6 The Silent, Limping Body of Philosophy

I

In the field of Western philosophy, Maurice Merleau-Ponty is something like the patron saint of the body. Although La Mettrie, Diderot, Nietzsche, and Foucault have also passionately championed the bodily dimension of human life, none can match the bulk of rigorous, systematic, and persistent argument that Merleau-Ponty provides to prove the body's primacy in human experience and meaning. With tireless eloquence that almost seems to conquer by its massive unrelenting flow, he insists that the body is not only the crucial source of all perception and action, but also the core of our expressive capability and thus the ground of all language and meaning.

Paradoxically, while celebrating the body's role in expression, Merleau-Ponty typically characterizes it in terms of silence. The body, he writes in *Phenomenology of Perception*, constitutes "the tacit *cogito*," "the silent *cogito*," the "unspoken *cogito*." As our "primary subjectivity," it is "the consciousness which conditions language," but itself remains a "silent consciousness" with an "inarticulate grasp of the world" (*PP* 461–3/402–4/468–70). Forming "the background of silence" (*S* 58/46) that is necessary for language to emerge, the body, as gesture, is also already "a tacit language" (*S* 59/47) and the ground of all expression: "every human use of the body is already *primordial expression*" (*S* 84/67).

There is a further paradox. Although surpassing other philosophers in emphasizing the body's expressive role, Merleau-Ponty hardly wants to listen to what the body seems to say about itself in terms of its conscious somatic sensations, such as explicit kinesthetic or proprioceptive feelings. The role of such feelings gets little

attention in his texts (much less, for example, than in William James or even Wittgenstein), and they tend to be sharply criticized when they are discussed. They are targets in Merleau-Ponty's general critique of representations of bodily experience, along with other "thematized" somatic sensations.

This chapter explores the reasons for Merleau-Ponty's insistence on somatic silence and neglect of explicitly conscious body feelings by showing how these themes emerge from and illustrate his specific goals for a phenomenology of embodiment and a revaluation of our basic spontaneous perception that has been the target of philosophical denigration since ancient times. But his commitment to the silent body may also reflect a more general conception of philosophy that he strikingly advocates. Just as Merleau-Ponty paradoxically describes the body's expressiveness in terms of silence, so – in his paper "In Praise of Philosophy" (his project-defining, inaugural lecture at the Collège de France) – does he stunningly describe philosophy as "limping" (*EP* 59/58) and yet goes on to celebrate it precisely in terms of this crippling metaphor: "the limping of philosophy is its virtue" (*EP* 61/61).

Why should a brilliant body philosopher like Merleau-Ponty use such a metaphor of somatic disempowerment to characterize his philosophical project? My chapter explores this question too, while contrasting his philosophical vision with the more practical, reconstructive pragmatist approach to somatic philosophy that pays much more attention to explicit or reflective somatic consciousness in its attempt to effect not only a theoretical rehabilitation of the body as a central concept for philosophy, but also a more practical, therapeutic rehabilitation of the lived body as part of the philosophical life. This greater emphasis on the value of explicit somatic consciousness and on a more practical, meliorative dimension of body philosophy (which is inspired by the experiential-centered pragmatist tradition of William James and John Dewey and is elaborated in my theory of somaesthetics) could provide a useful complement to Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of embodiment.[1]

Merleau-Ponty's reasons for insisting on somatic silence are not always clearly articulated, perhaps because they are sometimes so closely tied to his basic philosophical vision that he simply presumed them. He may have not really seen them clearly by seeing through them, just as we see through our eyeglasses without

seeing them clearly (and the more clearly we see through them, the less clearly they will be seen). Moreover, his neglect of the positive role of explicit somatic sensations can be interpreted in different ways. He could have neglected them simply because he thought they were irrelevant to his particular philosophical project of showing the body's indispensable role in directly perceiving the world without the further need of a mediating awareness of the body's own feelings to achieve such perception. Besides this weaker thesis of neglect through mere indifference or presumed irrelevance, however, a case can be made that Merleau-Ponty did not really want to affirm the value of consciously thematized bodily feelings because he presumed that such recognition could actually challenge his philosophical project of defending the adequacy of the body's tacit, unreflective mode of perception and because he thought that greater attention to explicit somatic feelings could hamper not only the understanding of our perception, speech, thought, and action, but even the efficiency of their performance.

This stronger thesis of resistance to somatic feelings finds support in Merleau-Ponty's sharp critique of their use as representations in intellectualist theories of perception and behavior, but also in his critique of Bergson's view that our basic lived attention to the world involves our "awareness . . . of 'nascent movements' in our bodies" (*PP* 93/78/91). Moreover, Merleau-Ponty sometimes suggests that explicit attention to the feelings *of* one's body disturbs one's more efficient direct perception and spontaneous action *through* one's body, because such attention to bodily feelings distracts us *to* the body itself rather than directing us effectively through the body to the things with which the body puts us in touch through its silent, nonexplicit, unreflective consciousness. Our body, he insists, wonderfully "guides us" but "only on condition that we stop analyzing it and make use of it" (*S* 97/78). "On the condition that I do not reflect expressly upon it, my consciousness of my body immediately signifies a certain landscape about me" (*S* 111/89). In short, body consciousness effectively guides us in perceiving and navigating the world only when it is a tacit, unthematized, and unreflective sense of bodily self in the world, but *not* when it is a focused, self-conscious awareness of what is being felt *in* rather than *with* our bodily self. Such focused attention to bodily feelings, which allows them not merely to be *had* in silence but also to be reflectively "heard," known, and

utilized seems to have no real place in Merleau-Ponty's philosophical project. Whether we interpret this absence as mere neglect or as resistance, it can be properly understood only against the background of Merleau-Ponty's general strategy for rehabilitating the body in philosophy.

II

The key to Merleau-Ponty's strategy is to transform the recognition of the body's weakness into an analysis of its essential, indispensable strength. The pervasive experience of bodily weakness may be philosophy's deepest reason for rejecting the body, for refusing to accept it as defining human identity. Overwhelming in death, somatic impotence is also daily proven in illness, disability, injury, pain, fatigue, and the withering of strength that old age brings. For philosophy, bodily weakness also means cognitive deficiency. As the body's senses distort the truth, so its desires distract the mind from the pursuit of knowledge. The body, moreover, is not a clear object of knowledge. One cannot directly see one's outer bodily surface in its totality, and the body is especially mysterious because its inner workings are always in some way hidden from the subject's view. One cannot directly scan it in the way we often assume we can examine and know our minds through introspection. Regarding the body as at best a mere servant or instrument of the mind, philosophy often portrayed it as a torturous prison of deception, temptation, and pain.

