

The Body of a Philosopher

Embodied Thought as Physical and Social Activity

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Over the past decade, Richard Shusterman has argued with originality and courage for an expanded concept of philosophy that encompasses a distinctive and concrete somatic practice, complementing the familiar theoretical discipline. In the same spirit of innovation, I wish to advance Shusterman's notion of a somatic practice of philosophy by its critique in light of his consideration of views of John Dewey, and more importantly, in light of some of the most significant work on the body for philosophy of the last sixty years, the joint and individual writings of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson.

Philosophers typically give little attention to the activity of philosophy. Talk of "doing philosophy" tends to direct attention either immediately to its products, or to its logical methods. While this situation is not surprising given the academic institutionalization of inquiry, it is perhaps less justified in the case of philosophy which, because it claims no subject matter peculiarly its own, is characterized as an attitude of and toward thought. Two recent philosophical developments — the philosophical practice movement and renewed attention to the concept of philosophy as a way of life — are noteworthy, then, for their enforcing attention to the body for our understanding of philosophical activity. The philosophical practice movement brings attention to the body as the site of philosophical activity by restoring dialogue to a central position as a philosophical modality. Philosophical practice has for its goal the self-understanding of its interlocutors through open-ended dialogue. My interest in philosophical practice for the purpose of this paper is the structural conditions of the activity of dialogue as philosophy. Dialogue brings to our attention the physical circumstances of philosophical thought — where and when it occurs — and in particular, its temporal spread. In considering these, if we allow that philosophy can be done dialogically, we admit certain constraints on its pursuit.

First, by requiring that we attend to the thought of one's interlocutor as well as one's own, we become aware of our thought as our own as well as the other and her thought. The circumstances of

conversation being what they are, we are made aware of ourselves more generally as well. Second, from the point of view of the practicing philosopher, the dialogical requirement of an interlocutor places constraints on the place and time of the philosophy transacted; no philosophy occurs until both parties to the dialogue become involved. This condition enjoins attention to philosophy as a social event that creates expectations on the parts of both interlocutors. There must be at least implicit agreement as to the physical circumstances of the dialogue, including where it is to occur and how long it will take. However routine and institution-alized these considerations might become as philosophical practice becomes established, they have particular importance for philosophy as dialogue. They are of the same type of condition as the physical conditions internal to the dialogue, viz. the space between the interlocutors, and the pauses between their speeches. These conditions are more critical to the philosophy that occurs in a dialogue than it is to the philosophical communication occurring in the delivery of a paper, say, or in a lecture before a class, as the exchange in the latter is less critical to the thought material to those events. Dialogue is more likely to require both parties hanging on every word. We are much more aware of the pace of thought occurring in dialogue than we are under most other conditions. The unprogrammed dialogue of philosophical practice entails a genuine exchange of ideas. The pace and direction of thought, then, is constrained by the attention that must be focused on one's interlocutor. Rhetoricians, of course, are familiar with these topics, which generally are transparent to private reflection. But rhetoric becomes material for philosophical consideration when dialogue becomes a mode of philosophy. For example, one concept familiar to rhetoric but virtually absent in philosophical discussion since the Hellenistic period is *kairos*, understood as the critical moment to speak or act. What is the philosophical significance of timing for an idea's being entertained? Such considerations are properly material for philosophical treatment when thought is regarded as an embodied activity.

The possibility of philosophy understood as a way of life is enjoying renewed attention. In addition to recent works devoted to the idea by Martha Nussbaum, Pierre Hadot, Alexander Nehamas, and Richard Shusterman, exemplars of the philosophical life since Marcus Aurelius include Montaigne, Kierkegaard, Thoreau, Nietzsche, Dewey, Wittgenstein, and Foucault. From Socrates through Marcus Aurelius philosophy was understood perhaps primarily as a way of life as opposed to the production of texts. What is the plausibility of such a concept today?

What would constitute a philosophical life in a time in the midst of which philosophy has currency only as an academic discipline? Perhaps reflecting the reality of the institution, Alexander Nehamas argues that a philosophical life must be one largely devoted to writing.¹ Only through the disengaged reflection characterized by writing would it be possible to address those problems Nehamas assumes would be material to philosophical living. Those exemplars of the philosophical life who wrote nothing are of interest to us not because of their actual biographies, but because of the vision of such a life that they may be said to exemplify. What is philosophical about the philosophical life is thinking about what such a life would entail. We get no indication that there is any philosophical significance in the practical attempt to pursue such a life let alone in the slackness of the greater part of our experience of which we have little awareness at all. Nehamas' account is significant in reflecting the prevailing textualism of philosophy, and allows us to make sense of the question "What is philosophical living?" by inquiring into what would count as a more embodied conception of the philosophical life.

