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Essays on the Ever-Contingent Perspectives on the Body

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Ilaria Flisi en Janneke Toonders (hoofredactie), Ted van Aanholt (vormgeving), Selina van der Laan (beeldredactie), Esmée van den Wildenberg en Tara Smid (eindredactie), Sami Dogan, Mark van Doorn, Laura Keulartz, Manon Lambooj, Stefan Schevelier, Jochem Snijders, Pieter Theunissen, Willem Vernooij, Piet Wiersma.

Bestuur

Vera Deurloo (voorzitter), Céline Ngapy (penningmeester), Paula Müller (secretaris)

Adresgegevens

Postbus 9103

6500 HD Nijmegen

splijtstof@ftr.ru.nl

Gelieve kopij per mail aan te leveren.

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Editorial

Dear Reader,

The edited volume in front of you is a special edition of *Splijtstof*, the magazine of the faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies at the Radboud University of Nijmegen. The volume consists of a collection of essays that are the final product of the second-year bachelor course 'Project'.

The purpose of this course is to train the students in research, presentation, writing, and cooperation skills on the basis of an overarching topic. Every student formulates her or his own specific research question relating to this topic and writes an essay about it. Peer feedback is a pivotal part of this process. For, besides the individual effort of every student (resulting in the form of an essay), together the students work towards producing an edited volume, which now lies before you.

The present volume consists of essays all concerning the overarching topic "Philosophers and the Body", and it was written under the guidance of Dr Veronica Vasterling. This particular volume was selected (out of a total of seven edited volumes) by a jury to be published by *Splijtstof*. This special issue is the sixth of its kind, and hopefully there will be many more to come. I wish you as much reading pleasure as I had.

On behalf of the editorial team,

Janneke Toonders
Editor-in-chief Splijtstof

Introduction

It is through our bodies that we interact with the world. We all deal with our bodies on a daily basis, our own bodies, but also the bodies of other individuals. In this sentence, one could already detect the prevalent philosophical view concerning the mind and the body in the Western speech. The revealing part is the phrase that indicates that one “has” or “owns” (rather than “is”) a body. In this way, the Western day-to-day speech reflects mind-body dualism: the belief that the mind and the body are two separate, independent substances. How we think of our body, and the relation it has to our minds, has a great influence on how we perceive ourselves and the world. The following collection of essays takes dualism as a central theme. In some it will be explicitly mentioned, in others it will be rather implicit. However, what is clear, is that the mind-body dualism, as introduced by René Descartes, reoccurs in several issues.

One’s stance on the mind-body issue does not only determine one’s attitude towards body modification, but it also influences one’s idea of identity and embodiment. As will become clear at the end of the bundle, dualism can also be linked to societal problems such as racism, the downplaying of sexual abuse, and gender stereotypes. Dualism and its associated Cartesian rationalism start from a beautiful thought: all humans are essentially the same, due to their mental and rational capacities. Nonetheless, if mind-body dualism can indeed be linked to injustice, then a different philosophical framework of the mind-body relation is desirable. Therefore, the essay bundle will end on a more positive note by attempting to propose two different alternatives to the dualist framework.

Modifying the Body

It is questionable if the body was ever really seen as a static, unchangeable substance. However, recent developments have caused the body to illustrate the complete opposite. Nowadays, the body seems to be perceived as a separate entity that can be modified completely to fit one’s wishes. What are the consequences of this? Three papers will examine the implications of three different forms of body modification: cosmetic surgery, eugenic intervention, and transhumanism.

One of the most familiar forms of contemporary body modification is cosmetic plastic surgery. Denise Gorissen writes about this phenomenon in her paper. Her starting position is the observation that this extreme form of body modification must have a great impact on the conception we have of our own body. The question is in what way cosmetic surgery will impact the body image: positively or negatively? By examining the impact of the availability, popularity and undergoing of cosmetic plastic surgery, this paper offers a complete overview of the consequences of this

popular practice on the body image. Furthermore, the paper sheds light on the remarkable difference between the dualist framework of cosmetic plastic surgery and the post-dualist framework of the body image.

A second form of body modification is attempting to alter the genetic makeup, also denoted as eugenic intervention. This is perhaps even more extreme than cosmetic plastic surgery, since the modification often takes place before the individual is born. Eugenic intervention, therefore, has implications for the individual it is used on, for society and even for the human species. An important question that immediately comes to mind is the following: to what extent is eugenic intervention in natural processes and bodies justifiable? Luisa Koch will examine this question in her paper by highlighting possible positive and negative consequences. She shows us that even seemingly clear-cut cases do not have a simple answer to the question whether the practices are morally acceptable or not.

The last form of body modification that will be discussed in this bundle is not practiced at the moment, but could potentially in the future. Lian van den Berg will examine the moral implications of transhumanism. This theory proposes that the physical and mental limitations of the body can be overcome with the help of science and technology. The ultimate goal is to achieve immortality, or at least a significantly longer life. One way of achieving this immortality would be by transferring the mental content of a human to a robot, also called “mind-uploading.” This proposed practice suggests a mind-body dualism by getting rid of the body and its limitations completely. And while it might sound ideal, it introduces several moral implications. Therefore, Van den Berg argues against striving for immortality.

Identity and Embodiment

After having discussed the topic of body modification, we will move on to the identity of individuals. The notion of identity seems to be intrinsically linked to the idea of who one believes to be and how one wants to be viewed. We experience our identity in two ways: as a mental state by asking the question “who am I?,” and through our bodies by asking the question “how do I want other people to see me?” We all aim to be our most authentic self, however, there seems to be an underlying tension between our inner and outer experience. In addition, mind and body, in relation to identity, could be viewed as connected, but separate entities. Following the dualist tradition, the mental experiences are therefore often prioritized over the body.

Based on this line of thought, Tanja Mourachova will investigate the paradoxical principle underlying our current notion of identity, which raises a series of issues that have serious implications for our mental well-being and our social interactions. Furthermore, she will explore the question whether there is something that corresponds with our notion of identity and if not, whether it is possible to function without. After discussing different positions on identity in the history of philosophy, she will introduce a new perspective on identity without the earlier-named paradoxical tension.

Mireille Kouevi will delve into the notion of black aesthetic as a positive counterpoint to the general discussion of the black body in relation to racism. Her paper explores how the notion of race influences how one is treated and viewed in the world. Furthermore, she will elaborate the notion of race and its relation to the body, by explaining how black aesthetics is situated in two black liberations movements: the Black Arts movement and the Black Panther movement. By illustrating this, she shows what impact a reclaimed and self-determined image of black people can have on how black people and people from African descent are viewed in the world.

Dualism, Misogyny and Racism

The conceptualization of the connection between mind and body not only influences how we come to perceive identities, but it also influences our understanding of societal problems such as misogyny (hatred of, contempt for, or prejudice against women) and racism in general. Historically, both females and people of colour were portrayed as subjective and inferior to white men. The mind and its ratio were often associated with white males, whereas females and people of colour were rather reduced to their bodies. Therefore, philosophical traditions such as dualism have a strong impact on the perception of ourselves and others.

To illustrate this, and to add to Kouevi's paper, Lea Metzger addresses how a Cartesian Rationalist framework cannot fully account for racism. It treats racism as a problem of conscious prejudice and offers the solution of colour blindness (seeing racial, bodily characteristics as arbitrary and irrelevant for defining our rational, human nature). First, she analyses how a Cartesian Rationalism framework fails to account for the implicit

The notion of identity seems to be intrinsically linked to the idea of who one believes to be and how one wants to be viewed.

biases that arise depending on one's visible bodily characteristics. This is due to the fact that certain attributes (morality, rationality, objectivity) where historically linked to the white male body. Secondly, by overlooking the influence of unconscious implicit

biases, Cartesian Rationalism dismisses the impact that history has on our present lived experiences, interactions, and assumptions.

Shifting our attention from people of colour to women, Miki Eisenga explores how the philosophical traditions of misogyny and dualism influence and strengthen each other in downplaying negative effects of non-violent physical abuse. The paper points out why there is still a need for a social movement such as the #MeToo Movement. It starts with an introduction to dualism and Descartes, zooming in on its influence on the conceptualization of the human being in the philosophical literature. The paper introduces some examples of Kant and Schopenhauer to illustrate the interwovenness of philosophical frameworks such as dualism and misogyny.

New Perspectives

By now, the reader has encountered a range of implications of the dualist framework, including attitudes towards body modifications, thoughts of how our identity corresponds to our mind and body, and the role embodiment plays. Dualism as a philosophical framework influences the understanding of concepts and the way societal problems are dealt with. The last two essays will therefore mainly focus on exploring alternative frameworks.

Annabel Dirkzwager will first point us to yet another problematic phenomenon related to dualism: gender stereotypes. The Cartesian dualist framework has deeply influenced our understanding of ourselves in relation to our body: gender and sex are usually seen as two separate categories, just as in the Cartesian dualist framework of mind and body. We still think of ourselves as if we consist of a *res extensa*, determined by nature, and a *res cogitans*, influenced by culture. This paper argues that these two seemingly separate opposing categories are more intertwined than we tend to assume. Focussing on the phenomenon of gender performativity, Dirkzwager examines whether the performativity theory of Judith Butler is an adequate post-dualist solution to the standard dualist conception of gender.

We end this bundle with Kirti Singh. His paper examines the possibility of an alternative to dualism by making a, perhaps surprising, comparison: between Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and his concept of the embodied subject on the one hand, and the view of the body of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school of thought (originated in India in the fourth century AD) on the other hand. As it turns out, these two philosophical positions have several points of resemblance, namely: (I) both schools of thought ascribe a mediating position to the body and embodiment, in between subjectivity and objectivity, (II) their focus on perception and (III) an emphasis on the extroverted view of the perceiver, or in phenomenological terms: a focus on being in the world.

In a Nutshell: Dualism and Its Influences

As became clear, this bundle offers an overview of how a dualist stance in the mind-body relation influences several practical as well as conceptual aspects of our lives. In the Western speech, we tend to say that we “own” a body, but our collection of essays shows that a dualist framework does not have to be taken for granted and that there are alternatives. Hopefully, this bundle will allow you to discover how much impact underlying philosophical frameworks, in this case dualism, have on how we deal with important questions concerning the state of our being. Whether we see the mind and body as interconnected or rather as separate entities, will affect our answers to these questions. The aim of this bundle is to offer different perspectives on philosophical topics surrounding the body and its connection to the mind. We hope you will enjoy reading it while forming your own (critical) opinion.

“Surely, the dualist language surrounding cosmetic plastic surgery can primarily be explained by the fact that our everyday language and perception in general exists within a dualist framework.”

Cosmetic Plastic Surgery and the Body Image

A Vicious Circle

Denise Gorissen

Breast enhancement, facelift, eyelid lift, tummy tuck, liposuction, Botox, filler treatment. Most people will be familiar with (some of) these concepts, know people who got such a treatment or even went through one themselves. With the price tags going down and the popularity going up, cosmetic plastic surgeries are becoming more common and acceptable. This relatively new phenomenon is now perceived as normal. Therefore, I started to wonder what this does to our body image, and thus to the conception we have of our own body. In cosmetic plastic surgery, one can adapt one's body to one's ideals, rather than "you have to work with what you are born with." The body, thereby, becomes completely modifiable. This designates a major shift in how we conceive the body, so it is clear that the availability of cosmetic plastic surgery has a significant impact on the way we deal with our body image. The question is in what way.

Will it affect our body image for the better, by enabling us to adapt our body to how we feel like we should look? Or does it damage our body image, by creating an unrealisable ideal? Given the growing popularity of cosmetic plastic surgery, the answers to these questions might be crucial and perhaps should determine how we should deal with cosmetic plastic surgery in the future.

The aim of this paper is to investigate what impact the availability and popularity of, and actually undergoing, cosmetic plastic surgery has on the way we deal with our body image.

This will be examined in the following way: I will begin with a historical overview of appearance-related practices, followed by an introduction of the concept of body image as well as findings from empirical research on cosmetic surgery patients, and I will end with an overall conclusion. Before the conclusion, I will also add a critical note on the existing framework of cosmetic plastic surgery.

Historical Overview

First, it is important to define practices discussed in this essay. Cosmetic plastic surgery is surgery entirely focussed on enhancing one's appearance. In contrast to "normal" plastic surgery, it is denoted as elective. Cosmetic plastic surgery was practiced for the first time between the mid-eighteen hundreds and the early nineteen hundreds.¹ However, back then, the cosmetic procedures were not nearly as popular as they have become today, due to the increasingly sophisticated methods and the decreased medical risks. But the roots of cosmetic practices predate the eighteen- and nineteen hundreds.

1 B.O. Rogers, "A Chronologic History of Cosmetic Surgery," *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine*, vol. 47,3 (1971): 265-302, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1749866/>.

Recall the definition of cosmetic plastic surgery: elective surgeries entirely focused on enhancing one's appearance. If we replace the word "surgeries" by "practices," it becomes clear that wigs, specific clothes, corsets and even jewellery all fall under the same category. Archaeologists have found and identified jewellery from the fifth century before Christ,² which shows just how old the human urge is to enhance one's appearance via "elective practices." Cosmetic plastic surgery is thus the continuation of a long tradition, now with increasingly sophisticated medical technology. As a consequence, this means that the way we deal with our body (image) has not *changed* because of cosmetic plastic surgery. Rather, it means that cosmetic plastic surgery changed *the means* by which we deal with our body (image), taking it to a new extreme.

Thus, cosmetic plastic surgery does not designate a new desire to enhance one's appearance. What it does, is take it to a new level: with cosmetic plastic surgery, one does not only make changes *on* the body (by putting on clothing, a wig or jewellery), but one makes changes *to* the body. As a consequence, cosmetic plastic surgery is more permanent than any of these other appearance-related practices. Whereas one could just take off jewellery, wigs or clothes, cosmetic plastic surgery can only be reversed (if it can ever really be reversed) by undergoing new surgeries. This characteristic of (semi-)permanence will affect the body image significantly, as opposed to the effects the earlier appearance-changing practices have had. To investigate what the effect of cosmetic plastic surgery on our body image exactly entails, I will first examine the concept of "body image."

The Body Image

My research on body image is mainly based on literature by Gail Weiss. This is partly because she is widely agreed to be an authority in the field of body image, and partly because she herself makes use of relevant philosophical word, such that her writings provide a complete overview of the philosophical notion of body image. Most of the passages on the notion of body image in this essay from philosophers other than Weiss are therefore also based on her work.

The construction of one's body images appears, at first sight, mostly personal: it is, in the end, the conception *you* have of *your* body. But it seems that most philosophers would strongly disagree with that. Michel Foucault questioned whether it is even possible to have a strictly personal, inward relation to one's body, stating that we understand our bodies through social practices that categorise bodies and "submit them to hierarchical differentiations." Given that it is impossible to escape from social practices, they will always play a part in shaping our body image.³ Weiss partly agrees

2 Reynold Alleyne Higgins, *Greek and Roman Jewellery* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), xxi.

3 Gail Weiss, *Body Images: Body as Intercorporeality* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 2.

with Foucault by stressing the important and defining role social construction plays in (the construction of) our body image. Weiss adds, however, that the social dimension is not the only dimension of body images: they also consist of a physiological and psychical dimension.⁴ Thus, whether the body image is completely determined by the social or not, both Foucault and Weiss agree that it is at least for a large part socially constructed.

Taking into account that one's social environment tends to change, an important characteristic of the body image is fluidity or plasticity. Neurologist Henry Head identified the body image's characteristic of fluidity, and explained it as "the constant changes the body image undergoes in response to changes in the body and/or the situation."⁵ Merleau-Ponty adopted this in his theory, stressing that "the body image changes not only in response to actual, physiological changes in the body and/or physical changes in the situation, but is greatly (and often lastingly) affected by psychical and social changes in the body/situation."⁶ These social changes include changes in possibilities, for instance the availability of new surgical procedures. According to Merleau-Ponty, the body image is thus dynamic, following an everlasting cycle of construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction, motivated by the continual changes from both within the body and the situation the body finds itself in.⁷

Weiss adds, however, that the social dimension is not the only dimension of body images: they also consist of a physiological and psychical dimension.

In short, according to these theories the body image is heavily influenced, if not determined, by its social environment: the current state of affairs and the possibilities within it. Furthermore, the body image is fluid: it is dynamic, since it is a response to the always-changing social environment the body finds itself in. The body image finds itself within an everlasting cycle of construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction.

Availability and Popularity of Cosmetic Surgery

Let us first look exclusively at the effects of the availability and popularity of cosmetic plastic surgery (thus leaving aside actually undergoing these procedures).

4 Gail Weiss, *Body Images: Body as Intercorporeality* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 2.

5 Gail Weiss, "Body Image Intercourse," in *Body Images: Body as Intercorporeality* (New York: Routledge, 1999), chapter 1.

6 Gail Weiss, "Body Image Intercourse," in *Body Images: Body as Intercorporeality* (New York: Routledge, 1999), chapter 1.

7 Gail Weiss, "Body Image Intercourse," in *Body Images: Body as Intercorporeality* (New York: Routledge, 1999), chapter 1.

As discussed above, the body image is subject to changes in one's social environment, even if those changes only have the form of possibilities. Therefore, the possibility of getting cosmetic surgery will affect the body image. To be more specific, new cosmetic surgery possibilities suggest a social model of the ideal body that goes beyond the one inherited from one's biological parents.⁸ This is because the availability of cosmetic surgery will make it possible for everyone to actually attain the current beauty ideals (independently of what those beauty ideals entail). The availability of new cosmetic surgery practices will thereby increase the social power of the beauty ideals and

The availability of new cosmetic surgery practices will increase the social power of the beauty ideals and simultaneously increase the perceived pressure to realize those beauty ideals, if necessary via surgery.

simultaneously increase the perceived pressure to realize those beauty ideals, if necessary via surgery. This, in turn, creates a feeling of lacking something in one's bodily appearance and hence in one's body image. The strength of this feeling will differ per person. After all, the factors influencing the body image (changes in one's direct surroundings and one's body) also differ per individual. For some this perceived pressure and this feeling of incomplete-

ness will be vigorous, activating them to start acting upon the availabilities. As a consequence, cosmetic plastic surgery will become more popular and this will change the body image again in another sense.

Let us look at the effects of the popularity of cosmetic plastic surgery. Social context has a great impact on the body image. In addition to the earlier mentioned philosophical accounts on body image, the impact can be explained by social learning theory. Following the logic of social learning theory, learning occurs through "social modelling" and imitation of others.⁹

When cosmetic plastic surgery becomes more common in one's surroundings, this will not only increase the pressure to uphold the beauty ideals, but according to the social learning theory one will also naturally feel the urge to imitate the behaviour. This urge to imitate others who have undergone cosmetic plastic surgery will have the same effect as the availability of cosmetic surgery practices: it will increase the feeling that one's biological/natural body is not satisfactory.

