

## Ethics and body: the silenced relationship\*<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

The text, of an essayistic nature, investigates the reasons for the body's denial or silence in ethics, contextualizing the problem within the Platonic, Cartesian, and Christian tradition and its interpretation of the human being and body-soul double, which prioritizes consciousness of itself and reaffirms ethics rational foundation. From the twentieth century, under the inflow of the philosophical trends of aspiration to life, there begins the revision of the understanding of the body. Then, Shusterman's thesis that the body's rejection in ethics is due to its strong fundamental ambiguity is presented and the different expressions of this ambiguity inscribed in the how the body experiences them are analyzed. A unified view of body and mind, as proposed by Espinosa and Damasio, recognizes that consciousness and emotion are not separated and that a consideration of the body is decisive in the care for oneself and in the attention to others. Lastly, it is argued that esthetics can operate in favor of the corporeal in ethics, especially for ethics in education, through the work of emotions and feelings, as ethical decisions consistently evoke experiences that are intellectual, but also emotional, whose basis is corporeal. Literature, because of the esthetic experience it arises, presents special conditions to narrate the complexity involved in the ethical life and to work emotions and feelings, as observed in Hermann Broch's *The death of Virgil*.

### Keywords

Body – Ethics – Esthetics – Shusterman.

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*Folly, sin, deception, avarice  
Occupy our spirit and labor our body [...].*  
Charles Baudelaire

*Was it his own body what the poet still felt?  
Or was it naught but the reflection of his organism  
or even a reflection of his own feeling?*  
Hermann Broch

## Weight of tradition and subtle displacements

This text springs from the fundamental intuition according to which it is necessary to journey into a resumption of ethics that considers corporeity. After all, the body remains an obscure philosophical question, still awaiting clarification, a fact even more evident for the philosophy of education. This is not a matter of proposing a descriptive or phenomenological analysis of the body by itself, but a matter of highlighting the bond with the activity of thinking, with emotions and affections and clarifying how these issues mean an ethical life and human formation. More precisely, it is a matter of investigating why up to now this topic has been insistently denied, disregarded, or silenced.

The theme of corporeity in ethic debate lies on a secondary level, many times even non-existent, and that has been its path in the western thought, because the ethic foundation has been limited to the intellect, at the metaphysical-based thought's will. Although ethics lies within the scope of practical reasoning, the moral acting was uprooted from the corporeal dimension and exclusively defined by metaphysical considerations, as a mental operation. The place of superficiality was assigned to the body, much to the taste of the dichotomies that presuppose the opposition between depth and surface, body and soul. The supremacy of such dualism, which privileged the soul over the body, granted it only a peripheral condition, as something to be dominated<sup>3</sup>, as observed in the field of education, in which repression was intense. In Plato and Descartes, one can find the foundational texts of this dichotomy. In *Timaeus*, the soul owns and governs the body (PLATÓN, 1986, v. I, p. 178, 34c). Plato also recommends that the soul be purified from the "folly of the body" (PLATÓN, 1986, v. III, p. 45, 67a) by rational self-control. The influence of the Christian religion<sup>4</sup> - all evil would be in the flesh - paved the way in which ethics was substantially constituted by the dominion of the body, that is, by the dominion of passions. It is not a matter of denying the importance of a certain rational balance in the control of passions, but of denying the body due recognition. In the dawn of modern times, the Cartesian formula "I think, therefore I am" endorsed the security of awareness of oneself, independent of the body. The division between *res cogitans* and *res extensa* deepens the view of the deceptive senses and the *cogito* offers safety. That is what favored

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**3-** According to Shusterman, the body was not emphatically ignored, but it had a somewhat negative presence in philosophy, which, persistently privileges the mind and spirit. "Its dominantly negative image - as a prison, distraction, source of error and corruption - is both reflected and reinforced by the idealistic bias and disregard for somatic cultivation that Western philosophers generally display". (SHUSTERMAN, 2008, p. IX).

