

## **Semasiology and the Ethogenic Standpoint: The Proper Alignment of Causal Powers and the Action Sign.**

### **Introduction**

Harré's ethogenic standpoint and Williams's semasiological theory are two theories of human action theoretically rooted in the concepts of causal powers, person, and embodiment. In addition, both are anti-positivist and thus free to embrace a realist naturalism in the study of human beings. This paper seeks to show that although the ethogenic standpoint presupposes the principles that to be a person is to be embodied, and that the body is active because persons are agents, implicitly the body remains static. In contrast, semasiology is grounded in a concept of dynamic embodiment, making explicit the idea that human movement is primary and composed of signifying acts (action-signs). A central paradox in the ethogenic standpoint is that causal powers do not necessarily lead to the action-sign, even though semasiological theory presupposes causal powers. The question must be asked: what more is required of the ethogenic standpoint to realise the concept of the human action-sign? The paper attempts to specify exactly how ethogenic theory was derailed during its development so that it fails to include a conception of dynamic embodiment. I suggest that the ethogenic standpoint privileges causal *power* but not causal *force*, and therefore does not define movement as a primary constitutive feature of embodied persons.

### **Naturalism, Positivism, and the New Realist Revolt**

Until recently, the dominant theoretical account of the way scientific intelligence works in its understanding of nature was provided by the positivist philosophy of science. One of the dogmas of positivist theory is that physics should provide the paradigm example in any endeavor to understand physical and biological aspects of the natural world. This includes the nature of scientific explanation, the concept of causation, and the methodological nature of empirical research. Human beings are implicated in this position since they are a particular variety of the bio-physical world. According to the positivist view, the character of explanation must assume the form of logical deduction -- the "covering-law" model. Determinism, a necessary component in a proper

formulation of causation, has to meet the Humean criterion that causation is neither a necessary nor an actual force. However, the Humean imperative means that causation is reduced to correlation -- the probabilistic conjunction of antecedent and consequent events. Empirical research is to be conducted according to a "closed-world" model of experimentation under artificial conditions designed deterministically for complete manipulatory control.

The positivist conflation of naturalism with physics has important consequences for the possibility of naturalism in the study of human beings, because the covering-law model entails the denial of *meaning* as an explanatory force. Determinism entails the denial of the reality of *human agency* because action is reduced to behavior. In addition, experimentation entails the denial of *culture* (a discursive social construction of person, self, and society) as a natural form of human being. Positivism, then, assumes that experimental investigation will identify the deterministic laws of human physiology and of the behavior of individuals. This, it is believed, will provide true, scientific and predictive knowledge of human beings.

Despite the demise of the positivist philosophy of science approximately three decades ago, the social sciences have continued to conflate naturalism with positivism. This has resulted in a tendency to bifurcate into pro-, and anti-positivist social science. Some anti-positivist social scientists have resorted to an intellectual exodus into the arts or humanities, embracing phenomenology, existentialism, and various French connections (e.g. Derrida, Foucault, Bourdieu). Others have embraced the theoretical enterprises of Habermas (1984) and/or Giddens (1984).

In both pro- and anti-positivist social science, however, the thematic drift has been a reaction against naturalism because of the misguided conflation of naturalism with positivism. What could not readily be conceived was the rational viability of naturalism in the social sciences. By the early '70s, however, an anti-positivist but pro-naturalist revolt in the philosophy of the natural sciences crystalized (Keat 1973). Warner (1990) refers to this promising development as "new realism", citing Harré (1975, 1986) as one of the leading authors. Inspired and informed by Harré's contribution, Keat (1975), Bhaskar (1979), Secord (1986) and

Manicas (1988) argued persuasively for the possibility of naturalism in the study of people (see also Margolis 1984 and Toulmin 1990).

The deep thrust of this variety of realism is that meaning, agency and culture are primary natural features of people when their human being -- the various living forms of being human -- is seriously considered. These primary natural features represent the social, historical and intelligent character of human beings in the ordinary setting of their everyday lives. For the purposes of this paper I will focus on Harré's variety of realism and his conception of causal powers as applied to human agency

A central idea in Harré's referential policy realism constitutes a conceptual reformation in our understanding of causality (Harré and Madden 1976), which can be stated in the form of four principles:

1. Correlation *is not* causation; the former is an *association* of variables.
2. Causation is agency; the *production* of consequences.
3. Production is the *power* and *liability* constitutive of natural kinds of particulars.
4. Nature is the *distribution* and *stratification* of various natural kinds of powerful particulars.

The meaning of 'natural kinds' is defined by the concept of structural integrity. This can be brought out in the form of three fallacies:

1. Actualism: as a *power*, causation is not to be identified with any one of its occurrences; as a *force* it is instantiated, but not exhausted, by such occurrences. To think otherwise is to commit the fallacy of actualism.
2. Bifurcation: causation is the *power* of a particular, *not* a particular *and* its power. Two variants of the latter (the power and particular schema) are to be avoided.

- a. Durkheimian: the externalization of power in the power and particular schema.
  - b. Freudian: the internalization of power in the power and particular schema.
3. Activation: Since bifurcation is a fallacy, it is likewise a fallacy to treat a bifurcated power as the *activation* of a particular.

Within this framework, neither a 'group' nor a 'personality', for example, can be regarded as causes of human actions (Varela 1994, forthcoming). The fallacies of bifurcation and activation jointly block the resort to any form of pseudo-explanatory transcendentalist devices such as a collective unconscious (sociological variety) or an individual unconscious (psychological variety). These fallacies are violations of the general principle that *causation is the activity of forceful particulars at work*. The fallacies involve the detachment of power from its structural base, inviting the creation of activating and reified empty abstractions.

#### **Semasiology and Ethogenics: The Causal Powers Link.**

Causal powers theory links the standpoints of semasiology and ethogenics and can also provide an account of the distinctive feature of each perspective. A central conception in semasiology is to be found in the *action-sign*. Human bodies move in an enactment space, that is, in a culturally grounded and socially mediated canonical coordinate space, by virtue of the agency of persons (see Williams 1979 and 1991). Semasiologically, movement and action can be mapped onto one another in such a way that movement is seen to be action and action is movement, thus, the notion of embodiment in semasiology constitutes genuine agency.

