

**DIMENSIONS OF CORPOREALITY.
A METATHEORETICAL ANALYSIS
OF ANTHROPOLOGISTS' CONCERN
WITH THE HUMAN BODY**

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Abstract. Since the very dawn of its history, modern philosophical anthropology has been addressing the issue of the human body. As a result of those efforts, Descartes, de Biran, Husserl, Sartre, Marcel, Merleau-Ponty and others have brought forward a variety of conceptions concerning various aspects of human corporeality. Anthropological explorations concerning the question of the human body, appear in a particularly interesting way, when they are considered in the context of those points of view which, in an essential way, refer to the subjective character of the human being. It is a matter of reconstructing and analyzing how the subject's corporeality is given to the subject, originarily, according to the phenomenological rule *zu den Sachen selbst*. The aim of this paper is thus to put into some order the concerns of a variety of anthropologists with regard to the question of the human body, as it is given to, or experienced by, the subject. A metatheoretical analysis of this field proves it is possible to do so with the use of a tool, which is called here, a dimension of corporeality.

Introduction

One of the categories found – among a variety of others – in descriptions of the human being is the category of body and its cognates, for instance: corporeality, physique, physiology, and bearing. It seems that without them such descriptions could not be comprehensive and complete. Our everyday outer experience tells us that all people we encounter are corporeal. Corporeality is also found in self-descriptions, which means that one of the ways to experience it is a private one.

The fact of the corporeality of the human being is not always clear to the same extent, though. There are even moments, when the human body – either the body of another, given in outer experience, or one's own body, given in inner experience – „volatilizes,” becomes volatile and transparent. On the other hand though, our corporeality appears sometimes, under certain conditions, strongly enough to become a subject of intensive reflection or even to overwhelm our perception.

The issue of the human body turns out to be interesting in its own way, when considered in the perspective of those anthropological approaches that recognize the subjective character of the human being. It is doubtful, whether the issue could be addressed otherwise, if it is to be grasped deeply enough. The issue of the human body, set within the context of its givenness to the subject, becomes thereby a psychological issue *par excellence*. The core category, together with that of the subject itself, is, for this perspective, the term *experience*. It is then a question of analyzing and reconstructing the phenomenon of corporeality as it is given for the subject *immediately*, originarily, according to the phenomenological rule *zu den Sachen selbst*.

Is the qualitative differentiation within which the *I* expresses itself founded essentially on the ground of the kind of experience that, regarding its ontic character, could be called corporeal? Or, does experiencing one's own corporeity, as a factor in the identity of the subject, play rather, a secondary, or even a marginal role, in the process of shaping this identity? The issue of the human body, including the question of its status with regard to the entirety of human identity, is well represented in the field of philosophical anthropology (Drwięga 2002). A variety of approaches to this issue are found there and proposals for how to address this issue can also be traced and classified from different standpoints. One approach is a metatheoretical analysis of anthropological concern with the question of the human body and a reconstruction of possible ways this theme is composed, by means of the use of an analytical tool, which, in this paper, is called *a dimension of corporeality* (Bielas 2005b). This is possible, since the issue of the human body, taken up from the subject's perspective, as the constitutive factor of the self, is presented in the area of anthropology in terms of dichotomist approaches. They appear to function as bipolar dimensions in the form of a continuum, with the opposite poles representing experiences of corporeality which are contrary in their quality. The experience of a particular aspect of corporeality is thus presented, in its qualitative expression, as a contrast to its opposite, and as one that finds its expression at the expense of the opposite experience. Comprehending it in this way – i.e. with the use of a concept of dimension – makes it possible to specify not only the quality

of the given experience but also the volume of its expression in relation to the volume of the expression of its opposite experience.

I. Dimensions of corporeality

The question „what is the human body?“, when taken up in the first person subjective perspective as – „what is the human body for the subject?“, has been guiding anthropologists' efforts to understand human corporeality since the dawn of modern philosophy. In order to reconstruct a variety of approaches to the issue of the forms in which the subject's corporeality occurs, and to the issue of its status with regard to human identity, it is possible to analyze it with the use of a metatheoretical tool that will be called, here, a dimension of corporeality. This allows us to bring some order to the richness of the conceptions, and the terms these conceptions consist of, in the area of anthropology. In this way, they can be seen more clearly as differentiated in their quality and quantity (Bielas 2005b).

