

THE HUMAN BODY AS EPISTEMIC ROUTE TO UNDERSTANDING REALITY

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Abstract

This paper argues that the classical, traditional Western notions of the human body is bifurcated, and plays down the conception of the human person. It misrepresents and trivializes the importance of the body. This has led to polarities in human relations and as such, the devaluation of the human body increased bodily humiliation such as the practice of capital punishment and to a large extent stands as an opposition to ascertain the role of the body in the promotion of human dignity. Hence, despite the 1948 universal declaration of human rights, the rate of human bodily abuses and attacks on the dignity of a person keeps on increasing. The crime indexes keep going high manifesting in various kinds of assaults on the human person. This is a direct indication that the notion of the human body in the classical traditional Western philosophy needs revision in order to situate appropriate conceptions of the human body; this is the objective of this essay. This is important because appropriate knowledge of the human body will improve human social relations and other bodily transactions. It is in the recent modern period that there are important philosophical interests of the body, but more needs to be done in this regard particularly from non-Western, African perspectives.

This will enrich more ontological understanding of the human body, its relation to human persons, and its right of place in the world. This will be achieved using the postmodernist ontological inquiry.

Keywords: Epistemic, Human, Body, Phenomenology, Bodily representation, Postmodern, Ontology, Experience

Introduction

This work is a philosophical examination of the notion of the human body in classical western philosophy. It is anchored on a tripod of theme, problem, and methodology. The theme of the paper is on human bodies. The problem is bodily representations and meanings, and the methodology is postmodernist ontological inquiry. This tripod is further premised on the theoretical framework of inter-subjectivity, which offers us the opportunity to explore the polarity in the classical works as regards men and women's bodies and open a new wave of knowledge from an African tilt. In this study of the human body, a critique of the place on our bodies in classical western philosophy from a postmodernist ontology offers us the following inquest;

- (a.) The philosophy underpinning human bodies runs contrary to the basic assumption of the apostles of women's bodies about reality in relation to that of men.
- (b.) The philosophical theorizations of human bodies are fundamentally flawed by the negative effects and consequences of human relationships and development.
- (c.) The emergence of universal morality and enforcing conformity to such single moral order resulted in a loop-sided dialectics on human relations, such that each sex will overthrow the other to rise. This means that human relationships have been built on the wrong assumption. This is evidence of a high rate of divorce, bodily abuse, pre-marital sex, infidelity, single parenting, lesbian and homosexual, and same-sex marriages.

These societal imbalances, bodily crimes, and abuse are a direct reminder that the epistemological representations of our bodies (women and men's bodies) are in error. The knowledge of the human body is one-sided. Thus, the bodily crisis becomes inevitable, a crisis in the world. It is in the light of this that this work embarked on a postmodernist inquest on human bodies, in order to posit a pluralist platform that will inculcate a win-win temperament, hence acting as a basis for ameliorating the so much diversity among the sexes, thereby promoting the orientation of gender neutrality and human dignity at large. This paper is divided into five sections; the first is the introduction. In the second section, we are going to make a historical assertion of what the body is and its status in classical philosophy. The third emerged from the previous discussion and thus it shall examine the polarities and paradoxes cause by classical misinterpretation of the human body. After that, we shall examine the notion of the body in an African culture which shall lead our discussion into understanding the human body as an epistemic route for understanding reality, and then we draw our conclusions.

The Status of Human Body in Classical Western Philosophy

The status of the human body was relegated in western philosophy and as well excludes from truth, eternal, universal as well as intellectual discussions. Most western scholars have drawn the dichotomy between body and soul. This dates from Pythagoras, who tried to resolve the metaphysical questions of the immortality of the soul. In the later phases of this creed, a belief in the immortality of the soul became prominent and to ensure the salvation of the soul. The disciples of the creed were required to observe a strict diet, disciplined life, and ritual. Pythagoras' teachings show a preference for the soul over the body and the body was seen as an obstacle to attain eternal life, thus, to understand Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans there is a need to know the doctrines of a religious sect, ***Orphism***. The *Orphism* believed that;

Man is a mixture of both divine and human elements. The soul is the divine element in man and is the essential

aspect of man. It formerly lived in another world and was sent into this world as a punishment for an offence committed. Now in this world, the soul is imprisoned in that body. The body, in other words, is the prison of the soul. After death, the soul will transmigrate into another body; thus leaving from one prison to the other. The next prison may be worse because it may be the body of an animal for the soul could transmigrate from a human body to an animal body. For this reason, Orphism forbade the killing of any animal since it could be the reincarnated soul of a member of one's family or the soul of a friend. The soul is doomed to the endless process of transmigration and reincarnation unless and until it achieves liberation (or release) and this can be achieved through ritual purification and an ascetic way of life, which includes among other things, abstinence from eating any animal flesh. If the soul is able to do this and it will, therefore, be released, it will go back to the world of the gods from which it came. That would be the end of transmigration and reincarnation for that soul.¹

Following the Pythagoras and Pythagoreans teaching, the human spirit is in a perpetual struggle to liberate itself from the bondage of the Human body. The depiction of the human body as taints, unworthy, material, and the tomb of the soul is one of the ways the human body has been shaped as no worthy of attaining excellence, and as such, the spirit was priors over the body. This gave them an aim in life, namely to cultivate the soul, shake off the taint of the body, and rejoin the universal soul of which their individual souls were in essence parts.² Considering Pythagoras teachings of the transmigration of the soul, one can as well say that the soul will as

¹J. I. Omoregbe, cited in O. K. Jeje, *A Short Account of the History of Western Philosophy (from Hesiod to Aristotle)*, Lagos: Prime Communications, 2003, 18-19.

