

Chapter 5: Embodied Philosophy: My Ontological and Epistemological Grounding

"How words are understood is not told by words alone".
Wittgenstein (1981: 144).

Reflexivity lies at the heart of this thesis: I seek to understand - to have knowledge of - a particular way of knowing. There are echoes of this reflexivity in my literature review of embodied cognition, where I discussed attempts to think about how we think. This reflexive circle need not be 'vicious', in the sense of tying me into a knot of self-reference, if I apply the tools of phenomenology and hermeneutics. Phenomenology is fundamental to much of the work on embodied cognition (see, inter alia Gendlin, Varela, and Merleau-Ponty) and as I explain later, hermeneutics takes a central role in my methodology.

It is from this background that I now discuss my philosophical stance and how it is grounded in the enactive process model. After framing my discussion using Kasulis's intimacy and integrity orientations (Kasulis, 2002), I discuss the failure of dualistic ontology and epistemology before describing how an embodied naturalizing epistemology (Quine, 1969) emerges from Gendlin's process philosophy (inter alia, Gendlin, 1997). By considering my ontological and epistemological stance, this chapter contextualizes the thesis in general and my methodology in particular.

INTIMACY AND INTEGRITY

In his 1998 Gilbert Ryle lectures, Kasulis proposes two alternative cultural orientations: Intimacy and integrity. Briefly, an 'intimacy' orientation understands that "self and other belong together in a way that does not sharply distinguish the two" and understands knowledge as "somatic" with "an affective dimension". In contrast, a culture of 'integrity' prioritizes "external over internal relations" and requires knowledge to be objective and "empty of affect" (Kasulis, 2002: 24-25). This "heuristic tool" (Kasulis, 2002: 172) describes normative discourse and does not essentialize a group or culture: Individuals within a culture may use both orientations in different contexts and the culture simply *foregrounds* one or the other (Kasulis, 2002: 134-135).

Kasulis originally developed his intimacy or integrity model to assist understanding the difference between Western "philosophical modernism" and Japanese traditional culture (Kasulis, 2002: 24) but his audience proposed many other correlations. Some suggested that in the West, feminine gender emphasizes intimacy over masculine integrity, noting the importance of intimacy in many feminist epistemologies (Kasulis 2002: 137), while others pointed to US subcultures that "seemed to be oriented more toward intimacy than integrity" (Kasulis, 2002: 24). Although he does not pursue the idea, Kasulis proposes that we consider the epistemology of the 'Dark Ages' as more intimate, shifting to the integrity orientation of the Enlightenment (Kasulis, 2002: 140-141) that is now challenged by postmodernism (Kasulis, 2002: 175).

Kasulis's provides a useful context to understand some of the underlying challenges of this thesis. The enactive process model clearly lies within his intimacy orientation: I have somatic affective knowledge when I have "the right *feel*" for something (Kasulis, 2002: 43). Such knowledge is "dark" in that its source "is not obvious even to those involved" and "is absorbed into the body somatically through praxis" (Kasulis, 2002: 79). Kasulis uses the example of how he might know that his child is worried through a sense "that my son is 'not his usual self'" (Kasulis, 2002: 48). Within the epistemology of intimacy "knower and known are not fully discrete" (Kasulis, 2002: 77), just as in the enactive process model.

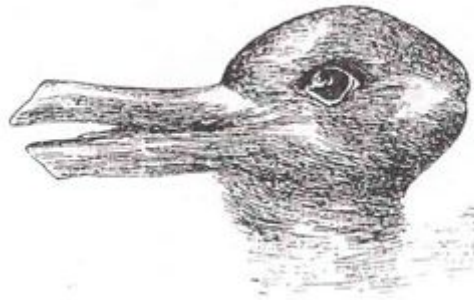


Figure 4: The Duck/Rabbit Drawing

Kasulis compares the switch between intimacy and integrity orientations with alternating between different languages (Kasulis, 2002: 153) or possible views of a bistable image (Kasulis, 2002: 22) like the duck-rabbit above. Some people will initially see this as a drawing of a duck, others as a rabbit, and most people can learn to switch between the two. But we cannot see it as both at once, just as we cannot adopt both an intimacy and an integrity orientation at the same time. In the "Introduction" I took an identical approach to differentiating embodied cognition and embodied knowing although both are intimacy terms, while the enactivist model (see inter alia, Varela et al., 1991) marks a shift within a integrity orientated scientific discourse towards intimacy.

