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WHY TRADITIONAL CHINESE PHILOSOPHY STILL MATTERS

**THE RELEVANCE OF ANCIENT WISDOM
FOR THE GLOBAL AGE**

Edited by
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Richard Shusterman

Introduction: The problem of reflection

Philosophy is paradigmatically a reflective discipline, with the injunction of "Know thyself" as its founding Socratic challenge. Self-reflection, however, can be a dangerous enterprise, and philosophers have often warned of its dangers. Reflection on one's bodily dimension has been especially criticized, even by body-friendly philosophers who insist, against Plato and others, that one's bodily dimension is an essential part of oneself and crucial to our action.¹ Many argue, for example, that thinking of our bodily means of action harmfully distracts attention from our ends and thus is more likely to cause problems of performance. Despite the general thrust of his pragmatist body-respecting philosophy, William James argues, for instance, that bodily actions are more certain and successful when we focus on "the end alone" and avoid "consciousness of the [bodily] means." Given the parsimonious economy of consciousness, we should concentrate its limited attention on the most important features of action, namely our goals, and leave the bodily means to our established unreflective habits of somatic use. "We walk a beam the better the less we think of the position of our feet upon it. We pitch or catch, we shoot or chop the better the less" we focus on our own bodily parts and feelings and, more exclusively, on our targets. "Keep your eye on the place aimed at, and your hand will fetch it; think of your hand and you will very likely miss your aim."²

Immanuel Kant further warns that somatic introspection "takes the mind's activity away from considering other things and is harmful to the head." "The inner sensibility that one here generates through one's reflections is harmful . . . This inner view and self-feeling weakens the body and diverts it from animal functions."³ In short, somatic reflection harms both body and mind, and the best way to treat one's body is to ignore, as much as possible, the sensations of how it feels, while using it actively in work and exercise. As James put the point in his *Talks for Teachers*, we should focus on "what we do . . . and not care too much for what we feel."⁴ Astutely recognizing that "action and feeling go together," James urged (in both public lectures and private advice) that we should just control our feelings by focusing on the actions with which they are linked. To conquer depression, he writes in *Principles of Psychology*, we should simply "go through the *outward movements*" that express cheerfulness, willfully making our body "act and speak as if cheerfulness were already there." For example, "Smooth the brow, brighten the eye, contract the dorsal rather than the ventral aspect of the frame, and speak

in a major key." He similarly urged his brother, "My dying words," [in a letter written more than thirty years before James's actual death] "are outward acts, not feelings."⁵

The Kantian-Jamesian rejection of somatic introspection is, I think, misguided (and largely a product of their avowed fears of hypochondria).⁶ But their argument do rest on a significant truth. In most of our usual activities, attention is and needs to be primarily directed not to our inner feelings of our embodied self but to the objects of our environment in relation to which we must act and react in order to survive and flourish. Thus for excellent evolutionary reasons, nature positions our eyes to be looking out rather than in. The error of Kant and James is in confusing ordinary primacy with exclusive importance. Although attention should be directed mostly outward, it is nevertheless often very useful to examine one's self and sensations. Consciousness of breathing can inform us that we are anxious or angry when we might otherwise remain unaware of these emotions and thus more vulnerable to their misdirection. Proprioceptive awareness of one's muscle tension can tell us when our body language is expressing a timidity or aggression that we wish not to display, just as it can help us avoid unwanted, parasitic muscular contractions that constrain movement, exacerbate tension, and eventually cause pain. In fact, pain itself – a somatic consciousness that informs us of injury and prompts a search for remedy – provides clear evidence of the value of attention to one's somatic states and sensations. Care of the self is improved when keener somatic awareness advises of problems and remedies before the onset of pain's damage.⁷