²Ejiogu E. Amaku, *The Ontological Foundations of Human Dignity in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, Enugu: Victojo Production Services, 2009, 120.

well return to another body after death (even though it could be animals or plants) but the body remains a criterion for the next life (rebirth). The body in order words is a criterion of excellence and liberation of the soul.

In the *Phaedo*, Socrates in explaining the meaning of death gave the body a lower place than the soul, thus, '*death is the separation of the soul from the body, and the soul separated from the body exists by itself apart from the body.*'³ Plato's writing shows that the soul is more important than the body and the fear of the place of the soul afterlife was more in contemplation than that of the life we live here on earth. In the light of his philosophy, the soul was as the grasper of wisdom, reasoning, and intellectual strength while the body contaminates the soul. And as such, every lover of wisdom, or those practicing philosophy, are directing leaving their bodies, for they are in search of wisdom and truth which the body does not possess. In Plato's writings;

The soul reasons best when none of these senses disturb it, hearing or sight, pain, or pleasure. It reaches out and grasps that which really is when it is completely by itself and says goodbye to the body. 'From all these,' said Socrates, 'great philosophers must come to some such opinion as follows, so as to make one another statement such as a sort of direct path, so to speak seems to take us to the conclusion that so long as we have the body with us in our enquiry and our soul is mixed up with so great an evil, we shall never obtain sufficiently what we desire and that, we say, is the truth. For the body provides thousands of busy distractions because of its necessary food, besides, if diseases fall upon us, they hinder us from the pursuit of the real. With love and desire and fears and all kinds of fancies and much rubbish, it infects us and really and truly makes us, as they say, unable to think one little bit about

³Plato, 'Phaedo' in *Great Dialogues*, W. H. D. Rouse (trans.), New York: New American Library, 1956, 467.

anything at any time. Indeed wars and factions and battles all come from the body and its desires from nothing else.⁴

Socrates speaking in Plato's writing thought that human desires emanate from bodily desires and as such those desires are evil. For example, the desire to get wealth and bring slaves to culture emanates from the body. He also believed that those desires cause confusion and disturbances and dazzle us so that it will not let us see that if we are ever to know anything purely we must get rid of it and examines the real things by the soul alone. Socrates believed that 'for the impure to grasp the pure is not, it seems, allowed.'⁵

For Aristotle, no affection of the soul is prevalent to itself. There seems to be no case in which the soul can act or can be acted upon without involving the body for example; anger courage, appetite, and sensation generally. Aristotle thought that;

the thinking seems the probable exception but if this too proves to be a form of imagination or to be impossible without imagination, it too requires a body as a condition of its existence. If there is any way of acting or being acted upon proper to the soul, the soul will be capable of its separate existence, if there is none, is separate existence is impossible.⁶

Aristotle thereafter proposed that the study of the soul must fall within the science of nature since the soul is part of the faculty of a body. The Manicheans observed that there are two ultimate principles, they are good and evil. They postulated that the good is light, God, and the soul while the evil side is located in darkness, Satan, and the body. Ascetic life aimed to release light that has been

⁴*Ibid*, 468-9.

⁵*Ibid*, 470.

⁶Aristotle, *Psychology*, W. D. Ross (trans.), Justin D. Kapln (ed.), New York: Washington Signet Press, 1958, 53.

trapped from the body. Therefore, the goal of the Manicheans was to teach on the rejection of the body as a guide to liberating the soul.⁷

The ancient philosophers and their teachings about the supremacy of the soul over the body influenced philosophers of the middle ages. For instance, Saint Augustine was influenced by the teachings of the Manicheans of corporeality as evil, and Plato's teaching of the supremacy of the body over the soul and carried these influences in building his Christian doctrine. Saint Augustine was known to have taught that man was essentially made up of body and soul and neither could exist without the other.⁸ Thus, Platonism was for St Augustine a vehicle for expressing the superiority of the soul over the body, it was not the vehicle for excluding the body from the unity of human nature.

From another perspective, Aquinas offered two major schools of thought; Platonic and peripatetic (Aristotelian) systems. Aquinas believed that just as the sculpture chooses the best materials for his work so is the human body given for the proper functioning of the soul, which informs it. Both are wisely chosen for each other and together they constitute the human person. The body is not evil, but an essential part of the human composite. Aquinas maintained that the body and matter are essentially good for God created both. The body is primarily good there is no reason for one to be ashamed of having a body.⁹ Aquinas maintained that in the union of the soul and body, the superiority of the soul cannot be in doubt and this is from the order of functionality. The soul is the principle of life and it confers life in an organic body. It is the primary but on the other hand, it does not belittle the value of the body. The body is strictly part of the human person.¹⁰ Two major issues could be seen in most classical thought; (a) the body is evil (b) the soul is imprisoned in this evil and the way out is the perpetual struggle of the soul to leave the body.