Nehamas' bloodless account of the philosophical life is a result inevitable for any that renders the activity of thought transparent. Certainly, the activity of writing provides some direction in fleshing out a vision of philosophical living, and others, notably Stanley Cavell, have made writing central to their visions of self-making. Writing is an embodied activity. As juxtaposed with the rest of human affairs in the concrete life of the writer, writing can be compared with them. It requires certain conditions; it may be more successfully pursued at particular times of the day; it may be more or less susceptible to distraction. The physical aspects of writing, then, can be evaluated in praxiological terms. But to that extent, what we describe as the physical act of writing would include acts of mere copying. Yet, we must resist the charge that the linguistic significance of writing is rendered transparent when it is considered in the category of physical activity. Ancient philosophers were aware of the utility of activities of writing for reinforcing the meaning for the writer of what is inscribed. As with speech, the act of writing constrains the rate of thought. Rhetoric, again, becomes a source of insight in this connection, as indicated by studies, for example, comparing the differential effects on composition of the technologies employed.

Such effects are at most marginal, however, in the arguments of philosophers such as Cavell and Nehamas, for whom writing represents a characteristic mode of thought as focused and disengaged. Yet despite

the privacy of abstract thought, and particularly as it is institutionalized in the act of writing, thought remains an embodied activity. The combination of the possibility of completed projects of private thought, the transparency of the activity of thinking, the internal coherence of books which make no reference to the occasion of their creation, and the ease with which a train of thought can be interrupted and reentered, contributes to a presupposition that thought and specifically philosophical thought, can be adequately understood without reference to its embodiment. To make the contrary case, I turn next to consideration of Shusterman's account of the somatic contribution to the philosophical life.

Much of Shusterman's discussion in this connection is offered in response to views of Richard Rorty. What Rorty finds particularly valuable in classical pragmatism is its historicist rejection of standard philosophical dualisms such as mind-body and analytic-synthetic, and its attempt to redirect philosophy's attention toward culture criticism. What Rorty finds unhelpful in the pragmatism of his self-avowed hero John Dewey is Dewey's concept of experience, which Rorty finds to be the basis of a confused and unnecessary metaphysics given Dewey's larger aims.² Shusterman is a pragmatist who seeks to salvage something of Dewey's concept of experience while avoiding the foundationalist traps into which he follows Rorty in believing that Dewey fell. I will argue that the charge of foundationalism against Dewey is misplaced even in the qualified view that Shusterman ascribes to him. More importantly, I will argue that Dewey's notion of quality that Shusterman rejects is necessary to Dewey's aims and establishes the importance of somatic experience for philosophy thereby affirming Shusterman's own independent arguments for its importance.

Shusterman argues for an aesthetic model of the philosophical life.³ Anticipating most of the questions which would likely be raised in response to such a suggestion, Shusterman works with a broader pragmatist notion of the aesthetic that supports a melioristic notion of an art of living. In line with the general pragmatist aim of maintaining the continuity of otherwise compartmentalized varieties of experience, Shusterman finds it natural to include somatic experience as a vehicle for aesthetic expression and evaluation. A philosophical life understood on an aesthetic model aims at self-improvement, not in terms of, perhaps, a more familiar "medical" norm of spiritual health as employed by the Hellenistic schools, but by finding one's own way through experimentation which increases one's experiential manifold. Shusterman gives particular atten-

tion to somatic experience, an area which, while he credits Dewey in advocating, has done more than any other philosopher in recent history to establish as a legitimate area of philosophical concern. Recently, Shusterman has advanced a proposal for a discipline of somaesthetics, which he describes and makes provisional remarks as to its location relative to both aesthetics and philosophy more generally.⁴ I will focus on that dimension of somatic experience that Shusterman calls “nondiscursive.”

Shusterman’s larger purpose, common to both *Pragmatist Aesthetics* and *Practicing Philosophy*, is to break the stranglehold of the linguistic in philosophy. Citing representatives of both the analytic and continental persuasions, from Wilfrid Sellars’ “myth of the given” to Gadamer’s claim that all experience is linguistic, Shusterman provides evidence for the widely-held view that as nothing can be entertained in thought but through the mediation of language, concepts being linguistic entities, only confusion can result when philosophy attempts to attend to anything “beyond” concepts.⁵ Although the pragmatist Richard Rorty advocates such a view, its critique would be expected from the perspective of classical pragmatism. In *Pragmatist Aesthetics* Shusterman argues for a concept of understanding distinct from acts of interpretation which provides the non-foundationalist grounds for such acts.⁶ Nondiscursive somatic experience is the primary evidence offered for this notion. From our inability to grasp things in thought without language it does not follow that “we can never experience them non-linguistically or that they cannot exist for us meaningfully but not in language.”⁷ Such understanding works both consciously and unconsciously. Just as a dancer must consciously seek to feel a sequence of steps proprioceptively in order to learn them, “[w]e typically experience our verticality and direction of gaze without being aware of them; but without our experiencing them, we could not be conscious of or focused on what we are in fact aware of, and our perceptual field would be very different.”⁸ Such a nonpropositional understanding is just our background “knowledge how” of making our way about in the world of ordinary objects — what Mark Johnson has described as “having a world.”⁹