8 Elizabeth A. Daniels, Meghan M. Gillen and Charlotte H. Markey, ed., "Appearance-Related Practices," in *Body Positive: Understanding and Improving Body Image in Science and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), chapter 5, <https://doi-org.ru.idm.oclc.org/10.1017/9781108297653>.

9 Daniels, Gillen and Markey, ed., "Appearance-Related Practices," chapter 5.

In line with the cycle Merleau-Ponty describes, the availability and popularity of cosmetic surgery will thus deconstruct the old body image and reconstruct a new one which has inherited this feeling of incompleteness. But, as said, the cycle of construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction is an continuous process. The availability and popularity of cosmetic plastic surgery will not suddenly transform a otherwise static body image. Whether plastic surgery is available or not, the body image is always caught up in a dynamic cycle, heavily influenced by one's social context. As mentioned above, for millennia people have adjusted their appearance by elective practices. The difference cosmetic plastic surgery makes is that it will affect (and deconstruct) our body image much more vigorously, since it takes appearance changing practices to a new extreme. Due to cosmetic plastic surgery, the body becomes completely modifiable. Depending on the current beauty ideals, breasts can be enlarged or reduced, noses can be made pointier or smaller, and even body fat can be displaced from one part of the body to another. A bigger shift in conceiving of one's body is hardly thinkable: from only being able to adjust one's body to a certain extent (which mostly requires time and effort – think about losing weight) to one's body being completely adaptable to one's beauty ideals.

Having made explicit what definition of body image will be used in this essay and having discussed the consequences of the availability and popularity of cosmetic plastic surgery for our body image, it is now time to look at the effect *undergoing* cosmetic surgery has on our body image.

Undergoing Cosmetic Surgery

What will happen to the body image if one, feeling the urge to undergo surgery in the given context, undergoes cosmetic plastic surgery? Will it have a positive effect on the body image?

To answer these questions, I have looked at several empirical research findings concerning the satisfaction and life quality of cosmetic plastic surgery patients. Among these patients were some who have undergone rhinoplasty ("nose jobs"), breast enhancement, breast reduction, facelifts, and liposuctions, among others. Although inevitably all research results differed slightly, it can be concluded that on average the satisfaction level of the patients was remarkably high.¹⁰ This points to a more positive body image as a result of the surgery. Dissatisfaction was mostly associated with already existing psychological problems such as Body Dysmorphia Disorder (BDD),

10 N.A. Papadopoulos, L. Kovacs, S. Krammer, P. Herschbach, G. Henrich and E. Biemer, 2007, "Quality of life following aesthetic plastic surgery: a prospective study," *Journal of Plastic, Reconstructive & Aesthetic Surgery*, vol. 60:8 (2014): 915-921. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bjps.2007.01.071>; M. D. Litner, A. Jason, Brian W. Rotenberg and Maureen Dennis. "Impact of Cosmetic Facial Surgery on Satisfaction with Appearance and Quality of Life," *Archives of Facial Plastic Surgery*, vol. 10:2 (2008): 79-83, doi: 10.1001/archfaci.10.2.79.

which can be defined as “a mental health disorder in which you can’t stop thinking about one or more perceived defects or flaws in your appearance — a flaw that appears minor or can’t be seen by others.”¹¹ Leaving aside the patients with psychological problems, some researchers even found that the patients experienced an improvement in social functioning, relationships, and general quality of life.¹² These are all factors that could improve the body image even further: if post-surgery one experiences an improvement in social functioning as a result of changes in one’s bodily appearance, one will conceive of one’s body even more positively.

How do these findings correspond to what has been argued before? We have seen that the availability and popularity of cosmetic plastic surgery affects the body image

As one adapts one’s body to the beauty ideal, the feeling of incompleteness will disappear and life quality will be improved.

negatively: it creates a certain feeling of incompleteness in the body image. As a response to this feeling of incompleteness, one may choose to undergo cosmetic plastic surgery. Undergoing cosmetic surgery will change one’s body image again, but this time for the

better. As one adapts one’s body to the beauty ideal, the feeling of incompleteness will disappear and life quality will be improved. In Merleau-Ponty’s vocabulary, undergoing cosmetic plastic surgery as a response to the created feeling of incompleteness will construct a new, more positive body image.

(Post-)Dualist Framework

Now that the fundamentals of my research are completed, there is one last critical observation to make: conversations and discussions about cosmetic plastic surgery normally take place within a dualistic framework. In mind-body dualism, the mind and body are perceived as distinct and separable.¹³ This is (implicitly) reflected in the language one uses when talking about cosmetic plastic surgery. People undergo cosmetic surgery because they want to make changes to their appearances, to the body they “own,” so they (as “minds”) feel more satisfied with their body. This strict separation between body and mind is not made within my essay. The body image is mainly discussed by phenomenological/post-dualist writers, which is the reason I based my essay on their theories. According to these post-dualist writers, the mind

11 “Body Dysmorphic Disorder,” Mayo Clinic, October 29 2019, <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/body-dysmorphic-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20353938>.

12 R.J. Honigman, K.A. Phillips, D.J. Castle. “A Review of Psychosocial Outcomes for Patients Seeking Cosmetic Surgery,” *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery*, vol. 113,4 (2004): 1229-37, doi: 10.1097/01.prs.0000110214.88868.ca.

13 Howard Robinson, “Dualism,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/dualism/>.

and body cannot be seen as two different entities. Indeed, the whole notion of body image as discussed in this essay presupposes a post-dualist conception of the mind not only being embodied, but also through embodiment embedded in and exposed to, a social environment. The difference between the framework of everyday experience of cosmetic plastic surgery on the one hand, and the theoretical framework of the body image (which is intrinsically linked to cosmetic surgery) on the other hand, is quite striking. Surely, the dualist language surrounding cosmetic plastic surgery can primarily be explained by the fact that our everyday language and perception in general exists within a dualist framework. But still, such a significant gap between the framework of everyday experience and the framework of theoretical explanation is remarkable, to say the least. What difference would it make if “real-life” cosmetic surgery would take mind and body as an inseparable whole as well? This is a question left unanswered, but a very interesting and perhaps also important question to ask oneself.

Conclusion

To conclude, the body image is (at least partly) socially constructed. It is subject to changes in one's social environment, including changes in possibilities. Through the availability of cosmetic plastic surgery, living up to the current beauty ideals will become possible for those who are in the position to get surgery. The pressure of reaching those beauty ideals will increase. This will, in turn, create the feeling of incompleteness in one's bodily appearance and, hence, in one's body image. The strength of this feeling will diverge, activating some to undergo cosmetic surgery. If, as a result, cosmetic plastic surgery becomes more popular, this feeling of incompleteness will be increased even more: a phenomenon explained by social learning theory. So what happens if one chooses to undergo cosmetic plastic surgery? The body image will change, but this time for the better. A new body image in which this feeling of “lacking something” has disappeared will be constructed. This places cosmetic plastic surgery in a more positive light, but it does not end here. As soon as new cosmetic plastic surgery practices are developed, it will again shake up the body image and undergoing cosmetic plastic surgery will again be needed to “restore” a positive body image. Therefore, the overall conclusion of my research is that cosmetic plastic surgery in relation to the body image results in a vicious circle. Cosmetic surgery makes itself necessary by simultaneously creating a problem and being the solution to that problem.

*“Eugenic practices can result
in a power relation and
hierarchy between the children
of those who can afford its
use, and those who cannot.”*

A Moral Assessment of Modern Eugenics

Luisa Koch

“What nature does blindly, slowly and ruthlessly, man may do providently, quickly and kindly. As it lies within his power, so it becomes his duty to work in that direction.”¹

- Francis Galton

Francis Galton, who proposed the term *eugenics* at the end of the 19th century, saw in eugenic practices the chance and duty to deliberately intervene in natural procreation in order to better the genetic heritage of humans.

However, eugenics has been a highly debated topic at least since Plato and his work *The Republic*. Plato proposed some sort of “selective breeding” – i.e. encouraging and letting only strong and healthy people procreate – to ensure that only the best genetic traits were passed on to future generations in order to form a good society. Already selective breeding was proposed as a means to undermine the natural process of procreation and to deliberately have an influence on the genetic code of future generations.

A lot of time has passed since Plato, and especially within the last century new technologies have been invented. These reach from genetical engineering to selection and modification, from contraception to in vitro fertilization, as well as genetic screenings for embryos with the possibility of abortion. All these interventions in the natural process of procreation – falling under the term *modern eugenics* – result in deliberately created beings that live up to certain human-made standards and norms, ultimately trying to create the “perfect” being.

What has already been a common practice in non-human animals and plants for a long time, is still a highly controversial debate when it comes to humans. Although at least Western society is becoming more and more receptive for modern eugenics, the overly negative perception of eugenics persists, as it is associated with the Nazi regime eugenics such as forced sterilization and euthanasia.²

With this paper I want to go into detail about the moral un- and acceptability of modern eugenics when used for humans, as there are cases in which the use of

1 Francis Galton, “Eugenics: Its Definition, Scope, and Aims,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 10, no. 1 (1904): 5.

2 Philippa Levine, *Eugenics: A Very Short Introduction*, Very Short Introductions, 495 (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 9.

eugenics seems to be more acceptable than in others. Moreover, I want to discuss the moral-societal implications that the use of modern eugenic practices to deliberately create living beings can have.

Therefore, I am going to focus on the question whether the eugenic intervention in natural processes and bodies, as well as the deliberate creation of genetically modified human beings, can be morally acceptable.

I will give an assessment of this by firstly elaborating the concept of eugenics, including the notion of negative and positive eugenics. Secondly, I will focus on the possible challenges and thirdly on the possible advantages of eugenics. Based on this exposition, I will then proceed by giving a moral assessment and consideration of both challenges and advantages by reference to an exemplary case. Based on this assessment, I will conclude this paper by arguing that we must see eugenics as a moral balancing act.

In this paper, I will not be able to address all the moral concerns that relate to eugenics. I therefore have chosen the issues that I regard as the most pressing and relevant ones and will present my findings on these particular issues. This paper therefore must be seen as a general overview of the most important ethical questions that eugenics raises.

Defining Eugenics

The term eugenics comes from the Greek terms “eu” meaning “good,” and “genesis” meaning “birth.” Therefore, eugenics can be translated as “good-birth.”

Although practices that fall under the term of eugenics have been an issue at least since Plato – so for over two thousand years – the term itself is a rather recent one.

*Within the field of eugenics,
a distinction is being made
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– i.e. preventive – eugenics.*

Eugenics was first proposed by Sir Francis Galton, a cousin of Charles Darwin, at the end of the nineteenth century. In his article in *The American Journal of Sociology* from 1904, he defines eugenics as “the science which deals with all the influences that improve the inborn qualities of a race.”³ Back then, eugenics was still focused on “control[ling] reproduction by preventing birth in some instances and

promoting it in others.”⁴ In general, it was not so much focused on the individual, but rather on the societal if not the species level with the aim to pass on only the best genetic characteristics to the next generation of humans.

Since the early twentieth century however, technological knowledge has expanded enormously, wherefore the definition of eugenics needs an update. In the book *The*

3 Galton, “Eugenics: Its Definition, Scope, and Aims,” 1.

4 Philippa Levine, *Eugenics: A Very Short Introduction*, 116.

Ethics of The New Eugenics from 2014, eugenics is defined as “strategies or decisions aimed at affecting, in a manner which is considered to be positive, the genetic heritage of a child, a community or humanity in general.”⁵ This signifies an important shift, as the modern definition includes consequences on the individual level as well, not only focusing on “the human race” as Francis Galton did. Furthermore, this definition leaves room for a wider range of practices such as genetic modifications and genetic screening tests.

Within the field of eugenics, a distinction is being made between positive – i.e. progressive – and negative – i.e. preventive – eugenics. A practice that falls in the category of positive eugenics is trying to promote a desired genetic characteristic, while a practice that belongs to the category of negative eugenics is trying to prevent or avoid a certain genetic characteristic.⁶

In order to make the concepts of negative and positive eugenics more graspable, I am going to point out some examples of such practices. On the one hand, encouraging people who have desirable traits to have more children, and “the selection of desirable sperm in a sperm bank” are both examples for positive eugenics.⁷ On the other hand, sterilization of people with undesirable characteristics (as happened in Nazi-Germany), the selection and abortion of embryos that carry a disorder, as well as genetic editing and manipulation in order to make a child resistant against a disease all belong to the category of negative eugenics.⁸

Negative Consequences

There are many ethically relevant consequences that we must consider when thinking about the possible moral acceptability of eugenics. In this section, I will focus on consequences like discrimination, responsibility and (individual) freedom, norms, values and subjectivity, and finally the backfiring of eugenics. These consequences of the use of eugenic practices poses a challenge for individuals as well as societies and the entire human species.

a. Discrimination

Although the possibility of deciding one’s baby’s eye and hair colour, interests and level of intelligence still is more of a fictional idea, it is already possible for parents to choose their baby’s sex. A procedure called *sex selection* is available for parents going through in vitro fertilization, by genetically testing all embryos and only transferring

5 Calum MacKellar and Christopher Bechtel (eds), *The Ethics of the New Eugenics* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2014), 3.

6 MacKellar and Bechtel (eds), *The Ethics of the New Eugenics*, 4.

7 MacKellar and Bechtel (eds), *The Ethics of the New Eugenics*, 4.

8 MacKellar and Bechtel (eds), *The Ethics of the New Eugenics*, 4.

the one(s) of the preferred sex.⁹ Moreover, it is also possible for parents to test their child for genetic “disorders” like down-syndrome and have an abortion if their child tests positive.

The discrimination of sex, which is being made even easier through modern eugenics, can have far-reaching societal consequences, as can be seen in India. There, a preference for having boys over girls has resulted in many illegal abortions, and consequently in a society that consists of a disproportional amount of men in comparison to women. This will possibly result in further problems when it comes to reproduction and the continued existence of the human species if it becomes a global phenomenon. The discrimination of a specific sex brings us to the question which life is worth living, which I will discuss in the section “Subjectivity of Norms and Values.”

This question is also linked to the discrimination of specific genetic “disorders.” For example, eugenics offers the possibility to abort an embryo that is diagnosed with down-syndrome, posing the question whether a life with down-syndrome is not worth living. Many, especially people that do have down-syndrome, would disagree. Additionally, as Raanan Gillon describes it – and I agree on this point – such an abortion “encourages negative discrimination against born people affected by the conditions for which such abortion is available.”¹⁰

b. Responsibility, Freedom and Autonomy

Another morally challenging aspect of eugenic practices becomes apparent when thinking about the notions of responsibility, freedom and autonomy.

An important question that needs to be asked before using eugenics is whom the responsibility lies with. Will it lie with the parents deciding for the (not yet existing) child? Doctors? Or even with heads of states and governments? Who will be deciding in which cases and to what extent eugenics can and should be used?

Take for instance the scenario of parents who choose to use eugenics on their child and in the future the child will suffer from negative consequences. These unforeseen consequences raise the question about who can be held responsible. The doctors, because they carried out a eugenic practice? The parents, because they chose to use eugenics? The governments for making the use of eugenics possible in their country? Furthermore, the parents hopefully make the decision to use eugenics with the best intention, but the child itself cannot give consent. Therefore, eugenics limits the autonomy and freedom of the child.

9 “Gender Selection,” San Diego Fertility Center, accessed December 01, 2019, <https://www.sdfertility.com/fertility-treatments/genetic-testing/gender-selection>.

10 Raanan Gillon, “Eugenics, Contraception, Abortion and Ethics,” *Journal of Medical Ethics* 24, no. 4 (1998): 220, Doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/jme.24.4.219>.

If the responsibility lies with heads of states and governments, we could potentially end up with a situation that Plato has already described in *The Republic*. The state will have power over its citizens taking away the freedom to decide for themselves, as I will elaborate in the next part.

c. Power Relations and Hierarchies

The second challenging consequence that results from the use of eugenics are power relations and hierarchies, which can occur in two different ways.

Firstly, eugenic practices can result in a power relation and hierarchy between the children of those who can afford its use, and those who cannot. Consequently, it “may lead to the creation of a genetic ‘overclass’ with unfair advantages” over others,¹¹ which will have an impact on the social reality of fairness and equality, but also societal structures.

Firstly, eugenic practices can result in a power relation and hierarchy between the children of those who can afford its use, and those who cannot.

Secondly, the use of eugenics can create a power hierarchy between those deciding on and imposing norms on others. Whoever will decide what counts as desirable or undesirable, as perfect or as disease will have enormous power over the rest of the population. In Plato’s *Republic* this would be the task of the “philosopher king.”¹²

If, for example, the head of state would decide that it is desirable to let all diseases go extinct and that down-syndrome should be considered a disease, this person might pass a law making abortion of all embryos that are diagnosed with down-syndrome obligatory. This undermines the freedom of parents but also the right of the child to live.

d. Subjectivity of Norms and Values

What we cherish and value has undoubtedly a huge impact on how we organize our societies. The case of eugenics takes this even further. Not only does eugenics raise the question who will decide which traits are desirable and which are undesirable, it also confronts us with the problem what counts as a disease and subsequently which life is worth living.

11 Arthur L Caplan, McGee Glenn, and Magnus David, “What Is Immoral About Eugenics?” *BMJ* (November/December 1999): 337, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.319.7220.1284>.

12 Plato, “The Dialogues of Plato, Volume 2,” in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato, Electronic Edition*, edited by Benjamin Jowett (Charlottesville, Virginia, USA: Intelix Corp, 1993): (458-460) p60 – (475-480) p65.

Notions such as “better” and “perfect” are relative and subjective, and are “more often than not, matters of taste, culture, and personal experience.”¹³ Although one would hardly disagree that making future generations resistant against a disease is a good thing, it nevertheless raises practical concerns for people that already carry this disease. As Sara Goering asserts, “public attitudes toward such individuals are likely to be prejudiced and will likely affect public financial support of the disabled.”¹⁴

Furthermore, the definition of what counts as a disease or disorder, has an impact on whether embryos that are diagnosed with a specific condition will have a right to live.

e. Unpredictable Consequences and Mutations

The last moral challenge that I want to address in this paper is the backfiring of eugenics. It is never guaranteed that a genetic modification will not additionally result in an unplanned and spontaneous mutation of a different part of the genetic code. Such mutations can, in the worst case, make a child “worse off” than it would have been without genetic modification.

