



Heidegger on the Notion of Dasein as Habited Body

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Abstract

Heidegger is often attacked for his failure to offer a thematic account of the body in his Being and Time (Aho, 2005). The general misunderstanding of Heidegger's negation of body arises from the different meanings associated with the term 'body'. Body can be understood from two perspectives: body in terms of corpse and body in terms of lived-body. Doctors study body as corpse or object because that is required in their training and education. Heidegger's Being in his Being and Time ruled out all dichotomy of the body. The aim of this paper is to understand the Heideggerian perspective on Dasein as not a negation of bodiliness but a phenomenological understanding of Dasein body, and as such to highlight the dimension of lived-body in Heidegger's Being and Time. The paper will re-examine how Heidegger's philosophy of Dasein contributed to the phenomenology of lived-body in terms of his analysis of habitual body.

Introduction

Everyone has started re-discovering the body – modern, pre-modern and post-modern. According to Rosser (2001), the body is everywhere. The body talked about is the ‘condemned body’, or the ‘privileged one’, the ‘body as representation’ or as ‘confrontation’. The body, exclusively as an objective material thing with measurable properties, follows from the Cartesian-Galilean traditional model of looking at things. But where is the body of the ‘life world’, the body that eats, that works, that dies, and that is afraid (Bynum, 1995)? The body that Heidegger is looking at is different from the Cartesian model. Heidegger is concerned with the real living body – in other words, the body that eats, that works, that dies, that is afraid, which lives out there in the world – and not with the body (corpse) lying on the table of the doctors (Askay, 1999). For Heidegger, corporeality merely indicates that the body is physically present (*korperhaft*). It fails to see the phenomenological problem of the body, namely that we are ‘there’ in a ‘bodily’ manner (Aho, 2005).

According to Heidegger, the body is personalized in a lived context or environment. The person is not composed of separate body parts, and does not constitute a mind-body dualism as in the Cartesian model, but is an integrated bodily unit that is situated in a specific location and time. As Deutsch (1993) writes, “Persons have bodies to the degree to which they appropriate the physical conditions of their individuality and become integrated (and not merely unified) psychological beings” (p. 5). This means that, at the pre-reflective level, the person ‘ex-ists’ the body, “I am “embodied” in the sense ... that I am my body” (p. 5).

Lived Body and Corpse Body

We find ourselves in a situation where we are theoretically talking about the corpse body, while practically looking for the lived body. The theoretical quest of Descartes has assured us of the disembodied and detached cogito. After Descartes, body became a problem for most philosophers, who could make

daring ‘thought experiments’ dichotomizing the real inner core from its accidental body-layer. However, Heideggerian worldly and embodied *Dasein* shares a pre-reflective bond between the body and the world. Heidegger used the word ‘body’ with caution, not because he wanted to give less priority to the embodied *Dasein*, but rather because he was reluctant to use the bifurcated subject/object models that have been passed over as the only acceptable model of understanding our bodily nature. From that perspective, our body is a problem to us. As Heidegger (1927/1962) writes, “*Dasein*’s bodily nature hides a whole problematic of its own” (p. 143). This can be better illustrated in terms of Heidegger’s *Dasein*, person as a Being-in-the-world and Being-with-others. Heidegger describes the paradox of embodiment without directly discussing embodiment. He considered ‘the Body’ to be the most difficult problem (see Cerbone, 2000, pp. 209-230). He specifically uses the term *Dasein* (there-being) instead of ‘human’ to try to define what constitutes the essence of human being, of human existence.

The Bodily *Dasein*

Dasein is a wider context that accommodates the corporal and the lived in a harmonious manner. Heideggerian *Dasein* experiences no dichotomy between the biological and the personal, between the patient, whose body alone is a problem that needs correction, and the agent whose facticity is an inseparable and an essential component of his own personal meaning. Facticity designates the irreducible specificity and the ‘always alreadyness’ of *Dasein*’s Being-in-the-world. The Heideggerian *Dasein* dwells in his body. For the authentic *Dasein*, there is a living bond between the fourfoldness of its embodied, psychological, cosmological and spiritual nature, all of which aspects, in their harmonious interplay, bring out the multifaceted personality of the earthly *Dasein* who is both ontic and ontological, both a body with its cells and liver and kidneys, and one who is not only his liver and his cells. “The body is alien, yet, at the same time, myself. This is because ‘the body’ involves biological processes beyond my control, but these processes still belong to me as lived by me” (Svenaesus, 2001, p. 100). The authentic man is a spontaneous dweller in all these different regions; an inauthentic and a fallen *Dasein* existentially and ontically dwells in one, mechanically making an arrangement with the other, who is a stranger to the one, in a world that has lost its distance and is no longer a habitat, with things that have ceased to be his reliable tools that once were ready to hand. In its authenticity, *Dasein* accepts its fragility and its vulnerability. It is a factic *Dasein* who is thrown into a situation, and this facticity is what constitutes its

essential core. The concept of facticity also implies that *Dasein* is meaningfully bound to the conditions of its existence and the entities it encounters. This is illustrated by Gronda in the following extract:

I am not just alive and existing *Dasein* always exists in the world, somewhere, some specific there. ... [T]hree terms - facticity, thrownness, and state-of-mind - help to describe the process of trying to dance with the body you have.