A central conception in ethogenics is the idea that spoken conversation as discursive practice is action, hence, language is action and action is language (Harré 1984). To persist in the belief that there is more to action than language is to betray a residual positivism in one's notion of action. This misconception consists in the idea that there is something apart from and independent of the ordinary everyday actions of people (including their various linguistic and other semiotic practises) that is the *real* reality, thus their *real* explanation. Here, we have the implicit influence

of the mistaken power-and-particular-schema and the basis for the traditional pseudo-transcendentalist devices of the social sciences.

Doing things with words is all the doing there is, as long as 'words' are construed to mean a variety of kind of lingual or semiotic acts. This is the full meaning of the idea of discursive practices, namely, that there are various Wittgensteinian grammars of action centered around vocal and manual gestures. The concepts of *action-signs* and *discursive practices* are of fundamental importance for the social sciences, although the reasons why they are important are different in each case.

The idea of the action sign, taken from Williams's semasiology, facilitated my preliminary formulation of a notion I have elsewhere referred to as "the body-dead, brain-dead axiom in social theory" (Varela 1994). That is to say, social theory is dead to the *moving* body (more accurately *the movement* of the body) in part because it is brain-dead to the concept of *the causal power of the moving body* -- not to be confused with the causal *determinism* of a moving *organism*. It is the agency of a person, hence the power of the body for movement that is crucial for the correct understanding of the genuine agency of embodiment. Body movement is the personal enactment of that power.

The determinism of the organism as a mere complex and a-social neuro-physiological entity is functionally *subordinated* to the embodied person when the organism is ontologically transformed into a culturally defined and socially constructed body. That transformation is effected in that socializational process, as a consequence of which the biological individual becomes a person (Varela 1994). Thus, the body-dead, brain-dead axiom refers to a denial of the genuine agency of embodiment which rejects the fundamental principles of semasiology.<sup>1</sup> [see p. 245]

### **Bodies and Society (Turner) and *Moving* Bodies and Society (Williams)**

Turner's study, *The Body and Society* (1984) provides excellent documentation of the neglect of the body in sociological [and anthropological] theory. He differentiates two aspects of the neglect: the *absence* of the body and the *submergence* of the furtive history of *the role of the body* in certain social theories. However, since Turner's call for an "adequate sociology of the body" is misleadingly defined as the "exercise

of corporeal governance", it is necessary to distinguish two types of embodiment theses: Type 1, traditional and Type 2, non-traditional.

The traditional type contains two varieties; intellectualist and phenomenological. In the intellectualist variety there is talk *about* the body: institutional-objective accounts of the socially regulated and disciplined body. In the phenomenological variety there is talk *of* the body: individualist-subjective accounts describing the psychological experiences and feelings of the body. In both varieties, the genuine agency of embodiment is systematically omitted.

To date, the Type 2 non-traditional kind of embodiment thesis is exemplified especially, but not exclusively, by semasiology. Here, primary emphasis is given neither to talk *about* the body, nor talk *of* the body, but talk *from* the body as it is enacted by virtue of personal agency. Intellectualist and phenomenological discursive practices and their descriptive accounts of embodiment function as secondary elective interests in this context. Enactment is effected through semiotic rules structuring a given movement system within the enactment space(s) located in a local culture (Williams 1976a, 1976b, 1979, and 1982).

The subtle persistence of the body-dead brain-dead axiom can be seen in contemporary social scientific thinking that comes to its resting place in the body, to be sure, but in a body that *never* moves. To highlight the distinction between the traditional and non-traditional theses of embodiment the body-dead brain-dead axiom can be stated in two forms. The strong form is the one Turner's work points to: the *absent body* in social theory. The weak or subtle form is the one Williams's version points to: the *absent moving body* in social theory. The two varieties of the axiom provide us with a critical standpoint from which to note the fate of the body in social theory of yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

### **The Paradox in the Ethogenic Standpoint**

An appreciation of this point is available to us with reference to a paradox that is a characteristic of the ethogenic standpoint in Harré's presentation of it to date. To get to the paradox, it is necessary to point out that Williams has been absolutely unequivocal in her claim that in significant ways the conception of the action-sign is made possible by the conception of causal powers (Williams 1976a: 125). The very idea that

causality is agency, and as such constitutes the power of particulars to produce consequences, is necessary for the idea that *persons are agents* empowered to construct, understand and produce various semiotic vocal and manual/bodily practises. This insight is pellucidly presented by Harré;

The conversational world, like the physical world, evolves under the influence of *real powers and forces*, dispositional properties of the *utterances* that are the *real substrate* of all interchanges (Mühlhäusler and Harré 1990: 24, emphasis supplied).

The paradox is this: while causal powers theory is the basis of the conception of discursive practices, and embodiment is certainly taken to be constitutive of such practices, the body that is featured in ethogenics is not a *moving* body. The conception of discursive practices certainly involves the idea of the agency of *embodied persons* but it does not explicitly involve the idea of the genuine agency of embodiment -- not in the strict sense of Williams's conception of the action-sign (see Williams 1979, and 1991: Chapter 8). Ethogenics encompasses a Type 1 embodiment thesis, but it does not encompass a Type 2. In this regard, it is my judgment that the Harréan representation of the ethogenic perspective is a sobering and subtle example of the tenacity of the body-dead, brain-dead axiom. In this paper, I intend to transform the example into an instructive one. While causal powers theory is a requirement for the conception of the action-sign, it is clearly an insufficient one. Harré's recent book on embodiment (1991) confirms the point. As Farnell has keenly observed, Harré's title is *Physical Being*, not *Moving Being*.<sup>2</sup>

### **Enacting Body Languages (Williams) and Bodily Enactments (Harré)**

What more, then, is required? What is the proper alignment of causal powers and the action-sign? In this regard, among other things, it will be necessary to identify the understanding that distinguishes Williams's idea of *the enactment of body languages* from Harré's idea of *bodily enactments* (Harré 1991: 4, 28-29). It illuminates the telling difference between the Type 1 and Type 2 theses of embodiment.

