

# Introduction

## The Emerging Body of Ontological Understanding

The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.

—T. S. Eliot, “The Dry Salvages”

The forming of the five senses is a labor of the entire history of the world down to the present.

—Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*

Too many philosophers have either neglected the human body or seriously misrepresented it, treating it as a substance. In many fundamental ways, Heidegger too neglects the body. But at least his representation of the being of the human as *Da-sein* breaks away from the imposition of a substance metaphysics, opening our embodiment, our being, to the world.

The potential half-guessed, the nature only half-understood, is the human body. This is not the body of anatomy lessons, neurophysiology, and mechanics, nor the body as physical object moved by a Cartesian mind, but the body of experience, thrown open to be in the world. Retrieving for initial guidance Aristotle’s concept of *dunamis*, we must renounce once and for all the metaphysical projection of the human body as an enclosed material substance and commence thinking of it as an organically organized, livingly unified system of capacities, abilities, and dispositions open and exposed to the world in contexts of interaction. This is the only way by which we can understand (1) how the three stages and dimensions of understanding constitutive of human embodiment—the pre-ontological,

the ontic, and the ontological—function, and (2) how the event of being can appropriate us for the history-making task that Heidegger envisions. However, (3) we cannot be appropriated for that task unless we *embody* it in developing a body of *ontological* understanding, a body of sense and sensibility, the character of which would realize its potential for engaging the world in a way that might overcome some of the malignancies and malevolence that Heidegger discerns in his ontologically grounded critique of our time, our epoch. Hence the importance, in my attempt to continue Heidegger's project, of recognizing and retrieving the promising ontological potential in the nature of our capacities and capabilities—for instance, in regard to the contemporary disposition and character of our visual and auditory perception and our gestures. This is a question of developing the potential, the promise, in those natural endowments of our embodiment through mindful practices and processes of learning, so that, as much as possible, habits of comportment conducive to the ontological dimension of an ethical life—that is, in regard to the being of beings—would be encouraged to emerge from the proper cultivation of human nature without the imposition of repressive social discipline. As I conceive it, this work is a continuation of the Enlightenment project, but without its teleology of reason and its excessive faith in progress.



I found my way into the thought of Martin Heidegger only after a long intensive study of the phenomenological writings of Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. While I discovered much in Husserl that was congenial, I could not be comfortable in the rationalism and subjectivism constituting his extreme withdrawal into transcendental idealism. In Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception, however, I found a work much more congenial to my philosophical and aesthetic disposition. And I happily immersed my thought in the elegant and eloquent prose of his phenomenology before realizing that I needed to engage with the thought of Husserl's extraordinary student. Entering into that thought was for some time overwhelming. I eventually resolved to put aside secondary sources and venture to understand Heidegger's thought on my own.

However, I did get a chance, while a student at Harvard, where its philosophers were committed to an empiricism scornful of *Being and Time*, to delve into Spinoza's *Ethics*. Born into a family of Jewish culture, I was drawn to the thought of this philosopher. One of the topics that caught

my attention and intrigued me concerned his handling of the relation that binds mind and body. It seemed to me that he was venturing a very original way of thinking about it, connecting the character of that relation to spiritual exercises and ethical practices of the self that were inspired by Greek and Roman Stoicism.

In “Of the Power of the Intellect; or of Human Freedom,” the final part of his *Ethics*, Spinoza says, “The mind can cause all the modifications of the body, or the images of things, to be related to the idea of God [*ideam Dei*]” (Proposition XIV).<sup>1</sup> Moreover, he also argues that, “In God, there exists an idea which expresses the essence of this or that human body under the form of eternity” (Proposition XXII). Arguing that “it is the nature of reason to conceive things under the form of eternity,” he explains what this proposition means, saying, “Everything that the mind understands under the form of eternity it understands [. . .] because it also conceives the essence of the body under the form of eternity” (Proposition XXIX). These propositions, together with others, lead him to the proposition that, as he puts it: “He who possesses a body fit for many things possesses a mind of which the greater part is eternal” (Proposition XXXIX).