Facticity designates the irreducible specificity and always alreadyness of *Dasein*’s being-in-the-world. The body I have is always unavoidably and specifically mine. The concept of facticity also implies that *Dasein* is meaningfully bound to the conditions of its existence and the entities it encounters. The specifics of my “there” mean something to me. Whether I have red hair or yellow skin or grow up in a brick veneer house are not just random, objective facts: they are important to me and to others, but I don’t get to choose them. I think the ‘there’ of my existence is always and most proximally, my body. My bodily particularities are part of facticity, they constitute the ‘mineness’ of my existence: it is the inheritance which I do not choose, and can therefore choose to choose. (2002, ¶11 & ¶12)

Heidegger uses the evocative term “thrownness” to connote this inescapable submission to existence itself. We are beings thrown into existence. *Dasein* is always and already “delivered over to the Being which, in existing, it has to be” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 173). For Heidegger we are forced to confront this ‘thrownness’ most powerfully in ‘state-of-mind’. State-of-mind, or mood, discloses existence prior to and beyond either cognition or will. We always ‘find ourselves’ in a mood just as, I would add, we find ourselves in a body, while knowledge and intention come later. At this point, *Dasein* has the opportunity to grasp hold of its ‘thrownness’, to choose its enigmatic, unexplainable specificity and inhabit the possibilities of its ‘there’. “In just this way, the practice of Contact Improvisation forces me over and over to confront my mood, to pay attention to my bodily state, to notice the body I actually have and to dance with it” (Gronda, 2002, ¶13). All these layers essentially constitute the *Dasein*’s essential core and make it fragile and worldly. This is an easy acceptance of the fact that *Dasein* is thrown into his facticity: that is how it exists and so it exists that way,

with red hair or white, as a man or as a woman. As long this easy acceptance is there on *Dasein's* part, his facticity is not a problem for him. He is at home with all these diverse traits of his as he is essentially a dweller searching for a home in a foreign place. This tension between the two is what makes him a worldly *Dasein*. Heidegger says that "the mood brings *Dasein* before the 'that-it-is' of its 'there', which as such, stares it in the face with the inexorability of an enigma" (1927/1962, p. 175). At this point, *Dasein* has the opportunity to grasp hold of its 'thrownness'. Within this model, a person's normal and spontaneous rootedness bestows on him/her a sense of dwelling, as the healthy man is a habitual dweller in his life world. It is in this sense that the world is not alien, nor is the person a stranger to the world that is his place of dwelling. Reflection on the body is a later phase that is based on pre-reflective habitual awareness of the body. At the reflective level, the body announces itself objectively in terms of its disruption of the normal course of the life-world. The same 'lived body' in its sheer corporeality is reduced to a 'sick body' and problematic part that can either be corrected of its peculiarity and its abnormality or, in the worst case, eliminated. "Heidegger argues that, for the most part, *Dasein* turns away from facing the enigma of its thrownness. And I think we're even expert at turning away from the moods themselves ... how often have you said – 'I'm just not sure how I feel'? Grasping hold of the 'there' – the facticity of *Dasein's* thrownness – is not an easy task" (Gronda, 2002, ¶13).

Illness as Unhomelikeness Being-in-the-World

But what if the body I have is paralyzed or if my capacity to be touched is marred by sexual abuse? What if the body I have is judged to be less than human due to its colour? Can I still accept the body I have? Should I bear it? ... How to deal with that specificity is a political question. ... There is very little space for the abnormal body to live. Most importantly, I make very little space for my own abnormality. (Gronda, 2002, ¶15)

As a broken tool thwarts the builder's plans, so the ill body disrupts the patient's plans. While the analogy of the ill body as a broken tool effectively captures the impact illness has on the patient's experience of the body, this is not to say that the body is a tool and that the ill body is a broken tool. According to Marcum (2004, pp. 125-137), it would be wrong to call the body parts tools since they are also part of *Dasein* as self. They are not only a part of the totality

of tools, but also, as lived (*leibliche*), they belong to the projective power of the self.