Crucial to that difference is the absence of the concept of *the semasiological body* in Harré's study of *Physical Being*. Without this

concept there is no permissible alternative to the title chosen by Harré for his pioneering study of embodiment. When in that study discussion arrives at what actors do with their bodies in different skilled performances, analysis centers exclusively on *the feeling of doing* (1991: 106-109). It never gets to the analysis of *the bodily movements that one is doing*.

This is vividly shown in the new image Harré has chosen to ground his social psychological commitment to the concept and study of discursive practices. Instead of the intellectualist image of a lecturer and his audience -- two static centers of vocal speech-acts -- there is now the dynamic image of several people cooperating to move a piece of furniture (Mühlhäusler and Harré 1990: 12). This switch is of deep importance for it is grounded in, and thus is afforded by, a shift in ontological models that services the work required by the principle that language *is* action and action *is* language. The quotation above expresses this ontological shift, from a Newtonian model of real powerful particulars that are mere things at rest or in motion, to an Aristotelian model of real powerful particulars that are special "things"; including speech-acts generated by actors. Consider also the following statement:

As a 'space', a set of possible and actual locations, the array of persons is non-Euclidean. It is structured by moral and political considerations, rules and conventions.... It is Einsteinian since it has a structure (Harré 1984: 62).

In a private conversation, Harré has admitted that, in principle, he could never have chosen an action-sign image; for example, several American Indian sign-talkers communicating silently for long stretches of time, but nevertheless punctuating their sign-talk occasionally with uproarious laughter.

In the context of *Physical Being*, Harré deals exclusively with the intellectualist (observational) and phenomenological (experiential) approaches to embodiment (1991: Chapter 1). Paradoxically, in Harré's perspective, the movement (enactment) approaches to embodiment are *conceptually permitted but not provided for* and so omitted. The provision is simply never realized and the paradox is unmistakable.

### **The Ethogenic Standpoint: Three Doctrines of the Ways of Being**

Harré's social scientific work can be conveniently arranged into two groups -- that to be found in *The Explanation of Social Behaviour*, and the 'Ways of Being' trilogy, namely, *Social Being*, *Personal Being*, and *Physical Being*. *Ways of Being* [WB] presupposes *The Explanation of Social Behaviour* [hereafter ESB] and systematically builds on it. Three major themes are developed in WB, dealing with *Social Being* [SB] -- our social relations of joint activity, *Personal Being* [PB] -- our socially constituted relations to ourselves as individuals, and *Physical Being* [PSB] -- our socially constituted embodied relations to the material world and to other embodied agents. The themes are embedded in doctrines or principles that define and orient theoretical and empirical work. The doctrines and the ways of being collectively constitute the ethogenic standpoint.

The sociological doctrine proposes that social life, as a symbolic interactive process, and in reference to the person-centered processes of its agents, regularly functions according to the complementary set of principles derived from Veblen and Goffman. These principles stipulate that the expressive dimension of meaning, identity and evaluation (respect contempt, etc.) tend to predominate over practical dimensions of survival, materiality and economic interests in the conduct of social life and in reference to personal motivational processes.

The psychological doctrine specifies that the processes of human being are constitutively social, originally and continuously socially constructed, and available to an understanding both from the accounts of the participating agents and from the tacit knowledge generating those human processes that may be independently analytically reconstructed by social scientists from those very accounts.

The social psychological doctrine proposes that the social construction of mind, identity, and action is effected by the discursive and other symbolic practices comprising a given local culture (Harré 1983 and Varela 1994).

Presupposed by all three doctrines are the philosophical assumptions of naturalism, agentic causation, and embodiment. Naturalism and agentic causation provide the notion that people are bio-physical phenomena in a bio-physical and lawful world. The laws are grounded in a complex of natural powerful particulars and processes, constitutively defined by the

causal principles of structural integrity and causal activity. Special examination of the third philosophical assumption of embodiment will be the focus for this paper.

### Personhood

In my considered opinion, the fundamental question in the examination of embodiment concerns the proper alignment of causal powers and the action sign. The question is this: in the complex of ideas involved in Harré's conception of embodiment, what accounts for the fact that the moving body is not an explicit topic and thus not systematically treated in *Physical Being*? The answer I will pursue is that although Harré's conception of personhood certainly involves the primary feature of a body, the 'body' referred to is taken to be a *thing*. This is in marked contrast to the body viewed as a *moving thing* in the semasiological sense of generating body languages, involving the *executive generation of movement* for expressive purposes. For Harré, however, the body is not *just* a thing: movement is implicated, but as a secondary, not as a primary, feature. It is as if Harré is preserving a 'still point' for human physical being: a null space, although not null and void. Hence, I contend that the absence of reference to the anthropology of movement systems in Harré's work, is not a contingent fact, but one that is a necessary consequence of the very way in which embodiment has been conceptualized.

What is particularly intriguing about all this is the fact that the category of movement *is* thoroughly compatible with the development of Harré's thought in the trilogy on human being and its ethogenic doctrines. Indeed, in ESB, Harré makes the point, in passing, that without movement (not in the semasiological sense), personhood is most likely not possible (Harré and Secord 1972: 110). In this precise sense it can be declared that the Harréan perspective not only *internally permits* the primacy of movement, but *internally requires it*. What the perspective does not do is *explicitly provide for the inclusion of movement itself as a medium for both the construction and the expression of meaning*.

I shall argue that the inclusion can be facilitated by reconceptualizing human physical being as a *moving thing* in a semasiological sense, rather than simply a physical thing. Once again, this is a directive mandated by the unarticulated Harréan principle that to be a person is to be

engaged in movement. In other words, personhood *is* dynamic embodiment. The purpose of this paper is to fill this gap in the Harréan perspective by reconstructing a certain moment in its development when it was derailed away from the principle of dynamic embodiment.