**4-** One can refer here to the well-known biblical passage, in which Paul, in the Epistle to the Romans, chapter 7, says: "For I know that good does not dwell in me, that is, in my flesh" (The Bible, 1995, p. 1390).

the shift of interests to the life of the spirit and to a strictly rational ethic foundation, leaving out of protagonism everything that refers to the sensible.

Only when language frees itself from its metaphysical bonds in search of a vital force do we find sporadic references to the value of the corporeal, as in Augustine (1973), who highlighted the power of the body when defining memory as “the womb of the soul” (AUGUSTINE, 1973, p. 205). The strength of this metaphor consists precisely of reuniting the body to the spirit, contrary to the usual disregard for the body, so common in medieval times. The metaphor points out that our memories, regardless of their psychic nature, bear bodily marks and, most likely, these tracks interfere with ethical decisions.

From the nineteenth century, under the inflow of philosophical trends of aspiration to life, the revision of the understanding of the body begins. Nietzsche led the way with his insistence on the radically corporeal dimension of functions related to consciousness and thought. At all times, he says, “I wrote my works with my whole body and my whole life: I don’t know what ‘purely spiritual’ problems” are (NIETZSCHE, 1988, v.9, p.170). In *Ecce homo*, when commenting on the creation of *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, he clearly shows that subjectivity is not *cogito*, but an achievement made from the body, which leads him to celebrate how much the body disposition is associated with intellectual creation:

[...] the muscular agility was always maximal in me, when the creative force flowed more vigorously. The body is enthused: we leave the “soul” out ... They could often see me dancing; I could, without a hint of fatigue, walk for seven to eight hours through the mountains. I would sleep a lot - I had perfect strength and patience. (NIETZSCHE, 1988, v.6, p. 341).

The question asked by some critics (SHUSTERMAN, 2004, p. 154) is whether Nietzsche wouldn’t only be reversing the trajectory of the Platonic, Christian, and Cartesian body-soul dualism by shifting the position of this double, in which the mind would become a mere instrument of the body. I believe that a closer look recognizes that the strength of the Nietzschean criticism does not lie in a mere displacement of the role of the body, but would be in the unveiling of the consequences of the control of passions that, without considering the constitutive dimension of the corporeal, leads the subject to disaggregation, to *décadence*. Subjectivity is not constituted only by reason or conscience. Rather, both the self and the thought result from a correlation of forces “of all the drives that constitute us” (NIETZSCHE, 1988, v. 12, p. 26), so that consciousness itself is conducted by the body, which it is not limited to being the seat of passions as tradition has assumed. By valuing it, Nietzsche does not leave the poles of the body-soul inversion intact, but redefines the body, demonstrating its infinitely complex possibilities, since it is “the richest, the clearest and the most palpable” of the phenomena (NIETZSCHE, 1988, v. 12, p. 205). It also opens the way for the soul, because “it is absolutely not necessary to even untangle from the soul”, but to open up “to new conceptions and refinements of the hypothesis of the soul” (NIETZSCHE, 1988, v. 5, p. 27).

Still in the context of this brief contextualization, it should be noted that the poets’ sensitivity can break a certain conceptual rigidity and anticipate truths that sciences will later prove. This is the case of Jorge Luis Borges when he delimits the unity between

body and soul, expressed in feeling, long before neuroscience. He reports “the real thrill” he felt when he first heard Keats’ verses, still in his childhood, when he discovered that language “was not only a means of communication, but could also be a passion and a pleasure”. When that was revealed to him, he says, “I felt that something was happening to me. It happened not with my simple intellect, but with my whole being, my flesh and my blood” (BORGES, 2000, p. 14). Borges unequivocally demonstrates that even the noblest activities of thought are felt bodily. This incarnated emotion, rooted in the corporeal, is often strange in the analysis of moral action. In the tradition of ethical thinking, our decisions, judgments, and choices are based on thinking and on what we conventionally call cognitive operations, drawn into the realm of consciousness, without considering that feelings and emotions are the foundation of reflected life.