Although James rightly affirms that it is generally more efficient to focus on the end and trust the spontaneous action of established habits to perform the bodily means, there are many times when those habits are too faulty to be blindly trusted and require somatic attention for their correction. For example, a batter will normally hit the ball better if she is concentrating on the ball, not on the stance of her feet, the posture of her head and torso, or the grip of her hands on the bat. But a poor or slumping batter may learn (often from a coach) that her stance, posture, and grip tend to put her off balance or inhibit movement in the rib cage and spine in a way that disturbs her swing and impairs her vision of the ball. Here conscious attention must, for a time, be directed to the somatic feelings of the problematic postures so that these postures can be proprioceptively identified and thus avoided while new, more productive habits of posture (and their attendant feelings) are developed and attended to. Without such proprioceptive attention, the batter will spontaneously relapse to (and thus reinforce) the original, problematic posture habits without even being aware of this.

Once an improved habit of swinging is established, the somatic means and feelings of swinging should no longer claim our primary attention since the more ultimate end remains hitting the ball. But achieving that further end requires treating the means as a temporary end and focus, just as hitting the ball – which is itself only a means to get on base to score a run and ultimately win the game – is treated as a temporary end in order to achieve those further ends. Direct seeking of ends without careful attention to the needed means will only bring frustration, as with the batter who wills with all her might to hit the ball with distance yet fails because

her eagerness to attain the end prevents her from concentrating on the required bodily means, including the simple act of keeping her eyes firmly fixed on following the ball. Likewise, scholars whose creative productivity is constrained by recurrent headaches and writing pains resulting from bad bodily habits of self-use at their work stations cannot remedy or overcome these problems by mere will power; the bodily habits and their attendant consciousness need to be examined before they can be properly transformed. We must know what we actually do in order to correct it, reliably, into doing what we want.

Despite his wisely advocating the value of somatic actions for influencing our feelings, James fails to recognize the corresponding importance of somatic feelings for guiding our actions. We cannot properly know how to smooth the brow, if we cannot feel that our brow is furrowed or know what it feels like to have one's brow smooth. Similarly, since most of us have been habituated to faulty posture, the ability to hold ourselves straight in a way that avoids excessive rigidity requires a process of learning that involves sensitive attention to our proprioceptive feelings. James's unfeeling insistence on vigorous dorsal contraction and stiff upright posture ("bottle up your feelings . . . and hold yourself straight," he exhorted) is thus a sure prescription for the kind of back pain he indeed suffered throughout his life, just as it is surely an expression of his puritan ethics more than a product of careful clinical research.⁸ If "action and feeling go together," as James remarked, they *both* warrant careful consideration for optimal functioning, just as both ends and means require our attention.⁹ Though knives are most clearly means for cutting rather than ends of sharpening, we sometimes need to focus on improving their sharpness and other aspects of their use in order to improve their effectiveness. Such means-respecting logic underlies the project of somaesthetics as a meliorative study of the use of our bodily instrument in perception, cognition, action, aesthetic expression, and ethical self-fashioning that together constitute humanistic research, artistic creation, and the global art of perfecting our humanity through better living.

Although William James was one of the most body-friendly of modern philosophers and one of the great masters of somatic introspection in psychology, he warned against its use in practical and moral life because he too thought it led to hypochondria and depression.¹⁰ James moreover introduced the further argument that "the inhibitive influence of reflection" on bodily action and its attendant feelings actually interferes with that action. "Trust your spontaneity and fling away all further care" is James's contrary maxim for successful sensorimotor performance.¹¹ To cite again his *Principles of Psychology*, "[W]e fail of accuracy and certainty in our attainment of the end whenever we are preoccupied with much ideal consciousness of the [bodily] means" and the internal (or "resident") feelings they involve. In other words, "We walk a beam the better the less we think of the position of our feet upon it. We pitch or catch, we shoot or chop the better the less tactile and muscular (the less resident), and the more exclusively optical (the more remote), our consciousness is. Keep your eye on the place aimed at, and your hand will fetch it; think of your hand and you will very likely miss your aim."¹²

