

AN EXISTENTIAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL VIEW OF INSPIRATION

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With our sensible and sentient nature we find meaning through perceptual forms, nascent and original, as they emerge from our experience in time and space. In the existential distance offered by reflection through the power of the body to transform and transfigure meaning, one apprehends and conveys in a single motion the perceived reality of human existence. Not only does one find meaning revealed in the distance offered by reflection but it is possible to find meaning in the receptive, openness of inspiration, the direct, immediate valued meaning.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty calls the power of the human body an already motility. The power of giving meaning is already into the body and is displayed in our aims and gestures. The power of projecting that significance is extending. It is our capacity to synthesize and reason, to arrive at the comprehension of seemingly dissimilar and unconnected strands of experience. This announces our existential capacity of projective consciousness, subtended by an intentional arc.¹ This intentional arc projects our field of already lived meaning and guides the perception and meaning of ongoing experience. The arc brings about the unity of sensibility and motility. It is a projective activity which leaps towards other spontaneous acts. This allows us to envision options, possibilities and alternatives. The projective function of consciousness provides the capacity to distance ourselves from the world. It is possible for the projective function to go limp. This limpness means one cannot project before oneself and enter into a vision that cannot be seen.

The projective function of consciousness, our imagination as a capacity to envision possibilities, is expressed by the living body's ability to cast before itself the essential features of self-experience. When this function goes limp, falters, it is not the same as our existential incompleteness. It is a deficient mode of being. Understanding human pathology in this way is different from definitions offered by interpretations based on scientific principles and measurement. Instead, it is understood as an announcement of an alternative reality, one available only to the logic of one's own experience and beyond which one cannot move. Being stuck means the inability of the power of the body to project emerging ongoing shifts and changes in self-experience. In the limpness of the projective function one is unable to distance oneself from what is outside oneself and in this way is unable to stand free to receive anything from outside oneself. The aspiring arc wilts with the inability of the capacity to envision.

The ambiguity of human experience demands that our ways of viewing experience, to arrive at its understanding, be open to ways of knowing which are not based on the linearity of logic. Inspiration directly links experiential gaps in meaning. A knowing touch projects one, through movement, to meet that which is meaningful. Meaning can come through in oblique movements. Logic and reason display the limits, the finiteness in ways of knowing which are reducible. Either without the other is a deficient mode of being.

In a similar way, as a boundary to human existence, in the existential phenomenological view death is described as a backdrop against which to view life. That we can imagine our existence in reverse, as beginning in authenticity through the known and unknown suggests it is our nature to transcend every human boundary. This is our capacity for self-transcendence and gives expression to the pioneering spirit of the human being, the existential freedom to define our own meaning and future through the intermediary of the body.

No matter to which theoretical perspective one turns in questioning, one cannot know what resides beyond. Death is an established boundary. Our bodily being is an expression of the finite boundary of knowing. It is an unknown which cannot be known. It is this capacity for unknowing as well as comprehending which is given recognition in our experiences of inspiration. Artists project themselves into the opening where that which comes from beyond them is dis-closed. This is related to our possibilities for self-transcendence, for spontaneously arising action which reveals boundaries of our capacities for being human.

Although we project ourselves into the unknown, unknowable space of death, our own death cannot be known and we acknowledge it as one of our ownmost authentic possibilities. Death becomes an existential boundary upon which we bounce our meaning, that veil through which the present is viewed withdraws itself. The unpredictable nature of death, as one of our ownmost authentic possibilities, releases us in a way which is similar to inspiration. Inspiration comes to us from beyond and death is that beyond which is our very own. Without death one's future is infinite. There would be no urgency or responsibility in life.

The paradox of this situation reveals that we understand human beings through wholeness. Life is ongoing and aspiring. Inspiration may be meaningful in an exceptional way as it reaches us from outside ourselves to enliven that which is already within. Inspiration, as spontaneously arising action of immediate experience, is that which reveals something in its availability. It is brought into visibility and shown in the actions of human beings.

Martin Heidegger presents the situated freedom into which we find ourselves *thrown* but which does not have the power or capacity to reveal for us the *who* which is implied by our finding ourselves *thrown*, nor the *where from which* we have originated.² Heidegger does not include that which transcends possibilities for experience which moves beyond the range of embodiment, neither is it revealed as to where from which *Dasein* (Being-there) is thrown into the world, nor the *who* of the one which throws *Dasein*. Although the freedom we experience is situated, boundaries which define the situation could be both inspiration and death. The where from which we are thrown is the unknown and the inability to grasp *Dasein* in its completeness is an impossibility because it is not-yet.

Heidegger's justification for examining the negative side of experience to reveal what the positive may mean is based upon the assumption that one cannot grasp the meaning of *Dasein* as the final boundary which defines being. Death is this boundary. As this suggests, any understanding of the human being cannot be grasped in its wholeness, in its totality. The spontaneity of inspiration and the cessation of experience as death share unpredictability. Neither one can be grasped in its wholeness, each is a boundary to human existence and neither can be known. Each must be accepted as it is and as it defines the nature of human existence. Any understanding which does not consider both is deficient. This offers a deepening of comprehension in the face of our possibility for non-existence. What emerges is an experience of the uncanny. The inability to outdistance, flee from or escape our ownmost possibility for being frees us. It frees us for action as though this existential boundary did not exist, to receive what comes from beyond us.

The ability to establish a reflective distance from immediate experience is the ground for the possibility of our freedom within time and space. In its perception it becomes a possibility and as Merleau-Ponty has revealed, acts of perception are acts of faith. Absolute knowing is as much an impossibility for human beings as is knowing one's own death. Both inspiration and death serve as boundaries which establish distance to envision what is possible. Without these boundaries our unfinished nature would prevent us the freedom found in self-transcendence as a mode of being. Creativity would be lost.

The potential for pathfinding, for pioneering, for flights to the moon, for medical breakthroughs in science, allows us the freedom to move beyond to what is possible. The projective function of consciousness to envision possibilities, to put them into action, establishes further boundaries to what is already known. There is no consciousness, says Mary Geneva Caruso, without memory.³ Finding oneself thrown, *having been thrown*, gives its forward self-extending finite thrown projection. One is temporally this side on the way to that side. The inability of projection is a deficient mode of

projection. Its possibility is the proof of this. To project an overarching unity gathers possibilities of existence. Consciousness projects into a there beyond its here. Projection is a release of a throw. This is an expression of that unfinished human existence which aspires to follow out, into the unknown, a continuing expression of power to not know, to not express, to not-be. Against the backdrop of nothing *stands out* something that wonders. The contextual boundaries in the experience of inspiration establish human events via the power of the human body. It is an initiating principle. Being is but cannot be from itself. This is a view of the human being as openness to. In this way inspiration blazes pathways for being.

Notes

- 1) Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New Jersey: The Humanities Press, 1976), p. 136.
- 2) Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 174.
- 3) Mary Geneva Caruso, *Reflection and Its Consequences* (San Francisco: Golden Phoenix Press, 1985), p. 53.