⁷Ejiogu E. Amaku. *The Ontological Foundations*, 120.

⁸Aquinas T., *Summa Theologica, Prima*, Translated by Fathers of English Dominica, New York: Benzinger books Inc., 1947, *ST* 1, q 84, art 5 corpus.

⁹*Ibid, ST.*, 1, q85, art. 1 Corpus.

¹⁰*Ibid, ST.* 1, q85, art2 ad.2.

These teachings are taught to people in different parts of the world, different religious sects. The fact is when the soul leaves the body, the person will cease to be human, and again the body is an instrument of thought. If the body is evil, thought or reasoning are all components of the body that cannot exist in isolation.

More so in the modern period, Descartes saw the body as a material substance whose essence is essentially an extension. The mind, he identified as spiritual and that man is more of a spiritual being, a thinking being and as such essentially made of mind. Descartes admits that man has a body, but the body is not part of the essence of man. On the interaction between the body and mind, Descartes feels that the mind interacts with the body through the reactive process of what happens to the body. Descartes can be flawed in his answer to the question of *how can a spiritual substance interact with a material substance?* He replied that the interaction takes place at the pineal gland, which is situated in the innermost part of the brain. It is here that the mind comes into contact with the body through the animal spirits. This answer was not satisfactory, even one of his disciples rejected his response.¹¹ The problem is that Descartes' explanation of the interaction of the mind-body led him to run into a dualism in a bid to project the soul as superior to the body. One can see that the philosophical notion of the body was such that the body was relegated and as such what makes us human was made derogatory. Based on the above position of classical philosophy, one can see where the dignity of being human which is essentially on the human body was crucified. Now let us examine the products and paradoxes of these bodily distortions and delusions.

Bodily Misrepresentations and Polarity in Social Life

In as much as the human body is an essential component of being human, it accounts for a substantial part of human existence. As

¹¹Arnold Geulinex (1625 - 1689), rejected Descartes explanation while he said that the mind and body interacts through a theory he *Occasionalism*. According to him, it is God that moves the body on the occasion of the mind willing or desiring something. But Descartes and his disciples' postulations are all obsolete.

Amaku noted;

Many scholars share the view that the devaluing attitude towards the human body began from the beliefs of some religious sects in the ancient world. Early Greek religious philosophic sects did not accord sufficient respect to the human body and matter in general. Their negative doctrines on human bodies became wild spread philosophico-theological heritage that has continued to influence our attitudes towards corporeality.¹²

This means the flouting of the human body as counting nothing amounts to a lot of polarities. This could lead to another problem of *Misplaced Human Value*. This misplaced human value has led to the increasing placing of wrong values on the human person in the twenty-first century which has witnessed some of the most ferocious acts of barbarism and brutality against the human person, thus manifesting in racism, terrorism, feminism, sexism, caste systems, ethnicism, tribalism, kidnapping, siege taking, human trafficking and certain preference on human treatment. Thus, with the rise in sophisticated empirical knowledge in our century as never been in previous centuries, we are more ignorant or at a loss as to what is knowledge and how to preserve human dignity since the foundations of human dignity has been misinterpreted.

The body which is the basis of human life, dignity, and knowledge has been given a lower place in human relations. This as well could account for the worse tragedies of the last two centuries which would not only be the manufacturing of nuclear weapon that devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki, nor even the holocaust and the gulags neither would it be the destruction of the twin towers in America nor the endless body conflicts, some inimical political and social systems as well as large scale eugenic program designed to eradicate ethnic, religious and cultural groups. Even though science and technology have elevated human life in this century but the

¹²Ejiogu E. Amaku, *The Ontological Foundations*, 119.

negative and positive impacts from them notwithstanding have proved numerous problems and this is evident in the pressures of human cloning, abortion, artificial insemination, fetus experimentation all to improve the lots of humans and yet overriding the sacredness and dignity of the human body.

Considering human-to-human relations, the high rate of abduction, terrorism, trafficking, prostitution, single parenting, same-sex marriages, human trafficking, divorce, sexual harassment, and bodily abuses are all indexes suggesting that our bodies; the human bodies have been wrongly understood. This also contributes in terms of individual worth and personality evaluation. As a result of this, society sacrificed integrity on the altar of individual bodily assessment.

There is a misunderstanding in defining the self and body. There are certain situations to observe that much of western philosophy has played a definite discomfort with the fact that human minds come in human bodies. In its widest meaning, philosophy itself is a product of the human body in as much as;

- (a) Consciousness and the thought processes are as much as possible underlined as embodied in more or less gross matter.
- (b) Personal identity, that is the 'I' which is the location of my consciousness finds its meaning in the body.
- (c) The relationship between the physical world (our bodies) and how they relate to consciousness, thought, dreams and identity is essentially a bodily affair.

Philosophers not only questions the relationship but go to the extent of privileging the mental over the physical and the human body along with it to a secondary ontological status, counseling efforts to transcend the body in order to apprehend truth, even regarding the fact that mental events can cause physical events as miracles performed by God on daily basis. The views about our bodies, their meanings, and representations have been given several erroneous epistemological misinterpretations at the philosophical starting point. The fact is that it is due to the body's highly enriched epistemological capacities that the human body surpasses the body of

the lower animals.