Maurice Merleau-Ponty is another philosophical champion of the body who nonetheless rejects the value of somaesthetic reflection. Like James, he contends

that spontaneity and unreflective perceptual awareness will always serve us best in everyday life, whereas somatic reflection and representational images are (for normal people) unnecessary and even get in the way of smooth functioning. The body marvelously "guides us among things only on condition that we stop analyzing it," only on "the condition that [we] do not reflect expressly upon it."¹³ Not only in bodily locomotion but in the variety of our actions (including the expressive, creative actions of speech and art), Merleau-Ponty repeatedly insists that successful performance depends on the efficacy of spontaneous bodily intentionality beneath the level of thematized awareness and that any conscious representations or reflective awareness of our somatic behavior tends instead to hinder efficient action: "like the functioning of the body, that of words or paintings remains obscure to me. The words, lines, and colors which express me . . . are torn from me by what I want to say as my gestures are by what I want to do . . . [with] a spontaneity which will not tolerate any commands, not even those which I would like to give to myself."¹⁴

In *Body Consciousness*, I challenge such claims against somaesthetic mindfulness and reflection by refuting their specific arguments and enlisting the insights of theorists who recognize the value of somaesthetic reflection for improving the quality and efficacy of our self-use, including our capacities for greater pleasure.¹⁵ John Dewey is one example. A long-time student and advocate of the Alexander Technique, Dewey recognized the horrible power that bad habits have over our action, thought, and will. What we call spontaneous action is the product of habit, not of a pure, free will; and habit typically incorporates aspects of the conditions of its acquisition. Because these conditions are often far from optimal (recall the imperfect home, school, and work environments in which we learn), we unreflectively can acquire bad habits just as easily as good ones. To correct our bad habits we cannot simply rely on spontaneity, which as the product of habit, is precisely part of the problem.¹⁶ This is why various disciplines of body training typically invoke representations and self-conscious somatic focusing in order to correct our faulty self-perception and self-use. These disciplines do not aim to erase the crucial level of unreflective behavior by the (impossible) effort of making us explicitly conscious of all our perception and action. They simply seek to improve unreflective behavior that hinders our experience and performance. But in order to effect this improvement, the unreflective action or habit must be brought into conscious critical reflection (though only for a limited time) so that it can be grasped and worked on more precisely. We have to know what we are doing with our bodies, in order to know how to correct what we are doing so that we can more effectively do what we wish to do with them. Thus, Dewey paradoxically concludes, "True spontaneity is henceforth not a birth-right but the last term, the consummated conquest, of an art – the art of conscious control" through an enhanced, reflective awareness of our bodies.¹⁷

Insights from classical Chinese philosophy

Turning now to China, we seem to find a similar divergence between philosophies that advocate reflective analysis and conscious control of self and body and those that instead advocate spontaneity. In the Confucian tradition, the *Analects* (I:4) affirm a daily self-examination of behavior (where the term for self is the same as that for body).¹⁸ Mencius later advocates cultivating the "flood-like ch'i

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that fills the body," such cultivation requiring attentive monitoring through conscious will and mind.¹⁹ Xunzi argues that the exemplary person should master "the method of controlling the vital breath" and be "absorbed in the examination of his inner self" and "scorn mere external things."²⁰

In contrast, although the Daoist tradition very strongly emphasizes somatic attentiveness in terms of caring for the body,²¹ it is also famous for championing unreflective spontaneity of action and release from willful self-consciousness. In the *Zhuangzi* we read: "Artisan Ch'ui could draw as true as a compass or a T square because his fingers changed along with things and he didn't let his mind get in the way."²² The *Liehzi* seems to express the same advocacy of unreflective, spontaneous action, which its translator, the distinguished scholar A. C. Graham, formulates as "thinking does [one] harm instead of good" and that "[i]t is especially dangerous to be conscious of oneself."²³ *Liehzi* notes how the drunken man by being unconscious is likely to be less injured in falling from a cart than a conscious man who stiffens and tries to brace his fall; likewise the good swimmer says, "I do it without knowing how I do it."²⁴ The Daoist master claims to be so unified in himself and with nature that he does not notice from which sensory organs he perceives something and whether it is his body or nature that propels guides his activity. "I do not know whether I perceived it with the seven holes in my head and my four limbs, or knew it through my heart and belly and internal organs. It is simply self-knowledge."²⁵ "I drifted with the wind East or West, like a leaf . . . and never knew whether it was the wind that rode me or that I rode the wind."²⁶

