

# Some Thoughts on Bioethics Turning to Body Ethics

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**Abstract:** Medicine and philosophy are important impetus for the development of bioethics. The development of modern medicine makes bioethics turn to the ethical concern of "body", and the body revival in body philosophy and humanities and social sciences should become an important theoretical support for the ethical thinking of body. Body ethics studies the moral problems of human life from the perspective of the body. With the help of the research results of body philosophy and related disciplines, it can promote the medical science to fully understand the body of disease and the "patient" of human beings, which has important research significance.

**Keywords:** Medicine; Bioethics; Body Ethics; Body Philosophy; Embodied

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## 1. Why did bioethics turn to body ethics?

### 1.1 The enzymatic effect of medical development makes bioethics turn to body ethics

In 1971, The American biologist Porter put forward the term of bioethics for the first time in his book *Bioethics: A Bridge to the Future*, which is "a science combining biomedical science with other rich humanistic knowledge to provide the best medical and environmental system for the survival of human species" <sup>[1]</sup>. Bioethics mainly uses philosophical thoughts and ethical theories to solve the ethical problems related to the development of medicine, life science and human existence through multidisciplinary research methods. From the perspective of disciplinary characteristics, philosophy is the theoretical source of bioethics and medicine is the field of application of bioethics. Medicine and philosophy are the important impetus to promote the development of bioethics.

There is no intervention of techniques and other complicated factors on ancient medicine. Doctor-patient relationship is very harmonious. Doctors have noble virtue and show high respect to the life and actively fulfill their obligations to patients, which shows a high degree of consistency between old Chinese medicine and Western medicine. The medical ethics words can see in the Hippocratic oath, and "On the Absolute Sincerity of Great Physicians" by Sun Simiao. Since the 16th century, mainstream medicine has achieved a qualitative leap from traditional empirical medicine to modern experimental medicine as the achievements of modern scientific development have been applied to the medical field. This leap led to two trends in the development of medicine: the first is reductionism and mechanism. Medicine seems to know more and more about the human body, but the patient's mind and body are separate and the patient is a living body/dead corpse. The human body is like a machine, and all the organs are the parts of the machine, and everything that goes wrong is fixed. The second trend is the materialization of medicine as a result of technological intervention. When medical science and technology are not developed, doctors are full of sympathy and care for patients, but once complicated factors such as technology are involved between doctors and patients. Doctor feelings for patients will dissipate in some intermediate links. Medical scientism makes people become the bearer of diseases, and turns patients from "sick people" to "human diseases".

Clinical treatment of body of patients' somatization makes medicine emphasize the truth of objective facts or objective laws, but it ignores the feeling and significance of people happiness, and cannot treat patients well. The development of

medical science was accompanied by patient rights movement, unfair distribution of medical resources, abortion, religion, death, population and environmental issues, which were closely related to individual physical experience, moral cognition and body culture, religion and social significance. Then there are the growing biomedical technologies that can manipulate genes, embryos, even the human brain and human behavior. The development of medicine makes bioethics turn to the ethical concern of "body".

## **1.2 Rational subject philosophy has limitations on the analysis of bioethics**

Since the 16th century, the medical application of science and technology has led to the materialization trend of medicine. After world War II, the Nuremberg Code and the Declaration of Helsinki emphasized that medical research should place the protection of the subject above all other interests. No matter clinical treatment or scientific research, medicine is for people's happy life and long-term survival of mankind. So, what exactly is a person? What is the most striking mark that distinguishes man from other living things? Thinking about these questions is an important subject of philosophy. In the 17th century, philosopher Descartes put forward the famous assertion "I think, therefore I am", which marked the awakening of man's subject consciousness. Man placed himself as the subject at the center of the world, and regarded all other beings and bodies with physical attributes as objects, forming the thinking mode of subject and object dichotomy. As the subject, man has various features, functions and attributes, which is the expression of man's subjectivity. "Subjectivity" is a very complex concept, mind/body, rationality/irrationality (intuition, will, emotion) can be the elements of human subjectivity. But obviously, rational thinking is the fundamental sign that human beings are different from animals and an important feature of human beings as subjects. Therefore, Descartes always placed rationality in the core position, so the metaphysics of subjectivity in Descartes is embodied as the metaphysics of rational subject <sup>[2]</sup>. After that, Kant's "absolute imperative" and Hegel's logical reason are the substantial advance of rational subject philosophy.

Since the 16th century, the thought of mind-body dualism led by western rational subject philosophy has exerted an important influence on medicine. Medicine divides health and disease, life and death, quality and function. Medical protection of patients and subjects is mainly manifested in respect of rational autonomy. Rational autonomy refers to the ability of every adult to judge and reason rationally so as to exercise certain propositions and decisions in the judgment of affairs. Medical informed consent is a practical philosophical activity of patient or subject's autonomous right and free will. Informed consent is based on the premise that every sane adult has the right to decide what to do with his or her own body. It is generally believed that rational subjects should reasonably constrain, control and dispose of their own bodies, that is, a person's metaphysical dignity mainly comes from his rationality and autonomy. But they do not realize that when suffering from pain and suffering caused by diseases. The body will also become a source of metaphysical dignity <sup>[3]</sup>. Obviously, bioethics should not only respect individual rational choice, but also pay attention to the body phenomenon of pain when discussing pain and other related issues. Body philosophy and the humanities and social sciences of body resuscitate can become an important theoretical source for the ethical thinking of body.