### **The Shift in the Conception of Embodiment from ESB to SB**

Those works by Harré that are relevant to examining the critical moment of derailment away from the principle of dynamic embodiment are *The Explanation of Social Behaviour* (1972) and the first edition of *Social Being* (1979). The later works, both PB (1984: 67-69 and 206-209) and PSB (1991: Chapter 1), present an emerging conception of embodiment in a manner consistent with the idea that the body of a human being is a physical thing and because it is a human body, it is the body of a person. The absolutely crucial meaning of these ideas is stated as follows in one of the discussions of embodiment in PB;

A powerful argument against physiological reduction of personal being to the identity of a body would be to show that there are *other modes of embodiment*, where personal identity is constituted *not* by the physical identity of the body but by a conceptual cluster defining this as an embodiment of the person in question. *The person is prior to embodiment* (1984: 69, emphasis supplied).

The principle that the person is prior to embodiment originates in ESB, but remains implicit. It first becomes explicit in a chapter on embodiment in the first edition of SB (1979: 297-306.) It is there that the logic of the principle in question is consolidated once and for all. At issue is a specific instance of the general idea that culture is prior to nature. A deep metaphysical premise of ethogenics is that, while physiology and discourse are the only proven realities setting the boundaries of human being, discourse is a completely autonomous realm. The roots of this premise are to be found in Harré and Secord's discussion in ESB concerning the application of mentalistic and bodily predicates. The application of predicates to the behavior of people in relevant situations has to do with the general practice of ascribing the identity of personhood to individuals. The theme of their argument (1972: 109-118) is that mind-body predicates,

1. are applied not as such, as if they were an independently given dichotomous set of items, but as a matter of their use, and thus they are to be viewed as a mind-body spectrum.
2. Their use and particularly their correct use, is a matter not of the logical adequacy of the criteria for their application but of their cultural adequacy, that is, cultural prescription, personal commitment, and thus social expectation.
3. Since the ontology of person-predicates is cultural and never logical, that is, ultimately never in reference to some original unspecified non-cultural state of affairs, any such logical adequacy that may be formulated is an afterthought relative to a given culture and so historically bound.
4. Thus, such person-predicates as mental and bodily items are in principle revisable and as such open to hermeneutic negotiation with reference to giving explanatory (and legitimating) accounts of any of the revised predicates.

When such specific attention is given to the concept of person and its relationship to the application of mentalistic and bodily predicates, an idea of embodiment is implied.

If the principle of logical adequacy is best understood under the auspices of the principle of cultural adequacy, mind or P-predicates and the body or M-predicates (to use Strawson's terminology) are then strictly construed as cultural categories socially constructed by personal agents. The use of such predicates in conversational practices is culturally prescriptive and socially expected; it isn't a matter of the a-cultural, individualistic and objectivistic performance of a 'natural scientist'. Harré and Secord conclude their discussion of mind-body predicates in relation to the concept of person with a strong statement:

It follows that there is neither a clear line of demarcation between bodily and mentalistic predicates, nor is there a priority of the one over the other in the matter of empirical validity. We are as free to ascribe and rebut the ascription of mentalistic predicates as we are the more *empirical use of bodily predicates* (Harré and Secord 1972: 113).

The Cartesian bias of dichotomizing these predicates is to be scuttled and replaced with the idea of a spectrum; one that sacrifices neither our general naturalistic status nor our specific cultural status. In so doing, the culturally prescriptive character of these predicates suggest instead that

it is probably better and more useful to distinguish mentalistic and non-mentalistic *uses* of predicates, rather than mental and bodily predicates *as such* (Harré and Secord 1972: 112, emphasis supplied).

The implicit point is that our naturalistic status as a physical thing and as a biological species of a certain kind is not *in question* and so is not *the question at issue*. *Embodiment in this fundamental sense is an ethogenic presupposition and one which is uncontroversial*. A given cultural theory of person and social life provides the Wittgensteinian grammar for the use of M and P-predicates in the relevant situations. The suggestion here is that the body is a cultural construct central to social meaning-making activities.

This provides the next level of conceptualization with regard to the implicit idea of embodiment, namely, the paradoxical formulation that the human body is generally a natural fact (species-specific), but specifically a cultural *artifact* (societally-specific). At this point in the development of Harré's conception of embodiment the apparent paradox has not been clearly articulated, and thus cannot yet be identified as in need of reconciliation. That is yet to come with a proper theoretical appreciation of the distinctions between such internally connected ideas as *organism* and *body*, and *individual* and *person*, in the form of the theoretical principle that an 'organism' becomes a 'body' as the individual is transformed into a person by virtue of social processes of psychological symbiosis (Warner 1990).

Before moving on, there is another point to be noted regarding the conception of embodiment adumbrated in ESB. This is mentioned only once in passing and seems not to have a central place in the discussion at that juncture. The topic of the mind-body spectrum provides an occasion for suggesting several criteria for the application of the person-predicates. Among such items as intentionality, emotional flux, skills and plans, the

following remark is made; "If a thing...cannot *move about* then it might not perhaps be a person" (Harré and Secord 1972: 110, emphasis supplied). Despite this, *movement* is never put forth as a *foundational* characteristic (a *real essence*, perhaps?) of human be-ing; neither here in ESB, nor in any of the theoretical discussions in the trilogy and other relevant papers. This can be seen in the first edition of SB, where, in a single chapter entitled 'Embodiment', the discussion is devoted to the issues of Cartesianism and neurological reductionism, and the problem of finding the best theory for locating 'mind' in physical being. Note also these relevant comments in PSB (1991):

But human bodies are not *just* things. However, they *are* things...(1991: 11).

Without just *that* body I wouldn't be me. It is not that I might be someone else. I would not be me at all (1991: 28).

Only by being embodied as a thing amongst things [not up against things] can I have a robust sense of personal identity (1991: 18).