Classical philosophy paid insufficient attention to the fact that the self is embodied and exists in a network of relations with others. This fault has led to racism and sexism (in so far as it has reinforced a masculinist notion of the self as autonomous, detached, and dominant over matter). From the above, we can come to two conclusions about the body:

- (a) It suggests a hierarchical view of the belief and social systems.
- (b) It is considered a top-down architectural form of epistemological organization, cognition, and representations.

There is a need to change this orientation of our body being evil and change this hierarchical and top-down architectural representation of our body because they inform crimes, violence, and dehumanization. Moreso, these ideas are obsolete in as much as they were given in time and space. An alternative system of thought would be to consider the views, suggesting that the domination of the idea of the nature of the body by classical philosophy is in error. The modern French philosophers stated another rethinking about human bodies, especially Michael Foucault and Merleau-Ponty. Lots of reactions¹³ followed after Merleau-Ponty's publications on the phenomenology of the human body. Proudfort in his essay collection presented papers that dealt with the role of the body in the conception of the self, in perceptions, intention, and action, in Artificial Intelligence, in thinking about sex and gender, and in psychoanalytical thinking.¹⁴ The central argument here is that the body is constructed. The body is as well the site where regimes of discourses and power inscribe themselves, a nodal for power and nexus for relations of judicial and productive power. This means that the body is pre-given, its status is culturally conditioned. Accordingly, there are more other ways of

¹³J. Butler, "Foucault on the paradox of the body" *Journal of Philosophy*, volume lxxxvi, no. 11, november 1989, 601-607. See also Bjurvell C. (1991) *The Philosophy of the Body*. In: Tymieniecka AT. (eds) *Husserlian Phenomenology in a New Key*. *Analecta Husserliana (The Yearbook of Phenomenological Research)*, vol 35. Springer, Dordrecht. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-011-3450-7_23.

¹⁴Michael A, Proudfort, *The Philosophy of Body*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2003 (114 pages).

being human, especially by understanding that our bodies are the popular indicator of the total consideration on humans and their bodies. A postmodernist analysis of knowledge permits that reality, truth, and ideas are pluralistic in nature. Not only that, but the postmodernist temperature also accepts dissensus as the basis of thought. Now let us consider the notion of the body from other perspectives especially from an African Perspective.

An African View of the Body

A deeper appreciation of the human body is understood when we explore other non-western ideologies. Within Africa, the human body is given a higher place than in western ontology. This shall be elaborated within the scope of African (Igbo) ontology. In Igbo culture, the body was given a worthy place in human communal relations. An analysis of the human person in the Igbo ontology will help a deeper understanding of the dignity of the human person. The human is called *Mmandu* (*Mma* – *ndu* is a compound word that contains the prefix, *mma* which means beauty, goodness, and the suffix - *ndu*, which translates as life or existence or creation). *Mmandu* could be translated as “the beauty of life”, “goodness of life”, “the beauty of creation”, as well as the “spice of existence”. What this is saying is that human person is the synthesis of all that is created as well as “intrinsic goodness”. The Igbo conception of human ontology is that man is a composite of *ahu* or *aru* (body) and *mmuo* (Spirit).

Although there are distinctions between the body and the soul, but the Igbos believed that the body is what makes us human. The *ahu* (body) belongs and accounts for all human physiological, anthropological, and neurological functions. The body is a primary distinction of who we are as terrestrial animals. The body is one of the major characteristics of what counts us as beings in the visible world, identifies us, and differentiates us from the rest of other beings. Life outside the body is a nuisance and strange in the human kingdom. The *mmuo* is the spiritual and metaphysical essence of man. When we talk about the spirits, soul, or death, it pertains to the gods and should be handled by the traditional priests, priestesses, and

seers.

Human nature is seen in the body and several metaphysical entities account for the various nature and ontology of persons. It is the nature of man to be egoistic, altruistic, or conscious just as it is like man to be scientific, technological, philosophical, or otherwise. The human body is as well in the state of probability. Probability in this essence would mean that man is a being in a state of flux or becoming. The tendency then is he may probably bring his anthropological attributes into manifestation. The probability may depict intrigues, mischiefs, and intricacies in life. The body captures human as a being of possibilities and potentialities whose existence is futuristic.

The body is seen as a symbol of identity. You are identified, admired, and praised by your body built and looks. Hence, you hear such words as *nwanyi oma mara nma di ogologobi ogi*, (a dark, beautiful tall woman), *nwaoke gbara dimkpa*, (A huge man). Hence the body acts as a symbol and the criterion of admiration.

The body is also a symbol of greatness, health, and strength. Your body is significantly your symbol of wealth. The Igbos believed that health is wealth in the sense that when you are healthy you can acquire wealth and other things in life. Hence, they express it in their maximum; *onye ji ahụ nwere ego*, (a healthy person is wealthy). This shows that your body identifies you as being healthy and as well your level of strength in display.