In *Practicing Philosophy* Shusterman begins to clarify his use of the notion of nondiscursive experience by distinguishing it from the outward presentation of oneself to the world. Apart from the publicly evident disposition of one’s body is “a quality of somatic feeling that lies beneath linguistic formulation and often resists it.”¹⁰ Here, then, we have the genuinely ineffable, experience that is not merely unconceptualized, but unconceptualizable. Of the varieties of nondiscursive experience, it is

the somatic that is Shusterman's primary interest. He argues for its importance for philosophy by rehabilitating Dewey's concept of experience by separating Dewey's legitimate and largely aesthetic uses of the concept from what Shusterman takes to be mistaken foundationalist uses.

Both Rorty and Shusterman as neopragmatists are remarkable for their erudition, and especially for their conversance with and evident respect for both the analytic and continental philosophical traditions. Such breadth of sympathies one would expect be reflected in what they take to be compelling philosophical issues. Each finds foundationalism in different places in Dewey. Shusterman defends Dewey against Rorty's charges of epistemological foundationalism in Dewey's concept of experience. With Rorty, Shusterman subscribes to Sellars' "myth of the given," the view that knowledge claims cannot avoid error by being based on prelinguistic immediate data of the senses, since they become linguistic simply in being supplied as reasons.¹¹ Justification is a language-game. Dewey avoids the force of the argument, however, because he is not playing this game. Immediate experience is had but not known.

Dewey uses the example of a painting to elucidate his concept of quality. "Its quality is not a property which it possesses in addition to its other properties. It is something which externally demarcates it from other paintings, and which internally pervades, colors, tones, and weights every detail and every relation of the work of art."¹² That to which this quality is ascribed is a situation. "The selective determination and relation of objects in thought is controlled by reference to a situation — to that which is constituted by a pervasive and integrating quality..."¹³ Situations are the initially pre-cognitively undifferentiated contexts of inquiry. Shusterman stresses this contextual holism of situations in his critique, and identifies five logical functions of quality. Quality functions to: determine the relevant situation of an inquiry, distinguish objects within the situation, indicate what is adequate to judgment, determine the basic sense or direction of the situation and to sustain it over time, and to explain the association of ideas for any occasion of thought. Shusterman's rejection of situational quality is supported by two reasons. First, he notes that Dewey makes the categorical claim that all thought is regulated by quality; a less sweeping existential claim would be more defensible. Second, quality satisfies these logical functions pre-cognitively: "We can never really analyze it, because doing so transforms it into something else."¹⁴ Dewey himself, Shusterman argues, supplies the means to avoid this "metaphysics of presence," as habits, purposes, and needs fulfill the

five logical requirements. Yet, while habit in particular does have the organizing and directive properties for action that Shusterman claims for them, they are inadequate to explain thought. Of the five logical functions, association has most individual importance for thought's characterization. "Thinking as an existential process is all one with controlled association. For the latter is not explained by any merely external conjunction or any external identity in things."¹⁵ Association is that which explains the particular succession of ideas in any given instance of thought. Since, as Shusterman himself notes, habit typically operates unreflectively, habit is inadequate to explain the association of ideas. As Dewey argues, "while there is no association without habit, the natural tendency of habit is to produce an immediate reaction, not to evoke another distant object of thought or idea."¹⁶ There is no association without habit, because habit is the mechanism "by which association is effected, by which suggestion and evocation of a distant object of thought is brought about."¹⁷ There are indeed habits of thought just as there are habits of manipulation required in using an experimental apparatus. But the habits that work within inquiry or thought are not the causes of thought. Dewey asks rhetorically, "When I think of a hammer, why is the idea of a nail so likely to follow?" Shusterman responds "The obvious answer is not the qualitative glue of immediate experience, but the entrenched habit of their functional association for practical purposes of building."¹⁸ Yet Dewey asks this question in the same breath and to the same end as another: "When I think of a nest, why does a bird come into my mind?" About this question, Dewey has more to say. "In general," he says, "the reason is that I have so often seen birds without seeing a nest and nests without birds." Surely, this would not be the case were habit the operative mechanism. Something else is necessary to "evoke another distinct object of thought or idea." It is the closest thing to a dogma of pragmatism that thought is a response to conflict in "nondiscursive" experience. Habit is the mechanism of our actions. Most of the objects with which we deal in the course of a day are at only the periphery of our awareness. We do not attend to the desk drawer we pull to retrieve a pen unless the drawer fails to open. Should that occur, the situation gets our attention, and becomes an occasion for thought (Is the wood swollen? Is the drawer jammed?). When the problem is identified, we resolve the difficulty, the relevant habit is recovered, and the situation falls away from our awareness. While habits are operative within thought, it is the impediment to habit that is the occasion for thought. Thought requires that an other, and usually an inanimate object, get our attention

