**Book review of “Affective Bodily Awareness”**

# Introduction

We are living in the world where physical and virtual spaces are increasingly designed to incorporate machines to read signs from our body to infer our emotional and affective states. Schools, workplaces, and public spaces are starting to use smart cameras for monitoring our emotional states to know whether students or workers are distracted, whether someone shows suspicious signs, etc (Bakir et al., 2022). Social media companies and various companies start to design into their platform’s algorithms that can track our emotions from behavioral data such as our clicks, likes, reactions, comments, etc. (Mantello, et al., 2023). At the macro level, these technologies are changing society at the scale and speed unprecedented to human history (Ho & Vuong, 2024). At a smaller yet deeper level, the shortcomings and influences of these technologies are showing us the gaps in our understanding of the connection between the body and emotion (Ho, 2021), which thus motivates us to deepen our theoretical and philosophical knowledge regarding the roles that affective states play in the connection between the subject and its body.

The subject's relation to his own body is a much discusses problem in philosophy, for example, by the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty: “I am my body, at least to the extent that I have an acquisition, and reciprocally, my body is something like a natural subject, or a provisional sketch of my total being” (Merleau-Ponty et al. 2013, 205). However, the role of affective components in the awareness of oneself about one’s own body is still an area that receives little attention. In general, there have been a number of studies on bodily awareness, with the most notable being Bermúdez et al. (1998) and Gallagher, S. (2005). But these works have their eyes only on the relation expressed through sensory perceptions or agentive dimensions, ignoring the affective dimension of the relationship between humans and their bodies. This has changed with the book *Affective Bodily Awareness* by Frédérique de Vignemont (2023).

In this book, drawing from her previous works, most notably Mind the Body (2018) and other works about pain, fear, and peripersonal space (Vignemont, 2011; Vignemont, 2014; Vignemont & Alsmith, 2017; Vignemont et al., 2021; Vignemont, 2021 b), to name a few, Vignemont gave a comprehensive view of bodily awareness, placing more emphasis on the affective components, namely: pain, interoception, and the sense of bodily ownership awareness. According to Vignemont, these affective components have a “specific relation to protective agency” (p. 18), which is an agency focused on the ability of the human subject to protect itself in contrast with instrumental agency, which focuses on the ability to actively participate in the outside world. From there, Vignemont wants to “understand what impact they (affectively loaded bodily experiences) have both for self-awareness and for the awareness of the world that surrounds the subject” (p. 3). In other words, by taking into account affective awareness, this book aims to bring a new, more complete view of a human's subjectivity in relation to his own body and the world around him.

# The role of affective awareness in the relationship between the subject and his body

Through an analysis of different perspectives on the use of bodily awareness, which she calls “sensorimotor approaches,” Vignemont argues that these approaches fail to account for “the body as one experiences it from within” (p. 9), in other words, affective awareness. Together with the challenges to these perspectives posed by empirical cases such as peripheral sensory deprivation (p. 6) or the rubber hand illusion (RHI) (p. 10), she suggests that we need to account for the motivating role of affect in the human body in protective agency. According to her, with protective agency, the relationship between bodily awareness and actions takes a turn. For pain, and other affectively loaded bodily experiences will motivate the body to act to defend itself. Thus, Vignemont proposes that “We will now move from the conception of the body as an agent to the conception of the body as a motivating reason” (p. 18), and in doing so, she leads us to explore the necessity of pain and interoception to protective agency.