Inattention to the body, however, should cause strangeness, given its determining character for our action, perception and thinking; after all, no one ignores the importance of the body in physical health and well-being<sup>5</sup>, as we read in Juvenal’s well-publicized Satire X (356): *Mens sana in corpore sano*. Despite the persistence of this verse in western memory and the recognized lunge of ancient thought in somatic practices, the weight of the metaphysical tradition eclipses our gaze, diverting attention. In fact, as Murdoch reminds us (2013, p. 55), attention in all morals consists of the effort to combat states of illusion. Not only the illusions with language, intentions, and decisions, but also, I would add, the lack of attention to the body, disguised in the repressive illusion of ideal bodies so much to the taste of fashion.

The contemporary valorization of sculpted and beautiful bodies still follows obscure tributary paths of the body-soul division, which deserved a vigorous criticism by Adorno and Horkheimer, in the *Dialectic of enlightenment*. They attribute to the body the double feeling of love and hate, seeing it “as something inferior and enslaved and, at the same time, desired as the forbidden, reified and alienated. [...] It is no longer possible to reconvert the physical body (*Körper*) into a living body (*Leib*)” (ADORNO; HORKHEIMER, 1998, p. 266). Thus, the body-soul division leads to an objectification of the body, to an attention that does not constitute true care, which is alienated, because it is based on a mechanical body.

What the path of ethics studies suggests as a first approach to the corporeal refers to the role of moral feelings as opposed to the thesis that reason would be enough to explain morality, as observed in Hume<sup>6</sup>. The author proposes a naturalistic basis for ethics, in which human action is aroused by desire followed by bodily movement. Moral distinctions are practical in nature, they command our actions. Hume’s ethical treatment involves only “a spontaneous feeling about the motives (of the action), not a trained sensitivity” (SCHNEEWIND, 2001, p. 396). This tradition considers the psychological dimension of the

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**5-** According to Damasio, “when the body works without difficulty and when the transformation and the use of energy unfold with the will, the body behaves with a defined style. Approaching others is made easier. There is a relaxation and openness of the body, as well as expressions that translate confidence and well-being; on the other hand, certain classes of molecules are released, such as endorphins. The set of these reactions and the chemical signs associated with them result in the experience of pleasure” (DAMASIO, 2012, p. 47).

**6-** Hume’s thought is, according to Alberto Saoner’s interpretation, linked to a fundamental historical fact in the genesis of modern ethical thought, that is, “the rupture that occurs, as a result of Renaissance innovation, of the impact of Protestantism and capitalism, between ‘virtue’ and ‘happiness’”. This fracture forced a redefinition of moral terms, which forced them to seek a foundation for happiness not on socio-community bases, but on individual psychology” (SAONAR, 1999, p. 290).

ethical subject, without corporeality being the object of analysis and the emphasis on the role of feelings in morals – a fundamental contribution – ends up being minimized by the overvaluation of reason that continues with moralistic metaphysicians.

The most influential theories on ethics in the contemporary debate remain, in general, linked to the view of duality between body and mind, still not exploring the possibilities of a view of unity, as proposed by Espinosa<sup>7</sup> and by the studies of neuroscience (Damasio), what favors the idea of knowing passions to dominate them and not to integrate them in harmony. Here it is worth mentioning the coincidences of some conclusions between the philosopher's and neuroscientist's thinking, in the perspective of stressing that, if body and mind constitute a unit, ethics must consider the body's affections. Espinosa and Damasio recognize that there is continuity between the body and the mental representations of what happens with the body, what allows the mind to act on it. That is, knowing our affectivity (emotions and feelings) to work on passions, not to try to eliminate them, but to avoid their obsessive effects on us. Espinosa uses the term affection (*affectum*) – which includes emotions and feelings – to refer:

[...] the affections (*affectiones*) of the body, by which the power of acting of this body is increased or decreased, favored or hindered, as well as the ideas of these affections. When, therefore, we are able to be the adequate cause of one of these affections, by affection I mean an action; in other cases, a passion. (SPINOZA, *Ethics III*, Def. III).