by intruding upon our experience. Self and other emerge in the inquiry aimed at resolving the problem which itself emerges from the situation.

Dewey is not guilty of foundationalism because he is not doing epistemology. There are better reasons to be skeptical of Dewey's notion of immediate quality. In both texts cited by Shusterman, Dewey's task is to draw the relation between the thought processes of scientific inquiry and thinking in the contexts of daily living; he is more concerned to explain thinking than he is to justify knowledge claims. As such, Dewey regards the task as a logical problem rather than an epistemological one. Dewey, like two other of the great classical pragmatists, William James and G.H. Mead, were psychologists as well as philosophers in the period when psychology was still emerging from philosophy's disciplinary ambit. Given that they freely contributed to the literatures of both disciplines, it is not surprising that we might feel unease at the psychologizing that often appears in their writings to the extent that we do not read them as historical. I would conjecture that Shusterman reads Dewey as foundationalist because explaining thinking is not a philosophical task. I am not capable of judging how well Dewey's work holds up as psychology. My more modest aim in this respect is to indicate a remarkable anticipation by Dewey of recent results in cognitive science championed by Lakoff and Johnson, and to argue for their importance for philosophical theory and practice.

In "Qualitative Thought," Dewey discusses the psychological process of assimilation in connection with his explanation of the association of ideas. Assimilation is the process by which we employ a general term to refer to a particular object viz., "To identify a thing as a promontory is a case of assimilation." It is to employ a category. Dewey makes the following remarks: "Assimilation is not itself the perception or judgment of similarity; the latter requires a further act made possible by symbols. It involves a proposition. The saying that there is a "tide in the affairs of men, etc.," does not of itself involve any direct comparison of human affairs with the ocean and an explicit judgment of likeness. A pervasive quality has resulted in an assimilation."¹⁹

Here Dewey brings the un-self-conscious use of metaphor under the process of assimilation. The "pervasive quality" of the situation is tide-like. The thought of the speaker who selects this metaphor is dominated her experience of tidal forces. Dewey here anticipates the Lakoff-Johnson theory of metaphor. Specifically, Dewey's notion of quality functions much as the more empirically sound notion of image-

schema in the work of Lakoff and Johnson in mapping our embodied experience onto our abstract concepts.

From an even stronger empirical orientation in philosophy than Dewey, whom together with Merleau-Ponty they cite as their predecessors as theorists of the embodied mind, linguist George Lakoff and philosopher Mark Johnson argue for the critical importance of recent work in cognitive science for our understanding of philosophical thought. Here is the circumspect opening of their *Philosophy in the Flesh*: “The mind is inherently embodied. Thought is mostly unconscious. Abstract concepts are largely metaphorical. These are three major findings of cognitive science. More than two millennia of a priori philosophical speculation about these aspects of reason are over. Because of these discoveries, philosophy can never be the same again.”²⁰

Among the key points of the embodied view of mind emerging from second-generation cognitive science they cite are these:

- Conceptual structure arises from our sensorimotor experience and the neural structures that give rise to it.
- Mental structures are intrinsically meaningful by virtue of their connection to our bodies and our embodied experience.
- There is a “basic level” of concepts that arises in part from our motor schemas and our capacities for gestalt perception and image formation.
- Our brains are structured so as to project activation patterns from sensorimotor areas to higher cortical areas. These constitute what we have called primary metaphors. Projections of this kind allow us to conceptualize abstract concepts on the basis of inferential patterns used in sensorimotor processes that are directly tied to the body.
- Reason is imaginative in that bodily inference forms are mapped onto abstract modes of inference by metaphor.²¹

Aside from the breadth of their concept of metaphor, that which is most controversial in their theory is the notion of a cognitive unconscious. The conventional wisdom in cognitive science is that at least 95 percent of all thought is unconscious. “The 95 percent below the surface of conscious awareness shapes and structures all conscious thought. If the cognitive unconscious were not there doing this shaping, there would be no conscious thought.”²² This claim, hardly news to cognitive scientists, should be startling to philosophers who have for 2000 years regarded metaphysics, as the study of ultimate reality, to be an a priori project. Aside from technical meta-subdisciplines, philosophers are not used to

waiting upon the results of empirical science. Metaphysical speculation, in particular, is metaphorical.