As Kasulis argues, neither orientation is 'more true' or 'better' than the other, though each has clear benefits and costs (Kasulis, 2002: 141-149).

Western epistemology originated from an integrity orientation and, *a fortiori*, so did traditional academia, although significant challenges to the tradition mean that intimacy orientations are increasingly influential. As Kasulis points out, the integrity orientation can lead to an "internal dissociation of the self" resulting in a "split between the intellectual and the affective/somatic" if it is "pushed too far" (Kasulis, 2002: 143). Clearly this is often the case in the West, and although Kasulis does not discuss the epistemological ramifications of this situation, it is at least partly responsible for the failure of traditional ontology.

THE FAILURE OF DUALISM

Traditional Ontology

The "bipolarity paradigm" of the integrity orientation entails an ontological dualism (Kasulis, 2002: 100) that postulates a 'real' world that exists independently and ultimately beyond the grasp of the human subject. On this representationalist model our knowledge consists of representations of an independent reality: true knowledge requires an accurate correlation between what appears to the mind and what exists in an entirely separate outside world (Wolterstorff, 1999: 311). This traditional Western philosophical ontology splits nature from culture, mind from body, reason from emotion and subjective from objective.

In the late twentieth century this established tradition was subjected to sustained critique by feminism and postmodernism, resulting in a "crisis of representation" (see, inter alia, Flick, 2006: 83-84; Rorty, 1979). My consideration of dualities like culture/nature in my "Introduction", mind/body in "A Theory of Embodied Knowing", and even ethnographer/field in my autoethnography, has repeatedly revealed their intrinsic flaws. I conclude, with many others (inter alia, Braidotti, 1991; Rorty, 1979), that we have inherited an inadequate model for understanding such fundamental concepts. Dualistic ontology offers a model of the world that ceases to function when applied to complex systems and processes. The situation is parallel to that in physics, where Newtonian theory is entirely adequate at a human scale, but fails once we consider the quantum level of the sub-atomically small. In a similar way conventional dualities function perfectly well in many contexts but as we study increasingly complex systems such divisions blur and finally collapse. The emergence of the 'intimate' enactivist model of cognition, driven partly by the failure of integrity orientated symbol-processing (representationalist) approaches may parallel the shift from Newtonian integrity to the more intimate quantum physics (Capra, 1975; Davis and Gribbin, 1991). One difficulty is that we are so used to using a dualist ontology that we sometimes struggle to think without it. We lack any equivalent of the mathematical language that enables physicists to articulate unintuitive concepts and negotiate the peculiar world of quantum physics, so we must find a new vocabulary to make sense of our emerging understanding. I will argue that just such a vocabulary is provided by Gendlin's philosophy of the implicit.

Traditional Epistemology

Although the main themes of Western epistemology can be found in Plato, it rose to prominence largely through the influence of Descartes and Locke. Descartes is most famous for the '*cogito*' - his belief that 'I think, therefore I am' (Descartes, 1968 [1640]: 103). His profoundly influential idea that the body and mind are entirely separate (Descartes, 1968 [1640]: 156) led to three centuries of epistemology based on the assumption of a disembodied thinker. This ties in with my discussions above: Kasulis identifies Descartes as influential on the emergence of the 'integrity orientation' which culminated in the Enlightenment and positivism (Kasulis, 2002: 24), while Locke's representationalist view of perception (Wolterstorff, 1999: 311) underpins symbol-processing theories of cognition.