However, as Sara Goering asserts, “treating painful and restrictive disorders [...] might be worth the risk, so long as traditional rules regarding informed consent for clinical trials are respected.”¹⁵

Positive Consequences

In this part of the paper, I will focus on the positive consequences modern eugenics can have. First, I will discuss to what extent eugenics can enhance freedom and the resulting challenges. Afterwards, I will assess the treatment of diseases and the possibility of making them go extinct by making use of eugenic practices.

a. Enhancing Freedom

Modern eugenic practices – such as abortion and genetic modification – can enhance the freedom of parents. For example, if parents do not see themselves in a position to raise a child with a specific disorder, they do have the option to get an abortion. Another example, that shows the positive impact of eugenics, are parents who wish to have a child of their own but are reluctant to have one as they carry a genetic disease that they do not want to pass on to their child. With the help of eugenics and genetic

13 Arthur L Caplan, McGee Glenn, and Magnus David, “What Is Immoral About Eugenics?” *BMJ* (November/December 1999): 336, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.319.7220.1284>.

14 Sara Goering, “Gene Therapies and the Pursuit of a Better Human,” *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics* 9, no. 3 (2000): 332, doi:10.1017/S0963180100903050.

15 Goering, “Gene Therapies and the Pursuit of a Better Human,” 332.

modification these parents are potentially able to have a child of their own that will be perfectly healthy. In the end, residual risks such as unforeseen genetic mutations persist, but in some cases, it might be worth the risk.

Additionally, modern eugenics can enhance the freedom of parents as it allows them to “choose according to their own values and conceptions of the good life.”¹⁶ Being able to choose freely – as long as it is not clearly against the interest of the child

– enables parents to basically create the child that they personally think will be best equipped for a life in our society. However, this soon becomes problematic again, for example in the case of intelligence enhancement, for it is not necessarily true that an exceptionally high level of intelligence will lead to a better life. In a society in which stagnation is considered to be bad, and in which (economic) growth, development and enhancement are a necessity, it is not unreasonable to assume that parents will make decisions regarding their future child which will follow this habitual line of reasoning. Therefore, it is crucial “to question the general notion that adding more of a capacity is good.”¹⁷

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development and enhancement are a necessity, it is not unreasonable to assume that parents will make decisions regarding their future child which will follow this habitual line of reasoning. Therefore, it is crucial “to question the general notion that adding more of a capacity is good.”¹⁷

b. Treatment and Extinction of Diseases

With the help of eugenics – for example the careful control of reproduction and genetic editing – humans are able to treat more and more diseases and might subsequently be able to make them die out completely. For example, within the past year the first trials have been initiated that use genetic editing technology such as CRISPR with the goal to cure diseases such as sickle cell disease, and some forms of cancer.¹⁸ This could potentially prevent a lot of suffering and early deaths, which are both seen as undesirable.

However, even minor changes in an ecosystem can have far-reaching and unpredictable consequences. For example, preventing diseases and therefore making (individual) humans grow older will have enormous environmental and societal

16 Sara Goering, “Eugenics,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/eugenics/>.

17 Goering, “Eugenics.”

18 Rasmus O. Bak, “The Potential of CRISPR/Cas9 in Hematotherapy,” *Stem Cells and Development* 28, no. 11 (2019): 710, doi: 10.1089/scd.2019.0079.

impacts. As Paul Ramsey already argued in 1970, “men now have the power to do things that influence the whole of mankind [...]. The effects of these actions can also foreclose a whole set of possibilities for an indefinite future.”¹⁹

Although a world free of suffering and early deaths due to disease sounds *prima facie* desirable, I want to argue that it is important not to overlook the possible consequences such a huge intervention in natural bodily processes can and will have.

Conclusion: Moral Assessment

After having had a look at negative as well as positive consequences which the use of eugenics can have, I want to argue that eugenics should be seen as a moral balancing

Undoubtedly, eugenics practices like genetic modification, testing and selection of the embryos, will enhance the freedom of the parents, as it gives them the choice to have a healthy child.

act. Giving a simple, clear-cut answer to the question whether the use of eugenic practices is morally acceptable is not possible. Instead, it is necessary to carefully evaluate and assess the circumstances in any given situation and context. To illustrate this, I will end this paper by assessing one example of eugenics and its moral implications, consequences and

challenges. For this purpose, I want to recall the example that I gave earlier about parents that carry a genetic disorder but want to have a healthy child.

Undoubtedly, eugenics practices like genetic modification, testing and selection of the embryos, will enhance the freedom of the parents, as it gives them the choice to have a healthy child. In this case, the parents are not limited by their own genetic makeup and will not pass on deficient genes on to the next generation. Furthermore, it could be argued that it enhances the freedom of the child, that will not have to deal with this genetic disorder.

However, the moral acceptability of the use of eugenic practices in this case will be (at least partly) determined by the kind of genetic disorder that the parents carry. As mentioned already, many would argue that down-syndrome should not count as a restricting disorder in the way sickle-cell disease or some forms of cancer do. Consequently, the use of eugenic practices would be less acceptable – if acceptable at all – in the case of down-syndrome than in the case of sickle-cell disease.

This relates to the problem of unpredictable mutations. Yet again, the circumstances have to be considered carefully, as the risks should not outweigh possible benefits. As mutations are still unforeseeable, it can be argued that the moral accepta-

19 Paul Ramsey, *Fabricated Man: The Ethics of Genetic Control* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 153.

bility also depends on the severity of genetic disorder – determined by norms and criteria for example set by doctors – but also on the availability of other forms of treatment.

Additionally, this case exemplifies that it will matter whether the parents are able to afford the use of eugenic practices and are therefore able to have a potentially healthy child or whether they do not have that option. As mentioned before, this has a direct impact on our notions of equality and fairness and will lead to questions such as: Should such a treatment be available to everybody? Where should we draw the line between the severity of disorders which will determine the necessity of treatment? Should it be cost-free for some severe disorders and considered a “luxury” for less severe disorders?

These are only some of the moral concerns that need to be taken into account when assessing the moral acceptability of this exemplary case. However, they show that determining the moral acceptability is not a matter of a simple yes/no-answer. Rather we are dealing with varying degrees of moral acceptability of eugenic practices which can change drastically when having a look at the same situation in different contexts. Therefore, and to conclude this paper, I argue that the eugenic intervention in the natural process of procreation, which result in deliberately created beings, needs to be seen as a moral balancing act, in which it is crucial to carefully examine the circumstances of any given situation.

“Transhumanism also illustrates the spirit of the dominant Western outlook: the belief that scientific and technological development, together with the power of human rationality, creates an optimal world with less suffering and greater happiness.”

Transhumanism

The Concept of “Mind Uploading” and Immortality

Lian van den Berg

The understanding of the finitude of life and inevitability of death has always been an interesting subject for scientists and philosophers. The thought of death is usually accompanied by a sense of anxiety about our mortality. Some sources such as religion, philosophy and science try to counter the anxiety that arises with the finality and inevitability of death by promising some form of immortality, which arguably only feeds this anxiety.

There are multiple ways of dealing with the unavoidable truth of death. One way that is becoming more popular in this day and age is to apply modern medicine and technology to overcome the limitations of human biology and with it, console the fear of ageing and possibly death. One radical movement which has arisen is the so-called “transhumanist” undertaking. This movement aims to push the limits of the human body by enhancing the body’s capabilities with the help of science to achieve immortality, or at least a significantly longer life.^{1,2}

Transhumanism also illustrates the spirit of the dominant Western outlook: the belief that scientific and technological development, together with the power of human rationality, creates an optimal world with less suffering and greater happiness.³ This line of thought evokes the question: why? Why is it so important for us to live “forever”? Transhumanism is an option, but is it a solution? Should we still consider it desirable if we take problems such as overpopulation, climate change and social injustice into account? To decide if it is indeed a good idea to strive for immortality, it is important to take a step back and to examine the moral implications of transhumanism. For my research I will examine the following question: What are the moral implications of the modern-day striving for immortality?

As mentioned previously, the dominant attitude to technological development is that it will lead to an optimal world. In this essay, I want to show that striving for immortality will not only achieve the opposite, but it will also undermine the essence of being human. I will do so by first introducing the way in which transhumanism

1 Jenny Huberman, “Immortality Transformed: Mind Cloning, Transhumanism and the Quest for Digital Immortality,” *Mortality* 23, no. 1 (2017): 50–64, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13576275.2017.1304366>.

2 Stephen Garrard Post, *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*, 3rd ed (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), xiii.

3 Tracy J. Trothen and Calvin R Mercer (eds.), *Religion and Human Enhancement: Death, Values, and Morality. Palgrave Studies in the Future of Humanity and Its Successors* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 121.

tries to achieve immortality and the problems that it gives rise to. Secondly, I will discuss the two main moral implications of immortality. Consequently, I will argue against the striving for immortality.

Transhumanism, Human Identity & Human Essence

Immortality can be imagined in many different ways. Transhumanists have been proposing several ways to attain it, such as delaying death by stopping the aging process, replacing organic tissue with synthetic tissue, and most interestingly, “mind uploading”; where one transfers the mental contents of a human being to a robot of some sorts.⁴

Mind uploading suggests mind-body dualism, as getting completely rid of the body and its limitations, requires the possibility to separate mind and body. Considering that mind uploading will affect the body the most by getting rid of it completely, mind uploading will be the main focus point of the discussion of transhumanism in this essay.

The concept of mind uploading raises questions about our human identity and essence. What makes a human essentially human? Is it part of being human to strive to move beyond being human? Some critics of transhumanism argue that enhancement interventions, such as mind uploading, could rob us of central normative features of our identity as human beings.⁵ Others like Nick Bostrom, a renowned transhumanist, argue that human enhancement will change human nature for the better. They see transhumanism as the next step in human evolution.⁶

Another argument against attaining immortality is that human vulnerability is a central aspect of what makes a human life valuable. The reasoning is that vulnerability should be seen as a limitation that keeps humans humble and will encourage humans to be modest.⁷

To answer the question of what makes a human essentially human, we will ultimately have to give a clear definition of what a human essentially is. Considering the debate, as old as history, about the essence of humans, we can conclude that this is a difficult issue to agree on.

4 Gabriel Andrade, “Philosophical Difficulties of Mind Uploading as a Medical Technology,” *The American Philosophical Association Newsletter. Philosophy and Medicine*, 18, no. 1 (2018): 15, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328451446_Philosophical_Difficulties_of_Mind_Uploading_as_a_Medical_Technology.

5 Eric Juengst and Daniel Moseley, “Human Enhancement,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/enhancement/>.

6 Nick Bostrom, “Human Genetic Enhancements: A Transhumanist Perspective,” *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 37, no. 4 (2003): 493, https://doi.org/10.1023/b:inqu.0000019037.67783.d5_.

7 Juengst and Moseley, “Human Enhancement.”

Additionally, when considering the debate on the essence of humans, another question comes up: to what extent can a synthetic brain *preserve* identity? Imagine that mental uploading is possible, and that the robot has indeed acquired the consciousness of a human being. Is it accurate to say that this robot is identical to the person who's mental contents it received?

The problem of identity questions the criteria according to which a person can be considered the same at different times.⁸ Some would argue that the continuity of the human body is irrelevant as the identity of a person is considered to be psychological. Philosopher John Locke, for example, takes memory to be a necessary condition of personal identity.⁹ Based on this reasoning, a machine or robot that preserves all the mental contents of the original person would be the same person. However, this reasoning in the context of mind-uploading overlooks the possibility that one person's mind could also be uploaded onto different machines all at once. If these machines with the same mental contents all coexist at the same time it will be hard to understand how all these machines can be identical to the original person, and which one *is* the original person. This is also known as the transitivity principle of identity.¹⁰

Mind uploading suggests mind-body dualism, as getting completely rid of the body and its limitations, requires the possibility to separate mind and body.

In contrast, Nick Bostrom makes the claim that the preservation of personal identity should not be an issue, as other things can be valued other than ourselves, and “we might regard it as satisfactory if some parts or aspects of ourselves survive and flourish, even if that entails giving up some parts of ourselves such that we no longer count as being the same person.”¹¹ With this claim, Bostrom suggests that achieving immortality will cause the personal identity of the robot to differ from the identity of the original person.

Arguably, one's personal identity changes throughout one's life, as, for example, you do not have the same body, thoughts and memories as your younger self. According to the theory of Parfit, however, there is a psychological connectedness or continuity of the person over time. Our deeds throughout the years have made us into the person

8 Gabriel Andrade, “Philosophical Difficulties of Mind Uploading as a Medical Technology,” 18.

9 Walter Glannon, “Moral Responsibility and Personal Identity,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 35, no.3 (1998): 238.

10 Gabriel Andrade, “Philosophical Difficulties of Mind Uploading as a Medical Technology,” 18.

11 Nick Bostrom, “Transhumanist Values,” accessed on November 12, 2019, [https://www.nickbostrom.com/ views/transhumanist.pdf](https://www.nickbostrom.com/views/transhumanist.pdf).

we are today.¹² And even though we experience changes throughout time, it is important to know that we are the “same” person. To have one’s mind uploaded to a robot radically changes physical relationships with others, much more so than the changes in personal identity throughout the years. It might even “lead to the annihilation of human consciousness altogether.”¹³ In that case, if we all become robots and are nothing like our prior selves, it could be argued that universal mind uploading means the end of human essence and identity.

The Two Moral Implications

What are the moral implications of the striving for immortality? I will discuss two main moral problems: (1) moral responsibility, and (2) the focus on quantity rather than quality in human values and the desire for immortality.

Moral Responsibility

As pointed out before, transhumanist Nick Bostrom argues that our personal identity is not the most important thing that we should value. Others, like Parfit, argue that instead of personal identity, there is a psychological connectedness or continuity with ourselves over time, which I would argue is still a form of human identity. Though personal identity changes over time, I conclude that the process of mental uploading will be too radical a change and as such it will not re-create the original person at all. Assuming that mental uploading leads to radical change, the question of identity leads to the moral question of responsibility. In this essay, moral responsibility is concerned with the issue “whether a person bears the right relation to their own actions, and the consequences of these actions, so that the person can be properly held accountable for them.”¹⁴ It is essential for moral accountability to presuppose identity in the sense of staying (more or less) the same person over time who acted justly or wrong in the past.¹⁵

The same goes for obligations to different people in your life. If people do not persist as distinct identities, their obligations to one another might not persist either.

12 Eric T. Olson, “Personal Identity,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2019/entries/identity-personal/>.

13 Trothen and Mercer (eds.), *Religion and Human Enhancement: Death, Values, and Morality. Palgrave Studies in the Future of Humanity and Its Successors*, 125.

14 Matthew Talbert, “Moral Responsibility,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2019/entries/moral-responsibility/>.

15 James Hughes, “Transhumanism and Personal Identity,” *The Transhumanist Reader* (November 2013): 228, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118555927>.

In addition, as Walter Glannon mentions in his book *Moral Responsibility and Personal Identity* “being responsible presupposes the capacity to respond to practical and theoretical reasoning concerning what one ought to do or not do.”¹⁶

As the process of mind uploading radically changes our physical relationships and might lead to the annihilation of human consciousness,¹⁷ we cannot predict whether, as robots, we are indeed the same person with the same capacity to reason what ought to be done or not done, as the original human we once were.

The Desire for Immortality

Will our desire for immortality satisfy us and bring us happiness? We need more discussion about what we most value and why, and if a longer life is part of it. I do not think it will be very plausible. Human flourishing today with its striving for immortality is focused on quantity of life rather than its quality. However, I believe that we should value the quality of life more.

Today, medical developments have made it possible for humans to live longer than they used to, however, this is not without its problems. The elderly are often neglected, they mostly live their last years alone and despite medical advances they still suffer from illnesses such as dementia. Moreover, they are not able to engage as much in simple physical activities anymore. A longer retirement may cause additional problems. While this may be seen more as a practical issue to be discussed among politicians, for example to determine how it should be financed, there is a moral implication we have to take into account. Longer, unproductive life may entail a lack of “purpose” in life, and therefore lack of happiness.

According to Karl Barth, meaningfulness is achieved during one’s time as a mortal because mortal life provides a beginning and end.¹⁸ We flourish by consenting to accepting mortality instead of trying to overcome it. Flourishing is based on the necessity and the benefit of death.

Furthermore, the question of values goes beyond the individual. How highly do we value the environment? While striving for a longer life, transhumanism, with its focus on humans, seems to neglect the state of the environment and non-human life. Considering the limitations of this article, I will focus on the environment.

. Human flourishing today with its striving for immortality is focused on quantity of life rather than its quality.

16 Glannon, “Moral Responsibility and Personal Identity,” 243.

17 Trothen and Mercer (eds.), *Religion and Human Enhancement: Death, Values, and Morality. Palgrave Studies in the Future of Humanity and Its Successors*, 125.

18 Trothen and Mercer (eds.), *Religion and Human Enhancement: Death, Values, and Morality. Palgrave Studies in the Future of Humanity and Its Successors*, 116.

We are currently in an environmental crisis. To mention a few factors: the growth of consumerism, overpopulation and a lack of awareness of the interdependence of all life on earth.¹⁹ The environmental crisis suggests that future living conditions are not optimal, which would raise the question if it is wise to strive for immortality. Immortals will presumably have a higher ecological footprint by consuming more throughout their life, since this life (if lived carefully) is endless.²⁰

In addition to environmental problems, there is also a neglect of social justice. Social injustice will presumably increase when the population group that has the financial means to reach immortality increases. The price for immortality will not be cheap, making existing social disparities between rich and poor even more pronounced than they are now.²¹

However, transhumanists state the opposite, and consequently argue that we should extend the human lifespan.²² They claim that inequalities that already exist

will be no different from future inequalities. Today, Western nations have access to life-saving medical treatments that are not accessible to other, poorer nations. This is not only a well-known issue, but according to John Harris – a bioethicist at the University of Manchester – people don't typically consider

The issue is immortality and what will happen when it becomes possible through these technological advances.

themselves wicked because they have access to medical procedures, for instance transplants, while people in other countries do not have this privilege.²³

In addition, the fact that only the rich would have access to this technology is not a sufficient reason to ban it, as denying life-treatments to one group of people will not save another. Furthermore, new technologies often start off expensive but become cheaper and more widely available with time.²⁴

Even though the transhumanists make fair points, it is important to note that I am not arguing against the use and development of technology to improve our health. The issue is *immortality* and what will happen when it becomes possible through these technological advances. It is an ultimate step in the process of enhancement that,

19 Anup Shah, "Ecology and the Crisis of Overpopulation: Future Prospects for Global Sustainability," in *Environment and Development Economics* 7, no. 1, ed. Anne H. Ehrlich (Cambridge University Press, 2002): 193, doi:10.1017/S1355770X02240127; Trothen and Mercer (eds.), *Religion and Human Enhancement: Death, Values, and Morality. Palgrave Studies in the Future of Humanity and Its Successors*, 324.