Using unconscious everyday metaphors, philosophers seek to make a noncontradictory choice of conceptual entities defined by those metaphors; they then take those entities to be real and systematically draw out the implications of that choice in an attempt to account for our experience using that metaphysics.²³

What is most important for our purposes is that the source of this unconscious cognitive structuring is that to which Shusterman refers as “nondiscursive” experience. The Lakoff-Johnson theory of metaphor would turn the “myth of the given” on its head. Recalling this epistemological argument, appeals to brute immediate experience to ground knowledge claims are disallowed as the understanding of such experience is necessarily made discursive in the justificatory process. A stronger claim along the same lines would be that we have no cognitive access to the world but through the medium of concepts made possible by language. Instead, we understand our conceptualization of our experience and the world in terms of largely unconscious cognitive processes which map the structures of our nondiscursive experience onto our abstract concepts. This is not to claim that our concepts are representations of reality; Lakoff and Johnson are clear on the point that there can be no knowledge of things-in-themselves. Rather, our understanding of the world is structured in terms of basic interactions with it.

The epistemological program pursued since Descartes seeks secure knowledge of an external world from the perspective of a disembodied mind certain of its own existence. I believe that it would not overstate their case to say that Lakoff and Johnson would have philosophy abandon the epistemological project. Dewey, I believe, himself a devastating critic of the epistemological program, and consistent with the empirical method in philosophy he advocated, would be comfortable in allowing that the inquiry that would replace epistemology would now properly be the province of cognitive science. Where would this leave philosophy? Certainly, philosophy would be a very different discipline. It would be constrained by the results of cognitive science, and would require a radically different methodology. It seems likely that much of what has been under philosophy’s ambit would be assumed by what Lakoff and Johnson term the “cognitive science of philosophy.” I offer only two speculative observations on this point. First, there would be room for the philosophy of science and meta-theory necessary to critique the

assumptions of ongoing cognitive science and science generally, as it is philosophy's prerogative to critique social institutions. Second, philosophers, presumably, would perform the culture criticism necessary to adjust social institutions to the results of cognitive science.

Part of the constraint that cognitive science would place on philosophy is the limited process, a process that would result in a change in one's stock of metaphors would change one's reality. While cognitive science shows us that we cannot reason independently of metaphor, the forging of new metaphors is possible, however difficult. With respect to the creation of new metaphors, Lakoff and Johnson distinguish between the reflective work of creating and, particularly, of analyzing a metaphor, and the considerably more difficult task of self-consciously integrating a new metaphor that it may structure one's experience, the difficulty of the task being a function largely of the extent of the unconscious processing required.²⁶

Having raised to an issue for an understanding of the philosophical life the question of the occasion of thought. Dewey's notion of situation was taken to address the same problem. Dewey's discussion of assimilation anticipates the Lakoff-Johnson theory of metaphor. At this point, then, we have considered the body in relation to thought in two respects: as the site of thought which conditions thought's temporal flow, and as the source of thought's structure through metaphor. Philosophy understood as a practice is characterized by a cultivated awareness that should be not merely conscious of itself, but responsive to reflexive efforts to improve. Ideally, one's processes of thought should be self-conscious and susceptible to modification. In particular, if somatic experience determines our concepts, it seems a plausible conjecture that one's conceptual structure would be altered by altering one's experience. Normative inquiries into what would count as improvement as well as practical inquiries into how one might proceed would be fertile ground

for study. In practical terms, however, there is a prior problem corresponding to the problem of exercising control over the organization of thought by metaphor.