One strategy for defending the body against these familiar attacks from the dominant Platonic–Christian–Cartesian tradition is to challenge them in the way Nietzsche did. Radically inverting the conventional valuations of mind and body, he argued that we can know our bodies better than our minds, that the body can be more powerful than the mind, and that toughening the body can make the mind stronger. Concluding this logic of reversal, Nietzsche insisted that the mind is essentially the instrument of the body, even though it is too often misused (especially by philosophers) as the body's deceptive, torturing prison.[2]

Although appealingly ingenious, this bold strategy leaves most of us unconvinced. The problem is not simply that its radical transvaluation of body over mind goes too much against the grain of philosophy's intellectualist tradition. Nor is it merely that the reversal

seems to reinforce the old rigid dualism of mind and body. Somatic deficiency is, unfortunately, such a pervasive part of experience that Nietzsche's inversion of the mind–body hierarchy seems too much like wishful thinking (particularly when we recall his own pathetic bodily impotence). Of course, we should realize that our minds are often impotent to explain discursively what our bodies succeed in performing, and that our minds often fatigue and strike work while our bodies unconsciously continue to function. But despite such mental deficiencies, the range of what we can do or imagine with the power of our minds still seems far superior to what our bodies can actually perform.

In contrast to Nietzsche's hyperbolic somaticism, Merleau-Ponty's argument for the body's philosophical centrality and value is more shrewdly cautious. He embraces the body's essential weaknesses but then shows how these dimensions of ontological and epistemological limitation are a necessary part and parcel of our positive human capacities for having perspectives on objects and for having a world. These limits thus provide the essential focusing frame for all our perception, action, language, and understanding. The limitation the body has in inhabiting a particular place is precisely what gives us an angle of perception or perspective from which objects can be grasped, and the fact that we can change our bodily place allows us to perceive objects from different perspectives and thus constitute them as objective things. Similarly, although the body is deficient in not being able to observe itself wholly and directly (because the eyes' view is fixed forward in one's head, which it therefore can never directly see), this limitation is part and parcel of the body's permanent, privileged position as the defining pivot and ground orientation of observation. Moreover, the apparent limitation that bodily perceptions are vague, corrigible, or ambiguous is reinterpreted as usefully true to a world of experience that is itself ambiguous, vague, and in flux.

This logic of uncovering the strengths entailed in bodily weakness is also captured in Merleau-Ponty's later notion of "the flesh." If the body shares the corruptibility of material things and can be characterized as "flesh" (the traditional pejorative for bodily weakness in Saint Paul and Augustine), then this negative notion of flesh is transformed to praise and explain the body's special capacity to grasp and commune with the world of sensible things since its flesh is itself sensible as well as sensing.

Before I go further into how Merleau-Ponty's strategy of rehabilitating the body leads him to neglect or resist the role of explicitly conscious somatic sensations, let me make some introductory remarks about such somatic sensations and their use. These are conscious, explicit, experiential perceptions of our body: they include distinct feelings, observations, visualizations, and other mental representations of our body and its parts, surfaces, and interiors. Their explicit or represented character distinguishes them clearly from the kind of primary consciousness that Merleau-Ponty advocates. Although these explicit perceptions include the more sensual feelings of hunger, pleasure, and pain, the term "sensation" is meant to be broad enough to cover perceptions of bodily states that are more cognitive and do not have a very strong affective character. Intellectual focusing or visualization of the feel, movement, orientation, or state of tension of some part of our body would count as a conscious body sensation even when it lacks a significant emotional quality or direct input from the body's external sense organs. Conscious body sensations are therefore not at all opposed to thought but instead are understood as including conscious, experiential body-focused thoughts and representations.

Among these explicitly conscious bodily sensations, we can distinguish between those that seem dominated by our external senses (such as seeing, hearing, etc.) and those more governed by proprioception such as kinesthetic feelings. I can consciously sense the position of my hand by looking at it and noting its orientation, but I can also close my eyes and try to sense its position by kinesthetically feeling (in terms of its felt sensorimotor input) its relation to my other body parts, to the force of gravity, and to other objects in my field of experience.

By instructing us about the condition of our bodies, both these kinds of conscious somatic sensations can help us to perform better. A slumping batter, by looking at his feet and hands, could discover that his stance has become too wide or that he is choking up too far on the bat. A dancer can glance at her feet to see that they are not properly turned out. Besides these external perceptions, most people have developed enough internal somatic awareness to know (at least roughly) where their limbs are located. And through systematic practice of somatic awareness, this proprioceptive awareness can be significantly improved to provide a sharper and fuller picture of our

body shape, volume, density, and alignment without using our external senses. These two varieties of explicitly conscious somatic sensations constitute only a relatively small portion of our bodily perceptions, which exhibit at least four levels of consciousness.

First, there are perceptions of which I am not really consciously aware at all but that Merleau-Ponty seems to recognize as belonging to our more basic "corporeal intentionality" (*S* 111/89). When Merleau-Ponty says "that my body is always perceived by me" (*PP* 107/91/104), he surely must realize that we are sometimes not consciously aware of our bodies. This is not simply when we are concentrating our consciousness on other things, but because we are sometimes simply unconscious *tout court* as in deep, dreamless sleep. Yet even in such sleep, can we not discern a primitive bodily perception of an unconscious variety that recalls Merleau-Ponty's notion of basic "motor intentionality" (*PP* 128/110/127) or "motility as basic intentionality" (*PP* 160/137/158–9)? Consider our breathing while we sleep. If an object such as a pillow comes to block our breathing, we will typically turn our heads or push the object away while continuing to sleep, thus unconsciously adjusting our behavior in terms of what is unconsciously grasped.[3]

A more conscious level of bodily perception could be characterized as conscious perception without explicit awareness. In such cases, I am conscious and perceive something, but I do not perceive it as a distinct object of awareness and do not posit, thematize, or predicate it as an object of consciousness. If my reflective attention is then explicitly directed to what is perceived, I could, in turn, perceive it with explicit awareness as a determinate, thematized, or represented object. The introduction of such reflection and explicit consciousness, however, would mean going beyond this level of consciousness, which Merleau-Ponty celebrates as "primary consciousness," describing it as "the life of unreflected consciousness" and "prepredicative life of consciousness" (*PP* x–xi/xv–xvi/xvii).

Consider two examples of this basic consciousness. Typically, in walking through an open door, I am not explicitly aware of the precise borders of its frame, although the fact that I perceive the borders is shown by the fact that I smoothly navigate the opening, even if it is a completely new doorway and the passage is not very wide. Similarly, I can perceive in some vague sense that I am breathing (in the sense of not feeling any suffocation or breathing impediment) without being

explicitly aware of my breathing and its rhythm, style, or quality. In a state of excitement, I may experience shortness of breath without my being distinctly aware that it is shortness of breath I am experiencing. Such shortness of breath is here *not* represented to consciousness as an explicit object of awareness or what Merleau-Ponty sometimes calls a thematized object or representation.

But perception can also be raised to a third level in which we are consciously and explicitly aware of what we perceive. We observe the doorway as a distinct object of perception; we explicitly recognize that we are short of breath or that our fists are clenched. At this level, which Merleau-Ponty regards as the level of mental representations, we can already speak of what I call explicitly conscious somatic sensations. I would also add a fourth layer of still greater consciousness in perception, a level that is very important in many somatic disciplines. Here we are not only conscious of what we perceive as an explicit object of awareness, but we are also conscious of this consciousness, and we focus on our awareness of the object of our awareness through its representation in our minds. If the third level can be called conscious perception with explicit awareness, then the fourth and still more reflective level should be described as self-conscious (or self-reflective) perception with explicit awareness. On this level, we will be aware not simply that we are short of breath but also precisely how we are breathing (say, rapidly and shallowly from the throat or in stifled snorts through the nose, rather than deeply from the diaphragm). We will be focused on our awareness of how our fists are clenched in terms of both tightness and orientation of thumb and fingers in the clenching.