Elaborating the significance of this proposition, he argues that, “In this life, it is our chief endeavor to change the body of infancy, so far as its nature permits and is conducive thereto, into another body which is fitted for many things, and which is related to a mind conscious as much as possible of itself, of God, and of objects [. . .].” Developing the potential capabilities of the mind, one correspondingly develops the body, hence its perceptivity; likewise, developing the sense and sensibility of the body, hence its perceptivity, one correspondingly develops the mind. In this regard, what is most important for Spinoza is the cultivation of what he calls the “intellectual love of God.” That is, as Spinoza formulates it, love of “God or Nature”: “Deus sive Natura.” Arguing for a certain version of Idealism and Rationalism that later, in Schelling, would give substance to Romanticism, Spinoza also identifies this “intellectual love of God,” perhaps best understood as dedication to an ethical life of virtue and care, with the assumption, or rather adoption, of the viewpoint of eternity (Proposition XXIX).

In other words, it is important for us to *imagine* and project what we think would be the ideal world, a morally perfect world—things as they would present themselves if contemplated from the standpoint of redemption [*wie vom Standpunkt der Erlösung*], as Theodor Adorno phrased it in concluding *Minima Moralia*—because that speculative vision, that projection, would both encourage and guide us to work for the moral improvement

of ourselves and the actual world.<sup>2</sup> That, he argues, is “the only philosophy that can be responsibly practiced in the face of despair.” Heidegger would perhaps call that standpoint the standpoint of the *Geschick*—the destiny that would befit our humanity. It is not easy, however, to determine what world—what ethical life—Heidegger’s vision of destiny imagines.

In his “Letter on Humanism,” Heidegger repudiates the Western world’s inheritance of Humanism, arguing that in neglecting to think our relation to being, Humanism fails to recognize our true “dignity.” However, he leaves his conception of Humanism in a condition of abstraction and indeterminacy. Presumably, our “dignity” is a question of giving thought to being itself, and not getting lost in the world of beings. But surely, that is important not only because, having been endowed with the capacity to think, we human beings should thankfully exercise and fulfill that endowment, but because giving thought to being is *necessary* for protecting the *being of beings* from the peril in forms of nihilism—reduction and reification—that are increasingly determining our world. Ultimately, it is not only our relation to the being of all the beings in our world that is at stake, but also, the being of our own being, our very humanity. I think that is what Heidegger means when he argues, all too abstractly, that our true dignity lies in giving thought to being. And I would argue that achieving an insightful understanding of the being of beings, an awareness that brings the different beings to light in their deepest individual and differentiating truth, is a moral task: a task that only we human beings, in touch with our *ownmost* sense of humanity, can undertake. Our “dignity” is in living by that understanding.

Heidegger repudiates and avoids burdening his thought with “morality.” But he is against mindless conformity to abstract principles and formulae, codifications of social and cultural practices that reduce “morality” to self-interest and custom. What he wants, I think, is a “morality” rooted in thoughtful caring for the being of beings. Such understanding of being, and the caring for being that it motivates, is what I believe he had in mind when he invoked a “fundamental, originary ethics.” Ontology and ethics are not only inseparable: they affect and inform one another. I shall have more to say about this in chapter 6.



The *Ethics* may be read as Spinoza’s answer to the question: What is the *character* of the perceptivity that must correspond to this “intellectual love of God”? “Intellectual” is in our time a correct yet misleading interpretive

translation: it suggests that this love is merely a cognitive or conceptual engagement—just the *thought* of such love. I submit, however, that the “intellectual” nature of this love abides in its attentiveness, its mindfulness. Since the world and all the beings within it are thought to be “in” God and “belong” to God, that love should translate into how we *interact* with all beings and with the being of the world itself, namely, as befits their nature. Thus, Spinoza’s ethics, deduced, in effect, from his ontology, essentially concerns the character of that interaction. This interpretation is possible only because of the way Spinoza brings mind and body together. In “Of Human Bondage” (Proposition XXVII), Spinoza brazenly overturns the epistemological priority of the mind in the entire history of idealism from Plato to Descartes. With thinking steeped in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* and *De Anima*, he says, “The more capable the body is of being affected in many ways, and affecting external bodies in many ways, the more capable is the mind.”<sup>3</sup> This also bears on the nature of the love that Spinoza had in mind.