The motivating abilities of affective awareness such as pain and interoception have already been mentioned by Vignemont (2018): “Pain has indeed an intrinsic motivational force that immediately causes us to act to prevent or stop the sensation” (Vignemont 2018, 158). However, in the present book, Vignemont has supplemented the motivational role of affective bodily awareness by thoroughly discussing and evaluating at length various accounts of pain and interoception. Regarding the concept of pain, Vignemont considers three accounts of the nature of the content of pain and asserts whether they are consistent with the motivating role of pain, namely, evaluativism, perceptualism, and imperativism. It seems that Vignemont is going with the account of imperativism, as with her recent article focusing on the unique nature of the anticipation of pain (Vignemont, 2023). This means that pain functions to motivate the subject to take protective actions, or, in other words, pain is given by the protective agency. Similarly, the author also analyzes accounts of interoceptions and concludes that "the need for protective agency would be at the origin of interoceptive awareness." (p. 27). Moreover, affective awareness such as pain and interoception also serves to perform a narcissistic function; that is, they, together with other bodily awareness, “mark bodily experiences by highlighting their relevance for the subject” (p. 31). This idea about a narcissistic function appeared earlier in philosophy and was supported by Vignemont before: “bodily experiences—including thermal sensations and possibly even more interoceptive feelings—obey narcissistic principles” (Vignemont 2018, 194).

Besides pain and interoception, Vignemont considers sense of bodily ownership as “belongs to the larger category of affective feelings” (p. 41), in contrast with the viewpoint she termed sensory approach, which relies on sensation and spatial position of the body to ground the experiencing of one's body as one's own. Vignemont also reaffirms the bodyguard hypothesis, which she has proposed in Vignemont (2018): the subject experiences a body as his own if that body is represented in its protective schema, which is the schema in charge of guiding the defensive moment of the body. Thus, the sense of bodily ownership “motivates and guides self-protection” (Vignemont 2018, 206). It also provides the answer to the question Vignemont raises at the beginning of the present book on what makes the difference between the body of a pilot and the ship that she controls (p. 1): that is, unlike her ship, her body has affective significance for him.

# The role of affective awareness in the relationship between the subject and the outside world

Vignemont considers the subject's relationship to the outside world to have three layers: to represent the body boundary of the subject, to represent the whereabouts of the subject in the world, and to give the subject reason to perform action, including action guided by protective agency (p. 45). In the final section of this book, Vignemont focuses on how the subject positions itself in relation to the world. According to her, the possibility of locating the subject based on egocentric awareness, which is the awareness from the point that the subject resides, is controversial. Therefore, she proposes that we should base the location of the subject in the world on the place of the body, that is, based on “the place from which one can perceive and act” (p. 49).

Furthermore, in the present book, Vignemont also proposes the role of bodily awareness and peripersonal awareness—the awareness in peripersonal space, a theme for many of her's works, for example (Vignemont, 2018; Vignemont et al., 2012)—in the formation of egocentric awareness as a complement to her system. She argues that the disruption of bodily awareness can possibly lead to the weakening of peripersonal awareness (p. 55). The loss of peripersonal awareness, in turn, will impair egocentric awareness. In other words, according to Vignemont, bodily awareness, through peripersonal awareness, plays a role in creating a connection between the subject and the world: “bodily space anchors peripersonal space, which in turn anchors the rest of egocentric space” (p. 56). Thus, losing that, the subject will lose connection with the world, making the world become separated from the subject.

# Conclusion

In conclusion, drawing both from the history of philosophy and experimental research, this book has clarified the role that affective awareness plays for the subject in relation to his body and to the outside world: affective awareness gives affective significance to the subject about his body and motivates the subject to protect the body of himself, at the same time creating the connection between the subject and the world. Thus, this newest book of Vignemont will bring value to two groups of readers. The first one composed of both those who wish to find answers to the classical question of philosophy regarding subjectivity in the light of recent developments in cognitive sciences and scholars who have followed Vignemont's works for a long time and wish to find both new proposals as well as developments of her arguments. The second group includes those who want to learn about the role and influence of affective states on the subject for application purposes. Since this book has provided a brief account about the influence of affective states on the subject and the roles that various affective states play in the connection between the subject and the environment that surrounds him, it will be helpful for this second group of readers, for example, to increase efficiency in the design of physical and virtual spaces to support healthy body-emotion regulation of oneself and interaction with others, as the connection between protective behavior and peripersonal space on one side and social cognition as well as emotional regulation on the other have been pointed out (Bogdanova et al., 2021; Graziano et al., 2021; Schiano Lomoriello et al., 2023).

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