20 There still is the possibility of accidental death, even after mental uploading.

21 John Harris, "Intimations of Immortality," *Science* 288, 5463 (2000): 59.

22 Bostrom, "Transhumanist Values," [https://www.nickbostrom.com/ views/transhumanist.pdf](https://www.nickbostrom.com/views/transhumanist.pdf).

23 Harris, "Intimations of Immortality," 59.

24 Harris, "Intimations of Immortality," 59.

I want to argue, we should avoid. Technological developments have made it possible for some people to acquire lifesaving treatments. However, when mental uploading becomes a reality, who is to say that all people will want to make use of it? Death is not an illness that should be cured. There will arguably still be a group of people that choose not to become immortal. The moral question here is whether this group will be put under moral and social pressure to consent to take this step, even though they wish not to, and hence to become immortal to avoid creating the two parallel groups of immortal vs. mortal? This would essentially limit freedom of choice.

Moreover, will we forbid people who do not want to become immortal to stop procreating in order to make room for the people that do choose to become immortal? It is difficult to predict whether it will be possible for immortal robots to procreate, but should they be able to, there will also be the question of who will be able to do so, which only increases social inequality.

Conclusion

To answer my research question – “What are the moral implications of the modern-day striving for immortality?” – I have examined the striving for immortality through the concept of mind-uploading. This has been influenced by the dominant approach to technological development which holds that technology will lead to an optimal world with less suffering and greater happiness. I argue the opposite and have done so by examining the moral issues of moral responsibility and the desire for immortality.

In this paper, I have argued that immortality should not be desired. First of all, it is important for moral accountability to belief that we are (somewhat) the same human over time who acted justly or wrong in the past. Since the process of mind uploading could radically change our physical relationships or lead to the eradication of human consciousness, there is no certainty of knowing that we are indeed the same person when we are a robot, and whether we will have the same capacity to reason what one ought (not) to do as the original human.

In addition, the desire for immortality creates a lack of “purpose” in life, and therefore a lack of happiness. Human meaning is achieved by being mortal. In the end we flourish by accepting our mortal fate instead of trying to overcome it. Furthermore, there are multiple factors that enhance the environmental crisis we are in today – a crisis that will only be deepened by immortality. The same goes for social injustice – which will intensify due to the increased size of the population group that has the financial means to reach immortality – as immortality might consequently create two distinct parallel groups of mortals and immortals.

Technology has improved many things in our lives and has extended the range of our possibilities. However, it is always important to consider whether we ought to do everything that is possible. In the case of immortality, I argue, we should not.

“The same dress is at one time clean, another time stained with beer. Do you already see the paradox: how can something be both identical to and different from itself from one time to another?”

Beyond the Paradox of Personal Identity

Tanja Mourachova

Saying “I love you” is a dangerous trap. Think about it: do you even really understand who or what you are referring to with the words “I” and “you”? It doesn’t feel complicated, until you are confronted with the moral consequences of your statement. You thought you just expressed the feelings you were experiencing at the moment, only to find out at a later moment you made an implicit promise to love someone forever. If you stop, you can’t blame the person holding you responsible for lying, because technically they are right. You see, if “you” refers to a person, and a person is an object extended over time, you told them that you (also a person and thus an object extended over time) are loving them now and as long as both they and you exist.

Before you decide to never again tell others about your feelings, consider another practical problem there seems to be with the notion of identity. It appears to be really important to know who you are these days. It shouldn’t be surprising how many young people are dealing with an identity crisis, if you realise that we (as persons) have so many different and ever-changing aspects which can even conflict between themselves. Just take a moment to reflect on the differences between how you see yourself and how others see you based on your appearance and behaviour. Even just looking in the mirror can emphasize the inconsistencies between your inner (mental) and outer (bodily) experience of identity. How are you ever going to feel “whole and complete” with this underlying tension you feel in your everyday life?

Now that we are aware of these problems with personal identity and their serious implications on our social interactions and our mental wellbeing, it would be nice to know how we could resolve these issues. In this paper we are going to do just that, by finding an answer to the following question: is there really something out there that corresponds with our idea of personal identity and if not, how can we function without it? I will start by laying out the fundamental principle on which our understanding of identity is build. Then I will discuss some different positions on personal identity in the history of philosophy: starting with the concept that personal identity is material (or somehow connected to our body) and continuing to the view that identity is a mere illusion. Finally, I will introduce a new perspective on personal identity, focusing on the causal connection between different versions of our material selves. This perspective can help us tackle the issues described above.

The fundamental principle on which our understanding of identity is build

If you search the internet for the etymology of “identity,” you will find that it comes from the Latin word “identitas” which literally means sameness. For something to be the same can mean two things. In philosophy this distinction is indicated with the use

of the terms qualitative and numerical identity. When x is qualitatively the same to y , it means they both share similar properties. If x is numerically the same to y , it means both x and y refer to one object.¹

Imagine arriving at a party and seeing the host wearing the same dress as you. When you greet each other, you may remark something about this awkward situation of *qualitative* sameness. Now, if some time (and a few drinks) later in the evening someone exclaims you two are wearing the same dress *numerically* speaking, that would be a whole lot more awkward. This would mean you somehow ended up together in the same dress. Good gracious, I wouldn't want to miss that party!

When we speak of a person "being the same person," we compare this person with themselves, only at another point in time. So now we are speaking of identity over time. Funny thing is, things change (qualitatively), but remain the same (numerically). The same dress is at one time clean, another time stained with beer. Do you already see the paradox: how can something be both identical to and different from itself from one time to another?² Hence the foundation of personal identity is a paradoxical one: it is the idea that there is something persistent through time, while that something is also changing in material properties.

To understand why we use such an impossible concept like personal identity, we only have to look at the seemingly simple interactions we have with others and ourselves in everyday life. We want to think that the friend we are drinking tea with is the same person we grew up with doing silly things together. We want the person we married to hold their promise and never leave us. We want that man who murdered the little girl to be held responsible and be sent to prison for many, many years. We want to look back at pictures and be able to say, that is *me* performing or winning at that volleyball competition. All these things, coming down to moral responsibility, seem to be impossible without the idea of a persistent identity.

Different Positions on Personal Identity in the History of Philosophy

Hobbes

Of course, I'm not the first one to question our notion of personal identity. A common assumption is that it is the existence of our body that gives us persistence through time, even though all our cells replace themselves eventually. There is an ancient Greek story that represents this idea. It's the story of Theseus, a hero who battled many enemies with his ship. Obviously, his ship needed to be repaired from time to time. So, the thinking goes: if after a while all parts of the ship are replaced, we would

1 Noonan, Harold, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, "Identity," last visited 21-01-2020, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity/>.

2 Gallois, Andre, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, "Identity Over Time," last visited 21-01-2020, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-time/>.

still see it as the same ship, numerically. So intuitively we are inclined to attribute identity not to the exact material parts or atoms of a thing, but to a form that holds the matter together.

Thomas Hobbes, a philosopher living in the seventeenth century saw a problem with this thinking. The Enlightenment was in full sway and many philosophers were breaking with the scholastic tradition based on Aristotelian ideas. Hobbes proposed a new thought experiment regarding the ship of Theseus: “if some man had kept the old planks as they were taken out, and by afterwards putting them together in the same order, had again made a ship of them, this without doubt, had also been the same numerical ship with that which was in the beginning; and so there would have been two ships numerically the same, which is absurd.”³ To rephrase it, what Hobbes is pointing out is that we can’t simultaneously accept the idea of personal identity as sameness of matter (persistence) and the idea of personal identity as sameness of form (change). If we do, it will lead to absurd consequences like that two distinct objects in time and space are also the same object.

*What Hobbes is pointing out is
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and the idea of personal identity
as sameness of form (change).*

Hobbes’ solution to this problem is that the alternatives posed above should not be viewed as exclusive competitors. Identity can exist on all those “layers,” matter and form. Each layer has a partial answer, correct if limited to its own domain, but inadequate when generalized.⁴ For persons the most used domain would be form or motion, as Hobbes describes here: “if the name be given for such form as is the beginning of motion, then as long as that motion remains, it will be the same individual thing; as that man will always be the same, whose actions and thoughts all proceed from the same beginning of motion.”⁵ Thus, our sameness lies in the uninterrupted motion of our everchanging matter. Therefore, as long as the motion remains, we are the same person for whose current actions we can be held responsible later.

Like everyone, Hobbes was a child of his time. Even though he tried to overstep the Aristotelian tradition, he still used Aristotle’s hylomorphic terms: matter and form. This is tricky, because form is a postulated entity that we can’t point out in

3 Thomas Hobbes, “De Corpore,” In *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes* (London: Bohn, 1839), 132.

4 Paidea and Identity: Meditations on Hobbes and Locke,” Uzgalis, Bill, Oregon State University, Visited on 21-01-2020, <https://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Mode/ModeUzga.htm>.

5 Hobbes, “De Corpore,” 137-138.

the world. And even though his redefinition of personal identity seems to bypass the paradox, it doesn't really help us with the practical problems we have in daily life because of the underlying tension.

Hume

Another attempt to resolve the tension of the paradox of personal identity was made a century later. It was David Hume, who argued to abandon the whole idea of something persistent in us. Check it out for yourself by repeating his experiment: "For my part,

*To Hume there is no paradox,
only an experienced confusion
of two different ideas.*

when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can

observe anything but the perception."⁶ He says we are never aware of any constant invariable impression from which we derive the feeling of having an identity. We "are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions."⁷ What we experience, rather, is a continuous flow of perceptions that replace one another in rapid succession.

To Hume there is no paradox, only an experienced confusion of two different ideas. The first being the idea of sameness or identity, what Hume defines as "an object, that remains invariable and uninterrupted thro' a suppos'd variation of time."⁸ The second is the idea of diversity, defined by Hume as "several different objects existing in succession."⁹ Though these two ideas of sameness and related objects are perfectly distinct, we combine them unwittingly in our daily thinking. Hume explains why we do so: "That action of the imagination, by which we consider the uninterrupted and invariable object, and that by which we reflect on the succession of related objects, are almost the same to the feeling."¹⁰

How does this happen? When we look inside ourselves and become aware of the smooth transition of all the different perceptions, rapidly following each other, we tend to see this motion as one continued object. It happens so fast that when we become aware of this mistake it is easier to yield to it and come up with a solution for the uncomfortable feeling of contradiction, than to correct the mistake. Hume describes how we do it: "In order to justify to ourselves this absurdity, we often feign some new and unintelligible principle, that connects the objects together, and prevents

6 David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 252.

7 Hume, *Human Nature*, 252.

8 Hume, *Human Nature*, 253.

9 Hume, *Human Nature*, 253.

10 Hume, *Human Nature*, 253-54.

their interruption or variation.”¹¹ In other words, our imagination creates something unknown that connects the parts, beside their relation. That mysterious something is what we call personal identity.

So according to Hume the answer to our research question would be no, there is nothing out there that corresponds to our notion of personal identity, only in our imagination. Well, in that case we don’t have to worry anymore about knowing who you are, because there is nothing to know, only different perceptions to observe. The only problem remaining would be that of moral responsibility: not having a persistent core would mean that your boss can suddenly decide to pay you less, because he has different perceptions today than the day you two made an agreement. That doesn’t seem a completely satisfactory solution.

Version Identity

Another way to look at personal identity would be through the lens of different versions of the same person, linked together by causality. I see myself as a completely different Tanja than I once was, but I still can remember the previous Tanja and her experiences and I am conscious of the influence those experiences have on me to this day. This version of me could not exist without all the previous versions. If we would translate it to Hume’s words: the versions are the related objects and the relation between them is causality. Maybe we could even say that what Hobbes described as “motion,” could be the whole causal chain of all our versions. We don’t need a “form” or any other imaginary placeholder for our versions.

In our conversations we refer to versions all the time. If I say “my paper is almost finished,” I refer to the most recent version of it on my computer, not the first draft or the finished one in the future. Or if I complain about my computer being slow, I refer to the version of my computer that has not been restarted or updated for days while working on this paper, not the one I bought three years ago. The same goes for people. When we talk about a person, we actually refer to the most recent version of this person (a real material object at a specific time, with all the past versions causally connected to it). “I love you” becomes “I, the most recent version of me, loves you, the most recent version of you.”

But what about moral responsibility? Let’s do a little thought experiment from the perspective of version identity. Let’s say I want to see my friend Manon and I call her to make an appointment. She agrees to see me next Wednesday. When I meet another friend and tell her I made an appointment with Manon, I’m referring to the most recent version of Manon that I remember: the one who was on the phone, not the one I will be seeing in the future. In the meantime, Manon has changed a little bit

11 Hume, *Human Nature*, 254.

and is a few versions newer, but most likely the new version of her still remembers our appointment. It is also likely this version of Manon has similar values and interests as the previous version, so I can assume safely she will show up to meet me.

It would be another story if, for example, I would volunteer to help homeless people and take an oath to do this for at least three years, because that version of me believes that helping them is the purpose of my life. In the course of the following two years different experiences shape the newer versions of me, the most recent one of which lacks the belief helping homeless people is the most important thing in my life. Could this new version of me be held responsible for breaking an oath made by another version of Tanja with different beliefs? That would be irrational. The same goes for crimes made by versions of people who are gone since and exist now as versions who would not do such things because of different values and beliefs. Clearly this perspective on personal identity is not what the moral system in our society is set up for today. It should be though and it could in the future, if we would take the expired and paradoxical definition of identity seriously and replace it with something more in tune with reality.

Conclusion

Now that we have reached the end of this paper, we can give an answer to the research question I proposed at the beginning: no, there seems to be nothing in the external world that would correspond to the traditional definition of personal identity. Let's summarize how we got to this conclusion. First, we uncovered the principle behind personal identity: we are something persistent over time (numerical sameness) while

Clearly this perspective on personal identity is not what the moral system in our society is set up for today.

changing in properties. Next, we saw how Hobbes dealt with this puzzling contradiction. He proposed to see identity on different layers: as matter or as a postulated form that

holds the changing matter together through time as a motion. Afterward we went on an adventure with Hume inside his mind, where we didn't see any form or other thing holding his perceptions together besides the relations between these objects. He believed we mistakenly see the transition between those perceptions as an interrupted object and to deal with that mistake we make a second mistake by imagining something mysterious holding the perceptions, which we call our identity.

So, are we doomed to be lost, now that it seems we don't have a persistent core over time? No, it appears to be a better idea to lose the whole concept of personal identity as sameness over time, accepting only the causal relationship between different versions of ourselves. We already refer to the most recent version of things all the time, why not do the same with people? In doing so there is no need for identity crises and, in addition, we can still honour our wish to hold each other responsible, insofar

as the recent versions of us resemble the acting version. Thus, next time you feel the urge to say how you feel about the wonderful person lying next to you, don't hold back. Just be sure that person knows you are talking about them and yourself in terms of versions, a specific combination of matter at a specific moment in time.

“The importance of the role of black aesthetic lies in its practice of creating, maintaining and possibly understanding the experiences of black people in a world in which the hegemonic aesthetic is oriented towards the European ideal which is the ideal of a white world.”

More than an Aesthetic

Mireille Kouevi

Our body serves as an outlet of our personal set of aesthetics and beliefs, which can have a substantial political consequence on how one views oneself, but also on how one wants to be viewed through the eyes of others. In *Black Skin White Masks*, the author Frantz Fanon describes how racism can develop a feeling of alienation from one's own body. He quotes the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre's argument on the anti-Semitic stereotypes of Jewish people and their ability to hide or downplay their "Jewishness," whilst black people, in contrast, will never be able to escape from their own blackness. Having dark skin according to Fanon means that one is not the "slave" to the idea that others have of one, but to one's own appearance.¹ In Chapter 5 "The Lived Experience of the Black Man," Fanon describes the consequences of having dark skin in a world that is dominated by whites. The visible differences in race, based on the colour of one's skin and characteristics such as hair types and facial features, mark how someone is viewed by their surroundings.² The notion of race becomes an instruction on how one will be viewed and treated in the world. Since we live in a world that is white, it will favour the visible characteristics and features considered "white" over those which fall under the spectrum of "coloured."

The aim of this article is to explore how black aesthetic is situated in the revolutionary black movements *Black Arts* and *Black Panther*. More specifically, I want to investigate how black aesthetics contributes to the phenomenon of black power and its relation to the development of challenging and understanding existing racist structures. Black Power itself is a revolutionary black movement, but for the sake of this paper, I will refer to it as the idea that advocates black pride, self-sufficiency and equality for all people of black and African descent. The notion of black aesthetics in this paper will refer to what its target audience considers black and what will, therefore, fall into their perception of what is considered to be "authentic black." The importance of the role of black aesthetic lies in its practice of creating, maintaining and possibly understanding the experiences of black people in a world in which the hegemonic aesthetic is oriented towards the European ideal which is the ideal of a white world. The relation of black aesthetics to racism lies in the former's practice of redefining the image of black people and their community through the construction of a self-determined image that advocates black power and centralises the experiences and values of black people. The importance of black aesthetics lies in how it challenges the narration in which black people are portrayed as barbaric and uncivilised savages who are incompatible with the white world.

1 Frantz Fanon, "The Lived Experience of the Black Man," In *Black Skin White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox New ed. (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 94-95.

2 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, 89-91.

The leading question for this paper will be: “What impact does the role of black aesthetics in black liberation movements have on the way black bodies are perceived and how does this contribute to understanding and challenging legitimized patterns of racism?”

I would like to introduce black aesthetics and its expression as a positive counterpoint to the usual discussion of the black body in relation to racism. Think of expressions associated with black aesthetic such as the clenched fist and the “afro” hairstyle which are part of a strategy to turn the tables on anti-black racism. I aim to illustrate the crucial role of black aesthetics in the creation of black consciousness as the liberating materialisation, in the sense of embodiment, of a collective self-realisation in contrast to the reductive racial classification of the black subject. Self-realisation is necessary because it turns the black person into an actional agent capable of revolutionary socio-political change. By actional agent, I refer to the processes within a human being that causes movements based on desire. The thrusting desire, in this case, will be the establishment of black aesthetics, to change and challenge existing racist assumptions concerning black people within a Eurocentric framework. Therefore, the notion of black aesthetic will be central due to its role in enabling liberating action within revolutionary black movements.

I will start by defining black aesthetics and the implications that come with it, after that I will focus on two black liberation movements that originate in the U.S., namely, *Black Arts* and *Black Panther* and their relation and participation in black aesthetics. However, it is also important to mention that the problems that will be mentioned are situated in the U.S., but this does not mean that black people in other parts of the world do not face the same issues. Moreover, this issue can be found in any country in which black people are situated as a community and which is built around a European framework in which the hegemonic gaze is catered towards a white world. Furthermore, I will explain the impact of black aesthetics in those liberation movements and focus on the creation of the black community and the political dimension of black aesthetics.