The point is *not* that Harré identifies the body as foundational for personal identity, that is, for the achievement of a numerical identity through the physically mediated process of spatio-temporal continuity (1984: 206-209). The critical point is that, in so identifying the body, its physical being is restricted to that of a physical *thing* and not that of a *moving thing*. In view of the implied principle mentioned earlier in ESB, that the *physical being of a person is that of a moving being*, we are justified in speculating about this manifest inconsistency in the development of Harré's thought.

Has Harré's initial professional identity as an applied mathematician focussing exclusively on physics, systematically predisposed him to privilege Being relative to Becoming in the evident acceptance of both as primary features of nature? Having correctly given up the modernist dogma of individualism, has Harré retained a residual individualism in the central place he has given to ownership in the fact of personal identity? Not at all. Having discarded the substance-quality model of matter and causality for a substance-powers, or, alternatively put, an individual-powers model, there is still the retention of the ideas of

'individual' and 'substance'! And so there should be, as Harré has shown in his philosophical work on science with reference to the metaphysical preference for a dynamical model of matter (*viz.* Harré and Madden 1975: Chapters 5 and 9).

Yet, I contend that in the very conception of the body presupposed by the dynamical model, in which it is regarded as a structure of *powers*, the causal *forces* actually producing the consequences have not been translated systematically into the idea of *movement* as a key feature of 'things'. In short, powers -- not forces -- have been privileged. It would seem that abandoning the Newtonian focus on mere things at rest or in motion for the Aristotelian focus on things as person-generated speech-acts involves a notion of speaking without the category of body movement. Deprived of the idea of moving about as a real and necessary essence of personal identity, Harré's conception of embodiment is not a conception of dynamic embodiment. *As a consequence the genuine agency of embodiment and the semasiological body are conceptually out of reach.*

One is led to wonder if this is peculiar to *Harré's work*, or to Harré's *work*? That is, if he had originally forged an intellectual identity as a biologist would that have made a critical difference? Perhaps. Is there perhaps some idiosyncrasy in Harré's cognitive style that is revealing here? At this point, it is not clear what that would be, although I am reminded of Richard Feynman's style of visualizing physical phenomena through his own whole body movements (Gleick 1993: 244). Perhaps the gender difference of the theorists is a factor here? Prior to becoming an anthropologist, Williams was a choreographer, dancer and teacher in her own school of dancing -- just the kind of idiosyncrasy, perhaps, to bias one's cognitive style in favour of 'moving things' rather than 'things'. Yet Hampshire's preference for the category of 'moving things' rather than 'just things' in his theory of thought and action challenges and may well defeat that point, as we shall see.

### **Social Being and Embodiment: Strawson, but not Hampshire**

In the first edition of SB, Harré's discussion of embodiment is a rigorous theoretical analysis that tenaciously pursues its theme. Neither Cartesian idealism, with its model of the virtual uncoupling of mind and body, nor positivist materialism, with its model of the virtual reduction of mind to body, provide cogent rational justification for these heroic

models. While not heroic, perhaps, Harré's proposal is robust. Human beings are natural causal agents, naturally embodied. Although mind and body are coupled, this takes place directly (close-coupling) and indirectly (loose-coupling) in various modes of intrinsic connectedness. This ranges from the close-coupling of a narrow range of private subjective experiences -- pains, muscular fatigue, anxiety, etc. -- to the variable degrees and levels of public symbolic activities -- intentionality, rationality, emotion (Harré 1979: 297-300 and 1984: Chapter 5). Public symbolic activities are certainly intrinsically connected to the neurophysiology of brain activity, but only indirectly through a model of the identity of functional structures of neural and mental activities, rather than a model of the material identity of those activities conceptually transformed into atomic units (1979: 300-304).

Functional identity is, in principle, only partial and never complete. Thus, there is an uncoupling (or, a very loose coupling) of brain and mind, but, again, it is functional and not material. While we are certainly materially embodied, we are also certainly functionally disembodied. In other words, the culturally located and socially constituted character of intentionality, rationality and emotion is such that they account for themselves in their own terms and cannot be accounted for by any form of neurophysiological knowledge (Harré 1990:345). In fact, such knowledge, as rationally constructed, is itself an instance of the functional autonomy of the public activity of mind.

Harré has indeed refined his thesis of our fundamental embodiment: human beings are in principle materially embodied, and, they are variably functionally disembodied. Nevertheless, what still appears to be left in conceptual limbo is the important problem of movement.

The discussion in Harré's chapter on embodiment in SB, or anywhere else in that book, makes absolutely no mention of -- even by implication, let alone explicit treatment -- of Harré's earlier idea that being a person entails movement. In the introductory remarks to the chapter on embodiment, he asserts instead the idea that being a person merely entails embodiment. He says;

I shall take it for granted that the argument of Strawson and Hampshire which relates *the identity of an actor, both socially and psychologically, to his embodiment is well founded*. But

there are residual difficulties with embodiment theses; these do not arise at the level of generality at which the arguments of Strawson and Hampshire operate, but move particularly in the ways in which any embodiment thesis is to be understood as implying an account of the interface between mental and physiological processes, states, dispositions and so on (Harré 1979: 298, emphasis supplied).

The question of movement, however, is a residual difficulty that indeed does "arise at the level of generality at which the arguments of Strawson and Hampshire operate". In presenting these two scholars in agreement on the issue of the fundamental embodiment of human beings, Harré has inadvertently assimilated the position of the latter to that of the former. That has an unfortunate consequence, in that Strawson's position on the individual and personhood resides at the level of physical things. Harré indeed has noted this limitation in pointing out that, "Even Strawson...leaves the body on the butcher's slab" (Harré 1986c: 189). In Strawson's view, a human being is an individual physical particular, whose primitive feature with reference to the status of mind-body predicates is a personhood that is constitutively cultural and linguistic. It is this matrix of person, culture and the social instrument of language that forces Harré to highlight the *use* of mental and bodily predicates "rather than mental and body predicates as such".

