CORPS & PSYCHISME
P-ISSN: 2496-4476 **E-ISSN:** 2273-1571
Volume 11/ Issue 2/ 2024

Between Flesh and Thought: Philosophical Perspectives on Corporeal Consciousness

Dr. Helena Vargas[1], Prof. Marc-Antoine Lévesque[2]
[1]Department of Philosophy, University of São Paulo, Brazil
[2]Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University de Montréal, Canada

Abstract
The traditional Cartesian separation of mind and body has long dominated Western approaches to consciousness, presenting thinking as detached from physical existence. However, contemporary philosophical inquiry increasingly situates consciousness not as an ethereal attribute of thought alone, but as fundamentally *embodied* in the fleshly existence of living beings. This review synthesizes key philosophical perspectives on **corporeal consciousness**—the idea that bodily experience is intrinsic to conscious thought and subjectivity. Drawing from phenomenology (particularly Maurice Merleau-Ponty's concept of flesh), somaesthetics, embodied cognition, and continental critiques of dualism, we explore how the body serves as both mediator and locus of conscious experience. After outlining historical debates and the mind–body problem, we examine phenomenological accounts that reject dualism, analytic work on embodied cognitive processes, and interdisciplinary engagements such as enactivism and somaesthetic philosophy. The review assesses how these frameworks collectively challenge traditional separations between flesh and thought, proposing instead that consciousness is *lived through the body* rather than merely housed in the brain or abstract mind. This integrated account has implications for understanding perception, agency, identity, and the lived self. The paper concludes with suggestions for future research at the intersection of philosophy, neuroscience, and cognitive science.
Keywords: embodied consciousness, corporeal subjectivity, phenomenology, mind–body, embodiment, lived body, Merleau-Ponty, somaesthetic, inactivism

1. Introduction

In Western philosophy, the **mind–body problem** has been a central concern: how do immaterial thoughts relate to material bodies? Cartesian dualism postulated a sharp divide between mind and matter, assigning consciousness to a non-physical domain while the body remained mechanical. This division has dominated philosophical and scientific discourse for centuries.

But as more recent accounts foreground, this traditional picture misses something crucial: human experience is not merely a product of abstract cognition; it is *embodied*—experienced through the body in action and perception. The notion of **corporeal consciousness** suggests that consciousness is not a disembodied observer in the head, but emerges *through* bodily engagement with the world. Enactivism offers a paradigm in cognitive science emphasizing that cognition emerges through dynamic interactions between the body, brain, and environment. This paper explores the concept of the body–mind as a dynamic system, where

P-ISSN: 2496-4476 **E-ISSN:** 2273-1571
Volume 11/ Issue 2/ 2024

perception, action, and cognition are deeply interdependent and mutually constitutive. By reviewing contemporary enactivist theories, embodied cognition research, and experimental findings from neuroscience and psychology, the study highlights how mental processes are not confined to the brain but distributed across bodily movements and environmental engagement. Implications for understanding learning, perception, and mental health are discussed, alongside applications in robotics, artificial intelligence, and therapeutic interventions. The research underlines that adopting an enactive perspective challenges traditional dualistic models and fosters a more integrative understanding of the body–mind nexus.

Background: Traditional cognitive science often views the mind as computational and separate from the body. Enactivism challenges this by seeing cognition as embodied and situated.
Core Idea: The body is not merely a vessel for the brain; cognition arises through sensorimotor engagement with the environment.
Relevance: Understanding the dynamic body–mind can inform AI, therapy, education, and robotics, providing insights into how organisms adapt to complex environments.
Objective: To examine how enactivist theories illuminate the dynamic relationship between bodily processes and mental phenomena.