Merleau-Ponty's philosophy poses a challenge to the value of these two higher (or representational) levels of conscious somatic perception. It does so not merely by celebrating the primacy and sufficiency of nonreflective "primary consciousness" but also by specific arguments against body observation and the use of kinesthetic sensations and body representations. An adequate defense of somatic reflexivity must do justice to the details of this challenge.

III

One principal aim in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is to restore our robust contact with "the things themselves" (*PP* iii/ix/ix–x) and

our "lived world" (*monde vécu*) as they "are first given to us" (*PP* 69/57/66). This means renewing our connection with perceptions and experience that precede knowledge and reflection, "to return to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always *speaks*" (*PP* iii/ix/x). Phenomenology is therefore "a philosophy for which the world is always 'already there' before reflection begins – as an inalienable presence; and all its efforts are concentrated upon reachieving a direct and primitive contact with the world, and endowing that contact with a philosophical status" (*PP* i/vii/vii).

Philosophy is perforce a reflective act, but phenomenology's "radical reflection amounts to a consciousness of its own dependence on an unreflective life which is its initial situation, unchanging, given once and for all" (*PP* ix/xiv/xvi). "It tries to give a direct description of our experience as it is" in our basic prereflective state (*PP* i/vii/vii), pursuing "the ambition to make reflection emulate the unreflective life of consciousness" (*PP* xi/xvi/xvii). Such philosophy "is not the reflection of a preexisting truth" (*PP* xv/xx/xxiii), but rather an effort "of describing our perception of the world as that upon which our idea of truth is forever based" (*PP* xi/xvi/xviii); it aims at "relearning to look at the world" with this direct, prereflective perception and to act in it accordingly (*PP* xvi/xx/xxiii). Such primary perception and prereflective consciousness are embodied in an operative intentionality that is characterized by immediacy and spontaneity (*S* 111–16/89–94). "Thus the proper function of a phenomenological philosophy" would be "to establish itself definitively in the order of instructive spontaneity" (*S* 121/97); and this basic, embodied "order of instructive spontaneity" constitutes a worldly wisdom and competence that all people share. Merleau-Ponty therefore concludes that the special knowledge of the philosopher

> is only a way of putting into words what every man knows well.... These mysteries are in each of us as in him. What does he say of the relation between the soul and the body, except what is known by all men who make their souls and bodies, their good and their evil, go together in one piece? (*EP* 63/63)

Three crucial themes resound in such passages. First, Merleau-Ponty affirms the existence and restoration of a primordial perception or experience of the world that lies below the level of reflective or thematized consciousness and beneath all language and concepts

but that is nevertheless perfectly efficacious for our fundamental needs and also provides the basic ground for higher reflection. This nondiscursive level of intentionality is hailed as the "silent consciousness" of "primary subjectivity" and "primordial expression." Second, he urges the recognition and recovery of *spontaneity* that is characteristic of such primordial perception and expression. Third is the assumption that philosophy should concentrate on conditions of human existence that are ontologically given as basic, universal, and permanent. Hence, the study of perception and the mind–body relationship should be in terms of what is "unchanging, given once and for all" and "known by all men" (and presumably all women) or at least all men and women deemed "normal."[4]

Even the first theme alone would discourage Merleau-Ponty from sympathetic attention to explicitly conscious bodily sensations. Not only do those sensations go beyond what he wishes to affirm as prereflective consciousness, they also are typically used by scientific and philosophical thought to usurp the explanatory role and deny the existence of the primary perception or consciousness that Merleau-Ponty so ardently advocates. This primordial consciousness has been forgotten, he argues, because reflective thought assumed such consciousness was inadequate to perform the everyday tasks of perception, action, and speech; so it instead explained our everyday behavior as relying on "representations," whether they be the neural representations of mechanistic physiology or the psychic representations of intellectualist philosophy and psychology. Merleau-Ponty's arguments are therefore devoted to showing that the representational explanations offered by science and philosophy are neither necessary nor accurate accounts of how we perceive, act, and express ourselves in normal everyday behavior (and also in more abnormal cases such as "abstract movement" and "phantom limb" experience).

His excellent criticisms of the various representational explanations are too many and detailed to rehearse here, but they share a core strategy of argument. Representational explanations are shown to misconstrue the basic experience or behavior they seek to explain by describing it from the start in terms of their own products of reflective analysis. Furthermore, such explanations are shown to be inadequate because they rely in some crucial way on some aspect of experience that they do not actually explain but that can be explained by primordial perception. For instance, to account for my

successful passing through the threshold of an open door, a representational explanation would describe and explicate my experience in terms of my visual representations of the open space, the surrounding door frame, and of my conscious kinesthetic sensations of my body's width and orientation of movement. But normally I do not have any such conscious representations when passing through a door. These representations, Merleau-Ponty argues (much as William James and John Dewey did before him), are reflective, theoretical, explanatory notions that are falsely read back or imposed onto original experience.[5] Even if I did have these various visual and kinesthetic explanatory representations, they cannot themselves explain my experience because they cannot explain how they are properly sorted out from other, irrelevant representations and synthesized together in successful perception and action. Instead, claims Merleau-Ponty, it is our basic unreflective intentionality that silently and spontaneously organizes our world of perception without the need of distinct perceptual representations and without any explicitly conscious deliberation.

Although this basic level of intentionality is ubiquitous, its very pervasiveness and unobtrusive silence conceal its prevailing presence. In the same way, its elemental, common, and spontaneous character obscures its extraordinary effectiveness. To highlight the astounding powers of this unreflective level of perception, action, and speech, Merleau-Ponty describes it in terms of the marvelous, miraculous, and even the magical. The "body as spontaneous expression" is like the unknowing "marvel of style" in artistic genius.

> As the artist makes his style radiate into the very fibers of the material he is working on, I move my body without even knowing which muscles and nerve paths should intervene, nor where I must look for the instruments of that action. I want to go over there, and here I am, without having entered into the inhuman secret of the bodily mechanism or having adjusted that mechanism to the givens of the problem.... I look at the goal, I am drawn by it, and the bodily apparatus does what must be done in order for me to be there. For me, everything happens in the human world of perception and gesture, but my "geographical" or "physical" body submits to the demands of this little drama which does not cease to arouse a thousand natural marvels in it. Just my glance toward the goal already has its own miracles. (*S* 83/66)

If representations of body parts and processes are negatively described as mechanistically inhuman, the unreflective use of the body not only is linked to the human and the artistic, but also suggests – through its miraculous marvels – the divine. In a section of *Phenomenology of Perception* in which Merleau-Ponty is criticizing the use of kinesthetic sensations, he likewise insists on the miraculous nature of bodily intentionality, describing its immediate, intuitive efficacy as "magical." There is no need to think of what I am doing or know where I am in space, I just move my body "directly" and spontaneously achieve the intended result without even consciously representing my intention. "The relations between my decision and my body are, in movement, magic ones" (*PP* 110/94/108).