## **2. Bioethics turns to the philosophical exploration of body ethics**

### **2.1 The beginning of Nietzsche's body Rebellion**

Obviously, the rational subjectivity is important, but it cannot represent a whole person. Nietzsche questioned the traditional rational subject philosophy. Nietzsche opposed the huge speculative system of western philosophy which centered on rationality and established by pure rational logical reasoning. He attached great importance to the power inspired by the ceaseless flowing desire in the perceptual body and attributed the will to power to "body", becoming the beginning figure of body philosophy. Nietzsche criticized being as the constant to explain the existence of human life activities, and believed that they should become to highlight the significance of life. Compared with the single and inevitable reason, generation represents difference, contingency and sensibility. Nietzsche said: "The body is not an object, an object that merely accompanies us. Most of what we know from the natural sciences of the body and the way it exists are assertions that the

body has been misinterpreted in advance as a mere natural object <sup>[4]</sup>. Biomedicine treats the body as a simple natural object, and the body is the objective carrier of disease. Medical knowledge is the objective expression of disease, which has nothing to do with the subjective state of doctors and patients. In fact, patients do not just "own a body", but "exist" in the body. Doctors are not only acting on a sick body, but should pay attention to the perceptual, different, accidental physical characteristics of patients.

## **2.2 Development of Body philosophy after Nietzsche**

Since Nietzsche, the body has occupied an important position in philosophy and become an important topic in post-modern philosophy. Postmodern philosophy is opposed to the characteristics of western traditional culture, which advocates rationality, emphasizes center and maintains structure. The research thoughts are gradually oriented to the concern of non-rationality, edge and deconstruction. Hermeneutics, post-structuralism and feminism are all important theoretical achievements of postmodern philosophy, which also inspires the research of body ethics.

Foucault, inspired by Nietzsche's genealogy, used the history written on the body as a carrier. In *Madness and Civilization* and *Discipline and Punishment*, he took mental patients and prisoners as objects and considered that difference would produce the realm of speech in the body. His seemingly natural things are actually specific products under certain social and historical conditions, highlighting the restraint of power on the body. Like Nietzsche, Deleuze regarded the body as the energy of force, transformed Nietzsche's will to power into a desire machine, and proposed a "body without organs", which is a body free from organization, and only this laissez-faire body can escape from various mechanisms, authorities and dictatorship <sup>[5]</sup>. Baudrillard, Le Breton and others explored the body from the perspectives of sociology, culturology and anthropology. Feminist ethics also believes that traditional ethics overemphasize absolutized subject and rational authority, and the principle of universality can play an important role in moral judgment. But in specific situations, they tend to give consideration to one side and lose the other. In the analysis of specific moral situation, we should distinguish the various relations that affect individual essence and pay attention to the subject's self-change when different experiences occur. When solving complex moral problems, we should construct "autonomy in relation" through the conversation and dialogue between different subjects in specific situations. The ethical study of the body is not to provide definitive answers to moral dilemmas, but to create an imaginary and fluid space in which to think about human ontology and epistemology.

## **2.3 Research on body phenomenology and body ethics**

The phenomenological research in the second half of the 20th century has always regarded the body as an important content, which has changed the derogatory tendency of the subject philosophy to the body since Descartes. It is the most important theoretical resource for the study of body ethics. Husserl, the originator of phenomenology, turned his attention to time, body, intersubjectivity and the living world in his late phenomenology <sup>[6]</sup>. He proposed to analyze the relationship between the functional and subjective body and the experienced object body. On the basis of Husserl's late philosophical thoughts, Mello Ponty further analyzed the phenomenon of body perception, and believed that "the world is not something for me to think about. I am open to the world, and I undeniably establish contact with the world. But I do not own the world, and the world is inexhaustible <sup>[7]</sup>. Marx Scheele questioned Kant's rational-based formalism ethics, and combined with the research method of phenomenology, deeply criticized the rational ethics, and created his unique phenomenology of emotion and value ethics of matter. Scheler believes that "body nature" shows a special nature of material being given, and distinguishes between "body" and "body", pointing out that the body of a simple body and the body and mind with identity and internal consciousness are a unified whole for the body <sup>[8]</sup>. Sartre designed a three-dimensional ontology of the body. I make my body exist: this is the first dimension of the existence of the body. My body is used and known by others, and this is its second dimension. I exist for myself as something known to others as a body, which is the third ontological dimension of my body. Complete the research on the existence of the body in the relationship between "me and others" <sup>[9]</sup>. Hermann Schmitz, a new phenomenologist, proposed body dynamics and made different analyses of physical and emotional tremor states and atmospheric situations. In his book *Body and Emotion*, he collected papers on body and emotion by the most important body philosophy researchers in the history of contemporary philosophy. The concept of "philosophical therapy"

was proposed by exploring human beings themselves, human history, and the relationship between human beings and surrounding groups <sup>[10]</sup>. Body phenomenology also focuses on the study of the relationship between mind and body, which is also the focus of contemporary philosophy of mind.