Since it is our largely nondiscursive somatic experience that structures our thought through metaphor, and as our conscious experience is itself structured by metaphor, it is our nondiscursive somatic experience that is at issue. How does one expand the manifold of one's (at most) peripherally conscious experience? Altering one's physical environment is one gross and unsubtle possibility. This would amount to the self-imposed application of constraints to one's possible actions or sensory experience, and could be accomplished either by putting oneself in, say, a different terrain, or by directly enhancing or inhibiting one's physical capacities, e.g. going through the day without speaking, or tying one arm behind one's back. The result is the same: conscious direction is not required to change the quality of one's experience, as that experience is altered whatever one does. Apart from such contrivances, the optimal condition would be self-directed immediate change of experience — altering one's response to a given situation at will, say, by assuming a different posture, or changing the trajectory or pace of a movement. Here, however, is a problem paralleling the "myth of the given." Just as there would seem to be no cognitive access to nondiscursive experience independently of language, so would it seem similarly impossible to exercise conscious control over a category of experience which, by its nature, is at the fringes of our awareness. This would appear to be a major problem for Dewey's view. If habit is the mechanism of thought and more overt activity, and habit operates unconsciously, how can it be made susceptible to revision? This problem indicates the importance Dewey attached to the work of F.M. Alexander. For over 30 years, Dewey was a student of Alexander, the creator of the bodywork modality known as the Alexander Technique. Dewey was an enthusiastic advocate of the technique and wrote introductions to all three of Alexander's principal works. While Dewey personally gained from his experience with the Alexander Technique (having attributed both an improvement of his vision and his longevity to it), it was at least equally important to him for its verification of his own claims, and for its general value as an educational method.

Alexander was an Australian actor whose early career of one-man recitals of Shakespeare was threatened by hoarseness and voice loss that would occur in the course of his performances. Frustrated by the inability of the many physicians and other therapists whose help he sought to

resolve the problem, and concluding that the problem was a consequence of the manner by which he was using his voice, Alexander undertook to diagnose and correct the problem himself. Through an extraordinarily disciplined course of investigations over a period of many months, Alexander was able to correct the problem and resume his career. His experiences became the basis for the technique which now is taught worldwide and is particularly familiar to actors, musicians, and athletes. To illustrate the nature of the technique, consider the often-used example of the golfer who takes his eye off the ball. In driving the ball off the tee, golfers are taught to keep their head down. On the face of it, failure to do so would seem to be a fairly easy matter to correct. It is not. Alexander theorized that our general inability to correct a motion (head position) that is part of a larger action controlled by habit once initiated (teeing off) is due to a phenomenon he termed "end-gaining." The kinesthetic and proprioceptive sensations of postures and motions within actions controlled by habit comprise the feel of our actions such that one way of describing those actions would be doing that which produces those sensations. Our understanding of an action involves the somatic sensations produced by it. Since an action controlled by habit by its nature is done in one way only, we become unable to effectively conceive of the action in any other way. "End-gaining" refers to our inability to intervene to alter the performance of a habitual action once an intention to accomplish an end has triggered the habit. For the golfer, teeing off is a gestalt — the action is all of a piece. Although the instruction to keep his head down seems reasonable enough, the golfer finds to his consternation and bewilderment that he is unable to do so. In fact, Alexander students will often deny that they continue to do what their teachers report that they observe. Our inability to "feel" our way into a different understanding of an action parallels the constraint on our thinking imposed by the metaphors we use. Significantly, to remove the constraint in one case is to remove it in the other.

The Alexander Technique involves two basic elements: inhibition and direction. Inhibition involves placing oneself in the presence of the stimulus, but then refraining from triggering the habit, which, once triggered, proceeds to its inevitable conclusion. The direction phase involves a gradual accretion of self-conscious and simultaneously-given instructions sufficient to modify the habit. What is most interesting for our purposes is the Alexander teacher's role at the point that the student is inhibiting the habit's discharge. What instructions is the golfer to give himself to keep his head down? In performing any habitual action, our

performance relies unconsciously on the feeling of what it is like to accomplish that task. Since the student's "unreliable" feeling, as Alexander termed it, of the problematic action is a necessary part of his understanding of that action, the recalcitrance of the feeling is a serious obstacle to effectively conceptualizing a correction. A critical part of the teacher's function is to give the student a new experience or feeling which, over time, the student will come to rely upon in performing the action in question.²⁷ The teacher accomplishes this through the gentle manipulation of the body part(s) concerned. Thus in the case of the golfer, presumably the teacher would prevent the student's head from moving as the student goes through the motions of teeing off. In the absence of the appropriate evidence, it is interesting to conjecture that one could acquire new metaphors in a similar way, that is, by being induced to have somatic experience that one would not otherwise have if left to one's own habitual manifold for encountering the world.

It would be of considerable philosophical interest if new metaphors could be acquired in this manner. If thought is constrained by metaphor, then we expand our individual capacities for conceptualization by increasing the richness of our unconscious base of metaphors. If the metaphors we possess are a function of the forms of our physical encounter with the world, then the growth in our capacities for thought in important ways depends upon the continued expansion of our unconscious somatic experience. Notice that such "expansion" differs from the notion simply of increasing one's sensory experience in general. As the example of the Alexander Technique indicates, it is not enough simply to make oneself available to passively receive new sensory information. Even when it is the Alexander teacher who induces the experience for the student, it is necessary that the student attend to the situation and continue to give herself the instruction to inhibit the discharge of the habitual response. Cultivated attention is essential to the technique. Since habitual experience constitutes the largest part of our engagement with the world, the great value Dewey saw in the Alexander Technique was its capacity to maintain attention even within habits. Alexander offered a means to get inside a habit to modify it to more effective and satisfying use.