Why should a secular philosopher hail our ordinary body intentionality in terms of miracle and magic? True, our mundane bodily competence can, from certain perspectives, provoke genuine wonder. But emphasizing the miraculous or magical also serves other functions in Merleau-Ponty's somatic agenda. To celebrate the primal *mystery* of spontaneous body proficiency is a strong antidote to the urge to explain our bodily perception and action through representational means, precisely the kind of explanation that has always obscured the basic somatic intentionality Merleau-Ponty rightly regards as primary. Moreover, celebration of the body's miraculous mystery deftly serves Merleau-Ponty's project of foregrounding the body's value while explaining it as silent, structuring, concealed background. "Bodily space ... is the darkness needed in the theatre to show up the performance, the background of somnolence or reserve of vague power against which the gesture and its aim stand out." More generally, "one's own body is the third term, always tacitly understood, in the figure–ground structure, and every figure stands out against the double horizon of external and bodily space" (*PP* 117/100–1/115). The body is also mysterious as a locus of "impersonal" existence, beneath and hidden from normal selfhood. It is "the place where life hides away" from the world, where I retreat from my interest in observing or acting in the world, "lose myself in some pleasure or pain, and shut myself in this anonymous life which subtends my personal one. But precisely because my body can shut itself off from the world, it is also what opens me out upon the world and places me in a situation there" (*PP* 192/164–5/190–1).

Merleau-Ponty may also have a more personal reason for advocating the hidden mystery of the body: a deep respect of its need for some privacy to compensate for its function of giving us a world by exposing us to that world, by being not only sentient but part of the sensible flesh of the world. Some of his remarks express a strong sense of corporeal modesty. "Usually man does not show his body, and, when he does, it is either nervously or with an intention to fascinate" (*PP* 194/166/193). And when Merleau-Ponty wants to exemplify "those extreme situations" in which one becomes aware of one's basic bodily intentionality, when one grasps that "tacit *cogito*, the presence of oneself to oneself... because it is under threat," the threatening situations that he gives are "the dread of death or of another's gaze upon me" (*PP* 462/404/470).

Merleau-Ponty's notion of bodily intentionality defies philosophical tradition by granting the body a kind of subjectivity instead of treating it as mere object or mechanism. But he is still more radical in extending the range of unreflective somatic subjectivity far beyond our basic bodily movements and sense perceptions to the higher operations of speech and thought that constitute philosophy's cherished realm of *logos*. Here again, the efficacy of spontaneous body intentionality replaces conscious representations as the explanation of our behavior:

> thought, in the speaking subject, is not a representation.... The orator does not think before speaking, nor even while speaking; his speech is his thought.... What we have said earlier about "the representation of movement" must be repeated concerning the verbal image: I do not need to visualize external space and my own body in order to move one within the other. It is enough that they exist for me, and that they form a certain field of action spread around me. In the same way I do not need to visualize the word in order to know and pronounce it. It is enough that I possess its articulatory and acoustic style as one of the modulations, one of the possible uses of my body. I reach back for the word as my hand reaches toward the part of my body which is being pricked; the word has a certain location in my linguistic world, and is part of my equipment. (*PP* 209–10/180/209–10)

In short, just as "my corporeal intending of the object of my surroundings is implicit and presupposes no thematization or 'representation' of my body or milieu," so "Signification arouses speech as the world arouses my body – by a mute presence which awakens my

intentions without deploying itself before them.... The reason why the thematization of the signified does not precede speech is that it is the result of it" (*S* 112–13/89–90).

Merleau-Ponty likewise highlights the marvelous mystery of this silent, yet spontaneously flowing somatic power of expression:

> like the functioning of the body, that of words or paintings remains obscure to me. The words, lines, and colors which express me... are torn from me by what I want to say as my gestures are by what I want to do... [with] a spontaneity which will not tolerate any commands, not even those which I would like to give to myself. (*S* 94/75)

The mysterious efficacy of our spontaneous intentionality is surely impressive, but it alone cannot explain all our ordinary powers of movement and perception, speech and thought. I can jump in the water and spontaneously move my arms and legs, but I will not reach my goal unless I first learned how to swim. I can hear a song in Japanese and spontaneously try to sing along, but I will fail unless I have first learned enough words of that language. Many things we now spontaneously do (or understand) were once beyond our repertoire of unreflective performance. They had to be learned, as Merleau-Ponty realizes. But how? One way to explain at least part of this learning would be by the use of various kinds of representations (images, symbols, propositions, etc.) that our consciousness could focus on and deploy. But Merleau-Ponty seems too critical of representations to accept this option.

Instead, he explains this learning entirely in terms of the automatic acquisition of body habits through unreflective motor conditioning or somatic sedimentation. "The acquisition of a habit [including our habits of speech and thought] is indeed the grasping of a significance, but it is the motor grasping of a motor significance"; "it is the body which 'understands' in the acquisition of habit." There is no need for explicitly conscious thought to "get used to a hat, a car or a stick," or to master a keyboard; we simply "incorporate them into the bulk of our own body" through unreflective processes of motor sedimentation and our own spontaneous corporeal sense of self (*PP* 167–9/143–4/165–7). The lived body, for Merleau-Ponty, thus has two layers: beneath the spontaneous body of the moment, there is "the habit-body" of sedimentation (*PP* 97/82/95, 150–1/129–30/149–50).

Affirming the prevalence, importance, and intelligence of unreflective habit in our action, speech, and thought, I also share Merleau-Ponty's recognition of habit's somatic base. Both themes are central to the pragmatist tradition of James and Dewey that inspires my work in somatic philosophy. But there are troubling limits to the efficacy of unreflective habits, even on the level of basic bodily actions. Unreflectively, we can acquire bad habits just as easily as good ones. (This seems especially likely if we accept the premise that the institutions and technologies governing our lives through regimes of biopower inculcate habits of body and mind that aim to keep us in submission.) Once bad habits are acquired, how do we correct them? We cannot simply rely on sedimented habit to correct them, since the sedimented habits are precisely what is wrong. Nor can we rely on the unreflective somatic spontaneity of the moment because that is already tainted with the trace of the unwanted sedimentations and thus most likely to continue to misdirect us.[6]

This is why various disciplines of body training typically invoke representations and self-conscious somatic focusing in order to correct our faulty self-perception and use of our embodied selves. From ancient Asian practices of meditation to modern systems such as the Alexander Technique and Feldenkrais Method, explicit awareness and conscious control are key, as is the use of representations or visualizations. These disciplines do not aim to erase the crucial level of unreflective behavior by the (impossible) effort of making us explicitly conscious of all our perception and action. They simply seek to improve unreflective behavior that hinders our experience and performance. In order to effect this improvement, however, the unreflective action or habit must be brought into conscious critical reflection (although only for a limited time) so that it can be grasped and worked on more precisely. Besides these therapeutic goals, disciplines of somatic reflection also enhance our experience with the added richness, discoveries, and pleasures that heightened awareness can bring.

In advocating the unreflective lived body in opposition to the abstract representations of scientific explanation, Merleau-Ponty creates a polarization of "lived experience" versus "representations" that neglects the fruitful option of "lived corporeal reflection," that is, concrete but representational and reflective body consciousness. This polarizing dichotomy is paralleled by another misleading binary

contrast that pervades his account of behavior. On the one hand, he describes the performance of "normal" people whose somatic sense and functioning is totally smooth, spontaneous, and unproblematic. His contrasting category of discussion concerns the abnormally incapacitated: patients such as Schneider who exhibit pathological dysfunction and are usually suffering from serious neurological injury (such as brain lesions) or grave psychological trauma.