People are honoured by their bodies. For example, people are decorated as a show of communal excellence. The traditional titles given are usually seen on decorations on people's bodies. Human bodies are as well-decorated during ceremonies and festivities to show varieties of human excellence, integrity, and as a way of assessing human dignity. Men and women decorate their bodies to show several rites of passages they are in and they are as well passing through. In marriage ceremonies and some cultural rites and rituals, the body is as well-decorated to portray integrity or vice. In some other African Cultures, like the Yoruba, the body is decorated with marks to show that they belong to certain tribes. Hence the tribal marks they wear helps to identify them as people from a certain place in Yoruba land.

In human life, the Igbos of Southeastern Nigeria sees the body priors over the soul or spirit. This does not neglect the functions of the human spirit and/or soul, but they are discussed at various realms of intellection and not to the detriment of the body. Thus, when we count human beings, we count human bodies, not souls because the souls need bodies to answer humans. This accounts for the influence of the body over the soul. There are also situations where the soul influences the body. Hence, the body and the soul are in a complementary relationship, especially where they need each other to form the human person. Hence the body is strictly part of the human person. It is not an accidental but the ontological constitution and therefore acts as explanations for the human *beingness*, experiences, existence, and personality in the phenomenological world.

Contrary to the classical teachings that the human body is evil, the Igbos believe that the thought is evil, they express this in many ways; *Echichi madu chere gbue ibe ya abugbi ihe echere na –otu ubochi* (the thought of killing another is not a thought of one night). Society usually advocates for people to guide their hearts with all diligence for out of it follows the issues of life. This means that evil follows from within and the body executes it and receives punishment afterward. This cancels the belief that evil is in the human body as seen in the teachings in classical philosophy.

Further, when we compare the idea of the body in Igbo and classical philosophy, we can make the following deductions;

- (i) The classical notion of the body runs contrary to that obtained within African culture.
- (ii) The classical notion of the Human body gave a derogatory status to the body and as such part of the reason for the polarities in human social, cultural, political, and academic representations.
- (iii) The classical interpretation of the body, paved way for inhuman treatment that is on the rise in the world today.
- (iv). The classical orientation of the human body is linear, monistic, and reductionist thus it is in a way an obstacle for inter-subjectivity. This suggests that there is a need for reorientation of the value, purpose, and dignity of the human body. This calls for immediate attention and thus, the next discussion of this paper is to give accounts

of how the body is an epistemic route to understand reality. The body provides an excellent platform to understand the world, ourselves, and others. Consequently, the body is part of the system by which truth, knowledge, and cognitive system and sources are built. We cannot understand the external except we go back to the body, thus we shall discuss this now.

Our Bodies as Epistemic Route for Understanding Reality

1. Bodies as Medium for Phenomenological Experiences

Phenomenology's emphasis upon being-in-the-world allows it to consider the totality of human experience in the world in terms of the individual's concrete existence. Hegel theses that *the real is rational and the rational is real* remind us that the body is real as well as rational. Even though knowledge for Hegel begins from senses, then perception. What this suggests is that sense-perception is the starting point of knowledge and has its roots in the body. The fact that the body is not mentioned is a way of suggesting that the body is inferior to the knowledge it is producing or about to produce. This is an error in reasoning in the sense that the process is discredited to the acceptance of the end product. If the process is discredited, then the end product should as well be discredited. For an impure and unjust course should not produce a pure or just course. We see this error in the thoughts of rationalist philosophers who discussed knowledge from sense perception without mentioning the body in as much as the sense made up different parts of the body. To perceive implies being sense potential, and sense active is to have a certain power to manifest certain activity. All these suggest that the criterion to perceive is being a sensual or bodily being. Sensation depends on the body and makes us use sense organs on the body. This is in line with the phenomenologist and a scientist who believed that the human body provides a fundamental way to treat natural objects. Hence objects, natural phenomena, plants, animals are studied in relation to the

body. This also allows for studies in physical sciences.¹⁵

Who are we? We usually identify with our bodies. What makes us human is the human body. We can differentiate between cats, lions, gorillas from a human being because of the body. Bodies define us as human beings. This runs contrary to the apostles that 'rational faculty' as a distinguishing factor between human beings and other animals instead of using reasoning as one of the activities of being human or simply put, one of the by-products of the human body. Alternatively, this runs contrary to the rational / idealist philosophers who taught that what makes us human is the 'thinking thing'. The body is prior to reason in situations of accounting for human existence. For instance, what counts our babies is the human body that they come out of the womb with. If a human female delivers a baby wearing the body of let us say; a cat, monkey, or any other lower animal we say it is strange; that something is wrong somewhere. That human female will invoke the attention of world researchers, as well as, the religious to discover what happened and why. This shows that we are counted as human because we are wearing human bodies. Bodies account for our phenomenal presence in this world as humans.

Again the theories that human beings are spirit and body may not be disputed, but the fact is that those that advocates for the spirit over the body or flesh may be erring in one way in the sense that without the body, the person will cease to be human in other words could be accounted as other forms of being. Even though we account for humans as consisting of body and spirit; the spirit being in humans does not supersede the body in the sense that the body is the factor that characterizes that spirit as the spirit of humans. Even the livingness and beingness in the world as a human is a determinant of the body. In other words, the body is the home of the spirit; the bodies house the vital forces of humans thereby defining us as embodied beings.