But alongside this advocacy of unreflective spontaneity, one also finds a deep respect for self-examination in these classic Daoist texts. Thus, the *Zhuangzi* insists:

When I speak of good hearing, I do not mean listening to others; I mean simply listening to yourself. When I speak of good eyesight, I do not mean looking at others; I mean simply looking at yourself. He who does not look at himself but looks at others, who does not get hold of himself but gets hold of others, is getting what other men have got and failing to get what he himself has got. He finds joy in what brings joy to other men, but finds no joy in what would bring joy to himself."²⁷

Zhuangzi thus recommends self-examination: "So I examine what is within me and am never blocked off from the Way."²⁸ At one point, even bodily action or movement is said to be improved by looking inward to establish a stable sense of self from which action can more effectively emerge. "If you do not perceive the sincerity within yourself and yet try to move forth, each movement will miss the mark. If outside concerns enter and are not expelled, each movement will only add failure to failure."²⁹

The *Liehzi* likewise affirms value in self-examination:

"You busy yourself with outward travel and do not know how to busy yourself with inward contemplation. By outward travel we seek what we lack in things outside us, while by inward contemplation we find sufficiency in ourselves. The latter is the perfect, the former an imperfect kind of traveling."³⁰

With respect to skilled action, the *Liehzi* similarly suggests that underlying masterful performance is a mastery of self, achieved through attention to oneself, because underlying the self is the unfathomable, empowering Way that guides us best. Thus, the musician insists on first finding the harmony in himself before venturing to play: "What I have in mind is not in the strings, what I am aiming at is not in the notes. Unless I grasp it inwardly in my heart, it will not answer from the instrument outside me."³¹

How can we reconcile these conflicting views between attending to self and unreflective forgetting of self in spontaneous action as keys to effective self-use, not only within Daoism and Chinese philosophy but also in Western philosophy and even within pragmatism (between James and Dewey). One strategy I have elaborated in past writings is that of interchanging phases or stages. Though spontaneous unreflective action is generally the most effective, even its proponents tend to acknowledge that in the stages of learning a sensorimotor skill (playing an instrument, batting a ball, riding a bicycle, learning a dance step) we very often need to pay careful, critical attention to what we are doing with the body parts engaged in that action. I would add that we should also pay attention to our breathing and the proprioceptive feel of what we are doing. But the advocates of spontaneity insist that once this learning stage is over, so is the need for explicit attention to what our bodies are doing. My position, which I share with body theorists like F. M. Alexander and Moshe Feldenkrais and with philosophers like John Dewey, is that there is also need for critical self-attention after the learning process is considered finished. This is because, as Xunzi insists, the learning process is never entirely complete.³² Learning is never over because there is not only room for further refinements and extensions of the acquired skill, but also because we so often lapse into bad habits of performance or face new conditions of the self (through injury, fatigue, growth, aging, etc.) and new environments that we need to correct, relearn, and adjust our habits of spontaneous performance. Not that all our actions must always be given explicit attention – that would be both impossible and undesirable. We need to focus attention on what needs it the most – usually the world in which we act (though we should never forget that careful explicit attention to one's body in action always involves attention to its environment – one cannot feel one's body alone). However, sometimes in order to deal more effectively with things in the world of action, we need either to acquire new habits or refine or reconstruct our habitual modes of action (as well as our attitudes, feelings, and knowledge that guide our action), and this process requires redirecting explicit attention to our somatic behavior. Once the new or reconstructed habits are acquired, we can forego special attention to one's body in action and instead move into the uncritical, unthinking spontaneous mode.

