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Preliminary report for admission to the doctoral examination of Mgr. Markéta Jakešová

The doctoral thesis of Ms. Markéta Jakešová is entitled "On Changing and Differing Types of Bodies and Their Relationships to Their Souls or/and Minds in Western Culture". Her aim is to make the phenomenology of corporeality, which Merleau-Ponty developed primarily in the wake of Husserl, but also by taking up the psychological and psychiatric literature of his time, more "inclusive". Her attention is directed above all to those forms of corporeality which, for one reason or another, have often been marginalized in philosophical literature and which, even in Merleau-Ponty, either play no role at all or are treated only in the form of pathologies. This concerns first of all the body of the woman or, more correctly, the many different forms of female corporeality. But it also concerns the sick, dissociated bodies that deviate in all conceivable ways from a supposed "normality" and which, on closer inspection, turn out to be the rule rather than the exception. Finally, Ms. Jakešová discusses the work of Viveiros de Castro on Amerindian perspectivism and asks whether the phenomenological description of corporeality does not fundamentally adhere to specific, culturally anchored pre-decisions that are exposed in their particularity by the "multinaturalism" described by Viveiros de Castro.

In the actor-network theory, which goes back essentially to the work of Bruno Latour, but has been taken up by numerous researchers and made fruitful for different disciplines, Ms. Jakešová sees a contemporary approach that can help to correct Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and open it to the diversity of body forms. Phenomenology and actor-network theory share an effort to overcome the classical subject-object dichotomy. Moreover, both approaches develop an understanding of action that no longer views the human subject as a sovereign agent in the world, but instead uncovers the relational structure of every action. While phenomenology admittedly emphasizes the pathic moment in action more strongly, actor-network theory focuses on the changing constellations of interacting parts of any action network. Ms. Jakešová does not want to pit the two approaches against each other, nor does she clearly take one side or the other. Rather, she is concerned with a constructive critique of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology with the help of actor-network theory.

To state this right at the beginning: The thesis meets the highest standards for a doctoral dissertation in philosophy, both in the level of content execution and in formal matters. Ms. Jakešová can be admitted to the doctoral examination on the basis of this thesis without the slightest hesitation. Her work is innovative and original in content, it considers the current state of

the research literature, and it is clearly written and neatly executed in form. With her thesis, Ms. Jakešová makes an independent and interesting contribution to research. I would also like to emphasize in a particularly positive way that she engages in a "conversation" between phenomenology and actor-network theory, crossing narrow disciplinary boundaries in order to make the great strengths of phenomenology fruitful for current issues (which are hardly ever dealt with in phenomenology) in this way. This is underlined not least by the discussion of Elfriede Jelinek's "Piano Teacher". This is a great merit.

The dissertation is divided into six chapters preceded by a short introduction that nicely explains the motivation for the research question and followed by an equally short conclusion which resumes the chapters in their coherence. The chapters do not build directly on one another, but they do develop a common thread that becomes increasingly clear, particularly in the course of the first four chapters. The two concluding chapters turn the view to non-European societies and thus broaden the discussion again considerably. This is important above all because Ms. Jakešová is able to make it clear that we must learn to endure differences and polyphony and not always strive for a resolution of tensions. Against this background, actor-network theory once again gains special significance because it assumes constantly changing constellations of action and therefore does not commit itself to specific forms of acting sovereignties anyway. Thus, it also questions the boundary between humans and animals in such a fundamental way that the leap to Amerindian cosmologies is at least easier. Ms. Jakešová rightly notes, however, that actor-network theory does not completely overcome the primacy of humans either.

In Chapter 1, Ms. Jakešová explores the boundaries of the corporeal starting from Jean-Luc Nancy's reflections on the body as a mass. She discusses three different meanings of the corporeal, all three of which are located at the boundaries of the phenomenon. The first meaning refers to the oppressed body, which Ms. Jakešová describes as a body that is taken for granted and not specifically felt. This body is necessarily "normalized" and does not allow for any deviations. With Merleau-Ponty, she thinks she finds such a meaning of the body in the self-evidence of the bodily self, which no longer thematizes the body specifically, but presupposes it in human's dealings with the world. The second meaning is directed to the idea of a composition of the body from particles that precede the bodily constitution. Such a view is close to the "object-oriented-ontology". Finally, the third meaning lies in the dissolution and decomposition of the body. In this context, Ms. Jakešová discusses the example of the Thai meditation practice called "asubha kammaṭṭhāna," which aims at learning to see a cadaver in the other person. Ms. Jakešová draws parallels to Merleau-Ponty's notion of "chair" for this third meaning.