The personal use of such predicates, as mentioned earlier, is an embodied act which is grounded, but not reduced to, the materiality of thinghood. The term 'grounded' is technically distinguished from the term 'reduced' by virtue of the functional disembodiment of public symbolic practices. That important distinction carves out the foundations of human agency by escaping the determinism of the physics of being through converting its physical constraints into physical resources. However, *the dynamic medium for the exercise of that resource and the discovery of its richness of possibilities is omitted. That richness of possibilities is the person-generated moving body, and not simply the body.* And it is precisely the moving body that distinguishes Hampshire's position from that of Strawson's.

In his study *Thought and Action*, Hampshire asserts the key principle uniting thought and action; "To doubt the existence of my own body would necessarily be to doubt my ability to move" (Hampshire 1959: 47). When Harré declares that philosophers from Descartes to Strawson have

"left the body to the butcher's slab" his correction is to set the body in the context of the moral order and in the activity of social construction, but this is never systematically connected to the principle of dynamic embodiment that he alluded to in ESB. The implications of Hampshire's explicit statement above are revealed in the remarks surrounding it;

The deepest mistake in empiricist theories of perception...has been the representation of human beings as passive observers receiving impressions from 'outside' the mind, where 'outside' includes their own bodies (Hampshire 1959: 47).

This is taken to mean that

the changing standpoint of the observer is not represented as a change of his situation in the world of action, but as a change in his relation to the world from outside (Hampshire 1959: 50).

Thus, the "deepest mistake" is ultimately "to assume that my only contact with objects, and with the world of physical things, is through perception" (Hampshire 1959: 50). Hampshire also says,

*Touch and not sight*, is primitively the most authoritative of the senses, the natural criterion of physical reality, just because *acting upon objects necessarily involves touching, the contact of my body, with the resisting body that is not my own....* Admittedly, in sophisticated and scientific uses of language, one may speak of physical things that do not offer any perceptible resistance to the human body. But these sophisticated objects of science still owe their status as bodies...to their *powers of affecting other bodies* (Hampshire 1959: 448-449, emphasis supplied).

Hampshire's remarks are set within a framework defining a fundamental view of nature as a world of action, that is, actions which are taken to be movement. He adds, "The external world is a system of things displacing each other, acting and reacting upon each other" (Hampshire 1959: 49). Our place in this world as human beings is not simply as physical beings, but as moving beings;

[B]oth in perception and in the least of my movements, I am aware of myself as one among these [moving] things.... In fact I find myself from the beginning able to act upon objects around me.... Therefore, when I am identifying the commonplace, socially recognized objects around me, I am identifying potential agents and reagents, taking the appearance, at the moment of identification, as a clue to what they are [as moving beings] (Hampshire 1959: 47 and 49).

It is eminently clear from the above comments that Harré has missed the distinctive and theoretically decisive difference between the views of Strawson and Hampshire.

### The Paradox Revealed

The significance of this goes to the heart of the paradox mentioned earlier. Although the ethogenic perspective provides the ideas of causal powers, person and embodiment, it does not systematically involve the category of the moving body precisely because *Harré's concept of fundamental embodiment itself does not include the category of movement as a constitutive feature of physical things*. In short, the principle that personhood entails a body is not constituted by the principle that the body of a person entails a moving body, despite the fact that Harré had earlier claimed that to be a person requires the dynamic of "moving about". We can usefully conclude at this point, then, that the *ways of being* and the ethogenic standpoint they presuppose, entail a conception of embodiment that is *substantively* Strawsonian and only nominally Hampshirean.

### If Not Hampshire Then Which Mead?

We must now ask, whether it is plausible to believe that in linking Hampshire with Strawson, Harré simply assimilated the former's position to the latter's? I very much doubt this. Hampshire's preference for the category of thing *and* the primacy of movement presumes the very Newtonian ontology Harré abandoned in order to emphasise agency, person, and speech-acts in his emerging ethogenic theory. The question is, does linking Strawson with Hampshire adequately account for the neglect of movement in Harré's theory? I think not. It is my judgment

that the source lies, rather, in how Harré developed Meadian theory, and, in that achievement, what, of Meadian theory, he left behind. We must now ask, of what consequence was it for ethogenics that Harré took Mead's pragmatism seriously but not Mead's Darwinism? (see Varela 1991: Chapters 7 and 8).

In PB, Harré states that he wrote all but one chapter directly under the influence of, "the original insight of G.H. Mead, that the self owes its form and perhaps its very existence to the circumambient social order"(Harré 1984: 256). First, Harré advanced Meadian theory generally, strictly in accordance with its anti-positivist spirit, that is, in the direction of a discursive turn. Mead only moved *toward* identifying language and action; Harré clearly identified them. Second, Harré specifically developed this to demonstrate that the Meadian "I", too, is social (Mühlhäusler and Harré, 1990: 98). Third, Harré's developments permit us to understand that "taking the role of the significant and the generalized other" -- the fundamental premise of Meadian theory -- is a matter of learning the conventions for the uses of second and third person pronouns in one's local culture (1986b: 151-152). Fourth, and finally, Harré has quite properly transformed "taking the role of the other" into "taking up a position in relation to the other", the purpose of which is to be ready to engage in situationally appropriate discursive practice(s). Despite such creative richness in the treatment of Meadian theory, is it nevertheless the case that Harré overlooked something of vital importance in relation to the category of movement? The answer must be yes.

At the heart of the linguistic or discursive turn that Harré gives to Meadian theory, the shift from role-taking to position-taking leaves behind the *gestural* component of the speech-act which Mead referred to as the *vocal gesture* (see Hanson 1986: 14-41 and Reck, 1964: 287). The point is that a speech-act, physically considered, is not simply behavioral motions of the mouth and throat but gestural movements that constitute a transubstantiation of motions of the organs of speech into the action of speaking.