Any dualistic epistemology is prone to haunting by the spectre of skepticism because of the gap between internal representation and external 'reality', and Quine's response was to call for a thorough empirical investigation of how our beliefs are actually formed. Such a program meant "naturalizing epistemology" by applying science to the question of how we come to know. Epistemology then "simply falls into place as a chapter of psychology and hence of natural science" (Quine, 1994: 25).

Feminist and Postmodern Alternatives

The main challenges to Western epistemology have come from feminism and postmodernism. There is no single 'Feminist Epistemology' and three strands are immediately identifiable: feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint epistemologies and 'feminist postmodernist' epistemologies (Harding, 1987b: 182). Feminist empiricism remains grounded in a conventional epistemology that seeks "objectivity" (Harding, 1991: 289) and so remains within the traditional realist ontology discussed above.

Feminist standpoint epistemologies initially show more promise since they begin with the realization that as embodied beings, our knowledge of the world comes "from a particular socially situated perspective" (Anderson, 2007). Because our physical location, political, social and gendered perspectives determine how we know, epistemology must be situated. In place of the dominant epistemology that valorizes masculine values over those associated with the feminine, Harsock proposed a feminist standpoint epistemology that opposes dualisms and values the relational (Hartsock, 1983). She claimed that this would provide a less prejudicial and thus more accurate understanding of reality - i.e. one that was more objectively true. Notwithstanding her claim to greater objectivity, the main difficulty with Harsock's theory is its mistaken assumption of trans-cultural sex relations (Longino, 1999: 333). Harding attempts to recover feminist standpoint epistemology by arguing for a *multiplicity* of standpoints that reflexively recognize their own understanding (Harding, 1993) but Longino argues that this reduces it to a series of equally valid perspectives (Longino, 1999: 333). Harding considers this as a strength because it emphasizes the need for reflexivity, while Haraway rejects Harsock's attempt at epistemological closure (Haraway, 1991). Feminist standpoint epistemologies may in due course offer a suitable model of an epistemology of embodied knowing, but currently remain embroiled in debate.

Whereas feminist standpoint epistemologies assume there is an objective reality that we can know, some feminist postmodernists opine that such claims "rest upon many problematic and unexamined assumptions" (Flax, 1990: 56). Feminist postmodernism is a diverse school of thought, but in general it seeks to deconstruct a perceived Western philosophy of transcendence and objectivity by emphasizing intersubjectivity, relatedness and intuition. Although feminist postmodernism sometimes speaks the language of embodiment, it rarely steps beyond the *theoretical* body. Because postmodernism begins with the primacy of *discourse* it cannot make any phenomenological engagement with the experience of the lived body, and so ultimately fails to develop a truly *embodied* epistemology.

Postmodernism in general has provided a powerful and valuable critique of Western epistemology (see inter alia, Braidotti, 1991). However, as I point out above, it remains largely trapped by a discourse model in which language is free-floating and dislocated from any given reality. Similarly "actions get their meaning from their relations to other actions, rather than from their relation to some pre-linguistic realm of human nature or natural law" (Anderson, 2007). I conclude that the very principles of the postmodern challenge to Western epistemology simultaneously refuse the possibility of a knowledge grounded in our embodiment.

Natural Science and the Humanities

In response to the dilemmas outlined above, I turn to the naturalizing epistemology recommended by Quine (1969), a move which leads me to briefly consider the often fraught relationship between natural science and the humanities. Dilthey argued that the two are fundamentally different: The natural sciences are concerned with explanation (*erklären*) while the humanities seek understanding (*verstehen*) (Green, 2005: 397). Green notes that though religious studies scholars are often sharply divided into those who follow Dilthey's approach and those who "seek the objectivity of scientific explanation", most, including myself, acknowledge that both explanation and understanding are required (Green, 2005: 397). Kasulis can provide clarity: In Dilthey's late 19th century world science rested soundly on an integrity orientation in opposition to the intimacy of the humanities. Thankfully the 21st Century offers more sophisticated approaches where science and the humanities can be in harmony. This is clear from the synthesis I presented as "A Theory of Embodied Knowing", where the enactivist model of cognition, which offers an *explanation*, and the phenomenological approach which seeks *understanding*, share an intimacy orientation.