That is why Espinosa will insist on our capacity to break free from the tyranny of negative emotions. The point is that affections can act better on us, to overcome the force of passion.

For Damasio, emotions “are actions or movements, many of them public, that occur on the face, in the voice, or in specific behaviors”. (DAMASIO, 2012, P. 42). The feelings:

[...] on the contrary, they are necessarily invisible to the public, as is the case with all mental images, hidden from anyone, except from their rightful owner, the most private property of the organism in whose brain they occur. (DAMASIO, 2012, p. 42).

The scientist offers as an example of feeling the moment when we feel pleasure in the body, on a beach, in a state of well-being, with relaxed musculature, without tension and the countless thoughts that come to mind, creating feelings of pleasure. There is a harmony between body and mind that denies the attempt to understand them separately. What actually happens is “the feeling of a perception of a certain state of the body, together with the perception of thoughts with certain themes and with the perception of a certain way of thinking” (DAMASIO, 2012, p. 98). For both Damasio and Espinosa, the events of the body are represented as ideas in the mind. Thus, the basis of any consciousness and feeling is in our body. Influenced by Espinosa and based on his experimental research, Damasio considers that life should include “means to resist

**7-** Espinosa interprets body and soul (or body and mind) as a unit and projects an ethic of affectivity, which takes into account the affections of the body. See the article *The link between body, ethics and esthetics* (HERMANN, 2018).

the anguish caused by suffering and death, means to suppress sadness and to replace it with joy” (DAMASIO, 2012, p. 289). More than 300 years later, neurobiology reaffirms Espinosa’s thinking that the emotion of happiness increases the potency of acting. It is a conclusion that can bring profound changes in the lives of those who take it seriously.

Contemporarily, with a unified view of body and mind as a reference, Richard Shusterman articulates pragmatist philosophy with esthetics, with a view to giving due attention to the meaning of the corporeal in our life. Far from a naive defense of the corporeal, his investigative work is supported by consistent studies on the rediscovery of the body, from the nineteenth century, made by Michel Foucault, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Simone de Beauvoir, Ludwig Wittgenstein, William James, and John Dewey, developing a rigorous assessment of these theories and their practical implications. He combines pragmatic philosophical studies with his therapeutic practice with the Feldenkrais method and the Alexander technique to promote a critical somatic awareness that favors knowledge of the self, of feelings, and of somatic behaviors. With a view to building bodily forms of subjectivity, Shusterman analyzes the competencies of perception and performance that can improve cognition and the capacity for virtues. He creates a disciplinary framework called *somaesthetics*, a field that:

[...] concerns the body as a locus of sensory-esthetic appreciation (*aesthesis*) and creative self-fashioning. As an ameliorative discipline of both theory and practice, it aims to enrich not only our abstract, discursive knowledge of the body, but also our lived somatic experience and performance; it seeks to enhance the understanding, efficacy, and beauty of our movements. [...] *Somaesthetics* therefore involves a wide range of knowledge forms and disciplines that structure such somatic care or that can improve it. (SHUSTERMAN, 2012b, p. 27).

In the work *Body consciousness*<sup>8</sup>, Shusterman points out that the term *soma* of *somaesthetics* “indicates a living, feeling and sentient rather than a mere physical body that could be devoid of life and sensation” (SHUSTERMAN, 2008, p. 1), and the *esthetics* term refers to:

[...] soma’s perceptual role (whose embodied intentionality contradicts the body/mind dichotomy) and its aesthetic uses both in stylizing one’s self and appreciating of aesthetic qualities of other selves and things. (SHUSTERMAN, 2008, p. 1-2).

His theory recognizes that body, mind, and culture are interdependent, so that mental life cannot be separated from bodily processes, nor can it be so reduced. Despite the importance of the analytical studies of *somaesthetics* (whether genealogical or ontological), which describe the nature of cultural perceptions and practices and the emergence of different doctrines on corporeal practices, as Foucault does, Shusterman defends the pragmatic *somaesthetics* that proposes somatic improvement, which will result in benefit to one’s mental life. According to Shusterman (2012b, p. 27):

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**8-** In the Brazilian translation: SHUSTERMAN, *Consciência corporal*, 2012a.

