constitutes the universal duality, between he/she empty/full, dark/light etc. In somatic terms (Qi) is the inner brain-body processes, which constitute the ability of breathing and inhaling-exhaling is Two.¹⁰ The inner life¹¹ of the body is the starting point as an empty, hidden beginning, which leads Two continuously on. The integration between One and Two gives birth to Three, which opens the world of multiplicity and its myriad of all things. In a qualitative definition of One as a symbol image can be pointed to Dao. We are told “The Dao produces One. One produces Two”, which emphasises the double meaning of One as both emptiness and unity. One is created by Dao and co-creative force (De 德) of the Yin-Yang process that produces all things. This alludes back to LZ.55: “If the hearts direct the Qi, this is called: forcing” (Moeller, 2006, 106) and emphasises the optimal in harmonising by non-intrusive cultivation using the potential of the hidden nuance of the human knowledge and experience. An essential embodied nuance concerning our sensory judgments is legible in LZ.12: “The five colours blind our eyes. The five notes deafen our ears. The five flavours deaden our palates. Precious goods impede our activities. This is why sages are for the belly and not for the eye; And so, they cast of the one and take up the other” (Ivanhoe, 2003, 12). Tending to and care of Qi is by the art of Qigong, meaning exercise with Qi and Tai Chi, meaning ultimate Qi. As legible in LZ.42 the two polarities optimally splice together in harmony. This harmony of Qi is obtained by a homeostasis or equilibrium in the human condition, the golden middle. The key aspect in tending Qi is the absence of coercion or the use of force. Cultivation be it physical, cognitive, or political, aesthetic, etc. are never intrusive. Rather, it is achieved by not interfering in natural processes. Dao is bifurcated in similar fashion with “One” in LZ.42. Continuously Dao fluctuates between empty-full, being-not being and other universal terms and are more than negation of Being/Full. Given that Dao does not exist as a unit or occurrence anywhere in or outside the universe, but “is” by virtue of creation and the return to the origin Dao is simply nothing. The Chinese word *Wu* 無 (nothingness - the mere potential for fullness/growth/being) engenders concepts as *Wuwei* 無為 (non-action or non-forcing/non-intervening, non-invasive). This leads to a sense of nothing as both creation and non-being. Creation is positive and the positive is derived from the negative and thus Wu is the source of creation and the

10 In/out are two aspects of the same: breathing.

11 Especially the heart.

basis for ontology (Yu, 1981, 485). Nothingness is not just a quality of Dao, but a character trait, the human consciousness has or should have and the link between consciousness and Wu is the encapsulation of embodied experiential phenomena. Such encapsulation is perceived as a subjective inner principle that links man to Dao and its natural currents (Wenning, 2011, 563) Nothingness is described in Zhuangzi:

Brilliance queried nothingness, saying: Are you, sir, being or are you nothing? Brilliance, being unable to gain a response, carefully regarded the other's appearance, which was a far-reaching vacuity. He gazed the entire day and saw nothing, listened but heard no sound, reached out but was unable to grasp anything. Brilliance said: How perfect! Who can be as perfect as this! I can grant the fact of nothingness but not the nonbeing of nothingness. As for nothingness, how can one realize such perfection (Chai, 2014, 664)

Dao is by continuous return and produce its own negation and thus the negation of the negation. A distinction that is central to the understanding of Dao as nothingness and non-being. Non-existence of non-being is not equal to Nothingness¹². Nothingness permeates ontic non-being, while non-being lacks ontological substance. The ontic non-being acts as a “place and placeholder” for what is now absent: “The things of the world are generated from presence. Presence is generated from non-presence (Moeller, 2006, 39). Dao is a double concept that encapsulates that ontological nothingness lies in the core of all manifested phenomena and is more than just the antithesis of ontological being.