Chapter 2 compares Bruno Latour's sociological reading of actor-network theory (ANT) with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. Ms. Jakešová draws attention to several weaknesses of phenomenology that arise from the perspective of ANT. First and foremost, this concerns the assumption that the constitution of corporeality ultimately leads to a fundamental harmony and thus obscures the view of tense and changing bodily experiences. Moreover, on the part of ANT, a diversity of bodies can be demanded, which - according to Ms. Jakešová at any rate - cannot be represented phenomenologically.

In chapter 3, Ms. Jakešová concretizes the aspects discussed in the second chapter by drawing on Annemarie Mol and showing that disturbed and repressed forms of corporeality can only be

described in phenomenology as deviations from the "normal." A closer look, however, would reveal that there is no such thing as a "normal" corporeality at all.

Chapter 4 turns to a literary piece of Elfriede Jelinek ("The Piano Teacher"). Ms. Jakešová takes this novel as a starting point to discuss the theoretical considerations from chapter 3 in concrete terms with regard to women's bodies.

In chapter 5, Ms. Jakešová opens the discussion to decolonial and intercultural issues. She presents Viveiros de Castro's account of Amerindian perspectivism in its main outlines and discusses the extent to which our understanding of the world is turned upside down by the multiplication of natural worlds in perspectivism. She argues that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology could help to better understand perspectivism.

Finally, the 6th chapter poses the question of how we will be able to live on in the ruins of the present world. In doing so, Ms. Jakešová emphasizes the importance of recognizing Amerindian knowledge and Amerindian cosmologies. It is not so much a matter of "using" this knowledge to save nature as of recognizing a plurality that in turn is capable of situating European-Western thought. In this way, according to Ms. Jakešová's concern, phenomenology is able to become more inclusive.

I have just few critical queries about the following three points:

First, in several places Ms. Jakešová adopts a sweeping reading according to which phenomenology is a philosophy of the subject or "first person philosophy". She develops the basic phenomenological idea very well, but then remains essentially with the early Merleau-Ponty, who still borrows strongly from Husserl. Accordingly, phenomena designate things and events in the world as they appear to the subject. However, Merleau-Ponty actually already transcends this first approach of phenomenology with his turn to the body. The body is never fully constituted, but is itself a constituting force. The body, however, is not simply to be equated with the subject, but first of all forms something like a subjectivity, which is quite different from the body (otherwise we could not speak of having a body). Above all, Merleau-Ponty goes decidedly further in his later works "Eye and Mind" and "The Visible and the Invisible". For instance, in the essay "Eye and Mind" it is said that seeing begins in the midst of things and that the seeing person is made of the same stuff as the things he sees (only therefore he can see and be visible at the same time).

Second, it is striking that Ms. Jakešová refers almost exclusively to Merleau-Ponty in her presentation and discussion of phenomenology. She justifies this by referring to Merleau-Ponty's importance for the analysis of corporeality and corporeality. Although this importance is not at all to be denied, it would be worthwhile in some places to draw more heavily on other phenomenologists who refer to Merleau-Ponty but develop his thought in one aspect or another. One of the crucial reproaches Ms. Jakešová makes to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology relates to what she calls the pursuit of "harmony." The constitution and appropriation of one's own body lead to the body being perceived as "normal". Precisely this, however, causes the body to no longer be felt as such, but to disappear, as it were (chapter 1). First, of course, it must be pointed out that the sensation of the body recedes only where the constitution of one's own corporeality makes it possible to direct one's intentionality toward the world. The body recedes not because it is "suppressed" and assumed to be, as it were, available, but because it constitutes a subjectivity turned toward the world and makes

experiences in and with the world possible. At any time, intentionality can turn anew to the body itself and make it the content of one's own experiencing and feeling. In addition to these considerations, however, reference should be made to those phenomenological approaches that fundamentally break through a harmony of self-evident corporeality by drawing attention to the moment of strangeness in one's own experience - including the experience of one's own corporeality. Such moments of strangeness are not an exception, but constitutive moments of every experience, this has been shown above all by Emanuel Lévinas and, even more strongly in recourse to Merleau-Ponty, by Bernhard Waldenfels. The reproach of "harmony" therefore seems to me ultimately to come from the outside and not to meet the actual concern of phenomenology.

Third, I would expect a phenomenological reflection on perspectivism in the form Viveiros de Castro presents it to ask how it can be that different bodies are associated with one and the same subjectivity. If the relationalism of this thinking is taken seriously, neither subjectivity/personality nor corporeality/nature can be presupposed. Both are mutually constituting. A similar inquiry can, of course, already be made of actor-network theory, which - at least in the form in which Latour advocates it - assumes entities that combine to form changing networks. Phenomenologically, however, it is clear that every such association also changes the entities involved in it in a lasting way.

However, I would like these criticisms to be understood as interested queries to an extremely stimulating and intelligent work, which do not detract at all from the quality of the present work.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "N. W. Waldenfels". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.