We think and feel with our bodies, especially with the body parts that constitute the brain and nervous system. Our bodies are likewise affected by mental life, as when certain thoughts bring a blush to the cheek and change our heart rate and our breathing rhythms. The body-mind connection is so pervasively intimate that it seems misleading to speak of body and mind as two different, independent entities.

This intimate connection indicates that considerations of this order should take on a greater impetus for ethical theories. If ethics seeks to answer questions about how to live and, above all, encourages the improvement of our behavior, then we must have somatic knowledge that can broaden our understanding of ourselves and how emotions and affections act to make us more capable of making an art of living out of life (SHUSTERMAN, 2008). This leads us to recognize the importance of a dialogue between science and philosophy, because “science can instruct morality in certain points and can change its direction, but it cannot contain morality nor, therefore, moral philosophy” (MURDOCH, 2013, p. 43). The integration between body and mind depends on an opening of ethics to other fields of knowledge, including neuroscience studies<sup>9</sup>.

## The ambiguity of the body

Why then, has the body been silenced in ethics studies<sup>10</sup>? Shusterman develops the paradoxical thesis that the rejection of the body in the humanities – and I would add in ethics in particular – is due to the fact that it (the body) “powerfully expresses the fundamental ambiguity of the human being” and also for its character of “all-pervasive, indispensable instrumentality in our lives” (SHUSTERMAN, 2012b, p. 28). In search of a nobler and less vulnerable view, ethics studies tend to avoid the theme of the body as well as the somatic means that could help achieve moral and intellectual ends.

The first dimension of the body’s ambiguity is revealed in the dual subject and object status. Simultaneously I am a body (subject) and I have a body (object). When I touch or examine a part of the body that is injured, I am exploring my body as an object and it becomes “the transparent source of perception or action, not an object

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**9-** On the path of studies about the body, neurosciences assume, contemporarily, an outstanding role, showing the biological bases of the thinking process, which leads many researchers to be concerned with interdisciplinary dialogue to broaden the range of understanding about corporeality in ethical life. It is worth remembering the statement by Catherine Malabou, that there could be a productive dialogue between neuroscience and philosophy, which benefits from new discoveries regarding the regenerative capacity of the brain, given its fantastic plasticity. According to the author: “Freud certainly would not have turned his back on his origin as a neurologist if he could have known this advance, he would not have inscribed psychoanalysis in the symbolic in detriment of the organic” (MALABOU, 2015). Damasio also argues that neurobiology can play an important role in the explanations of cultural structures, such as ethics, but it is necessary to “include ideas from anthropology, sociology, psychoanalysis, and evolutionary psychology, as well as data from proper studies on ethics, laws, and religion” (DAMASIO, 2012, p. 175).

**10-** Shusterman points out that the predominance of Platonism, strengthened by Cartesianism and idealism “has blinded us to a crucial fact that was evident to much of ancient and non-Western thought: since we live, think, and act through our bodies, their study, care, and improvement should be at the core of philosophy, especially when philosophy is conceived (as it use to be) as a distinctive way of life, a critical and disciplined care of the self that involves self-knowledge and self-cultivation” (SHUSTERMAN, 2008, p. 15 ). In this perspective, the philosopher criticizes the position of Pierre Hadot, who, despite valuing philosophy as a way of life, does it unilaterally, emphasizing only the mind. This criticism is extended to Martha Nussbaum, who maintains intellectual unilateralism, limiting philosophy to rational debate. He recognizes that Foucault has the merit of renewing the Greek’s ancient concept of philosophy, emphasizing its somatic and esthetic aspects.

of awareness” (SHUSTERMAN, 2012b, p. 28). The body is something that I own and, simultaneously, something that I use, that I order to do what I want and, often, it doesn't. Therefore, it is a source of disorder, distraction, and this leads to its depreciation, its reduction to a mere instrument.