¹⁵Although this has been criticized by scientific reductionism which tends to reduce explanation about the body to physical explanation as would be the case if one affirms that the body is nothing but the total of its observable and measurable operation.

Again, the spirit will still be identified as the body of such a person. For instance, the apostles' re-incarnation, sacred sciences, shamans, and different forms of 'sacred work' practitioners usually identify the spirits based on the body they lived in before. Well, whatever they do is beyond the scope of this paper, but the essence is that the spirit is interdependent on the body, especially on its identification as the human spirit cannot be overemphasized.

The body is the home of our spirit. If you have nobody, definitely, we are not alike. The body defines us as an existent being (in time and space) and without the body we are non-existent. Even if we believe that the spirit controls the body, we can as well say that the body defines us. We see this in Descartes's Meditation,¹⁶ that the mind causally interacts with the body, although it has been criticized from various perspectives. From a perspective that the mysterious nature of the spirit, supposed causality, comes with the question of 'how an immaterial substance causes a material substance to do something'? Causality requires some sort of contact. But how can this contact take place? Another perspective has to do with the physical law called the conservation of energy, which is well established in current physical theory; the amount of energy in the universe is constant. This implies that the mind can act on physical bodies, new energy stands in direct contradiction to known Physical Laws. The third line of this argument is from mounting evidence¹⁷ about the brain and how it operates. Scientists and philosophers working on this angle believed that it is only a matter of time until we explain human behaviour in physical terms. The more we understand how the brain works the more the evidence about the mental and brain function unfolds. More so, the recent criticism about Descartes's notion of the self as mind attracted the very idea of the self that underlines interactionism, that means, Cartesian dualism became a

¹⁶R. Descartes, 'Meditations on First Philosophy' in *Philosophical Writings*, E. Anscombe and Peter T. Geach (Trans. & eds.), Alexandre Koyre (Intro.) New York: The Thomas Nelson Philosophical Text, 1968) Pp. 66-70.

¹⁷Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will and Ideas' in *Selections*, Dewitt, H. Parker (ed.), New York: Scribners and Sons Ltd, 1928, .5-6.

refined and sophisticated version of Plato's soul-body dualism.¹⁸ The very way we talk about ourselves reflects a dualistic view. We think, discuss, and see our bodies as if they were shells or containers we just happen to inhabit. This means that being a body is not a necessary characteristic of which we are, but it provides a medium for the assertions of the self and personal identification is verified.

Considering new attitudes towards the body, Arthur Schopenhauer considered the world as an idea and our bodies as the starting point for each of us in our perceptions of the world in terms of its knowableness, and as such, it is simply an idea. In Schopenhauer words;

At present, therefore the body is for us immediate object, that is to say, that idea which forms the starting point of the subject's knowledge, because the body with its immediately known changes precedes the application of the law of causality, and thus supplies it with the first data.

He emphasized that the possibility of being in the world of perception depends on two conditions, the first is to be *objectively expressed*, this is the power of material things to act upon each other, to produce changes in each other, without which common quality of all bodies no perception would be possible, even by means of sensibility of the animal body. If it is expressed *subjectively*, the understanding first makes perception possible for the law of causality. Thus, the possibility of cause and effect spring only from understanding and it is valid only for it. Therefore, the world of perception exists only and through for it. The second condition is the sensibility of animals' bodies or the quality of being immediate of the subject which certain bodies possess. This is what Schopenhauer means that we experience the human body in two ways as an idea acquired through intellectual perception and as an objectification of the will.

2. Bodies and what they Represent

Bodies stand in relation to the natural world. Bodies are the only

¹⁸Both types of dualism have been immensely influential in western culture.

medium we act in the phenomenological world. Our empirical understanding of the world and or reality is basically through the medium called the body. The body is at the center of awareness of the temporality of the physical world. Movements of objects are usually in relation to the intimate grasp of quickness in our bodies. Thus, actions, movements, time, depend primarily on the measurement of the body it is in relation to. This means that the body is the determinant factor with time, seasons, developments, perceptions, and regions. The very fact that the body is at the center of the action is an eidetic feature of embodiment. This is why Maurice Merleau-Ponty¹⁹ wrote:

That our own body is in the world as the heart is in the organism: it keeps the visible spectacle constantly alive; the body animates and nourishes the world inwardly, and forms with it a system. This means that the body defines what reality is or means, irrespective of the perspective. Thus the body maintains our entire life-world. Our actions are expressed through the body and the judgment of how actions are, becomes the basis of ethics.

The body is the medium through which we communicate with the world. The body can be described as one of the physical objects among other physical objects. It is also under the influence of the physical laws of nature. It is governed by similar mechanical laws like every other object. These laws apply to the human body in both the internal and external dimensions. When these laws are studied, they form the basis of human anatomy, medicine, and every other science that studies the mechanism of the human body.

Furthermore, the senses are there for normal activities; the organs perform every characteristic of living things without our mental dictates to them. This is the function of the body on one hand and from another perspective; the body puts to performance the

¹⁹Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of perception*, Smith C. (Trans.) London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1989, 203.

translation into the effect of the will. Our thoughts, wills, minds, and we, ourselves, are expressed through the body. Accordingly, the body is used in two senses; as a reference point in which the spatial world is arranged, and as the most intimate of the worldly objects, that is embodiment.