My reading of Spinoza stirred me to ponder a difficult question: What embodiment, what perceptual capabilities, would correspond to the mind’s “intellectual love of God”? That was one of the questions that launched the project that has become my life’s work. In the light of Heidegger’s critique of our contemporary world, that question led me to wonder: What transformations in the historical character of perception are needed? How might a perception that redeems its potential change our world? There are hints in Heidegger’s texts, such as “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” “Poetically Man Dwells,” “The Thing,” and “The Origin of the Work of Art.” In these texts, Heidegger imaginatively projects a world informed by a new ontology, a new experience and understanding of being.

I suggest that the questions Spinoza’s *Ethics* provokes point toward a responsibility engaging the potential inherent in our perception. They point toward a claim carried by, and in, the most fundamental disposition of our embodied nature. That claim, as Heidegger will argue, calls us and appropriates us, demanding that we consciously take responsibility for our role in the necessary conditions for the experiencing of an intelligible, meaningful world that our very existence, our simply being bodily present in the world, makes.

For Heidegger, though, much more is at stake than the realization and fulfillment of our bodily nature, our capacities and capabilities, as *Dasein*. In question is how we should dwell on this planet earth and sojourn amid its beings. But this *is* a question concerning the character of our way of *embodying* openness, hence relationality, in our situated presence—*Da-sein*.

Perception is fundamental in this receptive enquiring openness. Thus, understanding the *character* of our perception is crucial to understanding the world in which we are living—and indeed the history and future of this world, which Heidegger’s narrative brings to light through his critical reading of the history of metaphysics. Who we are and who we want to become demands that we reflect critically on the ontology implicit in the contemporary character of our perceptivity, our interactions with the world and the beings appearing in it.

Heidegger seems to have felt an abiding affinity with Aristotle, the one philosopher whose reflections in *De Anima* on potentiality and human capacities might have suggested the key to continuing Spinoza’s thoughts in the context of his analytic of *Dasein* and the corresponding phenomenology of perception. Yet he never committed time to thinking in connection with Aristotle about the questions that Spinoza’s propositions pose concerning the development, or perfecting, of the human body as endowed with the capacity for an “intellectual love of God.”

In the context of Spinoza’s ethics, I would argue that the “perfection” of the human body in and as the “love of God or Nature” is the never-ending work of embodying and perfecting ways of feeling, enacting, and living that love in everything one does and says. Now, this “love of God or Nature” is called an “intellectual” love—meaning, I suggest, that what is called for is a mindfulness and dedication to the practice of virtue that comes, in large measure, from our self-reflection and self-examination; and it relates to everything we encounter in the world with due respect and care, *as if* God, or a trace of God’s touch, were actually invested in its material nature, or *as if* God left some of Himself on or within the nature of every form of being, so that everything we are engaged with would be received, at least initially, with fitting open-mindedness and generosity of spirit—*as if* it were manifesting the hidden material presence of God or God’s work. For Spinoza, I think this process of developing a love of God is a love that touches and affects everything we see, hear, taste, sense, and handle; and it would essentially involve an attitude grounded in the felt embodiment of the teachings inherited from the biblical texts, together with prayer and other sacred rituals and practices, giving this embodiment in voice, words, and gesture the discipline that would shape and perfect its understanding and expression of love, sympathy, and care. The hidden presence of God in all beings, or say the sacredness attributed to everything, is thus to be found in our *interactions* with the world. To think of God as the one and only sub-stance, or as the sacredness of being, is, I wish to propose, to think of the presence of God, or the sacredness of Nature, as manifest in

the ethical demand for appropriate acknowledgment, constitutive of everything everywhere. And that comes down to treating everything in a way that befits its “nature.” This is *a practice of love*: learning care in openness of heart and generosity of spirit in relating to everything in the world. As for what is dangerous and evil, it is still a question of treating the beings in our world as befits their “nature.” This, I believe, is Spinoza’s conception of an embodied ethical life with a deeply felt sense of the ontological dimension, guided by the religious teachings.

In giving the body such a significant role, corresponding to the perfecting of the mind in both knowledge and mindfulness, Spinoza ventured a conception of ethical life that was, in his day, and still is in ours, a very bold and radical thought. It was, in effect, an attempt to begin thinking *from* embodied experience. But, first of all, it was an awkward attempt to rethink the omnipresence of a hidden God through a radically new conception of substance: sub-stance not as something merely material, nor as something mystical, but rather as positing, or indicating, the sacredness that is felt to *under-lie and in-form* the presence of every being. That felt sacredness *is* the presence of God. In question is, therefore, is a deep sense of love expressed in all the ways that we inhabit perception, gestures, and words.