The body's ambiguity is also present in human existence through which we integrate the same species, but with individual differences. Philosophers attributed to language and rationality the categories that characterize the human species; however, corporeality is also an essential condition for humanity. The body gives us unity and differentiates us - due to physical structure, functional practice, and sociocultural interpretation - in different genders, races, ethnicities, and classes, in addition to our own condition as unique individuals (SHUSTERMAN, 2012b, p. 29). Unlike animals, we are not programmed and even “the precise makeup of an individual's nervous system (her preferred repertoire of neural pathways) is partly a product of her individual experience and cultural conditions” (SHUSTERMAN, 2012b, p. 29).

The body is constituted by social meanings and this becomes visible when we deal with racial prejudices that “are somatically marked in terms of vague uncomfortable feelings aroused by alien bodies” (SHUSTERMAN, 2012b, p. 29-30), being resistant to rational discourse, because they are below the conscious level. We even deny prejudices, because we do not understand that we feel them. In other words, their rooting is of a corporeal order<sup>11</sup> and the attempt to control or eliminate them depends on “develop the somatic awareness to recognize them in ourselves” (SHUSTERMAN, 2012b, p. 30).

In the human condition, the ambivalence of the body also shows as power and frailty, excellence and shame, dignity and brutality, knowledge and ignorance. Humanity is invoked both to lead to “moral excellence and rationality that transcend mere animality” and to “describe and excuse our flaws, failures, and lapses” (SHUSTERMAN, 2012b, p. 30) that are found in many behaviors, revealing the frailties we have in common with the beasts. However, the body is also the seat of human dignity, as seen in works of art, which express its beauty, as in the demand for its integrity inscribed in human rights.

Faced with this context, Shusterman reaffirms that ethical concepts and norms depend on how the body experiences them and the ways in which others treat it, that is, people with hungry and abused bodies probably do not find value in concepts such as duty, charity, and respect for others. It is equally through bodily experience that many of our emotions take hold, such as disgust, which, subsequently, extends to cases of misogyny, anti-Semitism, and homophobia. That (disgust) is a visceral emotion, with strong physical reactions (vomit) in the face of stimuli such as odors and objects that seem disgusting to us. It is centered on the repulsion to incorporate an offensive object. It is related, therefore, to the limits of the body and what is foreign to us, especially the border

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**11-** Damásio mentions the importance of knowing the biology of emotions because it offers a new opportunity to understand modern behavior. Thus, racial prejudices are based “on social emotions whose evolutionary value dwelled in detecting differences in other individuals - because these differences indicated possible dangers - and in promoting aggression and withdrawal. Such reactions may have produced extremely useful results in a tribal society, but it is neither useful nor acceptable in the current world. It is evidently important to know that our brains are still equipped with biological machinery that leads us to react in an ancestral, ineffective, and unacceptable way in certain circumstances.” (DAMÁSIO, 2012, p. 54).



with our animality, which is lived in a problematic way<sup>12</sup> (NUSSBAUM, 2006, p. 106-110). The body points out our frailty in the face of what surpasses us.

In addition, Shusterman shows that the ambiguity of the body also appears in relation to the freedom evidenced in ethical choices, since we can only act through our bodily means. The freedom to move our own bodies is at the root of all of the most abstract notions of freedom. And, at the same time, true to its ambiguity:

[...] the body also clearly symbolizes our unfreedom: the bodily constraints on our actions, the corporeal bulk, needs, and failures that weigh us down and limit our performance; the relentless degeneration of aging and death. (SHUSTERMAN, 2012b, p. 32).

Highlighting the meaning of the body for ethics does not mean stating that ethical considerations are restricted to it, but disregarding it is associated with a foundation regulated by infinitism, insofar as this principle does not recognize the limits, which the body insists on indicating. Infinitism seeks a “universal antidote to the lack, the transience, and the particularity, the three constituent elements of human finitude, all marked by pain” (LOPARIC, 1995, p. 9).