We can find hints of these very strategies in the *Liehzi*, where success on spontaneous action depends on having first established one's harmony by careful attention to one's somatic self. The great archer succeeds with even a poor bow not simply "because his attention was concentrated" on the target but because he had already trained his body so that "the movement of his hand equalized the give and pull" of the bow.³³ For archery, moreover, "you must learn not to blink" and

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"how to look," which also requires critically examining our somatic behavior in looking and blinking.³⁴ Similar points are made regarding the skills of fishing and charioteering, where spontaneity and focused response to the target rely on having acquired somatic control of the bodily means to attend and respond with calm and perceptive hands. And the only sure way to establish the necessary calmness in oneself is by looking attentively within to know one's nature and develop its virtues: "he will cling to his degree and not exceed it . . . he will unify his nature, tend his energies, maintain the virtue inside him, until he penetrates to the place where things are created. If you can be like this, the Heaven inside you will keep its integrity, the spirit inside you will have no flaws."³⁵ And this is immediately asserted as superior to the drunken man whose fearlessness of falling come only through the unknowingness provoked by the foreign substance of wine, rather than from knowing the heaven within the self.

Moreover, the *Liehzi* shows how our already acquired skills of spontaneous performance require reconstruction when they face new conditions. The accomplished archer totally loses his habitual skill and his masterful posture of stillness "like a statue" when he is asked to perform on a mountain cliff, where he trembles and falls on his face in fear, because he had not learned to master himself so that "his spirit and breathing do not change" in new conditions that provoke anxiety.³⁶ One's skill in other actions is likewise overwhelmed when one thinks of failure or reward: "you give weight to something outside you; and whoever does that is inwardly clumsy."³⁷ Similarly, in the *Zhuangzi*, the great carver Ch'ing explains that his apparently spontaneous skill relies on a process of self-preparation through the somatic discipline of fasting "to still [the] mind," so that after a week of fasting, "I no longer have any thought of congratulations or rewards, of titles or stipends . . . any thought of praise or blame, of skill or clumsiness . . . My skill is concentrated and all outside distractions fade away."³⁸

Somaesthetic solutions

These colorful fables suggest a critical point. Many of the experiences that advocates of spontaneity invoke as evidence that attention to one's somatic behavior in performance seems to make us stumble, stutter, and fail could well be cases in which it is not really the somatic focus (on our feet or tongue) that makes us stumble or stutter. It is instead the anxiety of falling or failing that causes such lapses and that intimately accompanies our attention to our body parts in our concern to help them do the job we fear they will not properly accomplish without our effortful anxious attention. In other words, such instances where attention to bodily movements in action seems to interfere in successful performance are really cases where one's actual attention to the bodily parts and movements is obscured by emotions and thoughts of failure, success, or one's image in the eyes of others. Thus, rather than globally condemning explicit or reflective body consciousness as detrimental to effective performance, we need to distinguish more clearly the actual focus and modes or acuity levels of such consciousness. For example, am I really focusing carefully on my finger and hand movements in my problematic lifting of a slippery pea with my chopsticks, or is my mental focus, when looking at my hand, equally suffused or even dominated by the

thoughts and attendant emotions of whether I will manage to do it successfully and how I am regarded (or judged) by others who see my efforts? Is my consciousness calmly observant or anxiously flustered? There is also the question of whether I have skill and accuracy in somaesthetic self-observation. Perhaps my somaesthetic sense of self is not very clear and that I am therefore not even aware that I have become anxious and that the quality or precision of my attention to my fingers has been thereby distracted, even if my eyes remain fixed on them.

Some people have better sensorimotor skills than others, and training is one way they have acquired them. Although Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach presumes that every normal person enjoys the same basic level of primordial spontaneous perception and action that functions with miraculous or magical efficiency (in contrast to extreme pathological cases of brain lesions or other forms of trauma), I think the situation is more complex. Many of us manage to get by with sensorimotor habits that have various minor flaws that do not disqualify us from being normal in the sense of having average functioning but do result in unneeded pain, discomfort, inefficiency, more rapid fatigue, and a tendency to certain kinds of errors or accidents.