The perfection of the human body involves us in endeavoring to draw our capacities and capabilities in perception, voice, and gesture into a mindfulness that realizes a love that corresponds to, and befits, the nature of everything in the world, and the world itself, in which we live. This, I suggest, is the essence of Spinoza’s “intellectual love of God.” Needless to say, this interpretation takes us far from a substance ontology and metaphysics, situating us in a *dynamic relationship* between us and the beings of the world: an *interaction* with the beings in our world in which we are mindful of their (way of) being and attentive to what befits their particular nature.

And precisely this is the historically persisting subject of Spinoza’s *Ethics*. How should we embody, and indeed endeavor to perfect, the intellectual love of God? Because of the fact that everything belongs to and takes part in the divine substance, and is thus an “attribute” of the divine substance, such that the presence of God is “in” all things, ethics concerns how we should relate to everything in our world and how we should relate to the world itself. What is the appropriate disposition and attunement in our worldly interactions? And how should we strive to embody it more perfectly? What does the love of “God or Nature” mean? The *Ethics* is Spinoza’s answer.

If what we call God is present in—and, in effect, nothing other than—all that in any way *is*, and therefore *is* even in the mode of absence or evil, then everything is sacred and needs to be treated accordingly—and

that means as befits its distinctive nature. An ethical life would consequently *embody* the *character* of this felt relation to the substance, the essence, of all things. This relation to the being of beings would be, then, the loving mindfulness constitutive of the intellectual love of God—“God or Nature.”

It is questionable whether Spinoza himself could ever have been comfortable thinking about God solely in this way. What he would think today of his ingenious attempt to reconcile the science of his time with theology is impossible to determine. But my interpretation eliminates the problematic notion of substance, channeling its religious attitude—its sense of the world as a sacred gift and unfathomable blessing—into the thoughtful sensibility required of ethical responsibility: insofar as possible, attentive to the being of all beings with an open mind, respectful, caring, generous, loving, as befits the nature of each being. This is the embodiment of the temperament and sensibility, the “spirit” that inhabits and nurtures an ethical life.



With problems and questions about the character of perception and sensibility provoking me, I undertook a project of thought that eventuated in the publication of a trilogy that, as the writing unfolded, I called “the emerging body of understanding,” bearing in mind Heidegger’s evocation of earth and sky in “The Origin of the Work of Art” and in such later writings as “The Thing” and “Building, Dwelling and Thinking.” In this trilogy, the question for us as mortals to ponder was how we should *under-stand* what it means for us to be *standing* on the earth and dwelling *under* the immeasurable sky. For me, this question called for a phenomenology of our embodiment in seeing, hearing, motility, and gesture: a phenomenology that must be hermeneutical, because, inasmuch as motility, gesturing, seeing, hearing, and the other three modalities of perception are forms of disclosiveness, it is a question of a prior holistic context of meaning forming the background of our world; and such a context, with its temporal and historical dimensions, and its inevitable boundary limits, is always at work as the condition for all intelligibility. Meaningfulness accordingly emerges from the background in an interplay of concealment and unconcealment.

Merleau-Ponty’s first major work, *The Structure of Behavior* (1942), a critique of Empiricism, Rationalism, and Idealism with regard to understanding human nature and human existence, laid the ground for his second major work, *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), which draws on research in empirical psychology, the phenomenology of Husserl (especially



his 1900 *Logical Investigations*, his 1913 *Ideas I: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, his 1928 *Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*, his 1929 *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, and his 1931 *Cartesian Meditations*), and Heidegger's first major work, *Being and Time* (1927). Even though Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* boldly developed Husserl's phenomenological studies, challenging their transcendental idealism in order to reconcile them with the existential phenomenology he found in *Being and Time*, his approach remained to some extent like Husserl's, namely, still under the sway of Cartesian subjectivism. However, he continued to elaborate his phenomenological approach, writing on art, nature, language, and the child's stages of social development in the course of its acquisition of language. And he obviously continued to read and reread Heidegger's published work as well as Husserl's very late texts, such *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (1936). I conjecture that this reading and rereading, especially in the 1950s, finally enabled him to think his way toward completing the process of breaking away from the remaining vestiges of Cartesianism troubling his thinking. That movement past Cartesianism is singularly manifest in his last lectures and writings concerning the phenomenology of perception, most notably, perhaps, his "Working Notes," published in *The Visible and the Invisible* (1959–1961). In these last lectures and writings, working with such key constructs as "flesh," "ecstatic" intentionality, "chiasm," "intertwining," and "reversibility," "hiddenness," and "unconcealment," Merleau-Ponty exposed the open pre-objective dimension of being, a figure-ground dynamic that precedes the emergence and formation of the subject-object structure.