Which forms does corporeality occur in then? How is the body given for the subject? Corporeality is an object of philosophical considerations which can be approached with the use of quite a number of categories. They often make up dualistic pairs, that have a dichotomist character and refer to two entirely separated elements. In other cases though, dualistic pairs of corporeal categories set apart opposite forms with a whole scope of intermediate ones spread out in between. Thus, corporeality turns out to be gradable and dimensional.

An example of a dichotomist approach to the issue of the human body is the Cartesian dualism of *res cogitans* – *res extensa*. Although there is only one concept that refers to body in this pair – *res extensa*, it is defined relatively as compared to the category of *res cogitans* (mind, soul, intellect, reason). The body is understood in this relation as a physiological mechanism, extended mass. Being thus, as the opposite of the soul, it is an element of the order of nature. It belongs to the world and follows the material, physical and biological rules of the world in which it spreads itself out. The body is then an object related to the subject but this is a very „loose“ kind of relationship. The subject and its body merely collocate in space, and the subject is the source, the agent causing some of the body's movements. The self does not penetrate the body and does not expand in its own body into the world. This is how the body is differentiated from the self.

Such an extreme and definite dichotomy gets „diluted“ in the context of Maine de Biran's conceptual approach. The self, in the act of effort, en-

counters a certain object that the *I* experiences as immediate. Through this object the *I* gets involved in the world of other objects. This specific kind of experience could be described by means of the dualism, *I – my own body*. Further more, within this perspective; there is an opportunity to follow the transient stages the subject goes through in the process of expanding into its own body. Thus, the original relationship *I – my own body* is replaced with another, more specific one, namely *the self – the inner space of one's own body*. Here again, the subject, making an effort, encounters the resisting body. This time however, the self penetrates its body and inhabits it. The more domesticated the body gets, the further the subject expands and the more spatial it becomes. In doing so, it becomes embodied. And so, the subject experiences its corporeality, something impossible, according to Descartes. The author of *Essai sur les fondaments de la psychologie* sets up then the perspective within which human corporeality reveals its dimensional character. The subject expands into its body and incorporates it as the sphere of its corporeality. Through its own body, it opens out to the world, and then to that extent it enlarges the sphere of this corporeality.

The gradable, dimensional character of the *subject – body* relationship refers to human corporeality also in the context within which it is given as sensuality. The *I – sensuality dimension* happens to be a case where the subject functions in a passive role. De Biran calls it „passive existence.” The body is then a medium that transmits stimuli from the environment. It acts as a receptor. Sometimes the body becomes a space for certain processes that can, to a great extent, limit the subjective qualifications. These are for instance, different kinds of bodily automatisms. The influence of the body on the self can, in extreme cases, be so intense that existence becomes „pure sensuality,” „when there is no *I* any more – as de Biran writes – „or anything related with it (...).” Biran calls these sensations „appetites.” Particular bodily organs like the stomach, lungs etc, are stimulated to such an extent that the *I* is overwhelmed by these sensations, and all its acts are influenced, becoming somehow automatic (Drwięga op. cit., pp. 53-54)¹. This exceptional phenomenon of the *I* getting diluted” and „getting lost” in sensuality, is in anthropological literature, addressed also by means of the category of „fleshness” (Hyży 2003). „Fleshness” relates to a total exposure to sensations, since it is a certain attitude of taking in the world without any protection, one could say: „without skin.” (Brach-Czaina 1992, p. 220). This phenomenon is also mentioned, in a very interesting and positive way, in Buddhist literature as a state that is to be reached.

¹ All translations by Jacek Bielas.