We can share Merleau-Ponty's appreciation of our inexplicit, unreflective somatic perception, but should also recognize that such perception is often painfully inaccurate and dysfunctional. I may think I am keeping my head down when swinging a golf club, though an observer will easily see I do not. Disciplines of somatic education deploy exercises of representational awareness to treat such problems of misperception and misuse of our bodies in the spontaneous and habitual behavior that Merleau-Ponty identifies as primal and celebrates as miraculously flawless in normal performance. So if Merleau-Ponty aims to recapture a primordial unreflective perception that is universal and "unchanging" and that is needed as the essential ground for explaining all other perception and performance, my pragmatist approach is more sensitive to differences in somatic subjectivity and instead aims to explore and enhance our behavior by rendering more (though not most or all) of it more explicitly conscious and reflective so that our perception and performance can be improved. Bringing unreflective habits into more explicit consciousness is useful not only for revising bad habits but for providing opportunities for unlearning and stimulating new thinking that more generally increase the mind's flexibility and creativity, which some recent research suggests may be partly connected with enhancing the plasticity of the brain's neural networks.³⁹

The value of explicit, critical, and even reflective somatic awareness seems undeniable not only for the stages of learning various skills and for our continuing efforts of extending and refining them but also for the process of unlearning inadequate habits and replacing them with better ones. But can explicit or even reflective somaesthetic attention be usefully directed also to action beyond these diverse stages of learning to phases of full mastery where focus is on successful performance rather than learning? There is certainly a presumption, apparently founded on real-life experience and some experimental studies, that explicit attention to the bodily means of movement will somehow distract us from the ends of action and thus diminish performance. But perhaps this is because our powers of attention are insufficiently trained to encompass both our bodily movements and

the targets of our action. We seem able to listen attentively to the narration of news while also watching attentively the news images or instead attending to traffic when listening while driving. Perhaps those more skilled in attending to bodily behavior can combine such explicit or reflective attention with smooth effective performance that equally attends to the targets of action.

At this point we must address Merleau-Ponty's most radical argument against somaesthetic reflection: that such reflection is in fact impossible because we cannot really observe the body in a proper way. It "defies exploration and is always presented to me from the same angle . . . To say that it is always near me, always there for me, is to say that it is never really in front of me, that I cannot array it before my eyes, that it remains marginal to all my perceptions, that it is *with me*." I cannot change my perspective with respect to my body as I can with external objects. "I observe external objects with my body, I handle them, examine them, walk around them, but my body itself is a thing that I do not observe; in order to be able to do so, I should need the use of a second body."⁴⁰ "I am always on the same side of my body; it presents itself to me in one invariable perspective."⁴¹

Somaesthetics, in contrast, appeals to our ordinary somatic experience to argue that we can and actually do observe our bodies. We observe our faces or bellies, not only through our eyes and mirrors but through the touch of our hands, to observe whether we need to shave or to diet and exercise; we can observe our feet are dirty by seeing, feeling, or even smelling their lack of cleanness; we can observe the position of our arms and legs not only by seeing and touching them but by feeling their position from the inside, proprioceptively. In short, we can explore our bodies from the different perspectives of the body's different senses. Beyond these ordinary practices of somatic observation, a variety of meditative disciplines are structured on heightening the soma's conscious critical self-examination.

Merleau-Ponty nevertheless argues that observation of one's body is in principle impossible because of theoretical reasons. His argument seems to rely on two underlying philosophical assumptions. The first is the very deeply entrenched presumption that critical observation requires some separation – a critical distance – from what is being observed. But since we can never separate ourselves from our own bodies, then it seems impossible for us to observe them, despite our feelings of doing so in everyday experience. The second assumption is that a subjectivity that perceives or observes must be essentially different from the object of observation. But since the body as one's "primary subjectivity" is the perceiving, intentional, active subject, then it cannot also be the perceived object. If we recognize the body as the subject, it cannot be perceived as an object since its entire essence and role are fully focused on the subjectivity of perceiving, feeling, and purposively acting.