Perhaps the deep indication that the Harréan theory of embodiment is substantively Strawsonian and only nominally Hampshirean, is that, while Harré grounded his discursive turn in an Aristotelian ontology, Mead grounded his clear, albeit uncertain, turn to language-in-use in a Darwinian ontology. The significance of this is that in so doing, Mead

assumed a Darwinian practical-survival grid within which human beings are taken to be agentic and problem-centered animals constitutively engaged in movement, that is, in the endless proliferation of gestures. The result of this difference is unmistakable: Harré retained the powerful particularity of the speech-act without the gestural movement which is the force of that power when it is in effect. This is the key argument for my hypothesis put forth earlier, namely, that Harré privileges causal *power* and not causal *force*. In so doing, he fails theoretically to translate that "force" into gestural movement as foundational to anything discursive.

Harré's paradoxical conception of embodiment that does not realize the idea of a dynamic embodiment has been made partly intelligible by the foregoing considerations. Ethogenic actors are active, embodied *and static*. There is provision for the agency of embodied persons but not for the genuine agency of embodiment.

Semasiology contains the idea of dynamic embodiment by virtue of its concept of the semasiological body. With that concept, the theory has as its fundamental premise the primacy of movement, and as its central orientation, the agentic perspective of enactment. Thus, dynamic embodiment involves the principle that action is the enactment of semiotic sign systems, including both vocal and non-vocal gestures. This is the bedrock of Williams's concept of the semasiological body.

### **The Semasiological (or Signifying) Body**

I suggest that semasiological theory is rooted in a revolt against two facets of determinism: the reduction of the cultural body to the biological organism, and the consequence of biological determinism, namely, the loss of personhood to a deterministic physics of being. The principle that human embodiment is a matter of *groundedness* in materiality and not *reduction* to materiality rescues both the body and the person from determinism, hence constitutes the recovery of human agency.

With regard to these two facets of determinism, semasiology and ethogenics are in perfect accord. In fact, with reference to the recovery of human agency, semasiology is indebted to the fundamental contribution of the Harréan perspective. Nevertheless, the peculiar contribution of semasiology resides in its theoretical exploitation of the defeat of

reductionism by virtue of the alternative idea of groundedness. This involves converting the physical constraints of a deterministic organism into the physical resources of a cultural body. The cultural body is semasiologically conceived as a dynamic medium for the exercise of those resources. It is also conceived as providing the opportunity for discovering and exploiting the body's richness of agentic possibilities.

The important insight of semasiology is this: the richness of agentic possibilities is constituted in the *moving* body, not the body itself. And the moving body refers decisively to the agentic production of signifying (and significant) movements. This, I contend, should be the theoretical import of Harré's unarticulated principle that to be a person is to "move about". It is certainly central to the semasiological conception of a signifying (or semasiological) body. With that conception, Williams has set the actor and his or her action(s) in what I will call an "enactment space"; that is, the space within which the body is used to generate whole-body gestures (*kinesemes*) and part-body gestures (*kinemes*). It is the canonical, indexical space within which movement utterances are generated and displayed (and displaced) in dynamic form patterns. Thus, we have the personal-space of the actor(s), the performance space for the action(s), and the "form space" (the virtual space) of the movement performance itself (Williams 1976a and 1976b).

Body-movement as a semantic use of enactment spaces is thus considered to be a semiotic medium of communication open to literacy. Williams insists that action-sign systems are languages equal in complexity and communicational power to ordinary spoken language systems, although she does not claim that body languages are therefore *the same* as spoken languages (Williams 1982: 161-164 and 1991: 178-190). This permits semasiologists to regard both speech-acts and action-signs as signifying acts. Embracing Mead's terminology we can say that *speech-acts are vocal gestures and action-signs are non-vocal or manual gestures*. Williams expresses this notion as follows, based on a creative interpretation of Hampshire's thesis of the primacy of movement: it is an axiom of semasiological theory, that *spatial points of reference are points of application for linguistic predicates*. (Williams 1991: 268).

In legitimate non-vocal body languages the semiotic rules for structuring action-signs are culture-specific, within which individuals may signify in their own idiolects. Hence, translation is a hermeneutic requirement for

understanding the semantic import of a body-language within a given ethnicity (Williams 1982: 161-162). This necessity for translation disqualifies the legitimacy of the term "non-verbal communication" when referring to human systems of bodily communication.

*Semasiologically, there can be no universal context-independent non-linguistic significance to human movement.* Even when the action-signs in question can be translated and glossed in English words such as 'bowing', or 'praying', or noted as indexical terms of self-reference, the acts in question remain culture specific and idiom specific, even though they may look the same, or be classified under the same verbal references (Williams 1982: 167-168).

In this sense, then, the semasiological body is a body-instrument that generates the *executive* use of movement itself for *expressive* cultural and personal purposes, and, in some cases, this is a *literate* use (Williams 1976: 123-130 and 1979: 41-54). Harré's reference in PSB to the human body as a prosthetic device to be used for practical purposes, is a legitimate, but very different conception (Harré 1984: 25). In many ways, it is admirably consistent with the change in the image of human action discussed earlier emphasizing "several people cooperatively moving a piece of furniture". This certainly makes *people* central, not just the individual, and the body, not just the mind. It focuses on "doing something", rather than standing still. It is also a suitable example from which to forge the idea of the body as a prosthetic device. Nevertheless, this is the ethogenic body, *not* the semasiological body. That is to say, movement itself is not the theoretical point.

It is clear from Harré's earlier reference to "moving about" and in later references to "people moving furniture about", that both of these references are on the same theoretical plane. It is the physical being of the body and not the moving being of the body that is the intended central emphasis. In another paper (1986b: 152-153), Harré ends his brief and informative intellectual biography with a five-point specification for embodiment, viewing this as an important set of philosophical topics for investigation. Although he identifies the body as a *target* of meaning (the bearer) and as the *origin* of meaning (the source), what is *not* indicated unambiguously is the body as a medium for *generating* meaning in the semasiological sense elaborated thus far.