What Shusterman especially defends is the relevance of somatic practices (Yoga, Feldenkrais method, Alexander technique) which, when placing us face to face with painful bodily limitations, shows the mortality of the body and teaches the wisdom of humility. It is in this perspective that the neglect of the body by philosophy reveals a “proud and willful denial of our mortal limits”. Thus, refining body perception and performance should be crucial to the philosophical task of “working on oneself” (SHUSTERMAN, 2008, p. 123).

## **Esthetics and the work of emotions and feelings**

I would like to add, in the course of argument, the way esthetics can operate in favor of the corporeal in ethics, through the work of emotions and feelings. This configures the formative sense that the body can take for an ethic in education, especially for the care of oneself, which helps us not remain strangers to ourselves, denying our ambiguity and frailty. More specifically, I am referring to the relevance of the esthetic experience, which, when making an agency of the senses produces new models and perceptions about its object, transforming it.

This experience mobilizes emotions, acting on our moral sensitivity in order to favor both self-knowledge and ethical virtues for the benefit of others. If, as Damásio (2000, p. 33) says, “conscience and emotion are *not* separable”, our mind, when making ethical decisions, consistently evokes emotional and intellectual experiences. We can only take more appropriate ethical action if our sensitivity perceives the context and beliefs involved in decisions.

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**12-** See especially chapter II - La repugnancia y nuestro corpo animal, in Nussbaum's *El ocultamiento del humano* (2006), in which the philosopher makes an inventory of research in this area, drawing a broad picture developed by experimental sciences and psychoanalysis.

Thus, the knowledge of the complexity of ethical action is activated by emotions and feelings - the basis of which is in the body - because such action does not occur just because we know an abstract principle or a norm of action. In this perspective, the depth of the literary work (and the esthetic experience it provokes) has special conditions to narrate the complexity involved in moral deliberation; “an adventure of personality”, which the literary narrative shows with all “terrifying expectations and among amazing mysteries” (NUSSBAUM, 1992, p. 142). This gives “beauty and wealth” to the narrated action that traditional philosophical texts cannot transmit, which coincides with Iris Murdoch’s observation, when recognizing that literature is “an education on how to imagine and understand human actions” (MURDOCH, 2013, p. 51). And, in a more radical step, the philosopher seeks to no longer contrast art and morals, since art is not just a playful activity, a “kind of by-product of our failure to be entirely rational”. On the contrary, “we must go back to what we know about grand art, the moral revelation it contains and the great moral realization it represents” (MURDOCH, 2013, p. 60). Art, continues the philosopher, “is the most educational of all human activities and a place where the nature of morality can be seen” (MURDOCH, 2013, p. 120).

What the esthetic experience promotes, in the case of novels, are emotional and intellectual reactions that start to interact with our beliefs and ideas, favoring new images of ourselves, the world, and how to operate with our passions and desires, in the face of ethical rules. If the body provokes ethics by facing our mortal limits, revealed by the suffering of pain and illness, the esthetic experience, which also originates in the senses, generates a variety of ideas as a result of the imagination that was activated and recreates the object that it is given to the subject, in a way that is not obtained by objective and intellectual knowledge.

This was the perspective that led Hermann Broch - one of the most important writers of the twentieth century - to dedicate himself to literature, in the search for a project to “pour all the esthetic into the power of the ethical” (BROCH, apud ARENDT, 2003, p. 103). He sought literature to deal with themes such as death and finitude, precisely because, according to him, philosophy fails to give validity to themes of this nature. In other words, certain themes reach us entirely through the senses, through esthetics.

*The death of Virgil* (1945), considered a masterpiece, narrates the last 18 hours of life of Virgil, the author of the Latin work *Aeneid*, since his arrival at the port of Brindisi (in Italy) coming from Athens, where he sought inspiration to conclude the *Aeneid*, until his death in the Palace of Emperor Augustus. The novel-poem - so it is considered - in “undulant lyrical rhythms”, as Arendt says, deals with the confrontation of the poet Virgil with death, with his life, and the life of his time, a world of “value disintegration”. Virgil fears that death will prevent him from completing his work, which he considers imperfect and incomplete and that is why he wants to burn it.