EMBODIED SITUATED EPISTEMOLOGY

A methodology must be grounded in an epistemology, and although I have provided a theory of how embodied knowing functions, I have not yet underpinned that with an embodied epistemology.

I propose that there are two fundamentally different ways of knowing: Propositional knowledge and embodied knowledge/knowing. I have conscious propositional knowledge that Paris is the capital of France, but I also have an emotional, sensual knowing of Paris – the smells of Paris, the taste of Paris, that odd little back street that I couldn't *tell* you how to find but that I could walk to with ease. This fuzzy, wordless, poetic knowing is embodied. Propositional knowledge is validated by Kasulis's integrity orientation (Kasulis, 2002), and is described by Belenky et al. as "separate epistemology". Embodied knowledge/knowing is recognized within the intimacy orientation, and in many ways correlates with "connected knowing" (Belenky et al., 1986: 113). Although a PhD. thesis is a formal academic text, and as such primarily intends to provide propositional, not embodied knowing, this does not present a theoretical hiatus. First, it is apparent that we can discuss and understand *about* embodied knowing using propositional knowledge; second,

we can use more explicitly creative approaches like autoethnography to enable the reader to gain a more empathetic (intimate) understanding (see Chapter 7); and third, we can use phenomenological exercises like those Merleau-Ponty and Gendlin provide, to allow the reader to have direct experience of instances of embodied knowing.

I turn then, to the contemporary philosopher and psychologist, Eugene Gendlin. Gendlin's process philosophy emerges from Pragmatism and is grounded in the embodied phenomenological experience of tacit knowledge. Rather than starting with metaphysical puzzles or theory, Gendlin's philosophy begins with the phenomenological experience of having a bodily sense of a situation, and then asks what this entails. A dualistic or postmodern epistemology cannot make sense of this process, and neither can existing physiological models of the body, but the fact that it *does* occur is obvious to anyone who takes a moment to observe their own process of creating meaning. Because Gendlin is both a psychologist and philosopher, he is well placed to offer the kind of naturalized epistemology which Quine called for. Although he acknowledges the value and power of science, Gendlin believes that the epistemology which underpins it cannot adequately deal with "living things" and proposes a "process approach" as an alternative (Gendlin, 2001). This approach understands "living bodies as self-sense making processes" (Gendlin, 2001). Propositional knowledge is not a process: I know now that Paris is the capital of France just as I did 30 years ago. But some embodied knowledge *is* a process - for example knowing how to find that "odd little back street" in the warren of the city - and it is these embodied processes which concern me here.

Many postmodernists conclude that "nothing can be prior to language and history" (Gendlin, 1992: 342) and as an example Gendlin quotes Foucault's claim that our once animal bodies were "utterly destroyed" by history (Foucault, 1977b: 148). But Gendlin seeks to move the discussion of language beyond postmodernism (see Levin, 1997) by showing that it emerges from the implicit ". . . ." of the body-sense discussed earlier ("Embodied Cognition Literature Review"). To recall this notion, imagine you are writing a paper and trying to find just the right phrase for ... for what? Something as yet unexpressed but *there*. "The knows what we want to say. It knows with a bodily gnawing, very much like something forgotten". The implicit is not preverbal; it clearly understands language since it will reject words that do not 'fit' and will resonate with those that do (Gendlin, 1997b: 17). But the new words are not simply floating in the implicit and neither do they represent it. This becomes apparent with the change in the implicit when we find the right phrase - a "carrying forward" that is sensed as a release of tension (Gendlin, 1995: 547). Language, then, is not a *representation* but a *carrying forward* of the implicit, making it explicit in symbols. As Levin puts it, "speaking is itself a further living in a situation" (Levin, 1997: 49), which he then explicates:

Symbols do not represent; rather, they relate to what we want to say in such the way that feeding relates to hunger. Feeding does not represent hunger; nor is there a hidden feeding underneath hunger (Levin, 1997: 50).