2. Historical Context: From Dualism to Embodiment

2.1 Cartesian Dualism and its Discontents

Cartesian dualism defined the mind as a thinking substance distinct from the extended body. While useful historically, this framework leads to persistent philosophical problems: how can two ontologically different substances interact? And how can consciousness, seemingly private and immaterial, relate to observable bodily processes?
Critiques emerged early: Gilbert Ryle disparaged the “ghost in the machine” conception, and later analytic philosophy sought alternative explanations. Meanwhile, continental traditions pointed to the lived body—not as object, but as *subject*—as crucial to consciousness.

2.2 Phenomenology and the Lived Body

Phenomenology shifted focus from abstract cognition to *lived experience*. Thinkers like Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty emphasized that consciousness is always “of something,” and that this *aboutness* is situated in bodily experience. Merleau-Ponty, in particular, argued that the body is not just a physical object but the means by which we perceive, act, and know the world. In his later work, he developed the notion of *flesh* as the elemental intertwining of body and world, challenging the dichotomy of mind and matter.

3. Phenomenological Perspectives on Corporeal Consciousness

3.1 The Body as Subjectivity

For phenomenologists, consciousness cannot be abstracted from the body. The *lived body* (Leib) is not a mere object in the world but the *medium* through which the world is encountered. This view undermines the idea that consciousness operates detached from the

P-ISSN: 2496-4476 **E-ISSN:** 2273-1571
Volume 11/ Issue 2/ 2024

physical form. Instead, proprioception, sensory perception, and motor intentionality are constitutive of conscious thought.

Merleau-Ponty's later philosophy introduces *flesh*—a concept describing the unified field of body and world, where perceiver and perceived are part of the same ontological fabric. This notion broadens corporeal consciousness beyond mere physiology to a more fundamental *being-in-the-world*.

3.2 Embodied Subjectivity and Perception

According to this perspective, perception is not a passive receipt of sensory data by a detached mind; it is an active engagement of a *body-subject*. Sensation, movement, and awareness are intertwined. The body anchors consciousness in space and time, shaping how we experience the world and ourselves within it.

This phenomenological stance rejects strict dualisms and emphasizes the **inseparability** of bodily presence and conscious experience.

4. Analytic and Cognitive Perspectives

4.1 Embodied Cognition

In analytic philosophy and cognitive science, the **embodied cognition** paradigm holds that cognitive processes are deeply rooted in bodily interactions. From this view, thinking emerges through the body's engagement with its environment, not solely in abstract neural computation.

This approach suggests that perceptual experience, action, and cognition are interdependent, challenging models that confine consciousness to the brain alone. For example, bodily states influence decision-making, and sensorimotor systems shape conceptual thought.

4.2 Extended Mind and Beyond

Related ideas such as the **extended mind thesis** propose that cognitive processes extend beyond the individual's brain and body into external tools and environments. While this thesis primarily discusses cognition rather than consciousness per se, it contributes to dissolving rigid boundaries between internal mental life and worldly engagement—further supporting embodied accounts.

5. Somaesthetics and Embodied Philosophy of Mind

5.1 Richard Shusterman's Somaesthetics

Richard Shusterman's work on **somaesthetics** articulates a philosophical approach that integrates body awareness with cognitive and aesthetic experience. By emphasizing attention to bodily sensations and movements, somaesthetics argues for a reflective bodily consciousness that is central to self-understanding and lived experience.

This approach aligns with phenomenological insights by asserting that bodily awareness is not secondary to mental life but foundational to it, shaping perception, emotion, and thought.

5.2 Practical Dimensions of Corporeal Consciousness

Somaesthetic practices—such as body awareness, posture training, and mindful movement—illustrate how intentional engagement with the body can transform one's conscious experience.

P-ISSN: 2496-4476 **E-ISSN:** 2273-1571
Volume 11/ Issue 2/ 2024

These practices demonstrate the *pragmatic* implications of philosophical claims about embodiment.

6. Enactivism and the Dynamic Body–Mind

6.1 Enactive Subjectivity as Flesh

Enactivism posits that cognition arises through dynamic interaction between organism and environment. Proponents like those engaging Merleau-Ponty's later philosophy argue that subjectivity itself is *enacted* through bodily engagement, dissolving the boundary between internal cognitive processes and external bodily activity.