This simple polarity obscures the fact that most of us so-called normal, fully functional people suffer from various incapacities and malfunctions that are mild in nature but that still impair performance. Such deficiencies relate not only to perceptions or actions we cannot perform (though we are anatomically equipped to do so) but also to what we do succeed in performing but could perform more successfully or with greater ease and grace. Merleau-Ponty implies that if we are not pathologically impaired like Schneider and other neurologically diseased individuals, then our unreflective body sense is fully accurate and miraculously functional. For Merleau-Ponty, just as my spontaneous bodily movements seem "magical" in their precision and efficacy, so my immediate knowledge of my body and the orientation of its parts seems flawlessly complete. "I am in undivided possession of it and I know where each of my limbs is through a body image in which all are included" (*PP* 114/98/112–13).

While sharing Merleau-Ponty's deep appreciation of our "normal" spontaneous bodily sense, I think we should also recognize that this sense is often painfully inaccurate and dysfunctional.[7] I may think I am keeping my head down when swinging a golf club, but an observer will easily see I do not. I may believe I am sitting straight when my head and torso are instead tilted. If asked to bend at the ribs, many of us will really bend at the waist and think that we are complying with the instructions. In trying to stand tall, people usually think they are lengthening their spines when they are in fact contracting them. Disciplines of somatic education deploy exercises of representational awareness to treat such problems of misperception and misuse of our bodies in the spontaneous and habitual behavior that Merleau-Ponty identifies as primal and celebrates as miraculously flawless in normal performance.

Although he exaggerates our unreflective somatic proficiency, it is hard to condemn Merleau-Ponty for overestimating the body's powers. For he also stresses the body's distinctive weakness in other

ways, including its grave cognitive limitations of self-observation. Indeed, his insistence on the miraculous efficacy of the spontaneous body (and on the consequent irrelevance of representational thought for enhancing our somatic performance) helps keep the body weaker than it could be by implying that there is no reason or way to improve its performance through the use of representations. Conversely, his compelling defense of bodily limitations as structurally essential to our human capacities could also discourage efforts to overcome entrenched somatic impediments, for fear that such efforts would ultimately weaken us by disturbing the fundamental structuring handicaps on which our powers in fact rely.

This suggests another reason why Merleau-Ponty might resist the contribution of reflective somatic consciousness and its bodily representations. Disciplines of explicit somatic awareness are aimed not simply at *knowing* our bodily condition and habits but at *changing* them. Even awareness alone can (to some extent) change our somatic experience and relation to our bodies. Merleau-Ponty acknowledges this when he argues that reflective thinking cannot really capture our primordial unreflective experience because the representations of such thinking inevitably change our basic experience by introducing categories and conceptual distinctions that were not originally given there. He especially condemns the posits of representational explanations of experience (whether mechanistic or rationalistic) for generating "the dualism of consciousness and body" (*PP* 162n/138n/160n), while blinding us to the unity of primordial perception.

However, the fact that representational explanations do not adequately explain our primordial perception does not imply they are not useful for other purposes, such as improving our habits. Change of habits can in turn change our spontaneous perceptions, whose unity and spontaneity will be restored once the new, improved habit becomes entrenched. In short, we can affirm the unity and unreflective quality of primary perceptual experience while endorsing self-reflective body consciousness that deploys representational thought for both the reconstruction of better primary experience and the intrinsic rewards of reflective somatic consciousness.[8]

In modifying one's relation to one's body, somatic disciplines of reflection (like other forms of body training) also highlight differences between people. Different individuals often have very different styles of body use (and misuse). Moreover, what one learns through

sustained training in somatic awareness is not simply "what every man knows well" through the immediate grasp of primordial perception and unthinking habit. Many of us do not know (and may never learn) what it is like to feel the location of each vertebra and rib proprioceptively without touching them with our hands. Nor does everyone recognize, when he or she is reaching out for something, precisely which part of his or her body (fingers, arm, shoulder, pelvis, or head) initiates the movement.

If philosophy's goal is simply to clarify and renew the universal and permanent in our embodied human condition by restoring our recognition of primordial experience and its ontological givens, then the whole project of improving one's somatic perception and functioning through self-conscious reflection will be dismissed as a philosophical irrelevancy. Worse, it will be seen as a threatening change and distraction from the originary level of perception that is celebrated as philosophy's ultimate ground, focus, and goal. Indeed, to recognize differences and changes in the primary experience of different people might even seem to challenge the very idea of a fixed and universal primordial perception. Merleau-Ponty's commitment to a fixed, universal phenomenological ontology based on primordial perception thus provides further reason for dismissing the value of explicit somatic consciousness. Being more concerned with individual differences and contingencies, with future-looking change and reconstruction, with pluralities of practice that can be used by individuals and groups for improving on primary experience, pragmatism is more receptive to reflective somatic consciousness and its disciplinary uses for philosophy. If William James made somatic introspection central to his research in philosophy of mind, John Dewey affirmed the use of heightened, reflective body consciousness to improve our self-knowledge and performance.

IV

Given his philosophical agenda, Merleau-Ponty has adequate motives for neglecting or even resisting reflective body consciousness. But do they constitute compelling arguments, or should we instead conclude that Merleau-Ponty's project of body-centered phenomenology and fundamental ontology could be usefully supplemented by a greater recognition of the functions and value of

reflective body consciousness? We can explore this question by recasting our discussion of Merleau-Ponty's motives into the following seven lines of argument.

(1) If attention to reflective somatic consciousness and its bodily representations obscures our recognition of primary unreflective embodied perception and its primary importance, then reflective somatic consciousness should be resisted. This argument has a problematic ambiguity in its initial premise. Our reflective somatic consciousness does distract us for a time from unreflective perception (attention to anything inevitably means a momentary obscuring of some other things). But such consciousness need not always or permanently do this, especially because this consciousness is not (nor is meant to be) constantly sustained. The use of somatic reflection in body disciplines of awareness is not meant to permanently replace but to *improve* unreflective perception and habit by putting them into temporary focus so they can be retrained. If such body disciplines can affirm the primacy of unreflective behavior while also endorsing the need for conscious representations to monitor and correct it, then so can somatic philosophy. Besides, if we adopt Merleau-Ponty's claim that experience always depends on the complementarity of figure–ground contrast, we could then argue that any real appreciation of unreflective perception depends on its distinctive contrast from reflective consciousness, just as the latter clearly relies on the background of the former.

(2) Merleau-Ponty rightly maintains that reflective consciousness and somatic representations are not only unnecessary but inaccurate for explaining our ordinary perception and behavior which are usually unreflective. From that premise, one might infer that representational somatic awareness is a misleading irrelevancy. But this conclusion does not follow; first, because there is more to explain in human experience than our unproblematic unreflective perceptions and acts. Representational somatic consciousness can help us with respect to cases in which spontaneous competencies break down and where unreflective habits are targeted for correction. Moreover, explanatory power is not the only criterion of value. Reflective somatic consciousness and representations can be useful not for explaining ordinary experience, but for altering and supplementing it.