On Gendlin's model, language - or any form of expression - is where the implicit is carried forward and becomes explicit. Meaning only emerges when the implicit is carried forward by explication (Gendlin, 1964), so it is clear that "[f]eeling without symbolization is blind; symbolization without feeling is empty" (Gendlin, 1962: 5). Thus Gendlin "forges a continuity in which knowing is both an embodied and languaged process" and each is required "in the rhythm of closeness and distance that is required for meaningful knowing to occur" (Todres, 2007: 34).

To sum up, the bodily or felt sense emerges from the implicit and can be made explicit though symbolization. I can best express this using the metaphor of the implicit as a huge ball of string and the felt sense as one strand that we can pick up, perhaps using Focusing. As I pull on a strand (the felt sense) it slowly unravels (carries forward) the ball of string (the implicit) into my hands (the explicit).

This is a radically different conception from that offered by the representationalism of dualistic epistemology. Instead of an internal representation of an external 'reality', we have a process of knowing that is grounded within our embodied experience of a specific situation. Gendlin thus avoids the problematic 'view from nowhere' (Bordo, 1993; Braidotti, 1991), satisfies the need for reflexivity emphasized by feminist epistemology, and highlights the relationship between epistemology and ontology (Haraway, 2000: 78; Stanley, 1990: 14). Yet *contra* postmodernism, language is not free-floating but grounded in a pre-conceptual embodied knowing. For Fisher such "[a]uthentic speech" enables us to speak from our place in the world:

Language is not a closed system of verbal forms, but a mode of poetizing, of allowing for the disclosure of new meanings, new forms, in our dwelling on or listening to the earth (Fisher, 2002: 132).

The Felt Sense

While Gendlin often uses the term "bodily-sense" (or occasionally "feeling") in his philosophy and "felt sense" in his psychotherapeutic work (Gendlin, 1981: 10), these terms are equivalent and he uses each as appropriate to the context. I generally use the term "felt sense" as this phrase is used most in the context of Focusing which forms a key strand of my methodology.

Gendlin's notion of the felt sense emerged from his empirical research into the frequent failures of psychotherapy and why it works when it does (Gendlin, 1981: 3). Those who were successful in therapy came to an inner knowing which Gendlin called the "felt sense", "a special kind of internal bodily awareness ... a body-sense of meaning" (Gendlin, 1981: 10) which the conscious mind is initially unable to articulate. A felt sense is more than just an emotion, though it usually has an emotional aspect: In everyday terms, the felt sense describes the fuzzy feelings that we don't usually pay much attention to - a vague 'gut feeling' or that inexpressible sense of unease we express as 'I'm not quite feeling myself today' or 'I just got out of bed the wrong side this morning'. A intuitive understanding of the felt sense is required to really understand Gendlin's work, so I will give a few more examples.

Imagine you are at a conference and spot someone that you have 'a bit of a history' with. How does that feel? Maybe some butterflies. Maybe some vague memories. A mixture of things. That feeling is a felt sense. Or let's say you're taking a walk on a beautiful fresh morning, just after a rain storm, and you come over a hill, and there, hanging in the air in front of you is a perfect rainbow. As you stand there and gaze at it you feel your chest welling up with an expansive, flowing, warm feeling. That feeling is also a felt sense. In many such ordinary situations we sense that something is wrong - or right - but may find it difficult to express just *what* that wrong - or rightness - is.