Furthermore, in the introduction to PSB, Harré identifies the place of his study in and among those scholars similarly interested in embodiment. In one special case, he points out the particular closeness of his perspective on embodiment to that of medical anthropologists Scheper-Hughes and Lock. Their preference for studying the body as experienced, as a natural symbol and as a source of practices in social control are all suitable and important investigative foci to be sure (Harré 1991: 6). The critical omission of the moving being of the body, however, remains evident.

The ethogenic body is conceived to be fundamental to one's personal being. Harré singles out precisely personal identity rather than the sense of identity in this regard, and does so for excellent theoretical reasons not relevant to this discussion (Harré 1984: 203-206 and 209-212). The function of the body, however, is made quite clear from a variety of comments on the issue;

Only by being embodied as a *thing amongst other things* can I have a *robust sense of personal identity* (Harré 1991: 18, emphasis supplied).

One's sense of one's own uniqueness as a person comes from the fact that one has a continuous point of view as a thing among other things.... This vantage point coincides via the body itself with the location at which one can *exert one's physical powers on other things* (Harré 1991: 20, emphasis supplied).

The rim of felt embodiment [the sensory experience and feel of one's own body] involves a static characterization of human corporeality. Only when we *reflect on bodies in action* does it become clear how important are our bodily powers...in the...conception of [our embodiment].... The powers...of human bodies are importantly distinguished by whether they are *controllable* (Harré 1991: 25-26, emphasis supplied).

Notice that the "robust sense of personal identity" is primarily Strawsonian, involving the primacy of being -- not just a thing but a thing nonetheless. It is also Merleau-Pontean, involving the primacy of

being an *experiential* thing as well. There is an elusive scent of Hampshire's emphasis on moving, but its primacy is not the emphasis.

While it must be acknowledged that Harré may well have recognized, in part, the significance of the *moving body*, it must also be acknowledged he has not recognized the significance of the *movement of the body*. As indicated above, the discovery of the former involved the condition that we must reflect on our bodies *in* action rather than our bodies *as* action. This is to recognize motion from the intellectualist's standpoint of observation and so to *talk about* it. However, that is not the same as apperceiving *movement* from the standpoint of enactment and so to talk *from* it as the body-instrument of meaning-making.

It is certainly of the utmost importance that Harré avoided the intellectualist trap by using Merleau-Ponty's subjectivist experiencing and feeling the body, and thus talking *of* it. Nevertheless, whether the body is in motion is of little importance from either the intellectualist or the subjectivist's stance. This remains so even if attention is emphatically on the moving of the body because it is meaningfully intended.<sup>3</sup> For, as a target or as the origin of meaning, the point of emphasis under the auspices of the Harréan perspective is the physical being of the body and its activeness, not the moving being of that active body. Ethogenics has not ventured beyond either talk *about* the body or talk *of* it to include the enactment of movement and thus to talk *from* that enactment. Semasiology has achieved that realization, hence, I argue that semasiology *has* a conception of the genuine agency of embodiment. This involves the theoretical understanding that embodiment is an executive act by virtue of which literate and expressive usages are made of the personal, the performance and form spaces of human body movement. To refer to these spaces collectively as "the enactment space" has a special meaning within the auspices of semasiological theory.

Williams has identified and formulated a set of invariant structures that are constitutive of the enactment space of human movement. In each case, the structures systematically specify parameters for the agentic production of movement.

1. *The finite system of agency*. In the concept of 'body-instrument', the word 'instrument' refers to the body itself as the facility of agency. That facility is mathematically defined as degrees of

freedom of the jointing parts of the signifying body and there is a law of hierarchical motility stated with regard to them. The finite anatomical structure of the body makes possible the precise identification of "all theoretically possible movements of the body".

2. *The facilitating conditions of agency.* Both the personal space of the enactor and the performance spaces in which the personal space is embedded are structured by three interacting dualisms of U/D (up/down), F/B (front/back), R/L (right/left)<sup>4</sup> and one dimension of time<sup>5</sup>. These particular enactment spaces involve conditions of orientation and displacement and three fixed and three moving axes upon which they are based. This complex condition of agency allows for the contextual form space of, for example, a dance, or the liturgical space of a ritual, or the communicative space of a signed conversation, etc.
  
3. *The actual construction of action.* For any 'moment' of action that may be considered, e.g. an ordinary conversation between two friends, or several Native Americans engaged in a sign-talking conversation, the human event in question can be examined on (at least) two levels. On the paradigmatic level, we have *kinds of* conversations available to two or more situated actors and the rules involved for their election. On the syntagmatic level, we have the actual performance of that kind of conversation situationally in place and the sequencing rules for its performance. In semasiology, a paradigmatic-syntagmatic scale encompasses the full range of levels, from "all theoretically possible human movements" to "one human gesture".

The finite system of agency, the facilitating conditions of agency, and the agentic construction of action, together constitute the special meaning I have referred to by the term "enactment space".

With that formulation, we have indeed advanced to a dynamic conception of embodiment -- the genuine agency of embodiment -- thereby actually providing what the ethogenic standpoint thus far could only permit. In the light of this theoretical advance, the proper

alignment of causal powers and the action sign can be seen to reside in the understanding of precisely this conception of dynamic embodiment.

Charles Varela

## NOTES:

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<sup>1</sup> It would be equally true to say that Williams rejected the causal determinism of a moving organism when she constructed semasiological theory.

<sup>2</sup> Private communication.

<sup>3</sup> Harré's image of people moving furniture or his emphasis on *the feeling of doing* must be remembered with reference to this point.

<sup>4</sup> Although not a spatial dimension in a physicist's sense, inside/outside [I/O], is usually included in Williams's definitions of the body-instrument space, because of its importance in various ethnographic formations of meanings "on the ground".

<sup>5</sup> Again, in a strict physical sense, only one dimension of time is generally recognized, however, Williams usually adds the provocative phrase "at least" to the words "one dimension of time" because many systems of time-reckoning studied in social anthropology don't conform to the limitations of the physicist's one dimension of 'passing time'.

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