(3) This prompts a further argument. If the changes that somatic reflection introduces into experience are essentially undesirable, then, on pragmatic grounds, it should be discouraged. Merleau-Ponty compellingly shows how reflection's representations form the core of both mechanistic and intellectualist accounts of behavior that promote body–mind dualism. Reflective somatic consciousness thus seems condemned for engendering a falsely fragmented view of experience, a view that eventually infects our experience itself and blinds us to the unreflective unity of primary perception.[9] But the misuse of representational somatic thinking in *some* explanatory contexts does not entail its global condemnation. Likewise, to affirm the value of representational somatic consciousness is not to deny the existence, value, or even primacy of the unreflective. Such reflection, I repeat, can serve alongside somatic spontaneity as a useful supplement and corrective.

(4) Merleau-Ponty prizes the body's mystery and limitations as essential to its productive functioning. He repeatedly touts the miraculous way we perform our actions without any conscious reflection at all. Could he, then, argue pragmatically that reflective somatic consciousness should be resisted because it endangers such mystery and "effective" weakness? This argument rests on a confusion. The claim that we can do something effectively *without* explicit or representational consciousness does not imply that we cannot also do it *with* such consciousness and that such consciousness cannot improve our performance. In any case, plenty of mystery and limitation will always remain. Somatic reflection could never claim to provide our bodies with total transparency or perfect power because our mortality, frailty, and perspectival situatedness preclude this. The fact that certain basic bodily limits can never be overcome is not, however, a compelling argument against trying to expand, to some extent, our somatic powers through reflection and explicit conscious direction.

(5) Here we face a further argument. Somatic reflection impairs our somatic performance by disrupting spontaneous action based on unreflective habit. Unreflective acts are quicker and easier than deliberatively executed behavior. Moreover, by not engaging explicit consciousness, such unreflective action enables better focusing of consciousness on the targets at which action is aimed. A well-trained batter can hit the ball better when he is not reflecting on the tension in his knees and wrists or imagining the pelvic movement in his

swing. Not having to think of such things, he can better concentrate on seeing and reacting to the sinking fastball he must hit. Somatic self-reflection would here prevent him from reacting in time. Deliberative thinking can often ruin the spontaneous flow and efficacy of action. If we try to visualize each word as we speak, our speech will be slow and halting; we may even forget what we wanted to say. In sexual behavior, if one thinks too much about what is happening in one's own body while visualizing to oneself what must happen for things to go right, there is much more chance that something will go wrong. Such cases show that explicit somatic consciousness can often be more of a problem than a solution. The conclusion, however, is not to reject such consciousness altogether, but rather to reflect more carefully on the ways it can be disciplined and deployed for the different contexts and ends in which it can be most helpful. That there can sometimes be too much of a good thing is also true for somatic awareness.

(6) Describing the body as '*la cachette de la vie*' ("the place where life hides away" in basic impersonal existence), Merleau-Ponty suggests yet another argument against somatic reflection. Explicit concentration on body feelings entails a withdrawal from the outer world of action, and this change of focus impairs the quality of our perception and action in that world: "when I become absorbed in my body, my eyes present me with no more than the perceptible outer covering of things and of other people, things themselves take on unreality, behavior degenerates into the absurd." To "become absorbed in the experience of my body and in the solitude of sensations" is thus a disturbing danger from which we are barely protected by the fact that our sense organs and habits are always working to engage us in the outer world of life. Absorbed somatic reflection thus risks losing the world, but also one's self, because the self is defined by our engagement with the world (*PP* 192–3/164–5/190–2).

Merleau-Ponty is right that an intense focus on somatic sensations can temporarily disorient our ordinary perspectives, disturbing our customary involvement with the world and our ordinary sense of self. Nevertheless, it is wrong to conclude that absorption in bodily feelings is essentially a primitive impersonal level of awareness, beneath the notions of both self and world, and thus confined to what he calls "the anonymous alertness of the senses" (*PP* 191/164/190). One can be *self-consciously* absorbed in one's bodily feelings;

somatic self-consciousness involves a reflective awareness that one's self is experiencing the sensations on which one's attention is focused. Of course, this "turning in" of bodily consciousness on itself involves to some extent withdrawing attention from the outside world, though that world always makes its presence somehow felt. A pure bodily feeling is an abstraction. One cannot feel oneself somatically without also feeling something of the external world. (If I lie down, close my eyes, and concentrate on scanning my body, I will feel the way it makes contact with the floor and sense the volumes between my limbs, just as I will recognize that it is I who is lying on the floor and focusing on my bodily feelings.) In any case, if somaesthetics' deflection of attention to our bodily consciousness involves a temporary retreat from the world of action, this retreat can greatly advance our self-knowledge and self-use so that we will return to the world as more skillful observers and agents. It is the somatic logic of *reculer pour mieux sauter*.

Consider an example. If one wants to look over one's shoulder to see something behind one's back, most people will spontaneously lower their shoulder while turning their head. This seems logical but is skeletally wrong; dropping the shoulder constrains the rib and chest area and thus greatly limits the spine's range of rotation, which is what really enables us to see behind ourselves. By withdrawing our attention momentarily from the world behind us and by instead focusing attentively on the alignment of our body parts in rotating the head and spine, we can learn how to turn better and see more, creating a new habit that eventually will be unreflectively performed.

(7) Merleau-Ponty's most radical argument against reflective somatic observation is that one simply cannot observe one's own body at all, because it is the permanent, invariant perspective through which we observe other things. Unlike ordinary objects, the body "defies exploration and is always presented to me from the same angle.... To say that it is always near me, always there for me, is to say that it is never really in front of me, that I cannot array it before my eyes, that it remains marginal to all my perceptions, that it is *with* me" (*PP* 106/90/104). I cannot change my perspective with respect to my body as I can with external objects. "I observe external objects with my body, I handle them, examine them, walk round them, but my body itself is a thing which I do not observe: in order to be able to do so, I should need the use of a second body" (*PP* 107/91/104). "I

am always on the same side of my body; it presents itself to me in one invariable perspective" (*VI* 194/148).

It is certainly true that we cannot observe our own lived bodies in exactly the same way we do external objects, since our bodies are precisely the tools through which we observe anything, and since one cannot entirely array one's body before one's eyes (because our eyes themselves are part of the body). It does not follow from these points, however, that we cannot observe our lived bodies in important ways. First, it is wrong to identify somatic observation narrowly with being "before my eyes." Although we cannot see our eyes without the use of a mirroring device, we can, with concentration, observe directly how they feel from the inside in terms of muscle tension, volume, and movement, even while we are using them to see. We can also observe our closed eyes by touching them from the outside with our hands. This shows, moreover, that our perspective with respect to our bodies is not entirely fixed and invariant. We can examine them in terms of different sense modalities; and even if we use a single modality, we can scan the body from different angles and with different perspectives of focus. Lying on the floor with my eyes closed and relying only on proprioceptive sensing, I can scan my body from head to foot or vice versa, in terms of my alignment of limbs or my sense of body volume, or from the perspective of the pressure of my different body parts on the floor or of their distance from the floor. Of course, if we eschew somatic reflection, then we are far more likely to have an invariant perspective on our bodies – that of primitive, unfocused experience and unreflective habit, precisely the kind of primordial unthematized perception that Merleau-Ponty champions.