We have all had a sense of not knowing what we're looking for, but being certain that we will know what it is when we find it. A poet, graphic artist, or indeed theoretician, will often have a sense of what their creative work needs to move forward, but it may initially be beyond their grasp. In such situations there is a knowing and a *not* knowing at the same time. What is known in this case is tacit and embodied and we seek to shift it into explicit conscious knowing. In each example the missing something - the next step in the process - is 'implied' by what is already there and this implied 'implicit' is one of Gendlin's central concepts. If we delve into our felt sense of the implicit, it begins to open up and "comes to imply more and more", revealing itself as an "*unseparated multiplicity*" (Gendlin, 1997b: 16; author's emphasis). Thus our experience suggests that the "bodily [the 'implicit'] can contain information that is not (or not yet) capable of being phrased" (Gendlin, 1992: 349). But how? Gendlin's explanation meshes with the understanding of embodied situated knowing described by enactivism: The body "is an ongoing interaction with its environment" (Gendlin, 1992: 349) and this explains how the felt-sense could access "a vast amount of environmental information" and how new creative work can emerge from it. Furthermore "if such a self-sensing body could also think, and could use its bodily in its thinking, well, it would always think after, with, but with more than conceptual and language forms. This more would be realistic since it would be the body-environmental interaction" (Gendlin, 1992: 350). Gendlin emphasizes that as a result of this approach the subject/object distinction collapses: "We will move beyond the subject/object distinction if we become able to speak from how we interact bodily in our situations" (Gendlin, 1997b: 15).

Gendlin closes his 1992 paper by asking the reader "[w]hat will you say about my paper" and points out that though his audience probably have not yet articulated a response in words, it exists as an "internally intricate bodily implying of speech and thought" (Gendlin, 1992: 353). With this example of what Levin calls his "reflexively constituted practice" Gendlin reveals what he asserts is happening in the very process of his sense-making (Levin, 1997: 45).

Experience

In the examples I gave earlier, of being followed by someone ("Embodied Cognition Literature Review"), or seeking just the right phrase to complete a sentence, there are two basic aspects: the explicit symbol and the implicit felt sense. The symbol is the form our experience takes; "a thought, a behavior, a sight or sound, an emotion ... an image, a rite, an event, some words" (Fisher, 2002: 56), while the felt

sense is the "rich, intricate sensed experience of our situations" (Purton, 2007). All experience is just this "interaction between feelings and 'symbols' (attention, words, events)" (Gendlin, 1964: 129). Symbols and the felt sense are in a dynamic relationship: The implicit felt sense becomes explicitly known when it is carried forward into a symbolic form that creates meaning, and a felt sense can be invoked when we are inspired by something richly symbolic. So as Fisher says, "[s]ymbols and feelings are thus mutually formative or determining: the traffic between them moves in both directions" (Fisher, 2002: 56). Furthermore my immediate experience draws on an implicit intricacy that is fed by a lifetime of experiencing complex situations as well as "imagined situations, situations about which we have read in novels or myths or biographies and so on" (Purton, 2007).

Conclusion

Gendlin provides a naturalized epistemology grounded in our phenomenological experience of the felt sense and consistent with enactivism, that enables me to discuss embodied knowing from the perspective of propositional, academic knowledge. The intricate embodied knowing of the implicit is carried forward to be symbolized in explicit awareness as, for example, speech, gesture or thought. Gendlin's philosophy collapses the subject/object distinction in just the same way that enactivism does (Varela et al, 1991) by showing that the body is "an ongoing interaction with its environment" (Gendlin, 1992: 349), and thus avoid the problems intrinsic to dualism.

My methodology chapter builds on this epistemology to demonstrate how Gendlin's Focusing approach accesses embodied knowing, and can underpin an embodied hermeneutics. This allows me to explore embodied knowing using an embodied methodology that is underpinned by an embodied epistemology, and thus grounds me in a virtuous circle of reflexive understanding.