In the course of an intense and extensive process, slowly reading through much of the available collection of Heidegger's lectures, seminars, and other texts, I arrived at two strongly compelling conclusions, the second one of them truly surprising and exciting. First, that Heidegger was, from the middle of the 1920s into the time of his death, unwaveringly committed to the phenomenological method as he understood it, namely, as *phainesthai*, a method for letting things reflexively show themselves from out of themselves—a method, therefore, for thinking from out of our lived experience (*aus der Erfahrung*), conceived as even more radical, and more hermeneutical, hence more faithfully phenomenological, than Husserl's method, which claimed to return to "the things themselves." And *second*, that in its essentials, there is ultimately no difference between Heidegger's fully developed phenomenology of perception and Merleau-Ponty's final version of his phenomenology of perception. The chiasm, intertwining, and

reversibility that figure in the latter appear in the former as “belonging-togetherness” (“*Zugehörigkeit*”), “mutual pull” (“*Bezug*”), “oscillation” (“*Gegenschwung, Schwingung*”), and “vibration” (“*Schweben*”). And Heidegger, like Merleau-Ponty, attempts to return reflection to experience that dimension which precedes the emergence of the subject-object structure, concentrating on what is, in effect, the dynamic tension in the figure-ground *Gestalt* and the reifying reduction of that dynamic *Gestalt*, in our time, to the *Ge-stell* (for Heidegger, see GA 7: 266/EGT 103; for Merleau-Ponty, see *Phénoménologie de la perception*, 254/*Phenomenology of Perception*, 219). The significance of that return to our belonging-togetherness with being, for Heidegger, is that, as I would describe the matter, that experience can lead us into a bodily felt sense of the claim on our responsibility in regard to being. Heidegger argues for that belonging-togetherness, but he fails to recognize how that implicates our responsibility.

Although the phenomenological method calls for describing our experience just as it is lived, I was at first surprised to discover that both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty use phenomenology in a way that departs from this discipline, as, for instance, when Heidegger retrieves the “oscillation” in the belonging-togetherness of our experience of being and when Merleau-Ponty retrieves the “melodic arc” in the most ordinary of gestures. How can these descriptions claim phenomenological truth? The answer is that neither philosopher was afraid to delve beneath our common, habitual experience to retrieve a deeper dimension, hoping that the description, functioning performatively like metaphor, would make itself true by a revelation that guides us into recognizing and living in the truth constitutive of the deeper experience. Merleau-Ponty describes this deeper, older dimension as the prereflective, preconceptual, and prepersonal. Heidegger calls it the pre-ontological, to be retrieved for development as the ontological by engaging thought in a process somewhat like Platonic recollection.

In the fiction of literature, truth-telling is always paradoxical. In *Languages of Truth*, Salman Rushdie, making an argument for story-telling, wrote that “tales full of beautiful impossibility, which were not true, but by being not true told the truth.”<sup>4</sup> Plato, however, thought that fiction is corrupting because it cannot tell the truth. Yet, in *The Republic*, he resorted to myth in order to communicate a truth not recognized by common experience. Other philosophers recognize the truth in literary fiction, even weaving the insights of fiction into their arguments.

In his *Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty proposes descriptions of our lived experience that are so much deeper than our ordinary,

habitually shallow and reflectively inattentive experience that they can at first seem to be false; yet, if we take them to heart and ruminate on them, these descriptions have the power to make themselves true to our experience. And moreover, we are likely to feel, as the descriptions are absorbed, that, in fact, they *were already true* to our experience. By being not true to the shallowness and distraction of our everyday life, the philosopher's stories can likewise tell the truth—a deeper, keenly felt truth, a deeper realism.