Merleau-Ponty's notion of bodily subjectivity might provide a last-ditch argument against the possibility of observing one's own lived body. In his critique of "double sensations" (*PP* 109/93/106), he insists that if our body is the observing subject of experience, then it cannot at the same time be the object of observation. Hence, we cannot really observe our perceiving bodies, just as we cannot use our left hand to feel our right hand (as an object) while the right hand is feeling an object. Even in his later "The Intertwining – The Chiasm," in which Merleau-Ponty insists on the body's essential "reversibility" of being both sensing and sensed as crucial to our ability to grasp the world, he strongly cautions that this reversibility of being both

observer and observed, although "always imminent," is "never realized in fact" through complete simultaneity or exact "coincidence." One cannot at the very same time feel one's hand as touching and touched, one's voice speaking and heard (*VI* 194/147–8). In short, one cannot simultaneously experience one's body as both subject and object. So if the lived body is always the observing subject, then it can never be observed as an object. Besides, as G. H. Mead claims, the observing "I" cannot directly grasp itself in immediate experience, because by the time it tries to catch itself, it has already become an objectified "me" for the grasping "I" of the next moment.

Such arguments can be met in a few ways. First, given the essential vagueness of the notion of subjective simultaneity, we could argue that, practically speaking, one *can* simultaneously have experiences of touching and being touched, of feeling our voices from inside while hearing them from without, even if the prime focus of our attention may sometimes vacillate rapidly between the two perspectives within the very short duration of time we phenomenologically identify as the present and which, as James long ago recognized, is always a "specious present," involving memory of an immediate past.[10] Part of what seems to disrupt the experience of simultaneous perception of our bodies as both sensing and being sensed is simply the fact that the polarity of perspectives is imposed on our experience by the binary framing of the thought-experiment, a case in which philosophy's reflection "prejudges what it will find" (*VI* 172/130). Moreover, even if it is a fact that most experimental subjects cannot feel their bodies feeling, this may simply be due to their undeveloped capacities of somatic reflection and attentiveness.

Indeed, even if one cannot simultaneously experience one's own body as feeling and as felt, this does not entail that one can never observe it, just as the putative fact that one cannot simultaneously experience one's own mind as pure active thinking (i.e., a transcendental subject) and as something thought (i.e., an empirical subject) does not entail that we cannot observe our mental life. To treat the lived body as a subject does not require treating it *only* as a purely transcendental subject that cannot also be observed as an empirical one. To do so would vitiate the essential reversibility of the perceiving sentience and the perceived sensible that enables Merleau-Ponty to portray the body as the "flesh" that grounds our connection to the world. The "grammatical" distinction between the body as subject

of experience and as object of experience is useful in reminding us that we can never reach a full transparency of our bodily intentionality. There will always be some dimensions of our bodily feelings that will be actively structuring the focus of our efforts of reflective somatic awareness and thus will not be themselves the object of that awareness or the focus of consciousness. There also will always be the possibility of introspective error through failure of memory or misinterpretation. Nor should we desire simultaneous reflexive consciousness of all our bodily feelings. But the pragmatic distinction between the perceiving "I" and the perceived "me" should not be erected into an insurmountable epistemological obstacle to observing the lived body within the realm provided by the specious present and short-term memory of the immediate past.[11]

Ultimately, we can also challenge Merleau-Ponty's argument against bodily self-observation by simply reminding ourselves that such observation (even if it is merely noticing our discomforts, pains, and pleasures) forms part of our ordinary experience. Only the introduction of abstract philosophical reflection could ever lead us to deny its possibility. If we take our pretheoretic commonsense experience seriously, as Merleau-Ponty urges us to do, then we should reject the conclusion that we can never observe our own lived bodies, and we could therefore urge that his philosophical project be complemented by greater recognition of reflective somatic consciousness.

V

Given the insufficiency of these reconstructed arguments, Merleau-Ponty's neglect of or resistance to explicit somatic consciousness can be justified only in terms of his deeper philosophical aims and presumptions. Prominent here is his desire for philosophy to bring us back to a pure, primordial state of unified experience that has "not yet been 'worked over'" or splintered by "instruments [of] reflection" and thus can "offer us all at once, pell-mell, both 'subject' and 'object,' both existence and essence," both mind and body (*VI* 172/130). Such yearning for a return to prereflective unity suggests dissatisfaction with the fragmentation that reflective consciousness and representational thinking have introduced into our experience as embodied subjects. Philosophy can try to remedy this problem in two different ways. First, there is the therapy of mere theory.

Philosophical reflection can be used to affirm the unity and adequacy of unreflective body behavior, to urge that we concentrate on this unreflective unity, while rejecting somatic reflection and representational somatic consciousness as intrinsically unnecessary and misleading. Here, the very mystery of unreflective bodily actions is prized as an enabling cognitive weakness that proves superior to performances directed by representational reflection. A second way to remedy dissatisfaction with our experience as embodied subjects moves beyond mere abstract theory by also actively developing our powers of reflective somatic consciousness so that we can achieve a higher unity of experience on the reflective level and thus acquire better means to correct inadequacies of our unreflective bodily habits. Merleau-Ponty urges the first way; pragmatist somatic theory urges the second, while recognizing the primacy of unreflective somatic experience and habit.

The first way – the way of pure intellect – reflects Merleau-Ponty's basic vision of philosophy as drawing its theoretical strength from its weakness of action. "The limping of philosophy is its virtue," he writes, in contrasting the philosopher with the man of action by contrasting "that which understands and that which chooses." "The philosopher of action is perhaps the farthest removed from action, for to speak of action with depth and rigor is to say that one does not desire to act" (*EP* 59–61/59–61). Should the philosopher of the body, then, be the farthest removed from her own lived body, because she is overwhelmingly absorbed in struggling with all her mind to analyze and champion the body's role?

This is an unfortunate conclusion, but it stubbornly asserts itself in the common complaint that most contemporary body philosophy seems to ignore or dissolve the actual active body within a labyrinth of metaphysical, social, and gender theories. Despite their valuable insights, such theories fall short of considering practical methods for individuals to improve their somatic consciousness and functioning. Merleau-Ponty's body philosophy exemplifies this problem by devoting intense theoretical reflection to the value of unreflective bodily subjectivity, but dismissing the use of somatic reflection to improve that subjectivity in perception and action. As opposed to men of action, the philosopher, says Merleau-Ponty, is never fully engaged in a practical "serious" way in what he affirms. Even in the causes to which he is faithful, we find that "in his assent something

massive and carnal is lacking. He is not altogether a real being" (*EP* 60/60).

Lacking in Merleau-Ponty's superb advocacy of the body's philosophical importance is a robust sense of the real body as a site for practical disciplines of conscious reflection that aim at reconstructing somatic perception and performance to achieve more rewarding experience and action. Pragmatism offers a complementary philosophical perspective that is friendlier to full-bodied engagement in practical efforts of somatic awareness. It aims at generating better experience for the future rather than trying to recapture the lost perceptual unity of a primordial past, a "return to that world which precedes knowledge" (*PP* iii/ix/x).