Heideggerians would respond to this as a problem for the theoretical philosopher and the speculator who is torn between the two: his body and himself. For Heidegger, the man on the street dwells in his body, and, in the same spirit, dwells in his 'facticity' and his vulnerability. It is a problem when the sick body or the pained body is abstracted from its own homely context and from its dwelling place. In abstraction, "...there is a subject: a 'you,' posited separate from another entity, 'the body'. The relation seems to be about possession: you, the subject, have or own an object, the body" (Marcum, 2004, p. 40). It is not my active design to possess or not to possess a body. For Heidegger, we "find ourselves" in a mood just as, one can add, 'we find ourselves in a body'. That is to say, in a lived relation, the one does not encroach the boundary of the other, both share an intimate bond as integral parts of one inclusive whole.

Now, if health is just a harmonious blend of the corpse body and the lived one, illness can be understood as an unhomelike Being-in-the-world in which one's own body is a stranger to one. In terms of Heidegger's notion of *sorge* (care), the meaning-structure of illness as Being-in-the-World is made possible or articulated with respect to a person's concern as a Being-thrown-into-a-world that is often strangely unfamiliar or unhomelike. This is certainly the case when a person is diagnosed with a fatal illness or must live with a debilitating illness. As an embodied person, the patient comes to know the authentic and genuine self as limited and finite, especially in the face of death or chronic illness. The face of death or illness and the anxiety (*angst*) over them are the bases of the patient's life-world or Being-in-the-world. By resolving the anxiety surrounding the patient's illness through re-establishing the patient's homelikeness, the patient is healed even though the diseased body part is not cured.

In the contest of health-care, it would therefore be expected that physicians learn to utilize effectively in the healing process the patient's anxious care about bodily existence. The question facing us today is whether it is too late to humanize the mechanized body in terms of the embodied person in order to address the crisis of care facing modern medical practice. My body is one place where the pain of difference can and must be borne. The body practice of affirming the facts of your existence – its physical, psychological, cultural and political specificities – and discovering what you can do with them is the only resource to resist a normalising power. And

bearing your actual weight is not just a personal issue. The global distribution of body mass is a literal indicator of world inequities. To bear my actual weight is in part to accept that Westerners are more likely to die of obesity than starvation (*vide* Bialystok, 1997).

Conclusion

Heidegger did not want to make any fuss about the pained body or the wounded body, abnormal body or split body, a body that is 'no one's' but is left exposed in its naked facticity to be scrutinized by 'any body'. His philosophy intended the practical *Dasein* for whom the human body is always already 'alive', handling, sensing and perceiving intra-worldly things in a particular way. The 'lived-body' (*Leib*) is not a bounded, material substance (*Korper*) that is extended in space, and it cannot be scientifically observed from a distance, because it is already spatially involved, manoeuvring through rooms, handling equipment, sensing who or what is in front or behind and so forth. The body is already 'in my way' as the original source of all practical comportment (*vide* Carman, 1999). According to Cerbone (2000), Heidegger was reluctant to talk about 'the body' in connection with the explication of *Dasein*, by arguing that doing so would be at odds with the kind of investigation his 'phenomenology of everydayness' is meant to be .

This paper has attempted to clarify some positions regarding Heidegger's understanding of bodily *Dasein* that present man as essentially embodied and embedded in a life-world that remains open to accommodating the relational and the intentional character of human-*Dasein*, which is in continuous dialogue with both the body as corpse and the body as

lived, these two being but two different aspects of the one unified whole. It may be rightly pointed out that Heidegger's *Dasein* is an all-inclusive embodied person, which incorporates all social, regional, cultural and political perspectives on body and not just pure consciousness in the absence of body. 'The body' is so tuned to its surroundings that, like his own embodied part, his homely surround becomes a dwelling place for the worldly *Dasein*. That way *Dasein* is at home with other Beings with whom he has a shared perspective on his own body. His body has a joint authorship that way; his body is no longer his own now. It is a book authored by him but that is now an open text that is re-interpreted by others and, in the process, made their own. His habitual body is habitually tuned to its familiar home as its dwelling place. That is, 'the body' or 'my body' has been habitually interwoven with a familiar region, automatically knowing what is to the left and to the right. The body walks me, half asleep, to the kitchen in the middle of the night when I need a drink of water. The body already knows where the door is, where the refrigerator is, where the light switch is and so on. According to Merleau-Ponty, our everyday doing and acting is made possible only on the basis of the pre-reflective know-how of the 'habit body' (*corps habituel*) (*vide* Carman, 1999). *Dasein* shares this dwelling relationship with one's own body, with one's own homelike familiar surroundings, with one's tools, as all these are now its own alter image, its own extended self. The same familiarity characterizes the intimate mother-child bond whereby one becomes an extended self to the other. One can rediscover the lived and the caring embodied *Dasein* in its true home. It is a network of genuine and caring relations that intimately binds the one to the other.

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