The basic form of the structure of existence, which is, according to de Biran, the dichotomy – *effort versus resistance*, turns out to be, to some extent, the dualism: *subjective body – objective body*. The subjective body – as it has been shown above – is understood in its triple aspects. Firstly, as a corporal solid, that, following Edmund Husserl, can be termed *Körper*. This is a thing among other things, which belongs to the physical world but is related, in a particular way, to the subject as its own. In this way, my body presents itself as objective. It seems paradoxical, to speak of the subjective body, as something that happens to be objective to a great extent. It is worthwhile, therefore, to repeat that the topic of the human body is considered in the field of anthropology, with the use of dualistic concepts that can be reconstructed with the metatheoretical tool, that is here called a dimension. This conceptual tool allows us to follow and capture the transient forms of the phenomena, which are otherwise set apart as the opposites. Those transient forms possess, in various proportions, the character of both the extreme poles of a dimension. This is the case where the *subjective body – objective body* dualism is concerned. With this conceptual approach, which uses the construct of dimension, it is possible to embrace quantitative and qualitative differentiation in the character of the subjective body in relation to the objective body. This is the case since the subjective character of the body does not „merely” reveal itself while the body as a solid turns out to be an object of immediate experience. But furthermore, this solid can provide a space within which the *I* spreads out, and becomes spatial. An extent of the objective body diminishes while the subject gets embodied, and fills up the inner space of its own body, as the sphere of its subjectivity. Apart from those two understandings of the subjectivity of the body, in relation to its objective aspect, there is also a third one. To say that the body is subjective, is to say it is sensual. The body is the subject of sensual activity, it senses. It can happen that some part of the body or even the body as a whole is given as a feeling of pain or pleasure. These experiences are given for me privately, i.e. exclusively, or for me differently than for anybody else. There are still however areas in my body that are given for me in the same way, as for others. Such objective features are possessed for instance by: nails, hair, or those parts which, as a result of some dysfunctions, have turned into *Körper*. Both corporeity – understood as „filled” with the self, the inner space of one’s own body – and sensuality represent features of the Husserlian *Leib*, the living body.

It turns out however, that Maine de Biran’s conceptualization of the *subjective body – objective body* dualism, provides the frame for still another understanding of this dimension. This concerns the subject’s ability to shape

its body, regardless of the body's objective features. Human morphology naturally determines man's relationship with the outer world. Human corporeality predestines man for being in the world, in a certain way. People basically function in the world, under the conditions of their bodily structure. Making the body subjective, would thus mean to ignore this innate frame. To be at the extreme of this dimension, and to make the most of this freedom from a „natural” bodily structure, would mean, for the subject, to be free to „construct” its corporeal experiences, in spite of the objective state of things. This version of the dualism *subjective body – objective body* could be called, following Jean Paul Sartre (1943), *body-as-an-object-for-me – body-as-a-being-for-itself* (*le corps-objet-pour moi – le corps comme être-pour-soi*). This subsequent dimension of the extent to which the body has been subjectified, presents also its social aspect. It comes out of the dualistic nature of man as a being for himself, and a being for others. A very interesting illustration that captures such an understanding of corporeal subjectivity by comparison with its objective aspect, is a fictional description of the experience of an aging body by a female character in the novel *L'angoisse du roi Salomon* by Romain Kacew (Romain Gary/Émile Ajar).

„ (...) Lady Cora had grown accustomed to being young and she followed this custom, and if she put on make-up that was too strong, it was so just like in the case of other people who don't care about the weather, in winter they wear clothes as if it were spring, and then they get a cold and die.

(...) She put one hand on her belly, with the second one she pretended to be playing castanets, in *olé, olé* style, and I don't know what she was dancing, whether it was flamenco or paso doble or tango or rumba, she probably didn't know herself but she started swinging her hips (...) that was the worst that could happen at her age, and it is even worse, when somebody doesn't know that it happens. Some of the people around were already starting to chuckle (...) a guy nearby hissed to me: – You had better tell your grandma this is too much.” (Gary/Ajar 2000, pp. 143 & 162)

Cora Lamenaire experiences her corporeity despite – as de Biran would put it – the „natural signs” of the body and in spite of the social inscriptions that influence this experience, making it objective. This is how the extent of corporeal subjectivity broadens out considerably, even to the utmost, at the expense of that part of the dimension which specifies the objective aspect of the body.