## **2.4 Embodiment and body ethics**

Driven by body philosophy, the research on "body" has covered cognitive science, neuroethics, body psychology, body sociology, body aesthetics, body literature and body politics, all of which can become the foundation of interdisciplinary research on body ethics. Embodiment is a very important concept for the study of the body, although not only. In contrast to the traditional view that cognition is abstract, embodied cognition believes that cognition requires the participation of the body and the world. Perceptual ability of people, such as the breadth, threshold and limit of perception, is determined by the physical attributes of the body. Subjective feeling of people body and body experience in the outside world can provide certain cognitive content for language and thought. Embodied emphasizes that the body is embedded in the environment. Body is a medium existing in the world. To have a body is to intervene in a certain environment, participate in some plans and stay in it <sup>[11]</sup>. Emotions are also closely related to the body and the environment. For example, emotional excitement is in a situation that people cannot cope with but cannot leave. Therefore, being embodied is not about seeing a body as a tool, or simply having a body. The body is the condition for the continuous realization of self-existence. When different experiences occur in the body, the self will also change and form a new connection. In the development of medicine, the uncertainty of individual body is becoming more and more obvious. The new body and identity will produce new cognition, emotion and interaction with the environment, which affects the performance of individual subjectivity in the new interaction association. For example, brain transplantation carries the memory, consciousness and identity of an individual. If the identity and memory representing the individual are transplanted to another individual, then what basis should we use to rejudge the identity and subjectivity of a person? After a brain transplant, the DNA of the recipient's offspring is in confusion, and how to define the identity of the recipient's offspring? Modern medicine is developing towards the direction of precision medicine, and humans have a clearer and clearer understanding of their own biology. But people tend to overlook the emotional, social, cultural and multi-layered implications. Body philosophy can better assist medical and life sciences in the analysis of biological, psychological and social dimensions to achieve a holistic understanding of human beings.

## **3. It is of great significance for bioethics to turn to body ethics**

From the research situation at home and abroad, it is inevitable that bioethics should turn to body ethics. Contemporary bioethics is a study of the overall state of human existence. The research contents and fields of concern are very broad, and it is always open. Bioethics has not yet formed a mature and unified theoretical system, and the thinking and research perspective of body ethics is also multi-dimensional, covering philosophy, ethics, sociology, anthropology and forming cross-study. The term "body ethics" was first proposed abroad in *Body Ethics* compiled by Australian scholar Shildrick in 2005. In the collected papers of post-traditional Challenge, HIV infection and treatment, drug addiction, narrative of cancer patients and other issues are discussed in the paper, and body ethics is considered as a post-traditional challenge of bioethics and a real study of body ethics <sup>[12]</sup>. Sun MUYI, a famous bioethicist in China, summarized the research content of body ethics into seven aspects: the moral philosophy of the body and the ethical significance of the body; The degree to which each body allows, protects, and desires overindulgence; How best to treat a sick body; Prudent and rational use of narcotics and psychotropic substances; Ethical issues of body augmentation; The sexual identity and role of the body and the ethical issues of the body, organs and biological resources of the body <sup>[13]</sup>.

Now take a look at Bioethics, Bioethics is closer to the meaning of Biomedical ethics due to its Biomedical background. Contemporary Bioethics research has expanded from Biomedical to population, pollution, poverty, politics, peace and other fields related to human survival. "Ethics of life" is more consistent with the ethical connotation of contemporary bioethics after entering the development stage of population health care. From "Ethics of life" to "Ethics of body", body ethics can be regarded as a variant thinking of bioethics <sup>[13]</sup>: The body is the materialized carrier of medicine, the body structure determines the human feeling, consciousness, will and spiritual form. Measures of moral evaluation of physical and spiritual orientation

must be taken through physical indicators in some sense, including clinical, natural, social, life, culture, philosophy and human life. Compared with bioethics, the study of body ethics strengthens the dignity and value of the body, as well as the moral value in social, economic and especially cultural implications. The study of the ethical aspects of the body of the subject as a whole. It values the unity of body and mind, believing that the combination of soul and body is not guaranteed as a random decision between two external factors, one of which is the object and the other is the subject. The combination of soul and body is realized in the movement of existence every moment. No part of the human body and soul is separate; they are part of each other and part of the whole. It is of great significance to study the moral problems of human life from the perspective of body, which can promote medical science to fully understand the body of disease and the "patient" of human being.

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