Defenders of somatic reflection can effectively challenge Merleau-Ponty's argument by challenging the presumption that the distance needed for critical observation of the body requires an impossible out-of-body perspective. We can critically examine aspects of our somatic experience without going outside our bodies to some putative disembodied mind. We use a finger to probe a small bump on our face; we use our tongue to discover and remove the traces of food on our

upper lip or on our teeth. We discriminate or assess our pain *within* the painful experience, not only after it has passed and we are, in that sense, beyond or outside it. In short somatic self-examination provides a model of immanent critique where one's critical perspective does not require being entirely outside the situation critically examined but merely requires a reflective, detached perspective on it that is not wholly absorbed in the immediacy of what is experienced. Rather than being seen as external, the perspective can be better described as somehow more peripheral to or aside from the focus of one's attention and experience. In other words, if the immediate focus of attention constitutes the absorbing immediate center of experience, then reflective somatic consciousness could be described as decentered or in Helmut Plessner's useful terminology as having "excentric" positionality.⁴²

These perspectives through which one's somatic subjectivity steps back and examines its own somatic experience are sometimes achieved by effortful disciplines of attention (such as yoga, *zazen*, etc.), but the subject's position of distanced or decentered reflection in which he observes his body with explicit focused attention often also arises spontaneously through experiences of somatic dissonance where unreflective spontaneous coordination is disrupted, thus stimulating a decentered, reflective critical attention to what is going on. We can understand the possibility of critical distance that is nonetheless immanent in the soma by recognizing the complexity of the soma and its modes of consciousness. As the soma involves a complexity of intentional functions and forms of perceptual awareness, so critical somatic consciousness involves some aspects of the soma's complex array of systems examining other aspects of that complexity. Thus, an essential dimension of the human soma is that it both observing subject and observed object. As beings that critically monitor themselves and purposefully use themselves, humans are both impulsively acting and deliberately thinking creatures; both spontaneity and reflection belong to human nature, which is always also a cultural product, since even our spontaneous impulses are typically the products of habits, desires, and needs acquired through a sociocultural context.

It is therefore much more fruitful to regard the contrast between reflection and spontaneity as a productive complementarity rather than being an either/or dualism where in advocating one we must reject the other. I cannot pursue this line of argument here by exploring the ways in which spontaneity and reflection can most effectively be combined or integrated in phased intervals in our behavior, but it seems clear that classical Chinese thought is helpful in appreciating their complementarity.

Notes

- 1 For a thorough discussion of this line of thought, see Richard Shusterman, "Self-Knowledge and Its Discontents: From Socrates to Somaesthetics," chap. 3 of *Thinking through the Body: Essays in Somaesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
- 2 William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 1128.

