

Book Reviews

Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics. Richard Shusterman. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008. Pp. xi + 239. \$85.00 h.c. 10: 0521858909. \$24.99 pbk. 10: 0521675871.

Before I explain why Richard Shusterman's new work, *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics*, is profoundly important, I want to begin with a purely anecdotal report. Long interested in alternative therapies, I have in recent years been surprised to meet a succession of bodywork practitioners who are former academics—all in philosophy. Bodywork is a rubric for a variety of practices that “promote heightened somatic consciousness and body–mind attunement: from yoga and t'ai chi chu'uan to *zazen* and Alexander Technique,” as Shusterman describes, himself a certified practitioner of the Feldenkrais Method (7). I met these women (and they are all women, a fact inviting investigation) in different places and under varied circumstances, and each had turned away from the discipline now “shrunk from a global art of living into a narrow field of academic discourse,” as a consequence not of careful thought but of feeling (ix). Anxiety, headaches, depression, and in one case, crippling paralysis counted among the somatic signals communicating the need for career change. Ultimately, the body's urgencies were informed by an impetus toward greater self-care—a virtue not absent from the historical trajectory of philosophy but certainly sidelined by contemporary mainstream “philosophical prejudice against the body” (19).

It is lucky for us that Shusterman has not abandoned academic philosophy but has instead chosen to bring the insights of bodywork practices within the purview of philosophical analysis—not merely to evaluate their merit or efficacy but to show that philosophy bereft of somatic consciousness betrays its own central aims of “knowledge, self-knowledge, right action, happiness, and justice” (19). Whether ideally conceived or biologically reduced, the mind/brain that has become the disembodied heart of philosophy is, in *Body Consciousness*, pushed out of the vat and into the world. Shusterman's somaesthetic framework inspires philosophy to vital transformation.

Shusterman first introduced somaesthetics as a concept in *Practicing Philosophy: Pragmatism and the Philosophical Life* (1997); in *Body Consciousness* it is provisionally defined as “the critical meliorative study of one's experience and use of one's body as a locus of sensory aesthetic appreciation (aesthesia) and creative self-fashioning” (19). This is no narcissistic enterprise; to know the self

is an originary injunction of philosophy. Shusterman's "systematic philosophical framework through which the different modes of somatic consciousness, somatic cultivation, and somatic understanding can be better integrated and thus more effectively achieved" supports the most fundamental of philosophical questions pertaining to the good life, that is, a life of virtue, meaning, and pleasure (1). Such questions are inextricably bound to body consciousness, for increased somatic awareness leads to greater self-understanding, which "can improve our perception of and engagement with the outside world": "*Any acutely attentive somatic self-consciousness will always be conscious of more than the body itself*" (8).

The somaesthetics framework remedies two features that current philosophical research on the body lacks: a comprehensive "architectonic" integrating the varied discourses on the body into a "more productively systematic field" and "a clear pragmatic orientation" that will provide a way of translating somatic understandings into more meaningful and efficacious practice (22). Integrating discourses is exactly what Shusterman does in the chapters following his introduction to *Body Consciousness*. Drawing from perspectives as widely ranging as Stoicism, *zazen*, bioenergetics, art, neuroanatomy, and bodybuilding, Shusterman examines six philosophers whose insights on the soma gain greater acuity through the revelatory light of somaesthetics. Beginning with Michel Foucault, whose "embodied vision of care of the self" inspired his own, Shusterman in subsequent chapters critically evaluates the contributions of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Simone de Beauvoir, Ludwig Wittgenstein, William James, and John Dewey.

Shusterman's somaesthetics framework owes much to the American pragmatists, especially John Dewey, whose experience with bodywork through the Alexander Method greatly influenced his philosophy, especially his theoretical emphasis on habit. Shusterman sees "the art of somatic reflection and conscious control [as] itself a refined, intelligent habit," one that emerges through the unstable, contradictory, impulsive, complex background "we call the self" (205). This notion of the self is far less theoretically isolated than the individual rational actor who remains the darling of so many academic disciplines today. In contrast, the symbiotically dependent self is not merely in or part of the world but is essentially *of* it: "The upshot for somatic philosophy is that one's body (like one's mind) incorporates its surroundings Our bodies (like our thoughts) are thus paradoxically always more and less than our own" (214). The interdependences of this "transactional self" must awaken us to a deeper charge of "caring for and harmonizing the environmental affordances of our embodied selves, not just our own body parts" (215). This is an aesthetic perspective but also deeply moral. The former philosophers I mentioned were not undermined by weak will or lack of reason but by a fundamental disharmony with their environment and themselves, a disharmony experienced as somatic betrayal and healed through the inculcation of new habits leading to greater somatic awareness and self-care. Shusterman's somaesthetics philosophy challenges what is largely taken for

granted as the disjunctive relation between the life of the mind and life itself. There is a profound ethics at the heart of Shusterman's project, and what has been accomplished here is truly a thing of beauty.

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Inquiry and Education: John Dewey and the Quest for Democracy. James Scott Johnston. SUNY Series, the Philosophy of Education, ed. Philip L. Smith. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006. Pp. viii + 244. \$74.50 h.c. 0-7914-6723-6. \$24.95 pbk. 0-7914-6724-4.

Readers who are familiar with many of John Dewey's most celebrated writings, and with the philosophical climate within which he wrote, will find in James Johnston's first book an erudite survey of some important secondary literature on Dewey (issuing from both Dewey's contemporaries and more recent interpreters), as well as an ambitious effort to recover Dewey's philosophy from what the author sees as distorting interpretations. In particular, Johnston aims to restore Dewey's philosophy of education to its rightful place as a vital aspect of Dewey's work as a whole by illuminating deep connections among Dewey's thoughts about education, inquiry, growth, community, and democracy. Johnston is to be praised for courageously charting a course through this difficult and rewarding terrain.

Johnston also deserves credit for producing a compelling study of Dewey's very difficult conception of growth. Like Sidney Hook before him, in "John Dewey—Philosopher of Growth," Johnston connects growth to education, community, and democracy. Johnston's treatment of growth is more extensively developed than is Hook's (except in one sense, to which I will return at the end of this review), and Johnston gives much more attention to the relationship between inquiry and growth than does Hook.

In his introductory first chapter, Johnston urges readers of Dewey to think of inquiry as "context bound" and "self-correcting." In other words, Dewey's theory of inquiry aims to provide neither a single model for all inquiries nor a complete and final account of the techniques, methods, and habits of inquiry. Instead, the form of inquiry will vary according to the kinds of subject matter into