Many of the early scholars working with Heidegger's texts were inclined to regard his more extravagant or bewildering phenomenological descriptions as merely poetic metaphor, thereby effectively denying these descriptions their disclosive, transformative power. For Heidegger, though, the essence of metaphor, as its Greek derivation should always remind us, is its revelatory power, a power to carry us into a new experience.

The convergence of the two philosophers should not, actually, be so surprising, since Merleau-Ponty attended some of Heidegger's lectures and was familiar with Heidegger's work. However, the way he elaborated and formulated the phenomenology is nevertheless entirely wrought in a process of reflection drawn from his own resources. Consequently, he is able to give compelling embodiment—flesh—to Heidegger's much more abstract and less experientially elaborated description of human existence. Whereas Heidegger's thought served to guide Merleau-Ponty's thought toward recognizing the *ontological dimension* of the phenomenology he was exploring, suggesting a way for him to think the ontological dimension of our embodiment and perception, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology could serve to provide Heidegger's ontological thought with the embodiment it very much needs, since Heidegger repeatedly turned away from giving human *embodiment* the thought it requires. Although in "The Principle of Identity" (1957) and "Time and Being" (1962), as well as in certain other texts, for example, in "The Way to Language" (GA 12: 248/OWL 128) and *The Event*, wherein he discusses the "incorporation" (*Einverleibung*) of our "most fundamental disposition," the "gentlest of laws" (GA 71: 216–24/E 185–92), Heidegger does, in effect, engage the phenomenology of the emergent subject-object structure in a way that moves into the proximity of an embodied felt experience; but he fails to recognize it: an experience, namely, of our ontological appropriation, the claim on our responsibility that is constitutive of our intimate relation—our inseparable togetherness with being. His failure in this regard means that he leaves the appropriation (*Ereignung*) of our most fundamental disposition in responding to an experience of the event of being dangling in the thin air of abstraction.

It was after returning to Spinoza and reading him in the light of a new acquaintance with Aristotle that for the first time I began to give thought to the so-called mind-body dualism from a perspective distinctly different from the one that dominated philosophical thinking in the academies. For me, Spinoza's propositions on mind, body, and the intellectual love of God (God or Nature) were a provocation that caused me to wonder about the nature of a body that would embody, or bear, a mind dedicated to, and stirred by, an intellectual love of God. What would such a body be like? Recognizing that that body must be an extraordinary body, not the body that most of us inhabit, I began to give thought to what the difference is and how it would occur in keeping with a mind that had become appropriated by a deep love of God. The question of transformation suggested that Aristotle's thought, especially what he wrote in *De Anima*, could provide guidance. But what occurred to me first of all was that we must not reduce the living human body to a substance. Aristotle's substance metaphysics has been responsible for this reduction; and it is precisely the sway of this reduction that leads thinking into the intractable aporetic problems confronting us in mind-body dualism. However, at the same time that he argued for a substance metaphysics, he introduced one of his most important, most consequential contributions, namely, a conceptual framework for thinking about, and understanding, the operation of potentiality in the disposition of human capacities. The strength of the argument for this conceptual framework should have compelled Aristotle to abandon substance metaphysics in thinking about the embodiment of the living human being. In any case, the argument did succeed in making me discern the problems with substance metaphysics. And it made sense for me, thereafter, to approach a number of difficult problems in epistemology and ethics in terms of the conceptual framework that Aristotle himself introduced. The living human body (*Leib*, not *Körper*) is an organically organized, unified system of dispositions, capabilities, and capacities continuously interacting with an environment that needs to be understood dynamically in terms of potentiality and actuality. It is in these terms that our embodiment—the body that we are—should be thought. Otherwise, as we witness in Heidegger's struggles to understand the human body, philosophical thought will inevitably get tangled up in a substance metaphysics from which there is no escape. Thinking of the human body as an organically organized system of capacities and capabilities engaging with its world avoids the impasse. Working with Heidegger's thought to bring out its bearing on the emerging body of ontological understanding, I regard the task before our project to be the *development* of these capaci-

ties and capabilities in the time-space fields of perception and gesture. At stake in this development is their moral disposition, their character, their “dignity,” considered in the light of Heidegger’s critique of our way of life in this epoch.