If it seems possible to combine this pragmatist reconstructive dimension of somatic theory with Merleau-Ponty's basic philosophical insights about the lived body and the primacy of unreflective perception, this is partly because Merleau-Ponty's philosophy has its own pragmatic flavor. Insisting that consciousness is primarily an "I can" rather than an "I think" (*PP* 160/137/159), he also recognized that philosophy is more than impersonal theory but also a personal way of life. If he urged philosophy as the way to recover a lost primordial unity of unreflective experience, if he defined philosophy as "the Utopia of possession at a distance" (*EP* 58/58)* – perhaps the recapture of that unreflective past from the distance of present reflection, were there reasons in his life that helped determine this philosophical yearning? Was there also a personal yearning for a utopian past unity – primitive, spontaneous, and unreflective – and recoverable only by reflection from a distance, if at all?

We know very little of the private life of Merleau-Ponty, but there is certainly evidence that he had such a yearning for "this paradise lost." "One day in 1947, Merleau told me that he had never recovered from an incomparable childhood,"[12] writes his close friend Jean-Paul Sartre.

> Everything had been too wonderful, too soon. The form of Nature which first enveloped him was the Mother Goddess, his own mother, whose eyes made him see what he saw.... By her and through her, he lived this

* The sentence containing this phrase appears in the 1953 edition of *Éloge de la philosophie*, but not in the 1960 edition, *Éloge de la philosophie et autres essais*, or thereafter. – Eds.

"intersubjectivity of immanence" which he has often described and which causes us to discover our "spontaneity" through another.[13]

With childhood gone, "one of his most constant characteristics was to seek everywhere for lost immanence."[14] His mother, Sartre explains, was essential to this utopic "hope of reconquering" this sense of childhood spontaneity and "immediate accord" with things. "Through her, it was preserved – out of reach, but alive." When she died in 1952, Sartre recounts, Merleau-Ponty was devastated and essentially "became a recluse."[15] There remained the consolation of philosophy: the ontology of the porous intertwining of the visible and the invisible, the immanent and the transcendent, presence and absence, the chiasm of what is and what is not, in the endless flow of continuous becoming.

NOTES

1. Introspective attention to bodily feelings is a central feature of William James's famous *Principles of Psychology*, and it plays a large role in his explanation of the self, the emotions, and the will. Such emphasis on bodily feelings forms the focus of Wittgenstein's critique of James's explanation of these concepts, although Wittgenstein allows other uses for bodily feelings. For a comparative discussion of James's and Wittgenstein's treatment of such bodily feelings, see my "Wittgenstein on Bodily Feelings: Explanation and Melioration in Philosophy of Mind, Art, and Politics." John Dewey was a fervent advocate and student of the Alexander Technique, a method of somatic education and therapy that is based on heightening reflective awareness of our bodily states and feelings. Alexander's emphasis on conscious constructive control of the self through reflective awareness of one's somatic feelings also plays a vital role in Dewey's theoretical writings in philosophy of mind. For more on the Dewey–Alexander relationship, see F. P. Jones, *Body Awareness in Action: A Study of the Alexander Technique* and my *Practicing Philosophy: Pragmatism and the Philosophical Life*. In the spirit of the James–Dewey tradition of experiential, embodied pragmatism, I have been advocating the role of explicit somatic consciousness as part of a disciplinary field I call somaesthetics. The basic aims and structure of this field are outlined in *Practicing Philosophy*, chapter 6, and *Performing Live*, chapters 7 and 8.
2. For a more detailed discussion of this Nietzschean strategy, see my *Performing Live*, chapter 7.

3. When Merleau-Ponty defines consciousness as simply "being towards-the-thing through the intermediary of the body" in a relationship not of "I think" but of "I can" (*PP* 160/137/159), it would seem that purposeful action in sleep should be construed as the actions of consciousness. One could then wonder to what extent we can ever speak of unconscious human life, let alone unconscious human acts or intentions. On the other hand, Merleau-Ponty sometimes speaks of consciousness as if it demanded a further "constituting" function: "To be conscious is to constitute, so that I cannot be conscious of another person, since that would involve constituting him as constituting" (*S* 117/93).
4. There have been feminist critiques that Merleau-Ponty's notion of a primordial, universal bodily experience that is ungendered in fact produces an account of embodied existence that is androcentric rather than neutral. See, for instance, Judith Butler, "Sexual Ideology and Phenomenological Description: A Feminist Critique of Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception."
5. Dewey described this as "*the* philosophic fallacy," while James called it "the psychologist's fallacy." See Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 34, and James, *The Principles of Psychology*, vol. I: 196, 278; vol. II: 281.
6. Nor, I should add, can we rely on mere trial and error and the formation of new habits because the sedimentation process would likely be too slow, and we would be most likely to repeat the bad habits unless those habits (and their attendant bodily feelings) were critically thematized and brought to explicit consciousness for correction. F. M. Alexander stresses these points in arguing for the use of the representations of reflective consciousness to correct faulty somatic habits. See Alexander, *Man's Supreme Inheritance; Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual; and The Use of the Self*.
7. As Alexander documents our "unreliable sensory appreciation" or "debauched kinaesthesia" with respect to how our bodies are oriented and used, so Feldenkrais argues that because the term "normal" should designate what should be the norm for healthy humans, then we should more accurately describe most people's somatic sense and use of themselves as "average" rather than normal. For a comparative account of the nature and philosophical import of Alexander Technique and Feldenkrais Method, see my *Performing Live*, chapter 8. The cited phrases are from Alexander's *Constructive Conscious Control*, 148–9.
8. Dewey recognizes this by advocating the reflective "conscious control" of Alexander Technique, while continuing to urge the importance of unreflective, immediate experience. For a discussion of the fruitful dialectic between reflective body consciousness and body spontaneity, see my *Practicing Philosophy*, chapter 6.

9. Merleau-Ponty complains that reflective thought "detaches subject and object from each other, and . . . gives us only the thought about the body, or the body as an idea, and not the experience of the body" [*PP* 231/198–9/231]. This cannot be true for disciplines of self-conscious somatic reflection that focus on the body as concretely experienced.
10. For James on the specious present, see *The Principles of Psychology*, vol I: 608–10. For the elusive vagueness of the notion of mental simultaneity and the intractable problems of determining "absolute timing" of consciousness, see Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 136, 162–6.
11. Mead himself wisely allows this. In making his famous "I–me" distinction, Mead did not conclude that the "I" was unobservable and absent from experience. Although "not directly given in experience" as an immediate datum, "it is in memory that the 'I' is constantly present in experience." The fact that "the 'I' really appears experientially as a part of a [subsequent] 'me'" does not, therefore, mean we cannot observe ourselves as subjective agents but only that we need to do so by observing ourselves over time through the use of memory. See Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society*, 174–6.
12. Sartre, "Merleau-Ponty," *Situations*, 157; "Merleau-Ponty *vivant*," in Stewart, *The Debate between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty*, 566.
13. *Situations*, 162; *Debate*, 570.
14. *Situations*, 167; *Debate*, 575.
15. *Situations*, 208; *Debate*, 610.