

The Transformative Power of Movement: A Conversation between Marcel Mauss and Maurice Merleau-Ponty and its Influence on Contemporary Theology

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Opponent's Report

Gilija Žukauskienė submitted her doctoral thesis *The Transformative Power of Movement: A Conversation between Marcel Mauss and Maurice Merleau-Ponty and its Influence on Contemporary Theology*, in the field of practical and ecumenical theology and theological ethics. I read it as a philosopher and phenomenologist who specializes, among other things, in the phenomenology of religious experience, and I can say at the outset that I find this work excellent precisely because of the way it advances reflection from sociology, anthropology, and the phenomenology of bodily movement to theology and practical theology. Gilija Žukauskienė connects these disciplines in a truly excellent and inspiring way. Thus, I would like to emphasize the appreciation of the interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approach to contemporary theology, including the important overlap with religious practice, as one of the important strengths of the present dissertation.

Gilija Žukauskienė has presented a dissertation that, although very extensive, is clearly structured, coherent, and consistent. Thematically, it deals with the transformative nature of bodily movement and the search for its relevance for practical theology. It does not begin by analyzing bodily movements within specific liturgies and rites, but begins outside of theology with anthropological and sociological theories of movement (Marcel Mauss and his followers), draws from them the keys for interpreting the phenomenological concept of the corporeality of movement (Maurice Merleau-Ponty) - and only from there arrives at a theology of the body and bodily movements, which itself draws on these anthropological-sociological-phenomenological sources (Louis-Marie Chauvet, Michel De Certeau).

Žukauskienė arrives at practical theology only through the application of theoretical gains

from these humanities and social sciences. Although it concludes with some remarkable theological applications, the dissertation does not draw directly from theological sources - this is precisely what I consider to be another of its strengths. Had the dissertation drawn primarily from theology, I believe it would have led to distortions in the concept of movement and its corporeality given by the tradition of theological starting points.

The anthropological-sociological perspective leads Žukauskienė from the very beginning to emphasize the social transformativity of bodily movement. Together with Mauss, the open motif of kinesthetic feedback points to the importance of the community (as the bearer of tradition) in the appropriation of bodily movements. The step from anthropology and sociology to phenomenology is then taken through the concept of habitus as the carrier of the corporeality of movement; a step that leads from the sociality of habitus to its subjective nature and relation to expression. To this we can add that the connection between Mauss and Merleau-Ponty's conception of corporeality is rather overlooked or unappreciated in the context of contemporary phenomenology (the main line of interpretation leads more towards cognitive science and enactivism) - and I consider this reminder to be another important contribution of the dissertation.

The dissertation then concludes by underlining the progression from Mauss to Merleau-Ponty by highlighting subjectivization and expression as key concepts for the possible theological application of the transformativity of movement in practical theology. It seems to me, however, that the conclusion should also emphasize the initial motifs of sociality and tradition within the community. For herein lies the significance of this work in demonstrating the crucial role of bodily movement at the intersection of the subjectivity and sociality of our experience – it locates the transformative nature of our movements precisely in the transitive realm at the intersection of community and intimate private experience.

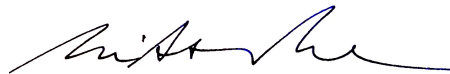
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I find no serious errors, either substantive or formal, in the thesis, so I would like to direct my two questions for the defense more toward a broader discussion of the topic presented.

The first question concerns the notion of movement. In this respect, the dissertation is somewhat imprecise in its title and in the tasks formulated in the introduction. The topic is not movement in general, but rather the movement of the human body - that is, bodily movement. A more appropriate title for the dissertation would be: *The Transformative Power of Bodily Movements*. And it would also be appropriate to distinguish between two approaches to human bodily movement that differ in whether they describe the movement of someone else's observed body (as in anthropology and sociology) or my own body (as in phenomenology). The dissertation moves from the first to the second perspective. To be sure, these perspectives are complementary, not mutually exclusive, but even in terms of application to the field of practical theology, some attention should be paid to their distinction. So, the question is: Do you think that the distinction between these two perspectives is important for practical theology?

The second question concerns transformativity. The focus of the dissertation is not on movement, but primarily on the transformative nature (or "power") of bodily movements. In fact, the author emphasizes this from the beginning to the end of the dissertation. I wonder if she sees any differences in the conception of the transformative nature of movement in Mauss and his students on the one hand and in phenomenology on the other?

I think the thesis presented is excellent. Even though extensive passages are devoted to a basic introduction of the authors under discussion, their biographies and main ideas, crucial passages link the concepts analyzed in a grand transdisciplinary synthesis, which is then applied to the framework of practical theology. In this sense, the dissertation is completely original and brings new insights. For this reason, I *recommend* the thesis for defense and suggest the best grades.



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