As we have noted, Heidegger formulated a compelling critique of contemporary life, including strong criticisms of the character of our typical ways of seeing and hearing. Implicit within those criticisms, I have discerned a vivid but still inchoate sense of what ways would be more desirable, implying that our modes of perception—in particular, seeing and hearing—are capabilities and capacities within which there are promising potentials that could be retrieved and developed. Getting at those promising potentials—what in *Being and Time* Heidegger calls our *Seinkönnen*—is what lies behind my project: the emerging of an ontological body of understanding. These potentials bear on the character of perception in the comportment of our ethical life. We have, therefore, a responsibility to retrieve and develop them.

In scholarly studies after Heidegger, it is not only the human body as such that has been neglected; our capacities and capabilities in perception and gesture have also been woefully neglected. My lifetime project has sought to give this subject the attention it requires, especially considering the fact that Heidegger’s compelling critique of the *character* of perception and gesture in contemporary life figures only occasionally and mostly in marginality. Although he makes a strong critique of metaphysics and challenges the metaphysical representation of the human body, rejecting a history that assumes it to be an enclosed substance, he nevertheless fails to find a way to represent it in a fitting way, somehow unable to complete his escape from the metaphysical picture. I suggest that thinking of the body in terms of capacities and capabilities the *character* of which can be developed makes that escape easier.

Pursuing this trajectory, I have attempted to subject the *character* of our perception and gestures to a critique that indicates, beyond the faults of character that Heidegger’s critique of contemporary life accuses, ways for these capacities and capabilities to be developed for the sake of ethical life. Learning such development, transforming the character of our seeing, hearing, and gesturing, calls for Socratic self-examination and work on ourselves. In experiencing the event of being itself—what Heidegger calls “*Ereignis*,” we deepen and strengthen this Socratic work, and we dedicate the questioning and the caring to the being of all beings, past, present, and future.

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In a poem concerning death, T. S. Eliot says, “I see the eyes but not the tears / This is my affliction.”<sup>5</sup> Our eyes, we think, are for seeing. But our eyes are also capable of tears. What is the significance of that second capability? Why and how are those two functions organically connected?

Perhaps the root of our seeing is the capacity for seeing with sympathy, manifest in tears. If, in a phenomenology concerned with the nature of human vision, methodically disciplined attention could guide us into a felt sense of that rootedness, a prereflective, pre-ontological understanding of our intimate connection to the very being of beings, then the sympathetic character of our seeing might be encouraged to develop, greatly benefiting our ethical life and overcoming some of the contemporary tendencies that Heidegger subjected to criticism. Such could be the performative force of phenomenological description.

A similar approach to our capacity for listening and hearing, taking us into a bodily felt sense of our prelinguistic, pre-ontological sense of our connectedness to being, hence to the being of audible beings, could likewise benefit ethical life, improving the quality of communication (*Gespräch*) and consequently improving mutual understanding and sympathy. We may hear the other in an objective, scientifically confirmable sense; but such mere hearing is not enough. We need to listen wholeheartedly to the other in order to hear *properly*. That kind of listening is encouraged when we retrieve our pre-ontological sense of being and learn to live in an ontological understanding of being.

It is unfortunate that, while Heidegger formulated compelling critical observations and arguments regarding the character of our seeing and hearing, which in today’s world tends to be either atrophied or malevolent, he does not undertake any corresponding endeavor to explore how we might redeem the potential promise in these modalities by retrieving their underlying ontological dimension, their inseparable connection with being, and accordingly ameliorating, at least to some extent, how seeing and hearing experience the being of the beings with which they are engaged. If he had undertaken this work of recollection in regard, say, to perception, then it would have been apparent how the ontological dimension serves to ground the “original ethics” that he invokes in *Being and Time*. He projects in the realm of thought the way from ontology to ethics, but does not draw on phenomenology to illuminate what that really means for the achieving of a life in which our seeing and hearing would approach, in the character of their self-development, an appropriation that could make possible the

redeeming of their promise. Derrida nicely illuminates how phenomenology is related to ontology and ethics.<sup>6</sup>

Philosophical thought is still only now beginning, as it frees itself from Idealism, Rationalism, and Empiricism, to approach an appropriately phenomenological understanding of this gift, this endowment, the human form of embodiment thrown open to be and dwell in the world, exposed, vulnerable, mortal. The lived body: *die erlebter Leib*. The chapters in this book gather together some of my contributions to this project, the emerging body of ontological understanding.