Black Aesthetic and Black Authenticity

It was the Afro-American critic David Dorsey who provided the clearest definition of black aesthetic. He defined a black aesthetic as “the syndrome of internal factors governing a black audience’s perception and appreciation of a work of art.” In other words, it is the black audience’s decision what is considered to fit into their particular framework and can be considered art.³

Central to the notion of black aesthetics is the idea of black authenticity. Black authenticity is widely seen as “a cultural resource legitimized through ideologies,

3 David Attwell, “The British Legacy in Anglophone African Literary Criticism.” *English in Africa* 11, no. 1 (1984): 94.

actions and interactions.” The reason why the notion of black aesthetics is necessary in order to understand black authenticity is that black authenticity aims to explore the cultural alienation black people face in their daily Eurocentric settings. One example for this is the phenomenon of “white masks,” which should be understood as the attempt to act and look as “white” as possible. This can be done through the means of clothing and using white idiom to mimic the white culture. Assistant professor Jasmin L. Harris describes her experience of “white masks” as a method that allows her to participate in academia as a black woman. She admits that the hyper-awareness of her blackness, especially in white settings, forces her to face the feeling of being unwelcome or at least unexpected in academic settings. It requires a double consciousness, a sort of dissociative identity, which requires her to embody two bodies and identities. A dissociative identity disorder is a mental health disorder that is characterised by at least two distinct personality mental states.

On the one hand, she is a person who is conditionally accepted as a member of higher education faculty by her white colleagues and, on the other hand, she is a person that will never experience full acceptance due to the stereotypes of black women as loud, uneducated, and angry.⁴

“Black authenticity includes ideals and expectations that affect what it means to ‘be black’ in relation to personal, public and cultural identities.”⁵ As stated earlier, Fanon described that an individual who is facing racism can develop a feeling of alienation from their own body. However, this is not only true for one’s body, but also for one’s culture. Deculturation is a process in which an individual develops a feeling of alienation towards their own culture in order to adapt to the values of another culture.

The complete absence of group or cultural identity is not required, deculturation deals with the practice of denying or refusing to acknowledge the culture of the individual or the role it may play in their well-being.⁶ In *D.W. Winnicott and Political Theory: Recentering the Subject* the author(s) write(s), “only the true self can be creative and only the true self can feel real. Whereas a true self feels real, the

Fanon described that an individual who is facing racism can develop a feeling of alienation from their own body.

4 Staci M Zavattaro and Shannon K Orr, “The Art of Teaching: Really, it is an Art,” In *Reflections on Academic Lives: Identities, Struggles, and Triumphs in Graduate School and Beyond*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2017): 131-132.

5 Jenny Nguyen and Amanda Koontz Anthony, “Black Authenticity: Defining the Ideals and Expectations in the Construction of ‘real’ Blackness,” *Sociology Compass* 8, no. 6 (2014): 774.

6 Michael S Merry and William New, “Constructing an Authentic Self: The Challenges and Promise of African-Centered Pedagogy,” *American Journal of Education* 115, no. 1 (2008): 29.

existence of a False self results in a feeling unreal or a sense of futility. [...] False self, in turn, arises when a perceived need for compliance and acquiescence generates an artificial presentation of oneself dictated by the terms of the world or audience rather than one's own.”⁷

In other words, the more a black person allows their true self to be masked or even deadened by living up to the standards of the white society, the more alienated the black person becomes to their own identity, which not only reflects their own set of beliefs but also their historical context, cultural relation and their social context. Deculturalisation re-enforces the idea that black identity is necessarily linked to its performance and perception in the white world, which is forcing black people to adopt a “white attitude” as a condition to be accepted in the white world.

Black Arts and The Black Community

The *Black Arts* movement is famously referred to as the “aesthetic and spiritual sister of Black Power,”⁸ and is mostly engaged in the artistic and cultural aspect of the black power movement. Their definition of “Black Community” is based on racial inclusion, integration and cultural harmony as an open contestation. It concerns itself with the creation of a popular art form to advertise the idea of black aesthetic based on the cultural politics of black nationalism and black separatism.

The notion of *Black Arts* is used to describe art, literature, and theatre that centralise the black experience in terms of black life and black culture. The literature

As such, Black Arts busies itself with the search for traces of a community, which is considered a necessary means to make representational claims of that community.

of this movement involves works written in what is perceived as black English, a dialect in the English language that is specific to black culture and that confronts issues such as inter-racial tension, socio-political awareness and the relevance of African history and culture.⁹ As

such, *Black Arts* busies itself with the search for traces of a community, which is considered a necessary means to make representational claims of that community. This means that they are looking for characteristics that would count as authentically black to represent their definition of a Black Community.

7 J LeJeune, “Adults in the Playground: Winnicott and Arendt on Politics and Playfulness,” in *D.W. Winnicott and Political Theory*, ed. Bowker M., Buzby A. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2017): 251.

8 Larry Neal, “The Black Arts Movement,” *The Drama Review* (Summer 1968): 29.

9 The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. “Black Arts movement,” In *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (August 01, 2019), <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Black-Panther-Party>.

The art in *Black Arts* is supposed to widen the emotional content of the individual's consciousness. Art is used as an emotional guide to act by expressing themselves.¹⁰ It is the artist's task to reveal the sensible to their audience.

For instance, one form of intervention by means of revealing the sensible is the act of participating in determining those who take part in the community as their members, by means of creating an image of the black individual and their community. One clear example of this act of political statement for black people is wearing their hair in an Afro, its naturally curly state, as a protest against the European Beauty ideal of wearing it straight, achieved by chemically manipulating and destroying one's natural curl pattern.

In other words, afro hair can be a sensible that black artist frequently use as a symbol to convey their idea of blackness. The distribution of the sensible reveals who can be considered to participate in the shared experiences of the community on what they do, and when and where the activity is taking place.

These forms are biased and politically motivated material, offered to the audience to identify themselves with. The *Black Arts* movement, therefore, concerns itself with current events and the present understanding and expression of feelings that govern the black individual's perception of the world they are situated in. It delivers a reconstruction of the black mind by centralising black experience as the starting point to understand the black experience in its present context.

Black Aesthetic and Panther Rhetoric

The rise of the *Black Panther* movement did not only start a political revolution, creating structural change in social domains, but it also re-established black consciousness through the idea of black power, black aesthetics and black intellectualism. The *Black Panther Party* was founded by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, as a response to police brutality against unarmed black civilians, and in particular to the assassination of the black nationalist Malcolm X who serves as the ideological forefather of the party.¹¹ The assassination of Malcolm X is a historical key moment that served as the destruction of "symbolic markers of the civil rights era, especially in the transition away from a mass-movement politics and nonviolent struggle and a post-civil rights era of vanguardism and violent repression."¹² Racism is systemic and deals with the policies and practices that are established in institutions to maintain racial group inequalities. It can be detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour. In other words, the *Black Panther* movement can be considered the first instance of

10 Josef Jařab, "Black Aesthetic: A Cultural or Political Concept?" *Callaloo*, no. 25 (1985): 591.

11 Garrett Albert Duncan, "Black Panther Party," In *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (19. July 2019).

12 Amy Abugo Ongiri, "We Waitin' On you, Black Power Black Intellectuals and the Search to Define a Black Aesthetic," In *Spectacular Blackness : The Cultural Politics of the Black Power Movement and the Search for a Black Aesthetic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 99.

a radical political agent, targeting the blunt racism towards black bodies by taking action when it is needed, setting the example of a new course for their community to follow. “How things are represented and the ‘machineries’ and regimes of representation” play an important role in the formation of social and political life.¹³

The two general political registers of the *Black Panther Party* rotate around the self-determined image of black people and the creation of a (counter-)hegemonic image. The construction of a self-determined black image and reputation based on Afrocentrism, which is a cultural and political approach centralising the history and values of African descent, and which aims to promote a positive self-image that advocates black power. The new self-determined image was provided through the powerful combination of art and photographic construction, which often relied upon the symbolism of African-coded items like Kente cloths and headwraps.¹⁴ Not only did the *Black Panther* movement start a political revolution, it also created a fashion trend that spread their message all over the country through the means of mass media. The Panthers were wearing their black berets and leather jackets, their Afro hair, dark glasses and other African-coded items like Kente cloth and head wraps. Those images of the Panthers were a great visual tool for raising political consciousness. Especially the raised fist we all know, has become a symbol of resistance and the signature gesture of the movement.

Another key element in Panther aesthetic is their military aesthetic. The images of leather clothed, gun-toting black people were attempts to reclaim their power and self-determination by trying to at least attenuate or end the memory of physical, constitutional and psychological violence against black people. The black people in the *Black Panther* movement, especially black males, were presented as conscientious, productive, and adaptable subjects able to resist neo-colonisation, police brutality and structural racism, simply by the fact of carrying a gun.¹⁵

The (counter-)hegemonic gaze is one of the features of the portrayal of the Black Panthers in their own newspaper. Margaret Russel describes the hegemonic gaze as “the tendency of the mainstream culture to replicate, through narrative and imagery, racial inequalities and biases which exist throughout society.” The use of hegemonic gaze can, therefore, be described as a conversion in which the media objectifies and trivialise the racial experiences of black people resulting in providing an ideological explanation for inequality based on racial differences.

The goal of the Black Panthers was to attempt a redefinition of black masculinity and femininity through a radical reclamation of history, that separates their values which are based on Afrocentrism, from the values of the white world, based

13 Matthew Hughey, “Black Aesthetics and Panther Rhetoric: A Critical Decoding of Black Masculinity in the Black Panther, 1967—1989,” in *Critical Sociology* 35, no. 1 (2009): 42.

14 Hughey, “Black Aesthetics and Panther Rhetoric,” 43-44.

15 Hughey, “Black Aesthetics and Panther Rhetoric”, 45.

on pedagogical and sociological ideas that conformed to mass appeal. Furthermore, they were convinced that it was up to them to protect those values and their community. The role of black aesthetic lies here in the aesthetical message that the Panthers spread through their fashion statements, targeting the black audience, by participating in aesthetic practices, visualising what had been accepted as authentic black by its audience, creating and defending the image of the self-determined black individual and its community.

Conclusion

To summarise, the notion of black aesthetic is fundamental to understand black authenticity and both the collective and cultural alienation that black people must face in their daily life which is situated in a European framework. Black authenticity has

to be understood as the black people's inner world and how they deal with the presented ideals and expectations of the white world that influence their own perception of their own "blackness" and their own performance, most likely resulting in trying to "play down"

their blackness. In the *Black Arts* movement black aesthetic becomes an important instrument to the open contestation aiming to create a black community to re-situate black people in their identity in the white world. In the *Black Panther* movement, the notion of black aesthetic is used as a tool to visualise what the artists of the *Black Arts* tried to visualise in their art: black aesthetic as the idea of black authenticity, to advocate black pride, self-sufficiency and cultural equality.

To conclude, the political impact of black aesthetic in black liberation movements is based on cultural politics advocating the idea of black power. The Black Panthers did not only create a political agent to protect the newly created black community, but they also attempt a redefinition of the black subject. The two general political registers of the *Black Panther Party* rotate around the self-determined image of black people and the creation of a positive counter-hegemonic image based on black power. These self-determined images of the Panthers served as a great tool to raise political consciousness and the symbolic behind the raised fist and the afro became world-wide acknowledged symbols of resistance against oppression. Additionally, the Black Panthers created a counter-hegemonic gaze to the mainstream culture, through their narrative and images, in order to challenge racial inequalities and biases that exist about the black subject throughout the U.S., but also other societies around the world that struggle with the same issues. Creating a counter-hegemonic gaze is focused on creating a positive counterpoint to the existing racialisation of black bodies, by targeting blunt racism not only political in the way that the *Black Panther Party* did but also culturally through the creation of a new popular art form.

The role of black aesthetic lies here in the aesthetical message that the Panthers spread through their fashion statements.



Fig. 1: Saartje Baartman, as 'The Hottentot Venus', ca.1850, in Sara Ahmed, "Racialized Bodies," in *Real Bodies*, ed. Mary Evans and Ellie Lee (London: Palgrave, 2002), 52.

Implicit Bias and Embodiment

Can a Cartesian Rationalist Framework Fully
Account for Racism?

Lea Metzger

Consider two thought experiments. First, imagine a person of colour who has lived in one room for their entire life. While living there, they specialize in racism, earning every degree that is out there, every fact that is to be known about racism in different societies, about its history and implications. Imagine this person leaving the room and entering a society which discriminates against people of colour. Would they have learned something new – would experiencing a racist encounter for the first time add something to their understanding of racism?

This thought experiment adapted from Franz Jackson is called the knowledge argument. In the original example, Mary has been living in a (black and white) room for her entire life, studying everything about the physics of colour via a black and white television. She becomes a neuro-physicist who knows everything you could possibly know about colours, but she has never seen or experienced them herself.¹ Again, the same question: Will seeing a colour for the first time add something to Mary's understanding of colours? The answers change depending on which philosophical framework we use. In this article, I will introduce the Cartesian rationalist framework (CRF), analyse how it can be connected to racism, and point out that it overlooks two important aspects of it: implicit biases and lived experiences. Finally, I will conclude that a CRF is unable to fully account for racism.

Racism and Cartesian Rationalism

Let us start by defining Cartesian Rationalism (CR). Cartesian Rationalism is a philosophical framework that has its source in René Descartes' work. He saw the mind, a thinking substance, as completely separate from and superior to the corporal body. Descartes famous sentence "cogito ergo sum" (I think, therefore I am) makes use of the philosophical tradition to see the mind (and its associated rational thinking) as the essential feature of humans. Descartes assumed that all reliable truths and scientific knowledge can be derived through deductive reasoning alone, that is a priori - from innate ideas. Therefore, innate ideas and rational capacities are a reliable source of knowledge, whereas the senses are not. Reasoning, not perception, is seen as the key to undoubtable knowledge.² Ergo, it is impossible to learn something new merely

1 Yujin Nagasawa, "The Knowledge Argument Against Dualism," *Theoria* 68, no. 3 (February 2008): 206, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1755-2567.2002.tb00131.x>.

2 John Cottingham, "Descartes: Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Mind," in *Routledge History of Philosophy Volume IV: The Renaissance and Seventeenth Century Rationalism*, ed. Gorge H.R. Parkinson (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 187-194.

through sense experience. Returning to the thought experiment, this would mean that a CRF could be used to argue that seeing colours or having a first racial encounter does not amount to gaining new knowledge.

In line with that, Noam Chomsky and Harry Bracken illustrate that philosophical theories such as CR and their methodologies provide a conceptual framework to argue in favour or against racism. They illustrate that in the philosophical literature, Cartesianism is thought to contain a modest conceptual barrier for racism. This often leads to the conclusion that “racism supposedly lies outside the context of Cartesianism because one is not permitted to

Cartesian Rationalism starts from the beautiful premise that all human beings, though not the same, are moral, political, social and economic equals.

count accidental properties as essential. [...] Since the essence of human beings is mental, we cannot regard colour, shape, sex, etc., as properties of the mind; these properties must be given an accidental status only.”³ This means that within a CRF, racial (bodily) characteristics are treated as arbitrary and accidental, not

as essential. An essential property (e.g. being a human endowed with reason) cannot be changed, since it makes you who you are. By contrast, accidental properties such as race and gender are thought not to contribute to who you are as a (human) being and should therefore be irrelevant for the acquisition of knowledge and the definition of a “true human nature.”⁴ Moreover, CR is nowadays often portrayed as a very egalitarian framework. It starts from the beautiful premise that all human beings, though not the same, are moral, political, social and economic equals. What makes us equal is the fact that we are all endowed with reason, as well as with certain innate mental properties.⁵ This so called “colour blindness solution” is still popular. Today, it defends the Enlightenment tradition and is thought to alleviate social injustices and oppressive institutions,⁶ since it does not infer mental properties (e.g. intelligence or morality) from physical properties. However, this “colour blindness solution” overlooks two important aspects of racism: implicit bias and lived experiences.

Implicit Bias: Racism Is Not Only a Problem of Conscious Prejudice

What exactly is an implicit bias and how can it affect our perception and behaviour? Implicit bias is often referred to as the collection of mental associations, for

3 Kay Squadrito, “Racism and Empiricism,” *Behaviorism* 7, no. 1 (Spring, 1979): 106, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27758933>.

4 Robert L. Holmes, *Introduction to Applied Ethics* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), 23-39.

5 Milan Zafirovski, *The Enlightenment and Its Effects on Modern Society* (New York: Springer, 2011), 126.

6 Squadrito, “Racism and Empiricism,” 107.

example prejudices, that we form through (in)direct influences. Prejudices consist of three factors. First, an affective (emotional) constituent, influencing for example if we perceive others as good or bad. Second, a behavioural factor, which enables us to discriminate against others and third, a cognitive component (the content of the prejudice itself).⁷ Constantly paired associations create implicit biases and they are formed, as well as internalized through society by means of scientific or religious beliefs, as well as through representations in the media, books, movies, museums, educational systems, etc.⁸ Implicit biases can be positive or negative and affect our behaviour in an unconscious way, outside of our awareness. People can explicitly be against racism, while implicit racial associations can still automatically (unconsciously) be activated – despite the conscious intentions and rational goals. In other words, implicit negative associations can negatively influence people’s feelings, attitudes and behaviours, even if they explicitly hold non-racial attitudes.⁹ As a consequence, unconscious negative biases can still influence daily life interactions, even if we live in a society that places high value on rationality, objectivity and equality. Therefore, the “colour blindness solution” (racial characteristics are arbitrary and should be neglected) overlooks that negative associations and racial biases which have already been created historically cannot simply be undone by the conscious conviction that all human beings are rational equals.

To understand how individualized and institutionalized implicit racial biases arise, it is important to consider the role of power in the creation of racial identities. According to the Foucauldian conception, power is, first, not simply something you either have or not: it is an omnipresent, productive force that creates social structures, norms and identities. Second, “power is action upon action [...] and the anchor point for exercises of power are always bodies. Third, power [...] is creative; it posits and produces reality as much as it sets limits upon it.”¹⁰ Under this conception, power also produces knowledge. Take for instance science and religion: their authoritative status never ceased to influence how bodily and/or mental characteristics are evaluated.

7 Henry Gleitman, James Gross, Daniel Reisberg, *Psychology* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011), 511.

8 Maxine L. Craig, “Racialized Bodies,” in *Routledge Handbook of Body Studies*, ed. Bryan S. Turner (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 326-330.

9 “Understanding Implicit Bias,” The Ohio State University: Kirwan Institute for the study of race and ethnicity, accessed January 26, 2020, <http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/research/understanding-implicit-bias/>; David J. Schneider, *The Psychology of Stereotyping* (New York and London: The Guilford Press, 2004), 267-271.