The body is socially expressive. The body is a medium of interaction, interconnectivity, interrelatedness, inter-subjectivity, and other expressions with other bodies. The body puts up expressions of anger, facial expressions to express moods, delights, and a range of other bodily expressions. Our bodies present other bodies the knowledge of us in terms of social, academic, health, and every other issue about us, even bodies without life expresses the collapse of the body too. This means that the body is intimate to itself as well as to the social and physical world. The body can then be described as a complex whole comprising of great harmony and alienation until it comes to its disintegration. Our relationships with fellow human beings are only possible through the body. Of course beings without human bodies cannot be related to as human rather they are related to as non-human. In light of this, community life is promoted in a relationship with the body. All our existentialist themes are only actualized when humans are relating to humans, for example, such themes as justice, friendship, marriage, dignity, integrity, faith, belief, and the like are ways we want to express our bodies as well as want others to see our bodies too. This means that the essence of community life is as well a coefficient of body-to-body harmony.

Another important function of the body is in the area of species. Our bodies are instruments of the continuity of human life. Without our bodies, the human species could go to extinction. This means that the bodies are as well for reproducing the human species. The role of the body is much that one can say that the entirety of life, its meaning, and continuity is a function of the body.

3 The Epistemic Functions of the Body and the embodiment of Perception.

The epistemological functions of the human body are such

that it is the foundation of human lives, development, and intellectual frame for us to build on. The truth is that we cannot sense without our bodies. Our bodies are part of us. This epistemological function cannot be denied. The intellectual operations of the soul begin with the body. The human soul cannot live outside the body and as such the epistemological functions of the body cannot be taken for granted. The body is the medium through which the soul interacts, acquires information from the external world. The corporeal attraction of the soul makes it possible for the soul to obtain information from the world. The body, therefore, helps the soul to gain knowledge. We can say that the human body is rational. Bodily possession supports the soul in gaining knowledge in as much as intelligence is not alone, or reasoning is not alone, the body adds sight to intelligence, it uses the ears, eyes, and of course the whole body in its search for truth hence our bodies are rational bodies.

More so, Ideas do not develop by themselves independent of human bodies. When an idea changes and develops it is always by means of a human body cum mind. The human body serves as transfer stations of ideas, knowledge, intellectual, and all sorts of rational activities. Our bodies stand for most kinds of cognition irrespective of the question of truth and falsehood. It is the body that we use to contrast with the world. Epistemic objects are defined relative to the bodily who contacts them. The body as well informs us of the existence of other things, beings, and bodies where it really exists, or which predicts something a character really possessed by it. Another function of the body is that the body harmonizes our and others' experiences. The body serves as an agent of correspondence with other bodies. In other words, it infers the existence of a real correspondence between knowledge and reality from the facts of harmony of experiences. Even though we may ask if that knowledge is absolutely free from error, we leave this argument for further discussion. From our thesis above, we can say that the body is an epistemic valve through which we understand reality in the sense that;

- (a) It initiates the process of cognition.
- (b) It brings new content to knowledge through contacts with

- new objects.
- (c) It is through the body that other sources of knowledge take place that is deduction, induction, and intuition.
 - (d) The body as well harmonizes its experience with other objects of experiences using its parts such as mind, memory, understanding, imagination, and brain. That is to say, the body accommodates knowledge, tools for arriving at all forms of knowledge, truth and as a matter of fact philosophy in particular as well as other disciplines rely on the body for them to be made manifest.
 - (e) Now, the different parts of the body stand as an epistemic valve to regulate our experiences about reality. For example, the tongue serves as a valve to differentiate whether a drink is alcoholic or malted. The same way our sexual organs serve as a valve to express sexual experiences. The woman's breast is used as a valve to experience sexual sensations.
The body is the center of activity in the world; the body expresses both physical and mental activities. Our hands and noses perform different functions and at the same time acting as an epistemic valve to understanding reality. This suggests that the human body is the channel through which we express our desires, emotions as well as exert our sense of colour, smell, sight, emotion, taste, hearing, or even knowledge.
 - (f) It is the body that makes us human and as well, primarily a terrestrial being. The body situates humans in the visible world. Without the body, individuation would not be possible, thus A is differentiated from B based on bodily recognitions.

One of the fundamental issues that have attracted many arguments from various perspectives, especially from the woman and feminist philosophers is; “are all bodies epistemic valve?” Which body is and which is not? If the answer is yes, have philosophy captured all reality given the fact that the experiences of one side of humanity have been left? It is not enough to unmask the ways traditional theories of knowledge have been tainted by male bias. Well, what concerns top is

which version of the truth will prevail and shape thought and action? If we follow the given,²⁰ this means that the women's standpoint faces a potential rejection of knowledge claims on epistemological grounds.²¹ Thus, the human female body has been denied proper recognition in terms of evaluation of the excellence of the human person. We can prove this because sense-knowledge, sense-experience, sense-perception are all embodied.