- 3 Immanuel Kant, *Reflexionen zur kritischen Philosophie*, ed. Benno Erdmann (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1992), 68–9, paras. 17 and 19. Kant later critically remarks that “man is usually full of sensations when he is empty of thought,” 117, para. 106.
- 4 William James, *Talks to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals* (New York: Dover, 1962), 99.
- 5 James, *Principles of Psychology*, 1077–8; *Talks to Teachers*, 100; *The Correspondence of William James*, vol. 4 (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1995), 586; and vol. 9, 14.
- 6 Noting his “disposition to hypochondria,” Kant felt that heightened attention to inner somatic sensations resulted in “morbid feelings” of anxiety. See Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 187–9. On James's hypochondria, see Ralph Barton Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James*, abridged in one volume (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1996), who also cites James's mother's complaints of his excessive expression of “every unfavorable symptom” (361). On the “philosophical hypochondria” of “introspective studies,” see James's letter to brother Henry of August 24, 1872, in *The Correspondence of William James*, vol. 1 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 167. James repeatedly confessed, in private correspondence, to being “an abominable neurasthenic.” See, for example, his letters to F.H. Bradley and George H. Howison in *The Correspondence of William James*, vol. 8: 52, 57.
- 7 In advocating the cultivation of somatic awareness, I am not suggesting that our bodily feelings are infallible guides to practice and self-care. On the contrary, I recognize that the average individual's somatic self-perception is often quite inaccurate (not noticing, for instance, excessive and harmful chronic muscular contractions). But this is precisely why somatic awareness needs to be cultivated in order to make it more accurate and discriminating and why such cultivation typically requires the aid of a teacher. I also do not want to suggest that our somatic self-awareness could ever be complete in a way that we become totally transparent to ourselves. For the limits and difficulties of somatic introspection, see Richard Shusterman, *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), chaps. 2, 5, 6.
- 8 William James, *The Correspondence of William James*, vol. 9 (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1995), 14.
- 9 James, *Talks to Teachers*, 100.
- 10 One could also argue that it leads to immoral self-absorption. I respond to these charges in *Body Consciousness*, chaps. 3, 5, 6.
- 11 James, *Talks to Teachers*, 99, 109.
- 12 James, *Principles of Psychology*, 1128.
- 13 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, trans. Richard C. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 78, 89.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 75.
- 15 Shusterman, *Body Consciousness*.
- 16 Nor can we rely on mere trial and error to form new habits, since the sedimentation process would likely be too slow and most likely be inclined to repeat the bad habit unless that habit was critically thematized in explicit consciousness for correction. For more detailed explanation of these points, see *Body Consciousness*, chap. 6.
- 17 John Dewey, *The Middle Works*, vol. 11 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), 352.
- 18 *The Analects of Confucius*, trans. Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 72.
- 19 *Mencius*, trans. D.C. Lau (London: Penguin, 1970), 154–5. (II:A.2).
- 20 Xunzi, “On Self-Cultivation,” *Xunzi, Volume 1*, trans. John Knoblock (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 154.
- 21 Its legendary founder, Laozi, claims, for instance: “He who loves his body more than dominion over the empire can be given the custody of the empire.” *Lao Tzu*, trans. D.C.

- Lau (London: Penguin, 1963), 17. Daoist somatic cultivation included special breathing exercises, dietetics, gymnastics, and sexual disciplines.
- 22 I quote from *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968).
- 23 I quote from *The Book of Lieh-tzu*, trans. A.C. Graham (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 32.
- 24 Ibid., 4.
- 25 Ibid., 77.
- 26 Ibid., 37.
- 27 *Chuang Tzu*, trans. Watson, 102–3.
- 28 Ibid., 319.
- 29 Ibid., 245.
- 30 *Lieh-tzu*, trans. Graham, 82.
- 31 Ibid., 107.
- 32 Xunzi writes, “The gentleman says, ‘Learning must never be concluded,’” “An Exhortation to Learning,” *Xunzi, Volume 1*, 135.
- 33 *Lieh-tzu*, trans. Graham, 105. In the same way, the catcher of cicadas must not only have his attention solely on them, but he also must already have learned how to “hold [his] body . . . and hold [his] hand as steady as a branch on a withered tree” (*Lieh-tzu*, 45).
- 34 Ibid., 112.
- 35 Ibid., 37–8.
- 36 Ibid., 38–9.
- 37 Ibid., 44.
- 38 *Chuang Tzu*, trans. Watson, 206.
- 39 For a more detailed articulation of this critique of Merleau-Ponty, see my discussion in Shusterman, *Body Consciousness*, chap. 2.
- 40 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 1962), 90–1.
- 41 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 148.
- 42 See Helmut Plessner, *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch. Einleitung in die philosophische Anthropologie* (Berlin and Leipzig: De Gruyter, 1928) and *Laughing and Crying: A Study of the Limits of Human Behavior*, trans. J.S. Churchill and Marjorie Greene (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970).