10 Ladelle McWorther, “Sex, Race, and Biopower: A Foucauldian Genealogy,” *Hypatia* 19, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 42, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2004.tb01301.x>.

Both had and still have a significant influence on the definition of what we consider to be the “true human nature,” and which capacities, qualities and characteristics are regarded as desirable.

To illustrate how implicit biases are still present today, let us consider two examples from the Dutch documentary “White Is Also a Colour.” Sunny Bergman invited thirty children between the age of four and seven to ask them some questions. Children’s statements are a good reflection of societies’ implicit associations, as they are too young to give socially desirable answers. Approximately three-quarters of the children thought that a white doll and/or a drawing of a white kid (compared to a doll/drawing of a person of colour) would be smarter, more likely to be the boss, more beautiful, less misbehaving, as well as getting and deserving less punishment. Those assumptions were present, independent of the skin colour of the child who was asked the questions.¹¹

The second example is given by Sinan Çankaya, an associate professor who specialized in ethnic profiling by the police and who has published several books as a recognized scientist. In interviews, he is often asked if his research can be really

seen as objective, given his own Turkish background. Sometimes there are also more implicit questions, for example if he wants to share his own experiences. However, as soon as he does that, his scientific research is often reduced to personal anecdotes and stories. Thereby, Sinan Çankaya is being judged based

*Cartesian Rationalism
treats racism as a problem of
conscious prejudice and adapts
a “colour blindness solution.”*

on his outer appearance rather than on his scientific work.¹² How often are white researchers asked the same question? Less frequently, since the viewpoint of white people (especially males) is still often seen as neutral and objective whereas the viewpoint of people with a different skin colour, gender or nationality is still rather seen as subjective.¹³ So, even if we want to see all people as rational equals, judgments can still be influenced by social norms, expectations and assumptions that were formed through present and past representations of power.

11 “2Doc – Wit is ook een Kleur,” YouTube Video, 50:14, posted by Renaat Van Poelvoorde, November 5, 2017, <https://youtu.be/J5mJVvpMGSk>.

12 “2Doc – Wit is ook een Kleur,” YouTube Video, 50:14, posted by Renaat Van Poelvoorde, November 5, 2017, <https://youtu.be/J5mJVvpMGSk>.

13 Sara Ahmed, “Racialized Bodies,” in *Real Bodies*, ed. Mary Evans and Ellie Lee (London: Palgrave, 2002), 51; Theresa H. Pfeifer, “Deconstructing Cartesian Dualisms of Western Racialized Systems: A Study in the Colors Black and White,” *Journal of Black Studies* 39, no.4 (March 2009): 529 -531, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934706298192>.

In short, CR treats racism as a problem of conscious prejudice and adapts a “colour blindness solution.” This fails to account for the implicit biases that arise depending on one’s visible bodily characteristics, since certain attributes – for example morality, rationality and objectivity – were historically linked to the white male body.¹⁴

Embodied Knowledge and Lived Experiences

Neglecting that the past has created certain (negative) prejudices that are associated with visible bodily characteristics, dismisses that this history can still have an influence on present lived experiences, interactions and assumptions about each other. Subsequently, a second problem arises: CR cannot fully account for the importance of lived experiences and the fact that knowledge is embodied. Depending on the body and the lifeworld one inhabits, different individuals exhibit different knowledge, perceptions, emotions and behaviours. Those different experiences can thus arise based on different visible (bodily) characteristics.¹⁵

Frantz Fanon’s book *Black Skin, White Masks* underlines the importance of visible bodily characteristics to account for racism. Due to the visibility of race, racism cannot be explained purely conceptually without missing important aspects of its spatial and ontological dimensions. Fanon’s description of him becoming aware of his blackness, through the white man’s eyes, shows us that different bodily characteristics, as well as the implicit and explicit expectations and associations that arise from it, can indeed change how we conceptualize ourselves and others, particularly, in an environment in which whiteness is perceived as a universal, objective and superior standard. To illustrate this thought I want to quote Frantz Fanon from his chapter “The Fact of Blackness.”

I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave-ships [...]. On that day, completely dislocated, unable to be abroad with the other, the white man, who unmercifully imprisoned me, I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object.¹⁶

Let us consider another example from this very article, the picture from the “Hottentot Venus” at the beginning of this paper. A white male scientist studies the body of a black woman from a distance. In this picture, he is portrayed as rather rational – accumulating knowledge through a telescope – whereby the black woman isolated on

14 Pfeifer, “Deconstructing Cartesian Dualisms,” 530.

15 Ahmed, “Racialized Bodies,” 54-61.

16 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Mask* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 84-85.

a platform is reduced to her body (parts).¹⁷ How do both examples connect embodied knowledge to CR? They describe a situation in which the coloured body is objectified. “It is by ‘seeing’ bodily others, that they are ‘known,’ and this knowledge serves to constitute the subject (in this case the white subject) as the one who knows.”¹⁸ To rationally discuss racism, an experience needs to be conceptualized. However, there will always be a difference between a rationally constructed racial identity (a disembodied notion of what it means to be a person of colour or white) and the concrete “real” body and lived experiences of a person. So, the establishment of a fundamental connection between knowing and being might not be that clear.¹⁹

As mentioned above, CR assumes that intuition and deduction provide us with a priori knowledge – knowledge that is deducted from pure reason – independent of sense experiences. A distinction is made between knowledge that is gained through the mind (and its rational thought) and knowledge that is gained through the body. Cartesian Rationalism sees the mind and the body as separate sources of knowledge of unequal ranking. One source of knowledge, the mind, is superior to the other,

situated knowledge gained by the bodily senses.²⁰ However, the more we portray the mind as separate from and superior to the body, the more we fail to acknowledge that racism is not merely expressed and experienced on a rational and mental level. In a

The qualitative experience of racism is not the same as knowing all facts about it.

society that inherits certain (structural) racial values, norms, assumptions, expectations and discriminatory biases (e.g. the examples of Fanon or from the documentary “White is also a colour”), racial characteristics are not inessential, as a CRF claims. On the contrary, different experiences, privileges (rights or (dis)advantages of a group or person) and general opportunities arise, depending on one’s own visible bodily characteristics, the way one is categorized and the normative standard that one is compared to. In the end, it is through our bodies that we interact with the world.²¹ Being a person of colour leads to different lived experiences than being white and the personal, situated and embodied knowledge that arises from the former is needed to understand the damaging and demoralising effects of racism.

As a result, the qualitative experience of racism is not the same as knowing all facts about it. Returning to the thought experiment from the beginning, Mary the

17 Ahmed, “Racialized Bodies,” 51-54.

18 Ahmed, “Racialized Bodies,” 56.

19 Denise F. da Silva, “Notes for a Critique of the ‘Metaphysics of Race’.” *Theory, Culture & Society* 28, no.1 (January 2011): 141, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276410387625>.

20 Squadrito, “Racism and Empiricism,” 107.

21 Crispin Sartwell, “Western Philosophy as White Supremacism,” *The Philosophical Salon*, July 01, 2019, <https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/western-philosophy-as-white-supremacism/>.

neuro physicist, upon leaving the black and white room, will probably see colours within a second, simply by looking at any object. The person of colour from the first example, however, needs another person to experience racism. Whether it will be a racist encounter, depends on the visible bodily characteristics of the person themselves, the person they encounter, the values, power relations and implicit biases of the people involved, as well as of the society that they enter. Only through bodily, face to face encounters with white people (considering current and past power relations) such a differentiation becomes possible.²² Acknowledging this raises the question if the mind alone can really be perceived as that superior? Or if we should not rather see thoughts, knowledge, concepts and ideas as embodied? This means that they cannot be interpreted without making a connection to the body and context in which there are produced and the relations they have with other bodies.

Conclusion

First, how we come to perceive white and coloured bodies, as well as the implicit biases and lived experiences related to those bodies, depends heavily on what science, society and religion defines as the ideal, superior standard. As a result, the process in which bodies are seen as racial identities is always embodied and embedded, since racial identities are ascribed within a specific context. To understand that “colour prejudices” can indeed apply to the mind, it is important to account for the historical and contextual factors that linked certain bodies to certain associations. Second, ignoring the unconscious level of racism and the different resulting lived experiences also means ignoring the impact that history has on present interactions, assumptions, perceptions and expectations. There will always be a difference between a rationally constructed racial identity and the concrete “real” body and lived experiences of a person. This is important, since the resulting harmful and violent, (im)material, economic, political, social and psychological consequences of racism cannot be understood by referring to reason alone. Treating racism as a problem of conscious prejudice and adapting a “colour blindness solution,” ignores the non-conscious dimension of implicit bias, as well as different lived experiences that arise depending on one’s own visible bodily characteristics. Since it is through our bodies that we interact with the world, they are not something we can take out of the equation - even if we try to judge people purely based on their mental capacities.

Concludingly, CR takes on a very egalitarian focus by emphasizing humans common shared rationality. However, a CRF first, pays too little attention to the history that linked certain (negative) qualities and attributes (superiority/objectivity vs inferiority/subjectivity) to a certain body type and the (negative) implicit biases that arose from it. Second, it does not adequately consider the fact that our knowledge and thoughts are always embodied, which is needed to understand how different

²² Fanon, *Black Skin, White Mask*, 82-83.

bodies perceive daily life interactions and encounters differently. Therefore, CR is a too one-sided view that fails to acknowledge the negative biases and lived experiences that arise from our colonial and racial history. Imagine that most of us would agree to see each other, rationally, as humans who deserve equal social, moral, political and economic consideration. Even then, historical, individual, and institution-

Cartesian Rationalism is a too one-sided view that fails to acknowledge the negative biases and lived experiences that arise from our colonial and racial history.

alized disadvantages, stereotypes, prejudices and biases will not simply disappear only because we, at some point in time, started to refer to all people as equal (based on their shared humanity and rationality). This should not devalue the good intentions of CR, but rather emphasize that

a “neutral starting point” in approaching racial differences cannot fully account for the contextual aspects of the past and the resulting practical implications that arise for different bodies. Coming back to the thought experiment from the beginning it becomes plausible to assume that being racialized for the first time would indeed add something to a person’s purely theoretical understanding of racism.

“A woman’s individual experience of sex is thus non-existent, because she apparently is not concerned with her existence as an individual.”

Descartes Meets #MeToo

On the downplaying of non-violent sexual abuse

Miki Eisenga

In the light of the current #MeToo-Movement, I am going to examine whether the need for this movement might be caused by a philosophical tradition. Although in the last decades a lot has changed when it comes to taking sexual abuse seriously, in October 2017 the movement arose.¹ The recent rise of the movement shows that the negative effects of physical abuse are often still downplayed in our society. Looking back in history, we see that – for a long time – the infringement of the female body without any physical violence has been explained away as doing no (mental) harm – e.g. non-consensual sex in marriages, raping a victim that did not verbally refuse, intimidation in the streets. This explaining away shows an odd relation some people apparently have to their bodies, and to the body of others. This brings up the question: when there is no perceptible physical abuse, can harm be done?

The #MeToo-Movement is focusing on this exact point. Officially, the seriousness of sexual abuse is recognized, but in practice victims need to first struggle through a suffering agony to build a case. The need for the movement shows the downplaying of sexual abuse and exposing the prevailing (misogynist) power structures which silence female voices.² Misogyny is the hatred towards, or contempt of women. The question I will examine in this paper is the following: *how do the long traditions of dualism and misogyny in philosophy influence, and even strengthen, each other in the downplaying of negative effects of non-violent physical abuse (e.g. rape and sexual assault)?*

The dualist tradition in philosophy could be the cause of the downplaying of sexual assault. Additionally, the long tradition of misogyny in philosophy, and therefore in society, should be taken into account while examining this phenomenon. The way great thinkers have written about women for centuries does not encourage to raise

1 Maya Salam, “One Year After #MeToo, Examining a Collective Awakening,” *New York Times*, October 05, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/05/us/me-too-movement-women.html>.

2 It is possible to devote a whole essay to the development of power structures and their connection to misogyny and sexual abuse. Because of the magnitude of that particular topic, I will not address it extensively in my essay. Still, existing power structures are one of the reasons that the #MeToo-movement came into existence. Barbara Herman explains this everlasting problem very profoundly in her essay on *Thinking About Kant on Sex and Marriage*. Referring to sexual harassment in workplaces she claims that “the premise of the most difficult claims of sexual harassment is that the individual sincerity of good (or not bad) intentions is insufficient guarantor of innocence where sex [...] and inequality of power mix. So the male professor who is certain that he would never make an unwelcome sexual approach to a student or junior colleague, who is offended at the very idea that he would act without consent, cannot see that given the structure of power and authority neither he nor the recipient of his sexual advance can make it the case that their private actions are reciprocally free and equal.”

one's voice when confronted with abuse. Although, thanks to feminist movements, women's position in society is improving, it is problematic how victims continue to not be taken seriously. In some cases, victims are set aside as "dramatizers" of an experience. Whenever the assault is unprovable, due to lack of visual damage, the victim seems to lose the right to claim to be assaulted. Or at least, this right is taken less seriously.

It is important to note that obviously not only women are victims of sexual harassment, assault and rape. It is an issue of great seriousness for all sexes. Therefore, the #MeToo-movement opts to take away the stigma or taboo surrounding the sexual abuse of male individuals – better: for all individuals, or people. However, for this paper the female perspective is used, since the philosophical argument that will be made is based on the denigration of women in the Western philosophical tradition. It is also important to point out that it is not only non-violent sexual abuse which is downplayed. Unfortunately, even violent sexual abuse and its effects are not always taken as seriously as they should be.

Dualism

Let us start with dualism. It seems no longer necessary to explain that when it comes to sexual abuse two features of a human being are being harmed: both the victim's mind and body. However, substance dualism would disagree. Within this philosophical framework, the corporal body is distanced from the mind, or vice versa, and is

In the case of non-violent sexual abuse, it is not necessarily the body that will signal the harm doing to the mind.

thereby leaving room for the possibility to explain away the negative effects of non-violent abuse. When sexual performances are merely an act of the body, mental harm should be non-existent. For example, dualist *interactionism* – a type of substance dualism – problema-

tizes this as well. Although interactionism claims that there is a causal link between body and mind, it is unclear how interaction is possible since they are two incompatible substances. Adding to that, in the case of *non-violent* sexual abuse, it is not necessarily the body that will signal the harm doing to the mind. It is commonly known that the body can react as if it is enjoying sexual intercourse – the arousing of the genitalia – whereas the individual still experiences the intercourse as abuse. However, dualism provides even more arguments that denigrate female experience of sexual abuse.

Conceptualization of Humans

Let us look at the role dualism plays in the conceptualization of humans. This is where the notion of misogyny comes in. Simply put: in the philosophical tradition human

beings are identified with their minds or ratio, which, in turn, is considered to be a feature of males. In her book *Man of Reason* Genevieve Lloyd argues that in the entire Western tradition of philosophy, reason and objectivity are gendered male.³

From a slightly different perspective, Susan Bordo argues that starting with modern philosophy Western *ideals* of reason and objectivity are gendered male; the rise of modern science created these ideals that are hostile towards women and feminism.⁴ Although there seems to be debate on the starting point and on what exact aspects of rationality are gendered male in the philosophical tradition, there is shown and proven to be a perception of the male's ratio being superior.

On the one hand, as a consequence of the male ratio defining human beings, the male body (and the female mind) and what it performs is neglected. On the other hand, the body and everything it entails – e.g. emotions, lust and sin – are gendered female. The negative representation and connotations of the female gendered body, and the positive representation and connotations of the male gendered mind show and imply that interaction between the sexes is out of balance.

Descartes?

What about the so-called founding father of dualism? Considering his time and societal context, Descartes had a rather feminist approach towards the issue, and to women. As Beverly Clack states: “for Descartes, the essential self is located not in the mutable body, but in the transcendent mind. [...] For [him], the mind has no sex.”⁵ He even argues that the ability to reason is common to all.

However, even if Descartes does not gender the mind, he still does see it as superior to the body. The infringement of the body could therefore still be regarded as doing less harm than the infringement of the mind. With respect to taking non-violent physical abuse seriously this could be regarded as a problematic attitude. Nonetheless, compared to the philosopher that I will discuss in the next section, Descartes might have been the one who would have supported the #MeToo-Movement the most.

Misogyny

Over the last few decades thinkers have taken up the challenge to wrap their heads around the concept of gender and sex. Up until the mid-fifties of the twentieth century the majority of famous thinkers were male; their famous female peers are mainly

3 Genevieve Lloyd, “Maleness, Metaphor, and the ‘Crisis’ of Reason,” in *A Mind of One's Own: Feminist Essays on Reason and Objectivity*, ed. Louise M. Anthony and Charlotte Witt (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 69 – 84.

4 Susan R. Bordo, *The Flight to Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism and Culture*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987).

5 Beverley Clack, “René Descartes 1596 – 1650,” in *Misogyny in the Western Philosophical Tradition*, (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1999), 95.

known for their writings about women's position in society.⁶ As stated by Marcia L. Homiak: "many of the values associated with canonical works have, historically, been used to denigrate and oppress women [...]. Thus, teaching the works of the traditional canon has encouraged not only ignorance and elitism but also sexism."⁷ These facts by themselves already show that in philosophy a tradition of the denigration of women has been, or is being upheld. Whether it is a misogynist society causing great thinkers to publish derogatory writings about women, or vice versa: either way, both have strengthened the disregarding of female voices in society. Let us take a look at some great thinkers and their relation to misogyny.

Kant's Take on Morality

According to Kant, man and woman do not share the same nature, which means that both have different qualities which are supposed to complement each other. The

This makes women incapable of achieving the highest form of virtue, the rational one. Therefore, women are morally inferior to men.

notion of complementing each other implies that the qualities are of equal value. According to Clack, what Kant "seems to argue [is] that these qualities are equally important [...]" and that in marriage the conjunction of these qualities

contributes to the complete human life."⁸ This does not mean that they both bring as much to the table.

In his account of morality, Kant evaluates the qualities that men and women contribute differently. Masculine qualities are namely the ones which are "necessary for the genuine moral actions"; these are duties. Duties in turn, can only be followed up through *rationality*. In contrast, feminine qualities, such as sympathy and compassion, do have a lower status according to Kant, since they are *emotive* and therefore less important when it comes to attaining the moral life. Thus, rephrasing Kant's line

6 Alcuin Blamires, Karen Pratt and C. William Marx, "A Woman Defends Women," in *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: an Anthology of Medieval Texts*, (Oxford England: Clarendon Press, 1992), 289 – 302; Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Vintage, 2011).

7 Marcia L. Homiak, "Feminism and Aristotle's Rational Ideal," in *A Mind of One's Own: Feminist Essays on Reason and Objectivity*, ed. Louise M. Anthony and Charlotte Witt (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 1.