The novel shows, with great literary virtuosity, the death inscribed in the flesh, in the aging of the body and in the “mysterious way” that “we are tied to time, mysteriously it flows ... empty current ... superficial current and we ignore both its course and its depth ... ”(BROCH, 1982, p. 364). The strength of the poetic narrative expands and intensifies the understanding of the human finitude, the human incoherencies, the desire for totality. To use one of Broch’s expressions, the novel rebuilds “existential layers” that reveal the

meaning of death, of pain, of human blindness. What Virgil seeks is the “knowledge of death” (BROCH, 1982, p. 334), the redemption of death.

At the end of the novel, there is a kind of revelation, an epiphany:

[...] Broch's Virgil ends up understanding, by apprehending in an existential way, the fact that the essential, the revelation of death, lies precisely beyond the word. On the other hand, only action, and not words, can give death a human sense. (STEINER, 2001, p. 281).

The absolute of redemption is above the words of the poet, it is the ethical appeal, in the sense of providing assistance to others. In this way, the esthetic experience promoted by Broch's work of absolute beauty, which transcends the limits of reality to touch the mystery of death, provokes in us the amplification of the somaesthetic feeling of frailty, which was instituted by the limitations of the body (as mentioned above in this text), to reveal, in an intensity of feelings, the spiritual testimony that the fundamental value of life, in the face of all limitations, lies in the attempt to be virtuous. This shows the link between bodily emotions, feelings, esthetics, and the ethical, as well as the educating capacity of esthetic feelings.

## **Final considerations**

In an attempt to make the relationship between ethics and the body less obscure, I initially sought to lay out the reasons that circumscribe the corporeal within the scope of metaphysical dichotomies, assigning it a peripheral place, something to be dominated and even denied or silenced. The origin of this interpretation, rooted in the Platonic, Cartesian, and Christian tradition, points to the primacy of the soul, self-awareness, and the rational foundation of ethics. As discussed throughout the text, the path traveled by the issue of the body in Western culture suffers profound oscillations, ranging from the approach made by Hume regarding moral feelings, through the contribution of Nietzsche, who highlights the radically corporeal dimension of the functions related to awareness and thinking. However, it is with Espinosa and, contemporarily, with the neuroscientist Damasio that the approach of unity between body and soul affirms the ethical behavior associated with body affections, breaking with the opposition body-soul or body-mind, to affirm the favorable position of continuity between the body and the mental representations of what happens with the body.

Shusterman's pragmatic approach is situated in this broader movement of valuing the corporeal, added, however, to the originality that the somatic experience takes in the constitution of our being. His hypothesis for refusing to consider the body in ethics is due to the fact that the body expresses the fundamental ambiguity of the human being, revealed both in the power and in the frailty of bodily experiences, above all, the experience of pain and death. The ethical discussion tried to circumvent this frailty, silencing the corporeal dimension and ensuring the foundation on more solid bases, derived from rational activity. Shusterman defends improving awareness of bodily feelings and

actions to favor the knowledge of ourselves, since ethical principles and norms depend on how the body experiences them.

Lastly, I suggested the educational way in which esthetics can operate in favor of the corporeal in ethics, through the work of emotions and feelings, particularly in the example of Hermann Broch's *The Death of Virgil*. The esthetic experience, promoted by novels, helps to understand the complexity of ethical decisions, which depend not only on the intellectual dimension, but also on emotional experiences, whose base is corporeal.

My intention was to break the silence of the relationship between body and ethics. Recognizing that the body is at the base of our emotions is a decisive step towards an ethic that does not intend to ignore our condition in the world. The mere intellectualistic knowledge of passions is not enough to overcome its strength, but rather the work on our emotions, from the recognition that the body acts on mental life.

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