Philosophy as theory is not self-conscious; the thinker's awareness of her thinking is transparent to any given instance of reasoning. To borrow Wittgenstein's metaphor, the eye is not in the visual field. Philosophical thought is characteristically self-critical; it is distinguished by a perpetual readiness to reconsider its assumptions and standards of

evidence. While it is this style of thought that enables reference to philosophical thought independent of reference to a subject matter, the existential or physical process of thought is transparent because it is the problem at hand that supplies the terms of reasoning and its evaluation. Although philosophy typically is characterized by a style of thought as opposed to a set of problems, philosophers themselves regard philosophy exclusively in terms of the problem. Thus, on being distracted, the philosopher can attend to other things before returning to pick up the thread of her thought, and the intervening interval between episodes of attention to the problem will have no significance for the issue at hand.

The philosophical attitude is characterized by its readiness to revise assumptions and methods. But these are notions which privilege abstractions as proper objects of philosophical attention. The conceptual issues with which philosophy is typically identified being abstractions are not immediate objects of attention. Something must get our attention before the process of abstraction occurs. What is immediate is somatic experience, and to the extent that such experience can be made the object of attention, and is susceptible to control, it is a proper object of the philosophical attitude. But is it the somatic experience itself to which the philosopher attends, or the concept of the experience? Charles Taylor in *Sources of the Self* makes the following remark:

[...] when we see something surprising, or something which disconcerts us, or which we can't quite see, we normally react by setting ourselves to look more closely; we alter our stance, perhaps rub our eyes, concentrate, and the like. Rather than disengaging, we throw ourselves more fully into the experience, as it were. There is a kind of search which involves being "all there," being more attentively 'in' our experience [...]. This involves reflexivity and self-awareness, but precisely not of the disengaging kind.²⁸

Not only does attention not imply disengagement, neither does self-aware attention. I submit, then, that immediate somatic experience is

a proper object of a self-aware philosophical attitude, and that one way of understanding the philosophical life is a life that cultivates the continuity of such self-aware experience.

Shusterman distinguishes between what is unconscious and what is part of our experience but not an object of attention. "The interdependent continuity of mind and body is reflected in the similar continuity of conscious thinking and the nondiscursive background which orients thought, an often unconscious somatic background which can however be brought into consciousness."²⁹ The best examples of this nondiscursive experience would involve the operation of habit as that which functions in our behavior without our having to attend to it, as when we compose a text simultaneously with our typing it. This capacity to do several things at once no doubt contributes to philosophy's neglect of the body, the phenomenon of absent-mindedness notwithstanding. But continuous with and underlying any particular habitual activity are the postural adjustments we make constantly in response to our background proprioceptive awareness. Unlike habits whose triggers are environmental cues for the performance of specific tasks, posture constitutes a special category of habit given its omnipresence and intimate association with our immediate sense of ourselves. How we hold ourselves is how we have ourselves somatically. The dual use of "attitude" is a particularly "apt" example in this regard. Clearly, its use in the sense of a mental or emotional disposition is a metaphorical projection from its use to refer to the posture of the body or the physical orientation of an object. I would suggest that "incline" and "decline" function similarly. Thus to be inclined to accept an invitation is to be leaning in that direction; to decline an offer is to move away from its acceptance.

Unlike the philosopher understood as one whose philosophical activity is identified in terms of the conceptual issues he pursues, the practical philosopher will be concerned with maintaining a philosophical attitude, and will be interested in those existential circumstances which facilitate and inhibit that objective. We are all aware that our posture can be affected by one's emotional state. We are only slightly less aware that causation goes in the other direction as well. Sitting straighter makes one more attentive, for example. Smiling, supposedly, can make one happier. To the extent that we philosophers consider such practical folk wisdom, we tend to treat it with the disdain had for such popular concepts as the "power of positive thinking," and the like. The practical philosopher cannot afford to be so patronizing with respect to this issue, but must take such discussions seriously. Fortunately, there is an ancient and

respectable body of thought as well as traditions of practice which consider the relation of posture and attitude, eastern sources taking pride of place. There is an intellectually respectable western tradition as well, extending from the Hellenistic schools at least. I locate Alexander in this tradition.