There is being, there is nonbeing, there is a not begun to be nonbeing, and there is a not begun to be nonbeing's beginning. Suddenly there is nothingness, and yet when it comes to nothingness I do not know if it is actbeing or nonbeing (Chai, 2014, 665)

Embodied cultivation of knowledge

The low and hidden is the giver of everything, while at the same time feeding on everything it creates. The upper and thus what we consciously understand (cognition) is Yang and is thus visible and actualized as action. By this, it can be assumed that the cognition of the human organism feeds on unconscious somatic experiences and patterns of emotion (Yin). As Yin both nourishes and gives life to everything above (Johnson, 10-15). Cognition and abstract thought have their place on an equal footing with somatic felt experience and they can both function independently. However, the human organism is in the most optimal state by cooperating and developing both on equal terms. The unconscious somatic experience can be found in i.e., the emotions and abstract concepts we associate with words like rank. Rank we know from the feeling of sitting straight with your back. We know concepts like rectilinearly from our body and the change in our limbs and torso as it changes from i.e., bent to outstretched. The slow and gentle movements of Tai Chi as physiological exercise, lead to dimensions of embodied cognition, which are constantly experienced and corrected by the simulation of the brain. Thus, you experience yourself moving in time and space and are thereby cultivating the body-emotion-mind mechanism and this allows the brain to transfer the experience of movement in time and space to different cognitive models. This helps to explore new spheres of movement experience,

¹² Ontological nothingness

as the new situations provide new experiences that in turn create the potential for a new cognitive understanding of something unconscious (Johnson & Lakoff, 1980(2003), 117). This is because a basic understanding of being a human organism in a world comes from the understanding of one's movement in time and space (Johnson, 2007, 21). Both oneself and other elements and how they behave in motion and under different spatial conditions form a fundamental part of one's linguistic ability to express themselves. Linguistic capacity is not just the function of being able to express oneself to the outside world. It is also to be aware of own emotional states by linguistic capacity and vocabulary to differentiate and predicate these emotions. Understanding imparts knowledge that is based on the subject's intuitive sensory understanding of one's own flesh; body movement understood through experience domains (Johnson, 2007, 29-30). This knowledge is also structured using rational and conceptual knowledge in i.e., the form of health and the martial applications. This structure is made up of logically systematized and rationally decoded self-defence functions and body-health optimizations. This structure is continuously linked to an embodied expression and hence a somatic and emotional effect. There is a somaesthetic and cognitive potential to optimize one's presence in all kinds of situations, where body, emotion and mind in infinite combinations complement and support each other (simulation). It is here that the theory of inter-subjective creation of meaning with the world becomes relevant (Johnson, 2007, 35-51). A creation imparted through i.e., sounds and words or sounds and events. For the same reason, Tai Chi has official music in which the movements are pronounced as they are to be performed. Thus, a subjective understanding of the movement and its name is possible for the individual via both voice and tones (Johnson, 2007, 235-63). This subjective understanding is based on a surrounding world and a self as being in and with a body to make sense of itself in the world. Tai Chi, for example, exerts one's sense of fluctuations in own movements and allows one to optimize both the movement's aesthetic expression and its functions. This is achieved by non-forcing through daily practice. Over time, changes will appear to the practitioner. The inner states one becomes aware of are one's emotional concepts (Johnson, 2007, 55-66). The outer states are markers of the inner, which are learned through one's own body. It is these changes that Tai Chi can make one aware of and hence the opportunity for cultivation. However, such a conception may be an insufficient understanding of human cognition and our construction of meaning (Johnson, 2007, 1-8). Meaning and thus knowledge is a depth embedded and inherent body-sensory experience process where language and cognition do not prevail but has its own role. By contrast, the sense of meaning and the formation thereof may be an overall effort of all human primary internal and external somatic capabilities. Hence our concepts and view on knowledge and how it is created is contented by the body and emotions and offers a perspective on human nature and knowledge that in many ways has been forgotten or misinterpreted.