8 Beverley Clack, "Immanuel Kant 1724 – 1804," in *Misogyny in the Western Philosophical Tradition*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 145.

of reasoning, Clack concludes that “[women’s] morality arises not from principle, but from emotive responses.”⁹ This makes women incapable of achieving the highest form of virtue, the rational one. Therefore, women are morally inferior to men.

Clearly, man’s rationality is regarded, once again, as superior to woman’s emotive capacities. The mental harm sexual abuse produces is thus being explained away. Viewed from the perspective of man’s rationality, sex in marriage is not only a physical act in which man and woman are complementary. Woman’s emotional reaction to this act can be disregarded as well.

Schopenhauer on Women

It might be a cliché, or at least an obvious example to address, but Schopenhauer holds a strong misogynist view. Like Kant, Schopenhauer argues that women are not fully able to be moral agents due to their inferior powers of reason. Although his view might be regarded as exceptionally misogynist, even for his time, it is important to note that Schopenhauer “explicitly builds upon and develops attitudes towards women implicit in the arguments of his fellow philosophers.”¹⁰

To show the misogynist view in Schopenhauer’s writings, I will present some passages from his writing *On Women*.

Hence it will be found that the fundamental fault of the female character is that it has no sense of justice. This is mainly due to the fact, already mentioned, that women are defective in the powers of reasoning and deliberation [...]. Nature has equipped woman, for her defence and protection, with the arts of dissimulation.¹¹

Dissimulation is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as “the fact of trying to hide your real feelings, character or intentions.”¹² Thus, in order to protect herself, a woman should hide her feelings. In the case of non-violent sexual abuse, this could be interpreted as it being better for her not to voice her opinion – especially, since she *has no sense of justice* in the first place.

9 Clack, “Immanuel Kant 1724 – 1804”, 145.

10 Beverley Clack, “Arthur Schopenhauer 1788 – 1860,” in *Misogyny in the Western Philosophical Tradition*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 181.

11 Arthur Schopenhauer, “On Women,” in *Schopenhauer Selections*, ed. D. H. Parker, trans. T. D. Saunders (New York: Charles Scribner, 1928), 185.

12 “Dissimulation,” Cambridge Dictionary, last modified December 02, 2019, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/dissimulation>.

That woman is by nature meant to obey may be seen by the fact that every woman who is placed in the unnatural position of complete independence, immediately attaches herself to some man, by whom she allows herself to be guided and ruled.¹³

Here it is stated that it is in the female nature to obey and this nature is so inevitable that she, as if she were a magnet, clings to a man to be guided. This natural attitude of obedience might explain why she is supposed to accept the infringement of her body by her guiding husband, since he is supposed to know *better* – or the best – what is good for both.

And since women exist in the main solely for the propagation of the species, and are not destined for anything else, they live, as a rule, more for the species than for the individual, and in their hearts take the affairs of the species more seriously than those of the individual.¹⁴

Women are being brushed aside as “breeding machines” and only men can be regarded as true individuals. A woman’s individual experience of sex is thus non-existent, because she apparently is not concerned with her existence as an individual. She is supposed to be focussed on the species, having sex and thereby propagating the species is a woman’s intrinsic and only task.

It is needless to explain the misogynist attitude that Schopenhauer holds, and to explain the downplaying of sexual abuse, since sex in the first place serves the only function women have: propagation. In addition, women are regarded as emotional creatures without rationality. Therefore, they are subordinate to men, making men more likely to know what is good for women.

This explains the neglect of mental harm: as men know what is best for women, who only serve to propagate anyway, mental harm of sexual assault – or maybe even sexual assault as such – is simply non-existent.

Interwovenness

By now it has become clear, first, that the traditional dualist view denigrates women and, second, that the male gendered ratio underwrites misogynist arguments in the writings of philosophers. To point out the interwovenness of dualism and misogyny I will use Kant’s account on sex and on marriage. This interwovenness provides the final explanation for the downplaying of non-violent sexual abuse.

13 Schopenhauer, “On Women,” 185.

14 Schopenhauer, “On Women,” 185.

According to Kant when “one is moved by sexual appetite, it is the sex (the genitalia) of the other that is the object of interest.”¹⁵ This objectification of the other is both natural and inevitable in sexual activity. Having a look at Kant’s account on sex:

The desire which a man has for a woman is not directed towards her because she is a woman; that she is a human being is of no concern to the man; only her sex is the object of his desires. Human nature is thus subordinated. [...] If then a man wishes to satisfy his desire, and a woman hers, they stimulate each other’s desire; their inclinations meet, but their object is not human nature but sex, and each of them dishonours the human nature of the other.¹⁶

For Kant, the essence of human nature is the mind (ratio). Sex, therefore, is a bodily activity that does not involve the mind. By making “sex the object of one’s desires,” sex as an activity is no longer controlled by the mind. Although Kant suggests a male-female equality in the physical activity of sex, this equality is not given. The difference in *strength* – both physical and social

By making “sex the object of one’s desires,” sex as an activity is no longer controlled by the mind.

– of the two participants is what causes possible harm to the female body. A male is driven by his appetite, only focused on the female genitalia – not on, for example, her emotive state – he uses the strength of his stronger body to achieve the satisfaction of that appetite.

This also justifies men not taking responsibility for what their body does. If sex is considered to be a natural instinct, as Kant seems to suggest, consent (and even responsibility) as a rational act has nothing to do with it. Consent as a part of intercourse, can only be absent if there is the previously mentioned equality. But, as shown, there is no such equality. Thus, there is an inconsistency in Kant’s reasoning. In addition to that, *even* if a man would be driven by the ratio while inclining to that “natural instinct,” his rational thoughts would be seen as more valid than women’s (non)rational thought.

15 Barbara Herman, “Could It Be Worth Thinking About Kant on Sex and Marriage,” in *A Mind of One’s Own: Feminist Essays on Reason and Objectivity*, ed. Louise M. Anthony and Charlotte Witt (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 55.

16 Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, trans. Louis Infield (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963), 163.

Consider the example of marriage. Kant claims that marriage is a way of legislating sex, thus indirectly by marriage you consent to sex.¹⁷ Even though marriage

If the philosophical tradition would have taken Descartes' non-gendered ratio seriously, would the current need for a movement such as #MeToo have been less urgent?

is supposed to be an agreement which allows both parties to equally enjoy "honourable intercourse," considering the superior position of the man, it is questionable how equal this agreement actually is. Being married, the wife has automatically consented to any sexual approach by her

husband, so rape and assault simply do not exist within marriage. The non-existence of rape and sexual assault within marriage was so much taken for granted, that it took a long time to acknowledge that rape and assault do take place within marriage. For example, in the Netherlands marital rape was not forbidden until 1991.¹⁸

Note, that this reasoning focuses on the male's body; but what should be at stake is the focus on the infringement of the female body. Also, this male oriented reasoning plays a big role in the negative mental consequences for women in the downplaying of sexual assault.

Descartes?

To conclude, we have seen that there is a tradition of downplaying non-violent sexual abuse. This tradition can be explained by the interwovenness of misogyny and dualism. Dualism defines the human being as a male ratio, a definition that is already tinged by misogyny. The (female) body being subordinate to the (male) ratio causes difficulties in taking effects of the infringement of the female body seriously. Schopenhauer explicitly writes about women as subordinate to men. Kant mixes misogyny and dualism in his account on differences in morality, and sex as an object in itself.

Obviously, there have been philosophers in recent decades who hold other views, and luckily society is changing as well. However, the example of the professor in the

17 For Kant sexual activity outside marriage is dishonouring *humanity*. He even claims that sexual activity can cause the "loss" of humanity. Such sexual activity objectifies both parties involved; "to make oneself an Object of demand [sexual appetite], is to dispose oneself as over a thing" (Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, 165). A monogamous marriage is, however, the only way two people can enjoy sexual intercourse without risking reducing themselves to objects. In order for the couple to *surrender their persons* to one another, and be able to have non-dishonouring intercourse, the "exchange" should be legally enforced. Marriage is, according to Kant, "sexual union in accordance with law" (Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 62).

18 Catherine McNamee, "Rape," in *A Comparative Perspective on Major Social Problems*, ed. by Rita J. Simon, (New York/Oxford: Lexington Books, 2001), 20.

beginning of my paper shows – and I think not unfamiliarly to you – that the struggle for taking non-violent sexual abuse seriously still exists. Hence, there is still a need for the #MeToo-movement. This makes us wonder: if the philosophical tradition would have taken Descartes' non-gendered ratio seriously, would the current need for a movement such as #MeToo have been less urgent?



Fig. 1: "Humorous Gender Reveal Party Ideas," Brianna Michele Adams, accessed January 15, 2020, <https://partieswithacause.com/humorous-gender-reveal-party-ideas/>.

Gender Performativity

Annabel Dirkzwager

Introduction

“No, you can’t play soccer with us, girls aren’t as good at playing soccer.”

Growing up as a girl who loved to play any kind of sport, a phrase like this cannot be unfamiliar. Even though the young feminist in me somehow always felt that this exclusion was not fair, I believed for a long time that I was not physically capable of being really good at any kind of sport that is considered masculine. I started to consciously disagree with a lot of sexist stereotypes after learning about socialization and the fact that besides nature, nurture also constitutes our identities. For a very long time however, I believed that I, as a woman, was just naturally not as strong and fast as men are. This stereotype, as a result of the dichotomy of nature and culture, has deeply influenced our understanding of ourselves and others.

Using Butler’s theory of gender performativity, I will explain why the dichotomy of nature and culture, and therefore the sex and gender distinction, is wrong. In order to argue this, I will answer the following research question: Is the performativity theory of Judith Butler an adequate post-dualist solution to the standard dualist conception of gender? To do so, I will give a short illustration of *biological foundationalism* and its heritage. Then, I will explain Butler’s notion of gender performativity. To illustrate the notion of gender performativity, I will use an example of female bodily enactment, as given by Iris Marion Young. I will conclude by arguing that this view of the gendered body shows why we should get rid of the dichotomy of nature and culture.

Biological Foundationalism

The notion of *doing one’s gender* has become an influential phrase within feminist studies.¹ This social constructivist notion of gender is an important but not always unproblematic one. The concept of gender was first introduced by feminists to get rid of the determinist biological view of sex-identity as a natural given.² According to the determinist biological view, human behaviour is fully determined by biological attributes.³ The determinist view has justified the reduction of women to their reproductive

1 Rosemarie Buikema, Liedeke Plate, and Kathrin Thiele, *Doing Gender in Media Art and Culture. A Comprehensive Guide to Gender Studies*, second edition (Oxon: Routledge, 2018): 39.

2 Linda Nicholson, “Interpreting gender,” *Signs*, vol. 20, no 1 (1994): 80.

3 “Determinism, Biological,” International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, Encyclopedia.com, accessed on January 23, 2020, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/applied-and-social-sciences-magazines/determinism-biological>.

capacities. As a result of this view, women have been seen as not capable of the same moral, intellectual and creative achievements as men. To undermine this sexist idea, feminists have introduced the concept of gender.

Even though this concept that views gender as a social construct is a great start, it evokes the problem of dualism. As Linda Nicholson writes, the biology of men and women might not fully determine someone's gender identity anymore: "They still view the physiological self as the 'given' upon which specific characteristics are 'superimposed': it provides the location for establishing where specific social influences go to."⁴ This *biological foundationalism* keeps in place the dichotomy of nature and culture.⁵ According to this view of sex and gender, the physical characteristics that make me a not so great soccer player still find their source in something natural and given. Because I was born with a female body, chances are I will never be as strong and fast as my peers with male bodies.

To get rid of *biological foundationalism* we need to become aware of the fact that the idea of a given biological reality is too simplistic. The claims we make about the female identity are the effect of "our own places within history and culture; they are political **acts** that reflect the contexts we emerge out of and the futures we would like to see."⁶

In addition, we tend to forget that physical differences between men and women, like strength and speed, are statistical. That is, they are average, and they do not say anything about distribution, the fact that some women are much faster than most men, and some men are slower than the average woman etc.⁷

To summarize, there is no such thing as a given sex-identity concealed in nature to be discovered by scientists; claims about female identity and behaviour should all be described by using the concept of gender. More specifically, they should be described by using the concept of gender as a(n) (political) act.

Gender performativity

Butler writes, "It is not possible to know sex as distinct from gender."⁸ First of all, gender norms influence biology, therefore the two cannot be seen separately. Second, it takes a dualist framework to pretend that the body can be investigated, and its sexual identity established, independent of cultural and social assumptions about what it means to be a woman or a man. Culture influences our understanding of nature;

4 Nicholson, "Interpreting Gender," 81.

5 Nicholson, "Interpreting Gender," 82.

6 Nicholson, "Interpreting Gender," 103.

7 Veronica Vasterling, "Het Dogma van de Genderbinariteit," in *Mythen van Gender: Essays voor Willy Jansen*, ed. Stefan Dudink and Liedeke Plate (Nijmegen: Van Tilt 2015).

8 Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 524, doi:10.2307/320789.

gender assumptions influence our understanding of sex.⁹ Seeing one's sex as distinct from one's gender neglects the embodied experiences that come along with having a certain gender, as well as the social construct that associated certain bodies with certain assumptions in the first place. Our gender norms also influence our structuring of biology,¹⁰ as it is not possible to argue that the dichotomy of sex and gender is accurate. Consequentially, we need a new understanding of the concept of gender.

For her analysis, Butler departs from a phenomenological view of the body. Phenomenology refers to philosophical theories that study concrete, lived experience. "Literally, phenomenology is the study of 'phenomena': appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience."¹¹ Thus, what is important is *how* we experience.

The phenomenological view of the body that Butler uses, she derived from Merleau-Ponty:

The body cannot be conceived of as a static or univocal fact of existence, but, rather, as a modality of existence, the 'place' in which possibilities are realized and dramatized, the individualized appropriation of a more general historical experience.¹²

In this particular phenomenological view, experience is always embodied. The body that experiences is not a static fact; there is no self before experiences. As Butler would phrase it: there is no doer behind the deed. My body that does not seem as good at playing soccer as the body of my male peers is a place where the impacts of a "more general historical experience" come together.¹³ I experience them to be a natural, given fact of my body, but in reality, there is no such thing as a natural, given body.

*The body that experiences
is not a static fact; there is
no self before experiences.*

On the relation of the body to its gender, Butler writes:

9 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (London: Routledge, 1990), 9.

10 Rachel Alsop, Annette Fitzsimons and Kathleen Lennon, "Judith Butler 'The Queen of queer,'" in *Theorizing Gender* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), 97.

11 David Woodruff Smith, "Phenomenology," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/>.

12 Judith Butler, "Sexual Ideology and Phenomenological Description: a Feminist Critique of Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception," in *The Thinking Muse: Feminism and Modern French Philosophy*, ed. Jeffner Allen and Iris Marion Young (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 86.

13 Butler, "Sexual Ideology and Phenomenological Description," 86.

The body is not passively scripted with cultural codes, as if it were a lifeless recipient of wholly pre-given cultural relations. But neither do embodied selves pre-exist the cultural conventions which essentially signify bodies. [...] the gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives.¹⁴

In this quote Butler uses the notion of performativity to explain how the body constitutes itself as a gendered body, while at the same time it is being constituted by the existing directives, ergo the gender conventions that, in their turn, are being maintained by every gender performance. Gender is not passively inscribed; the existing directives are actively performed, re-enacted and reconstituted.

Butler's notion of gender performance paves the way for a very strong post-dualist conception of gender. This notion simply means that "gender reality is performative which means, [...], that it is real only to the extent that it is performed."¹⁵ The term performance is a very powerful one, according to Butler:

The distinction between expression and performativeness is quite crucial, for if gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no pre-existing identity by which an act or attribute might be measured, [...] and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regular fiction.¹⁶

Whereas the established view sees gender attributes and acts as expression of an inner core, i.e. a gender identity, performativity theory beautifully shows that there is no doer behind the deed. Instead of the *biological foundationalist* view that claims there is a self that does the expression, in line with Butlers theory we can argue that the identity of the doer is in the doing, i.e. in the performance, itself. As social sanctions make sure that we repeat the same gender performances daily, seemingly stable inner gender identity is easily explained. A natural, stable, inner gender identity, which we take to be the cause of gendered acts, is actually rather an effect of our gendered acts.¹⁷ I will further explore the fruitful notion of a true inner gender identity being a fiction using examples of bodily comportments that are considered to be typically female, such as "throwing like a girl" as an example of gender performativity. With this example I want to further examine whether gender performativity can provide a phenomenological solution to the dualist conception of gender.

14 Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," 526.

15 Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," 527.

16 Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," 528.

17 Alsop, Fitzsimons and Lennon, "Judith Butler 'The Queen of queer'," 98.

Throwing Like a Girl

In the article *Throwing Like a Girl*, Iris Marion Young criticizes the idea that the physical differences between women and men are seen as biological facts. We should look at the body from a phenomenological point of view, instead of looking at femininity and masculinity as something natural, she argues. From a phenomenological viewpoint we embody gender ideas. In this section, I will argue that bodily comportments that are considered to be typically female, for example “throwing like a girl,” provide examples that illustrate gender performativity. I will argue that and why these modalities - which are considered to be typically female - are not something naturally given.

To understand how these bodily comportments seem natural, we have to consider the fact that from the moment we enter this world gender norms are drawn upon us. The photo of a gender reveal party cake - as on the cover of this paper - shows us how the gender and the physical abilities of a child are being inevitably linked, even before the child has actually entered this society. If it turns out to be a boy, he is expected to be good at playing soccer; if the child is born a girl, she has to become a beautiful ballerina! As Butler beautifully describes:

*From the moment we enter
this world, our parents
are all we have and know.*

The life of the infant as immediately bound up in a set of relationships whereby it receives food, shelter and warmth, it becomes impossible to separate the fact of biological subsistence from the various ways in which that substance is administered and assured. Indeed, the very birth of the child is already a human relation, one of radical dependence, which takes place within a set of institutional regulations and norms.¹⁸

From the moment we enter this world, our parents are all we have and know. We are completely dependent on them and they are our only point of reference. We will take what is theirs as if it is ours, and the (gender) norms they (mostly unconsciously) impose on us will become a seemingly natural part of our identity. Just like these norms have become part of our parents' identities from the moment they entered this world. While growing up, this process of socialization continues and, according to Butler and Young, bodily comportments that are considered to be typically male or female become a part of us in the process of growing up.¹⁹

¹⁸ Butler, “Sexual Ideology and Phenomenological Description,” 91.

¹⁹ Iris Marion Young, “Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment Motility Spatiality,” *Human Studies* 3, no. 2 (April 1980): 152.