Shusterman is to be credited with establishing the legitimacy of directed somatic experience as a mode of doing philosophy. He has reasserted the central importance of experience for pragmatist thought, and has identified programmatic avenues for further work both in aesthetics, and for the concept of philosophy as a way of life. Shusterman's meliorative focus on experience as an end, however, obscures the larger instrumental significance of somatic experience for philosophical practice. Philosophical dialogue, Dewey's notion of the situation of inquiry, Lakoff and Johnson's arguments for the somatic determination of thought, and the function of the Alexander Technique teacher in causing new proprioceptive experience in her student, are examples of the ultimately somatic encounter with the other as the occasion for thought. Because the logical self-sufficiency of concepts renders transparent the causal role of somatic experience for thought, western philosophy for most of its history has been pursued without attention to the body. Several current philosophical developments, including the resurgence of pragmatism, the philosophical uses of second-generation cognitive science, renewed interest in the concept of philosophy understood as a way of life, and the attention now being given to philosophical dialogue as a result of the appearance of philosophical practice, suggest the promise of multiple avenues of work on thought's embodiment.

We need not wait for the results of cognitive science before we can determine the importance of somatic experience for the activity of philosophy. Shusterman's work demonstrates as much. But to the extent that cognitive science can establish a causal link between nondiscursive somatic experience and the structure of thought, the importance of the body is established as an object of philosophical theory as well as the vehicle for its practice.

¹ Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 8.

² Richard Rorty, "Dewey's Metaphysics" in *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

- ³ Richard Shusterman, *Practicing Philosophy: Pragmatism and the Philosophical Life* (New York: Routledge, 1982).
- ⁴ Shusterman, "Somaesthetics: A Disciplinary Proposal," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 57 (1999): 299-314.
- ⁵ *Practicing Philosophy*, 173.
- ⁶ Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1992), 120-133.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 128.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 127.
- ⁹ Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination and Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 175.
- ¹⁰ *Practicing Philosophy*, 31.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 171.
- ¹² John Dewey, "Qualitative Thought," in *Philosophy and Civilization* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1968), 96.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 97.
- ¹⁴ Shusterman, *Practicing Philosophy*, 165.
- ¹⁵ Dewey, 108.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 110.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 109.
- ¹⁸ Shusterman, *Practicing Philosophy*, 166.
- ¹⁹ Dewey, 115.
- ²⁰ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 3.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 77.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 13.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 14.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 556.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.
- ²⁶ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 145.
- ²⁷ The Alexander student's induced epiphany suggests a category of vaguely dialogical experience of interest to the practical philosopher. Such a category

might also include moments of edification had in dialogue strictly understood. To the extent that such experiences are consciously induced by an other, they would constitute instances of *kairos*.

²⁸ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 163.

²⁹ Shusterman, *Practicing Philosophy*, 169-170.

The Body: Unbounded Openness and Other

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Can the body, as a location of openness, capacity, and unclosed possibility, assist us with a deeper understanding of how to live in the world with others? I propose that the question of *other* in our world raises profound moral issues for us in this time and it is to the body we can return to locate the primary grounding for our moral understandings.

The body attended is a primordial ground of all of our experience. While we are most aware of the body studied in its gross material form — its anatomy, its psychology — my interest in the body lies within a consideration of its felt subsymbolic aspects (Ashbrook, 1989). These are aspects often out of our awareness in an interior dimension which is unceasing in its pulsing, sensing, perceiving responses to the world we inhabit, what Wilshire (1990) refers to as “the moody and visceral sensing of the background” (44), the “pre-reflexive matrix of one’s life” (69).

The body, if we stand outside psychological or physio-mechanical understandings, is founded upon layers underneath the cognitive levels. Yuasa (in Shigenori, 1992) speaks of layers descending into the body’s opaqueness as we move away from the brightness of consciousness (70). Darroch-Lozowski (1999) refers to the uncoded world and the “threshold body”. In the deepest layers, remote from our conscious awareness, we are sustained by dimensions which Ashbrook calls “subsymbolic”, or the persistence of the reptilian brain and its faithful, continuous sustaining of our incarnate lives. Although an understanding of its functioning is not cognitively available to us, the full presence of the body can be attended through our reflection cast inward, what Levin (1985) refers to as our “guardian awareness”. The body, granted our guardian awareness, our attention, reveals itself in felt experience as a space of immensity. We feel ourselves to be enduring in our bodily darkness, in quiet noise, in rhythm. Turning inward, our body is a “place” of feeling, of sensation, of prospect, of unclosed, infinite possibility. We apprehend in our bodies a dimension of our being which is prior to reflection, to consciousness, to language. And it is through such full layered experience of our bodies that all encounter with the world occurs despite our contemporary magnification of the importance of cognitive dimensions. (For, example,