The basic form of an experience, according to de Biran, is the making of an effort by the *I*, and the resistance that the *I* encounters. In this way the *I* abstracts itself from its own body, as something different and primary. Although the self presents its mental character, it becomes embodied within

the inner space of its body. Looking at this process from another standpoint, one can say that one's own body develops, in this way, its character as a subjective body. A quite different perspective on the structure of the human being is presented by Gabriel Marcel (1962, 1987). According to this French philosopher, the primary form of existence given in experience is of a corporeal character. „Indeed” – he writes – „it seems to be indisputable that I can not be given to myself, otherwise then in space, e.g. in the form of affection. (...) Everyone recognizes that my awareness can be given, both for itself, and for another awareness only as body.” Then he adds – „attention goes directly at it, before it reaches any other object.” (Marcel 1987, p. 27). The author of *Journal metaphisique* writes about the „absolute priority of my body.” The *Arché* of human existence then, is corporeal. Does this mean that existence does not possess a mental character? It does possess it. Marcel argues against the Cartesian psychophysical dualism, and for a monistic perspective. This does not however mean that the human body presents itself merely as corporeity. Marcel replaces the dualism of *res cogito – res extensa* with another one, namely: *being as body – having a body*. From an initial state of self-experience as a corporeal being, under certain conditions, there emerges an objective body. In such cases I cease being this body, and start experiencing it as something I possess. *I* – as an embodied being – have got a body. The process of shifting in the character of the body, from corporeity as *arché* of my existence to a body that I possess, develops in either of two ways: the body embodies itself, or it gets embodied. The first case happens for instance, in illnesses, traumas or in physiological dysfunctions. An example of the second case, are situations when one's own body is treated as a tool. Marcel writes: „as long as I speak of my body in terms of an instrument, I treat it as an object (...), to this extent, my position towards it is from the third person perspective, and the definition of it, I am able to formulate then, expresses my overall un-embodiment.” (op. cit., p. 254) The cited fragment draws the reader's attention to the condition of the objectification of the body, and through this, its un-embodiment – „as long as I s p e a k of my body ...” This „speaking” is to be understood as an act of a particular kind, the act that refers to the subject's own structure of existence. „Speaking” means a particular way of self-comprehending, self-approaching, different than, for instance, living through. Speaking requires language, concepts and categories. Speaking states some distance. In his *Le mystere de l'etre* Gabriel Marcel (1995) introduces a conceptualization that sheds a light on the understanding of the *being as body – having a body* dualism. There he puts forward the concept of the two ways which Man uses to comprehend himself. Marcel calls these *primary* and *secondary reflec-*

tion. Primary reflection is, in point of fact, the act of thinking. It is carried out as a way to identify objects and to approach the world as a problem to be solved. Marek Drwięga explains it, writing:

„Within this perspective, the world appears to be a sum of objects, and the subject that comprehends them, does not really commit itself in any engaging relationship with objects of this kind. By means of first reflection, it is possible to recognize impersonal relations between things, to come up with abstract, conceptual systems. But the knowledge that is gained as a result of primary reflection, however correct it might be, is limited and brief.” (Drwięga 2002, p. 149)

This is why primary reflection is not able to follow and fully capture the answer to the question of who I really am. The objectified *I* ceases to be an authentic one. The result of this indirect approach, as it is mediated by conceptions, is a picture of human existence that is vague and unclear. Secondary reflection is a direct kind of self-experience in the world. As a result of this approach, we are granted, as Marcel puts it, a „sure awareness of our primary existential situation which means to participate in, to be present in being, in the mystery (...)” Secondary reflection results then in our unity with and primary attachment to reality (Drwięga, op. cit., p. 150).

II. Concluding thoughts

As has been shown above, modern anthropology has come up with a rich cluster of answers to the question – what is the human body? A reconstruction of the different perspectives on this issue reveals the variety of forms in which the human body appears. In order to present all these forms of corporeality in a comprehensive and clear way, they are approached by means of dualistic categories. They are sometimes understood in dichotomist terms, which means that two opposite and separate categories refer to two, by nature, different objects. In other cases however, dualism is understood as a dimension. Opposite categories are treated then as the poles of a scale. In between there is a whole range of gradual forms, in which the body is characterized by the extent to which a certain phenomenon differs from its extreme form in a given dimension. This is the way in which the forms of human corporeality are presented/present themselves, not only in their qualitative, but in their quantitative differentiation too. An example of a dichotomist perspective on human corporeality is Cartesian dualism, *res cogito – res extensa*. The majority of approaches to the question of the

human body in the field of anthropology present this issue in a context that consists of various corporeal dimensions though. A meta-theoretical analysis of this subject area, carried out by the authors of this paper, has resulted in the reconstruction of the following dimensions of human corporeality:

I – My own body

Body-as-an object-for-me – body-as-a being-for-itself

the self – the inner space of one's own body

Subjective body – objective body

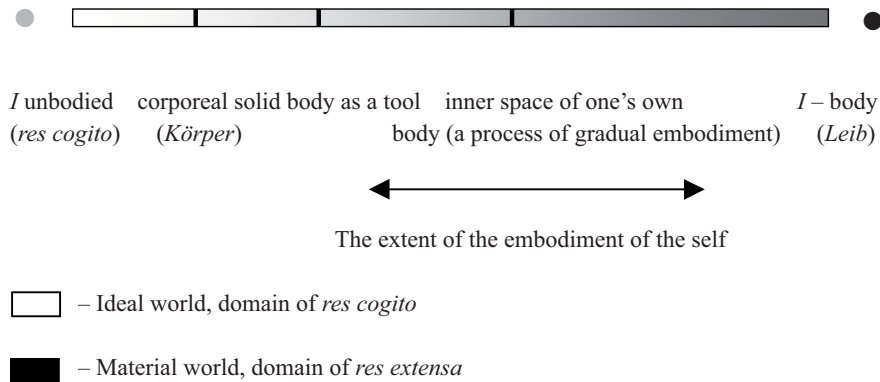
I – sensuality

Being as body – having a body

Body as a solid (Körper) – the living body (Leib)

A variety of approaches to the issue of the human body in the field of philosophical anthropology discover this object as differentiated, both in its quality and quantity. It appears in different forms. Those forms vary in the volume, the extent of their appearance, and make up different configurations. It is possible – as it has been shown above – to apply a certain perspective, in order to classify this richness as dimensional. The concept of dimension, however, as a sort of classification tool, is, this time, of a meta-theoretical character. It is meant to summarize all the given possibilities of body, discussed by anthropology. In order to do this, one needs to formulate such a dimension, which means to specify its poles, and the intermediate forms between them. It is, however, necessary to point out once again, that in the context of the psychological character of the inquiry carried out in this paper, and the experiential perspective set up here, the human body is considered as an object, given in the subject's experience, furthermore – given for the subject immediately, originally, according to the phenomenological rule *zu den Sachen selbst*. The anthropologists, cited above, consider the body in relation, relating it to that human factor which is called the *I* or *the self*. It turns out, that it is impossible to consider corporeality, apart from this element of the structure of human being and that the various forms in which corporeality appears, depend on the manifold ways in which corporeality relates to the *I*. The extreme case of such a relationship is a situation of minimal relation between *I* and my body. The *I* is then of a pure psychic character, and it is thus unembodied. Such a perspective is presented and represented by Descartes. In this kind of extreme form, the unembodied *I* as *res cogito* is the thinking subject. Being merely *res cogito*, the *I* lacks its spatial-temporal setting in the world, which is the domain of *res extensa*. Body is actually treated here as extraneous to the *I*. According to Husserl's conceptualization, an object, which possesses such qualifications, could

be described in terms of the notion of a solid body (*Körper*). It is a physiological mechanism, that is merely co-located with the subject in the world, and that carries out the activities initiated by the subject. The category of an object specified in terms of the notion of a solid body is basically of a biological or physical character. This conclusion will be used, then, to set up one of the extreme poles for the dimension that encompasses the formal differentiation of the human body, and can be used to specify its various manifestations. This pole refers to the unbodied *I*, and the criterion for its differentiation, is the extent to which *the self* is embodied, thus embedded and spatialized in the world.



Tab. 1. A dimension of human corporeality in the field of philosophical anthropology

The body bearing such qualities, sometimes also called objective body or body—or a being—for-itself, in terms of other conceptualizations, becomes an object that provides space for *the self* to become spatial. This is possible due to an aspect of human corporeality that Maine de Biran describes as the inner space of one's own body. In this way, the human body is presented by means of categories having a dual character: physical-psychological. As an objective body, it is a physiological solid, given however, immediately in experience. Yet, it reveals an aspect of inner space, within which the subject is able to get embodied – become spatial within the body and through it out in the world. Finally, the embodiment of the subject can occur to a degree, such that, one can say the *I* is fully embodied, and at the same time, united with the outer world. Comprehending this situation from another standpoint, one can say that the body is fully „psychologized.” It is a living body

(Leib). Merleau-Ponty calls this a „natural relationship between existence and the world.”

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