Young shows how my experience of myself as being unable to become a really good soccer player is an idea that was formed while growing up as a girl. These experiences are real to the extent that they are performed, but there is no natural or biological reason related to my sex that determined me not to become a great soccer player. As Young puts it:

There is no inherent, mysterious connection between these sorts of typical comportments and being a female person. Many of them result [...] from lack of practice in using the body and performing tasks [...] Women often do not perceive themselves as capable of lifting and carrying heavy things, pushing and shoving with significant force, pulling, squeezing, grasping, or twisting with force. When we attempt such tasks, we frequently fail to summon the full possibilities of our muscular coordination, position, poise, and bearing.²⁰

A girl who experiences herself as not as physically strong and capable of performing tasks that are considered to be typically male, was not born with a body that was determined to naturally evolve like this. Rather, while growing up, she embodied the supposed inability.

Conclusion

In this paper we have seen that the experience of a stable gender identity is explicable, but not in line with our lived reality. For ages the sexist ideas coming from determinists have made us believe that male and female identity as well as physical trades are something that is anchored in biology. When nurture finally entered the debate, neither the idea of a given self still nor the dichotomy of nature and culture were eliminated. While we cannot perceive of a body without it already being in this world full of existing norms and directives, we cannot speak of a doer behind the deed, and the performativity theory of Judith Butler is an adequate post-dualist solution to the standard dualist conception of gender.

Yes, I throw and kick like a girl; in my process of growing up I have embodied the prejudices regarding my physical abilities. I will keep on playing soccer and I will keep wearing my favourite tutu. I will keep performing a gender identity, but not always in line with the binary categories society would love to classify me with. Sometimes my deeds make me look like a girl, sometimes they make me look like a boy. I get inspired by my dear trans non-binary friend and artist Síadhail, who shows us how we can perform our gender identity beyond binary categories. In this artwork by them they show their male physicals, which they love, while wearing a skirt, jewelry and long, painted nails. Our gender is in our performance and we can all try to rewrite the script through the performance of our gender beyond binary categories

20 Young, "Throwing Like a Girl," 141-142.



“The body is not only connected to the mind and individual self, but it also has five senses with which it is possible to perceive the outer world and most importantly to obtain knowledge of objects.”

Embodiment and Perception in Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika Philosophy and Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology

Kirti Singh

Maurice Merleau-Ponty is known for his contributions to phenomenology, most notably in *Phénoménologie de la Perception*. Two of the themes he writes about are embodiment and perception. These themes bear resemblances with the philosophy of *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika*; an Indian school of thought that lasted from the first century to around the 16th century AD. This school came to life when two independent schools of thought grew together.

In this paper, I will focus on the resemblances between the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and the philosophy of the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika*. With the guiding research question being: “Is it possible to establish a connection between the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* philosophy, with the aim of formulating an alternative to mind-body dualism?” The focus points are embodiment and perception since they both play an important role in both schools of philosophy. The goal of this paper is not to present an alternative non-dualist theory, with help of the resemblances, but to highlight resemblances between the two respective philosophical schools.

Merleau-Ponty reacts to the dualist view of Descartes wherein the body is split from the mind, and the mind is the experiencing subject. After highlighting his refusal of Descartes' standpoint, I will mention Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body. According to him, our experience – perceiving, thinking and all other “mental” actions – is embodied. According to the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika*, embodiment happens when we are born. Our soul and mind are connected to our body, and we can engage in the world precisely because of our embodiment. After presenting Merleau-Ponty and *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* individually, it will be clear that there are similarities, but I will not make claims about a possible influence. Along with highlighting resemblances, the purpose of this paper is to show that there are two (out of many) intercultural refutations of Cartesian Dualism.

This paper is divided into three parts: (I) Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of the Body, (II) *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika*, and (III) Comparing Merleau-Ponty and *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika*.

I: Maurice Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of the Body

Merleau-Ponty and Cartesian Dualism

Merleau-Ponty takes aim at Descartes' statement “I am a thinking thing.” In Descartes' identification of what human beings are, the body does not play any role. He even regards the body as an object outside of human beings. Merleau-Ponty argues that the body constitutes one's thinking experience. Reducing oneself to a thinking thing is therefore wrong.

Descartes makes a distinction between *res extensa* and *res cogitans*, the former translating to extended substance, the latter to thinking substance. This distinction, which goes by the name of substance dualism, separates mind and body, individualizing both.

Descartes states that there is a causal relation between the two domains, in which mental experiences are caused by a physical body.¹ Pain, for example, is a mental state caused by our foot touching something physical and painful.

According to Merleau-Ponty, this simplistic cause-effect relationship does not do justice to the complexities of the body.² This point already is a remarkable difference in their respective thoughts regarding the body. Descartes' view of the body as a mechanistic cause for our mental experiences distances the body from our everyday bodily

Merleau-Ponty seeks to go beyond the distinction of physical and mental in thinking the body.

experience. Merleau-Ponty argues that we feel pains not as caused by our bodies, but we inhabit our bodies and therefore also our pains.³ The body is then not something distanced and impersonal; it is

something through which and in which we experience the world. Whereas Descartes placed the body in the realm of the physical and mechanical, Merleau-Ponty seeks to go beyond the distinction of physical and mental in thinking the body.

Merleau-Ponty and Embodiment

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body is a non-dualist theory that is based on (experimental) psychological research and phenomenological analysis.

In short, Merleau-Ponty argues that we are *embodied subjectivity*, rather than a thinking thing.⁴

Merleau-Ponty's theory of the body differs greatly from Descartes' objective analysis. "Objective" here means analysing the body as if it were an object outside of us. Merleau-Ponty puts the focus on embodied experience. This difference in approaching the body can be linked to the following terms: "objective" and "pre-objective."⁵ The pre-objective approach is characterized by an emphasis on the body as a constituent of experience in the world and the objective approach focuses on the body as an object of analysis and contemplation.⁶ The objective approach to the body would be Descartes'

1 Taylor Carman, *Maurice Merleau-Ponty* (London: Routledge, 2008), 85.

2 Carman, *Merleau-Ponty*, 88.

3 Carman, *Merleau-Ponty*, 85.

4 Komarine Romdenh-Romluc, "Maurice Merleau-Ponty," in *Routledge Companion to Phenomenology*, ed. Sebastian Luft and Søren Overgaard, (London: Routledge, 2011), 108.

5 Carman, *Merleau-Ponty*, 29.

6 Carman, *Merleau-Ponty*, 90.

method, and the pre-objective approach is applicable to Merleau-Ponty's way of viewing the body. According to Merleau-Ponty, we are primarily bodily beings in the world. Simply put, the body is not merely an object of contemplation; it is primarily an elemental component of our experience of the world.

The body then is not solely an object, nor solely a perceiving subject; the body is the *middle ground* between me experiencing and perceiving, and the world.⁷ An example to clarify this is the following question: "Do you see with two eyes?" The answer to this question would be both yes and no. No, as in: I do not *experience* seeing as done with two different things. Yes, as in: I *know* that I have two eyes. The former is the pre-objective experience, which constitutes the possibility to objectify your eyes to two different physical entities. This does not mean that your eyes are *merely* two different objects.

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, which shifts the focus from analysing the body as an object to the body being the middle ground between objectivity and subjectivity that mediates our perception, doesn't render objective scientific analysis of the body obsolete; it only is a negation of the body solely being an object. Scientific and neurological statements regarding the causal relation between the brain and the body are therefore not excluded by Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. He states the following:

There is not a [...] single psychical act that has not found at least its germ or its general outline in physiological dispositions.⁸

The body functioning as a middle ground between subjectivity and objectivity is worked out in the paragraph on the *body schema*:

Far from my body being for me a fragment of space, there would be no such thing as space if I did not have a body.⁹

Therefore, my body is not only something that appears in an objective space, as an external object. In contrast, the body enables orientation in and perception of space. According to Carman, "my body constitutes my perspective on the world."¹⁰ The body structures our awareness of objects and through these objects we also get to know our body. Thus, the body is lived, inhabited, and it enables interaction with objects.

According to Merleau-Ponty, "the theory of the body schema is implicitly a theory of perception."¹¹ Thus, the body also structures the way we perceive the world.

⁷ Carman, *Merleau-Ponty*, 93.

⁸ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (Routledge: 2012), 90.

⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 104.

¹⁰ Carman, *Merleau-Ponty*, 102.

¹¹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 213.

Moreover, my body encompasses my orientation and my spatiality in the world and our awareness of objects. It does so through movements and perception which both are, according to Merleau-Ponty, two sides of the same coin. Perceiving is essentially an embodied activity because our perception is cemented in the way our body interacts within the world.¹² Perception must not be seen as a subjective mental activity, but it is a bodily activity.

To summarize, the body is only secondarily an object of contemplation. Primarily, the body constitutes the world about which we can contemplate. It therefore is a lived body or body-subject; we are embodied subjects. The constituting of the world is done through the interaction of consciousness and the world, which is mediated by the body and its perceiving and acting qualities.¹³

II: Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika

Introduction and Substance-Ontology

The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school of thought has its roots in the first century of India and lasted until the sixteenth century AD. As the name may suggest, it is a merger of two individual schools of thought whose methods grew together. The *Vaiśeṣika* school was known for their metaphysics and ontology.¹⁴ The *Nyāya* school focused on logic and had an epistemological approach to ontology: it was known for its robust inferential system. Both schools have their origins in *sūtras*; sacred Hindu aphorisms that lay the foundation for their respective philosophies and further discussion in their schools.

After the introduction of their ontology and epistemology, I will discuss their philosophy of the body, perception and cognition, in this order because the body serves as a sort of vehicle for perception and experience.

Vaiśeṣikasūtra 1.1.5 goes as follows:

Earth, Water, Fire, Air, Ether, Time, Space, Self
and Mind [are] the only substances.¹⁵

12 Romdenh-Romluc, “Merleau-Ponty,” 107.

13 Romdenh-Romluc, “Merleau-Ponty,” 109.

14 Franco Eli and Karin Preisendanz, “Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika”, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, doi: 10.4324/9780415249126-F009-1.

15 Kanada, Shankara Misra, Chandrakanta Tarakalankara and Jayanarayana Tarkapanchanana, *The Vaishesika Sutras of Kanada with the Commentary of Sankara Misra and Extracts from the Gloss of Jayanarayana and the Bhasya of Chandrakanta*, ed. by Nandalal Sinha (Allahabad: Panini Office, 1923), 17.

This sūtra shows that there are nine different substances that make up their “substance-ontology.” Important properties of these substances are that they persist throughout time without a perceiver or subject; these substances exist in a “mind-independent environment.” Next to these substances persisting without a perceiver, they are essentially knowable. Each object has a corresponding term, and the perceiver can obtain knowledge of these external objects.

The role and the process of gathering knowledge will not be further elaborated, but this element is important for their view of the body:

Supreme felicity is attained by the knowledge about the true nature of sixteen categories, viz., means of right knowledge, objects of right knowledge.¹⁶

The nine substances that are mentioned in the previous sūtra are part of the category “object of right knowledge.” The body is not mentioned in the Vaiśeṣikasūtra 1.1.5, but it is seen as an “object of right knowledge.”¹⁷ Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school actually has a sophisticated view of the body which not only regards the body as an object of knowledge, but also as a necessary condition for earthly human life and subjective experience.¹⁸

The Body, Embodiment and Perception

As mentioned before, the individual self and the mind are two distinct entities. These things are connected to a body through birth, which causes the self to become self-conscious.¹⁹ The self, therefore, is an embodied self, since birth is seen as a connection of the individual self and the mind with the body, and embodiment makes it possible for the self to become self-consciousness. This is in stark contrast to Descartes regarding the self as a thinking thing.

The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika ontology is characterized by its rigorous and sharp distinctions between substances and entities.

As seen above, the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika ontology is characterized by its rigorous and sharp distinctions between substances and entities. This rigour reoccurs in their view of the body. The body is not only connected to the mind and individual self, but it also

16 Satis Chandra Vidyabhusana, *The Nyaya-Sutras of Gotama*, (Allahabad: The Panini Office, 1913), 1.

17 Vidyabhusana, *The Nyaya-Sutras of Gotama*, 5.

18 Christopher Bartley, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2011), 94.

19 Amita Chatterjee, “Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika Philosophy,” in *The Oxford Handbook of World Philosophy*, ed. by William Edelglass and Jay L. Garfield (Oxford: Oxford, 2011), 116.

has five senses with which it is possible to perceive the outer world and most importantly to obtain knowledge of objects.²⁰ This process is explained in Sūtra 1.1.3 of the *Nyāyasūtra*:

Perception, inference, comparison and word [verbal testimony] – these are the means of right knowledge.²¹

Perception is done through the five senses, which is one part of the process of obtaining knowledge of external objects. The whole process goes as following: (i) the self comes in contact with the mind, (ii) the mind comes in contact with the sense organ, (iii) and the sense organ comes in contact with its object.²² The sense organ connecting with its object (iii) is what the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika regard as perception. This connection is characterized by its *isomorphism*,²³ this means that each sense has an enduring corresponding object and that the senses are inherently connected to an external object. For the nose this would be smell, the tongue has a connection with water, the eye with light, the skin with air and the ear with the ether.²⁴ Isomorphism thus means that each sense has a necessary intrinsic correspondence with a designated object or attribute.

The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika view the self as an embodied perceiver as outside itself, which goes against Descartes' identifying humans with a thinking thing. When

we are perceiving our thoughts and perceptions that are not a veil between an inner subject and the outer world,²⁵ it is an embodied process in which we are already outside ourselves and necessarily connected to external mind-independent objects. The senses cause the perceiver to have an enduring connection with external

The senses cause the perceiver to have an enduring connection with external objects; the perceiver always is outside of itself, because of its isomorphism.

objects; the perceiver always is outside of itself, because of its isomorphism. Since the embodied perceiver always is outside of itself and has a necessary connection with objects through the senses, we cannot say that thoughts and experiences take place in a closed off inner world. The self and the mind therefore are “extroverted”; they reside in the world through the body and its senses.

20 Bartley, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, 91.

21 Vidyabhuksana, *The Nyaya-Sutras of Gotama*, 2.

22 Chatterjee, “Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika Philosophy,” 117.

23 Bartley, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, 91.

24 Vidyabhuksana, *The Nyaya-Sutras of Gotama*, 5.

25 Bartley, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, 109.

III: Comparing Merleau-Ponty with the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika School

The first and most evident similarity is that neither Merleau-Ponty nor Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika are substance dualists. In accordance with not being substance dualists, they also share having a sophisticated and nuanced way of viewing the relation of the mind and body. The first point of resemblance therefore is that they neither regard the body as an object nor as a subject. The second point of resemblance is their focus on perception and the third point is the extroverted view of the perceiver.

Berger describes the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika as “embodied connectionists,” because they have a “willingness to understand the body as an object [...], as a contingent property of the embodied self and as the subjective apprehension and subjective knowledge that constitute first person experience.”²⁶ This willingness to take an intermediate view and position regarding the body resonates with the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty. He describes that the body is not an object, nor can it be reduced to consciousness. The body constitutes our world and is somewhere in between objectivity and subjectivity. Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika do differ from this in one sense, namely that the body does not constitute the world, but it does constitute self-consciousness. According to them, the world exists independently from our own experience.²⁷

Both Merleau-Ponty and Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika would agree with the statement that perception and the body are intrinsically linked. According to Merleau-Ponty, perceiving and acting are constituted by the body schema, as the way that we interact with the world is mediated by our body.²⁸ The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika state that perception is done through the senses that are part of the body, and that the senses in turn are connected to objects in the world. Moreover, the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika distinguish conceptual perceptions from non-conceptual perceptions. The former is “understanding the object of sight” and the latter is the act of “seeing.”²⁹ In Carman’s description of Merleau-Ponty’s thought the former seems to resemble the “objective” stance, because of the emphasis on knowing an object, and the latter the “pre-objective” stance, which is characterized by an emphasis on perceptual experience.

As shown, perception is crucial in its own way in both philosophies. Perception is embodied and done by an extroverted perceiver. The perceiver also is not a thinking substance located somewhere in the brains, but perception takes place outside of oneself. Merleau-Ponty and Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika share this view of the perceiver always

26 Douglas L. Berger, “Embodied connectionism,” in *History of Indian Philosophy*, ed. Purushottama Bilimoria, J.N. Mohanty, Amy Rayner, John Powers, Stephen Phillips, Richard King and Christopher Key Chapple (Abingdon: Routledge: 2017), 195.

27 Eli and Preisendanz, “Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika.”

28 Romdenh-Romluc, “Maurice Merleau-Ponty”, 107.

29 Bartley, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, 110.

being in the world. For both philosophies the following counts: “Our thoughts and representations are not a veil intervening between the cognizing subjects and the world.”³⁰

Having these points in common does not mean that these philosophies fit together like two pieces of a puzzle. I have explicitly focused on their resemblances, and even then, there still remain differences. The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika focus on knowing – this is their intellectualist approach – the objects of the world. This is the most striking difference. We could say that whereas Merleau-Ponty wants to shift the focus from the body being viewed as solely an object to the pre-objective stance of the body-subject as intermediating between both objectivity and subjectivity,³¹ the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school views the pre-objectivity of the body as a premise for their goal to obtain knowledge of the objects. The body, its senses and perception are “means of right knowledge,”³² not the constituent of the world.

Conclusion

The above examination shows that my research question: “Is it possible to establish a connection between the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophy, with the aim on formulating an alternative to mind-body dualism?” can be answered affirmatively. In other words, it is possible to connect Merleau-Ponty and the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school of thought.

Merleau-Ponty’s refutation of Cartesian dualism already is a prelude to an alternative to Descartes. The former’s own theory centres around the body being a constituent for experience and analysis. The body is inhabited and lived as a subject; this is in stark contrast to Descartes’ distant and objective view of the body. The body is lived and functions as a sort of middle ground between objective analysis and subjective experience, and humans therefore

Both Merleau-Ponty and Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika would agree with the statement that perception and the body are intrinsically linked.

are embodied subjects, called body-subjects. This intermediary position of the body also characterizes the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika approach. The body is viewed as a necessary constituent of the individual self and the mind for

human life and its cognizing faculties, but it also is seen as an object of study. Next to this main point there remain other similarities that can be linked and viewed as an alternative to Cartesian dualism. Regarding perception as a bodily activity is an important commonality, and through the embodiment of perception they view the

30 Bartley, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, 91.

31 Carman, *Maurice Merleau-Ponty*, 99.

32 Vidyabhuksana, *The Nyaya-Sutras of Gotama*, 2.

embodied perceiver as outside of itself and in the world. Merleau-Ponty and Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika deem the body and its subjectivity as important and they do justice to this importance through an analysis of the body, without letting go of objective analysis.

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