Supplement to Formal Education

The philosophical aim of harmonising the human condition by cultivating emotions is not that they should be subjugated or annulled. Rather they should be exercised by granting attendance to the surreptitious body-emotion collaboration by embodied practice of self-cultivation and their relevance for and impact on cognition. If properly exercised, it can be gateway to an intuitive flexible consciousness, learning and knowledge. When humans in all their modalities practices harmonization, the body is better connected to the mind. When body and mind are accustomed to being as one, they can be united and directed with conscious intentionality. The focus is on the acquisition of knowledge and a universal acceptance of negation. Tai Chi means "highest Qi" because practicing it cultivates Qi (harmonises homeostasis) in body-emotion-mind. When

Qi fluctuates freely through the body, the body is connected to the mind. When body and mind cooperate, they can be united and directed with intent.

Specifically, the argument turns on what I call bifurcated intentionality: we need two different concepts of intentionality in order to have fully adequate conception. These two concepts are discursive intentionality, the capacity to engage in linguistic semantic contents within a shared linguistic community, and somatic intentionality, the capacity to engage with ambient environment through a system of bodily relations. These two capacities are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for all reasoning with empirical content, and thus are essentially bound up with perception and action. (Sachs, 2014, 2)

Intentionality training develops agility, speed, and strength in body as well as thought. Somatic and mental qualities, that express themselves when the need is present and without much effort. It is a sharp intuitive somatic and emotional presence with the present and oneself in it. As mentioned, internal body economisation and especially the heart is the starting point for life in the body. The eyes are the body's two polarizations (sun / light and moon / dark). The head is the sky (yang), and the legs are the earth (yin). In the context of the solar plexus, the head and legs are the body's primary competence.

Hence Tai Chi¹³ can exist in formal education as a curricular subject to support subjective learning focus, the practice of learning-resistance and the sociality of an educational environment. This can support a universal trait of accommodating negation, which is a central aspect of learning and experience; of learning how to fail and relish in the experience of becoming wiser for it. If knowledge is available primarily at the end goal (the solution/result), the process of knowledge can be static and has only before it the results my axioms for the starting point allow. Of this, knowledge can be confined to a rudimentary examination of the phenomenon and not its more obscure/hidden characteristics which require scepticism, doubt, and a more concrete handling of negation. Taichi and similar embodied arts, exercises the ability to observe, differentiate and change the minds habit of relying on the emotional concepts brought forth by body-budgeting and cultivating this by way of harmonising the automatic, prototypical biological mechanisms of the human condition. Our inherited view of human nature as mind and body as separate and belonging to each their own paradigm with status and importance to human life can thus be nuanced. A nuance of methodical exploration of human knowledge and meaning-making as not oriented towards the modalities as exhaustive but oriented towards the connections of the individual in wholeness and the surrounding world and its inherent epistemological structure. With the help of this merging of physiological being, emotional experience and cognition, a perspective on human understanding can be provided as consisting of body, emotions and mind in one whole. They are never separate and always independent and never in either mentioned or any other fixed order or rank. They function as a variety, never detached from the whole, but autonomous and yet mutually influencing each other.

If you want to learn Taichi, you must be sincere. Without sincerity you will not be able to learn any art. To learn Taichi you must be aware of yourself physically as well as mentally. To learn Taichi is to study yourself. You are the person who must learn, and it is you as a person who will be studied. Taichi as an art form cannot

13 And similar embodied somaesthetic arts that does not reduce or give precedence to a mental subject (ipse) in its approach to methodology and implemented practice.

only be taught but must be experienced. You will learn a dance commonly called the Taichi form. Taichi is more than its form. You learn Taichi by practicing the Form. Without training every day, no one can master it. Taichi can be learned as body therapy, a dance, a method to improve health, as self-defense, it is a living philosophy. Taichi is a very creative art form, but you must learn to be the creator. Taichi teaches you how to live, but it's up to you to live the life you want. Taichi is not a science but can be studied scientifically. However, it must be practiced as an art form (Pang, 1987).

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