Often, philosophers' writings tend to reduce rationality in favour of direct or unmediated bodily experience, or reducing embodied experience in favour of abstract rationality. This is one of the reoccurrences in western intellectual tradition and as such accounts for the absence of sustained reflections on the status of the human body as well as gender. Human existence is both embodied and gendered. It will be partial to account for human existence on the levels embodied and leaving the other which is gender. It is not accidental that the knowledge is gendered as well as embodied. In as much as human knowledge begins from the sense, the empiricist standpoint, is suggesting that human experience and knowledge starts from the senses. That is to say, that human experience and /or perception is embodied.

The argument is how is perception embodied? Embodiment suggests that we are beings with (human) bodies. Human interaction with the external world, other humans, and within oneself is through the body. We sense light rays and sounds through the body. This happens because they are transduced into a neurobiological currency capable of generating experience. This is to say that bodily processes form a constitutive element in perceptual experience. This could be explained in terms of the bodily process having a causal role at the beginning of perceptual experiences. This can as well infer the

²⁰By the given I mean the (especially feminist) criticism of traditional philosophy as the male account of philosophy in western orientation

²¹P. A.Collins, "Towards an Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology" in *Voices of Wisdom, A Multicultural Philosophy Reader*, G.E. Kessler(ed.) 5th edition, Belmont: Thomson Wads worth, 2004, 293.

following statements;²²

- (a) There is a constitutive dependency between bodily processes and perceptual experiences.
- (b) There is a causal dependency between bodily processes and perceptual experiences.

The argument of (b) over (a) is of limited significance on a plausible assumption that perceptual experiences are the product of a cognitive process, then (a) apparently commits one to view that at least some cognitive process is constituted, in part, by the exercise of sensoria motor skill in the body. On the further assumption that instances of the exercise of sensorimotor skill are constituted, in part, by a process in bodily components, such as peripheral nerves and muscles, we have it that at least some cognitive processes are constituted in part, by the bodily process. Whether knowledge, experiences, and cognitive process span from the brain, body, head, senses, enactive bodily capacities or world-involving bodily capacities and some other ways (through any biological science or Psychology) of explaining cognition, knowledge and their sources, the basic denominator is the body and its parts is involved, even if the explanation is that these capacities are not recognized by some internal arrangements of the brain or the central nervous system but by the embodied state of the whole person, including the different parts of the body. That is to say that the body and the environmental processes are as much involved. There are different ways the body could be perceived, for instance, the computational process (that is generating conceptual representations of reality based on sensory) and perhaps motoric or high-level cognitive inputs. We could say that

²²In (a) above, perceptual experiences are constituted in part by the exercise of sensoria skills; where as in (b) perceptual experiences are cause in part, by the exercise of sensorimotor skills. There is experimental evidence that favour (b) over (a). More so there have been arguments of (b) over (a), see the popular arguments from, John Haugeland. 'Mind Embodied and Embedded', in *Having Thought*, Haugelane (ed.) (Cambridge: Harvard, 1998), 207 - 37, Robert Wilson, *The Boundaries of the Mind: The Individual in Fragile Sciences*, (New York: Cambridge, 2004). More so (b) belongs to science of Psychological while (a) belong to biological science.

perceptual experience is conceptually independent of the exercise of sensorimotor skills, that is perceptual experiences are constituted, in part, by the exercise of sensorimotor skills. It could also be seen as sensoria motor skills as a capacity to perform in a certain way, rather than merely possessing some theoretical understanding. Whether the human knowledge and/or cognitive abilities arise from the sensorimotor skills or capabilities, they are all different ways of characterization of the embodiment of perception, when the roles of the body are not prominently mentioned and as such demonstrating in varieties of ways that the human body is an epistemic Valve for understanding reality.

Conclusion

Our bodies are rational. They as well account for our existence as human, rationality as well as salient agents for cognition. From the discussions above, both the ancient and twelfth-century anthropological pedagogy about the human body was not taken seriously or was excluded from discussions pertaining to the determination of human value. Ancient philosophers deliberated more on the soul and disregarded the body as worthless. Within an African conception of thought and practices (particularly in Igbo culture) the human bodies were decorated especially during cultural ceremonies, rites of passages, marriages, and different cultural festivities. This shows that the body plays a strong role in assessing human value, worth, dignity, and personality. The body bears the responsibility of the first form of our identification, that is to say, we are counted human because of the body we are putting on. We are first, bodies before we became rational. The body with its different forms to life and display in the world is the bane of learning and this has cumulated into different forms of learning as demonstrated by the varieties of discipline in our institutes of learning. The body stands as a necessary epistemic valve to comprehend our intelligible world, contrary to the interpretations of classical western philosophy. The moment the body, its functions, and roles are properly interpreted the crime indexes in the human world will reduce. The body remains a fundamental factor in human to human or human to world

transaction. It does not matter what theorists are saying that knowledge starts from the senses, perception, sensoria motor, or mental causation, or whatever interpretation of the sources or origins of knowledge (rationalist or empiricist, idealist or materialist), the underlying factor whether it is mention or not is the fact that our bodies are the starting point of knowledge in relation to ourselves or in relation to the outside world. Thus, our bodies surely stand as an epistemic route to apprehend reality.