6.2 Beyond Representation

Within enactivist frameworks, perception and action are not representations inside the head but ongoing embodied processes. Consciousness emerges from sensorimotor patterns that are inseparable from bodily context. This view reinforces the claim that thought and flesh are not distinct domains but mutually constitutive.

7. Critical Challenges and Debates

7.1 The Cartesian Legacy and Modern Rebuttals

Despite embodied frameworks gaining ground, debates persist. Critics question whether bodily processes can fully account for the qualitative aspects of consciousness (i.e., the "hard problem" of subjective experience). Cartesian dualism still appears in updated forms, though often critiqued.

7.2 Integration with Neuroscience

Emerging interdisciplinary work seeks to integrate phenomenological insights with neuroscientific data. While neuroscience clarifies neural correlates of consciousness, embodied philosophies caution against reducing consciousness to brain activity alone.

8. Implications and Future Directions

The philosophical study of **corporeal consciousness** opens several avenues for research and application:

- **Philosophy of Mind:** Rethinking theories of consciousness to integrate body–world relations.
- **Cognitive Science:** Designing experiments that account for bodily context in cognition.
- **Ethics and Aesthetics:** Exploring how bodily awareness influences moral perception and artistic experience.
- **Clinical Practice:** Applying embodied approaches to mental health and somatic therapy.

Future research should further bridge philosophy with empirical science, especially studies that examine how bodily states shape conscious experience.

9. Conclusion

P-ISSN: 2496-4476 **E-ISSN:** 2273-1571
Volume 11/ Issue 2/ 2024

This study demonstrates that integrating geospatial data with demographic, environmental, and infrastructural information enables accurate identification of high-risk zones, informing effective disaster preparedness and mitigation strategies. GIS-based vulnerability mapping not only highlights the areas where communities are most at risk but also facilitates prioritization of resource allocation, early warning systems, and evacuation planning. The findings underscore the importance of combining technological tools with local knowledge and policy interventions to enhance coastal resilience. Ultimately, this approach contributes to proactive disaster management, empowering authorities and communities to reduce loss of life, protect livelihoods, and strengthen adaptive capacity in the face of recurring tsunami threats. The traditional view of consciousness as detached thought fails to capture the lived realities of embodied experience. Philosophical perspectives—from phenomenology to analytic embodiment and somaesthetics—collectively argue that **consciousness is fundamentally corporeal**. Flesh and thought are not antagonistic categories but intertwining aspects of lived life. Recognizing this unity enriches our understanding of perception, agency, and selfhood.

References

Hart, D. E., & Knight, G. A. (2009). Geographic information system assessment of tsunami vulnerability on a dune coast. *Journal of Coastal Research, 25*(1), 131–141. https://doi.org/10.2112/07-0960.1

Pushpakumara, T. D. C., & Gamlath, S. (2021). GIS based tsunami risk assessment. *International Journal of Advanced Remote Sensing and GIS*, Article 498. https://doi.org/10.23953/cloud.ijarsg.498

Wood, N. J., & Good, J. W. (2004). Vulnerability of port and harbor communities to earthquake and tsunami hazards: The use of GIS in community hazard planning. *Coastal Management, 32*(3), 243–269. https://doi.org/10.1080/08920750490448622

Arrisaldi, T., Arya, M. A., Nurapita, K. K. R., & Pratiknyo, P. (2024). Tsunami inundation modeling and hazard mapping using GIS in Sawarna Beach, Banten Province. *Dinamika Teknik Sipil*. https://doi.org/10.23917/dts.v18i1.10617

GIS based coastal vulnerability assessment and adaptation barriers to coastal regulations in Dakshina Kannada district, India (2022). *Regional Studies in Marine Science, 55*, 102509. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rsma.2022.102509